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the Entirely Compassionate,
the Especially Merciful

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2- Promoting and deepening Ahl al-Bayt (as) culture and knowledge;

3- Promoting and presenting scientific products of Imam Moibn Research Center;

4- Publishing an authentic and reference Quarterly with scientific-research validity in the field of Ahl al-Bayt (as) culture and education.

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Piety and Organizational Responsibility: A Model of Piety-Oriented Management in *Nahj al-Balaghah*

Muhammad Nasser Vaezi[1]
Abdul Qadir Amini[2]

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of organizational piety within the framework of Islamic management, with a specific focus on *Nahj al-Balaghah*, and aims to develop an operational model of responsibility for contemporary organizations. The central research question is: How can the principle of piety (*Taqwá*), as articulated in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, be conceptualized and operationalized as an internal control mechanism? Employing an analytical–interpretive methodology, the research draws on the sermons, letters, and wisdoms attributed to Imam Ali (as). Textual units were selected through purposive sampling based on their explicit relevance to governance, ethics, and responsibility; they were then coded, categorized, and synthesized into core dimensions and finally into a proposed management model. The findings demonstrate that piety in Imam Ali's intellectual system extends beyond a personal moral virtue and functions as an internal control mechanism that elevates organizational responsibility from a contractual obligation to a divinely oriented commitment. Based on this foundation, the article identifies seven core pillars of *taqwá*-based organizational responsibility: justice orientation; transparency and accountability; participation and consultation; prioritization of the public interest; respect for human dignity; long-term thinking and sustainability; and attention to knowledge and wisdom. Building on these elements, the study proposes a *piety-oriented management* model. The article concludes by outlining key implementation challenges and offering practical strategies for institutionalizing this model within today's organizations.

Keywords: Piety (*Taqwá*), Organizational Responsibility, Imam Ali (as), *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Islamic Management, Organizational Ethics

1 Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Faculty member of Imam Mobin Research Center, Qom, Iran. vaezi@mobinac.ir
2 PhD in Contemporary Islamic Thought, Department of Arabic Conversation, Higher Education Complex for Language, Literature and Culturology, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, Iran: (Corresponding author). qaderamini1@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is characterized by profound managerial paradoxes. While technological acceleration and worldwide connectivity have unlocked extraordinary capacities for growth, they have simultaneously exposed organizations to severe ethical crises. The erosion of public trust, systemic financial corruption, widening social inequality, and intensifying employee alienation all signal a deep moral vacuum within the architecture of modern management (Pfeffer, 1998). This coexistence of technological progress and ethical regression urges organizational theorists to revisit foundational conceptions of rationality, motivation, and responsibility.

Western management approaches—from *Corporate Social Responsibility* (Carroll, 1991) to *Stakeholder Capitalism* (Freeman, 1984)—represent commendable attempts to institutionalize ethical considerations. Yet, they largely remain embedded within a secular, utilitarian framework. As Weber (1978) illustrated with the notion of *instrumental rationality*, modern Western rationalism gradually detached social and economic behavior from ultimate moral and spiritual ends, replacing them with the calculus of material profit. In such contexts, ethical compliance typically stems from external stimuli—legal enforcement, reputational risk, or market pressure—rather than from internal conviction. Consequently, these models have been unable to establish an enduring moral commitment, as they lack roots in a deeper metaphysical understanding of human purpose and accountability.

In contrast, the school of Islamic management—grounded in a monotheistic worldview and anthropology based on *fitrah* (innate nature)—seeks to construct management systems driven by transcendent values and intrinsic motivation. Within this theological-ethical paradigm, *Nahj al-Balaghah*, regarded as the brother of the Qur'an, stands as a profound intellectual source for deriving principles of governance and organizational ethics beyond utilitarian logic. Central to Imam Ali's (as) thought is the concept of *taqwá*, which functions not as a peripheral moral attribute but as the fundamental axis of both individual and collective conduct in a faithful society.

This research explores the transformation of *taqwá* from a personal spiritual disposition into the cornerstone of organizational responsibility. Specifically, it investigates how piety can operate as an internal control mechanism that enhances moral accountability and strategic integrity in complex organizations. In the present article, the words piety and *taqwá* are synonymous and thus interchangeably used throughout the study.

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic management and business ethics, a significant gap remains regarding the operationalization of *taqwá* as a comprehensive organizational mechanism. Existing studies have frequently examined piety as an individual moral virtue or spiritual disposition, while comparatively little attention has been devoted to its potential role in shaping organizational structures, managerial processes, accountability systems, and stakeholder relationships. Consequently, the theoretical relationship between *taqwá* and organizational responsibility remains underdeveloped, particularly within the rich governance discourse of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. Addressing this gap is important for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of indigenous Islamic management models capable of engaging contemporary organizational challenges. Practically, it offers a value-based framework for organizations seeking to strengthen ethical governance, social trust, accountability, and sustainable performance through internally motivated rather than externally imposed mechanisms of control.

To make the purpose and scope of the article immediately clear, this study is guided by one primary research question: How can the principle of piety (*taqwá*), as articulated in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, be conceptualized and operationalized as an internal control mechanism that strengthens organizational responsibility in contemporary organizations?

Two secondary questions support this main question: 1. What core dimensions and pillars of organizational responsibility can be derived from *Nahj al-Balaghah* on the basis of *taqwá*? 2. How can a *taqwá*-oriented management model be adapted to modern organizational forms (e.g., matrix, networked, and virtual organizations), and what are the main implementation challenges and opportunities in contexts such as Iran?

The scope of the article is conceptual and model-building. It focuses on textual interpretation of *Nahj al-Balaghah* and the construction of a proposed management model; it does not present empirical data from organizations that have implemented the full model.

Using an analytical-documentary method, this study draws upon the textual corpus of *Nahj al-Balaghah* alongside contemporary organizational literature to answer these questions. The central hypothesis posits that, in the Alawite discourse, piety constitutes an intrinsic motivating force that cultivates trusteeship, justice-seeking, and compassionate stewardship. When integrated into organizational systems, this inner force gives rise to a transcendent organization—one in which work is perceived as worship, justice defines operational ethos, and trust forms the essential social capital.

2. Methodology

This section clarifies how the concepts and the proposed model were derived from *Nahj al-Balaghah*, and how the study moves from textual interpretation to a structured conceptual framework.

2.1. Design and Approach

The study employs an analytical–interpretive (hermeneutic) design grounded in Islamic textual sources and informed by contemporary organizational theory. The approach is qualitative and conceptual, aiming to extract, systematize, and theorize ethical–managerial principles rather than to test hypotheses empirically.

2.2. Data Source: *Nahj al-Balaghah*

The primary data source is *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the collection of sermons (*khutab*), letters (*kutub*), and short wisdoms (*ḥikam*) attributed to Imam Ali (as). For the Arabic text, the edition compiled by Sharif al-Radi (2008/1428 AH) was used; for English renderings, the translation published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc. was consulted. All quotations from Imam Ali in this article are drawn from these sources, as indicated in the footnotes.

2.3. Sampling of Textual Units

Textual units (sermons, letters, and wisdoms) were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Explicit reference to governance, leadership, justice, trusteeship, accountability, or public funds (e.g., Letter 53 to Malik al-Ashtar, Sermon 193, and relevant wisdoms).
- Clear ethical or managerial implications for organizational behavior, decision-making, or stakeholder relations.
- Conceptual richness for deriving dimensions of responsibility and control mechanisms within organizations.

This purposive selection ensured that the analysis focused on passages most relevant to organizational ethics and management, rather than attempting an exhaustive treatment of all moral themes in Nahj al-Balaghah.

2.4. Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in four stages:

1. Close reading and initial coding:

Selected passages were read repeatedly to identify key ethical and managerial concepts (e.g., taqwá, justice, trusteeship, accountability, consultation, public interest, dignity, knowledge). Each relevant segment was assigned preliminary codes reflecting its core idea.

2. Categorization into dimensions:

Codes with conceptual affinity were grouped into broader categories (e.g., “internal control and self-accountability,” “justice and fairness,” “transparency and oversight,” “participation and consultation,” “public

interest and trusteeship," "human dignity," "long-term orientation," "knowledge and wisdom").

3. Synthesis into pillars and mechanisms:

Categories were refined and consolidated into seven core pillars of taqwá-based organizational responsibility. In parallel, mechanisms through which piety transforms organizational functioning (e.g., substitution of external supervision, social capital formation, intrinsic motivation, ethical knowledge governance) were articulated.

4. Model construction:

The pillars and mechanisms were integrated into a coherent taqwá-oriented management model. The model links the theological–ethical foundation of taqwá to organizational structures, processes, and behaviors, and outlines its potential adaptation to modern organizational forms.

2.5. Concept Derivation and Model Formulation

Key concepts such as "organizational piety" and "organizational responsibility" were derived inductively from the coded textual material and then defined in dialogue with contemporary management literature. The proposed model was formulated by mapping:

- The theological–ethical foundations of *taqwá* (as an internal control and meaning-giving mechanism);
- The seven pillars of organizational responsibility extracted from *Nahj al-Balaghah*;
- The transformative mechanisms through which piety affects organizational dynamics;
- The potential application of these principles to modern organizational structures (matrix, networked, virtual).

This process moved from textual interpretation to conceptual abstraction, and finally to a structured, though still theoretical, management model.

2.6. Distinction Between Interpretation and Evidence

It is important to emphasize that the evidence presented in this article consists of textual quotations and interpretive analysis, not empirical data from organizations. The contemporary organizational examples provided later in the paper are illustrative scenarios intended to clarify how the model might operate in practice; they do not constitute empirical validation of the model. The *taqwá*-oriented management model proposed here is therefore a conceptual framework that requires future empirical testing and refinement.

3. Conceptual Foundations

Prior to everything else, explaining the related fundamental concepts such as piety, organizational piety, responsibility and organizational

responsibility is crucial. This section provides precise definitions of these core concepts and clarifies how they are used in the present study.

3.1. The Essence of *Taqwá* in Lexicon and Terminology

The term *taqwá* derives from the Arabic root *w--q--y*, which connotes protection, guarding, and safeguarding from harm. In its lexical usage, *taqwá* refers to *self-restraint* and *self-preservation* from that which leads to damage, corruption, or destruction. Within Qur'anic and Hadīth discourse, however, the concept acquires greater depth and semantic breadth, denoting a stable *inner disposition* or *psychological state* that protects the individual from moral slips and sinful behavior.

A reductionist understanding of *taqwá* equates it merely with "avoiding sin" or a fear-driven abstention motivated primarily by the dread of punishment. Such a view renders *taqwá* a negative, passive, and purely individual phenomenon. By contrast, in the profound discourse of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, *taqwá* appears as a positive, dynamic, and system-forming concept. In this perspective, *taqwá* is not limited to abstinence from wrongdoing; rather, it embodies *active care* and *comprehensive responsibility-awareness*, shaping the entire orientation of individual and collective life.

In this article, *taqwá* (piety) is understood as a stable inner disposition that comibnes God-consciousness, moral vigilance, and responsible care, guiding individuals and groups to act justly and avoid harm even in the absence of external supervision.

3.2. Taqwá in the Mirror of Alawite Discourse

Imam Ali (as), in Sermon 193 (often known as the Sermon of Hammam), offers a distinctive characterization of the pious, in which he states: "Taqwá, in this world, is caution and abstinence; and in the Hereafter, it is the cause of nearness and proximity [to God] ... It is the greatest remedy for your illnesses."[1] (Sharif al-Raḍi, 2008/1428 AH, Sermon 193/16) Several key dimensions of *taqwá* relevant to organizational analysis can be extracted from this statement as follows.[2]

1. **A Preventive and Protective System**

The comparison of *taqwá* to medicine highlights its preventive and curative function vis-à-vis moral and social ailments. Just as an effective medicine prevents disease or mitigates its progression, *taqwá* acts as a

1. فَالتَّقْوَى فِی الْیَوْمِ الْحذْرُ وَ الْوَرَعُ وَ فِی الْغَدِ الْقُرْبَةُ وَ الزُّلْفَی ... فَهِیَ الدَّوَاءُ الْأَکْبَرُ مِنْ أَسْقَامِکُمْ

2It should be mentioned that throughout the whole paper, Imam Ali's words in Arabic have been derived from Nahj al-Balagha compiled by Sharif al Radi, 2008/1428 AH, and the whole Imam Ali's words in English have been taken from *Nahj al-Balaghah* compiled by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc. Publishers & Distributors of Holy Qur'an.

moral immune system, precluding the emergence and spread of corruption and deviation---both at the individual and organizational levels. In a managerial context, *taqwá* can therefore be conceptualized as an "ethical immunity system" that shields the organization from internal degeneration.

2. **Continuous Vigilance Rather than Passive Fear**

The term *hadhar* (caution) implies ongoing awareness, alertness, and foresight. A *muttaqi* (pious person) constantly monitors their intentions and behavior, evaluating consequences before acting. Translating this to organizational management, *taqwá*-based vigilance manifests as careful planning, continuous performance monitoring, and proactive identification of potential risks and deviations.

3. **Conscious Abstention from Doubtful and Ambiguous Domains**

Wara' (scrupulous abstinence) represents a higher stage of *taqwá*, whereby the individual not only refrains from what is clearly prohibited (*ḥaram*) but also avoids doubtful or ambiguous matters (*shubuhat*). In organizational terms, *wara'* signals a principled avoidance of ethical "gray areas"---those practices which may be technically legal yet morally questionable. A pious manager therefore refrains not only from overt corruption and discrimination but also from borderline behaviors that might erode trust or justice.

4. **Orientation Towards Nearness to God as the Ultimate Goal**

By presenting *taqwá* as a pathway to *qurb ilāhi* (nearness to God), Imam Ali (AS) grounds ethical conduct in a transcendent telos beyond material gain or social approval. Organizationally, this implies that ethical behavior is not reducible to compliance with regulations or protection of reputation; it is rooted in an innate desire for transcendence, perfection, and accountability before God.

Mutahhari (1998) as cited in Noori Muṭlaq (2011) defines *taqwá* as "a state of guarding and constant inner watchfulness that prevents a person from slips." (p.83) This definition resonates strongly with organizational application wherein *taqwá* functions as an *internal guardian* that continuously supervises conduct, guiding individuals toward fulfilling their duties correctly and refraining from violations---even in the absence of external oversight.

For the purposes of this study, *taqwá* is treated as the foundational ethical–spiritual construct from which the notion of organizational piety is derived.

3.3. Operational Definition of Organizational Piety

Building on the above conceptual foundations, this article proposes the operational definition of *organizational piety* as the conscious, continuous, and responsible care exercised by individuals and organizations in the

utilization of all resources (financial, human, informational, natural), based on the principles of trusteeship (*amanatdāri*), justice, and respect for the rights of all stakeholders, motivated by the fulfillment of divine duty and oriented toward the organization's transcendent goals. This definition rests on three core pillars:

1. ***Taqwá* as self-control reducing dependence on external supervision**

A pious individual, even in the absence of external observers, perceives themselves as being in the presence of God and therefore strives to perform duties accurately and conscientiously. In an organizational setting, this internalized self-control can significantly decrease the need for costly external monitoring mechanisms, lowering agency costs and fostering a culture of trust.

2. ***Taqwá* as inseparable from ethics: trusteeship and justice as central axes**

In the framework of Islamic management, *amanatdāri* (trusteeship) and *'adl* (justice) constitute two primary ethical pillars. A pious manager views themselves as a trustee not only of organizational assets, but also of employees, customers, and the wider community. Consequently, they seek to uphold justice in the allocation of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities. Organizational piety thus entails an ethical commitment to fair structures and processes.

3***. Taqwá* as a meta-material meaning-giver to managerial conduct**

Under *taqwá*, managerial work is not pursued solely for salary, personal advancement, or worldly success; it is undertaken as a form of worship and as a means of serving God's creatures. This transcendental orientation generates a deep, intrinsic motivation that is both more stable and more resistant to short-term incentives and pressures than purely material motives.

Imam Ali (as), in Letter 53 to Malik al-Ashtar, crystallizes this managerial manifestation of *taqwá* in the following directive, "Let the most beloved of your affairs be those that are most moderate in relation to the truth."[1] (Letter 53) This command ibnds managerial decision-making concerning resources to justice (*qist*) and moderation (knowledge-based balance). The pious manager avoids both excess (extravagance) and negligence (shortcoming), instead choosing a path of informed, just moderation. Such moderation presupposes a deep understanding of the issues at stake, careful evaluation of alternatives, and the moral courage to select and implement what is right---even when it is costly or unpopular.

1. وَلْيَكُنْ أَحَبَّ الْأُمُورِ إِلَيْكَ أَوْسَطُهَا فِي الْحَقِّ

To avoid ambiguity, this article defines organizational piety precisely as follows:

Organizational piety is the collective manifestation of *taqwá* within an organization, expressed through shared norms, practices, and systems that promote responsible stewardship of resources, justice-oriented decision-making, transparency, accountability, and respect for stakeholders, all motivated by a sense of divine duty and ultimate accountability.

This definition distinguishes organizational piety from individual piety by emphasizing its systemic, shared, and institutional dimensions, while still grounding it in the inner disposition of individual members.

3.4. Organizational Responsibility in Conventional Literature

In mainstream management literature, organizational or corporate responsibility is commonly defined as a voluntary commitment, beyond legal requirements, to respect and protect the rights and interests of stakeholders (Carroll, 1991). Among the various models proposed, Carroll's pyramid of corporate social responsibility is particularly influential. In this model, economic responsibility (profit generation and efficiency) constitutes the foundation; legal responsibility forms the second tier; ethical responsibility occupies the third level; and philanthropic responsibility (voluntary contributions to society) appears at the apex.

Although such models represent important advances in integrating ethical concerns into business practice, they remain anchored in a secular, contractarian framework. Responsibility is primarily derived from social contracts, public expectations, and the pressures of public opinion or market legitimacy, rather than from an explicit sense of divine duty and accountability before God. As a result, organizational responsibility tends to be contingent and context-dependent, and may fluctuate with changes in stakeholder pressure, regulatory regimes, or reputational risk.

For conceptual clarity, this article adopts the following working definition of organizational responsibility: Organizational responsibility refers to the obligations of an organization and its managers to act in ways that protect and promote the legitimate rights and interests of all stakeholders—including employees, customers, owners, society, and the environment—through fair, transparent, and accountable practices.

Within the Alawite framework, this definition is extended by grounding responsibility in divine duty (*taklīf*) and ultimate accountability before God, rather than only in social contracts or stakeholder pressures.

In contrast, as it will be argued in subsequent sections, *Nahj al-Balaghah* articulates an understanding of responsibility that is theologically grounded and intrinsically motivated, thereby providing a

qualitatively different foundation for organizational responsibility and governance.

4. Organizational Responsibility in the Alawite View: Divine Duty, Not Social Contract

In the Alawite perspective, organizational responsibility transcends the notion of a social contract, being firmly rooted in the concept of divine mandate (*taklif*). Imam Ali (as), in Sermon 193 (Sermon of the Gout), articulates this profoundly, "Fear God concerning His servants and His lands... for you shall be questioned even concerning [the condition of] the lands and the beasts."[1] (Sermon 193/16) This powerful declaration introduces three fundamental shifts in the conceptualization of organizational responsibility as follows.

1. **Holistic Inclusivity of Stakeholders and Environment**

The responsibility encompasses not only immediate stakeholders such as employees and customers but extends to the broader environment—including lands and animals. This perspective posits that no element within or around the organization lies outside the manager's sphere of accountability. Such a comprehensive view intrinsically incorporates social and environmental responsibilities, offering a more expansive framework than many contemporary management theories. For example, a manufacturing firm guided by this view would treat environmental compliance not merely as a legal requirement but as a religious–ethical duty, investing in cleaner technologies and waste reduction even when short-term profits might be affected.

2. **Stability of Divine Command versus Volatility of Social Contract**

Responsibility derived from divine decree is inherently stable, constant, and universal. Unlike social contracts, which can shift with public opinion or political climates, the divine mandate remains immutable. A religiously committed manager, therefore, cannot abdicate their responsibilities by referencing changes in governance or popular sentiment.

3. **Ultimate Accountability Before God: The Strongest Enforcement Mechanism**

While managers are accountable to the organization, shareholders, employees, and oversight bodies, the ultimate locus of accountability is before God. This belief serves as the most potent guarantee for ethical conduct, providing an intrinsic enforcement mechanism that transcends secular sanctions.

1. اَللهَ اَللهَ فِی عِبَادِهِ وَ بِلاَدِهِ... فَإِنَّكُمْ مَسْؤُولُونَ حَتَّى عَنْ الْبِقَاعِ وَ الْبَهَائِمِ

4. **The Interplay of Rights and Duties in the Qur'anic Cosmology**

Izutsu (2008) argues that the Qur'anic worldview is fundamentally centered on divine reality and moral responsibility. From this perspective, respecting the rights of others may be understood as part of fulfilling one's responsibility before God. Within the Qur'anic worldview, *right* (*ḥaqq*) is a divine principle permeating the cosmos. Humanity, as God's *vicegerent* (*khalīfah*), is thus obligated to uphold these rights. Consequently, respecting *the rights of people* (*ḥaqq al-nās*) within an organization is tantamount to fulfilling *the right of God* (*ḥaqq Allah*). This imbues organizational responsibility with the character of organized worship.

This perspective establishes a profound linkage between rights and duties: every right vested in another party generates a corresponding duty for the manager. The right of employees to fair treatment necessitates the manager's duty to ensure justice. The right of customers to quality products mandates the manager's duty to uphold stringent quality control. Similarly, society's right to a healthy environment imposes upon the manager a duty to adhere to ecological standards.

This theological framing transforms management from a mere occupation into a divine *duty*. It thereby provides the deepest and most enduring source of motivation for the accurate fulfillment of responsibilities, moving beyond transactional exchanges to a commitment grounded in existential purpose.

In this article, "responsibility" in the Alawite sense is therefore defined as a divinely grounded obligation to uphold the rights of all stakeholders and the environment, motivated by ultimate accountability before God rather than only by contractual or reputational considerations.

5. The Seven Pillars of Organizational Responsibility Rooted in Piety

Drawing from the foundational principles discussed, seven key pillars of organizational responsibility, derived from the Alawite model, can be systematized. These pillars represent the practical manifestations of organizational piety and can serve as a robust basis for designing evaluation and reward systems within an organization.

These pillars were derived through the analytical procedure described in the Methodology section: textual units from *Nahj al-Balaghah* were coded for ethical–managerial concepts, grouped into categories, and then synthesized into seven core dimensions that collectively express *taqwá*-based organizational responsibility.

5.1. Justice-Orientation (*Al-'Adl*)

In the Alawite worldview, justice is not an optional ethical consideration but an existential necessity. The Holy Qur'an makes a meaningful reference

to the concept of justice and its superiority over benevolence or charitable giving:

"Indeed, Allah enjoins justice and kindness, and generosity towards relatives, and He forbids indecency, wrongdoing, and aggression. He advises you, so that you may take admonition."[1] (16:90) (Qarai, 2005)

In this verse, God first emphasizes justice as a universal and comprehensive principle. The concept of *iḥsān* (benevolence or excellence) is mentioned subsequently, indicating its secondary position relative to justice. Furthermore, the expression *"giving to relatives"* (*ītāʾ dhī al-qurbā*) suggests that such benevolence is not universal in scope but is directed toward particular individuals or groups. This distinction highlights the broader and more inclusive nature of justice, whose benefits extend to society as a whole, in contrast to acts of generosity that are typically more limited in their reach.

Thus, the verse presents justice as the fundamental organizing principle of social order, while benevolence represents a complementary virtue whose application is necessarily more selective and particularized. Correspondingly, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was asked whether justice or generosity was the greater virtue. He replied:

"Justice puts everything in its rightful place, whereas generosity diverts things from their proper position. Justice serves and safeguards the community as a whole, while generosity benefits only those who are its recipients. Therefore, justice is more comprehensive and more excellent than generosity."[2] (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Wisdom 437)

As Makarim Shirazi (1996) interprets, in reality, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) points to two fundamental considerations. First, the outcome of justice is that every individual in society receives his or her rightful due and that everything is placed in its proper position. Indeed, some scholars have defined justice as *"putting things in their proper place"* (*waḍʿ al-shayʾ fī mawḍiʿihi*). It is evident that under such conditions, all members of society are encouraged to strive and work in order to obtain their legitimate rights. As a result, society flourishes, becomes dynamic, and advances under the protection of justice. Generosity and benevolence, however, do not function in the same way, because they involve giving people more than what they are entitled to receive. Although generosity is undoubtedly a commendable and virtuous quality in its proper context, it may sometimes have the

1. إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۚ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

2. «وَ سُئِلَ (عليه السلام) أَيُّهُمَا أَفْضَلُ، الْعَدْلُ أَوِ الْجُودُ؟ فَقَالَ (عليه السلام): الْعَدْلُ يَضَعُ الْأُمُورَ مَوَاضِعَهَا، وَ الْجُودُ يُخْرِجُهَا مِنْ جِهَتِهَا؛ وَ الْعَدْلُ سَائِسٌ عَامٌّ، وَ الْجُودُ عَارِضٌ خَاصٌّ؛ فَالْعَدْلُ أَشْرَفُهُمَا وَ أَفْضَلُهُمَا.»

unintended effect of encouraging certain individuals to become complacent, reduce their efforts, and wait for the charity and benevolence of others rather than relying on their own work and initiative.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) then draws attention to another important point. Justice is a universal principle whose benefits extend to the whole of society, enabling all people to enjoy a dignified and honorable life under its protection. Generosity and benevolence, by contrast, are not universal in scope; they are typically limited and selective in their application. It is therefore clear that a principle whose positive effects encompass all members of society is superior, nobler, and more excellent than one whose benefits are confined to particular individuals or specific situations.

This profound saying signifies that justice is not merely a virtue but a fundamental condition for the survival, vitality, and efficacy of organizations and societies. An organization that systematically violates justice is destined to falter, losing its efficiency and becoming susceptible to pervasive crises.

Reflecting this imperative, Imam Ali (as) declares that "People must have a ruler, whether virtuous or vicious... so that the [divine] right may be administered through him."[1] (Sermon 40) This statement implies that even if a ruler is imperfect, societal structures must be designed to ensure justice prevails. Analogously, within an organization, managers must establish systems that uphold justice, even when individual inclinations might veer towards unfairness. Consequently, a pious manager actively designs and implements systems that embed justice across all dimensions:

- **Distributive Justice:** Fair allocation of resources, rewards, and opportunities.
- **Procedural Justice:** Equity and impartiality in organizational processes and decision-making.
- **Interactional Justice:** Respectful and dignified treatment of all individuals.
- **Informational Justice:** Transparency and clarity in communication and decision rationale.

In contemporary terms, a justice-oriented organization would ensure transparent pay scales, clear promotion criteria, and fair grievance procedures. For instance, a hospital applying this pillar would allocate shifts, bonuses, and training opportunities based on clear, merit-based rules rather than personal connections.

1. لا بُدَّ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ أَمِيرٍ بَرٍّ أَوْ فَاجِرٍ... لِيَقُمْ بِالْحَقِّ

5.2. Transparency and Accountability (*Al-Shāfāfiyyah wa al-Musā'alah*)

A pious individual inherently shuns concealment and betrayal, viewing accountability as an integral aspect of their duty. Administrative piety, therefore, necessitates oversight and transparency. In Letter 53 to Malik al-Ashtar, Imam Ali (as) issues a clear directive: "...Then scrutinize their deeds."[1] (Letter 53) This command for continuous oversight underscores the paramount importance of transparency and accountability within the Alawite framework. In the same letter, the Imam advises: "...And for judgment among the people, choose the best of your subjects..."[2] (Letter 53)

The selection of the most capable individuals for positions of authority highlights the emphasis on meritocracy and accountability. Transparency in this context means making organizational processes, decisions, and criteria openly accessible to all relevant stakeholders, unless there is a compelling, justifiable reason for confidentiality. Accountability, in turn, signifies a readiness to explain and justify decisions and actions to those stakeholders.

Operationally, transparency and accountability may be expressed through open budgeting, published performance indicators, and clear channels for reporting misconduct. As an illustration, a university department might publicly share its criteria for research grants and promotion, and maintain a confidential but trusted mechanism for reporting ethical violations.

5.3. Participation and Consultation (*Shura*)

Piety serves as a bulwark against arbitrary decision-making (*istibdād*) and arrogance, fostering a deep appreciation for collective wisdom. A pious manager recognizes the limitations of individual intellect and understands that true insight is often illuminated through consultation. Imam Ali (AS) articulates this in his sermon: "Whoever consults with the wise is illuminated by the lights of their intellects."[3] (Sermon 216)

Within the Alawite framework, consultation (*shurá*) is not merely a strategic management tool but a fundamental ethical and spiritual principle. It embodies respect for the inherent dignity of others and leverages shared intellect for more effective decision-making. A pious manager acknowledges that complex organizational challenges require diverse

1. ثُمَّ تَفَقَّدْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ
2. وَ اخْتَرْ لِلْحُكْمِ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَفْضَلَ رَعِيَّتِكَ
3. مَنْ شَاوَرَ ذَوِي الْعُقُولِ اسْتَضَاءَ بِأَنْوَارِ الْعُقُولِ

perspectives to navigate successfully. Participation, therefore, extends across multiple organizational dimensions:

- **Decision-Making:** Involving stakeholders in the formulation of strategies and policies.
- **Implementation:** Engaging those affected by decisions in their execution.
- **Oversight:** Allowing for shared monitoring and evaluation of processes and outcomes.
- **Benefit Sharing:** Ensuring that the fruits of collective effort are distributed equitably.

A truly pious organization cultivates an environment where all stakeholders are encouraged to participate, fostering a profound sense of belonging and shared ownership.

In modern organizations, this pillar can be reflected in participatory budgeting, cross-functional project teams, and employee representation on key committees. For example, a technology firm might use agile teams in which developers, designers, and customer-support staff jointly decide on feature priorities and implementation plans.

5.4. Prioritizing Public Interest

Financial piety represents one of the most apparent manifestations of organizational piety. A pious manager fundamentally distinguishes between personal assets and public or organizational funds (*Bayt al-Māl*), viewing the latter as a sacred trust. Imam Ali (as) powerfully expresses this principle in one of his sermons: "By God, I have not taken a single dirham from your wealth [from the public treasury] ..."[1] (Sermon 215) This assertion underscores a commitment to non-appropriation and the prioritization of collective welfare over personal gain. Further, elaborating on the basis of ownership, Imam Ali (as) states: "No one has a greater right to property than another, except by right."[2] (Wisdom 239)

This principle establishes that ownership rights within an Islamic framework are not inherent but are contingent upon religious and legal criteria. Consequently, prioritizing public interest above individual or group interests is a paramount indicator of organizational piety. A pious manager consistently places the welfare of the organization and society above their own or their group's immediate interests, ensuring that public funds are utilized solely for their intended purposes and that resource allocation is guided by the overarching interests of the community.

1. فَوَ اللهِ مَا أُعطِيتُ مِنْ دُنْيَاكُمْ مِنْ دِرْهَمٍ
2. مَا أَحَدٌ أَحَقُّ بِمَالٍ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِحَقٍّ

In practice, this pillar discourages conflicts of interest, nepotism, and the use of organizational resources for private benefit. A contemporary example would be a public-sector manager refusing to award contracts to companies owned by relatives, even when no legal prohibition exists, because doing so would violate the spirit of trusteeship and public interest.

5.5. Respecting Human Dignity (*Karāmah*)

Piety cultivates a profound respect for the intrinsic worth of the human self, encompassing both oneself and others. Actions such as insult and humiliation are seen as direct contradictions of piety. Imam Ali (as) warns this by stipulating that "One whose own self is contemptible in his eyes, do not trust his [potential] evil."[1] (Wisdom 328) This highlights that an individual who devalues themselves may lack the moral compass to respect others or may resort to harmful actions.

Conspicuously, in Letter 53 to Malik al-Ashtar, the Imam eloquently defines the basis of human dignity: "People are of two types: either your brother in faith or your equal in creation."[2] (Letter 53) This foundational statement posits that all human beings, irrespective of their religious affiliation or background, share a common creation and thus possess inherent dignity. In an organizational context, this translates to treating all employees, customers, and stakeholders with respect, regardless of their position, gender, ethnicity, or belief. A pious manager actively fosters an environment where everyone is treated with dignity, their opinions are heard, and their contributions are valued.

Contemporary expressions of this pillar include anti-discrimination policies, respectful communication norms, and mechanisms to prevent harassment and abuse of power. For instance, a multinational corporation might enforce a zero-tolerance policy for verbal abuse by supervisors, coupled with training on respectful leadership and confidential reporting channels.

5.6. Long-Term Perspective and Sustainability

Piety opens the manager's vision to the enduring consequences of actions, both in this world and the next, encouraging a move away from transient gains toward sustainable benefits. Imam Ali (as) offers profound guidance: "Work for your world as if you will live forever, and work for your Hereafter as if you will die tomorrow."[3] (Wisdom 31) This illuminates a crucial balance: diligently planning for worldly endeavors with foresight,

1. مَنْ هَانَتْ عَلَيْهِ نَفْسُهُ فَلَا تَأْمَنْ شَرَّهُ
2. النَّاسُ صِنْفَانِ: إِمَّا أَخٌ لَکَ فِی الدِّینِ أَوْ نَظِیرٌ لَکَ فِی الْخَلْقِ
3. اِعْمَلْ لِدُنْیَاکَ کَأَنَّکَ تَعِیشُ أَبَداً، وَ اعْمَلْ لِآخِرَتِکَ کَأَنَّکَ تَمُوتُ غَداً

while simultaneously remaining prepared for the ultimate accountability of the Hereafter. In organizational management, this translates to harmonizing long-term strategic planning with short-term operational needs, and integrating immediate profitability with long-term sustainability. A long-term perspective in management involves a commitment to:

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Minimizing ecological impact and promoting responsible resource management.
- **Intergenerational Equity:** Considering the needs and interests of future generations.
- **Investment in Innovation:** Allocating resources to research, development, and continuous improvement.
- **Ethical Practices:** Upholding principles that ensure the organization's longevity and positive societal impact.

A pious manager views the organization not merely as a current enterprise but as a legacy to be preserved and enhanced for future generations, thus intrinsically focusing on its enduring sustainability.

In modern terms, this pillar supports strategies such as long-term R&D investment, responsible supply-chain management, and avoidance of short-term profit maximization that harms the environment or community. An energy company, for example, might invest in renewable technologies and gradual transition plans even when fossil-fuel operations remain more profitable in the short run.

5.7. Attention to Knowledge and Wisdom (*'Ilm* and *Ḥikmah*)

Piety actively repels ignorance and bigotry, guiding individuals toward knowledge and wisdom. Consequently, a pious organization is inherently a learning organization, oriented towards wisdom. Imam Ali (as) states: "No poverty is more severe than ignorance."[1] (Wisdom 44). As a matter of fact, ignorance is characterized as the true poverty that impedes understanding reality and making sound decisions.

Highlighting the role of intellect, the Imam stipulates that "Intellect is a concealing cover, and meddling [or excessive curiosity] is an exposing display of faults."[2] (Wisdom 56) Intellect acts as a protective shield, preserving one's dignity and reputation, while unbridled curiosity or gossip can expose flaws. In the contemporary knowledge economy, embracing continuous learning and wisdom is an imperative for organizational success. A pious organization champions knowledge sharing, encourages intellectual critique, and values ethical innovation as core virtues.

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1. لاَ فَقْرَ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْجَهْلِ
2. الْعَقْلُ غِطَاءٌ سَتِيرٌ وَ الْفُضُولُ عِيَابٌ ظَهِيرٌ.

The all mentioned pillars—justice orientation, transparency and accountability, participation and consultation, prioritizing public interest, respecting human dignity, long-term perspective and sustainability, and attention to knowledge and wisdom—collectively form a coherent framework for understanding and implementing organizational responsibility within the Alawite model. Each pillar offers concrete indicators for evaluating and enhancing organizational piety.

These seven pillars are not merely abstract virtues; they are proposed as actionable dimensions that can guide the design of codes of conduct, performance appraisal criteria, leadership development programs, and governance structures in organizations that wish to operationalize *taqwá*-based responsibility.

6. Transformative Mechanisms of Piety in the Organization

Piety transcends a mere ethical checklist; it acts as a dynamic force that fundamentally transforms organizational functions through several key mechanisms. This section explores four primary ways piety drives organizational change:

6.1. Piety as a Substitute for External Supervision

A significant challenge in organization theory is the "agency" problem, as detailed by Jensen and Meckling (1976). They argue that because principals and agents often possess divergent interests, there is no assurance that agents will consistently act in ways that maximize the principal's welfare. Consequently, organizations incur monitoring and bonding costs to align interests and reduce agency losses (Jensen & Meckling, 1976, pp. 308–310). The primary drawback of conventional agency theory lies in the substantial costs associated with this monitoring. These include expenses for designing surveillance systems, employing inspectors and auditors, generating extensive reports, and accounting for violations that escape detection.

Piety, however, introduces a powerful and cost-effective control mechanism: *internal self-accountability*. By fostering an ingrained sense of responsibility, it supplants the need for constant external oversight. Imam Ali (as) powerfully advises: "Call yourselves to account before you are called to account."[1] (Wisdom 431) This principle of internal self-accounting serves as the most robust guarantee for ethical conduct. A pious employee, feeling a constant awareness of divine presence, performs duties diligently even when unobserved. Such individuals are less inclined toward misconduct, even if the opportunity for undetected transgression exists. This internal locus of control naturally leads to a reduction in violations,

1. حَاسِبُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ قَبْلَ أَنْ تُحَاسَبُوا

more honest reporting, and a diminished reliance on expensive monitoring systems. In economic terms, this translates to lower transaction costs (North, 1990) and reduced agency costs. Consequently, organizations that institutionalize piety operate with greater efficiency and lower oversight expenses.

From a practical standpoint, this mechanism suggests that organizations seeking to reduce excessive bureaucracy and monitoring can invest in cultivating a culture of piety and ethical self-regulation. For example, a remote-work team might rely less on screen-monitoring software and more on shared ethical norms, clear responsibilities, and mutual trust, knowing that each member feels accountable before God as well as before the manager.

6.2. Piety as a Source of Social Capital and Organizational Resilience

Social capital—defined by scholars like Putnam (1993) as encompassing trust, norms of cooperation, and communication networks—is a cornerstone of contemporary social sciences and management. It forms the essential foundation for constructive cooperation and interaction within both society and organizations.

An organization that embeds piety and justice into its operations inherently cultivates high levels of social capital. When employees observe managers acting with fairness, making ethical decisions, fulfilling promises, and prioritizing organizational welfare over personal gain, trust flourishes. This trust is the bedrock upon which social capital is built. This accumulated social capital acts as a crucial buffer, enhancing organizational resilience during times of crisis. Organizations rich in social capital are better equipped to withstand shocks and recover more swiftly. Imam Ali (as) cautions against superficial strategies, "Whoever relies on cunning will be humbled by circumstances."[1] (Wisdom 82)

Conversely, an organization driven by deceit and superficial stratagems is prone to collapse under pressure, having eroded its social capital. A pious organization, grounded in a history of honesty and trust, is better positioned to navigate crises, mitigate damage, and even rebuild trust effectively.

In contemporary settings, this mechanism can be observed when organizations with strong ethical reputations recover more quickly from scandals or market downturns because stakeholders are willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. For instance, a bank known for transparent dealings and fair treatment of customers may retain more depositors during a financial crisis than a competitor with a history of hidden fees and aggressive sales practices.

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1. مَنْ تَوَكَّلَ عَلَى الْحِيلَةِ دَانَتْ بِهِ الْحَالَةُ.

6.3. Piety as an Engine of Transcendent Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation theories in management, from Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943) to Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) and Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), primarily focus on material and psychological factors to foster deep and sustainable employee commitment. The Alawite model offers a compelling alternative through the *transcendent meaning-making of work*. When labor is undertaken with pure intention (*niyyah*) and framed as a duty or service, it is elevated beyond a mere job to an act of worship and a profound source of meaning. It has been famously reported that the Holy Prophet Moḥammad (pbuh) has stated that one's actions are judged by his/her intentions.[1] Imam Ali (as), emphasizes the value derived from diligent effort: "The worth of every person is in what they do well."[2] (Sermon 34) This perspective fosters the deepest levels of job satisfaction and commitment. A pious employee is motivated not solely by remuneration but by a desire to serve fellow human beings and to seek divine pleasure. This pursuit of *ihsan* (excellence) in work transcends mere task completion. This transcendent motivation provides a sustainable drive that remains resilient even in the face of adversity. Pious employees are more likely to persevere through difficult conditions and financial challenges, steadfastly fulfilling their responsibilities without shirking.

In practice, this mechanism implies that organizations can strengthen commitment not only through pay and benefits but also by articulating a higher purpose for work. A healthcare organization, for example, might frame clinical work not only as a profession but as a form of service to humanity and a means of spiritual growth, thereby reinforcing staff motivation during periods of high workload or resource constraints.

6.4. Piety and Ethical Knowledge Governance

In the contemporary knowledge economy, effective knowledge management is paramount. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) highlighted the concept of the knowledge-creating company, emphasizing that organizational success depends on the continuous creation, sharing, and utilization of knowledge. Through their SECI model (Socialization, Externalization, Comibnation, and Internalization), they demonstrated that sustainable organizational learning and innovation emerge from ongoing processes of knowledge exchange and collective learning.

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1. إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّات "Verily, deeds are judged by intentions."
2. قَدْرُ كُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا يُحْسِنُهُ

The Holy Qur'an eloquently illustrates the intrinsic relationship between piety and knowledge: *"Be wary of Allah and Allah will teach you, and Allah has knowledge of all things."*[1] (1: 282) (Qarai, 2005) This sacred verse highlights that piety serves as a precursor to true knowledge and insight. It posits that for those who practice piety towards God, a divine promise of teaching and enlightenment follows. This promise offers profound hope and encouragement for the challenging yet immensely fruitful path of *taqwá*-oriented transformation in organizations. The journey toward building organizations that are not only efficient but also ethically grounded and spiritually fulfilling is a noble endeavor, illuminated by divine guidance and sustained by a commitment to the principles derived from Nahj al-Balaghah.

From an Islamic perspective, knowledge is regarded as a form of trust (*amānah*) that carries ethical responsibilities toward both individuals and society. Possessing knowledge therefore entails an obligation to employ and share it for the common good rather than withholding it for personal advantage. The concealment of beneficial knowledge may constitute a violation of this trust because it deprives others of opportunities for learning, development, and collective advancement (Qur'an 4:58[2]; Tabataba'i, 1997). Many Muslim scholars interpret *amānah* broadly to include not only material responsibilities but also knowledge and expertise entrusted to individuals for the benefit of society (Tabataba'i, 1997).

Islamic teachings strongly discourage the concealment of beneficial knowledge. The Prophet Moḥammad (peace be upon him) warned against withholding knowledge when it is needed by others, emphasizing the moral responsibility of scholars and professionals to disseminate what they know. Such teachings encourage openness, learning, and the circulation of knowledge within organizations and communities (Abu Dawud, 2008). Similarly, Imam Ali viewed knowledge as a resource that grows through dissemination rather than possession. Unlike material wealth, which may diminish when distributed, knowledge expands through teaching, dialogue, and collective learning. This perspective encourages organizational cultures based on cooperation, mentorship, and the sharing of expertise rather than competition and knowledge hoarding (Sharif al-Radi, 1986).

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1. وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۖ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ»

2. إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا»

Translation: *"Indeed, Allah commands you to deliver the trusts to their [rightful] owners, and to judge with fairness when you judge between people. Excellent indeed is what Allah advises you. Indeed, Allah is all-hearing, all-seeing."* (Qarai, 2005)

Contemporary Muslim scholars have reinforced this understanding. Mutahhari (2010) argues that knowledge is not merely a personal asset but a social responsibility whose value is realized when it contributes to human development and public welfare. Consequently, the deliberate withholding of expertise for personal gain conflicts with the ethical purpose of knowledge and undermines collective progress. Likewise, Al-Sadr (1982) emphasizes that individual capabilities and resources should contribute to the advancement of society as a whole. Applied to organizational contexts, this principle implies that knowledge should be shared and utilized for collective benefit rather than monopolized for individual advantage.

These principles find practical expression through piety (*taqwā*) in organizational life. Piety mandates a sense of trusteeship in knowledge and regards knowledge hoarding as a betrayal of that trust. An employee who conceals expertise to maintain personal indispensability or gain advantage over colleagues acts contrary to the ethical demands of piety. By contrast, piety fosters a culture of knowledge sharing, honest dialogue, and mutual learning. A pious employee readily shares insights with others and remains open to learning from them, recognizing that knowledge expands when shared and diminishes when hoarded. This approach directly addresses the problem of individual appropriation of knowledge. In a pious organization, negative competition is minimized, while collaboration and interaction are encouraged, facilitating the collective creation and dissemination of knowledge. As a result, the organization evolves into a genuine learning organization characterized by continuous growth, innovation, and improvement.

In modern knowledge-intensive firms, this mechanism can support practices such as open internal wikis, mentorship programs, and communities of practice where senior experts are recognized and rewarded for developing others rather than for guarding their knowledge. A software company, for instance, might evaluate senior engineers partly on their contribution to team learning and documentation, not only on individual code output.

7. The Taqwá-Oriented Management Model and Its Adaptation to Modern Organizational Structures

The *taqwá*-oriented management model is not confined to traditional, hierarchical structures; its principles become even more vital and necessary in complex, modern organizational settings. This section examines the application of this model within three prevalent modern organizational structures: Before detailing these applications, it is important to clarify that the following discussions present a conceptual adaptation of the model to contemporary organizational forms. The examples provided are illustrative

scenarios intended to show how the model might function in practice; they do not constitute empirical evidence that the complete *taqwá*-oriented management model has already been implemented in any organization.

7.1. Matrix Organizations

Matrix organizations, characterized by employees reporting to multiple managers simultaneously, are designed for intricate, multi-dimensional projects. They inherently present challenges such as role conflict and ambiguity regarding priorities, as employees may receive conflicting directives (Galbraith, 1971; Davis & Lawrence, 1977). In such an environment, *communicative piety* and *transparency* become paramount. A pious employee, when faced with competing demands, will honestly and transparently communicate their limitations, capabilities, and current workload to all relevant managers. This open dialogue allows managers to understand the employee's situation and coordinate their directives accordingly, thereby mitigating conflict and clarifying priorities.

In practice, a project-based engineering firm operating with a matrix structure might encourage employees to maintain shared workload dashboards and hold regular tripartite meetings (employee, functional manager, project manager) to negotiate priorities. A culture of piety would support truthful reporting of capacity and constraints, reducing the temptation to overpromise or shift blame.

7.2. Network Organizations and Ecosystems

Network organizations thrive on collaboration between independent units to deliver a product or service, often involving extensive outsourcing and inter-organizational relationships. This structure is heavily reliant on *high levels of trust* (Powell, 1990).

In this context, *piety of commitment*, exemplified by loyalty to agreements even in the absence of direct supervision, is crucial for building social capital and fostering inter-organizational trust. The selection of ethical partners is a fundamental condition for survival and success within such networks. An organization that demonstrates disloyalty to its commitments will rapidly lose its standing and its place within the network ecosystem.

Contemporary supply-chain networks illustrate this mechanism: a manufacturer that consistently honors delivery schedules, quality standards, and fair pricing—even when short-term opportunities for opportunistic behavior arise—becomes a preferred partner in the network. Over time, this reputation reduces transaction costs, facilitates smoother negotiations, and increases resilience during disruptions.

7.3. Virtual and Remote Work Organizations

The rise of remote work and virtual organizations, accelerated by advancements in communication technologies and events like the COVID-19 pandemic, has made these structures increasingly common. In this model, in-person supervision is minimized, making direct oversight of employees difficult for managers. Here, the *self-control stemming from piety* emerges as the primary supervisory mechanism. This emphasis on internalized accountability is consistent with the Islamic conception of *taqwá* as a continuous awareness of divine oversight and moral responsibility (Qur'an 49:13[1]; Al-Isfahani, 2009). A culture of trust replaces the need for micromanagement. A pious employee, whether working from home or elsewhere, is expected to perform their duties diligently and avoid wasting time, knowing they are accountable for their actions regardless of direct supervision.

In a fully remote software-development startup, for example, team members might coordinate through asynchronous tools and shared task boards, with minimal real-time monitoring. A *taqwá*-oriented culture would encourage each developer to manage their time responsibly, meet deadlines, and communicate proactively, not because of surveillance but because of an internalized sense of duty and trust.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate how the seven pillars and transformative mechanisms of piety can be mapped onto modern organizational forms. They also underscore that the *taqwá*-oriented management model is proposed here as a conceptual framework whose full implementation and effects remain to be empirically investigated.

8. Implementation Challenges and Operational Solutions

Implementing the *taqwá*-oriented management model in contemporary organizations presents several significant challenges. This section addresses the most critical of these and proposes operational solutions.

8.1. Main Challenges

- **Superficial Understanding of Piety:** Many managers and employees hold a narrow view of piety, seeing it solely as an individual, devotional matter disconnected from the organizational sphere. This misconception is a primary barrier to its application in management.

1. يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ
Translation: *"O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, all-aware."* (Qarai, 2005)

Overcoming this requires a redefinition of piety, emphasizing its organizational and managerial dimensions.

- **Incompatibility with Existing Structures:** Many organizations operate with quantitative reward systems and power-oriented bureaucratic structures that are fundamentally at odds with the values of piety. In such systems, individual gain often overshadows public interest and ethical considerations. Reforming these structures to align with piety requires a redesign based on its core values.
- **Difficulty in Measurement:** Quantifying *piety* and *ethical performance* is inherently difficult. Unlike easily measurable metrics such as sales or profit, ethical indicators lack straightforward quantification. This measurement challenge hinders the development of reward systems directly tied to piety. Therefore, developing operational indicators for measuring organizational piety is essential.
- **Cultural and Contextual Constraints:** In some organizational and national contexts, prevailing norms may prioritize short-term performance, aggressive competition, or personal connections over justice, transparency, and trusteeship. Introducing a *taqwá*-based model in such environments may encounter resistance or be superficially adopted without genuine transformation.
- **Risk of Instrumentalization:** There is a danger that piety may be reduced to a public-relations tool or a symbolic label, rather than being internalized as a guiding principle. This risk is particularly acute when ethical language is used to enhance reputation without corresponding changes in structures, incentives, and behaviors.

8.2. Solutions at the Micro Level (Organization)

- **Leadership by Example:** The transformation must commence with senior leadership. Managers must embody piety in their actions and practically implement Alawite principles. The importance of ethical role modeling by leaders has been widely recognized in organizational ethics literature (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Retraining senior managers on concepts derived from Nahj al-Balaghah is a crucial first step. A good example, as mentioned earlier, is Imam Ali's instructions to Malik al-Ashtar (Letter 53).
- **Redesigning Systems:** Selection, evaluation, and reward systems should be reconfigured around ethical indicators and piety. During selection, ethical characteristics should be prioritized alongside technical skills. Ethical performance must be a key criterion in evaluations. Reward systems should encourage and recognize virtue-oriented behaviors. Establishing a secure ethical reporting system can also aid in identifying and rectifying ethical issues.



- **Establishing Ethical Governance Bodies:** The formation of a professional ethics council and an ethical transformation task force within the organization can institutionalize pious values. These bodies can draft an ethical charter, manage ethical complaints, and provide ethical guidance to all personnel, playing a vital role in shaping a morally grounded organizational culture.
- **Employee Training and Cultural Transformation:** Research in organizational ethics suggests that ethical culture is strengthened through systematic training, value reinforcement, and leadership commitment (Schein, 2010). Comprehensive training on piety and organizational responsibility, alongside modeling by pious managers and employees, storytelling about virtuous conduct, and explicit appreciation of such behaviors, can gradually foster a culture of organizational piety.
- **Developing Operational Indicators:** To address the measurement challenge, organizations can develop qualitative and semi-quantitative indicators of organizational piety, such as:
  - Frequency and quality of ethical discussions in meetings.
  - Employee perceptions of fairness, transparency, and respect (via anonymous surveys).
  - Incidence and handling of ethical violations.
  - Extent of knowledge-sharing practices (e.g., mentorship activities, documentation contributions).

These indicators do not reduce piety to a simple score but provide feedback for continuous improvement and reflection.

8.3. Solutions at the Macro Level (Policy and Education)

- **Curriculum Integration in Higher Education:** Universities and higher education institutions play a critical role in shaping future managers. Incorporating courses such as Foundations of Islamic Management and Business Ethics Based on Religious Texts into management curricula will train managers conversant with the principles of piety.
- **Government Incentives:** Governments can foster organizational piety through robust incentives. This could include granting a national ethical certificate to organizations demonstrating high transparency and accountability, and offering tax benefits or preferential treatment in tenders to such organizations.
- **Content Production and Role Modeling:** Showcasing successful organizations and managers who have effectively integrated ethics with efficiency can provide valuable models for others. Producing relevant content—books, films, articles—and organizing conferences and workshops can help disseminate the culture of organizational piety.

- **Support for Empirical Research:** Academic and research institutions can support studies that operationalize the *taqwá*-oriented management model, develop measurement instruments, and test its effects on organizational outcomes such as trust, performance, employee well-being, and sustainability. Such research is essential to move from conceptual proposal to evidence-based practice.

9. Discussion

This article has demonstrated that piety, as articulated in the discourse of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, transcends its interpretation as a mere individual and devotional virtue. Instead, it functions as a dynamic and transformative system capable of establishing profound and sustainable organizational responsibility on a divine foundation. By fostering internal control, mitigating agency costs, augmenting social capital, strengthening intrinsic motivation, and institutionalizing ethical knowledge governance, piety possesses the capacity to revolutionize contemporary organizations.

The *taqwá-oriented management* model, as presented herein, offers a comprehensive framework that addresses both the internal transformation of individuals—cultivating an ethical conscience—and the design of facilitating organizational structures and systems. Through the extraction of seven foundational pillars of organizational responsibility—namely, justice-orientation, transparency and accountability, participation and consultation, prioritization of public interest, respect for human dignity, long-term perspective and sustainability, and attention to knowledge and wisdom—this model provides a clear roadmap for operationalizing piety within an organizational context.

The aspirational outcome of this model is the creation of a *transcendent organization*. Such an entity is one where work is imbued with the character of worship, justice is a prevailing force, trust serves as the primary capital, and profit is viewed not as an end in itself, but as a means for service and a context for divine blessing. Consequently, this organization not only generates wealth but also cultivates meaning and justice for all its stakeholders and for society at large.

The transcendent organization is envisioned to possess the following key characteristics:

- **Committed Employees:** Individuals with strong intrinsic motivation who approach their work with dedication, viewing it as a form of worship.
- **Trustworthy Managers:** Leaders who perceive themselves as stewards or trustees responsible for the organization, its employees, and society, thereby safeguarding public funds and resources.

- **Just Systems:** Organizational systems and processes are designed with justice as their cornerstone, leaving no room for discrimination or inequity.
- **Mutual Trust:** A climate of deep, reciprocal trust pervades interactions between managers and employees, as well as between the organization and its external stakeholders.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** The organization demonstrates a commitment to environmental sustainability and upholds its responsibilities towards future generations.
- **Continuous Learning:** The organization engages in ongoing learning and improvement, fostering a dynamic environment for the flow of knowledge.

The proposed model has several practical implications for managers, policymakers, and educators:

- **For managers:** The model offers a value-based framework for designing ethical cultures, governance mechanisms, and leadership practices. Managers can use the seven pillars as criteria for evaluating decisions, policies, and behaviors, and as a basis for developing codes of conduct and performance appraisal systems.
- **For policymakers:** The model suggests that public policies and incentives can encourage organizations to adopt ethical practices grounded in justice, transparency, and trusteeship. National ethical certification schemes, procurement preferences, and support for ethics education can create an enabling environment for *taqwá*-oriented management.
- **For educators:** The model provides content for courses on Islamic management, business ethics, and leadership. Case discussions, reflective exercises, and textual analysis of *Nahj al-Balaghah* can help students connect theological–ethical principles with contemporary organizational challenges.

Like all conceptual studies, this research has limitations that should be acknowledged:

- **Conceptual and Textual Nature:** The model has been developed primarily through textual and interpretive analysis of Nahj al-Balaghah and related Islamic sources. It has not yet been empirically tested in organizational settings.
- **Contextual Specificity:** While the principles are intended to be broadly applicable, their interpretation and implementation may vary across cultural, religious, and institutional contexts. The discussion of Iran in the research questions highlights one possible context, but further work is needed to explore other settings.

- **Measurement Challenges:** As noted earlier, operationalizing and measuring organizational piety and its effects pose methodological challenges. Developing valid and reliable instruments remains an important task for future research.

Future studies may therefore seek to:

- Operationalize the model through measurable indicators of organizational piety and develop assessment instruments.
- Examine the model's effectiveness across different organizational and cultural contexts using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.
- Conduct comparative studies between *taqwá*-oriented management and contemporary ethical leadership models to identify strengths, overlaps, and unique contributions.
- Explore how specific pillars (e.g., transparency, justice, knowledge sharing) relate to outcomes such as employee trust, commitment, performance, and well-being.

Realizing this vision necessitates a collective commitment. Researchers are called upon to scientifically expand and rigorously test this model. Courageous managers must take the initiative to implement it experimentally within their organizations. Policymakers, in turn, are tasked with creating the conducive macro-level environments required for its widespread adoption. By adhering to the illuminating wisdom of Ali (peace be upon him) and drawing guidance from *Nahj al-Balaghah*, a significant stride can be made toward constructing more humane and just organizations and, by extension, more equitable societies.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the relationship between piety and organizational responsibility through an analysis of Nahj al-Balaghah and to develop an operational model of *taqwá*-oriented management applicable to contemporary organizations. The central research question was how piety, as articulated in Nahj al-Balaghah, can be conceptualized and operationalized as an internal control mechanism that strengthens organizational responsibility. The findings demonstrate that, within the Alawite intellectual framework, *taqwá* is far more than an individual spiritual virtue. Rather, it functions as a comprehensive ethical and managerial principle capable of shaping organizational behavior, decision-making processes, governance systems, and stakeholder relations. By transforming responsibility from a merely contractual obligation into a divinely grounded commitment, *taqwá* provides a distinctive foundation for organizational accountability and ethical performance.

The study identified seven interrelated pillars of organizational responsibility rooted in piety: justice orientation, transparency and

accountability, participation and consultation, prioritization of public interest, respect for human dignity, long-term sustainability, and commitment to knowledge and wisdom. Collectively, these pillars constitute an integrated framework for the construction of ethically resilient and socially responsible organizations. The analysis further indicated that piety can serve as an internal control mechanism that reduces agency costs, strengthens social capital, enhances intrinsic motivation, and promotes ethical knowledge governance. These capacities suggest that the proposed model is not limited to traditional organizational settings but can also be adapted to contemporary organizational forms, including matrix, networked, and virtual organizations.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing field of Islamic management by offering a systematic and operational model derived directly from Nahj al-Balaghah rather than from generalized ethical principles. It also expands contemporary discussions of organizational responsibility by introducing a transcendent and internally motivated perspective that complements existing secular approaches. Practically, the model provides managers, policymakers, and educational institutions with a framework for cultivating ethical organizational cultures grounded in trust, justice, and accountability.

Like all conceptual studies, this research has limitations. The proposed model has been developed primarily through textual and interpretive analysis and has not yet been empirically tested in organizational settings. The contemporary examples provided are illustrative scenarios, not evidence of full implementation. Future studies may therefore seek to operationalize the model through measurable indicators of organizational piety, develop assessment instruments, and examine its effectiveness across different organizational and cultural contexts. Comparative studies between *taqwá*-oriented management and contemporary ethical leadership models may also provide valuable insights into their respective strengths and areas of convergence.

Ultimately, the article argues that piety, when understood as a comprehensive organizational principle, possesses the potential to transform organizations into communities of responsibility, trust, justice, and meaningful service. Such organizations contribute not only to economic performance but also to the moral and social flourishing of the societies they serve.

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A Conceptual Framework for Elucidating the Epistemological Foundations of Academic Readiness and Academic Integrity for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence: Emphasizing the Teachings of *Nahj al-Balaghah*

Elham Shakari[1]
Farhad Balash[2]
Riḍā Ghorban Jahromi[3]
Atefeh Shakibarad[4]

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, has created new opportunities and challenges for higher education. The responsible use of this technology extends beyond the mere ability to operate intelligent tools; it also requires academic readiness and adherence to the principles of academic integrity. Despite the significance of these two constructs, the existing literature has generally examined them within separate theoretical frameworks, while the potential of Islamic epistemological sources to deepen their theoretical foundations has received limited attention. Accordingly, the present study aimed to develop a conceptual framework for explaining the epistemological, educational, and ethical foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity in the context of AI, with particular emphasis on the teachings of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. This study employed a theoretical review approach using

1M.A. Student of Educational Psychology, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran.
Corresponding Author: elham.shekari7711@gmail.com
2Assistant Professor, Faculty Member, Imam Mobin Research Center, Qom, Iran: efarhaddevelopment@gmail.com
3Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran: rrghorban@gmail.com
4Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran: atefeh.shakibarad@gmail.com

document analysis, concept analysis, and theoretical synthesis. First, the literature on academic readiness, academic integrity, and the responsible use of AI in higher education was reviewed to identify their principal components. Subsequently, selected concepts from *Nahj al-Balaghah* were examined through concept analysis to explore their potential for explaining the theoretical foundations of the research constructs. The objective was not to establish direct conceptual equivalence between classical concepts and contemporary constructs, but rather to identify the capacity of *Nahj al-Balaghah* to enrich the study's theoretical framework. The findings indicated that concepts such as reason (*ʿaql*), wisdom (*ḥikmah*), the unity of knowledge and action, self-accountability, truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, and responsibility can serve as foundational components for reinterpreting academic readiness and academic integrity in the age of AI. Based on the theoretical synthesis, a conceptual framework was developed in which academic readiness provides the cognitive, psychological, and technological capacities required for informed engagement with AI, whereas academic integrity determines the ethical orientation and sense of responsibility guiding such engagement. By integrating contemporary higher education literature with the epistemological resources of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, this study proposes an integrative framework for a deeper understanding of the foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity amid technological transformation. The proposed framework may provide a basis for future empirical research, the design of educational programs, and the development of institutional policies regarding the responsible use of AI in higher education.

Keywords: Academic readiness, Academic integrity, Artificial intelligence, *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Higher education.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Transformation of Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, has transformed learning, teaching, research, and knowledge production in higher education. AI-based tools are increasingly used for content generation, information analysis, translation, programming, and educational and research support, offering opportunities to enhance productivity, personalize learning, and expand access to scholarly resources (Kasneci et al., 2023: 102274). However, their widespread use has also raised concerns about learning quality, intellectual independence, the authenticity of scholarly work, intellectual property, and research credibility (UNESCO, 2023: 24–25). Therefore, higher education must develop not only students' technological skills but also the cognitive, psychological, and value-based capacities required for informed and responsible AI use.

1.2. Academic Readiness and Academic Integrity

In this context, academic readiness and academic integrity have become increasingly important. Academic readiness refers to the capacities required for learning, research, problem-solving, and decision-making, including cognitive abilities, self-regulation, psychological readiness, technological competence, and awareness of ethical requirements (Pintrich, 2000: 451–452; Zimmerman, 2000: 13–14). Academic integrity, in contrast, encompasses the principles that guide scholarly conduct and protect the credibility of education and research. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) identifies honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage as its fundamental values (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021: 4). Although conceptually distinct, academic readiness and academic integrity are complementary in the age of AI. Technological competence without ethical responsibility cannot ensure appropriate AI use, while ethical commitment without sufficient cognitive and technological capabilities may limit its effective use.

1.3. The Potential of Nahj al-Balaghah for Explaining the Conceptual Foundations of the Study

Nahj al-Balaghah, as an influential epistemological and ethical text in the Islamic intellectual tradition, contains teachings concerning knowledge, learning, human conduct, and social responsibility. Concepts such as reason, wisdom, self-accountability, truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, and responsibility provide valuable perspectives for understanding scholarly behavior. This study does not seek to establish direct equivalence between these concepts and contemporary higher education constructs.

Rather, through concept analysis and theoretical synthesis, it examines their potential to elucidate the foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity.

1.4. Research Objective and Contribution

This study aims to develop a conceptual framework for explaining the epistemological foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity in the responsible use of artificial intelligence, with emphasis on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah. It addresses the following research questions:

2. How can the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah contribute to explaining the epistemological and ethical foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity?
3. How can concept analysis and theoretical synthesis contribute to developing a conceptual framework for responsible AI use in higher education?

The study contributes by connecting contemporary higher education literature with the epistemological resources of Nahj al-Balaghah without treating either as a substitute for the other; integrating academic readiness and academic integrity as complementary constructs for engagement with AI; and proposing a conceptual framework that may support future empirical research, assessment instrument development, and educational programs promoting responsible AI use in higher education.

2. Problem Statement

Previous research has examined various dimensions of academic readiness, academic integrity, self-regulated learning, and the use of emerging technologies. However, these domains have generally been investigated within separate theoretical frameworks. Consequently, there remains a need for conceptual frameworks capable of integrating the cognitive, individual, and value-based foundations of engagement with intelligent technologies into a coherent theoretical model. Moreover, most existing frameworks have been developed within contemporary human sciences, while the potential of Islamic epistemological resources to explain concepts such as knowledge, reason, responsibility, trustworthiness, and ethics in higher education and emerging technologies has received comparatively little attention. Therefore, exploring the potential of these resources to enrich the theoretical foundations of higher education constructs may contribute to the development of interdisciplinary conceptual frameworks.

3. Theoretical Foundations

3.1. Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Higher Education

Artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, has become a major driver of transformation in higher education. Its capabilities in content generation, information processing, translation, programming, and support for teaching and research offer opportunities to improve the quality and efficiency of academic practices (Kasneci et al., 2023: 102274). However, its widespread adoption has also raised concerns regarding learning quality, intellectual independence, the authenticity of scholarly work, intellectual property, and research credibility (UNESCO, 2023: 24–25). Therefore, the challenge is not merely to provide access to AI or develop technical skills, but to enable students to engage with these technologies critically and responsibly through appropriate cognitive, self-regulatory, technological, and ethical capacities.

3.2. The Concept of Academic Readiness

Academic readiness refers to the capacities and competencies required for effective learning, research, problem-solving, and decision-making in higher education. Beyond subject-specific knowledge, it includes managing the learning process, using academic resources effectively, adapting to new educational environments, and engaging with academic challenges (Pintrich, 2000: 451–452; Zimmerman, 2000: 13–14). In the age of AI, academic readiness also requires the ability to critically evaluate information, interact thoughtfully with intelligent technologies, and maintain intellectual independence. Based on the literature, it can be conceptualized through four dimensions:

Cognitive Readiness: The ability to analyze information, think critically, solve problems, and evaluate information credibility, particularly when assessing AI-generated outputs (Kasneci et al., 2023: 102274).

Psychological Readiness: Self-regulation, motivation, self-efficacy, and the ability to manage learning through goal setting, performance monitoring, and strategy adjustment (Pintrich, 2000: 451–452; Zimmerman, 2000: 13–14).

Technological Readiness: The ability to select, evaluate, and effectively use digital technologies for educational and research purposes (Vuorikari et al., 2022: 3–4).

Ethical Readiness: The ability to recognize ethical issues, make responsible decisions, and consider the consequences of scholarly conduct (Rest, 1986: 3–5).

Thus, academic readiness represents a set of complementary capacities enabling informed, purposeful, and responsible engagement with academic activities.

3.3. The Concept of Academic Integrity

Academic integrity refers to the values and principles that preserve the credibility of education, research, and knowledge production and guide scholarly conduct. It extends beyond avoiding misconduct to encompass a broader commitment to ethical academic behavior (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021: 4–5).

According to the International Center for Academic Integrity, six core values constitute academic integrity **(International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021: 5)**:

- **Honesty:** Truthfulness and authenticity in producing and presenting knowledge.
- **Trust:** Scholarly relationships based on reliability and mutual confidence.
- **Fairness:** Justice and impartiality in academic activities.
- **Respect:** Recognition of the rights, perspectives, and dignity of others.
- **Responsibility:** Accountability for academic decisions and conduct.
- **Courage:** Commitment to academic principles under difficult circumstances.

In the age of AI, these values are particularly important because intelligent technologies raise questions about authorship, transparency, authenticity, and responsibility in knowledge production.

3.4. The Relationship between Academic Readiness and Academic Integrity

Academic readiness and academic integrity are distinct but complementary. Academic readiness provides the cognitive, psychological, technological, and ethical capacities required for effective academic engagement, while academic integrity provides the principles that guide such engagement. In AI-supported environments, technological competence without academic integrity may lead to inappropriate use, whereas ethical commitment without sufficient cognitive and technological competence may limit effective use. Examining both constructs together therefore provides a more comprehensive basis for understanding responsible AI use in higher education.

3.5. Positioning the Present Study Within the Existing Literature

Existing frameworks, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Digital Competence Framework (DigComp), self-regulated learning theory, and academic integrity framework, address different aspects of technology use and scholarly behavior (Davis, 1989: 320; Vuorikari et al., 2022: 3–4; Zimmerman, 2000: 13–14; International Center

for Academic Integrity, 2021: 4–5). However, they largely originate from contemporary human sciences and give limited attention to alternative epistemological traditions in explaining concepts such as knowledge, responsibility, and scholarly conduct. The present study therefore draws on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah to enrich the conceptual foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity in the context of responsible AI use.

4. Research Method

4.1. Research Approach

This study is a fundamental, theoretical review employing document analysis, concept analysis, and theoretical synthesis to develop a conceptual framework for explaining the epistemological foundations of academic readiness and academic integrity in the responsible use of artificial intelligence, with particular emphasis on the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah. Since the study focuses on the analysis and conceptual development of constructs rather than empirical testing of causal relationships, a theoretical review approach was adopted (Jabareen, 2009: 49–52; Snyder, 2019: 333–335). The study first examined the core constructs in contemporary higher education literature, then analyzed relevant epistemological and ethical concepts from Nahj al-Balaghah, and finally integrated the findings through theoretical synthesis.

4.2. Document Analysis

Document analysis was conducted to identify and organize the theoretical foundations of the study. Sources included scholarly articles, academic books, policy documents, and theoretical frameworks related to higher education, academic readiness, academic integrity, and AI use in educational settings. Relevant literature was identified through Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Persian academic databases. *Nahj al-Balaghah* and its authoritative commentaries were also examined as the principal sources for analyzing epistemological and ethical concepts. Sources were selected based on their relevance, scholarly credibility, theoretical contribution, and suitability for developing the conceptual framework. The selected documents were then analyzed to identify and organize the concepts required for subsequent stages (Bowen, 2009: 27–29; Grant & Booth, 2009: 93–95).

4.3. Concept Analysis

Concept analysis was used to examine the study's core concepts and the potential of *Nahj al-Balaghah* to enrich their theoretical foundations. Concepts from different epistemological traditions may be expressed through distinct conceptual frameworks while contributing to the understanding and development of a common phenomenon (Rodgers,

2000: 77–81; Walker & Avant, 2019: 163–166). Accordingly, the definitions and dimensions of academic readiness and academic integrity were first identified in contemporary literature. Relevant epistemological, educational, and ethical concepts in Nahj al-Balaghah concerning knowledge, reason, responsibility, and human conduct were then identified and analyzed. The purpose was not to establish direct equivalence between these concepts and contemporary constructs, but to examine their potential for strengthening their theoretical foundations. Concepts were included in the final framework based on three criteria:

1. Direct relevance to the research problem;
2. Support from authentic textual evidence in *Nahj al-Balaghah*;
3. Theoretical relevance to academic readiness, academic integrity, or responsible AI use.

4.4. Development and Synthesis of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was developed through four stages involving the analysis and integration of concepts derived from contemporary higher education literature and the teachings of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. *Nahj al-Balaghah* was not treated as a substitute for contemporary theories, but as an epistemological resource for explaining concepts related to knowledge, responsibility, and scholarly conduct. The resulting framework was evaluated in terms of conceptual coherence, theoretical consistency, and its capacity to explain the research problem (Jabareen, 2009: 51–54; Snyder, 2019: 336–339).

Table 1. Stages of Developing the Conceptual Framework

Stage	**Activity**	**Output**
Document Analysis	Review of the literature on higher education, academic readiness, academic integrity, and artificial intelligence	Identification of the principal constructs and concepts
Concept Analysis	Examination of *Nahj al-Balaghah* concepts related to knowledge, reason, ethics, and responsibility	Identification of relevant epistemological and ethical concepts
Conceptual Relationship Analysis	Examination of the potential of *Nahj al-Balaghah* concepts to enrich the theoretical foundations of the research constructs	Development of theoretical linkages among concepts
Theoretical Synthesis	Organization of the selected concepts into a coherent conceptual structure	Proposed conceptual framework

5. Findings of the Concept Analysis of *Nahj al-Balaghah*

5.1. Foundation of the Concept Analysis of *Nahj al-Balaghah*

The concept analysis of *Nahj al-Balaghah* in this study was not conducted with the intention of identifying direct equivalents for contemporary higher education constructs. Concepts such as academic readiness and academic integrity have emerged within the theoretical context of modern educational sciences and higher education and therefore cannot be directly equated with concepts found in classical texts. Accordingly, *Nahj al-Balaghah* was examined as an epistemological and educational resource capable of contributing to the explanation of concepts related to cognition, learning, responsibility, and human conduct. The concept analysis focused on identifying concepts from *Nahj al-Balaghah* that were both supported by authentic textual evidence and conceptually relevant to the dimensions examined in this study, namely cognitive capacities, self-regulation, academic responsibility, and ethical values. Consequently, concepts including reason (*ʿaql*), wisdom (*ḥikmah*), self-awareness and self-accountability, the unity of knowledge and action, trustworthiness, truthfulness, justice, and responsibility were identified as the principal concepts of the analysis. These concepts were considered not as substitutes for contemporary constructs but as epistemological and ethical foundations that enrich their interpretation.

5.2. Reason and Wisdom: Epistemological Foundations for Conscious Engagement with Knowledge and Technology

One of the central themes of *Nahj al-Balaghah* is the emphasis on reason and wisdom as guiding principles of human conduct. From this perspective, knowledge acquires value only when accompanied by sound judgment, careful deliberation, and informed decision-making. Imam Ali (as) states:

«لَا غِنَى كَالْعَقْلِ» (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Saying 113)

This statement presents reason as one of humanity's greatest assets. Within the conceptual framework of the present study, reason is understood as the capacity for evaluation, discernment, and sound judgment—a capacity closely associated with critical thinking, information evaluation, and scholarly decision-making. Likewise, the concept of wisdom emphasizes the appropriate application of knowledge and its use in the proper context. Knowledge, therefore, is not merely the accumulation of information but requires an understanding of circumstances, anticipation of consequences, and the selection of appropriate actions. Accordingly, reason and wisdom constitute epistemological foundations for understanding the cognitive dimensions of informed decision-making in the context of emerging technologies.

5.3. Self-Awareness and Self-Accountability: Foundations of Self-Regulation and Personal Responsibility

Another important theme in *Nahj al-Balaghah* concerns self-knowledge and the continuous evaluation of one's own conduct. The concept of self-accountability is based on the principle that individuals should examine their own inner state and actions before judging external matters. Imam Ali (A.S.) states:

«مَنْ حَاسَبَ نَفْسَهُ رَبِحَ» (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Saying 208)

From an analytical perspective, this concept corresponds to ideas such as self-assessment, self-monitoring, and behavioral regulation found in theories of self-regulated learning. However, *Nahj al-Balaghah* frames this process within an ethical and educational context. Consequently, self-awareness and self-accountability may be regarded as epistemological foundations for understanding self-regulation, intellectual independence, and individual responsibility in scholarly activities.

5.4. Knowledge Accompanied by Action: The Relationship Between Knowledge and Responsible Practice

In *Nahj al-Balaghah*, knowledge attains its full value only when it is translated into action. Imam Ali (A.S.) states:

«ثَمَرَةُ الْعِلْمِ الْعَمَلُ بِهِ» (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Saying 366)

This teaching suggests that knowledge separated from appropriate action lacks its full human significance. Within the context of this study, it is interpreted as emphasizing the necessity of transforming knowledge into responsible scholarly practice. Thus, the unity of knowledge and action provides an epistemological basis for the view that scientific and technological competence becomes meaningful only when exercised responsibly in real-world academic practice.

5.5. Trustworthiness and Truthfulness: Foundations of Academic Authenticity and Scholarly Trust

Trustworthiness and commitment to truth are among the important concepts emphasized in *Nahj al-Balaghah*. Within this perspective, individuals are responsible for whatever is entrusted to them, and knowledge is no exception. In Letter 53, Imam Ali (as) emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness in fulfilling social responsibilities. From the standpoint of concept analysis, trustworthiness and truthfulness provide an epistemological basis for understanding values such as academic authenticity, proper attribution of knowledge, avoidance of distortion, and responsibility in the production and dissemination of information. In the context of artificial intelligence, these concepts become particularly important because the use of AI-generated content requires transparency,

the preservation of academic authenticity, and accountability for generated outputs.

6.6. Justice and Responsibility: The Social Dimensions of Scholarly Conduct

Nahj al-Balaghah regards justice and responsibility as fundamental principles of social order. In Letter 53, justice is presented as one of the foundations of sound governance. Within the present study, justice and responsibility contribute to understanding the social dimensions of scholarly conduct, including fairness, consideration of the consequences of decisions, and accountability in the use of knowledge and technology. Rather than being treated as direct equivalents of particular dimensions of academic integrity, these concepts function as ethical foundations for understanding responsible scholarly behavior.

5.7. Summary of the Concept Analysis

The concept analysis of *Nahj al-Balaghah* demonstrates that the text offers a rich body of epistemological and ethical concepts capable of contributing to the theoretical understanding of academic readiness and academic integrity.

These concepts include:

- **Reason and wisdom** as the foundations of discernment and the prudent use of knowledge;
- **Self-awareness and self-accountability** as the foundations of self-regulation and behavioral improvement;
- **The unity of knowledge and action** as the link between knowledge and responsible practice;
- **Trustworthiness and truthfulness** as the foundations of academic authenticity;
- **Justice and responsibility** as the foundations of scholarly and social conduct.

Accordingly, *Nahj al-Balaghah* is not presented as an alternative framework to contemporary higher education theories. Rather, it serves as an epistemological resource for enriching the understanding of academic readiness and academic integrity in the age of artificial intelligence.

6. Theoretical Synthesis and Development of the Conceptual Framework

6.1. Identification of the Principal Components of the Conceptual Framework

Based on the document analysis, concept analysis, and examination of the teachings of *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the proposed conceptual framework was organized into three primary levels. The first level consists of the epistemological and ethical foundations extracted from the concept

analysis of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. These foundations include reason, wisdom, self-awareness, the unity of knowledge and action, truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, and responsibility. These concepts are not regarded as substitutes for contemporary higher education constructs; rather, they function as epistemological foundations for a deeper understanding of scholarly conduct and responsible engagement with technology.

The second level comprises the two principal constructs of the study: academic readiness and academic integrity. Academic readiness represents the cognitive, psychological, and technological capacities required for informed engagement with academic environments and emerging technologies, whereas academic integrity provides the ethical orientation and guiding principles governing scholarly conduct.

The third level represents the responsible use of artificial intelligence, which is conceptualized as the outcome of the interaction between academic readiness and academic integrity. In this framework, effective use of AI becomes possible only when individual competencies are accompanied by academic and ethical values.

Table 2. Relationship Between *Nahj al-Balaghah* Concepts and the Proposed Conceptual Framework

Concepts from *Nahj al-Balaghah*	Epistemological Role within the Conceptual Framework
Reason and Wisdom	Strengthening discernment, critical evaluation, and informed decision-making
Self-Awareness and Self-Accountability	Enhancing self-regulation and performance evaluation
Knowledge Accompanied by Action	Linking knowledge to responsible practice
Truthfulness	Promoting academic authenticity and the pursuit of truth
Trustworthiness	Supporting responsibility in the production and dissemination of knowledge
Justice	Encouraging fairness and consideration of the social consequences of scholarly conduct
Responsibility	Accepting accountability for academic decisions and scholarly performance

6.2. Conceptual Synthesis of Academic Readiness and Academic Integrity

The theoretical synthesis indicates that academic readiness and academic integrity are two distinct yet interrelated constructs. Academic readiness equips individuals with the capacities required to engage with

academic challenges, evaluate information, learn independently, and use technology purposefully. Academic integrity, in contrast, determines the ethical and value-based framework within which these capacities should be exercised. From the perspective of the proposed framework, the ability to use artificial intelligence without principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, and responsibility may result in superficial or inappropriate use of the technology. Likewise, ethical values alone cannot be translated into effective scholarly conduct without the cognitive abilities necessary for critical analysis, learning, and the effective use of technology. Accordingly, the responsible use of artificial intelligence is not the product of a single construct but rather the outcome of the interaction between individuals' cognitive and technological capacities and the ethical values that govern scholarly conduct.

6.3. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical synthesis, the proposed conceptual framework is organized into four hierarchical levels.

Level 1: Epistemological Foundations of *Nahj al-Balaghah*

The first level comprises the epistemological and ethical principles that shape individuals' perspectives toward knowledge, technology, and responsibility. These include:

- Reason
- Wisdom
- Self-awareness
- Knowledge accompanied by action
- Truthfulness
- Trustworthiness
- Justice
- Responsibility

This level serves as the theoretical and ethical foundation of the conceptual framework.

Level 2: Academic Readiness

The second level consists of the capacities that prepare students for scholarly activities and engagement with emerging technologies. These include:

- Cognitive readiness
- Psychological readiness
- Technological readiness
- Ethical readiness

This level represents individuals' ability to understand, evaluate, and effectively utilize academic and technological resources.

Level 3: Academic Integrity

The third level comprises the values that guide scholarly conduct. These include:

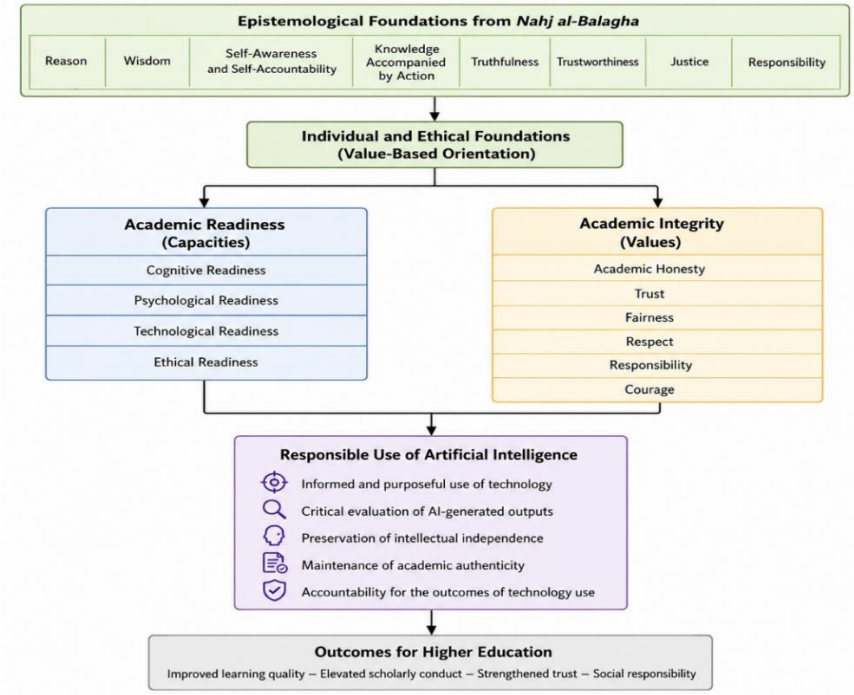
- Academic honesty
- Trust
- Fairness
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Courage

This level ensures that knowledge and technology are employed in accordance with accepted academic principles.

Level 4: Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence

The interaction between academic readiness and academic integrity leads to the development of a model of responsible artificial intelligence use characterized by:

- Informed and purposeful use of AI technologies
- Critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs
- Preservation of intellectual independence
- Maintenance of academic authenticity
- Accountability for the outcomes of AI use



7. Discussion

7.1. Interpretation of the Proposed Framework

This study developed a conceptual framework for explaining academic readiness and academic integrity in the context of artificial intelligence, drawing on the epistemological resources of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. The findings indicate that its teachings can enrich the understanding of cognition, responsibility, academic authenticity, and scholarly conduct at epistemological and ethical levels. The framework suggests that responsible AI use depends not only on technological competence but also on the interaction between individual capacities and ethical principles. Academic readiness provides capacities such as critical analysis, self-regulation, and purposeful technology use, while academic integrity guides their ethical application. Accordingly, AI is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful to academic quality; its outcomes depend on users' readiness and commitment to academic principles. Concepts such as reason, wisdom, self-awareness, trustworthiness, and responsibility in Nahj al-Balaghah provide an epistemological basis for understanding this relationship.

7.2. Relationship Between the Proposed Framework and Contemporary Theories

The proposed framework both overlaps with and extends existing approaches. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use in technology adoption (Davis, 1989: 320), whereas the present framework argues that technology acceptance alone cannot explain the quality and responsibility of AI use.

Similarly, the Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) emphasizes competencies required for effective technology use (Vuorikari et al., 2022: 3–4), while the present framework highlights the ethical principles necessary to guide these competencies. Self-regulated learning theories emphasize planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation (Pintrich, 2000: 451–452; Zimmerman, 2000: 13–14), capacities that are applied here specifically to engagement with AI. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) identifies honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage as fundamental values of academic integrity (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2021: 4–5). The present framework seeks to deepen the interpretation of such values by drawing on the epistemological and ethical teachings of *Nahj al-Balaghah*.

7.3. Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in three areas. First, it connects academic readiness and academic integrity as complementary constructs, demonstrating that competence requires ethical orientation and that academic values require adequate capacities for their practical

realization. Second, it interprets responsible AI use as more than a technical issue, linking it to broader questions concerning knowledge, responsibility, and human action. Third, it introduces Nahj al-Balaghah as an epistemological resource for enriching contemporary discussions of knowledge, ethics, and scholarly responsibility, rather than as a replacement for existing theories.

7.4. Educational Implications

AI education in higher education should extend beyond technical skills to cultivate critical thinking, self-regulation, information evaluation, academic authenticity, and responsibility. Universities should therefore design curricula that develop students' ability to make informed judgments about when, how, and to what extent AI should be used in academic activities.

7.5. Policy Implications

The integration of AI into higher education requires more than restrictive regulations or technical guidelines. Institutional policies should promote academic honesty, transparency, accountability, and responsibility while establishing clear standards for AI use. The proposed framework may provide a theoretical basis for developing institutional guidelines, educational policies, and assessment instruments related to academic readiness, academic integrity, and responsible AI use.

8. Conclusion

The present study aimed to propose a conceptual framework for elucidating the epistemological foundations of Academic Readiness and Academic Integrity in the responsible use of artificial intelligence, with an emphasis on the teachings of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. The findings derived from document analysis, conceptual analysis, and theoretical synthesis demonstrated that responsible use of artificial intelligence in higher education cannot be reduced merely to proficiency in using technological tools. Rather, the quality of engagement with AI depends on the integration of the competencies required for informed action and the value-based principles that guide academic conduct. In this regard, the teachings of Nahj al-Balaghah, without being treated as substitutes for or direct equivalents of contemporary constructs, can provide an epistemological and ethical foundation for a deeper understanding of this relationship. Accordingly, the principal strategy emerging from the proposed framework is a shift from a purely skills-based approach toward an integrative approach that considers both the "ability to use artificial intelligence" and the "manner and responsibility of its use."

The operational contribution of the proposed framework lies in providing a theoretically grounded and systematically organized basis for

guiding university practices in three areas: education, assessment, and policy-making. In the educational domain, the framework can serve as a basis for designing programs that integrate AI skills training with the development of critical thinking, self-regulation, information evaluation, academic authenticity, and responsibility. In the assessment domain, the components of the framework can provide an initial basis for developing indicators and assessment instruments to evaluate Academic Readiness and Academic Integrity in the context of AI use. In the policy-making domain, the framework can inform the development of guidelines concerning the scope and manner of AI use, transparency in disclosing its use, the preservation of academic authenticity, and users' accountability for their academic outputs. Thus, the practical value of the proposed framework lies in providing a conceptual basis for translating epistemological and ethical principles into educational, assessment, and policy-oriented directions for universities' engagement with artificial intelligence.

Given the review-theoretical nature of the present study, these contributions should be understood as practical implications of the proposed framework rather than as an empirically validated intervention, assessment instrument, or implemented policy. Operationalizing the components of the framework and empirically evaluating its effectiveness in real-world higher education settings constitute the next steps in the further development of the proposed framework.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the proposed framework is derived from conceptual and theoretical analysis and therefore requires empirical validation in real higher education contexts. Second, the analysis of Islamic sources was limited to *Nahj al-Balaghah*; incorporating additional Islamic texts may provide further theoretical insights. Third, the present study did not develop measurement instruments or examine cultural and disciplinary differences across higher education institutions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to validate the proposed framework through quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research designs. Further research should also focus on developing assessment instruments for academic readiness and academic integrity in the context of artificial intelligence, investigating the influence of individual and organizational factors, and conducting comparative studies across different higher education systems.

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An Anthropological Critique of the Modern Subject in the Teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt Based on ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's Reading

Mansure Sherkat Tavasoli*[1]
Irandokht Fayyaz[2]

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Abstract

This study critiques the foundations of the "self-grounded modern subject" through the anthropological teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, drawing upon the exegetical-philosophical framework of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī. The central problem examined concerns the ontological and epistemological crises arising from the subject's claim to autonomy and self-grounding throughout the development of Western humanism. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology with a critical orientation, this library-based study first outlines the core pillars of the modern subject and subsequently evaluates them through the textual traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) within Ṭabāṭabāʾī's anthropological framework. The findings indicate that within the epistemic system of the Ahl al-Bayt—in contrast to the autonomous modern subject—human identity is defined through relationality and essential poverty. The analysis demonstrates across three dimensions that: (1) in the ontological sphere, "povertial contingency" (*imkān-i faqrī*) refutes the Cartesian independent substance; (2) in the cognitive sphere, the Hadīth conception of the "worshipping intellect" (*ʿaql-i ʿābid*), elucidated via Ṭabāṭabāʾī's theory of conventional perceptions (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*); and (3) in the teleological sphere, authentic human autonomy and purpose are realized solely through annihilation in the Absolute Reality (*fanāʾ fī al-ḥaqq*) and self-sufficiency attained through servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*). Ultimately, this three-dimensional critique not only resolves the impasses of the modern subject but offers an alternative paradigm grounded in "self-knowledge within the station of servitude."

Keywords: Teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt; Philosophical Anthropology; ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī; Modern Subject; Humanism.

1PhD Student in Philosophy of Education, University of Allameh Tabataba'I, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author). Email: m_tavasoli99@atu.ac.ir
2Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy of Education, University of Allameh Tabataba'I, Tehran, Iran. Email: irfayyaz@atu.ac.ir

Introduction

The modern era brought about a major transformation in how human beings conceive of themselves and their relation to the world. Through this shift, the human person gradually transitioned from an entity defined relative to a transcendent order into an autonomous subject (*subjectum*) that views itself as the sole origin of understanding, normative judgment, and teleological determination. Far from being a simple adjustment in philosophical vocabulary, this reorientation reshaped modern anthropology by establishing human authority as the primary locus of cognition and valuation. Modern humanism served as the theoretical framework for this transformation, repositioning the human person not merely as an object of contemplation, but as the ultimate measure of reality and the sole arbiter of life's meaning.

Although this conceptualization initially emerged with an emphasis on human dignity, rationality, and agency, its historical evolution resulted in a perspective wherein humanity's connection to the Transcendent Origin, extra-mental reality (*ḥaqīqat-i nafs al-amrī*), and teleological ends transcending individual desire was progressively eroded. Accordingly, the modern subject is not solely an epistemological construct, but a distinct anthropological stance in which self-grounding becomes the defining principle of human nature. Examining the modern subject within the discourse of Western humanism is, therefore, an inquiry into an anthropology whose ramifications extend beyond philosophy into moral, cultural, and social domains.

In contrast to this framing, the epistemic worldview of the Ahl al-Bayt opens a different horizon for understanding human reality. Within this framework, the human being is not an unmoored, self-sufficient entity, but a reality defined as "sheer relationality" (*ʿayn al-rabṭ*), possessing an inherent dignity whose true identity is realized only through an ontological connection to the Source of Being and movement toward a transcendent ultimate end. To systematically analyze and articulate these Hadīth traditions and supplications, the exegetical-philosophical framework of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī provides a highly effective instrument. Ṭabāṭabāʾī's thought possesses the conceptual rigor required to translate the insights embedded in the teachings of the Imams into a coherent critique of the anthropological foundations of the modern subject.

Despite the critical nature of this issue, existing scholarship reveals notable gaps. Most studies remain confined either to a generalized critique of humanism or to an internal critique of the modern subject within Western intellectual history. Even scholarship engaged with Islamic thought has largely favored abstract philosophical approaches. Consequently, the

primary gap in this field is the absence of a clear formulation demonstrating how an anthropology rooted in textual traditions specifically dismantles the self-grounding of the modern subject.

Accordingly, the central problem of this study is: How can a critical engagement with the foundations of the subject in modern humanist discourse be articulated through the epistemic worldview of the Ahl al-Bayt, utilizing ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's exegetical-philosophical framework? This research investigates how this critique operates across three distinct domains: the ontological, the cognitive (epistemological), and the teleological. The objective of this paper is to reorient the analytical focus from a purely speculative philosophical paradigm to a tradition-anchored framework—demonstrating that the Islamic critique does not target human dignity or self-awareness per se, but refutes the illusion of human independence and self-grounding.

Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, this study first concisely reconstructs the historical evolution of the subject (from the Renaissance to the crises of meaning in thinkers such as Heidegger and Foucault) to establish the problematic context. It then develops the critique across three main spheres: (1) in the ontological sphere, by contrasting essential poverty (*imkān-i faqrī*) with illusory autonomy; (2) in the cognitive sphere, by establishing the primacy of textual traditions in understanding the intellect and deploying the theory of conventional perceptions (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*) to delineate subject limitations; and (3) in the teleological sphere, by examining knowledge, servitude, and spiritual self-sufficiency (*istighnāʾ*) within supplications in relation to human primordial nature (*fiṭrah*). The core thesis of this paper is that within this paradigm, humanity's ultimate end is "annihilation in the Absolute Reality" (*fanāʾ fī al-ḥaqq*) rather than material self-actualization, offering a robust foundation for navigating the crises of the modern subject.

Literature Review & Research Gap

The critical evaluation of humanism and its central construct—the "modern subject"—has a significant history in both Western philosophy and contemporary Islamic thought. Within scholarship on this topic, existing studies can be broadly categorized into three main bodies of work:

The first category comprises studies directly examining ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's engagement with humanism. For instance, Nikseresht and Tabatabaei (2017) examine the moral and social ramifications of humanism through the lens of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. Similarly, Qazi-Zahedi and Ghaffari Qarabagh (2023) offer a critical analysis of "spiritual humanism" as an anthropological foundation for separating spirituality from religion. In addition, Abbasi Azandaryani and Taghavi (2025) compare Islamic and

Western humanistic paradigms. While these works effectively demonstrate the broad contrast between Islamic theology and Western anthropocentrism, they present two key limitations: first, by focusing broadly on "humanism," they bypass a detailed philosophical and ontological examination of its core component—namely, Cartesian-Kantian subjectivism; second, the textual traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt remain marginal or absent from their analytical frameworks.

The second category focuses on the constructive formulation of Ṭabāṭabāʾī's anthropology. Studies such as Faghih Imani and Karimi (2022)—which explores the principle of affection (*maḥabbah*) within Ṭabāṭabāʾī's anthropological framework and its social implications—alongside works centered on human primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), provide valuable insights into his thought. However, these works adopt an abstract, intra-religious approach and do not engage in critical dialogue with modern Western anthropology or the structural crises surrounding the subject.

The third category examines the concept of the "Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and anthropological principles through supplications (*adʿiyah*) and Hadīth traditions. The primary methodological limitation of these studies is the lack of a structured philosophical-exegetical framework—such as Ṭabāṭabāʾī's hermeneutical method—for interpreting textual traditions. As a result, their analyses often remain limited to ethical descriptions or isolated textual citations, rather than providing a rigorous philosophical critique of competing paradigms.

Based on this review, a significant gap remains in current scholarship: the absence of a textually anchored synthesis that systematically integrates four key axes—(1) the philosophical critique of the modern subject, (2) the structural examination of Western humanism, (3) the Hadīth corpus of the Ahl al-Bayt, and (4) ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's anthropological framework—into a unified conceptual framework. Existing research has yet to position Ṭabāṭabāʾī as a philosophical-exegetical bridge to extract and formulate a fundamental critique of the modern subject directly from textual traditions. The present study addresses this unexamined epistemological intersection through a structured analytical approach.

Theoretical Foundations

The analytical framework of this study rests upon three structural spheres that define the human condition in relation to three fundamental dimensions of existence: the ontological sphere (humanity's relation to the Source of Being and its existential structure), the cognitive sphere (the human role in epistemology—specifically, whether priority lies in discovering objective reality or constructing it), and the teleological sphere (the source for defining the human good, perfection, and ultimate purpose).

Together, these three spheres form a unified conceptual framework through which the "self-grounding of the modern subject" is critically evaluated.

In this context, the present research applies the foundational concepts of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's philosophy beyond an isolated metaphysical system, utilizing them as an exegetical and interpretive tool to articulate the anthropological teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt rationally. Accordingly, the critique of the modern subject across these three spheres rests on three theoretical pillars:

1. Relational Existence (*wujūd-i rābiṭ*) and Essential Poverty (*imkān-i faqrī*) in the Ontological Sphere In Ṭabāṭabāʾī's ontology—which clarifies the monotheistic vision of religious texts—human reality is defined as sheer relationality (*ʿayn al-rabṭ*), dependency, and essential ontological poverty relative to the Transcendent Origin, rather than a self-subsistent, independent substance. This framework, expressed in Hadīth traditions through concepts such as absolute creaturely ownership (*mamlūkiyyat-i muṭlaq*) and existential servitude (*ʿubūdiyyat-i takwīnī*), directly challenges the Cartesian subject's assumption of substantial independence. It demonstrates that within Islamic anthropology, any premise of human ontological self-grounding is inherently impossible—a negative proposition by virtue of the non-existence of its subject (*sālibah bi-intifāʾ al-mawḍūʿ*).

2. Distinction Between Real and Conventional Perceptions in the Cognitive Sphere In his epistemological system, Ṭabāṭabāʾī distinguishes between real perceptions (*idrākāt-i ḥaqīqī*), which uncover objective extra-mental reality, and conventional perceptions (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*), which are mental constructs designed to meet biological and social needs. Aligning with the role of the discovering intellect (*ʿaql-i kāshif*) in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, this distinction demonstrates that human cognitive agency cannot serve as the foundation for establishing truth or autonomous self-legislation, as proposed in Kantian subjectivism. Instead, the mind's convention-making capacity remains dependent on and constrained by ontological realities.

3. Primordial Nature (*fiṭrah*) and Ontological Telos in the Teleological Sphere In Ṭabāṭabāʾī's anthropology, human perfection and spiritual progression, alongside the determination of true wellbeing, are governed by an innate directional orientation embedded within human nature. This principle—reflecting the divine primordial nature (*fiṭrat Allāh*) and the pre-eternal covenant (*ʿahd-i azalī*) highlighted in textual traditions—invalidates the humanist premise of teleological self-grounding. Consequently, authentic human purpose is defined beyond subjective desire and individual will, with human perfection attained

through alignment with the teleological order of creation rather than absolute autonomy.

Research Methodology

In terms of its primary objective, this study constitutes basic theoretical research. Methodologically, it employs a descriptive-analytical, critical, and comparative approach, relying on documentary and library-based data collection. The analytical procedure begins by conceptualizing the core components of the modern subject as the object of critique. These components are then evaluated against the anthropological worldview of the Ahl al-Bayt, using the exegetical and philosophical framework of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī.

Data processing and analysis proceeded in three sequential stages:

1. Historical Reconstruction: A concise reconstruction of the historical development of the modern subject—from Descartes to Kant and the subsequent crises of meaning in contemporary philosophy.

2. Textual Hermeneutics and Systematization: The extraction of anthropological principles from the Hadīth traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt through a hermeneutical analysis of textual sources, grounded in Ṭabāṭabāʾī's philosophical (*ḥikmī*) and exegetical framework. In this stage, the textual evidence is structured across three core dimensions: (a) essential poverty (*imkān-i faqrī*) and existential servitude (*ʿubūdiyyat-i takwīnī*); (b) the cognitive-unveiling function of the intellect (*ʿaql-i kāshif*) in contrast to conventional perceptions (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*); and (c) primordial (*fiṭrah*-based) teleology.

3. Critical Evaluation: A comparative critique examining these three dimensions against the structural components of the modern subject within the epistemic paradigm of the Ahl al-Bayt. This step highlights the fundamental contradictions between human self-grounding and monotheistic (*tawḥīdī*) anthropology, detailing the philosophical implications of this divergence across all three spheres.

Research Findings

The Historical Evolution of the Concept of the "Subject" in Western Humanism

The evolution of the concept of the "subject" can be traced across four distinct historical periods. These junctures mark a major epistemological and ontological shift in Western thought: the transition of the human person from a "dependent creature" in the pre-Renaissance era to an "autonomous, self-grounding subject" in modern philosophy. This historical overview examines the stages through which human beings came to be positioned as the primary agents of cognition, normative judgment, and world orientation.

The Genesis of the Subject in the Renaissance

Beyond its role as a chronological period following the Middle Ages, the Renaissance transformed the epistemic foundations surrounding the human place in the cosmos. Medieval cosmology, synthesizing Christian theology with classical Greek philosophy, viewed the universe as a "Great Chain of Being" (*scala naturae*) in which every entity occupied a divine, predetermined, and teleological position. Within this framework, epistemology functioned as an auxiliary branch of theology, wherein human reason held validity primarily as the "handmaiden of theology" (*ancilla theologiae*). Viewed as a fallen and fragile creature, the human person understood cognition as dependent upon divine grace (Gilson, 1389 SH).

The Renaissance emerged largely in response to late medieval theological difficulties. Late medieval developments, particularly Nominalism, framed God as so radically transcendent and unknowable that the cosmic order appeared unpredictable and insecure to the human intellect. Consequently, traditional teleology no longer offered a secure basis for deciphering divine will or cosmic structure (Taylor, 2007). Within this intellectual context, reliance on human cognitive and practical capacities gradually strengthened—a development conceptualized by Hans Blumenberg as "self-assertion" (*Selbstbehauptung*) (Blumenberg, 1983).

This anthropocentric turn manifested primarily across three key domains:

1. The Copernican Revolution and Cosmological Reorientation: In medieval scholasticism, Ptolemaic-Aristotelian geocentrism held sacred theological meaning, causing alternative cosmological models to be viewed as heterodox challenges to ecclesiastical authority (Gilson, 1389 SH). Copernicus's heliocentric model disrupted both the physical layout of the cosmos and its metaphysical foundations. While heliocentrism displaced Earth from physical centrality, it paradoxically elevated the observing human intellect. Understanding cosmic order relied increasingly on human empirical observation, mathematical calculation, and rational verification. Consequently, even as Earth lost its central position, human cognitive agency assumed an unprecedented central role (Cassirer, 1393 SH).

2. Overcoming Institutional Monopolies (*Ad Fontes*): The humanist call to return directly to primary sources (*ad fontes*) challenged the Church's exclusive authority over the interpretation of reality. Although medieval discourse acknowledged human dignity, it did so strictly within the bounds of revelatory description. The key shift during the Renaissance involved framing the individual as an active agent seeking truth through rational inquiry and introspection rather than passive reliance on an

external, transcendent institution (Gilson, 1389 SH). This shift formed an essential precursor to modern subjectivity.

3. Redefining Human Agency and Destiny: Humanity's relationship with destiny underwent significant reinterpretation. Human beings were no longer viewed purely as passive observers expected to conform to a pre-established cosmic order, but as active agents capable of shaping the world and defining their own identity. Humans transitioned from spectators in the cosmic theater to active participants and transformers of reality (Cassirer, 1393 SH)—a central feature of modern subjectivity.

These cumulative developments established the historical conditions for the emergence of modern subjectivity. Nevertheless, the Renaissance did not yield a fully articulated or systematic philosophical formulation of the subject, nor did it immediately permeate all social institutions. Initially confined to humanistic education, literary circles, art, and the revival of classical antiquity, these ideas coexisted alongside resilient medieval theological and ecclesial structures. The authority of theology, the Church, and traditional social order remained intact, and nascent subjectivity was not yet codified as the foundational axiom of first philosophy; however, it created the necessary conditions for highlighting humanity as an active knowing subject and agent.

Therefore, the Renaissance should not be viewed as the final realization of modern subjectivity, but rather as its historical gestation stage. In this process, attention shifted from humanity as a member within a predetermined cosmic order toward humanity as an agent capable of understanding, judging, and intervening in the world. Humans moved from being understood primarily within a given cosmic framework to becoming active participants with the capacity to comprehend and alter reality—a horizon that enabled the explicit formulation of the modern subject in subsequent periods.

The Philosophical Foundations of Subjectivism in Cartesian Thought

Subjectivism reached a major turning point and acquired formal philosophical expression in the thought of René Descartes through his foundational proposition, *cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") (Descartes, 1369 SH). What had emerged during the Renaissance as a socio-historical backdrop became an explicit epistemic principle in Cartesian rationalism: the idea that philosophical inquiry begins with the thinking subject. Employing methodological doubt (*doute méthodique*), Descartes challenged inherited epistemic traditions in order to base the structure of knowledge entirely upon the immediate certainty of the conscious self. Within the Cartesian framework, because primary certainty resides in self-awareness, all subsequent knowledge claims must be

justified through reference to this initial certainty. Consequently, when the *cogito* is established as the sole baseline of certainty, external domains—including tradition, the physical world, and theological doctrines—must demonstrate their validity before the judgment of human reason. Under this paradigm, autonomous reason becomes the primary criterion of truth and the foundation for evaluating reality (Copleston, 1388 SH).

By distinguishing mind from matter, Descartes established a dualism between the subject, or thinking substance (*res cogitans*), and the object, or extended substance (*res extensa*). This distinction reshaped epistemology and redefined the relationship between humanity and the cosmos. Nature was increasingly framed as an extended, quantifiable, and mechanically analyzable domain, rendering the external world an object of human cognition and control (Taylor, 1989). Consequently, human beings were no longer understood primarily as entities within a pre-given, meaningful cosmic order, but as the perceptual center and starting point for comprehending reality.

Thus, the anthropocentric tendencies originating in the Renaissance received a systematic philosophical formulation in Cartesian thought, establishing the subject as the foundation of certainty, judgment, and epistemological inquiry. Descartes should therefore be viewed not simply as an epistemologist, but as a key figure in establishing the modern understanding of the human person as a self-grounding subject—a conceptualization that carried broader ontological, ethical, and political implications in subsequent developments.

The Supremacy and Autonomy of the Subject in Kantian Philosophy

In this historical progression, subjectivism expanded from an epistemological starting point in Cartesian rationalism into a comprehensive philosophical paradigm, culminating in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. In Kant's system, the subject shifted from being a foundation for certitude to the necessary condition for the possibility of knowledge (*Bedingung der Möglichkeit*) and, within ethics, the primary source of practical legislation. To address the epistemological deadlocks of rationalism and empiricism, Kant inverted the traditional relation between mind and object through his "Copernican Revolution." As he stated in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Hitherto it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to objects… Let us deal with the tasks of metaphysics by assuming that objects must conform to our cognition" (Kant, 1998, Bxvi).

Under this model, the human mind is no longer a passive mirror reflecting an objective reality in-itself (*noumenon*); rather, the conditions governing experience and the appearance of phenomena (*phenomenon*) are

structured by the mind's intrinsic *a priori* frameworks. By establishing a transcendental distinction between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), Kant placed the subject at the center of philosophical inquiry, demonstrating that empirical experience is active, synthetic, and organized through the *a priori* forms of intuition and categories of understanding.

This epistemological centralization finds a clear expression in the realm of practical reason. Here, the concept of autonomy (*Autonomie*) dictates that moral obligation originates within practical reason itself rather than in external authority. By formulating the categorical imperative (*kategorischer Imperativ*) and emphasizing the self-legislation (*Selbstgesetzgebung*) of practical reason, Kant grounded moral validity in the autonomous will. Consequently, external domains—such as natural order, cosmic teleology, or divine commands—no longer serve as direct sources of moral normativity.

Within this framework, human beings are no longer passive discoverers of values within a pre-given natural or theological hierarchy; instead, as autonomous agents, they become the primary source of moral legislation and normative standards (Körner, 1389 SH). This shift in the grounding of value represents a major turning point in the development of the modern subject, altering humanity's relationship with both the physical world and the transcendent. The external world is emptied of intrinsic sacredness and teleology, becoming a domain that derives meaning within the horizon of human cognition and volition. This centrality of the subject acquired a historical and dialectical dimension in German Idealism, particularly in Hegel, where self-consciousness was linked to the historical unfolding of Reason (*Vernunft*).

The Crisis of the Modern Subject

Over time, the modern subject faced fundamental critiques that questioned its basic axioms and revealed its internal structural crisis. The philosophical project that began in the Renaissance and found structured expression in Cartesian rationalism and Kantian idealism was compelled to examine the limits, implications, and validity of its own foundations. Although this crisis was anticipated in the radical reflections of thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, it acquired a more foundational formulation in the thought of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger directed his critique at the metaphysical underpinnings of subjectivity. In his essay "The Age of the World Picture" (*Die Zeit des Weltbildes*), he demonstrated how humanity shifted from an entity existing within the broader order of being to the sole reference point and foundation for all beings (Heidegger, 1977).

Heidegger describes this shift as follows: “The fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age. […] Man becomes that being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth. Man becomes the relational center of that which is as such” (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 128–130). Under this reorientation, being is no longer understood as an independent domain distinct from human cognition; instead, reality is comprehended in relation to representation (*Vorstellung*) and control by the subject. The world is transformed into an “object” (*Gegenstand*) positioned before the knowing subject. Modern subjectivism is thus not simply an epistemological theory, but a mode of encountering the world in which entities are treated as objects before a human observer. Heidegger shows that self-grounding subjectivity is not only an epistemic claim, but a framework that directs humanity toward appropriation, exploitation, and organization. The ultimate consequence of this shift is the dominance of instrumental rationality and technology, wherein humanity's relation to Being changes from discovery and meaning to appropriation and exploitation (Heidegger, 1977).

Michel Foucault directed his critique toward humanistic essentialism. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault argued that the autonomous, history-making "man" is not an eternal or universal truth, but a recent epistemological construct dating to the late eighteenth century. According to Foucault, the subject does not freely construct discourses and institutions; rather, intertwined networks of "power/knowledge" (*pouvoir/savoir*) produce and shape the subject. Foucault characterized this shift as the disappearance of man, comparing it to "a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault, 1389 SH). The subject—viewed in modern philosophy as the source of meaning, law, and history—is recognized as the product of mechanisms it previously claimed to govern.

By confining truth within the scope of subjective perception and cognitive categories, subjectivism established autonomy and individualism as core elements of modern discourse, positioning the subject as the center of legislation, valuation, and meaning. Although this process initially promised liberation from dogmatism and mastery over nature, it ultimately revealed internal contradictions. As post-structuralist critiques have shown, the subject intended to serve as an independent source of truth and meaning is itself formed within historical horizons, power structures, and specific modes of understanding. The crisis of the modern subject is therefore not simply the weakening of a philosophical theory; it marks the instability of the foundation on which modernity established humanity as the ultimate reference point for understanding, value, and meaning.

Critical Engagement with the Modern Subject Based on the Anthropological Teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt in ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's Thought

In responding to modern humanism and subjectivism, the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt offer a distinct anthropological framework. This perspective distinguishes itself, on the one hand, from medieval theological views that degraded human status through doctrines of inherent sinfulness, and on the other hand, from modern humanism's premise of absolute self-grounding. By integrating the Imami narrative tradition (*ḥadīth*) with Qurʾānic principles, ʿAllāmah Moḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī articulates an anthropological system in which human status is situated neither in absolute autonomy nor in complete degradation, but in the dual positions of divine vicegerency (*khilāfah*) and ontological dependence (*ʿayn al-rabṭ*).

This critique of the modern subject, grounded in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt and developed through Ṭabāṭabāʾī's exegetical and philosophical framework, is analyzed across three dimensions:

The Ontological Dimension: Contrasting the autonomous subject with existential contingency (*imkān-i faqrī*) and primordial servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*).

The Epistemological Dimension: Re-examining subjective cognition by distinguishing conventional, socially constructed perceptions (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*) from the cognitive function of the intellect (*ʿaql-i kāshif*).

The Teleological Dimension: Reorienting modern anthropocentric autonomy toward primordial (*fiṭrah*-based) teleology and monotheistic perfection.

Critique of the Human Ontological Dimension

In the ontology of the modern subject, structured around concepts such as the Cartesian thinking substance (*res cogitans*) and the Kantian autonomous subject, human beings are assumed to possess existential independence and centrality when interpreting the world and establishing their relation to Being. In contrast, the anthropological framework of the Ahl al-Bayt defines human reality through essential ontological poverty (*al-faqr al-dhātī*) and complete dependence.

This existential poverty is expressed in the supplications (*adʿiyah*) of the Imams. In the Supplication of ʿArafah, Imam al-Ḥusayn rejects the notion of independent existence for any contingent entity relative to the Divine, stating: "My God! How can You be proved through that which, in its existence, depends upon You?" (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 95, p. 225). Similarly, Imam al-Sajjād presents this poverty not as an accidental trait, but as an enduring feature of human reality: "I am the one who is needy of You in every state."

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī develops this tradition of essential poverty within his exegesis to critique the ontological foundations of the autonomous subject. In his commentary on the verse, “O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy” (Qurʾān 35:15), Ṭabāṭabāʾī explains that this dependence reflects the core reality of human existence: “O people, insofar as you are created and divinely governed, you are entirely needy of God in every aspect of your being; whereas God, as Creator and Sustainer, is Self-Sufficient, and there is no self-sufficiency apart from Him” (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 17, p. 34). Poverty, in this framework, is not a conditional deficiency limited to specific aspects of life; rather, as a created entity under divine governance, the human person remains ontologically dependent upon the Other (*qāʾim bi-al-ghayr*) across all dimensions of existence.

Drawing upon the monotheistic (*tawḥīdī*) perspective of the Ahl al-Bayt in his commentary on "Master of the Day of Judgment" (Qurʾān 1:4), Ṭabāṭabāʾī distinguishes between real (*ḥaqīqī*) and conventional (*iʿtibārī*) ownership. He emphasizes that in real ownership, the existence of the possessed entity is grounded in and dependent upon the existence of the Owner, having no independent existence apart from Him (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 1, p. 21).

The integration of these Qurʾānic and ḥadīth doctrines demonstrates that the relation between humanity and the Divine is intrinsically ontological (*takwīnī*), rather than merely doctrinal or ethical. Defining the human subject as a self-subsistent and autonomous entity is therefore not simply a moral error, but an ontological misconception regarding human nature. Subjectivism effectively redefines a being that is inherently sustained by the Creator (*mutaqawwim bi-al-khāliq*) into an independent center of meaning.

From the perspective of the Imams and Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s exegesis, the root of this humanist error lies not in the possession of knowledge or power, but in the "illusion of autonomy" (*tawahhum al-istiqlāl*). Commenting on the Qurʾānic verse, “Nay! Man surely transgresses, because he sees himself self-sufficient” (Qurʾān 96:6–7), Ṭabāṭabāʾī emphasizes that human self-sufficiency (*istighnā*) is not an objective reality, but a deceptive perception (*an raʾāhu*) that absorbs the individual in self-regard and outward causes (*al-asbāb al-ẓāhiriyyah*), leading to existential rebellion (*ṭughyān*) against the Divine (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 20, p. 325). He observes: “This occurs because man becomes absorbed in himself and in the outward means through which he achieves his ends. Thus, he becomes oblivious to his Lord, failing to perceive any need for Him that would prompt remembrance

or gratitude for His blessings; consequently, he forgets Him and transgresses" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 20, p. 325).

A central premise of modern subjectivism is that humanity requires no transcendent referent to determine its orientation toward the world. In contrast, in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, even the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*)—who embodies the highest degree of existential perfection—acknowledges poverty and servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*). Within this framework, existential perfections indicate perpetual dependence upon the Divine Source (*mabdāʾ*), rather than grounds for self-sufficiency.

The primary divergence between Islamic anthropology and modern subjectivism appears in Ṭabāṭabāʾī's reading of the well-known ḥadīth attributed to Imam ʿAlī: "He who knows himself knows his Lord" (*man ʿarafa nafsahu faqad ʿarafa rabbahu*). While Cartesian introspective reflection (*cogito, ergo sum*) leads to establishing the subject as an independent substance, self-knowledge within the ḥadīth tradition serves to invalidate this presumed autonomy. Ṭabāṭabāʾī explains this mechanism as follows:

"The human soul has no domain except within itself, no exit from itself, and no occupation other than the compelling journey along its own path. It discovers that it is severed from all things it once presumed to be united or intertwined with, except its Lord, who encompasses its inner and outer dimensions and everything beneath Him. Thus, the soul realizes that it is in perpetual solitude with its Lord, even when amidst a crowd of people. At that moment, it turns away from everything, directs itself toward its Lord, forgets all else, and remembers Him alone. Hence, no veil hides Him, and it is concealed by no screen—and this is the true cognition (*ḥaqq al-maʿrifah*) ordained for humanity" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 6, p. 172).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī underscores that this tradition is not merely a moral exhortation, but an indication of an ontological reality (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 6, pp. 170–189). Genuine self-knowledge becomes possible only when one comprehends the soul within the horizon of essential poverty, relationality (*rabṭ*), and absolute dependence upon the Self-Subsisting Sustainer (*al-Qayyūm*). Self-knowledge, therefore, does not fortify an autonomous self—which would reproduce the subjective illusion—but leads directly to the Lord. In Islamic thought, self-knowledge is not a means to assert the subject, but a step toward dismantling the illusion of its independence.

In summary, the anthropological framework grounded in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt and articulated by ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī offers a fundamental critique of the ontological pillars of humanism—specifically, the self-grounding and independence of the subject. If human reality is

intrinsically defined by essential poverty, relationality, and constant dependence upon God, any conceptual system that posits the subject as the ultimate origin of meaning and value rests upon a deep obliviousness (*ghaflah*) to human existence.

Extending into the contemporary social sphere, the concept of essential poverty (*al-faqr al-dhātī*) carries profound implications for the redefinition of human identity. This is because human existential dependence is not confined solely to a vertical relationship with the Transcendent Source (*mabdāʾ*); rather, it objectifies a horizontal relationality with society. In contrast to liberal anthropology, which posits individual identity as discrete, atomistic, and independent of others, existential poverty demonstrates that human beings, at their very essence, are dependent upon the Transcendent and, consequently, inextricably bound to one another. This existential dependence renders social responsibility and ethical relationality meaningful—not as an imposed conventional (*iʿtibārī*) contract, but as a natural extension of human existential reality. Such an approach defines individual identity in synergy with society, thereby precluding the alienation characteristic of modern humanity.

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Critique of the Human Epistemological Dimension

A foundational element of the modern subject is the status and function assigned to human reason. In Western humanism—from Cartesian subjectivism to Kantian idealism—reason is posited as an autonomous, legislative authority charged with independently discerning truth and establishing values. Over the development of this paradigm, rationality was gradually reduced from a capacity for uncovering reality to "instrumental reason" (*Zweckrationalität*), oriented toward controlling and managing the world. Although internal critics, most notably the Frankfurt School,

challenged the consequences of this shift, their critiques operated within the boundaries of the Western paradigm itself and did not yield a constructive alternative framework.

In defense of this autonomy, modern liberal theorists might argue that moral and epistemic autonomy is an indispensable condition for safeguarding individual dignity and liberty, and for averting dogmatism and external authoritarianism. However, as will be demonstrated below, tethering human dignity to a self-groundedness severed from the cosmic order ultimately engenders a crisis of groundless values; for genuine human dignity resides not in the negation of ontological authority, but in its conscious discovery

To formulate a critique from an alternative standpoint, one must turn to the epistemological foundations of the Ahl al-Bayt. In narrative traditions, the nature and function of reason differ essentially from the claims surrounding the modern subject. Within the logic of the Ahl al-Bayt, reason is not a self-grounded, truth-generating capacity, but an instrument for apprehending ontological realities and submitting to the Creator. Defining the essence of reason, Imam al-Ṣādiq states: "Reason is that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped and Paradise is attained" (al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 11). In this tradition, rationality is directly linked to servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*). Furthermore, in his counsel to Hishām, Imam al-Kāẓim designates reason as God's "internal proof" (*ḥujjah bāṭiniyyah*) alongside the prophets as the external proof (*ḥujjah ẓāhiriyyah*): "Verily, God has two proofs over humanity: an external proof and an internal proof" (al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 16). The epistemic authority (*ḥujjiyyah*) of reason in this worldview is neither intrinsic nor independent of divine creation; rather, it is a derived authority posited subordinate to the Divine Will to enable humanity to decode the structure of cosmic reality.

In his philosophical formulation of these doctrines, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī delineates the limits of human reason and dismantles its presumed autonomy through his theory of "conventional perceptions" (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*), set forth in the sixth essay of *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* (*Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾālīsm*). This theory demonstrates that despite its cognitive agency, the human mind cannot step outside the orbit of "worshipping reason" (*al-ʿaql al-ʿābid*) to re-establish itself as a truth-creating entity.

By drawing a clear distinction between "real perceptions" (*idrākāt-i ḥaqīqī*) and "conventional perceptions" (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*), Ṭabāṭabāʾī defines the precise boundaries of mental activity. Within this framework, real perceptions comprise concepts with objective, mind-independent referents, in which the mind acts receptively and conforms strictly to

reality—such as philosophical conceptions, judgments, and mathematical principles. Conversely, conventional perceptions are functional constructs generated by the mind to fulfill biological, natural, and social requirements. These concepts are posited, contractual, and practical, having no mind-independent referent (*nafs al-amr*) in objective reality, such as normative imperatives, moral values, and social conventions (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1402 AH, vol. 2, p. 143).

Ṭabāṭabāʾī's primary anthropological critique of humanist epistemology crystallizes at this exact nexus, laying bare the core cognitive error of the modern subject. By overextending mental agency, humanism conflates the boundary between "discovering objective reality" and "constructing social conventions." Because the modern subject exercises creative agency in the practical realm and formulates values, it wrongly infers that objective reality itself is a mental construct. According to Ṭabāṭabāʾī, the root of this error lies in applying the properties of conventional constructs to objective realities, thereby illicitly elevating reason from its reality-unveiling capacity (*kāshifiyyah*) to an absolute, truth-creating power (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1402: Vol. 2, 173-174). It is at this precise juncture that reason strays from the orbit of "that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped" and mutates into an instrument for subjective rebellion.

In philosophically articulating humanity's dependence on the cosmic order, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī demonstrates that even the mind's convention-making capacity does not constitute an autonomous creation *ex nihilo*. Explaining how the human mind posits and constructs these mental concepts, Ṭabāṭabāʾī emphasizes: "None of the conventional perceptions represent entirely new elements or novel concepts in contrast to real perceptions" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1402: Vol. 2, 166). Rather, every conventional perception is derived and adapted—whether voluntarily or involuntarily—from real perceptions under the pressure of internal drives and existential necessities. Consequently, these posited perceptions remain rooted in biological realities, primordial needs (*fiṭrah*), and cosmic truths: "Every one of these mentally posited concepts (*maʿānī wahmiyyah*) is anchored upon an objective reality" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1402: Vol. 2, 167). Elaborating on the generative relationship between real and conventional perceptions, he notes that "although thinking is an active process, this activity is neither arbitrary nor unrestricted; rather, it remains subordinate to objective reality and the actual state of affairs (*nafs al-amr*)... The foundational dynamic of mental and rational activity lies in the real, mind-independent relations of cognitive contents" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1402: Vol. 2, 171-172).

This philosophical analysis serves as the epistemological counterpart to the doctrine of "essential poverty" (*al-faqr al-dhātī*) established in the

ontological realm. Just as human existence is utterly dependent upon God ontologically, human consciousness in the cognitive realm is strictly bounded by the parameters of the cosmic realities created by the Divine. Commenting on the Qur'anic verse, "And who would abandon the religion of Abraham except one who fools his own soul?" (Qurʾān 2:130), Ṭabāṭabāʾī references the prophetic tradition—"Reason is that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped"—to delineate the proper role of reason. Within this religious paradigm, reason derives its purpose solely in relation to servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*) and the discernment of divine truth. Consequently, if reason detaches itself from divine guidance and transforms into an autonomous legislative authority, it abdicates its primary function. The same principle applies to the realm of values: if conventional perceptions are grounded in real human needs and the ontological structure of existence, value systems cannot be formulated in isolation from objective reality and human *fiṭrah*. This perspective fundamentally undermines the modern claim of absolute subjective autonomy. In Ṭabāṭabāʾī's framework, the human person acts as a discoverer and regulator of existential relations, rather than the ultimate legislator of truth (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d.: Vol. 1, 300).

Ultimately, within the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) as philosophically formulated by ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, the human cognitive dimension is by no means negated; rather, it is restored to its proper locus. In this systemic framework, humanity functions as the "discoverer and organizer" of relations based on cosmic truths, rather than an "autonomous, ultimate positer" of reality. By delimiting the boundaries of self-grounded reason, this paradigm overcomes the deadlock of modern epistemic relativism and paves the way for a return to a revelation-anchored rationality—the worshipping reason (*al-ʿaql al-ʿābid*).

Critique of the Human Teleological Dimension

A central element in the critique of the modern subject involves its formulation of the human *telos*—the ultimate purpose and finality of human existence. In the development of Western humanism, the subject is framed as an autonomous agent capable of defining its own purpose and establishing its criteria of perfection within an immanent, earthly horizon. Within this framework, human fulfillment is typically expressed through concepts such as self-actualization, individual autonomy, and the immanent flourishing of human capacities. The primary issue extends beyond the anthropocentric centering of humanity; rather, it lies in the subject assuming the role of ultimate normative authority in defining its own destiny.

To critique this self-grounded teleology, the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt present a distinct, transcendent horizon for human destiny. Within this

framework, the *telos* of human existential progression is defined not as self-assertion, but as self-transcendence and spiritual annihilation (*fanāʾ*) in Absolute Reality. A key articulation of this teleological dimension appears in the statement of Imam al-Ḥusayn to his companions: "God, Almighty and Glorious, did not create His servants except that they might know Him; for once they know Him, they worship Him, and once they worship Him, they become—through His worship—dispensed from the worship of any other" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1378 AH, vol. 1, p. 9).

In this tradition, human perfection and finality are structured in a three-stage process: gnosis (*maʿrifah*), servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*), and true emancipation (*istighnāʾ*). The key distinction regarding the modern subject resides in the concept of *istighnāʾ* (transcendent self-sufficiency). Whereas Western humanism pursues autonomy by detaching the subject from the Origin of Being and relying on the isolated self, the Ahl al-Bayt paradigm demonstrates that authentic liberation is achieved through connection to the Infinite through divine servitude. Any *telos* constructed outside this divine orientation confines humanity within immanent materiality and subjective isolation.

Through an exegetical and philosophical approach, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī demonstrates that this ultimate purpose (*maʿrifah* and *ʿubūdiyyah*) is neither a contingent moral recommendation nor a conventional prescription, but is anchored in the primordial, ontological constitution (*fiṭrah*) of human nature. Commenting on the Qurʾānic verse, "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me" (Qurʾān 51:56), and drawing upon the statement of Imam al-Ḥusayn, Ṭabāṭabāʾī interprets worship through the lens of cognitive gnosis, observing: "The supreme objective refers to that specific divine mercy which ensues from worship, which is itself the unique beatitude (*saʿādah*) stemming from gnosis" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 18, p. 391).

To explain the ontological rationale behind this teleology, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī invokes the Qurʾānic concept of *fiṭrah* (primordial nature). In his exegesis of the verse, "So set your face toward the religion as a person of pure faith—the *fiṭrah* of God upon which He has created humanity" (Qurʾān 30:30), he demonstrates that the human *telos* is neither a contractual convention nor a byproduct of socio-historical constructs, as modern human sciences contend. Rather, it is embedded within the existential structure of humanity. Humans are created with an innate nature that propels them ontologically toward a perfection commensurate with their true reality (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 16, p. 178). Consequently, *fiṭrah* cannot be reduced to a latent capacity among others; it serves as the foundational principle governing the direction of human life. From this

perspective, the human *telos* is not self-posited. Humanity does not unilaterally dictate its purpose; rather, it must discover its *telos* in relation to its existential reality. Ṭabāṭabāʾī maintains that human beatitude (*saʿādah*) is rooted in a shared ontological constitution, rendering it irreducible to fluctuating individual or collective desires. Indeed, humanity shares a unified orientation toward beatitude or misery (*shaqāwah*), given that perfection and deficiency are defined by universal human realities (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 16, p. 179). Thus, while the historical manifestations of the human *telos* may vary across epochs and cultures, its underlying essence remains bound to an immutable reality.

Within this analytical framework, humanist teleology involves an ontological reductionism. When the modern subject defines its purpose solely in terms of immanent gratification and egoistic autonomy, it acts contrary to its substantial movement (*ḥarakat-i jawharī*). Ṭabāṭabāʾī grounds this movement philosophically through the Qurʾānic declaration, "...Indeed, to God we belong, and to Him we shall return" (Qurʾān 2:156). He asserts: "The reality of this principle is that human beings belong ontologically to God as His true domain, and their ultimate trajectory is a return toward God, the Glorified" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 1, p. 353). In this paradigm, returning to the Origin of Being is not an accidental choice, but an intrinsic, ontological necessity of human existence.

Furthermore, Ṭabāṭabāʾī explains the link between self-knowledge (*maʿrifat al-nafs*) and existential teleology, as expressed in the tradition: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Within this framework—and in contrast to modern psychology, which seeks to uncover and centralize subjective power—self-knowledge serves as a gateway to intuiting one's absolute existential poverty (*al-faqr al-muṭlaq*) and essential dependence upon the Creator. Ṭabāṭabāʾī emphasizes that the human soul is itself the path toward the Lord, and God is the ultimate destination of this journey (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., vol. 6, p. 166).

In conclusion, the divergence separating the anthropology of the Ahl al-Bayt from the modern formulation of the subject reflects a foundational difference regarding human nature. A subject that restricts its horizon of perfection within the confines of the ego and the immanent realm conflicts with its authentic, primordial self. This conflict explains why modern anthropology often leads to existential bewilderment and nihilism stemming from ontological severance. Conversely, the *telos* presented in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt and philosophically formulated by ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī connects human existence to the divine encounter (*liqāʾ Allāh*), opening an infinite horizon of meaning anchored in Absolute Truth.

Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of the modern construct of the subject and the theological anthropology grounded in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, this study demonstrates that contemporary crises of modern thought stem from a fundamental misconceptualization of human identity and ontology. The modern subject's pursuit of absolute autonomy and its ontological severance from the Origin of Being have not resulted in genuine emancipation; instead, they have generated severe epistemological and ethical impasses. To address these challenges, this study moves beyond purely negative philosophical critique by placing the epistemic framework of the Ahl al-Bayt at the center as an explanatory model, utilizing the philosophical and exegetical framework of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī to articulate these religious principles in a systematic and rational manner.

Across the three primary dimensions examined, this study reveals major theoretical divergences:

In the Ontological Domain: Reducing the human person to a knowing subject (*res cogitans*) detached from the Transcendent—as exemplified in Cartesian and Kantian frameworks—directly contradicts the monotheistic principles of existential poverty (*al-faqr al-wujūdī*) and pure relationality (*al-rabṭ al-maḥḍ*). Based on Imami traditions and Ṭabāṭabāʾī's philosophical formulation, human existence is ontologically identical to dependence on the Creator, making any claim to self-subsistent independence an illusion that alienates humanity from its true nature.

In the Epistemological Domain: The modern subject relies on autonomous, instrumental reason (*Zweckrationalität*), presenting itself as the ultimate arbiter of truth. Grounded in the tradition, "Reason is that by which the All-Merciful is worshipped," this study demonstrates that authentic reason is not a tool for dominating nature, but God's internal proof (*ḥujjah bāṭiniyyah*) guiding humanity toward divine servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*). Furthermore, Ṭabāṭabāʾī's theory of conventional perceptions (*idrākāt-i iʿtibārī*) shows how practical reason, when detached from revelatory guidance, becomes trapped in posited constructs and fails to perceive objective reality.

In the Teleological Domain: The analysis highlights a fundamental contrast between modern immanent teleology and the transcendent horizon of the Ahl al-Bayt. Human finality in Islam is not confined to material self-actualization or world dominion, but is realized through the process of gnosis (*maʿrifah*), servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*), and transcendent self-sufficiency (*istighnāʾ*). Ṭabāṭabāʾī's articulation of primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) demonstrates that movement toward this *telos* represents an

ontological necessity (*ḍarūrah takwīniyyah*) for returning to Absolute Perfection, which constitutes the sole path to genuine existential tranquility.

Although liberal theorists posit the autonomy of the modern subject as a necessary defense against dogmatism and a guarantor of individual liberty, the present analysis demonstrates that this self-groundedness ultimately decouples values from objective ontological reality, culminating in a crisis of meaning. In contrast, revelation-guided rationality—the worshipping reason (*al-ʿaql al-ʿābid*)—within the tradition of the Ahl al-Bayt redefines human dignity through a conscious alignment with authentic existential truths, thereby averting the pitfalls of epistemic authoritarianism.

Ultimately, the approach of this study shows that addressing contemporary anthropological dilemmas requires transitioning from the paradigm of the autonomous human to that of the vicegerent (*khalīfat Allāh*). Within the framework of the Ahl al-Bayt, human dignity and freedom are defined not through rebellion against the Source of Being, but through conscious connection and submission to Divine Reality. This theoretical foundation provides a viable basis for cultural policy formulation and scholarship within Islamic humanities. Future research may build upon these findings by conducting comparative studies on the crisis of meaning in the postmodern subject, drawing upon the ethical and educational teachings of the Imams to clarify the practical and social dimensions of this model.

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An Analysis of the Concept of Imamate in the Teachings of Imam al-Riḍā (as): A Comparative Study with Other Islamic Schools of Thought, with an Emphasis on the Views of Fakhr al-Razi

Ali Sorouri Majd[1]

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Abstract

The lineage of Imams begins with Prophet Ibrahim (as), whose attainment of this exalted station following multiple divine trials is explicitly stated in verse 124 of Surah al-Baqarah. Subsequently, this station was granted to other distinguished and specific figures. During the era of Imam al-Riḍā (as), the analysis of the meaning and nature of Imamate was a critical subject of debate, particularly as it was frequently conflated with the common notion of "Caliphate" among non-Shi'a scholars. The central question of this article is: How is the station and concept of Imamate analyzed in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), particularly Imam al-Riḍā (as), and what is its fundamental distinction from the perspectives of other Islamic schools of thought? In addition to the Qur'an and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), this study focuses on *Tafsir al-Mizan* as a representative of Shi'a exegesis, and Fakhr al-Razi's *Mafatih al-Ghayb* as a representative of Sunni exegesis. Within Shi'a thought, it is argued that the term "Imam" in verse 124 of Surah al-Baqarah denotes a station distinct from prophethood, as it was granted to Prophet Ibrahim (as) in his old age—a time when he had already attained the station of prophethood; thus, a redundant conferral of prophethood is logically untenable. Conversely, Fakhr al-Razi and certain other Sunni exegetes insist that the term "Imam" refers to the station of prophethood itself, enjoyed by all prophets. This article, written using a descriptive-analytical method and based on documentary research, concludes that the "Imam" referenced in the Qur'anic verse and the teachings of the Infallibles (as)—with an emphasis on the discourses of Imam Riḍā (as)—possesses a station superior to that of prophethood. This station is characterized by *wilāyah* (divine authority), '*ismah* (infallibility), and divine knowledge.

Keywords: Imamate, Prophethood, Qur'an, *Itrah* (Ahl al-Bayt) (as), Imam al-Riḍā (as), Shi'a.

1 Assistant Professor, Research Institute of Culture, Art and Communication (RICA): a.sorouri@iau.ac.ir | soroori@rica.ac.ir

Introduction

Since the era of the Prophet (pbuh), the subject of Imamate has been a focal point of continuous scholarly discourse, spanning debates, polemics, epistolary exchanges, and extensive academic treatises across various Islamic schools of thought. In certain historical instances, these intellectual disputes even unfolded in the presence of various caliphs and sovereigns. Indeed, if one were to attempt to catalog the approximate volume of scholarly works and the historical background of Imamate discourses, the result would encompass a vast library spanning multiple global languages. However, the primary concern and innovation of this research lies in the analysis of the infallible discourse of the descendant of the Family of Moḥammad (pbuh), Imam al-Riḍā (as), in response to opposing ideologies—an analysis that provided answers to the great Sunni scholars, including Fakhr al-Razi, more than 1,200 years ago.

Based on the authoritative interpretations of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, the station of Imamate is considered one of the unique divine ranks bestowed upon certain prophets. Attaining this divine station necessitates specific qualities that are manifested through divine trials and tribulations. Regarding verse 124 of Surah al-Baqarah, which addresses the Imamate of Prophet Ibrahim (as), extensive commentary exists within both Shi'a and Sunni exegetical traditions. A significant point of divergence arises in the interpretation of the term *imaman* (an Imam) used in this verse, which signifies the divine reward granted to Ibrahim (as) following his successful completion of divine tests.

Shi'a exegetes—including those of *Al-Tibyān* (Tusi, 1409, 1:449), *Majma' al-Bayān* (Tabarsi, 1372, 1:193), *Ālā' al-Raḥmān* (Balaghi, 1420, 1:12), *Mawāhib al-Raḥmān* (Musawi Sabzawari, 1409, 2:10), *Tasnīm* (Javadi Amoli, 1386, 6:461), *Nemuneh* (Makarem Shirazi, 1384, 1:437), *Makhzan al-Irfān* (Banou Isfahani, 1361, 2:64), and *Partoy-i az Qur'an* (Taleghani, 1362, 1:291), among others—maintain that the Imamate of Ibrahim (as) was granted after his prophethood. They view it as a divine grace bestowed upon him during his old age.

In contrast, Sunni exegetes, most notably Fakhr al-Razi, insist that this station pertains to the period prior to Ibrahim's (as) prophethood. Other prominent Sunni scholars share this view, such as al-Alusi (1415, 1:374) in *Ruh al-Ma'ani* and Rashid Riḍā (n.d., 1:455) in *al-Manār*, who endorsed Fakhr al-Razi's position. It should be noted that some Sunni works, such as *al-Kashshāf* (Zamakhshari, 1407, 1:183), bypass the issue without explicit comment. Others have interpreted the term as meaning "exemplar" (*qudwah*) or "leader" (*muqtadá*), a meaning that does not transcend the station of prophethood; examples of this include *Rūḥ al-Bayān* (Haqqi, n.d.,

1:223) and *al-Basiṭ* (Bayḍāwi, 1421, 1:135). It is evident that these scholars are aware of the theological implications: if they were to argue otherwise, they would inadvertently validate the Shi'a perspective, or if they were to suggest that the granting of Imamate as prophethood occurred after his prophethood, they would be engaging in a logical redundancy (*taḥṣīl al-ḥāṣil*). Consequently, they have adopted this view to avoid these two pitfalls.

Conversely, Shi'a exegetes, including Allameh Tabataba'i and many others, contend that the "Imam" mentioned in this noble verse refers to a station distinct from prophethood. They maintain that this station was granted during the latter years of his life and is a rank superior to prophethood, bestowed upon him following his stages of servitude (*'ubudīyyah*), prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and messengership (*risālah*). To substantiate this claim, they rely on numerous evidences, most notably the traditions (*aḥadīth*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

The Meaning of Imamate in the Thought of Shi'a Scholars

The concept of Imamate is defined by Shi'a scholars through several interconnected dimensions:

1. **Leadership in both religious and worldly affairs.** (Fadl ibn Hasan al-Tabarsi, *Tafsir Jawami' al-Jami'*, Vol. 1, p. 77; Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Sayyid al-Murtada, *Rasail*, Vol. 1, p. 5).

2. **Vicarious leadership in religious and worldly affairs on behalf of the Prophet (pbuh).** This leadership is considered a rational necessity (*wajib 'aqli*), as Imamate is viewed as a divine grace (*luṭf*). Consequently, the Imam must be infallible (*ma'ṣūm*), designated by divine appointment (*manṣūṣ*), and the most excellent member of the community. As Allameh al-Hilli articulates: *"Imamate is a general leadership in the religious and worldly affairs of a specific individual, acting as a deputy to the Prophet. It is rationally necessary because Imamate is a divine grace; therefore, the Imam must be infallible, divinely designated, and the most superior of the subjects"* (Hasan ibn Yusuf al-Hilli, *al-Bab al-Hadi 'Ashar*, pp. 10–12).

In the terminology of Allameh al-Hilli, *"Imamate is the general leadership in religion and the world for a specific individual, acting as a deputy to the Prophet"* (Hasan ibn Yusuf al-Hilli, 1413: 66; ibid., 1365: 10–12; Moḥammadi, 1378: 403). Similarly, Mir Sharif al-Jurjāni writes: *"Imamate is the succession to the Messenger in the establishment of religion, such that following him becomes obligatory upon the entire community"* (Sharif al-Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, Vol. 8, p. 345; Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid*, Vol. 5, p. 234). Sayyid al-Murtada further elaborates: *"Just as the necessity for a Prophet (pbuh) arises from the need to articulate divine laws, invite to obedience of the Lord, and other*

matters, there is an equal necessity for someone to act as his successor in preserving the Sharia… a person who possesses infallibility (ismah) and is free from error, oversight, or concealment" (Sayyid al-Murtada, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 178).

Furthermore, Imamate entails the realization of the objectives and programs of religion, encompassing governance in its broadest sense, the implementation of divine limits (*ḥudūd*) and rulings, the administration of justice, and the cultivation and edification of souls—both externally and internally. This station is considered superior to the stations of Prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and Messengership (*risālah*). While Prophethood and Messengership primarily involve the transmission of divine communications, the delivery of commands, and the conveying of glad tidings and warnings, the Imamate encompasses all these functions while adding the continuous execution of divine laws and the holistic spiritual and outward nurturing of human souls.

The Imam is divinely appointed, infallible, divinely supported (*mu'ayyad*), and possesses comprehensive knowledge of all sciences pertaining to both the temporal (*ma'āsh*) and the eschatological (*ma'ād*) realms of mankind. He is the most excellent of his era in terms of inner virtues, and the deeds of all servants are not hidden from his knowledge. The earth is never devoid of his presence. (It is, however, noted that a number of prophets also held the station of Imamate) (Moḥammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, pp. 272–275).

The Imamate and the authority of *Wilāyah* (divine guardianship) following the Prophet (PBUH) are established through divine designation (*naṣb ilāhi*). Regarding the verse, *"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due"* (Qur'an 4:58), the following commentary is provided: *"The 'trusts' (amanat) refer to the Imamate. Allah has made it an obligation upon the [preceding] Imam to fulfill the trust by appointing the one whom Allah has commanded after him. Subsequently, Allah addresses the people: 'Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority (ulī al-amr) among you,' meaning the Imams; thus, the 'trusts' are the Imamate"* (Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, *Tafsir al-Qummi*, Vol. 1, pp. 148–150; Ali al-Astarabadi, *Ta'wīl al-Āyāt al-Ẓāhirah*, Vol. 1, p. 141).

Another of the most critical characteristics and duties of the Imam, acting as the "father of the community," is the purification (*tazkīyah*) and education (*ta'līm*) of the people. This very purpose is reflected in the supplications of Prophet Ibrahim (as) during the construction of the Kaaba: *"Our Lord, and send among them a Messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise"* (Qur'an 2:129).

Once this supplication is answered, the sequence of spiritual development places purification (*tazkīyah*) prior to instruction (*ta'līm*): *"It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they were before in clear error"* (Qur'an 62:2).

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) identifies the most fundamental duties of a just Imam as the guidance of humanity: leading them through a known *Sunnah* (tradition) and extinguishing an unknown *Bid'ah* (innovation). In *Nahj al-Balaghah*, he states: *"Know that the most excellent of Allah's servants in the sight of Allah is a just Imam, who was guided and [in guiding others], he established a known Sunnah and extinguished an unknown innovation. Verily, the Sunan (traditions) are luminous and have clear signs, and the Bid'ah (innovations) are manifest and have clear signs. Indeed, the worst of people in the sight of Allah is an oppressive Imam, who went astray and caused others to go astray, thereby extinguishing a taken Sunnah and reviving an abandoned innovation"* (*Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 163).

Imamate in the Teachings of Imam al-Riḍā (as)

Regarding the nature of Imamate, Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Riḍā (as) states:

"Imamate is far more sublime, majestic, exalted, fortified, and profound than people can comprehend through their own intellects, or grasp through their personal opinions and beliefs, or even select through their own choice. Imamate is a station that Allah, following Prophethood and the station of *Khalīllah* (the Intimate Friend), specifically designated to Ibrahim al-Khalil (as) as a third rank, thereby honoring him with this virtue and exalting his name. Allah says: *'Indeed, I will make you an Imam for the people'* (Qur'an 2:124)—meaning, 'O Ibrahim, I have chosen you as an Imam for the people.' In joy, Ibrahim (as) asked: *'And [will You appoint Imams] from my descendants?'* (Qur'an 2:124). Allah replied: *'My covenant does not encompass the wrongdoers'* (Qur'an 2:124). This verse invalidates the Imamate of any oppressor until the Day of Resurrection; thus, the Imamate was established among the virtuous and the pure.

Subsequently, by placing the Imamate among the virtuous and pure within his lineage, Allah honored him, saying: *'And We gave him Isaac and Jacob as an additional gift; and We made each of them righteous, and We made them leaders [Imams] guiding by Our command. And We inspired to them the performance of good deeds, the establishment of prayer, and the giving of zakāt; and they were worshippers of Us'* (Qur'an 21:73–74). Thus, Isaac and Jacob were granted to him as an additional blessing; all were rendered righteous, and they were made Imams who guided by Our

command. We inspired them to perform good deeds, establish prayer, and give zakat, and they were devoted worshippers of Us. In this manner, the Imamate remained within his lineage, passed from one generation to the next as an inheritance, until the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) became its heir." (Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 198, Chapter: *Rare Narrations regarding the Virtue and Attributes of the Imam*).

Regarding the necessity of the Imam's existence, Imam al-Riḍā (as) further explains:

"…If Allah had not appointed for them a steadfast, trustworthy, and protective guardian (*qayyūm*, *amīn*, *ḥāfiẓ*), the *Millah* (divine community/faith) would have perished, the religion would have vanished, and the *Sunan* (traditions) and *Ahkam* (rulings) would have been altered. Innovators (*mubtadi'ūn*) would have encroached upon it, and atheists/heretics (*mulhidūn*) would have diminished it, making these distortions appear ambiguous to the Muslims. We observe that mankind is deficient, in need, and imperfect, compounded by their differences, the divergence of their desires, and their fragmented perspectives. Had He not appointed for them a steadfast guardian to preserve what the Messenger (pbuh) brought, they would have corrupted it in the manner we have explained; the laws, traditions, rulings, faith, and religion would have been transformed, ultimately resulting in the destruction of all creation…" (Al-Saduq, 1378, Vol. 2, p. 101).

Regarding the verse, *"Then We caused the successors [heirs] of the Book to inherit it"* (Qur'an 17:9), Imam al-Riḍā (as) was asked for an explanation, to which he replied:

"The heirs of the Book and the precursors in good deeds are the children of Fatima (as). The [third category is] the *Muqtasid* (the moderate/restrained one), who is the one who recognizes the Imam; and the [final category is] the one who wrongs himself, who is the one who fails to recognize the Imam." (Al-Kulayni, 1401, Vol. 1, p. 215).

Upon arriving in Merv and observing the disputes among the people regarding the Imamate, Imam al-Riḍā (as) remarked: *"They failed to recognize the Imamate, so they could not recognize the Imam. Just as Allah is known through His Divinity (Uluhīyyah), the Imam is known through his Imamate."* He then proceeded to enumerate the characteristics of the Imam:

"…Indeed, the Imamate is of a more sublime degree, a more majestic station, a higher position, a more fortified side, and a more profound depth than people can reach through their intellects, attain through their opinions, or establish through their own choice. Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, specifically designated the Imamate to Ibrahim al-Khalil (as) after the stations of Prophethood and *Khullah* (intimacy) as a third rank and a virtue

through which He honored him and exalted his mention, saying: *'Indeed, I will make you an Imam for the people'* (Qur'an 2:124)…" (Ibid.).

He continued by descriibng the unique nature of the Imam:

"The Imam is the Trust of Allah (*Amīn Allah*) among His creation, His Proof (*Ḥujjah*) over His servants, His Vicegerent (*Khalifah*) in His lands, the Caller to Allah, and the Defender of the sanctity of Allah. The Imam is purified from sin and cleared of all defects; he is uniquely endowed with knowledge and characterized by forbearance (*Hilm*). He is the regulator of the religion, the glory of the Muslims, the bane of the hypocrites, and the destruction of the disbelievers. The Imam is the unique one of his era; no one can equal him, no scholar can rival him, he has no substitute, and he has no peer…" (Ibid., pp. 200–201).

Regarding the signs of the Imam, Imam al-Riḍā (as) states:

"The Imam possesses certain signs: he is the most knowledgeable of the people, the wisest, the most God-fearing (*atqá*), the most forbearing (*aḥlām*), the most courageous, the most generous, and the most devout of worshippers… He is closer to the people than they are to themselves, and more compassionate toward them than their own fathers and mothers. He is the most humble before Allah, Exalted is His mention. He is the one who most strictly adheres to what he commands and is the most restrained from what he forbids. His supplication is answered; indeed, if he were to supplicate against a rock, it would split in two. He possesses the weapons of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and his sword, *Dhul-Fiqar*, and he holds a register (*ṣaḥīfah*) containing the names of his followers (*shi'a*) until the Day of Resurrection…" (Al-Saduq, 1413 AH, Vol. 4, pp. 418–419).

Abu al-Salt al-Harawi, a servant of Imam al-Riḍā (as), recounts:

"Imam al-Riḍā (as) used to converse with everyone in their own language. By Allah, he was the most eloquent and the most knowledgeable in every language and dialect! One day I said to him: 'O son of the Prophet! I am amazed that you are acquainted with all these languages, despite their various differences.' He replied: 'O Abu al-Salt! I am the Proof of Allah (*Hujjatullah*) over His creation, and Allah would not appoint a Proof over a people whom He is not acquainted with in their own languages…'" (*'Uyun al-Akhbar*, Vol. 2, p. 228; *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 26, p. 190).

Furthermore, Allameh Tabataba'i, interpreting verse 71 of Surah al-Isra, argues that the Imamate is not a temporary station restricted to a specific era:

"By the decree of the verse, *'The Day We shall call every people with their Imam'* (Qur'an 17:71), the Imam is he who, on the Day when the inward becomes manifest, drives the people toward Allah, just as he guides them toward Allah in both the apparent (*ẓāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*)

aspects of this world. This noble verse conveys not only this point but also implies that the station of Imamate is not a position that is exempt from any period of human history or any era of time; rather, it must exist throughout all ages and epochs, unless the human race is entirely removed from the earth." (Moḥammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *al-Mizān*, Vol. 1, p. 413).

Imamate is the station of comprehensive leadership—encompassing the material and the spiritual, the physical and the metaphysical, and the apparent and the hidden. The Imam is the head of the government, the leader of society, the religious guide, the educator of morals, and the inward, spiritual leader. On one hand, through his spiritual power, he guides worthy individuals on the path of internal perfection (*takamul batin*). Through the authority of his knowledge, he educates the ignorant. And through his governmental power, or other executive capacities, he implements the principles of justice.

Accordingly, the station of Imamate is a rank higher than these, even surpassing Prophethood (*Nubuwwah*) and Messengership (*Risālah*). This is the very station that Ibrahim (as) received from Allah after undergoing numerous trials of worthiness; it is this same station that has been granted to his chosen progeny, among whom the Noble Prophet (pbuh) is the most eminent and chosen of all.

Consequently, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Imam is incomparable to any other human being, and his station is beyond the comprehension of ordinary mankind.
2. The earth shall never be devoid of the Divine Proof (*Ḥujjah*) and the Imam.
3. The Imam possesses the station of Divine Designation (*Naṣb Ilāhi*), infallibility (*'Ismah*), and the mandate for guidance; his knowledge is inherently dependent upon Divine Knowledge.
4. The Imam holds the authority of leadership over the people, both materially and spiritually, and both externally and internally.
5. In its general definition, Imamate encompasses Prophethood; indeed, some Prophets have also held the station of Imamate.
6. The Imam possesses the authority of leadership over the people for the purpose of establishing Divine laws, upholding equity and justice, and eradicating oppression and tyranny.

Imamate from the Perspective of Other Islamic Schools of Thought

Among the Shi'a, the Zaydis believe that Imamate was explicitly designated (*mansus*) up to Imam al-Husayn (as); however, after him, it is restricted to the progeny of Fatimah (as). They acknowledge the Imamate of Ali (as), al-Hasan (as), al-Husayn (as), and Zayd ibn Ali (as). (Moḥammad ibn Moḥammad ibn Nu'man al-Mufid, *Awa'il al-Maqalat*,

Vol. 4, p. 39). Unlike the Twelver Shi'a, who uphold the doctrine of "manifest designation" (*nass jali*), the Zaydis subscribe to "hidden designation" (*nass khafi*). They argue that the designation made by the Prophet (pbuh) regarding Ali (as) was a "hidden designation"—meaning the appointment was kept secret and disclosed only to certain select companions for specific interests. Consequently, they regard the Caliphates of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman as valid; they contend that the succession of Abu Bakr and Umar was correct in order to appease the social unrest (*fitnah*), given that Ali ibn Abi Talib fought against the polytheists during the lifetime of the Prophet (pbuh), resulting in the deaths of many of his kinsmen and the fathers of the Companions. This led to a deep-seated resentment among them, making them unwilling to accept his Caliphate. In contrast to the Imamate of the "superior" (*al-fāḍil*), which would be Ali (as), the Zaydis also accept the Imamate of the "lesser" (*al-mafḍūl*); they argue that even in the presence of a superior individual, the appointment of a less prominent (*mafḍūl*) individual as Imam is permissible. By this logic, they regard Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman—who were the *mafdul*—as Imams. (Moḥammad Jawad Mashkur, *Farhang-e Firaq-e Islami*, p. 215).

Furthermore, they believe that anyone who possesses knowledge, courage, generosity, and asceticism (*zuhd*), and who rises up against oppressors and calls the people to his leadership, is an Imam. (Ahmad Mahmud Subhi, *al-Zaydiyyah*, p. 234). They do not accept a child as an Imam, they do not consider infallibility (*'ismah*) to be a prerequisite for Imamate, and they do not permit the existence of more than one Imam at a single time. Finally, they do not believe in the doctrine of the Return (*Raj'at*). Whenever a Muslim council (*shurá*) elects one of the descendants of Imam al-Hasan or Imam al-Husayn (as) to the Imamate, he becomes an Imam whose obedience is mandatory (*wājib al-ṭā'ah*). The most vital creedal pillar of the Zaydis is "Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil" (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*); in reality, the Imamate is subordinate to this pillar, and the requirement for the Imam to rise by the sword is rooted in this very principle. The Zaydi sect is the closest to the Sunnis among the Shi'a denominations, and they hold numerous theological (*kalāmi*) and jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) differences with the Imamiyyah. (Moḥammad Jawad Mashkur, *ibid.*, pp. 217–219).

For the Zaydis, the subject of Imamate is a social and political necessity within the Muslim community, more so than a mere religious necessity or a component of a theological system. It should be noted, however, that the Zaydis believe in the religious authority (*marja'iyyah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), which is not necessarily linked to their political theory regarding Imamate. In other words, they do not posit a necessary

correlation between Imamate and religious leadership and political leadership, although they do discuss the religious conditions and duties of the Imam—that is, the Islamic ruler. Naturally, in such a view, "designated Imamate" (*al-imāmah al-manṣūṣah*) loses its meaning and concept, as the Imam derives his legitimacy directly not from God, but from the consensus (*ijma'*) of the community (*ummah*).

From the Isma'ili perspective, Imamate is a divine station, and the Imam is chosen and guided by God. (Moḥammad ibn Hasan al-Tusi, *Qawa'id al-'Aqa'id*, p. 84). Through his mediation, Muslims are able to fulfill their religious duties and attain a complete and comprehensive understanding of the apparent (*zahir*) and hidden (*batin*) dimensions of the Qur'an—the realization of which is fundamental to the fulfillment of divine ideals on earth. The Isma'ilis consider the *wilāyah* (authority/guardianship) of the Imam to be one of the pillars of religion, and they believe that Imamate is the highest of these pillars; (Moḥammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Shustari, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Vol. 1, pp. 227–228). They even regard it as the very essence of faith (*'ayn al-imān*). They maintain that Imamate continues eternally and that the universe cannot endure for a single moment without the existence of the Imam; should the Imam be lost, the entire world would instantly perish.

"We have narrated from Abu Ja'far Moḥammad ibn Ali (AS) that he said: 'Islam is built upon seven pillars, the best of which is Wilāyah. Through it, and through the Wali (Guardian), one attains knowledge, purification, prayer, zakat, fasting, Hajj, and Jihad.' These are the pillars of Islam, which we shall mention, God willing, after mentioning Faith (Iman), for which Allah does not accept any deed, nor does anyone prosper in His sight except those who are of its people." (Nu'man ibn Moḥammad ibn Mansur al-Maghribi Ibn Hayyun, *Da'āim al-Islām*, Vol. 1, p. 2).

One of the fundamental creeds of the Isma'ilis is that after the passing of the Noble Prophet (pbuh), Ali (as) was chosen as Imam by divine command and by the explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) of the Prophet (pbuh) during his lifetime. Furthermore, Imamate must continue hereditarily through the progeny of Ali (as) and Fatima (as), and the succession of a subsequent Imam must be based on the designation (*naṣṣ*) of the preceding Imam. The Isma'ilis recognized Ismail as the Imam following the Imamate of Imam al-Ṣādiq (as). The Isma'ilis believe in seven Imams and are also known as the "Seveners" (*Sab'iyyah*). For them, the method of determining the Imam follows two paths: heredity and the stable designation (*nass*) of the Imam. In contrast, according to the Twelver Shi'a, all twelve Imams were introduced by the Prophet (pbuh) through Divine appointment, and each Imam introduced the subsequent Imam to his specific companions and

followers. Some Isma'ili groups recognize seven Imams other than the aforementioned seven. Another name for the Isma'ilis is the "Batinis." They believe that religious texts possess an apparent (*ẓāhir*) and a hidden (*bāṭin*) aspect, the latter of which is known only to the Imam. According to other Islamic sects, the Isma'ilis have practiced excess (*ifrāṭ*) in the esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of religion. (Murtada Mutahhari, *Kalam wa 'Irfan*, p. 21).

The Kaysaniyya was a Shi'a sect that, following the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as), recognized Moḥammad ibn al-Hanafiyya—another son of the Commander of the Faithful (as)—as the Imam. They held that the method of determining the Imam is through designation (*nass*) and maintained that a designation was issued regarding Moḥammad ibn al-Hanafiyya following the first three Imams. (Note: Sheikh al-Mufid has refuted their arguments. Moḥammad ibn Nu'man al-Mufid, *al-Fusul al-Mukhtara*, p. 300).

A group of the *Ahl al-Hadīth* and Sunni literalists, known as the Bakriyya, held the belief that there was a designation (*naṣṣ*) regarding the Imamate of Abu Bakr. (Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, pp. 212–213). Another sect, known as the 'Abbasiyya or Rawandiyya, held the belief that Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib had been designated as the successor to the Prophet (pbuh) through *nass*. (Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Murtada, *al-Shafi fi al-Imamah*, Vol. 2, p. 121).

Abu Hanifa believed that any man from the tribe of Quraysh who calls the people to the Book, the Sunnah, and the practice of justice, his Imamate is established; furthermore, it becomes obligatory for others to join him in "uprising" (*khuruj*). (Sa'd ibn Abd Allah al-Ash'ari, *al-Maqalat wa al-Firaq*, p. 8; Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, Vol. 3, p. 224). Regarding the Companions of the Prophet (pbuh), Abu Hanifa, in response to 'Ata ibn Abi Rabah, described himself as one of those who avoids the "cursing of the predecessors" (*sabb al-salaf*). (Sa'd ibn Abd Allah al-Ash'ari, *ibid.*; Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, *ibid.*).

The Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, Maturidites, Salhiyya, Batriyya, the Zaydis, and the various Kharijite sects have all denied the existence of a divine designation (*naṣṣ*) regarding the Imamate. Instead, they view the determination of the Imam through the processes of *bay'ah* (allegiance) and election.

The Ash'arites consider the allegiance (*bay'ah*) of only one or two individuals to be sufficient. They argue this point by citing the *bay'ah* given to Abu Bakr by Umar, and to Uthman by Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf. (ibid.). The Mu'tazilites, however, require the allegiance of six individuals. Abu al-Hashim al-Jubba'i stated that if one person gives allegiance to a qualified

individual and four others express their consent, his Imamate is established. (ibid.).

The Hashawiyyah and the Sunni *Ahl al-Hadīth* literalists do not consider justice (*'adalah*) to be a prerequisite for the Imamate; they believe that if an individual seizes control through coercion and force (*qahr wa ghulba*), his Imamate is established, even if he is a tyrant (*ja'ir*). (ibid., Vol. 1, p. 199). Ahmad ibn Hanbal stated that obedience to the Imam is mandatory, even if he is a sinner (*tabah*). (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Usul al-Sunnah*, p. 80). According to the majority of the *Ahl al-Hadīth*, an Imam is not removed from his position through the commission of injustice or immorality (*fisq*); rising up against him is not permissible. Rather, one must only offer him counsel (*nasiḥah*) and refuse to obey him in acts of disobedience to God. (Abu Bakr Moḥammad ibn Tayyib al-Baqillani, *Tamhid al-Awa'il*, p. 478).

A statement by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi regarding this matter is of significant importance. In discussing the authority of the Prophet (pbuh) and his role in the "perfection of the deficient" (*takmīl al-naqiṣīn*), he writes:

"The Prophet is the founder of the Shari'ah and the guide toward the Truth. His relationship to his Companions is like that of the sun to the stars. Among the Companions, there is an individual whose proximity to the Prophet is greater than all others, and whose virtue is more abundant. Their relationship is like that of the moon to the sun; he is the Imam who serves as the deputy (*qā'im maqām*) of the Prophet and the one who clarifies his Shari'ah… As for the common people, they are like the temporal events of the universe in relation to the sun and the moon. There is no doubt that through them [the Imam/the luminaries], the deficient intellects are perfected and strengthened. Thus, this is a rational proposition derived through induction (*istiqra'*) that yields certainty (*qat'* and *yaqin*)." (Moḥammad Fakhr al-Razi, *al-Matalib al-'Aliyah*, Vol. 8, p. 63).

In contrast to the Twelver Shi'a position, which is based on the divine designation (*naṣṣ*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), there exist other theories such as the theories of *bay'ah* (allegiance) and *saltanah* (monarchy/sovereignty) as forms of the Succession of the Messenger of Allah. Since these fall outside the primary question and objective of this article—and since they have been extensively addressed and answered within the books of *Kalam* (theology)—we shall refrain from discussing them further.

The Perspective of Fakhr al-Razi

Under the exposition of the aforementioned verse, al-Razi addresses six points, the first of which we shall examine:

1. The Intended Meaning of the word Imām in the Verse

Regarding this, he states that scholars of deep investigation (*ahl al-tahqiq*) have argued that the intended meaning of "Imam" in this context is "Prophet," and several evidences support this theory:

1. **The Universality of the Term:** God's statement, *"making for the people an Imam"* [referring to Abraham (AS)], indicates that God appointed Abraham (as) as the Imam for all people. Anyone who is to be an Imam for all of humanity must be a Prophet appointed by God and possess an independent *Shari'ah* (divine law). If he were merely a follower of another Prophet, he would be a follower (*ma'mūm*) of that Prophet rather than an Imam; thus, the claim of "universality" would be invalidated.

2. **The Totality of Leadership:** The verse itself indicates that Abraham (as) is an Imam in all matters, and anyone who holds such a position must necessarily be a Prophet.

3. **The Hierarchy of Leadership:** Prophets are Imams in the sense that following them in character and conduct is obligatory (وجعلناهم ائمة يهدون بأمرنا — "And We made them leaders guiding by Our command" [Al-Anbiya: 73]). Similarly, Caliphs are Imams because they occupy a position where following them is mandatory and their words and rulings must be accepted. Furthermore, jurists (*fuqaha*) and judges (*qudat*) are also referred to as Imams. Even one who leads a congregational prayer (*Imam al-Jama'ah*) is an Imam.

Thus, it is established that "Imam" is a title for anyone who possesses the merit of being worthy of being followed (*istihaq al-iqtida*) in matters of religion. Occasionally, the term "Imam" is even applied to a false or unjust leader, as in the verse: *"And We made them leaders [Imaman] inviting to the Fire"* [Al-Qasas: 41]. The distinction is that the term "Imam" is not used absolutely for a false leader; rather, it is used in a qualified (*muqayyad*) sense.

The Final Conclusion: Since Prophets occupy the highest rank of Imamate, the word "Imam" in this verse must be interpreted as "Prophethood" (*nubuwwah*). This is because God uses the term "Imam" here in a context of bestowal of favor (*imtinān*), and this favor must necessarily be among the greatest of favors to be consistent with the context of divine grace. Therefore, Imamate in this verse must be understood as Prophethood.

Al-Razi continues, noting that those who argue that no one can become an Imam except through divine designation (*naṣṣ*) have relied on this very

verse. They argue that the verse demonstrates that Abraham's (as) status as an Imam was established through explicit designation (*nass*), similar to the verse: *"Indeed, I will make in the earth a successive authority [Khalifah]"* [Baqarah: 30]. Consequently, they claim that the office of the Caliphate/Imamate can only be realized through *nass*.

Al-Razi's Rebuttal: Al-Razi states that this argument is weak. We have already established that the intended meaning of "Imam" here is "Prophethood." Even if we were to concede that the intended meaning is "Imamate" in its general sense, the verse merely indicates that *nass* is **one** way to achieve Imamate—this is not a point of contention. The actual dispute lies in whether Imamate can be established through means **other than** *nass*. This verse does not offer a definitive affirmation or negation regarding that specific issue. (Fakhr Razi, *al-Matalib al-'Aliyah*, Vol. 4, p. 34).

2. The Infallibility (*'Ismah*) of Abraham (as)

Continuing his analysis, he states: The phrase *"Indeed, I will make you an Imam for the people"* denotes that Abraham (as) was infallible (*ma'sum*) from all sins. This is because an Imam is, by definition, one who is to be followed (*iqtida*). If a sin were to be committed by him, it would necessitate following him in that sin; consequently, it would become obligatory for others to commit that sin as well. This is an impossibility (*muhal*), for the very definition of a sin is that it is forbidden (*mamnu'*), whereas the definition of an obligation (*wajib*) is that its abandonment is forbidden. Both these premises cannot coexist in the same act. (Fakhr al-Razi, *al-Matālib al-'Aliyah*, Vol. 4, p. 36).

3. The Intended Meaning of the word "Covenant" (*'Ahd*)

Regarding what is meant by the word "Covenant" (*'ahd*) in the aforementioned verse, he cites four possibilities:

1. That the intended meaning of the covenant is the **Imamate** itself.
2. That the covenant refers to **Divine Mercy**.
3. That the covenant refers to **Obedience to God**.
4. That the covenant refers to **Security/Safety** (*aman*) granted by the Lord.

Ultimately, Fakhr al-Razi selects the first view as the most appropriate. (Fakhr al-Razi, *al-Matalib al-'Aliyah*, Vol. 4, p. 37).

4. The Fulfillment of Abraham's (as) Request Regarding Certain Descendants

Fakhr al-Razi notes that the verse indicates that God will grant the request made by Abraham (as) to certain of his offspring. If this were not the case, God's response to Abraham's prayer would have been a categorical "No" (*la*). Instead, God responded by stating that His covenant

"does not reach the wrongdoers" (*la yasilu 'ahdi al-zalimin*). This clearly demonstrates that those among the progeny of the Prophet who are *not* wrongdoers will indeed attain this station.

If an objection is raised—namely, *"Did Abraham (as) not already know that Prophethood is not worthy of wrongdoers?"*—the response is as follows: He did indeed know; however, the eventual state of his descendants was unknown to him. Thus, God clarifies for him that while some of his progeny will be wrongdoers, Prophethood will reach only those who are not.

5. Does Subsequent Sin/Transgression (*Fisq*) Nullify Imamate?

Regarding this, the majority of researchers and theologians (*mutakallimun*) have stated that it is not permissible for the Imamate to be established for a person who is currently a transgressor (*fāsiq*). However, there is a difference of opinion regarding whether a **subsequent** or **accidental** transgression (*fisq-i tārī/'āriḍ*)—meaning a sin committed after the Imamate has already been established—nullifies the Imamate.

The majority use this very verse (*"And when Abraham was tested by his Lord…"*) to prove that a *fasiq* lacks the capacity (*salāḥiyyah*) to hold the office of Imamate. Their reasoning is that every sinner is a "wrongdoer against oneself" (*zālim 'alā nafsihi*), and since the verse indicates that a person in a state of transgression/wrongdoing cannot hold the station of Imamate, it follows that the office and the sin are mutually exclusive.

6. The Indication of the Verse regarding the Infallibility of Prophets

Al-Razi posits that this verse provides evidence for the Infallibility of Prophets through two distinct logical paths:

1. **The Path of *A Fortiori* Argument (*Qiyās al-Awlá*):**

   Since we have established that the intended meaning of "Covenant" (*'ahd*) in the verse is "Imamate," and there is no doubt that every Prophet is an Imam (as an Imam is one to be emulated, and a Prophet is the most worthy of emulation for all people), it follows that if the verse proves an Imam cannot be a transgressor (*fāsiq*), then a fortiori (by even greater necessity), a Messenger cannot be a transgressor or a person of sin.

2. **The Path of the Nature of the Covenant:**

   God states: *"My covenant does not reach the wrongdoers"* (*lā yanālu 'ahdī al-zālimīn*). If this "Covenant" refers to Prophethood (*nubuwwah*), then it is an absolute necessity that no wrongdoer can attain it. If the "Covenant" refers to Imamate, the same result holds; because every Prophet is an Imam, and any transgressor—who is by definition a wrongdoer against oneself—can never attain the station of Prophethood.

These points constitute the collection of arguments provided by Fakhr al-Razi in his *Tafsir* under the analysis of this verse (Fakhr al-Razi, 1420 AH, Vol. 4, pp. 32–41).

Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis, the following conclusions are drawn:

First: The Nature of Appointment (*Naṣṣ*)

Imamate is a divine appointment (*naṣṣ ilāhī*); the selection of the Imam is not subject to human agency or communal choice. The role of the Prophet (pbuh) was not to appoint a leader via social contract, but to serve as the divine messenger tasked with introducing the divinely appointed Imams to the people.

Second: The Ontological Superiority of the Imam

The Imam possesses unique and incomparable attributes that distinguish him from all other human beings. These include: Divine Designation (*nass*), ontological connection to Divine Knowledge (*'ilm ilāhī*), Infallibility (*'ismah*), being the locus of the Divine Names (*mazhar al-asmā' al-ilāhiyyah*), Divine Vicegerency (*khilāfah*), Wilāyah, and sacred lineage (*qarābah*). These attributes render the Imam incomparable to any other figure in human history.

Third: The Rational Necessity of Infallibility (*'Ismah*)

If the requirement of Infallibility were removed from the station of Imamate—as suggested by certain views (such as the Hanbali or Zahiri positions) which argue that obedience must be rendered even to a transgressor—the logical consequences would be catastrophic for the Qur'anic text. Such a position would necessitate two impossible conclusions:

1. It would imply that God has commanded the mandatory obedience of the unjust, which contradicts the verse: *"Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you"* Nisá: 59).

2. It would directly contradict the explicit divine declaration: *"...My covenant does not reach the wrongdoers"* (Baqarah: 124).

Therefore, Infallibility is not merely a merit, but a logical and textual necessity for the legitimacy of the Imamate.

Fourth: The Mechanism of Designation in Twelver Shi'ism

In Twelver Shi'i theology, Imamate is strictly *manṣūṣ* (designated). This designation is twofold: it is established through the explicit *naṣṣ* of the Prophet (pbuh) and through the *naṣṣ* of the preceding Imam regarding his successor.

Fifth: The Comprehensive Scope of Imamate

Imamate is a multi-dimensional leadership encompassing the material and spiritual, the physical and the metaphysical, and the exoteric (*ẓāhir*)

and the esoteric (*bāṭin*). The Imam is simultaneously the head of the state, the leader of society, the religious guide, the moral educator, and the inner spiritual mentor. He guides the worthy toward spiritual perfection through his metaphysical power, instructs the ignorant through his divine knowledge, and enforces the principles of justice through his executive authority.

Final Synthesis

Ultimately, the station of Imamate represents a rank that transcends these various dimensions; it is a station of such supreme height that it is even considered superior to the stations of Prophethood and Messengership (*nubuwwah* and *risālah*). This is the very station that Ibrahim (as) attained after undergoing exhaustive divine trials. It is this exalted rank that has been bestowed upon his chosen progeny, the foremost and most distinguished among whom is the Prophet Moḥammad (pbuh).

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Tasbīḥ and Moderation in the Knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (as): An Approach to Rejecting Exaggeration (*Ghuluw*) and Deficiency (*Taqsīr*)

Hossein Ghasemi[1]
Moḥammad Riḍā Aram[2]
Amir Tohidi[3]

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Abstrac

Avoiding Exaggeration and Deficiency is considered a fundamental principle for examining the narrations transmitted in relation to the knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). Since any person may, in the process of transforming narrational data into belief and conviction, fall into errors such as excess or Exaggeration, and Deficiency or lowering their status, the existence of a clear criterion and a reliable standard is necessary in order to remain safe from falling into the trap of Exaggeration and Deficiency by relying upon it. This criterion and judgment is connected with the human capacity, which is gradational and capable of development, for attaining correct belief. The *tasbīḥ* of God, which is the declaration of His transcendence from negative attributes, plays a fundamental role in purifying the heart in acquiring correct knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them); on the one hand, it rejects deifying the Ahl al-Bayt, and on the other hand, it removes Deficiency in failing to recognize their true virtues.

Keywords: *Tasbīḥ* of God, rejection of Exaggeration, rejection of Deficiency, true knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them).

1PhD Student, Department of Qur'anic Sciences and Hadith, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran: ghasemi.masiha60@gmail.com
2Professor of Qur'anic Sciences and Hadith, Department of Theology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran: mohammadreza.aram@iau.ir
3Associate professor, Department of Qur'anic Sciences and Hadith, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran: amir_tohidi_110@yahoo.com

Introduction

The two great afflictions on the path of true knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), namely «Exaggeration» and «Deficiency», and the various dimensions of this subject, such as its lexical root and technical meaning, its background, and its examination in the verses and content of the narrations, have been examined and scrutinized by many scholars.[1] For Most of these works have revolved around the issue of Exaggeration, and insufficient attention has been paid to the issue of Deficiency in the matter of knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) in relation to Exaggeration. Perhaps it can be concluded that a considerable number of researchers, in presenting narrations related to the knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), have, out of fear of falling into excess and Exaggeration in this matter, fallen into Deficiency and, consequently, fewer studies have been conducted in this field. Historical examination and the study of narrations show that Exaggeration has its roots in the political motives of the enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), whereas Deficiency has more often affected their devotees and Shiites, an issue that has largely resulted from observing principles such as *taqiyyah* as a defensive strategy under conditions of political oppression. The path to knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), which according to the narrations is the same as the knowledge of God and lies along its path, is a moderate statement and judgment that is lower than Exaggeration and excess and higher than Deficiency and shortcoming. In religious teachings, the heart is the locus of beliefs and the place of knowledge of God; and just as it must be purified of impurities and vices for the acceptance of true monotheism, the path to correct knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) must likewise be purified of obstacles such as Exaggeration and Deficiency. The *tasbīḥ* of God, in addition to purifying the human heart of obstacles and vices, provides a pure foundation for true knowledge of the oneness of God and moderation in knowing the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and therefore occupies a central position in the human epistemic journey, because through *tasbīḥ*, a person declares God free from attributes

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• See: Safarī Forūshānī, *Ghāliyyān: A Study of the Movements and Outcomes up to the End of the Third Century*, Mashhad: Astan Quds Razavi, Islamic Research Foundation, 1378 AH (solar calendar) / Anṣārī Būyir Aḥmadī, ʿAlī, *Ghulū from the Perspective of Shiʿism*, Āshiyāneh-ye Mehr, Qom, 1390 AH (solar calendar) / Ḥaydarī, Kamāl, *Al-Ghulū: Its Reality and Types*, Mashʿar, translated by the Research Center for Hajj and Pilgrimage, 1391 AH (solar calendar).

that are unworthy of Him, and this practical declaration of transcendence has a direct effect on purifying the heart and removing vices from it.

Statement of the Problem

The human heart is the locus of love and hatred and, consequently, the place where beliefs are formed in accordance with human nature. Nevertheless, because divine knowledge is infinite and the means of human cognition are limited, this path is accompanied by numerous slips and afflictions. The narration perspective considers acceptance of the authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) the sole condition for embarking upon the path of the *tawhidi* knowledge of God and attaining the rank of the «sincere servants»; therefore, constant care for the heart and its purification from every impurity is a central obligation for believers on the journey toward God. The two afflictions of «Exaggeration» and «Deficiency» are among the most important epistemic obstacles that threaten the seeker on the path of correct knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). The Qur'anic verses and the narrations of the Infallibles, which originate from divine revelation and explain the truth of the verses, offer solutions for observing moderation on this path. One of the most prominent of these spiritual solutions is the *tasbīḥ* of God, which, on the one hand, purifies the heart of impurities and, on the other hand, prepares the heart for attaining moderate knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and, consequently, *tawhidi* knowledge of God. This article first addresses the issue of Exaggeration and Deficiency, then seeks to arrive at a relative definition of the *tasbīḥ* of God, and finally examines the effect of the *tasbīḥ* of God in purifying the heart of these obstacles.

The present article seeks to answer the following questions:

1- How is the relationship between knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and knowledge of God explained in the narrations?

2- What are the most important obstacles on the path to knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and upon what factors does observing moderation in this knowledge depend?

3- What role does the *tasbīḥ* of God play in removing obstacles and attaining true knowledge of God and moderate knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them)?

In response to the aforementioned questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1- It seems that knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) lies along the path of knowledge of God and is considered an essential condition for *tawhidi* knowledge of Him.

2- It seems that Exaggeration and Deficiency, which have been the two main obstacles to acquiring correct knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be

upon them), are rooted in spiritual vices, and that correct and moderate knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) depends on the extent to which the heart is purified of these vices.

3- It seems that the *tasbīḥ* and declaration of God's transcendence, by purifying the heart of impurities and epistemic obstacles, plays an effective role in attaining *tawhidi* knowledge and moderate knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them).

Research Background

Safarī Forūshānī states on this subject: «From the very beginning of the emergence of the sects of the exaggerators, many books were written against them by the great Shiite scholars and the companions of the Imams, peace be upon them, as well as by some Sunni scholars. Unfortunately, many of those books have not reached us. Some of the lost books written by the companions of the Imams are as follows:

1- al-Radd ʿalā al-Ghāliyah al-Moḥammadiyyah, written by Faḍl ibn Shādhān ibn Khalīl al-Nayshābūrī, one of the companions of Imam al-Jawād, peace be upon him.

2- al-Radd ʿalā al-Ghāliyah, written by Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Faḍḍāl al-Kūfī, who died in 224 AH.

3- al-Radd ʿalā al-Ghāliyah wa Abī al-Khaṭṭāb, written by Abū Isḥāq Kātib Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Ḥafṣ, one of the companions of Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, peace be upon him.

4- al-Radd ʿalā al-Ghālāt, written by Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī, one of the companions of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, through Imam al-Hādī, peace be upon him.

5- al-Radd ʿalā al-Ghālāt, written by Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad ibn Ūrmah al-Qummī, one of the companions of Imam ʿAlī al-Naqī, peace be upon him.

6- al-Radd ʿalā al-Ghālāt, written by Yūnus ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Qummī». (Safarī Forūshānī, 1378 SH, vol. 1, p. 19)

Regarding the issue of Deficiency, apart from the narrations transmitted on this subject, no study was found. Numerous writings by scholars and mystics have been produced on the concept of *tasbīḥ* in Qur'anic sciences, theology, philosophy, and mysticism, but the subject of «the effect of tasbīḥ on the purification of the heart» has not so far been studied and examined.

Lexical Examination

At the beginning of this article, it seems necessary to explain the lexical meanings of the three key words «Exaggeration», «Deficiency», and «*Tasbīḥ*» on the basis of what the lexicographers have written, since these words constitute the main framework of the subject under discussion.

Exaggeration

Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, in defining this word, has stated:

غَالَ الناسُ فی الأمر، أی: جاوَزُوا حَدَّهُ

"The people exceeded the limit in the matter; that is, they went beyond its limit." (Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, 1409 AH, vol. 4, p. 446)

Ibn Fāris says:

الغین و اللام و الحرف المعتل أصلٌ صحیحٌ فی الأمر یدلُّ علی ارتفاعٍ و مجاوزةِ قدرٍ. یقال: غلا السعر یغلو غلاءً، و ذلک ارتفاعُه. و غلا الرجلُ فی الأمر غُلُوًّا، إذا جاوزَ حدَّه

"The letters ghayn, lam, and the weak letter constitute a sound root indicating elevation and exceeding the proper measure. It is said: ghala al-siʿr yaghlu ghalaʾan, meaning that its price rose; and ghala al-rajul fī al-amr ghulūwwan, when a person exceeds its limit." (Ibn Fāris, 1404 AH, vol. 4, pp. 377–378) The root gh-l-ʿ is a sound root containing a weak letter and indicating elevation and exceeding the proper measure. Ghala al-siʿr means that the price rose, and ghala al-rajul means that a person exceeded the limits of a matter. Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī presents exaggeration as meaning exceeding the limit: when it concerns the price and value of an object, it is called «*ghalāʾ*», and when it concerns the worth and status of a person, it is called exaggeration:

الغُلُوّ: تجاوزُ الحدّ، یقال ذلک إذا کان فی السِّعر غَلاءٌ، وإذا کان فی القدر والمنزلة غُلُوٌّ

"Exaggeration means exceeding the limit. This is said when it concerns price as *ghalāʾ*, and when it concerns worth and status as Exaggeration." (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, p. 613)

Deficiency

القاف و الصاد و الراء أصلان صحیحان، أحدهما یدلُّ علی ألا یبلغَ الشیءُ مداه و نهایته، و الآخر علی الحبس. و الأصلان متقاربان

"The letters qāf, ṣād, and rāʾ have two sound roots. One indicates that something does not reach its extent and end, and the other indicates confinement. The two roots are close to one another." (Ibn Fāris, 1404 AH, vol. 5, p. 96) Ibn Fāris considers the root q-ṣ-r to have two sound meanings: one indicating that something does not reach its full extent and ultimate end, and the other indicating confinement and restriction. Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī identifies the root of the word Deficiency as the opposite of length or height, and as indicating inability to reach the end and conclusion of a matter or falling short in an action:

قَصُر: خلاف الطول و التقصیر: اسمٌ للتضجیع

"*Qaṣura*: the opposite of length; and Deficiency: a term for causing to fall short." (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, pp. 672–673)

Thus, in light of the points stated, the word «Exaggeration» originally means a matter indicating elevation and rising beyond the limit, and technically means going beyond the boundaries of a matter and exceeding those limits. As indicated, this word is used to refer to the rise in the price and value of an object and to raising the status of a person beyond his actual limit. Deficiency, too, has two meanings: remaining confined within the limits of a meaning or thing, and falling short or being unable to reach the ultimate end or goal. Consequently, the meaning of the word «Exaggeration» can be understood as excess and going beyond specified limits, while the meaning of «Deficiency» can be understood as falling short in a matter and presenting it below its proper level.

***Tasbīḥ* (تَسْبِيح)**

Ibn Fāris identifies two meanings for the root of the word *tasbīḥ* — that is, the letters *sīn* (س), *bāʾ* (ب), and *ḥāʾ* (ح). The first meaning denotes a type of worship, and the second denotes a type of striving. The first meaning, *al-subḥah* (السُّبْحَة), refers to prayer, and is specifically applied to supererogatory (*nāfilah*) prayers, not obligatory ones. The word *al-tasbīḥ* (التَّسْبِيح) in this same context also means the exaltation (i.e., declaring far removed) of God from anything unbefitting Him. He also mentions other derivatives of this root, such as: expressing astonishment, swimming in water, and a swift horse. He also interprets the word *subuḥāt* (سُبُحات) in the narration as meaning the majesty and grandeur of God. (Cf. Ibn Fāris, 1404 AH, vol. 3, pp. 126–127).

Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī takes the root of the word *tasbīḥ* to mean rapid movement through water or air. He attributes this movement, in light of the noble verses, to various creatures. In the noble verse: *"wa kullun fī falakin yasbaḥūn"* (وَ كُلٌّ فِی فَلَکٍ یَسْبَحُونَ) — "and each, in an orbit, are swimming" (al-Anbiyāʾ, 21:33) — this meaning is applied to the rapid movement and passage of stars in space; in the verse: *"wa al-sābiḥāti sabḥan"* (وَ السّابِحاتِ سَبْحاً) — "and by those that glide with ease" (al-Nāziʿāt, 79:3) — to the swift movement and running of horses; and in the noble verse: *"inna laka fī al-nahāri sabḥan ṭawīlan"* (إِنَّ لَکَ فِی النَّهارِ سَبْحاً طَوِیلاً) — "indeed, for you by day is prolonged occupation" (al-Muzzammil, 73:7) — to rapid and hasty movement in one's daily affairs and activities. (Cf. Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, vol. 1, pp. 392–393).

Explanation of the Approach of the Verses and Narrations in Prohibiting Exaggeration and Deficiency

Historical examination of the issue of Exaggeration and Deficiency shows that this concept has held a special position not only in theology and philosophy, but also in the revealed sources, namely the verses and narrations. Ṣāliḥī states: "Islam, which is the religion of all the prophets, has always had as one of its principal programs the struggle against religious exaggeration and the effort to guide excessive and extremist individuals. For example, the Noble Qur'an has shown great sensitivity regarding the exaggeration of Christians, and in many verses, including verses 59 of Āl ʿImrān; 171 and 172 of al-Nisāʾ; 72, 73, 75, 77, 116, and 117 of al-Māʾidah; and 30 and 31 of *al-Tawbah*, it has strongly criticized the belief of Christians in the exaggeration concerning Jesus and his mother, to the extent that regarding "They say, 'The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is the son of God'" (al-Tawbah 9:30), it has used the expression "May God destroy them" or "May God curse them." (Ṣāliḥī Najafābādī, 1384 SH, vol. 1, p. 20)

The content of this group of noble verses commands the People of the Book not to say anything but the truth about God, His religion, and Jesus son of Mary (peace be upon him), and not to go beyond the truth that has been stated. The call to observe moderation in knowledge of God and the prophets is an instruction given by God to the followers of religions and between the two phenomena of «Exaggeration» and «Deficiency».

It can be concluded from the words of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

إِنِّی أَبْرَأُ إِلَیْکَ مِنَ الَّذِینَ قَالُوا فِینَا مَا لَمْ نَقُلْهُ فِی أَنْفُسِنَا، إِنِّی أَبْرَأُ إِلَیْکَ مِنَ الَّذِینَ قَالُوا فِینَا مَا لَمْ نَقُلْهُ فِی أَنْفُسِنَا، اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا لَسْنَا لَهُمْ بِحَقٍّ

"I declare before You my disavowal of those who have said about us what we have not said about ourselves. O God, we are not what they claim us to be." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1414 AH, p. 99) That the exaggerators are those who do not speak the truth about the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and go beyond what they themselves have stated in introducing themselves; the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) have declared their disavowal of them.

Shaykh al-Mufīd defines the exaggerators as follows:

و یکفی فی علامة الغلو نفی القائل به عن الأئمة سمات الحدوث و حکمه لهم بالإلهیة و القدم

"It is sufficient as a sign of Exaggeration that the one who holds it denies the attributes of temporally originated existence in the Imams and judges them to possess divinity and pre-eternity." (Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1414 AH, p. 136) The belief of the exaggerators is that they deny the attribute of being created in time for the Imams (peace be upon them) and judge them

to possess divinity and pre-eternity. ʿAllāmah Majlisī also speaks of the instances of Exaggeration:

اعلم أن الغلو فی النبی و الأئمة ع إنما یکون بالقول بألوهیتهم أو بکونهم شرکاء الله تعالی فی المعبودیة أو فی الخلق و الرزق أو أن الله تعالی حل فیهم أو اتحد بهم أو أنهم یعلمون الغیب بغیر وحی أو إلهام من الله تعالی أو بالقول فی الأئمة ع إنهم کانوا أنبیاء أو القول بتناسخ أرواح بعضهم إلی بعض أو القول بأن معرفتهم تغنی عن جمیع الطاعات و لا تکلیف معها بترک المعاصی. و القول بکل منها إلحاد و کفر و خروج عن الدین کما دلت علیه الأدلة العقلیة و الآیات و الأخبار السالفة و غیرها و قد عرفت أن الأئمة ع تبرءوا منهم و حکموا بکفرهم و أمروا بقتلهم و إن قرع سمعک شیء من الأخبار الموهمة لشیء من ذلک فهی إما مؤولة أو هی من مفتریات الغلاة

"Know that Exaggeration regarding the Prophet and the Imams, peace be upon them, consists in claiming their divinity; considering them partners with God Almighty in worship, creation, or provision; claiming that God Almighty has indwelt them or united with them; claiming that they know the unseen without revelation or inspiration from God Almighty; claiming that the Imams were prophets; claiming the transmigration of the souls of some of them into others; or claiming that knowledge of them renders all acts of obedience unnecessary and that there is no obligation to refrain from sins. Holding any of these beliefs is heresy, disbelief, and departure from religion, as indicated by rational proofs, verses, previous reports, and other evidence. It is known that the Imams, peace be upon them, disavowed them, judged them unbelievers, and ordered that they be killed. If you hear a report that appears to imply any of these matters, it is either subject to interpretation or is one of the fabrications of the exaggerators." (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 25, p. 346)

He considers Exaggeration regarding the Prophet and the Imams to include the following: claiming their divinity, considering them partners in worship, creation, and provision, claiming God's indwelling or union with them, claiming knowledge of the unseen without revelation, claiming the prophethood of the Imams, the transmigration of souls, and claiming that knowledge of them makes religious obligations unnecessary. He considers these beliefs, on the basis of rational and transmitted evidence and the verses and narrations, to be heresy and disbelief, and states that the Imams of guidance (peace be upon them) have disavowed such people, judged them unbelievers, and ordered their killing. Accordingly, if something is heard in this regard, it has either been interpreted or is among the fabrications of the exaggerators. In confirmation of this statement, Riḍwānī says:

"Opposite these kinds of beliefs are beliefs for which definitive rational or transmitted evidence has been established, such as belief in the infallibility of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), the designation and immediate succession of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), followed by the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), belief in the Return, the Imam's divinely bestowed knowledge, and other Shiite beliefs for each of which firm and reliable proofs have been established. Therefore, they cannot be called Exaggeration (غلوّ) or transgression beyond the limit; rather, they are the very truth and reality." (Riḍwānī, 1391 SH, vol. 1, p. 18)

It is evident that while our narrations call us to avoid Exaggeration, they likewise, to the same extent, prohibit Deficiency and falling short in acquiring true knowledge of the Imams of guidance (peace be upon them) and in expressing their virtues. Imam al-Sajjād (peace be upon him) complains about this situation in a particular manner[1], and the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) presents the middle path and moderation in the following manner:

وَ أَمَّا الْمُسْتَقِيمُ فِی الدُّنْيَا فَهُوَ مَا قَصُرَ عَنِ الْغُلُوِّ وَ ارْتَفَعَ عَنِ التَّقْصِيرِ

"As for the straight path in this world, it is that which falls short of Exaggeration and rises above Deficiency." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1403 AH, text, p. 33) In other words, the greater part of the narrations that contain a prohibition against Exaggeration also contain a prohibition against Deficiency in knowledge of them. Unfortunately, however, for reasons such as observing the principle of *taqiyyah*, the issue of Deficiency has not received attention to the extent that the issue of Exaggeration has. It seems that, in addition to observing *taqiyyah*, there are other reasons for not presenting the narrations concerning the knowledge and virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). One of these reasons can be considered to be the existence of different levels in the acceptance of these beliefs, since the Imams of guidance (peace be upon them) spoke to each person according to his capacity. Evidence for this claim is the noble statement of Imam al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him):

مَا كَلَّمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) الْعِبَادَ بِكُنْهِ عَقْلِهِ قَطُّ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص): إِنَّا مَعَاشِرَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ أُمِرْنَا أَنْ نُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ عَلَى قَدْرِ عُقُولِهِمْ

"The Prophet never spoke to the servants according to the full depth of his intellect. He said: The Prophet said: We, the community of prophets,

1"And the others went to excess in our regard." (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 27, p. 193)

have been commanded to speak to people according to the measure of their intellects." (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 23)

Examination of the Position and Levels of Knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt in the Narrations

Complementing the above statement is attention to narrations indicating the impossibility of attaining true knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and that the virtues that have been narrated constitute far less than one-tenth of the reality of their existence[1] and that their creation differs from that of other creatures, because their outward is human while their reality is beyond possession, and the inner dimension of their authority is a hidden and incomprehensible unseen reality.[2] Analysis of the collection of related narrations leads us to the conclusion that understanding the position of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), like tawhidi knowledge of God, has levels, and human beings in this domain possess various ranks, from lower levels to higher degrees. Abū al-Qāsim Ṭehrānī introduces the levels of knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) at four levels: first, encompassing their rank as it truly is, which lies beyond our understanding; second, becoming informed of the secrets of their inner secrets and gaining awareness of their inward realities and consciences to the extent of human capacity, which itself has degrees, and this is the rank of the specially chosen Shiites and the truthful among the saints; third, becoming informed of the levels of their perfections and the degrees of their exalted stations and believing that they possess authority over all that exists, and this is the rank of believing scholars and jurists among philosophers and mystics; and fourth, acknowledging their Imamate and possession of perfections, which, in general, is the share of the common people. He also believes that these levels apply to knowledge of their friends and saints according to their respective ranks. (Cf. Ṭehrānī, 1376 SH, pp. 324–325.)

The texts of the narrations support this classification. On this basis, several epistemic spectra can be posited, each occupying different levels according to the capacity of the audience's understanding and the extent of acceptance of the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). These narrations rest on several axes:

First group: narrations that consider the boundary separating Exaggeration and Deficiency to be the failure to attribute divinity and

1"The station of the Family of Muhammad is far too exalted for those who describe it and for the descriptions of those who describe." (Majlisī, 1403 AH., vol. 25, p. 172)

2"Their outward is a matter that cannot be possessed, and their inward is an unseen reality that cannot be comprehended." (ibid., vol. 25, p. 171)

lordship to the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). This level may perhaps be regarded as the beginning of the epistemic journey concerning the Ahl al-Bayt. Such is the statement of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him):

إِيَّاكُمْ وَ الْغُلُوَّ فِينَا وَ قُولُوا فِي فَضْلِنَا مَا شِئْتُمْ

"Beware of Exaggeration concerning us, and say whatever you wish regarding our virtues." (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 25, p. 270)

- The second group includes narrations that explain higher levels and emphasize the inability of the Shiites to attain the essence of knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), such as the statement of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him):

أَنَا عَبْدٌ مِنْ عِبَادِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ وَ خَلِيفَتُهُ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ، لَا تَجْعَلُونَا أَرْبَابًا وَ قُولُوا فِي فَضْلِنَا مَا شِئْتُمْ وَ لَا تَبْلُغُوا كُنْهَ مَا فِينَا وَ إِيَّاكُمْ وَ الْغُلُوَّ فِينَا

"I am a servant among the servants of God Almighty and His vicegerent over His servants. Do not make us lords, say whatever you wish concerning our virtues, and you will not attain the essence of what is within us. Beware of Exaggeration concerning us..." (ibid., vol. 26, p. 2)

Likewise, the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) states:

وَ إِنَّمَا انا عَبْدٌ مِنْ عَبِيدِ اللَّهِ، لَا تَسُمُّونَا أَرْبَابًا وَ قُولُوا فِي فَضْلِنَا مَا شِئْتُمْ فَإِنَّكُمْ لَنْ تَبْلُغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِنَا كُنْهَ مَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَ لَا مِعْشَارَ الْعُشْرِ

"We are only servants among the servants of God. Do not call us lords. Say whatever you wish regarding our virtues, but you will not attain all of the virtue that God has granted us." (ibid., vol. 26, p. 6)

- The third group consists of narrations which, despite containing expressions that may give rise to the suspicion of Exaggeration, are, upon careful examination, distinct from Exaggeration, because these texts, by emphasizing that the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) are created beings, preserve the fundamental distinction between the Creator and the created, such as the rescript of Imam al-Zamān (may God hasten his noble reappearance):

فَجَعَلْتَهُمْ مَعَادِنَ لِكَلِمَاتِكَ وَ أَرْكَاناً لِتَوْحِيدِكَ وَ آيَاتِكَ وَ مَقَامَاتِكَ الَّتِي لَا تَعْطِيلَ لَهَا فِي كُلِّ مَكَانٍ يَعْرِفُكَ بِهَا مَنْ عَرَفَكَ لَا فَرْقَ بَيْنَكَ وَ بَيْنَهَا إِلَّا أَنَّهُمْ عِبَادُكَ وَ خَلْقُكَ فَتْقُهَا وَ رَتْقُهَا بِيَدِكَ بَدْؤُهَا مِنْكَ وَ عَوْدُهَا إِلَيْكَ أَعْضَادٌ وَ أَشْهَادٌ وَ مُنَاةٌ وَ أَذْوَادٌ وَ حَفَظَةٌ وَ رُوَّادٌ فِيهِمْ مَلَأْتَ سَمَاءَكَ وَ أَرْضَكَ حَتَّى ظَهَرَ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ

"So You made them repositories for Your words, pillars for Your oneness, and signs and stations of Yours that are never suspended in any place, by which whoever knows You comes to know You. There is no

difference between You and them except that they are Your servants and Your creation. Their opening and closing are in Your hand; their beginning is from You and their return is to You. They are supports, witnesses, guardians, and guides. Through them You filled Your heaven and Your earth until it became manifest that there is no deity but You." (Ṭūsī, 1411 AH, vol. 2, pp. 803–804)

On the basis of the findings of this section of the research, it can be concluded that the narrations related to the knowledge and virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) possess a systematic structure. These narrations begin with the expression of general virtues, proceed by explaining higher levels and emphasizing the limitations of human knowledge to point to the grandeur of their station, and finally, while employing expressions that may suggest Exaggeration, establish the limits between Creator and created by affirming that the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) are created beings and prevent falling into the trap of Exaggeration and Deficiency.

The Pattern of Moderation in Confronting the Two Poles of Exaggeration and Deficiency

On the path to knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), moving beyond the two poles of excess and Deficiency is necessary for attaining correct knowledge. The narrations of the Infallibles (peace be upon them), by drawing a precise boundary, have delineated the middle path in such a way that, on the one hand, the principle of monotheism is safeguarded through emphasizing their created nature, and, on the other hand, their exalted and distinct position in relation to other creatures is correctly recognized. The moderate pattern introduced by the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) expresses, on the one hand, the difference between their creation and that of other creatures and the impossibility of descriibng the essence of the reality of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) through limited human perceptions, and, on the other hand, places special emphasis on their being created beings. Without doubt, on the path to knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), care must be taken not to fall into Exaggeration on the one hand, in view of the narrations transmitted along this path, and not to fall into the trap of Deficiency and shortcoming in true knowledge of them on the other hand. It must not be overlooked that while many reports and narrations transmitted to us prevent Exaggeration in expressing the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), excess in expressing the truth of their own knowledge, and claiming divinity for them, they equally prohibit falling short in obedience, true knowledge, correctly expressing their virtues, and disseminating the sciences of the Family of Moḥammad (peace be upon them), because according to the

narrations, knowledge of them, which consists of affirmation, allegiance, following, and disavowal of their enemies, lies on the path of knowledge of God[8] [1]and is in fact identical with knowledge of Him, while denying it is equivalent to denying knowledge of Him.[92] A prominent example given for this form of knowledge of God concerning the people of every age is the knowledge of the Twelfth Imam by the people of every age.[3]

Mullā Ṣadrā, in commenting on this narration, establishes a direct relationship between knowledge of God and affirmation of the Imams and saints in two forms: the particular form and the general form. He considers the levels of the particular form of knowledge to include affirmation of God through proofs establishing His oneness, uniqueness, knowledge, power, wisdom, and other essential attributes, as well as the fact that God's essence is the source of His acts and that these acts are of the utmost beauty, order, and perfection. In Mullā Ṣadrā's view, and on the basis of the reasons he has mentioned, there must be intermediaries between God and His creation for bringing into existence. At the first rank are God's proximate angels, followed by the angels entrusted with governance. In addition to intermediaries of creation, there are intermediaries of completion and guidance between God and creatures, namely the noble prophets in the first rank and the guiding saints after them. Mullā Ṣadrā introduces this form of

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- lAbū Jaʿfar (peace be upon him) said to me: "Indeed, only one who knows God truly worships God. As for one who does not know God, he merely worships Him in this manner, in error." I said, "May I be sacrificed for you, what is the knowledge of God?" He said: "It is affirming God, the Mighty and Exalted, and affirming His Messenger (peace be upon him and his family); loving ʿAlī (peace be upon him), following him and the Imams of guidance; and declaring before God, the Mighty and Exalted, one's disavowal of their enemies. This is how God, the Mighty and Exalted, is known." (Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Islamic edition), 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 180)
- 2I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh (peace be upon him) about the Imams after the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). He said: "The Commander of the Believers was an Imam; then al-Ḥasan was an Imam; then al-Ḥusayn was an Imam; then ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn was an Imam; then Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī was an Imam. Whoever denies this is like one who denies knowledge of God, Blessed and Exalted is He, and knowledge of His Messenger (peace be upon him and his family)." (Ibid., vol. 1, p. 181)
- 3Abū ʿAbd Allāh reported: "Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī came out to his companions and said: 'O people, God, exalted is His remembrance, did not create human beings except that they might know Him. When they know Him, they worship Him; and when they worship Him, they become independent, through their worship of Him, of worshipping anyone other than Him.' A man said to him: 'O son of the Messenger of God, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you, what is the knowledge of God?' He replied: 'It is the knowledge of the Imam of their time, the one whose obedience is obligatory upon them.'" (Ibn Bābūwayh, 1385 AH (solar calendar), vol. 1, p. 9)

knowledge of God as the true and particular knowledge of the elect, through which they first know the Essence through existing proofs, His attributes through His Essence, and His acts through His attributes. Ultimately, they come to know the intermediaries of creation and guidance, and this knowledge draws them toward love of the Seal of the Prophets (peace be upon him) and his successors (peace be upon them). This love, in turn, leads them to obey them, love their friends, and intensely disavow their enemies in this world and the hereafter, and they will be resurrected with them. In defining the general form of knowledge, Mullā Ṣadrā considers the first thing that the legally responsible person must believe to be the oneness of God and His having no partner, and that Moḥammad (peace be upon him) is His messenger to all creation. It is appropriate to affirm the attributes of God and belief in the Hereafter according to one's understanding, and to attain certainty in the existence of an infallible Imam after the Messenger (peace be upon him) in every time and age. One should know all twelve Imams one by one until their Qāʾim (may God hasten his noble reappearance), love them and their saints with heart and tongue, and disavow their enemies. All beliefs mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadīth should be accepted without additional proof. (Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, 1383 SH, vol. 2, pp. 509–511)

From this perspective, the difference between the two particular and general forms of belief lies in the levels and in the fact that the former is demonstrative for the elect, whereas the latter is belief without consideration of proofs for the common people.

ʿAllāmah Majlisī also states in this regard:

لعلّه ع إنّما فسّر معرفة الله بمعرفة الإمام لبيان أنّ معرفة الله لا يحصل إلّا من جهة الإمام أو لاشتراط الانتفاع بمعرفته تعالى بمعرفته ع

"Perhaps he interpreted knowledge of God as knowledge of the Imam in order to explain that knowledge of God is attained only through the Imam, or because benefiting from knowledge of Him is conditional upon knowledge of the Imam." (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 23, p. 83) From this statement it can be inferred that knowledge of God is interpreted as knowledge of the Imam for two reasons: first, knowledge of God is not attained except through the Infallible Imam; and second, the condition for benefiting from knowledge of God is knowledge of the Infallible Imam. In reality, the condition for not falling into the trap of Exaggeration is belief that the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) are created beings, while the condition for not falling into Deficiency in knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) is expressing and believing in the content of narrations that contain knowledge of and statements concerning the virtues

of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) at higher levels. It must be known that, according to the narrations, there is no essence or ultimate limit to knowledge of God and the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). The foregoing rational and narrational premises—which consist of the gradational nature of knowledge of God and its division into knowledge for the elect and the common people, the conditionality of knowledge of God upon knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and the narrations indicating the division of the followers of those great figures into two groups, Shiites and devotees (cf. Baḥrānī, 1374 SH, vol. 4, pp. 601–606)—lead us to the conclusion that just as human beings possess different levels in tawhidi knowledge of God, they also possess different degrees in knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). In such a way, the higher level in both domains corresponds to the «elect» in Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy and the «Shiites» in the narrations; that is, those who, through profound and authority-centered knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt, have attained pure and experiential knowledge of God, and these two forms of knowledge have become so interwoven in their being that they are inseparable. In contrast, the lower and weaker level in both epistemic systems corresponds to the «common people» in Mullā Ṣadrā's view and «devotees» in the narrations; that is, those who, although they are devoted to the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and do not deny their truth, remain at a superficial, imitative, and non-experiential level of knowledge of the reality of authority and God, and are deprived of understanding the inner dimensions of the knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them).

Examination of Fabrication in the Narrations of Exaggeration and Deficiency

One of the principal concerns of researchers in the field of Hadīth studies has always been the examination of the nature and manner of the emergence of narrations of Exaggeration. In this context, reflection on a narration from Imam al-Riḍā (peace be upon him) not only opens new horizons in this field but also provides a precise criterion for distinguishing correct knowledge from false knowledge and can clarify many existing ambiguities. The text of the narration is as follows:

إِنَّ مُخَالِفِينَا وَضَعُوا أَخْبَارًا فِي فَضَائِلِنَا يُحِبُّونَ بِهَا مَثَالِبَنَا وَ ثَالِثُهَا التَّقْصِيرُ فِي أَمْرِنَا وَ ثَانِيهَا الْغُلُوُّ وَ أَحَدُهَا جَعَلُوهَا عَلَى ثَلَاثَةِ أَقْسَامٍ

"Our opponents fabricated reports concerning our virtues through which they seek to expose our defects; and they made them into three categories: one of them is making us gods, the second is Exaggeration, and the third is falling short regarding our affair." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1378 AH, vol. 1, p. 304)

According to this luminous statement, the basis of fabricated narrations in the domain of the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) rests on three elements and foundations:

- Attributing divine status to the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them).
- Lowering their status and considering them equal to ordinary people.
- Speaking ill of the caliphs accepted by themselves and attributing such statements to the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and their Shiites.

One of the methods adopted by opponents and enemies to harm the Imams (peace be upon them) and their Shiites was the fabrication of false narrations. In reality, in addition to hard warfare and the use of weapons against the Shiites, the enemies also used soft warfare and the engineering of public opinion through the fabrication of forged narrations, and the principal elements they used as instruments for achieving their evil objectives were addressing the issue of Exaggeration and Deficiency regarding the Imams of guidance (peace be upon them).

From this perspective, all narrations whose theme and content consist of «Exaggeration» and «Deficiency» can be placed among fabricated narrations. In confronting this strategy, the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) also engaged in explanation and clarification and, by declaring their disavowal of the exaggerators, neutralized the enemies' scheme. This can be observed in numerous narrations transmitted from them in rejection of Exaggeration and Deficiency.[1]

The religious authority Sayyid Kamāl Ḥaydarī introduces the reasons for the emergence and creation of Exaggeration on three foundations: 1- political motives, 2- personal greed, and 3- intellectual decline.

He considers the principal and fundamental factor in the emergence and creation of Exaggeration to be political motives and objectives aimed at controlling the people. In this way, by attributing accusations such as claims of divinity and attributes beyond human limits to the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), the enemies sought to diminish their status and excommunicate them so as to disperse the people from around them, because the people's attention to and turning toward the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) would expose their false rule to danger and destruction. One of the clearest methods used by the enemies in bringing forth and spreading exaggerated and exaggeration-oriented claims was inserting some exaggerators and

• See also: Chapter 10, "The Rejection of Ghulū concerning the Prophet and the Imams, peace be upon him and them, and an Explanation of the Meanings of Delegation (Tafwīḍ), Including What Should Not and What Should Be Attributed to Them" (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 25, pp. 261–327).

plotting among the ranks of the Muslims. (Cf. Ḥaydarī, n.d., pp. 23–27.) In addition to the foregoing discussions, examination of a collection of narrations reveals that even a group of true believers and pure Shiites have, to some extent, fallen into excess and Exaggeration regarding the status of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), whereas the Infallible leaders themselves have explicitly prohibited such an approach. (Cf. Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 25, p. 279.) Undoubtedly, the root of this phenomenon must be sought in the depth of the love that has taken root in people's hearts for the Household of Revelation, since the human heart is the principal center of emotions and the locus of love or hatred, and this increasing love sometimes crosses the boundary of moderation without conscious awareness.

The Centrality of the Heart in the Emergence of Deviations and the Observance of Moderation

The perspective of the verses and narrations on the concept of the «heart» and its characteristics is one of the fundamental subjects in Islamic ethics. According to the narrations, the foundation of religion is a person's love and hatred, whose locus is the heart.[1] Numerous writings have sought to explain these profound concepts through the use of verses and narrations and to introduce the diseases of the heart and the ways of attaining a sound heart from this perspective.[2] In this context, in addition to reasons such as intellectual error or scholarly misinterpretation in the field of knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), the roots of the two deviations of «Exaggeration» and «Deficiency» can also be sought in the inner layers of the heart. Attention to the statement of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) in the Sermon of the Means concerning the materials of wisdom and their opposites in the human heart reinforces this interpretation.[3] In reality, if the human heart is afflicted by worldly impurities such as deviation, heedlessness, doubt, ignorance, and fanaticism, it will fall into excess or Deficiency in accepting the truth of the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), receiving it either in an exaggerated form or in an incomplete form. From this perspective, «Exaggeration» and «Deficiency» may also arise from those same impurities of the heart, in which case their source can be sought in inner unrest and anxiety. In contrast, observing moderation can bring the heart to the shore of tranquility and reassurance. Naturally, attaining the rank of moderation is not possible merely through correcting beliefs; rather, its

1"Is religion anything other than love and hatred?" (Furāt al-Kūfī, 1410 AH, p. 430)
2See also: Dastgheib, 1388 S.H.
3"Every shortcoming in it is harmful, and every excess in it is corrupting." (al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 8, p. 21)

prerequisite is purifying the heart of impurities and establishing faith within it. Nuṣratī, referring to the verses «They say, 'We believe with our mouths,' but their hearts do not believe» (al-Māʾidah 5:41) and «The Bedouins say, 'We believe.' Say, 'You have not believed; rather, say, "We have submitted," for faith has not yet entered your hearts'» (al-Ḥujurāt 49:14), and considering the reciprocal relationship between faith and the heart, believes that faith is an act of the heart. This means that in the voluntary stages of faith, a person passes beyond the stage of Islam and enters the stage of faith, while in its non-voluntary stages the heart becomes receptive. Since the heart is the house of faith, as long as faith has not entered the heart and become established within it, the expression «you have not believed» applies to such individuals and they cannot be called believers. Verbal confession without acceptance by the heart does not bring a person into the stage of faith. (Cf. Nuṣratī, 1396 SH, pp. 196–199.) It therefore seems that, in order to attain the healing of the heart and consequently observe moderation in beliefs, the heart must first be cleansed of impurities through Qur'anic and narrational methods and its true healing attained; only then can moderation in knowledge be achieved. One of the most effective of these methods is the *tasbīḥ* of God, which is recommended in numerous verses.

Conceptual Analysis of *Tasbīḥ* in the Verses and Narrations

Knowledge of God has no end or ultimate limit; consequently, complete knowledge of His creatures is likewise impossible. On this basis, the verses and words of the Noble Qur'an, and each of the concepts expressed within it, also possess an infinite scope, and this concept demonstrates the miraculous dimensions of the Qur'an in both wording and meaning. On the one hand, these concepts possess unlimited meaning, while on the other hand, human intellects are limited, and the confined capacities of human beings cannot bear and endure this heavy burden; rather, they drink from this pure water only according to the capacity of their vessels. One of these concepts, which is expressed by God through the verses of the Qur'an in summary and in the narrations in detail, is the matter of *tasbīḥ*. It can be said that the mention of *tasbīḥ* exists in the Qur'an and the explanation of *tasbīḥ* exists in the narrations transmitted from the Imams of guidance (peace be upon them), because they alone are the «interpreters of revelation». (Ibn al-Mashhadī, 1419 AH, p. 561)

The subject of *tasbīḥ* is among the fundamental concepts in the Qur'an's system of belief and worship and is reflected with considerable diversity at various levels of the verses. It can be understood along three principal axes: «God's *tasbīḥ* of Himself» (al-Isrāʾ 17:1 and 44; and 108), «the report of the creatures' *tasbīḥ* of God» (al-Jumuʿah 62:1), and «God's command to

creatures to perform *tasbīḥ* of Him» (Aḥzāb 33:42). In some verses, God Himself performs *tasbīḥ*, while in others He commands all creatures, both in the ontological order and in the legislative order, to perform *tasbīḥ*. The legislative command is expressed in various ways: sometimes through the imperative verb «سَبِّحْ» and sometimes through the comibnation « فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ...» (Baqarah 2:30), and also through the comibnation «فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ» (Wāqiʿah 56:74 and 96; Ḥāqqah 69:52). The command to perform *tasbīḥ* of the Name has been revealed in only one place, with the phrase « سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّکَ الْأَعْلَی» (Aʿlā 87:1).

The word *tasbīḥ* is used in the Qur'an in four forms: the noun «*subḥān*», the past-tense verb «*sabbaḥa*», the present-tense verb «yusabbiḥu», and the imperative «*sabbiḥ*». It may be said that, on the one hand, the repetition of this command and the existence of the sūrahs known as «al-Musabbiḥāt» in the Qur'an indicate the great importance of *tasbīḥ*, while, on the other hand, the use of *tasbīḥ* at all times indicates that the *tasbīḥ* of God is not confined to a particular time. Although some Qur'anic verses command the *tasbīḥ* of God every morning and evening, such as Āl ʿImrān 3:41, and others at specific times, such as before sunrise and sunset (Ṭā Hā 20:130), in the middle of the night (Ṭūr 52:48), throughout the night and at the edges of the day (Ṭā Hā 20:130), and after prostration (Qāf 50:40), upon reflection we realize that all times have been mentioned for the *tasbīḥ* of God. Although this matter may not have been stated precisely, mentioning most of the hours of the day and night and commanding the *tasbīḥ* of God may be an allusion to all times of the day and night. This meaning is supported in the *Tafsīr Kanz al-Daqāʾiq* as follows: the command to perform *tasbīḥ*, which is expressed in some sūrahs in the past tense and in others in the present tense, informs us that God should be glorified at all times, and this is a natural matter that does not change with changing circumstances; and the use of the verbal noun in Sūrat Isrāʾ makes clear that God deserves *tasbīḥ* from everything and in every state.[1]

1"Whatever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah." This expression appears here, as well as in Sūrat al-Ḥashr and Sūrat al-Ṣaff, in the past tense, whereas in Sūrat al-Jumuʿah and Sūrat al-Taghābun it appears in the present tense. This indicates that whatever is attributed to it is characterized by glorifying Him at all times, since this is an innate form of indication that does not vary according to changing circumstances. The use of the absolute verbal noun in Sūrat Banī Isrāʾīl is even more eloquent, insofar as it suggests that everything, in every state and circumstance, is entitled to glorify Him." (Qummī Mashhadī, 1368 S.H., vol. 13, p. 70)

Part of the content of the narrations includes the definition and meaning of the word *tasbīḥ*, while another part includes formulas of *tasbīḥ*. In the words of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), *tasbīḥ* of God consists in magnifying the majesty and glory of God Almighty and declaring Him pure from everything that any polytheist says about Him, and when a servant performs *tasbīḥ* of God, all the angels send blessings upon him.[1][61] Accordingly, the noble phrase «سبحان الله» in the words of Imam al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) is explained as declaring God transcendent.[2]

What the scholars have stated in defining the word *tasbīḥ* also indicates this same meaning. For example, Subḥānī, in addition to declaring God transcendent and free and considering Him far removed from anything that is unworthy of Him, also applies the meaning of declaring people free of blame to persons, meaning declaring them free of reprehensible attributes.[3] Ṭabrisī, too, introduces *tasbīḥ* in the lexicon, with reference to the verses and narrations, as having four meanings: declaring God transcendent, exception (saying *in shāʾ Allāh*), prayer, and light.[4]

Examination of the Qur'anic verses, the narrations of the Infallibles, and the views of theologians reveals that the *tasbīḥ* of God possesses two dimensions, ontological and legislative, and runs throughout all creatures, whether in speech or in state, although human beings are unable to perceive it. All beings lie between non-existence and growth, and what brings them out of non-existence and directs them toward growth and perfection—which is the knowledge of and proximity to God—is their verbal and

1"It is the glorification of the majesty of Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, and the declaration of His transcendence above what every polytheist has attributed to Him. When a servant says it, every angel invokes blessings upon him." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1398 S.H., p. 312)

2"On the authority of Hishām al-Jawāliqī, who said: I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh (peace be upon him) about the statement of Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, 'Glory be to Allah.' What does it mean? He said: 'Declaring Him transcendent.'" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1403 AH, p. 9)

3"Linguistically, *tasbīḥ* means declaring someone free from deficiencies and defects. Thus, when a person declares someone to be free from deficiencies and defects, it is said that he has glorified and sanctified him." (Subḥānī, 1421 AH, vol. 1, p. 243)

4"It has been said that, in the Arabic language, *tasbīḥ*, with the intensified form, has four meanings: (1) declaring transcendence, as in the verse, 'Glory be to Him who took His servant by night'; (2) making an exception, as in the verse, 'Why do you not make an exception?'—that is, by saying 'if Allah wills'; (3) prayer, as in the verse, 'Had he not been among those who glorify Allah'; and (4) light, as mentioned in the tradition, 'Were it not for the radiances of His countenance,' meaning His light." (Ṭabrisī, 1372 S.H., vol. 6, p. 536)

existential *tasbīḥ* of God.[1] Although according to one view all human actions are subsumed under the *tasbīḥ* of God,[2] the narrations explicitly introduce certain specific formulas and actions independently as legislative *tasbīḥ*, some examples of which are mentioned below:

- *Tasbīḥs* recited in prayer, including the dhikr of bowing and prostration (Baḥrānī, 1415 AH, vol. 3, p. 337) or the four *tasbīḥs*. (Cf. Ibn Bābawayh, 1378 AH, vol. 2, p. 108)
- The *tasbīḥs* of Fāṭimah (peace be upon her), which are among the instances of abundant remembrance and possess great importance among the Ahl al-Bayt. (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 2, p. 500 and vol. 3, p. 343)
- The *tasbīḥ* of Fāṭimah (peace be upon her). (Ibn Bābawayh, 1413 AH, vol. 2, p. 591)
- The breath of the fasting person. (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 4, p. 64)
- The moaning of the believer. (Ibn Bābawayh, 1413 AH, vol. 4, p. 364)
- Studying and reviewing knowledge. (Ibn Shuʿbah al-Ḥarrānī, 1404/1363 AH, p. 28)

It may be said that, by performing these acts and invocations and by remaining continuously within the atmosphere of God's *tasbīḥ* throughout all the hours of the day and night that pass, the human being, in addition to fulfilling his important role in the orderly and harmonious movement of creatures toward knowledge of God, prepares the prerequisites for the effect of *tasbīḥ* upon the heart and its purification from impurities, thereby preparing it to receive the infinite knowledge of God.

It seems necessary to state that, based on the aforementioned narration of the Commander of the Faithful in his definition of *tasbīḥ*, it becomes evident that the *tasbīḥ* of creatures, in addition to its central role in strengthening the bond between the creature and the Creator, also affects the strengthening of relationships among creatures. This meaning is contained in a passage of his statement in which he says:

فَإِذَا قَالَهَا الْعَبْدُ صَلَّى عَلَيْهِ كُلُّ مَلَک

"Whenever the servant says it, every angel sends blessings upon him." (Ibn Babawayh, 1398 SH, p. 312.) Accordingly, a person's *tasbīḥ* of God

1In this regard, one may refer to a narration from Imām al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him), who said: "No bird is ever caught except when it abandons its *tasbīḥ*." (al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 3, p. 505) The fact that birds are caught because they cease their *tasbīḥ* can be regarded as a clear example of the aforementioned meaning and of the extension of this meaning to all beings.

2"And *tasbīḥ* has been made general in acts of worship, whether they consist of speech, action, or intention." (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, vol. 1, pp. 392–393)

creates the basis for the angels to send blessings and salutations upon him, clearly indicating the harmony and cohesion of creatures in the *tasbīḥ* of God at all levels and degrees of existence.

The Role of *Tasbīḥ* in the Purification of the Heart

In the boundless divine system of creation, human beings are not separate from the laws governing existence. The *tasbīḥ* of God, which has been explained legislatively in the Qur'anic verses and narrations, is not merely a devotional duty; rather, it provides the basis for the existential harmony of the human being with other creatures on the path of knowledge and perfection and of distancing oneself from non-existence and destruction. In addition to creating order throughout the realm of creation, this harmony leaves a profound effect on the heart, soul, and spirit of the human being. Based on its lexical and technical definitions, *tasbīḥ* means declaring transcendence and purification. Through this process, by recalling the negative attributes, the human being considers God free from every deficiency and defect that is unworthy of His مقام. Naturally, such remembrance and supplication, when accompanied by conditions such as presence of heart and the heart's being free from anything other than the remembrance of God, has a profound effect on the heart of the person who engages in remembrance and purifies it from spiritual vices. This understanding can be inferred from the meanings and semantic layers concealed within the word *tasbīḥ*.

Allamah Tabataba'i, while defining *tasbīḥ*, introduces those who are the true glorifiers of God. This matter affects both their spirit and body and purifies their hearts from impurities. In Allamah's view, the technical definition of *tasbīḥ* is declaring transcendence, meaning the negation of anything that entails deficiency or need and is incompatible with the realm of the perfection of The Divine[1].

The culmination of Allamah's discussion concerning the subject under consideration can be observed where he addresses the function of *tasbīḥ*. He considers *tasbīḥ* to mean emptying the heart of love for anything other than God and declaring God free from every partner that the heart absorbs through the soul, or from anything that diverts it from the remembrance of the Lord and occupies it with another matter. (See: Tabataba'i, 1390 AH, vol. 1, p. 17.) In his view, the Lord must be declared free from every partner in name or meaning, and from deficiency or non-existence in the sacred realm of the Lord. This encompasses all forms of *tasbīḥ*, including verbal,

1."*Tasbih* is declaring transcendence; it is the negation of anything that entails deficiency or need, which is unbefitting of the realm of His perfection, the Exalted." (Tabataba'i, 1390 AH, vol. 19, p. 144)

practical, linguistic, and heartfelt *tasbīḥ*; otherwise, it would be tainted by a form of polytheism. (Ibid.)

Elsewhere, Allamah, by pointing out that true *tasbīḥ* does not take place only through speech but includes all forms of *tasbīḥ*—verbal, practical, linguistic, and heartfelt—discusses the effect of this spiritual process on the person who performs *tasbīḥ*, including its consequences for the heart of the spiritual wayfarer and his intellectual structure, his monotheistic knowledge of his Lord, the manner in which he performs *tasbīḥ* of God, and the role that the *tasbīḥ* of God plays in his conduct toward others. He writes:

"The first thing with which God honored His friends—namely, those in whose hearts there is no one other than God and who recognize no administrator of their affairs other than Him—is that He purified their hearts from love for anything other than Him. Consequently, those friends of God love no one other than Him and have no attachment except to Him. They declare God free from every partner toward which their hearts are drawn, causing them to turn away from His remembrance, and from everything that makes them heedless of the remembrance of their Lord and occupies them with itself. In this way, they declare their Lord free from everything that is unworthy of His sacred realm—anything that shares with Him neither in name nor in meaning, and in whom deficiency and non-existence have no place. They do not perform *tasbīḥ* of God merely through words and speech; rather, their *tasbīḥ* is verbal, practical, linguistic, and heartfelt. Anything other than this type of *tasbīḥ* is mixed with polytheism. God, who is absolute goodness, has purified their hearts from even the slightest love for anything other than Him and has filled them with love for Himself. They encounter no one except with hearts filled with goodwill and peace, unless the person confronting them intends evil and seeks to harm them. The Qur'an, too, is a source of healing for whoever seeks healing, but for those who are among the losers, it is a source of loss. With these pure hearts, they see all creation as the blessings of God, the Most Glorious, and they see within it the attributes of His beauty and the meanings of His perfection, which testify to His greatness and majesty." (Ibid., vol. 10, p. 18.)

From the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy, the relationship between the *tasbīḥ* of God and the heart of the true performers of *tasbīḥ* is reciprocal and interactive. This means that the more a person declares God free from every deficiency and negative attribute and engages in His remembrance, the more his heart gradually becomes purified of attachments and love for anything other than God, and the grounds for receiving the lights of monotheistic knowledge are thereby prepared within

it. Since the heart is the locus of contradictory emotions, namely love and hatred, it necessarily cannot simultaneously contain two contradictory loves. (See: Astarabadi, 1409 AH, pp. 440–441.) Accordingly, in the view of the narrations and also in Allamah Tabataba'i's perspective, whenever the heart of a believer is simultaneously directed toward love for God and His friends and toward the enemies of God, this state is regarded as a form of polytheism.

Mulla Sadra also believes that eternal felicity is strongly dependent upon the intensity of love and longing for God, and that attaining such love is possible only by emptying the heart of love for anything other than God. For, according to the Noble Verse:

مَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِرَجُلٍ مِنْ قَلْبَيْنِ فِی جَوْفِه

"God has not made for any man two hearts within his body." (Ahzāb/4)

The human heart therefore does not have the capacity for two simultaneous loves. For this reason, sincerity, in reality, means purifying the heart of everything other than God in order to receive knowledge of Him. This purification itself brings about the strengthening of love and, consequently, the strengthening of knowledge. (See: Mulla Sadra, 1361 SH, vol. 6, p. 103.)

According to a narration from Imam al-Sadiq, worship of meaning has been introduced as true monotheism[1]. On this basis, another important point that Allamah Tabataba'i explicitly states in defining *tasbīḥ* and those who perform it is that, in addition to declaring God free from every defect and deficiency, one must avoid attributing any form of participation between the Creator and creatures in name and meaning and limiting monotheistic knowledge of God to such an attribution, because this is regarded as polytheism toward God. From the totality of these transmitted and rational proofs, it becomes clear that the realization of true monotheism cannot be achieved except through complete and genuine *tasbīḥ* of God. Only hearts that have been purified of vices and impurities through this true *tasbīḥ*

1. مَنْ عَبَدَ اللَّهَ بِالتَّوَهُّمِ فَقَدْ كَفَرَ وَ مَنْ عَبَدَ الاسْمَ دُونَ الْمَعْنَى فَقَدْ كَفَرَ وَ مَنْ عَبَدَ الاسْمَ وَ الْمَعْنَى فَقَدْ أَشْرَکَ وَ مَنْ عَبَدَ الْمَعْنَى بِإِيقَاعِ الْأَسْمَاءِ عَلَيْهِ بِصِفَاتِه الَّتِی وَصَفَ بِهَا نَفْسَهُ فَعَقَدَ عَلَيْهِ قَلْبَهُ وَ نَطَقَ بِه لِسَانُهُ فِی سَرَائِرِه وَ عَلَانِيَتِه فَأُولَئِکَ أَصْحَابُ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ع حَقّاً

"Whoever worships the Divine through conjecture has disbelieved; whoever worships the name without the meaning has disbelieved; whoever worships both the name and the meaning has associated a partner; and whoever worships the meaning by applying the names to it through the attributes by which the Divine has described Himself, and whose heart affirms it and whose tongue articulates it in his private and public affairs—those are truly the companions of the Commander of the Faithful." (Kulayni, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 87)

become worthy of setting out on the path of the infinite and true knowledge of God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what emerges from this examination can be explained on the basis of two transmitted premises and one rational premise:

First Premise: Knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt is the same as knowledge of God.

Second Premise:

نَزِّلُونَا عَنِ الرُّبُوبِيَّةِ وَقُولُوا فِی فَضْلِنَا مَا شِئْتُمْ

"Place us below Lordship and say whatever you wish concerning our

Third Premise: The *tasbīḥ* of God, in addition to purifying the heart from impurities associated with polytheism, guides the human being toward moderation in monotheistic knowledge of God and true knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt and prevents excess and deficiency.

On this basis, "ghuluw" means exceeding the limit, while *taqsīr* means falling short in expressing the truth. Ghuluw has been condemned in the Qur'anic verses, and according to the narrations, the "extremists" are those who do not speak the truth concerning the Ahl al-Bayt and go beyond the framework that they themselves have established for introducing themselves. Historical and narrational evidence indicates that the origin of ghuluw is rooted, above all, in political motives and the conspiracies of the enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt. In order to advance their evil and worldly objectives and dominate the people, they resorted to every means of undermining the position of the Ahl al-Bayt and preventing their influence among the people. One such means was the circulation of narrations expressing ghuluw regarding their position.

Since the levels of knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt possess different lower and higher degrees, care must be taken not to fall into ghuluw in true knowledge and in the expression of their virtues, while also avoiding falling into the trap of *Taqsīr*. In order to attain true knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt, a path of moderation and the middle way has been delineated in the narrations. On the one hand, it negates the claim of Lordship from them and introduces them as "honored servants" of God; on the other hand, it recognizes knowledge of them as an essential condition for knowledge of God.

Given that, in the narrations, the central axis of religion is regarded as love and hatred, and the heart is considered the place where human beliefs take shape, the purity or impurity of the heart plays a fundamental role in the acceptance of these beliefs. Therefore, ghuluw and Taqsīr in knowing and expressing the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt arise in the heart.

Tasbīḥ in the Qur'anic verses possesses an infinite and unrestricted meaning, and its scope encompasses all beings and all of creation. It means declaring God transcendent and considering Him free from attributes of deficiency and defect in the realm of name and meaning. The effect that the *tasbīḥ* of God, in all its verbal, practical, linguistic, and heartfelt dimensions, has on the human heart is that it empties it of love for anything other than God and purifies its realm from every form of polytheism and impurity. Since true knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt is the same as knowledge of God, *tasbīḥ* removes from the heart the impurities present on the path of knowing and expressing the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt and makes possible for the human being the path of moderation in their true knowledge, which is the same as monotheistic knowledge of God. *Tasbīḥ* of God in this realm teaches us that the relationship of the Family of Moḥammad, peace be upon them, with Almighty God is that of created beings and servants, while their relationship with the other creatures is that their creation is different from and superior to the creation of all other creatures, and their attributes are also divine. For this reason, it is not possible to reach the essence and ultimate extent of descriibng and expressing the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt.

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Epistemological Foundations of the Impossibility of Comparing Others with the Ahl al-Bayt (as)

Seyed Ali Rabbani Mousaviyan[1]

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Abstract

The Ahl al-Bayt (as) possess such an elevated status that, according to both Shia and Sunni sources, comparing others with them is impossible and explicitly prohibited by traditions (*Aḥādith*). Due to this incomparability, specific jurisprudential rulings distinguish them from the Ummah. These include: their Wilāyah being a condition for faith and accepting deeds; invoking blessings (*Ṣalawāt*) upon them in prayer; the prohibition of receiving charity (*Ṣadaqah*); the exclusive allocation of Khums and Anfal; the prohibition of entering their presence in ritual impurity; and the death penalty for insulting them (*Sabb*). This incomparability is founded on their unique position in the ontological order (*Niẓām al-Takwīn*). Consequently, recognizing these epistemological foundations is necessary to conceptually accept these premises. The most significant foundations for their incomparability include being the proofs of Allah (*Ḥujaj Allah*), possessors of divine rulings, absolute vicegerents (*Khalīfah al-Tammah*), manifestations of Allah's supreme attributes, and intermediaries of grace (*Wasā'it al-Fayḍ*). Furthermore, the Ahl al-Bayt serve as the exact equivalent to the Messenger of Allah, the speaking Qur'an (Qur'an al-Natiq), and Allah's most proximate chosen servants.

Keywords: Ahl al-Bayt (as), Comparison with the Ahl al-Bayt (as), Epistemological Foundations, Impossibility of Comparison, Prohibition of Comparison.

1 Department of Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Islamic Law, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran: ali.rabanimousaviyan@iau.ac.ir

1. Introduction

The unique position of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) in the cosmic order, their relationship with God Almighty, the Messenger, and the Book, alongside the exceptional sanctity they hold before the Lawgiver (*Shāri'*), indicate that these noble figures are subject to specific rulings. Any speech or action attributed to them, as well as any interaction or reaction concerning them, is measured on a distinct and unparalleled scale compared to the rest of creation. Just as in the sacred law (*Sharīah*), the greater the recognized rights, respect, and sanctity of an individual, the higher the Lawgiver's expectation regarding the manner and nature of behavior toward them. This reaches a point where the Lawgiver does not tolerate insulting behavior, desecration, or the slightest degree of injustice toward certain possessors of rights and sanctity (*Dhawi al-Ḥuquq wa al-Iḥtirām*), issuing specific commands and prohibitions concerning them and establishing correspondingly severe punishments. For instance, regarding parents, the Lawgiver does not consent to the utterance of even the slightest word that causes them distress, explicitly prohibiting the saying of "Uff" and identifying it as a cause for parental disownment (*'Aaq al-Walīdayn*). By a *fortiori* argument (*Ṭarīq al-Awlá*), when such commands are given regarding physical parents, a higher expectation applies to spiritual parents who hold the right of guidance over the people. It is expected that the Lawgiver has established far more stringent rulings regarding the possessors of the greatest rights over the people—namely, the Prophet and the Imams. Therefore, regarding His Messenger, Allah prohibited raising voices in his presence and did not even consent to him being addressed like ordinary individuals, declaring that such actions would render one's deeds void (*Ḥabṭ al-A'māl*). "O you who have believed, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet or be loud to him in speech like the loudness of some of you to others, lest your deeds become worthless while you perceive not" (Ḥujurāt, 2).

2. The Impossibility of Comparing Others with the Ahl al-Bayt

According to numerous traditions expressed with various terminologies in the sources of both sects, the Holy Prophet of Islam and his infallible Ahl al-Bayt (as) occupy such an elevated status among creation that no one can be compared to them. The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (as), states: "None of the Islamic community can be compared with the progeny of Moḥammad (peace be upon them), and those who were nourished by their favors cannot be equated with them. They are the foundation of religion and the pillar of certainty" (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 2: 45).

As previously noted, the incomparability of the Ahl al-Bayt with others and the prohibition thereof are supported by abundant evidence in Shia (*Khasah*) sources and have been articulated through various expressions.

2-1. In Shia Sources:

A. In the noble *Al-Kāfi*, Imam al-Riḍā (as) is reported to have described the position of the Ahl al-Bayt as being at a level where hands fall short of reaching it and tongues are incapable of descriibng its reality: "And how can he be fully described, or how can his inner essence be characterized, or how can anything of his affair be comprehended, or how can anyone be found to take his place and suffice in his stead? How and by what means? While he is like the star, far beyond the reach of those who stretch out their hands and the description of those who describe" (Kulayni, 1365: Vol. 1, p. 201).

B. In the *Ziyārat Jāmi'ah Kabīrah*, transmitted by Shaykh al-Tusi in *Al-Tahdhīb* and Al-Saduq in *Al-Faqīh*—which many traditionalists (*Muhaddithin*) consider among the best visitations (*Ziyārat*) in terms of text and chain of transmission—it is narrated from Imam al-Hādi (as) that the rank and station of the Ahl al-Bayt reside in the highest degrees of the messengers. This is to such an extent that no one can catch up to their station, surpass them, precede them, or even hope to attain it: "Thus, Allah has elevated you to the most honorable station of the honored ones, the highest ranks of those drawn near, and the most exalted degrees of the messengers, where no pursuer can reach, no surpasser can excel, no preceder can overtake, and no aspirer can ever hope to attain" (Saduq, 1366: Vol. 2, p. 613; Tusi, 1370: Vol. 6, p. 98).

C. Ibn Mashhadi in *Al-Mazār al-Kabīr*, within the profound and lofty *Ziyārat al-Ghadirīyyah*, quotes Imam al-Hadi (as) declaring that anyone who equates another with the Commander of the Faithful is cursed: "May Allah curse whoever equates you with those who oppose you; while Allah, Exalted is His mention, says: 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' And may Allah curse whoever sets an equal to you, [you] whose guardianship Allah has made obligatory" (Ibn Mashhadi, 1415 AH: p. 270).

2-2. In Sunni Sources:

A. The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) addressed Abd al-Rāhman ibn Awf, saying: "O Abd al-Rahman, you are my companions, but Ali ibn Abi Talib is from me and I am from Ali; whoever compares him to anyone else has surely wronged me" (Hamuwaiy Juwayni, 1428 AH: Vol. 2, p. 68, Chapter 15).

In another narration, an addition is included: Narrated from Ibn Abbas, who said: The Messenger of Allah said to Abd al-Rahmān ibn Awf: "O Abd al-Rahman, you are my companions, and Ali ibn Abi Talib is from me and

I am from Ali. So whoever compares him to anyone other than me has wronged me, and whoever wrongs me has harmed me, and whoever harms me, upon him is the curse of my Lord" (Khawarizmi, 1423 AH: Vol. 1, p. 60, Chapter 5).

B. According to the noble *Hadīth of the Tree* (*Ḥadīth al-Shajarah*), the Creator fashioned the Prophet, the Commander of the Faithful, and consequently the other infallible Imams, from a single tree, while creating the rest of creation from another tree; thus, these two groups are incomparable. (Shia sources: Saduq, 1403 AH: Vol. 1, p. 21, Ch. 72; Saduq, 1380: Vol. 2, p. 73 & 340. Sunni sources: Muttaqi Hindi, 1398 AH: Vol. 6, p. 54, Hadīth 2561 & 2562; Haskani, 1399 AH: Vol. 1, p. 375).

In some traditions within this chapter, it is further stated that the Commander of the Faithful and the other Imams cannot be compared even with the Prophets (excluding the Seal of the Prophets), as the Prophet of Islam and the pure Imams are described as originating from one tree, and the other Prophets from a different tree: "Indeed, Allah created the Prophets from various trees, and He created me and Ali from a single tree" (Haskani, 1399 AH: Vol. 1, p. 554).

C. Ibn Abbas states: "Indeed, Allah reproached the companions of Moḥammad in more than one place [in the Qur'an], and He did not mention Ali except with goodness" (Haskāni, 1399 AH: 1: 49-54; Tarikh al-Khulafa of Suyuti: 171; and other Sunni sources).

D. Abdullah ibn Umar says: "When we used to enumerate the companions of the Prophet, we would say Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman. Someone asked: 'What about Ali?' Ibn Umar replied: 'Ali is from the Ahl al-Bayt; no one can be compared to him, and he is with the Messenger of Allah in his degree'" (Haskani, 1399 AH: 2: 197; Qunduzi, 1422 AH: 178 & 253, Chapters 55 & 56).

E. Abdullah ibn Ahmad ibn Hanbal said: "I asked my father about the superiority of the companions of the Prophet. He said: 'Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman.' I said: 'Then what about Ali ibn Abi Talib?' He said: 'He is from the Ahl al-Bayt; no one is compared with the Ahl al-Bayt'" (Qunduzi, 1422 AH: 152 & 253, Chapters 52 & 56).

Based on the numerous pieces of evidence, some of which have been mentioned, it becomes clear that in the sources of both sects, comparing others with the Ahl al-Bayt is strictly prohibited, to the extent that the one who makes such a comparison is subjected to a curse. This fact signifies the absolute prohibition (*Ḥurmah*) of comparing others with the Ahl al-Bayt.

3. Foundations of the Incomparability of the Ahl al-Bayt with Others

The impossibility of comparing others with the Ahl al-Bayt (as) essentially roots back to ontological (*Takwīni*) truths regarding their position. If knowledge of these truths is not acquired, accepting this concept might be difficult for the listener. However, knowledge of these truths facilitates the heart of the scholar to bear difficult matters that are hard for the ignorant, and makes the sound heart (*Qalb al-Salīm*) submissive to it. These foundations include divine knowledge (*'Ilm al-Ilahi*), infallibility in action (*'Ismah fi al-'Amal*), the answering of prayers (*Istijābat al-Da'wah*), being the noblest of creation (*Ashraf al-Khalā'iq*), and being those whose obedience is obligatory (*Muftariḍ al-Ṭa'ah*). For the sake of brevity, only five of the most important of these epistemological foundations will be discussed here.

3-1. The Ahl al-Bayt (as) as Divine Proofs (*Ḥujaj Allah*) and Vicegerents of Allah (*Khulafá Allah*)

In literal terms, *Ḥujjah* means reason and proof. However, in the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), various usages are mentioned for it, including reason, guide, and the remover of excuses and pretexts. If the Ahl al-Bayt (as) are introduced as the Proofs of Allah (*Ḥujaj Allah*), it means they are the guiding reasons and the removers of excuses and pretexts for disobedience.

Through the existence of the Imams (as), Allah has completed the proof upon the people and left no excuse. This matter is not possible except through the infallible Imam (as); therefore, they are the sole divine proofs in every era. The culture, knowledge, and teachings of these noble figures prove prophethood, resurrection, and the existence of Allah.

Imam al-Sadiq (as) states: "Since we have proven that we have a Creator and Maker who is more exalted than us and all created beings… then it is proven that in every age and era, messengers have been sent with reasons and proofs they brought to establish their truthfulness, so that Allah's earth is never devoid of a proof (*Ḥujjah*) who has with him knowledge or a sign testifying to the truthfulness of his speech and his justice" (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 167).

The earth is never devoid of an Imam (as), so that if the believers in the religion go astray, he can bring them back from this deviation, and if they diminish anything from the religion, he can complete it. The proof of Allah holds an exalted position; he is infallible, possesses ontological guardianship (*Wilāyat al-Takwīniyyah*) by Allah's permission, and is superior in all domains—this is why he is the proof of Allah. Among the undeniable dogmatic beliefs of the Shia is that the Imam in his time must be the most superior of the people of that era. The late 'Allamah al-Hilli, in

his commentary *Sharh al-Tajrid*, states: "The Imam must be superior to his followers (*Al-Imāmu yajib an yakun afḍal min ra'īyyatih*), because three scenarios can be assumed: 1. The Imam is equal to them in virtue; in this case, his Imamate is unjustified because preference without a preferrer (*Tarjīḥ bilā Murajjiḥ*) is rationally repugnant (*Qabih*). 2. The Imam is inferior to some of the followers; this is also impossible because preferring the inferior over the superior (*Tarjīḥ al-Mafḍul 'alá al-Fāḍil*) is repugnant, as indicated by both intellect and the Holy Qur'an: '…Then is He who directs to the truth more worthy to be followed, or he who guides not unless he is guided? Then what is [wrong] with you - how do you judge?' (Yunus, 35). 3. The Imam is superior to others. With the invalidation of the previous two assumptions, this assumption takes the seat of truth. Therefore, the Imam must be superior to others in all domains: knowledge of religion, generosity, courage, and all virtues of the soul and body" (Hilli, 1413 AH: Vol. 1, p. 366).

The position of Imamate in the view of the prominent figures of the Shia school is such an exalted station. Therefore, for some to introduce the infallible Imams merely as pious and righteous scholars, and nothing more, is to lower the exalted level of the infallibles to that of ordinary scholars and is a dereliction of their rights (*Taqsīr*)! Just as exaggeration (*Ghuluww*) regarding the status of the infallibles (as) and the belief that they have no Lord or Creator is a great deviation, failing to recognize their divine and sacred stations is also a dereliction (*Taqsīr*) regarding the Ahl al-Bayt and a great deviation. Thus, such a perspective stems from the speakers' lack of knowledge regarding the exalted station of the infallibles (peace be upon them all) and is a deviation that must be countered, just like *Ghuluww*. Because just as exaggeration regarding the infallibles is prohibited and condemned, falling short (*Taqsīr*) regarding them, their knowledge, and their rights is also prohibited and condemned. Truly, who has known them according to the true right of their knowledge and fulfilled their rights!? The late Sha'rani, in his commentary on *Tajrid al-I'tiqad*, says: "It should be known that discussing the extent of the virtues, sciences, merits, the degree of proximity of the infallibles, their connection with the beings of the unseen world, their power to perform miracles, and the like is outside the duties of the science of scholastic theology (*'Ilm al-Kalām*). These belong to the subtleties of sciences and must be deduced from the authentic traditions (*Ahādīth Mu'tabarah*) on Imamate and by contemplation on their meanings. It is astonishing that an ignorant group in our time is so oblivious to the necessities of the religion (*Ḍaruriyyāt al-Madhhab*) to the extent that they even deny the Imam's grace (*Luṭf*), infallibility (*'Ismah*), and

knowledge in religious matters…" (Sha'rani, 1413 AH: Vol. 1, pp. 512-513).

In a supplication that Imam Ṣādiq (as) taught to Zurarah, it is stated: "O Allah, make me know Yourself, for if You do not make me know Yourself, I will not know Your Prophet. O Allah, make me know Your Messenger, for if You do not make me know Your Messenger, I will not know Your Proof. O Allah, make me know Your Proof, for if You do not make me know Your Proof, I will deviate from my religion" (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 337). Can the Imams, whom numerous traditions have called the Gates of Allah (*Abwāb Allah*), the Pervaders of Allah's Knowledge (*'Urafa' Allah*), the Pillars of the Earth (*Arkan al-Arḍ*), and the Supports of Truth (*Da'ā'im al-Ḥaqq*), be seen merely as ordinary pious scholars?!! Can the Imams, who are the treasurers of Allah's knowledge, the heirs of the Prophets, and the most knowledgeable of people, be seen as ordinary prominent scholars? Can the Imams, whose love is the love of Allah and the love of the Messenger of Allah, whose love is the foundation of Islam, whose love is the highest act of worship, and whose love is a divine gift, be seen as ordinary scholars?! (Moḥammadi Reyshahri, 1387 SH: p. 254).

Numerous traditions have been narrated bearing the theme of the following tradition: Imam Ṣādiq (as) said: "Indeed, Allah… has made us His eye among His servants, His speaking tongue among His creations, His extended hand of compassion and mercy over His servants, His face through which He is approached, His gate that guides to Him, and His treasurers in His heaven and earth. Through us, trees bear fruit, fruits ripen, and rivers flow. Through us, the rain of the sky descends and the herbage of the earth grows. By our worship, Allah is worshipped, and had it not been for us, Allah would not have been worshipped" (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 144).

The infallible Imam (as), as the proof of Allah and the vicegerent on earth, is the representative of the beautiful names (*Asmá al-Husná*) and the supreme attributes (*Ṣifāt al-'Ulyá*) of Allah. In terms of ruling (*Ḥukm*), all divine rulings are completely applicable to him, and the Book and the *Sunnah* contain abundant evidence that the ruling of the Messenger of Allah and the Ahl al-Bayt in various matters is equivalent to the ruling of Allah. Among these, the Holy Qur'an has called pledging allegiance to the Messenger of Allah as pledging allegiance to Allah, and obedience to the Messenger of Allah as obedience to Allah: "Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Moḥammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah" (Fath, 10). "He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah" (Nisa, 80). In numerous traditions, obedience to the Ahl al-Bayt is termed obedience to Allah, disobedience to them as disobedience to Allah, love for

them as love for Allah, hatred and enmity towards them as hatred and enmity towards Allah, their satisfaction and anger as the satisfaction and anger of Allah, and so forth.

Zurarah narrates from Imam al-Baqir (as) regarding the verse "And they did not wrong Us, but they were wronging themselves" (Hud, 101) [Note: verse citation translated exactly as provided in the source text]. The Imam (as) said: "Indeed, Allah the Exalted is greater, mightier, more majestic, and more impregnable than to be wronged; however, He has associated us with Himself, making the wrong done to us as the wrong done to Himself, and our guardianship (*Wilāyah*) as His guardianship, where He says: 'Your wali is none but Allah and His Messenger and those who have believed'—meaning the Imams from among us. Then He said in another place: 'And they did not wrong Us, but they were wronging themselves,' mentioning the like of it in His Qur'an (such as the anger and satisfaction of Allah, and His regret and sorrow, where in these instances we are also intended)" (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 146).

Based on this foundation, the divine proofs assume divine rulings, and their distinction from others in all characteristics becomes apparent. Just as Allah the Exalted is incomparable with others, His absolute vicegerent (*Khalīfat al-Tāmmah*) is also incomparable with others, and his rulings are not comparable to those of others.

3-2. The Ahl al-Bayt (as) as the Intermediaries of Divine Grace between the Creator and Creation

Among the matters that distinguish the Ahl al-Bayt (as) from other creations is that they are the intermediaries of divine grace (*Wasitah al-Fayḍ al-Ilāhi*) in its absolute sense between the Creator and the creation. Regarding the Ahl al-Bayt being the intermediaries of grace and their ontological guardianship (*Wilāyah al-Takwīniyyah*), the prominent figures and leading jurists of the Imami School are in consensus based on the received traditions. Here, examples of their statements are mentioned.

Sheikh Moḥammad Husayn Isfahani (Kumpani) states: "The Prophet and the Imams possess spiritual guardianship (*Wilāyah al-Ma'nawiyyah*) and esoteric sovereignty (*Saltanah al-Batiniyyah*) over all ontological and legislative matters. Just as they are the conduits of ontological emanations (*Fuyudat al-Takwīniyyah*), they are also the conduits of legislative emanations (*Fuyuḍāt al-Tashri'iyyah*). Thus, they are the intermediaries of creation and legislation. Furthermore, the Prophet and the Imams, by virtue of being the conduits of the grace of existence, possess the capacity of instatement (*Jā'iliyyah*) and encompassment in that respect; meaning they are the intermediary *in* existence (*Mā bihi al-Wujud*), not the bestower *of* existence (*Mā minhu al-Wujud*), because bestowing existence is exclusive

to the Necessary Being (*Wājib al-Wujud*)" (Gharavi Isfahani, 1418 AH: Vol. 2, pp. 379-381).

Mr. Khoei, who is considered among the leading contemporary jurists, also states: "The apparent meaning is that there is no doubt regarding their guardianship over all creations, as it appears from the traditions, because they are considered the intermediary in creation. Existence is through them, and they are the cause of creation. Had it not been for them, the people would not have been created at all; people were created for their sake, and their existence is by virtue of them. They are the intermediary in the emanation of existence. Rather, they possess ontological guardianship (*Wilāyah al-Takwīniyyah*) over everything other than the Creator God. This guardianship, like the guardianship of Allah the Exalted over the creation, is an affirmative guardianship (*Wilāyah Ijābiyyah*), even though it is weaker compared to the guardianship of Allah over the creation" (Khoei, 1377: Vol. 5, p. 35).

Mirza Naeini, one of the greatest jurists, also has a noteworthy statement in this regard. He states: "Know that their guardianship has two degrees. One of them is ontological guardianship (*Wilāyah al-Takwīniyyah*), which consists of the subjugation and sovereignty over the created beings under their will and volition by the power and strength of Allah; as it has come in the *Ziyārat* of Hazrat Ḥujjah—may our souls be sacrificed for him—'There is nothing of us except that you are its cause.' This is because they (as) are the loci of manifestation (*Māẓahir*) of the names and attributes of Allah the Exalted. Thus, their action is His action, and their speech is His speech. This degree of guardianship is exclusive to them and cannot be granted to others, because it is among the requisites of their luminous essences and sacred souls, whose lowest degree no one else can reach.

The second of those two degrees is the divine legislative guardianship (*Wilāyah al-Tashri'iyyah al-Ilāhīyyah*), which is established for them from Allah the Exalted in the realm of legislation. It means the obligation of following them in everything, and that they are legally (*Shar'an*) more worthy of the people in everything than their own selves and wealth. The difference between these two degrees of guardianship is evident, inasmuch as the first degree is guardianship in the realm of creation, and the second is guardianship in the realm of legislation. The second degree is not established except for the one who possesses the first degree, because not everyone is worthy of assuming that exalted position and lofty station unless Allah the Exalted has specifically granted him His honor, and that is the possessor of the first degree. This is according to the truth with us [the Shia], contrary to the general public [the Sunnis], who hold that the second

degree is established for anyone who takes charge of the affairs of the Ummah, whether righteous or wicked" (Amoli, 1413 AH: Vol. 2, p. 233).

Therefore, according to Mirza Naeini, the ontological guardianship of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) means that all existent beings are subjected to them, and they can exercise any disposal (*Tasarruf*) in them as they wish by divine power and strength. They are the cause of all matters in the universe and the loci of manifestation for all the names and attributes of the Lord, such that their actions are entirely the actions of Allah, and their words are the words of Allah and the manifestation of His will. This is a station in the universe that is exclusively theirs and no one else's. However, he subsequently derives an important point: only the one who has guardianship in creation can have guardianship in legislation. That is, he considers legislative guardianship a branch of ontological guardianship. Furthermore, in refuting the view of some who have considered the legislative guardianship of the infallibles limited to non-customary (*Ghayr 'Urfi*) matters, he states:

"There is no problem for us in the establishment of both degrees of guardianship for the Prophet and his successors—blessings of Allah be upon him and upon them—who are from his progeny. The four proofs (*Adillah al-Arba'ah*) denote it, just as the author [of *Al-Makāsib*] argued for it in that book. Therefore, no heed is paid to the opposition of one who restricts legislative guardianship solely to the obligation of following them in Islamic rulings and gives no importance to accepting what they convey of the rulings… The weakness and absurdity of this statement is not hidden; rather, the four proofs stand to refute it, and it seems that the one who holds this view has followed the opponents [Sunnis] in this matter."

In support of Mirza Naeini's view, Sheikh Ansari also in the book *Al-Matajir* [*Al-Makāsib*], after discussing in detail with proofs regarding the establishment of guardianship for the Prophet and the Imams (as), states: "The purpose of all that has been said is to repel the illusion that the obligation of obeying the Imam (as) is restricted to legislative commands (*Awāmir al-Shar'iyyah*), and that there is no proof for the obligation of obeying the Imam in customary commands (*Awāmir al-'Urfiyyah*) or his sovereignty over properties and lives. In summary, what is derived from the four proofs after investigation and contemplation is that the Imam has absolute sovereignty (*Saltanah Muṭlaqah*) over the subjects from Allah the Exalted, and that their disposal (*Tasarruf*) regarding the subjects is absolutely effective and decisive" (Sheikh Ansari, 1385: Vol. 2, p. 46).

3-3. The Ahl al-Bayt (as) as Equivalent to the Messenger of Allah

Abundant (*Mustafīd*), and even multiply-attested (*Mutāwatir*), traditions denote that the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (as) are not separate from him;

rather, they stand at the status and equivalency (*Biman-zilat*) of the Messenger of Allah. The Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet consist of Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, Husayn, and the nine descendants of Husayn (as), among whom today only the Proof of the Age (*Ḥujjah al-Zamān*), Imam Mahdi (as), is living.

According to the Verse of Mubahalah, the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), is the self and soul (*Nafs*) of the Prophet (pbuh), and this signifies the equality of all the statuses (*Shu'ūn*) of the Commander of the Faithful with those of the Prophet and his equality in rank with him, with the exception of the matters that have been specifically excluded. On the other hand, numerous traditions have introduced the rest of the infallible Ahl al-Bayt as holding the exact ruling (*Ḥukm*) of the Commander of the Faithful. Therefore, the Ahl al-Bayt (as) share with the Prophet (pbuh) in the sanctity (*Ḥurmah*), dignity (*Karāmah*), and rights (*Ḥuquq*) that Islam has established for the Prophet.

According to the belief of Shia scholars, any sanctity established for the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) is equally established for Hazrat Amir al-Mu'minin, Ḥazrat Fatimah, and their infallible descendants (as). Consequently, whatever we observe in the verses of the Qur'an regarding the status and rank (*Sha'n wa Manzilat*) of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) holds true for all the Infallibles (as).

The minimum level of knowledge (*Ma'rifah*) of the Imam—the absence of which is equivalent to ignorance (*Jāhilīyyah*) and misguidance—is recognizing the co-equality in status between the Imam and the Noble Prophet (pbuh). Imam Sadiq (as) stated: "The lowest degree of knowledge of the Imam is the belief that he is equal in weight and equivalent to the Prophet (pbuh) in all statuses, except in the status and degree of prophethood, and in this respect, the Imam is the inheritor of the Prophet (pbuh). Furthermore, it includes the confession that obedience to the Imam is obedience to Allah and the Prophet, as well as submitting to him, delegating affairs to him, acting upon his words, and believing in the matter that after the Prophet (pbuh), Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), and after him, Hasan and Husayn up to Hazrat Ḥujjah (as) are the successors of the Prophet and the leaders (*Pishwayān*) of the Muslims."

Imam Sadiq (as) stated:

«أَدْنَى مَعْرِفَةُ الْإِمَامِ أَنَّهُ عَدْلُ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا دَرَجَةَ النُّبُوَّةِ وَ وَارِثُهُ وَ أَنَّ طَاعَتَهُ طَاعَةُ اللَّهِ وَ طَاعَةُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ وَ التَّسْلِيمُ لَهُ فِي كُلِّ أَمْرٍ وَ الرَّدَّ إِلَيْهِ وَ الْأَخْذَ بِقَوْلِهِ وَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّ الْإِمَامَ بَعْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص) عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ وَ بَعْدَهُ الْحَسَنُ ثُمَّ الْحُسَيْنِ ثُمَّ عَلِيُّ بْنُ الْحُسَيْنِ ثُمَّ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَلِيٍّ ثُمَّ أَنَا ثُمَّ بَعْدِي مُوسَى ابْنِي وَ

بَعْدِه عَلِيٌ ابْنِه وَ بَعْدَ عَلِيٍ مُحَمَّد ابْنَهُ وَ بَعْدَ مُحَمَّدٍ عَلِيٌ ابْنِه وَ بَعْدَ عَلِيٍ الْحَسَنُ ابْنُهُ وَ الْحُجَّةُ مِنْ وُلْدِ الْحَسَنِ»

(Khazzaz Razi, 1400 SH: p. 263; Majlisi, 1403 AH: Vol. 4, p. 55 and Vol. 36, p. 407). Furthermore, Imam Sadiq (as) stated:

«الأئمة بمنزلة رسول الله صلى الله عليه و آله إلا أنهم ليسوا بأنبياء، ولا يحل لهم من النساء ما يحل للنبى صلى الله عليه و آله ، فأما ما خلا ذلک فهم فيه بمنزلة رسول الله صلى الله عليه و آله»

(Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 270). Imam Sadiq (as): The Imams stand at the status of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh), except that they are not prophets. And whatever is lawful for the Prophet (pbuh) regarding women is not lawful for them (having more than four permanent wives simultaneously), but in all matters other than that, they are considered to be at the status of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh).

Likewise, by referring to the verses of the Qur'an, we realize that the progeny (*Dhurrīyyah*) of the Prophet (pbuh) have been the object of special attention and distinct divine grace, and for this reason, they possessed the qualification for the station of Imamate and vicegerency (*Wisayat*) and have been presented alongside the Holy Prophet. Among them:

1. The Messenger of Allah, at the onset of his prophetic mission (*Bi'thah*), is commanded to begin his warning (*Indhār*) and propagation (*Tablīgh*) with his close family:

«وَأَنذِرْ عَشِيرَتَکَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ»

[And warn your closest relatives] (Al-Shu'ara: 214) [In the original Persian text, the verse number is inadvertently listed as 211; preserved as 211 to reflect your source text directly: (Al-Shu'ara: 211)].

2. The Almighty God's ontological will (*Irāda al-Takwīniyyah*) has attached itself to the infallibility (*'Ismah*) and purity (*Ṭahārah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (as):

«إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيراً»

[Indeed Allah desires only to remove defilement from you, O Ahl al-Bayt, and to purify you with a thorough purification] (Aḥzāb: 33).

3. The Almighty God granted such a distinct capacity to the progeny and Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet of Islam (as) that only they were permitted to participate alongside him in the Mubahalah (mutual imprecation) to establish the legitimacy (*Haqqāniyyah*) of Islam, and He made the fulfillment of His Messenger's supplication contingent upon their *Amīn*:

«فَمَنْ حَاجَّکَ فِيهِ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَکَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنفُسَنَا وَأَنفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَل لَّعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ»

[And whoever disputes with you concerning him after what has come to you of knowledge, say: 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then let us supplicate earnestly and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars'] (Imran: 61).

4. God addresses the Prophet (pbuh), stating: Tell the people that I ask of you no reward except love for the near of kin:

«قُل لَّا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ»

[Say, 'I ask of you no reward for it except love for my near relatives'] (Shura: 23).

5. He commands the Prophet (pbuh) to have a private emphasis and injunction regarding prayer upon his household:

«وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا»

[And command your family to establish prayer, and be steadfast in it] (Taha: 132).

In general, based on abundant and universally agreed-upon (*Muttafaq*) traditions of both Islamic denominations (*Fariqayn*), the Messenger of Allah introduced the Ahl al-Bayt as being from himself, and himself as being from them, restricting this exclusive attribute solely to them. He introduced their flesh and blood as his own flesh and blood, and even their understanding and knowledge as his own understanding and knowledge. He declared friendship and enmity, and cursing (*Sabb*) and warfare against them to be friendship and enmity, and cursing and warfare against himself, descriibng their relation to him as the head to the body and the soul to the physical frame (*Jism*), such that no expressions more eloquent or profound could be employed to articulate the intensity of connection, union, and the identification (*Yeki Engashtan*) of them with himself (to observe these traditions in Sunni sources, refer to: Firuzabadi, *Faḍā'il al-Khamsah min al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah*).

On the other hand, we know that the Almighty God established a special and distinguished position for His Noble Messenger, singling him out in the Holy Qur'an for specific honors and venerations, and issuing special directives and recommendations concerning him. Since the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) also stand at the status of the Messenger of Allah and are equal in rank (*Ham-Sha'n*) to him, therefore all these venerations and honors are inevitably concomitant with them as well, and the ruling (*Ḥukm*) applicable to the Messenger of Allah runs and operates (*Sari wa Jari*) concerning them. In what follows, several of these special Qur'anic honors and venerations directed at the Messenger of Allah along with their corresponding directives are outlined:

1. The Holy Qur'an considers one of the attributes of true believers to be not leaving the assembly of the Messenger of Allah without his permission, a matter which signifies the necessity of preserving the utmost sanctity and reverence for the Messenger of Allah:

«إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَإِذَا كَانُوا مَعَهُ عَلَى أَمْرٍ جَامِعٍ لَمْ يَذْهَبُوا حَتَّى يَسْتَأْذِنُوهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَأْذِنُونَكَ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ»

(Nur: 62). True believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Messenger (with complete submission), and when they are with him on a matter of collective concern, they do not leave until they have asked his permission. Indeed, those who ask your permission—they are the ones who truly believe in Allah and His Messenger.

2. The Almighty God has commanded in the Holy Qur'an to assist, venerate, and honor the Messenger of Allah:

«إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا ۞ لِّتُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتُعَزِّرُوهُ وَتُوَقِّرُوهُ وَتُسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا»

(Fath: 8-9). Indeed, We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of good tidings, and a warner; so that you [people] may believe in Allah and His Messenger, and assist him and honor him, and glorify Him morning and evening.

3. The Holy Qur'an has made it obligatory (*Wājib*) that we love His Messenger more than anyone else, even more than family, parents, spouse, and children:

«قُلْ إِن كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِنُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ»

(Tawbah: 24). Say: 'If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have acquired, commerce wherein you fear decline, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait until Allah brings about His command.'

4-3. The Ahl al-Bayt (as) as Equivalent to the Speaking Qur'an

After himself, the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) left behind two weighty sources—the Holy Qur'an (the silent book) and the Progeny (*'Itrah* / the speaking Qur'an)—for the guidance of humanity, stating:

«إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمُ الثَّقَلَيْنِ مَا إِنْ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَ عِتْرَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي وَ إِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضَ فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ تَخْلُفُونِي فِيهِمَا»

[Indeed, I am leaving among you two weighty things; as long as you hold fast to them, you will never go astray: the Book of Allah and my progeny, my Ahl al-Bayt. And indeed, they will never separate until they

return to me at the Pond (of Kawthar), so observe how you treat them after me] (Shaykh Mufid, 1413 AH: Vol. 1, p. 233).

Based on the multiply-attested (*Mutawātir*) Hadīth of *Thaqalayn*, the Ahl al-Bayt (as) are the peers of the Qur'an; holding fast to one of the two without the other is equivalent to abandoning both, and attaining the complete religion is only possible in the light of holding fast to the verses of the Qur'an and their traditions. Of course, since the Ahl al-Bayt embody all the truths of the Qur'an, possess them, are the elucidators (*Mubayyin*) of the correct and actual intent of the divine speech, and are the incarnate Qur'an, whoever holds fast to them has definitively held fast to the Qur'an as well. However, this concomitance (*Mulāzamah*) does not hold in reverse; holding fast to the Qur'an does not necessarily entail holding fast to the Ahl al-Bayt. Rather, by claiming the sufficiency of the Qur'an, one can distort the divine intent of His speech, interpret it to mean the exact opposite, and ultimately place the apparent (*Ẓāhir*) meaning of the Qur'an in opposition to its truth (*Ḥaqiqah*). It is narrated from Fayḍ Kashani that if someone says the Qur'an is sufficient for us, they have gone astray and are placed on the path of misguidance and deviation. However, if someone says the Ahl al-Bayt are sufficient for us, they have not gone astray and are on the path of guidance, because wherever the Ahl al-Bayt are, the Qur'an is also present… because the true exegetes (*Mufassir*) of the Qur'an are the Ahl al-Bayt. But one who relies solely on the Qur'an falls into interpretation by personal opinion (*Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y*) and interprets the Qur'an according to their own desires, the result of which is misguidance. The relationship between the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt is one of absolute general and specific (*'Umum wa Khuṣuṣ Muṭlaq*); meaning, wherever the speaking Qur'an (the Ahl al-Bayt) is, the silent Qur'an definitely exists as well, but wherever the silent Qur'an is alone, it cannot be made to speak and requires a speaker (*Nātiq*), and consequently loses its critical efficacy (Ganji, 1386 SH: pp. 45-46).

In reality, the difference between the language of the Ahl al-Bayt and the Qur'an lies only in elaboration (*Tafṣil*) and brevity (*Ijmāl*); otherwise, both are revelation (*Waḥy*) and divine speech. However, the divine book has been articulated in the language of brevity, and its elaboration has been delegated to the Sunnah of the Infallible, manifesting in their speech and actions.

The Holy Qur'an is the Word of God, and despite its simplicity, it is highly complex and profound; its deep concepts are not clear to everyone. Therefore, for a precise understanding of the Qur'an, its correct exegesis, and the prevention of malicious esoteric interpretations (*Ta'wīl*) and

erroneous deductions, the Qur'an requires an exegete and elucidator. God Almighty introduced the Prophet (pbuh) himself as its primary exegete:

«وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ»

[And We revealed to you the message that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them and that they might give thought] (Nahl: 44). After the Prophet, based on the Hadīth of *Thaqalayn* and other proofs, his Ahl al-Bayt bear this responsibility and serve as the speaking tongue of the Qur'an, or the "speaking Qur'an" among the Ummah. No one other than them is completely aware of the apparent (*Zahir*) and hidden (*Bāṭin*) meanings of the Qur'an and the actual and definitive purposes of the divine speech. Others are indebted to them in this regard, and attaining correct Qur'anic teachings without them and by referring solely to the Qur'an is neither possible nor feasible. The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (as), states:

«ذَلِکَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَنْطِقُوهُ وَ لَنْ يَنْطِقَ، وَ لَكِنْ أُخْبِرُكُمْ عَنْهُ»

[This is the Qur'an, so ask it to speak, but it will never (itself) speak; rather, I will inform you about it] (*Nahj al-Balaghahh*, Sermon 158). Imam Saādiq (as) also states:

«ذَلِکَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَنْطِقُوهُ وَ لَنْ يَنْطِقَ لَكُمْ أُخْبِرُكُمْ عَنْهُ إِنَّ فِيهِ عِلْمَ مَا مَضَى وَ عِلْمَ مَا يَأْتِي إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَ حُكْمَ مَا بَيْنَكُمْ وَ بَيَانَ مَا أَصْبَحْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ فَلَوْ سَأَلْتُمُونِي عَنْهُ لَعَلَّمْتُكُمْ»

[This is that same Qur'an, ask it to speak, it will never speak to you; I will inform you as an interpreter of it, that within it is the knowledge of what has passed and the knowledge of what is to come until the Day of Resurrection. The Qur'an is the judge between you, and it has a decisive clarification regarding whatever you differ in; if you ask me, I will teach you] (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 61). The terms "speaking Qur'an" and "silent Qur'an" are derived from the narration of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (as), who states:

«أَنَا كَلَامُ اللّهِ النَّاطِقُ وَ هَذَا كَلَامُ اللّهِ الصَّامِتُ»

[I am the speaking Word of God, and this (the Qur'an) is the silent Word of God] (Majlisi, 1403 AH: Vol. 30, p. 546).

The reason for naming the Imam as the speaking Word of God and the Qur'an as the silent word is that the infallible Imams (as) elucidated the divine verses and applied them to their correct instances. The divine book, without the existence of a person who has the power from God to make it speak, cannot be a reference for guidance and the resolution of disputes. The evidence for this is that although all Islamic sects and denominations believe in the Qur'an, and this book is the reference of discernment for all of them, by clinging solely to the Qur'an, they have been unable to find the

path of growth and guidance; despite the Qur'an, there are vast differences among them, which is clear testimony to the impossibility of guidance by sufficing with the Qur'an alone. Those who consider the Qur'an to be independent of the Infallible are like those who say: "Medical books are sufficient for us, and we have no need for a doctor." In truth, the reality of the Qur'an, according to its own statement, is nothing but those same sciences and clear verses within the breasts of those who have been granted knowledge, namely the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt:

«بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ»

[Rather, the Qur'an is distinct verses [preserved] within the breasts of those who have been given knowledge] (Al-'Ankabut: 49). And no one except the purified ones (*Muṭahharun*)—whom the Verse of Purification (*Āyat al-Taṭhīr*) has introduced—has access to its primary purposes, correct meanings, realities, and esoteric depths:

«لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ»

[None touch it except the purified] (Wāqi'ah: 79). Abu Basir says: Regarding the verse:

«هَذَا كِتَابُنَا يَنطِقُ عَلَيْكُم بِالْحَقِّ»

[This is Our record; it speaks about you in truth] (Jāthiyah: 29), I asked Imam Sadiq (as), and he replied: "The Qur'an does not speak; rather, Moḥammad and his Ahl al-Bayt (as) are the speakers of the book—meaning the Qur'an" (Majlisi, 1403 AH: Vol. 23, pp. 197-198).

In another tradition, Imam Sadiq (as) stated: "Amir al-Mu'minin (as) says: I am the knowledge of God and the speaking tongue of God" (Saduq, 1362 SH: p. 164). Also, expressions such as "His speaking tongue" or "We are the speaking tongue of God" (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 144) and similar statements regarding Imam Ali (as) and the other infallible leaders found in the traditions, convey that they are the true exegetes of the Qur'an, the manifestation of divine knowledge, and knowledgeable of all sciences related to the Qur'an. As such, they have expressed various traditions on different occasions regarding its exegesis, esoteric interpretation, and otherwise, of which others have been deprived. It is for this reason that applying the term "speaking Qur'an" to those noble figures is correct.

It is also mentioned in Sunni traditions that:

«وَمَنْ عِندَهُ عِلْمُ الْكِتَابِ»

[And whoever has knowledge of the Scripture] (Al-Ra'd: 43), the one who possesses the knowledge of the entire book is Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was knowledgeable of its apparent, esoteric, exegesis, esoteric interpretation, abrogating (*Nāsikh*), abrogated (*Mansūkh*), lawful (*Halāl*),

and unlawful (*Ḥarām*) aspects (Tha'labi, 1422 AH: Vol. 5, p. 303). It is also narrated from him that he said: "By the One in whose hand is my soul, no verse was revealed except that I know where it was revealed and concerning whom it was revealed" (Muttaqi Hindi, 1398 AH: Hadīth 36404).

According to the Hadīth of *Thaqalayn* and numerous other traditions, the Ahl al-Bayt (as) are the sole equivalents, partners, and soul of the Qur'an, and their guardianship (*Wilāyah*) is the pole (*Qutb*) of the Qur'an. A vast portion of the divine verses was revealed regarding their status and virtues (*Manāqib*), or regarding the flaws (*Mathālib*) and condemnation of their enemies. God Almighty has described His book with various attributes in the Holy Qur'an, and considering that the Ahl al-Bayt are the peers of the Book of Allah and hold the status of the speaking Qur'an, all these attributes apply to them and correspond to them as well.

Based on the preceding, at the very least, the equivalence of the Ahl al-Bayt with the Qur'an is established; however, beyond that, the superiority of the Ahl al-Bayt over the Qur'an becomes clear through various aspects, just as some prominent figures have explicitly stated the superiority of the Ahl al-Bayt over the Qur'an according to the Shia. Mirza Habibullah Khui, in his commentary on *Nahj al-Balaghahh* under Sermon 86, quoting Ibn Maytham Bahrani (d. 7th century AH), says: "For us (the Imamiyyah), the Progeny (*'Itrah*) of the Prophet is superior to the Qur'an, and they are its custodians (*Qayyim*)" (Khui, 1400 AH: Vol. 6, p. 215). In the language of the traditions, the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are referred to as the Tongue of God (*Lisān Allah*) in contrast to the Qur'an which is the Word of God (*Kalām Allah*). It is clear that all divine speech is not the Qur'an, and the expression "divine tongue" represents a station preceding divine speech, encompassing all words and whatever has been revealed by God Almighty and all revelatory sciences. Hence, it is recorded in the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt: "Indeed, a part of the knowledge given to us is the exegesis of the Qur'an" (Fayḍ Kashani, 1399 AH: Vol. 1, p. 21). Or regarding the Scroll (*Ṣahīfah*) of Fatimah (as), it is recorded that it is three times the size of the Qur'an, yet there is nothing of this Qur'an within it. Descriibng the Ahl al-Bayt as the speaking Qur'an in contrast to the silent Qur'an also demonstrates the silent Qur'an's need for a speaker for elucidation. Thus, Sunni principles (*Usuliyyin*) have also explicitly stated that the Qur'an is more in need of the Sunnah than the Sunnah is in need of the Qur'an. In *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, the Hadīth of *Thaqalayn* is narrated from the Messenger of Allah as follows: "I am leaving among you two weighty things, the Book of Allah and Ali ibn Abi Talib; and Ali (as) is better for you than the Book

of Allah because he is the translator and elucidator of the Book of Allah for you" (Bahrani, 1419 AH: Vol. 1, p. 132).

As mentioned, according to numerous traditions, the guardianship (*Wilāyah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt is the pole of the Qur'an, and the major part of the verses of the Qur'an was revealed concerning the status of the Ahl al-Bayt, introducing them, and their enemies. Undoubtedly, this portion of the verses constitutes the mother (foundation) of the book and the axis of the Qur'an, taking precedence over moral discussions, rulings (*Aḥkām*), and the like. This matter indicates that the fundamental reason for the revelation of the Qur'an was to introduce the Ahl al-Bayt and to guide towards the Imam (as), just as they were the fundamental reason for creation. Undoubtedly, the most superior of creatures are situated as the ultimate cause (*'Illat-i Ghā'i*) of creation, and the ultimate cause of creation is superior to any created thing, including the Qur'an. Therefore, under the verse:

«إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ»

[Indeed, this Qur'an guides to that which is most suitable] (Al-Isra: 9),

Imam Ṣādiq (as) stated: "It guides to the Imam" (Kulayni, 1365 SH: Vol. 1, p. 216). As noted, the guardianship of the Ahl al-Bayt is the pole of the Qur'an, and the Holy Qur'an was in fact revealed in praise and description of the Messenger of Allah and his Ahl al-Bayt, and it is clear that the praised and described subject is superior and more noble than the act of praise and description itself.

Another point is that just as the Qur'an is the miracle of the Messenger of Allah, the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are also the miracle of the Messenger of Allah; rather, they are the greatest miracle of the Messenger of Allah through whom the magnificent miracle of God becomes manifest. In the Holy Qur'an, the term "miracle" (*Mu'jīzah*) is not used, and a miracle is referred to as a "sign" (*Āyah*); hence, the author of *Tafsir al-Mizan* states: "The meaning of *Āyah* in the Qur'an is a miracle" (Tabatabai, n.d.: Vol. 1, p. 73). However, the expression of being the miracle of the Prophet's mission is used in the Ziyārat of Amir al-Mu'minin, Ali (as), which Muhaddith Qummi relates from Shaykh Mufid, Shahid, and Sayyid: "The one whom You made the sword of his prophethood, the miracle of his mission, and a clear proof for his argument (*Ḥujjah*)" (Qummi, 1393 SH: p. 834). Furthermore, the expression "sign of the Prophet's mission" is used for him, as Muhaddith Qummi relates from *Al-Mazar* by Ibn Mashhadi in the absolute Ziyārat of His Eminence: "The one whom You made the sword of his prophethood, the sign of his mission, and a witness over his Ummah" (Qummi, 1393 SH: p. 779). Therefore, both the Qur'an and Ali (as) are divine signs and miracles, but the greatest divine miracle and sign,

according to the explicit declaration of the Commander of the Faithful himself, is he himself. Ali (as) said: "God has no message greater than me, and God has no sign greater than me" (Majlisi, 1403 AH: Vol. 23, p. 206). And in a Ziyārat that Muhaddith Qummi relates from the *Misbah* of Sayyid ibn Tawus, we address him thus: "Peace be upon you, O greatest sign and miracle of God (*Āyatullah al-'Uẓmá*)" (Qummi, 1393 SH: p. 818). In summary, the Ahl al-Bayt are the true existence of the Qur'an, and their superiority over the written, verbal, and mental existence of the Qur'an is clear and self-evident. As expressed by some contemporaries, the Qur'an is the scientific Imam and the Ahl al-Bayt are the objective Imam (Ganji, 1386 SH: Vol. 1, p. 105), and the Qur'an, its knowledge, and the encompassment of it are merely one status among the statuses of the Ahl al-Bayt.

However, regarding the expressions used in some texts of the Hadīth of *Thaqalayn* descriibng the Qur'an as the greater weight (*Thiqal al-Akbar*) and the Ahl al-Bayt as the lesser weight (*Thiqal al-Asghar*), researchers have provided detailed answers. The summary of their statements is that this expression was suited to the understanding of the audience of that time and was solely for a specific aspect and consideration; otherwise, there is no doubt about the superiority of the Ahl al-Bayt over the Qur'an. Among them, Ayatollah Jawadi Amoli writes: "It can in no way be proven that the Qur'an is superior to the reality of the perfect divine vicegerent, as the late Kashif al-Ghita has pointed out an aspect of this discussion" (Jawadi Amoli, 1403 AH: Vol. 1, p. 133). Elsewhere, regarding the expressions of the greater and lesser weights, he says: "These expressions look toward the realm of nature, where the duty in this realm is to defend the Qur'an. The perfect human is never lesser than the Qur'an; otherwise, separation would occur between them. The perfect human is the first emanation (*Ṣādir-i Awwal*). The first emanation is either superior to or a peer of the Qur'an" (Jawadi Amoli, 1399 SH: Vol. 2, p. 200).

Some others, like Shaykh Ali Akbar Nahawandi, have discussed the superiority between the Word of God and the Ahl al-Bayt in detail, a summary of which we mention here: "Know that prominent scholars have differed on whether the Qur'an is superior to the Ahl al-Bayt or vice versa… Considering that the two weights were described as one being greater and one lesser, the greater being the Qur'an and the lesser the Ahl al-Bayt. In some traditions, they said one is superior (*Afḍal*), in some, they said one is longer (*Aṭwal*), and in some, they equated both and gave the example of the two index fingers… Know that some have adopted the view that the Qur'an is superior, drawing their proof from the apparent meaning of those traditions containing the words greater, superior, and longer, each apparently denoting the precedence of the Qur'an, and they argue using the

tradition of its personification on the Day of Resurrection… However, generally, if this is considered, it would necessitate the superiority of the Qur'an over the Messenger of Allah, a claim no one has voiced… And how could intellect permit that the words and phrases originating from a king, sent via a messenger to someone, be superior to that messenger… And whenever the intellect rejects the superiority of the Qur'an over the Messenger of Allah, it must also reject its superiority over the Guardian (*Walī*), because God Almighty established His Eminence as the soul (*Nafs*) of the Prophet… Thus, the superiority of the Qur'an over one and its inferiority to the other is inconceivable. Another aspect is that numerous traditions state: 'I and Ali are one light which the Bountiful God created thousands of years before the creation of the universe.' This must be based on literal truth, not metaphor, and assuming it is literal truth, undoubtedly Amir al-Mu'minin would be superior to the Qur'an… Another aspect is the widely narrated tradition that the Qur'an in its entirety is in praise of us, the Ahl al-Bayt, and condemnation of our enemies; and if the Qur'an is entirely in praise of them, how can it be superior to the one being praised, while the entirety of it is their praise? How can the adjective be superior to the noun it describes? In summary, the group that considers the Qur'an superior—if by 'Qur'an' they mean these inscriptions drawn on pages of paper—have been very audacious because… how could words and phrases possess superiority over the sacred essence and holy being of the Refuge of Wilāyah? Rather, the nobility and superiority of the Qur'an are by virtue of its meanings (and those meanings are embedded in the knowledge of the Ahl al-Bayt and inseparable from them, leaving no rationale for the superiority of the Qur'an over the Ahl al-Bayt)." He then addresses the objections of the opponents of this view and their reasoning based on the aforementioned traditions, providing explanations for them. Among these explanations is that the expression of the Qur'an being "greater" was an etiquette (*Adab*) on the part of the Holy Prophet; he wished, out of respect for his Ahl al-Bayt—who were like his own soul—to call the letter and book of God "greater," and such etiquette is praiseworthy both intellectually and legislatively. Another explanation is that what is meant by "superior" and "greater" is the same attribute of being "longer" (*Atwal*) mentioned in another narration, which is out of similarity to an extended rope (*Ḥabl-i Mamdūd*), as traditions compare the Qur'an to an extended rope (Nahawandi, 1389 SH: pp. 447-454).

Even if the Ahl al-Bayt are conceptualized in relation to the Qur'an at the lowest degree—namely, as peers of the Book of Allah—the conclusion remains that comparison with them will be impossible. Just as the Qur'an is the Word of God, and the Word of God is incomparable with the words

of God's creation, and just as the Word of God is matchless and incomparable to other words, its peer similarly cannot be compared to anything.

5-3. The Ahl al-Bayt (as) as the Most Proximate Servants and Divine Chosen Ones

From the perspective of the Imamiyyah, the Ahl al-Bayt of Infallibility and Purity (as) are the chosen ones of God, the most superior of creatures, and the most proximate servants to the Divine Threshold. It is axiomatic that the greater a servant's proximity to God Almighty and the more they are a divine chosen one, the more they are the focus of divine attention; undoubtedly, God does not ordain their ruling (*Ḥukm*) to be like that of the rest of His creation and servants. For example, He never equates the crime of murdering the Prophet with that of murdering an ordinary believer, just as He has not equated the murder of a Muslim with the murder of a disbeliever (*Kāfir*), ordaining retribution (*Qiṣāṣ*) for the murder of a Muslim by a Muslim or a disbeliever, but not ordaining *Qiṣāṣ* for the murder of a disbeliever by a Muslim. On this basis, even if someone is inwardly pleased with the killing of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt and the oppression against them—like those who were satisfied with the murder of Aba Abdillah al-Husayn (as), despite not outwardly participating in his killing—they exit the circle of faith and are, in reality, absolute disbelievers (*Kāfir*). Even if they profess Islam and perform prayers and fasting, they are considered hypocrites (*Munāfiq*).

Regarding the fact that the Ahl al-Bayt (as) possess superiority (*Afḍalīyyah*) over all other creatures, there is abundant evidence. All the Imamiyyah and a large number of Sunni scholars have transmitted the superiority of the Commander of the Faithful (as) over the other companions (*Ṣaḥābah*). What is significant in the Sunni transmissions is that they attribute the belief in the superiority of Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) over the other companions to the Prophet himself or to the companions. Hakim al-Nayshaburi, with an authentic chain of transmission (*Sanad Sahih*), narrates from Ahmad ibn Hanbal: "For none of the companions of the Messenger of Allah have as many virtues (*Faḍā'īl*) been narrated as for Ali (as)" (Hakim al-Nayshāburi, 1420 AH: Vol. 3, p. 116). Nasir al-Din al-Albani in *Silsilat al-AHadīth al-Da'ifah* states: "Many of the predecessors (*Salaf*—companions and followers [*Tābi'īn*]) considered Ali (as) superior to others" (Albani, 1412 AH: Vol. 13, p. 881). Al-Dhahabi writes in *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalá*: "Considering Ali (as) as superior is neither *Rafḍ* (rejection) nor *Bid'ah* (innovation); rather, this was the belief of many of the companions and followers" (Dhahabi, 1405 AH: Vol. 16, p. 457). Moḥammad al-Baqillani writes in *Manāqib al-A'immah al-Arba'ah*: "The

assertion of Ali's (as) superiority is famous among many companions, such as Abdullah ibn Abbās, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, 'Ammār, Jābir ibn Abdullah, Abu al-Haytham ibn al-Tayyihan, and others" (Baqillani, 1422 AH: p. 294), and so on.

Prominent Shia scholars have also maintained the superiority (*Tafḍīl*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) over all creation, ranging from the other companions to the angels and prophets. Among them is Shaykh Saduq, who, by considering the prophets, messengers, and proofs (*Ḥujaj*) superior to the angels, views the prostration of the angels to Adam as a prostration to someone superior to themselves. In his view, this prostration was an act of honoring Adam because the Prophet (pbuh) and the Imams were situated in his loins (*Ṣulb*). The expression he employs here:

«وَ لَمْ يَأْمُرْهُمُ اللَّهُ بِالسُّجُودِ إِلَّا لِمَنْ هُوَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْهُمْ، وَ كَانَ سُجُودُهُمْ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى عُبُودِيَّةً وَ طَاعَةً وَ لِآدَمَ إِكْرَاماً لِمَا أَوْدَعَ اللَّهُ صُلْبَهُ مِنَ النَّبِيِّ وَ الْأَئِمَّةِ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ»

[And Allah did not order them to prostrate except to one who is superior to them; and their prostration was in servitude and obedience to Allah Almighty, and out of reverence for Adam due to what Allah had deposited in his loins from the Prophet and the Imams, peace be upon them all] is clearly derived from the phrase of a Hadīth narrated from Imam Riḍā (as):

«وَ أَمَرَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ بِالسُّجُودِ لَهُ تَعْظِيماً لَنَا وَ إِكْرَاماً وَ كَانَ سُجُودُهُمْ لِلَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ عُبُودِيَّةً وَ لِآدَمَ إِكْرَاماً وَ طَاعَةً لِكَوْنِنَا فِي صُلْبِهِ فَكَيْفَ لَا نَكُونُ أَفْضَلَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَ قَدْ سَجَدُوا لِآدَمَ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ»

[And He ordered the angels to prostrate to him out of glorification and reverence for us. Their prostration was out of servitude to Allah, Mighty and Exalted, and as honoring and obedience towards Adam because we were in his loins. So how could we not be superior to the angels when they all, entirely, prostrated to Adam?] Thus, it appears that he [Shaykh Saduq] considered at least this portion of the aforementioned Hadīth to be a doctrinal teaching and believed in it.

Other Imami scholars are also in agreement with Shaykh Saduq regarding the superiority of the Prophet (pbuh) and his Ahl al-Bayt over the angels. Shaykh Mufid presents a view similar to that of Saduq (Saduq, 1414 AH: pp. 89-90). Allamah Majlisi also, by opening a chapter titled "The Superiority of the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt (Peace Be Upon Them) over the Angels and their Testimony to their Wilāyah" (*Faḍl al-Nabī wa Ahl Baytihi Salawat Allah Alayhim 'Ala al-Mala'ikah wa Shahadatihim bi-Wilāyatihim*), has narrated 24 Hadīths from various sources confirming the chapter's title.

Shaykh Mufid, in his invaluable book *Tafḍīl Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (as) 'Alá Jami' al-Anbīyá Ghayr Moḥammad (pbuh)* [The Superiority of the

Commander of the Faithful, Ali (as), over All Prophets except Moḥammad (pbuh)], has mentioned the proofs for the superiority of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (as), over others. This book consists of seven chapters and seven arguments regarding the superiority of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (as), over other creatures, ranging from the prophets to, specifically, the companions. Concerning the subject of the superiority of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) over the rest of creation, a significant number of Shia scholars have authored independent works. Among them, 'Izz al-Din Abu Moḥammad Hasan ibn Sulayman ibn Moḥammad Hilli 'Amili (d. 802 AH) wrote a book regarding the superiority of the Imams over the prophets and angels titled *Tafḍīl al-A'immah 'Alá al-Anbīyá wa al-Mala'ikah*.

The traditions that explicitly state the superiority and precedence (*Afḍalīyyah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt of Infallibility and Purity over other people—and indeed over all creation—are too numerous to count; here, we will suffice with mentioning just a few examples. Tabarsi narrates in *Al-Iḥtijīj* from the Prophet (pbuh):

«مَعاشِرَ النّاسِ فَضِّلُوا عَلِيّاً فَإِنَّهُ أَفْضَلُ النّاسِ بَعْدِی مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَ أُنْثَی»

[O people, acknowledge the superiority of Ali, for he is the most superior of people after me, of both male and female] (Tabarsi, 1403 AH: Vol. 1, p. 75). Karajaki in *Kanz al-Fawa'id* narrates from the Messenger of Allah:

«مَا أَظَلَّتِ الْخَضْرَاءُ وَ لَا أَقَلَّتِ الْغَبْرَاءُ بَعْدِی عَلَی أَفْضَلَ مِنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِی طَالِبٍ وَ إِنَّهُ إِمَامُ أُمَّتِی وَ أَمِيرُهَا»

[The blue sky has not shaded, nor has the earth carried, anyone after me superior to Ali ibn Abi Talib; and indeed, he is the Imam of my Ummah and its commander] (Karajaki, 1369 SH: p. 208). Fadil Miqdad, one of the great jurists of the ninth century AH, in the discussion of Imamate in his theological book *Irshād al-Ṭālibin*, has opened a chapter titled "Indeed He (as) is the Most Superior of People after the Messenger of Allah" (*Innahu 'Alayhi al-Salām Afḍal al-Nās Ba'd Rasūl Allah*). Among the transmitted proofs he cites from the sources of both sects for the superiority of the Commander of the Faithful (as) is the Prophetic Hadīth:

«عَلِيٌّ خَيْرُ الْبَشَرِ فَمَنْ أَبَی فَقَدْ كَفَرَ»

[Ali is the best of mankind, so whoever refuses (to accept this) has committed disbelief] (Fadil Miqdad, 1405 AH: p. 304). Irbili in *Kashf al-Ghummah* narrates from the Messenger of Allah:

«خَيْرُ مَنْ يَمْشِی عَلَی وَجْهِ الْأَرْضِ بَعْدِی عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِی طَالِبٍ»

[The best of those who walk upon the face of the earth after me is Ali ibn Abi Talib] (Irbili, 1340 SH: Vol. 2, p. 157). Majlisi in *Biḥār [al-Anwār]* narrates that Imam Sadiq (as) said:

«مَا مِنْ نَبِيٍّ وَ لَا رَسُولٍ أُرْسِلَ إِلَّا بِوَلَايَتِنَا وَ تَفْضِيلِنَا عَلَى مَنْ سِوَانَا»

[No prophet or messenger was sent except with (the mandate of) our Wilāyah and our superiority over all others] (Majlisi, 1403 AH: Vol. 26, p. 280).

However, regarding the Ahl al-Bayt (as) being the chosen ones among the Ummah, the argument of Imam Riḍā (as) in the court of Ma'mun with the scholars of the opponents—which Saduq has narrated in *'Uyūn [Akhbār al-Riḍā]*—suffices (Ṣaduq, 1380 SH: Vol. 1, pp. 468-497).

4- Conclusion

The Ahl al-Bayt of Infallibility and Purity possess such a station and standing in the ontological order (*Niẓām al-Takwīn*) that their rank and status cannot be compared with any of the individuals of the Ummah and their followers, let alone the rest of the people. Therefore, they are subject to special rulings (*Aḥkām*); due to the unique station and status they hold before God Almighty, they are entitled to a specific reverence and honoring. Extending this level of reverence and honoring to others is not only unnecessary, but due to the impermissibility of comparing others to them, it is also not permissible (*Jā'iz*).

On this basis, the transmitted traditions have prohibited making comparisons with them. This prohibition of comparing others to the Ahl al-Bayt has been issued in an absolute (*Muṭlaq*) manner; therefore, one cannot compare others to them in any of their characteristics and traits, especially in spiritual dimensions.

The origin and reason for the incomparability of others to the Ahl al-Bayt lies in the reality and the special bestowed stations (*Maqamat-i Mawhibati*) of the Ahl al-Bayt before the Lord. Thus, it is not possible to extend (*Tasri'*) this ruling to others merely because they occupy some of the positions (*Manāṣib*) of the Ahl al-Bayt.

The Ahl al-Bayt possess unique stations and virtues that are beyond the reach of others, and this very fact is the cause for the impermissibility of making comparisons with the Ahl al-Bayt. Therefore, when encountering Hadīths that encompass some of the special stations, virtues (*Manāqib*), and affairs (*Shu'ūn*) of the Ahl al-Bayt, one must not—merely out of finding them improbable (*Istib'ād*) or overwhelmingly grand in one's mind—attribute these virtues and traits to exaggeration (*Ghuluww*), accuse them of falsehood, and reject them. Rather, in these instances, one should accuse their own deficient understanding, or at the very least, remain silent in these cases and delegate the knowledge thereof to the Knower of the Family of Moḥammad (pbuh).

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