THEOLOGY OF NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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ABSTRACT

Nahj al-Balāghah is a book consisting of the sermons, letters and short words of wisdom of Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), compiled by the fourth century Shiʿi scholar and poet Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī, more commonly known as al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015). It contains important theological discussions reflecting Imamī beliefs. By the fourth Islamic century, it was established that the core Twelver Shiʿi Imamī theology, *uṣūl al-dīn*, consisted of the following: *tawḥīd* (monotheism), *ʿadālah* (divine justice), *nubūwah* (prophethood), *Imamah* (divinely appointed leadership), and *maʿād* (resurrection and the afterlife). Imam ʿAlī discussed all these topics in *Nahj al-Balāghah* in a manner and style that is notably different form the language used by fourth Islamic century theologians.

This thesis is the first work in English that explores the five *uṣūl al-dīn* as discussed in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. The first chapter introduces this work and gives an overview of Imam ʿAlī, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and the methodology of the work. Chapter 2 examines the main theological topics that were discussed in the third and fourth Islamic centuries. It also critiques two major works and refutes the idea that Shiʿi scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) were influenced by Muʿtazilī ideologies. Chapter 3 explores *tawḥīd* in *Nahj al-Balāghah* while also comparing Shiʿi beliefs to those of Muʿtazilīs and Ashʿarīs. Chapter 4 reviews the concept of *ʿadālah* in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and considers the Imamī stand versus Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī theologies. Chapter 5 looks at *nubūwah* in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and it shows that

the topics mentioned by Imam ʿAlī form the basis for al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's description of the qualities of prophets. Chapter 6 is about *Imamah* in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which is the most contentious issue discussed by early Shiʿi theologians, and arguably the first to be debated immediately after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. Chapter 7 discusses the concept of *maʿād* in the *Nahj*, and how Imam ʿAlī revolves the essence of life around God-wariness (*taqwā Allāh*) and achieving the pleasure of God. The belief in the Hereafter encourages a person to have a virtuous character and drives one to implement justice in all one's interactions.

This dissertation is among the few works in western scholarship that investigates *Nahj al-Balāghah*, one of the most important books in Shiʿi Islam. It demonstrates that Imam ʿAlī discussed important theological themes long before they were explored by early Muslim theologians. It shows that concepts such as God and His attributes, free will and predetermination, the essence of prophethood and *Imamah*, as well as death, physical resurrection and the afterlife are all explored in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. This establishes Imam ʿAlī as the founder of *ʿilm al-kalām*, and his inevitable influence can be observed in Muʿtazilī theology. Instead of studying theology per early theologians and scholars, this thesis derives theological understanding directly from the words of Imam ʿAlī. The thesis concludes that the core of the entire corpus of Twelver Imamī Shiʿi belief is presented in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, providing a solid foundational basis for the followers of Imam ʿAlī.

DEDICATION

To my Master, and the Master of the Believers, Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ʿalaihi assalam). Please accept this insignificant contribution in your praise and grant me your intercession (shafāʿah).

يا أيُّها العزيزُ مَسَّنا وَ أَهْلَنا الضُّرُّ وَ جِئْنا بِبِضاعَةٍ مُزْجاةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنا الكَيْلَ وَ تَصَدَّق عَلَيْنا إنَّ اللهَ يَجْزي المُتَصَدِّقين – سورة يوسف الآية ٨٨

وَوَدّ كل نبيٍّ مُرسَلٍ وَوَلي	لو أنّ عبدًا أتى بالصالحات غدًا
وصامَ ما صامَ صوّامًا بلا مَلَلٍ	وَقامَ ما قامَ قَوّامًا بلا كَسَلٍ
وَطافَ بالبَيْتِ حافٍ غَيْر مُنْتَعِلٍ	وَحَجَّ ما حَجَّ من فرضٍ ومِن سُنُنٍ
وغاصَ في البَحْرِ لا يخشى مِنَ البَلَلِ	وَطارَ في الجَوِّ لا يأوي إلى أَحَدٍ
خِلوًا من الذنب معصومًا من الزّلَلِ	وَعاشَ في النّاس آلافًا مُؤَلَّفةً
وَيُطعِمُ البائسينَ البُرَّ بالعَسَلِ	يكسو اليتامى من الديباجِ كلهم
إلاّ بِحُبِّ أمير المؤمنين علي	ما كان عند الله في الحَشرِ منتفعًا

(لنصير الدين الطوسي رضوان الله تعالى عليه)

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First and foremost, I thank Allāh (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*), for all his blessings and favours upon me, and then I thank His holy Messenger, Muḥammad (*ṣalla Allāhu ʿalaihi wa ālihi wa sallam*), who is the first, purest, and greatest of all of Allāh's creation, and the seal of the Prophets. My gratitude extends to the holy Ahlulbayt (*ʿalaihim assalam*), the family of the Prophet (*ṣalla Allāhu ʿalaihi wa ālihi wa sallam*), the impeccables whom Allāh (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) removed all impurities away from them and purified them a thorough purification. I am honoured to be their humble servant and pray to Allāh (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) they accept this insignificant contribution from me.

Second, I would like to thank my respected parents, especially my belated mother. She put much effort in raising me loving Imam ʿAlī and always encouraged me in serving the Ahlulbayt (*ʿalaihim assalam*). She always demonstrated her continued pride in me, my work and my services. Whenever I appeared on television, she would make sure to listen attentively to me and would call her friends and talk to them about me. She witnessed me achieving my first Ph.D. in 2010, and I had truly wished she can be in attendance to witness me holding my second Ph.D. Nonetheless, while she may not be here in person to see me, I am sure her pure soul is praying for me. I genuinely miss her, may Allāh (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) bless her soul and keep her with the honourable, Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' (*ʿalaiha assalam*).

Third, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my respected wife, Dhamya Hussein. Since our marriage, she stood by me, giving me her unconditional support

through all the ups and downs of life. She sacrificed her degree to look after our children, and so that I can achieve mine. She is my partner in my first Ph.D. in chemistry from Simon Fraser University, my Master of Science in Education degree from Niagara University, and in this Ph.D. in theology from the University of Exeter as well. I truly pray that Allāh (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) brings peace, joy and comfort to her heart, and grants her the intercession of Ahlulbayt (*ʿalaihim assalam*) in this world, in the grave and in the Hereafter. Moreover, I would also like to thank my lovely children, Noorfatemah, Hudafatemah and Muhammadali, who spent months without having me at home, while I was working on this thesis, patiently waiting for me to complete it, so they can have my undivided attention. May Allāh (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) make them among the sincere Shiʿa of Imam ʿAlī (*ʿalaihi assalam*) and grant them success in this world and in the Hereafter.

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(*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) grant them the intercession of Imam ʿAlī (*ʿalaihi assalam*) in this world, in the grave and in the Hereafter.

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Ninth, I am indebted in this work to al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and all the Shiʿi scholars I referenced, especially Ṣaffār, al-Shaykh al-Kulaynī, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī and al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī. These scholars put much effort preserving the sayings of the Imams and defending the school of Ahlulbayt (*ʿalaihim assalam*). Their writings have been sources of illumination for over a millennium, and their struggles contributed to saving the rich legacy of the school of Ahlulbayt (*ʿalaihim assalam*), rather Islam. I am humbled when I see the amount of work they produced, given the circumstances they lived in and the limitations they had. If God had not made al-Sharīf al-Raḍī as the reason for compiling *Nahj al-Balāghah*, then this thesis would not have come into existence. So, my humble gratitude to you, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, and I will always keep you in my prayers.

Finally, I praise Allāh Almighty (*subhanahu wa taʿālā*) for creating coffee and making it permissible to drink. Indeed, it was a good companion throughout my studies and sleepless nights. *Al-Hamdulillāh*!

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QUR'ĀN AND NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH TEXTS

The primary book of *Nahj al-Balāghah* used will be the print by the Holy Shrine of Imam

ʿAlī from the holy city of Najaf (2015). Ed. Sayyid Hāshim al-Mīlānī.

I will translate the verses of the Qur'ān and the sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah* required for

this thesis, unless otherwise indicated. However, the following three translations will be

used as references:

1) The Qur'ān, translated by Quli Qara'i, ʿA. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc;
2) Holy Qur'ān, translated by Shakir, M.H. Qum: Ansariyan Publications; and,
3) *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul-Balagha*. Ed. Al-Jibouri, Y.T. (2009). New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc.

Chapter 1: **INTRODUCTION**

يا علي ما عرف الله إلاّ أنا وأنت ، وما عرفني إلاّ الله وأنت ، وما عرفك إلاّ الله وأنا

O ʿAlī! No one recognized God but you and I; and no one recognized me but God and you; and no one recognized you but God and I.[1]

1.1 Theology and *Nahj al-Balāghah*

By the fourth Islamic century, it was established that Imamī Shiʿi Twelvers (*ithnā-ʿasharīs*) adhere to the teachings of the Qur'ān, Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter, Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and the twelve Imams starting with Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib, and concluding with the twelfth Imam, al-Mahdī. These are the basis for their theological belief and jurisprudence.[2] They also give special emphasis to Imam ʿAlī, the first Shiʿi Imam, due to his close proximity to the Prophet, being his cousin, son-in-law, and raised by him in his house. Furthermore, he is the father of all Shiʿi Imams,

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[1] Al-Ḥillī(n.d.). *Mukhtaṣar al-Baṣā'ir*. Retrieved from http://books.rafed.net/view.php?type=c_fbook&b_id=355
[2] Mufīd (1992). *Awā'il al-Maqālāt*. Qum: Al-Mu'tamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd; Ṣadūq (2011). *Al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Beirut: Dār al-Jawādayn.

and the Prophet stated thousands of traditions about his merits.[3] In addition, he was the one appointed by the Prophet as his successor at the event of *Ghadīr Khumm*.[4]

Fourth Islamic century scholar, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), a very prominent Twelver theologian, asserts that all Shiʿi theology is found in the words of Imam ʿAlī.[5] In fact, it may be argued that Imam ʿAlī's theological formulations established the basis of what later became known as *ʿilm al-kalām*, or simply *kalām*, which is the science dealing with theology and theological matters.

This thesis aims to demonstrate that the teachings of Imam ʿAlī, compiled by fourth Islamic century scholar, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), in *Nahj al-Balāghah* (henceforth, NB), constitute a complete and comprehensive corpus of Shiʿi theology as it was known in the fourth Islamic century. While the argumentative methodology of NB appears to be earlier than the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries, somewhat overlapping with the style of the Qur'ān, it comprises of all the thematic theological discussions presented by Shiʿi scholars of the time: *tawḥīd* (monotheism), *ʿadālah* (divine justice), *nubūwah* (prophethood), *Imamah* (divinely appointed leadership), and *maʿād* (resurrection and the afterlife). This is extremely significant for several reasons. First, it will be demonstrated that NB reflects the state of Shiʿi theology in the fourth Islamic century.

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[3] Both Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and al-Nisā'ī have books dedicated to the merits of Imam ʿAlī. Ibn Ḥanbal (2005). *Faḍā'il Amīr al-Mu'minīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Ed. Ḥasan Ḥamīd al-Sinayd. Qum: Markaz al-Ṭibāʿah wal-Nashr lil-Majmaʿ al-ʿĀlamī li-Ahlilbayt ʿalaihim assalam; Nisā'ī (1986). *Khaṣā'ṣ Amīr al-Mu'minīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Ed. Aḥmad Mirīn al-Bulūshī. Kuwait: Maktabat al-Muʿallā.

[4] Regarding *Ghadīr Khumm*, see the eleven-volume encyclopedia titled *al-Ghadīr* written by the contemporary Shiʿi scholar al-Amīnī (1995). *Al-Ghadīr*. Qum: Markaz Ghadīr lil-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah.

[5] Murtaḍā (1954). *Amālī*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍil Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyyah, vol.1, p. 148.

Second, there do not exist many academic, in-depth studies of NB available in the English language. Third, this is among the first studies investigating Shiʿi theology from the words of Imam ʿAlī in NB. Fourth, presenting a complete Shiʿi theology in the words of Imam ʿAlī would *ipso facto* negate the argument that Shiʿi theology is influenced by Muʿtazilī ideologies. Finally, this study may encourage additional academic research into the multifaceted content of NB such as history, governance, and leadership, and may even intrigue the curiosity of some to explore similar themes in other major Shiʿi works such as *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*.

There are volumes of works about NB in the Arabic and Farsi languages. Among the ones that briefly discuss the topic of theology in NB are the following two books in Arabic: al-Muʿallim, M.A. (1999). *Al-ʿAqāʾid Min Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, and al-Ḥakīm, M.T. (1991). *Daqāʾiq al-Tawḥīd fī Nahj al-Balāghah*. Qum: Qism al-ʿIlāqāt al-ʿĀmmah fī Muʾassasat Nahj al-Balāghah. Both books, however, do not provide an in-depth study of the topic.

A more detailed study in Persian is by Shaykh Luṭfullāh Ṣāfī Golpaygānī (n.d.). *Ilāhiyyāt dar Nahj al-Balāghah*. Isfihān: Daftar Intishārāt Islāmī. In his book, Golpaygānī quotes Imam ʿAlī from sermon 192 of NB, known as *al-Qāṣiʿah*, which will be mentioned and discussed in detail in chapter 5, where Imam ʿAlī describes his close proximity to the Prophet Muḥammad.[6] Golpaygānī then adds, "With all these experiences, relation to the great Messenger of God and knowledge about the revelation, it is no surprise that [he] can describe theological themes of the Qurʾān in such eloquence and detail never stated or comprehended by anyone of the companions.

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[6] See 5.9 for a comprehensive discussion on this part of sermon 192.

Moreover, it is no surprise ʿAlī achieved a level of understanding theology that no human can reach, and anyone after him who states anything about God, cannot surpass what he realized and stated."[7] In his discussion of *tawḥīd*, Golpaygānī describes God and His attributes as per NB. He then explains *ʿadālah*, and mentions the sending of Prophet Muḥammad, the revelation and the Qurʾān. While his analysis is thorough, he does not explore the state of *kalām* in the fourth Islamic century, nor does he make a comprehensive study of Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī opinions. Moreover, he does not explore *Imamah* or *maʿād*, which are among the established pillars of Shi'i theology. Thus, his work does not discuss all the five roots of the religion as per NB, and rather only concentrates on three of them.

This thesis, however, makes an enriched analysis of the topic of theology in *Nahj al-Balāghah* exploring all five roots of the religion according to the Twelver Imamī Shi'i school, and performs comparisons to Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī thoughts. It concludes that the core of Twelver Imamī Shi'i belief is presented in NB, providing a solid foundational basis for the followers of Imam ʿAlī.

This Introductory chapter will begin with a brief look at the life of Imam ʿAlī and his eloquence. This will be followed by a short biography of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, and his possible reasons for compiling NB. It is not the aim of this thesis to discuss the authenticity of NB as that would require examination of early texts and manuscripts, as well as extensive review of early sources and literature, some of which are not extant. It would also entail a thorough study of the chain of narrators for the sources of NB, and a meticulous textual analysis, which would be beyond the

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[7] Ṣāfī Golpaygānī, L. (n.d.). *Ilāhiyyāt dar Nahj al-Balāghah*. Isfihān: Daftar Intishārāt Islāmī, p. 12.

scope of this work. Nonetheless, the issues arising around the authenticity of NB will be briefly reviewed. In addition, it will be demonstrated that by the fourth Islamic century, the following five pillars: *tawḥīd* (monotheism), *ʿadālah* (divine justice), *nubūwah* (prophethood), *Imamah* (divinely appointed leadership), and *maʿād* (resurrection and the afterlife), constructed the *uṣūl al-dīn*, or roots of the religion, in Imamī Shiʿi theology. Finally, the methodology of this work and its resources will be explained.

1.2 Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib

The first Shiʿi Imam, who is also respected by Sunnis as the fourth Caliph, Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) was from the tribe of Quraysh and the lineage of Banū Hāshim. He was Prophet Muḥammad's cousin, his son-in-law and rightful successor. Born inside the most sacred place in Islam, the *Kaʿbah*, at the centre of Makkah, he was raised by the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/ 630) and was the first to believe in his message. He, himself, states in NB,[8] "And there was no house [whose inhabitants were all] united on [the faith of] Islam other than the Messenger of God, Khadījah and I being the third of them. I see the light of revelation and message, and I smell the fragrance of prophethood."[9] He was given the title, Commander of the Faithful, *Amīr al-*

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[8] For the purpose of this work, the words of *Nahj al-Balāghah* will be taken, at face value, as those of Imam ʿAlī's. Whenever it is mentioned that Imam ʿAlī says, it is analogous, for the sake of this work, to saying that NB states. This will be repeated later in the section discussing methodologies and resources.

[9] NB, sermon 192, known as *al-Qāṣiʿah*, p. 374. The copy of NB that is used throughout this thesis is the one published in 2015 by the Shrine of Imam ʿAlī, or al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah, in the city of Najaf. Ed. Sayyid Hāshim al-Mīlānī.

Mu'minīn, by the Prophet Muḥammad.[10] After migrating from Makkah to Madīnah, Imam ʿAlī married Prophet Muḥammad's only daughter, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', and became the father of Imam Ḥasan and Imam Ḥusayn, who were Prophet Muḥammad's only surviving grandsons, and the second and third Shiʿi Imams, respectively. When the news of the appointment of Abū Bakr reached ʿAlī he said, "They [Quraysh] argued [about their legitimacy] due to them being from the tree [of the Messenger; i.e. from his tribe] while they forgot about the fruit."[11] Thus, among the people of Quraysh, Imam ʿAlī is considered to be the closest to the Prophet Muḥammad, as not only is he the cousin of the Prophet and was raised by him, but he also was his son-in-law, married to his only surviving biological daughter, and the father of the Prophet's grandchildren. Imam ʿAlī was struck with a poisoned sword by a Kharijī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī, in Masjid al-Kūfa on the 19th day of the month of Ramaḍān while he was in the state of prostration in his pre-dawn prayers. He died of his wound two days later, on the 21st day of the month of Ramaḍān, in the year 40 after Hijrah (661), and was buried in Najaf, Iraq. The famous Muslim traveler, Ibn Baṭṭūṭah (d. 779/1369), says that he visited the city of Najaf where he saw thousands of people visiting the holy shrine of Imam ʿAlī.[12]

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[10] It is narrated that the Prophet Muḥammad said, "If people were to know when ʿAlī was called *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* then they would not dispute his merit. He was called that during the process of the creation of Adam, when He [God] said, 'Am I not your Lord!' They replied, 'Yes.' So He, the Exalted, said, 'I am your Lord, Muḥammad is your Prophet and ʿAlī is your Commander.'" This is in reference to the Qur'ānic verse 7:172, "And when Your Lord took of the progeny of Adam of their successors, and He made them witnesses on themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify.' Such that you do not say on the Day of Judgment we were not aware of this." Al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 320/932) (2000). *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Biʿthah, vol. 2, p. 174.

[11] NB, sermon 66, p. 118-119.

[12] Ibn Baṭṭūṭah (1987). *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭah*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-ʿUlūm, p. 188-190.

Imam ʿAlī is highly revered by all Muslims and many early Shiʿi and Sunni scholars dedicated volumes of books or long sections for his attributes. Both Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and al-Nisāʾī wrote books dedicated to the merits of Imam ʿAlī.[13] *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī*[14] and *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Aʾimmah*[15] are written from a Shiʿi perspective, emphasizing the Imamah of Imam ʿAlī. The Prophet stated that "looking at him is an act of worship,"[16] and, "ʿAlī is with the Qurʾān and the Qurʾān is with ʿAlī, they will not separate until they arrive to the river [of Paradise]."[17] Moreover, he is the Gate to the City of Knowledge as per the Prophetic tradition, "I am the City of Knowledge and ʿAlī is its gate. Whoever seeks the City should enter through its Gate."[18]

Imam ʿAlī possessed invaluable knowledge and system of justice. He states, "The Messenger of God taught me a thousand gates of knowledge; each gate leads to another thousand gates."[19] He used to go on the pulpit in Kūfa and say, "Ask me! Ask me! For indeed, I have lots of knowledge that was given to me by the Prophet."[20] Moreover, ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab, frequently resorted to Imam ʿAlī for help in several issues, such that he is famously quoted saying, "May God not keep me in a problem for which Abū al-Ḥasan is not there [to solve it]," or, "If it were not for ʿAlī, then

[13] Ibn Ḥanbal (2005). *Faḍāʾil Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Ed. Ḥasan Ḥamīd al-Sinayd. Qum: Markaz al-Ṭibāʿah wal-Nashr lil-Majmaʿ al-ʿĀlamī li-Ahlilbayt ʿalaihim assalam; Nisāʾī (1986). *Khaṣāʾṣ Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Ed. Aḥmad Mirīn al-Bulūshī. Kuwait: Maktabat al-Muʿallā.

[14] Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī (d. 76/696) (2009). *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī*. Beirut: Dār al-Ḥawrāʾ.

[15] Raḍī (1985). *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Aʾimmah*. Mashad: al-Ustānah al-Raḍawīyyah al-Muqaddasah (The Holy Shrine of Imam Riḍa).

[16] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol.3, p. 152.

[17] Ibid, vol. 3, p. 134.

[18] Ibid, vol.3, p. 137.

[19] Mufīd (2008). *Al-Irshād fī Maʿrifat Ḥujaj Allāh ʿalā al-ʿIbād*. Beirut: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, vol. 1, p. 34 ; Al-Qandūzī, S.I. (1992). *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*. Qum: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, vol. 1, p. 82.

[20] Al-Qandūzī, S.I. (1992). *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*. Qum: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, vol. 1, p. 84.

ʿUmar would have perished," or "I seek refuge from God to live among people who you are not one of them,"[21] where Abū al-Ḥasan was the title, *kunyah*, of Imam ʿAlī. As for his system of justice and governance, Imam ʿAlī's letter to Mālik al-Ashtar when he made him the governor of Egypt, number 53 in NB, consists of a detailed system of leadership, which inspired Mr. Kofī Annan in 1997 to encourage Arab leaders to follow the example of Imam ʿAlī's justice.[22]

Especially notable is Imam ʿAlī's knowledge in theology. He is considered as the one who laid the foundation for Islamic theology, or *ʿilm al-kalām*. In the section defending *kalām*, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1112) states, "And the first who established discussions against the innovators to bring them to the truth was ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him."[23] Therefore, his theological knowledge was very thorough and, according to Al-Ghazālī, he was the first to explore theological themes in great detail, positing him as the father of *kalām*.

Regarding Imam ʿAlī's oratory talents and skills of eloquence, Raḍī states, "*Amīr al-Muʾminīn* was the essence of rhetoric (*faṣāḥah*) and its source, and its foundation and its birth."[24] Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), adds, "Indeed! *Amīr al-Muʾminīn*, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God honour his face, has one

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[21] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol.1, p. 628; Ibn Shahr Āshūb (d. 588/1192) (1991). *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*. Ed. Yūsuf al-Baqāʾī. Beirut: Dār Al-Aḍwāʾ, vol. 2, p. 408.

[22] Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information. Annan, K. (1997). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines and illuminates global pluralism and diversity.* Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/1997-12-10/universal-declaration-human-rights-enshrines-and-illuminates-global. For more on Imam ʿAlī's justice, see Jordac, G. (2007). *Imam ʿAlī: The Voice of Human Justice*. Trans. M. Fazal Haq. Qum: Ansariyan Publications; Al-Shirazi, M.A. (2018). *Economic Success.* Michigan: Imam Jaafar al-Sadeq Centre; Shah-Kazemi, R. (2006). *Justice and Remembrance*, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers; and *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam* (2006). Ed. M. Ali Lakhani. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc.

[23] Al-Ghazālī, M. (2005). *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn.* Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, p. 113-114.

[24] NB, p. 32.

hundred proverbs, where each proverb is worth one thousand of the best of the words of ʿArabs."[25] Moreover, al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī (d. 454/1062) compiled some of the eloquent words of Imam ʿAlī, some of his wisdom, as well as his poetry, in what he called *Dastūr Maʿālim al-Ḥikam wa Maʾthūr Makarim al-Shiyam*, recently translated by Tahera Qutbuddin as *A Treasury of Virtues*.[26] In addition, it is suggested that to facilitate retaining a carefully articulated thought through a verbal expression, a rhythmic pattern must be used.[27] Imam ʿAlī's use of parallelism produces, according to Tahera Qutbuddin, "A strong acoustic rhythm, and pithy sentences, repetition, assonance, and prose-rhyme augment this rhythm. Several other features of oral-based verbal production are also discernible, including vivid imagery, testimonial citation, additive rather than subordinative phrases, aggregative rather than analytic expositions, an agonistic tone, and closeness to the human lifeworld, shown through the use of mundane objects and daily activities as metaphors physically showcasing abstract ideas."[28] Even Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān praised Imam ʿAlī's great oratory skills. When Maḥfin defected from Imam ʿAlī's camp to Muʿāwiyah's and said, "I came to you from the least eloquent of people (*aʿyā al-nās*)," Muʿāwiyah replied, "The least eloquent?! Did anyone other than ʿAlī establish eloquence for Quraysh?"[29] In fact, well-known writers such as ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-Kātib (d. 132/749) and Ibn Nubātah

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[25] Al-Jāḥiẓ (2013). *Miʾat Kalimah min Kalām Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Trans. Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press, p. 222.

[26] Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī (2013). *A Treasury of Virtues*. Trans. Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press.

[27] Ong, W.J. (2015). *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge.

[28] Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī (2013). *A Treasury of Virtues*. Trans. Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press, p. xviii.

[29] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Edito Creps International, vol. 1, p. 14. Hence forth, only referenced as Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd.

(d. 374/984) proudly state their eloquence stems from the memorization of some of Imam ʿAlī's sermons.[30]

One of the major works containing many of the sermons, letters and virtuous words of Imam ʿAlī that display his mesmerizing eloquence and command of the Arabic language is *Nahj al-Balāghah* (NB), which was compiled by fourth Islamic century scholar and poet, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015).

1.3 Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī

Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, henceforth Raḍī, was born in 359/969. He is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad from both his father's and his mother's sides. Paternally, his lineage goes to the seventh Shiʿi Imam, Mūsa al-Kāẓim: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sharīf al-Raḍī Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn ibn Mūsa ibn Muḥammad ibn Mūsa ibn Ibrahīm ibn Mūsa ibn Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and Fāṭimah daughter of Prophet Muḥammad. Maternally, he is the son of Fāṭimah bint Ḥusayn ibn Ḥasan al-Nasir al-Daylamī, ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. He and his elder brother, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), henceforth Murtaḍā, were among the most brilliant students of Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022).

An interesting story is narrated about them becoming the pupils of Mufīd. One night, in his dream, Mufīd saw Lady Fāṭimah al-Zahrā, daughter of Prophet Muḥammad, bringing her two

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[30] Al-Thaʿālibī (1983). *Yatīmat al-Dahr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 3, p. 155; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 14; ʿAlī, M.K. (1929). ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib. *Majallat al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī*, vol. 9(33), p. 516.

sons, Imams Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to his class and asking him to teach them. He woke up unable to understand or interpret the dream. That day, Mufīd went to teach his class in Baghdad as usual, and during his class the mother of Murtaḍā and Raḍī came with her two sons, and she asked Mufīd to teach them. Seeing them, Mufīd understood the significance of his dream and recognized that these two boys would become profound scholars.[31]

Raḍī lived during the reign of the Būyids from 334/945 to 454/1062. The Būyids had Imamī affiliation and inclination, and hence, the Shiʿi community enjoyed the freedom to learn, write and discuss its faith in an unprecedented manner.[32] Moreover, when the Būyids took over Baghdad as well, which was the capital of the ʿAbbasid dynasty, Shiʿi scholars in the city, such as Mufīd, Raḍī, Murtaḍā and Ṭūsī, prospered and excelled at teaching, debating and writing. The Būyids era ended in 454/1062 at the hands of the Seljuks.

Raḍī's father, Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥusayn, who was also named by the Būyid ruler Bahā' al-Dawlah, "*al-Ṭāhir al-Awḥad*," meaning the "only purified one," was well respected by the ʿAbbasid Caliph as well as Būyid rulers. He was designated as the *Naqīb*, the leader of the progeny of Abū Ṭalib (*Ṭālibiyyīn*), and kept in charge of *Dīwān al-Maẓalim*, a position with court authority on social, political and pilgrimage matters. He also played a role settling disputes when they arose between

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[31] Al-Jaʿfarī, M.R. (n.d.). *Al-kalām ʿind al-Imamiyyah*, p. 83. Retrieved from http://rafed.net/turathona/32-33/32-2.html

[32] About the Shiʿi affiliation of the Būyids see Marcinkowski, M.I. (2002). Twelver Shīʿite Scholarship and Būyid Domination. A Glance on the Life and Times of Ibn Babawayh al-Shaykh al-Sadūq. *Islamic Culture*, vol. 76(1), p. 69-99; Thaver, T. (2013). *Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, and the Formation of Shiʿi identity in al-Sharif al-Radi's (d. 1015 C.E.) Qur'ān Commentary*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, p. 40-42.

the Abbasid Caliph and the Būyid and Ḥamdānī rulers. He was, however, arrested (369/980) and imprisoned in Shīrāz by ʿAḍud al-Dawlah (ruled from 367-372/978-983) due to his political influence and had his property confiscated. Raḍī was nine years old at the time, and he saw his mother selling her wealth to support him and his brother as they completed their education. He managed to complete his education by the time his father was freed in 376/986 by Sharaf al-Dawlah, son of ʿAḍud al-Dawlah, who was on his way to Baghdad to take the reins of leadership away from his brother Ṣamṣām al-Dawlah.[33]

Raḍī served as the *Naqīb* even during the time of his father but assumed its sole responsibility after the death of his father in 403/1012. The Niqābah of his father, and later his own, enabled him to be in constant proximity to the Caliph and high-ranking officials, as well as, demonstrate his qualifications and knowledge for such a position. He died shortly after his father, in 406/1015, at the age of forty-seven. He was very well respected by leaders and scholars alike, despite his young age.

Raḍī's demeanour and eloquence earned him the admiration of scholars and dignitaries of his time. He once wrote a poem to the ʿAbbasid Caliph, al-Qādir Billāh (r. 381-421/991-1031), comparing himself to the Caliph saying,

<div dir="rtl">

عطفاً أميرَ المؤمنين فإننا في دَوْحَةِ العلياءِ لا نتفرّقُ

</div>

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[33] Al-Thaʿālibī (1983). *Yatīmat al-Dahr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 3, p. 155; Also see the introduction by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥilū (1976) to *Dīwān al-Sharīf al-Raḍī*. Ed. Abī Ḥakīm al-Khabarī. Iraq: Ministry of Communication, p. 9-21.

<div dir="rtl">

ما بيننا يومَ الفخار تفاوتٍ أبداً، كِلانا في العلاء مُعرق

إلاّ الخلافةَ ميّزَتْكَ فإنني أنا عاطلٌ منها و أنت مُطوّقُ

</div>

> "You ought to know O Commander of the Faithful,[34] that the high lineage we both belong to is the same; there is no difference between us in the matter of pride, we are both honoured in lineage; except the leadership of Muslims, where you put its chains around your neck, but I am free of it."[35]

It is noteworthy to mention that according to the sixth Shiʿi Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), the title of *Amīr Al-Muʾminīn*, Commander of the Faithful, is exclusive to Imam ʿAlī.[36] Al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 320/932) narrates the Prophet Muḥammad saying, "If people were to know when ʿAlī was called Amīr al-Muʾminīn then they would not dispute his merit. He was called that during the process of the creation of Adam, when He [God] said, 'Am I not your Lord!' They replied, 'Yes.' So He, the Exalted, said, 'I am your Lord, Muḥammad is your Prophet and ʿAlī is your Commander.'" This is in reference to the Qurʾānic verse 7:172, "And when Your Lord took of the progeny of Adam of their successors, and He made them witnesses on themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify.' Such that you do not say on the Day of Judgment we were not aware of this."[37] However, when ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb took the reins of power after Abū Bakr, he ordered people to call him *Amīr Al-Muʾminīn*,[38] and all Umayyad and ʿAbbasid leaders continued

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[34] See footnote 10.

[35] Al-Thaʿālibī (1983). *Yatīmat al-Dahr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 3, p. 163-164; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Edito Creps International, vol. 1, p. 18.

[36] Al-ʿAyyāshī (2000). *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Tehran: Muʾassasat al-Biʿthah, vol. 1, p. 443-444.

[37] Al-ʿAyyāshī (2000). *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Tehran: Muʾassasat al-Biʿthah, vol. 2, p. 174.

[38] Al-Ṭabarī, M. (d. 310/923) (n.d.). *Tārīkh al-Umam wal-Mulūk*. Riyad: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dūwaliyyah, p. 708-709; al-ʿAskarī, Abū Hilāl (d. early fourth Islamic century) (1981). *Kitāb al-Awāʾil*. Ed. Walīd Qaṣṣāb and Muḥammad al-Maṣrī. Riyad: Dār al-ʿUlūm liltibāʿah wal-Nashr, p. 226-227.

using it as well. Shiʿi Imams who lived in the ʿAbbasid era called the Caliphs with this title as well,[39]

most probably to avoid the tyranny of the ʿAbbasid rulers.[40] Hence, Raḍī used the title of *Amīr al-*

Muʾminīn to address the ʿAbbasid Caliph al-Qādir Billāh following the tradition of his forefathers.

In addition to Raḍī's charismatic character, he also was very eloquent and a great poet. Al-

Dhahabī (d. 748/1374) describes him as,

> Al-Sharīf Abū al-Ḥasan, Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭāhir Abī Aḥmad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mūsā
> al-Ḥusaynī al-Baghdādī the poet, the author of *al-Dīwān*.[41] His compositions [of
> poetry] are at the pinnacle [of eloquence], such that it was said, "He is the best
> composer [of poetry] of the *Ṭālibiyyīn*." He assumed the responsibility of Niqābah
> (leadership among the ʿAlids) after his father. His Dīwān consists of four volumes.
> He also has an interesting book on the meanings of the Qurʾān (*Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*)
> that proves his vast knowledge. He died in Muḥarram, and it is said in Ṣafar, in the
> year 406, when he was forty-seven years old; and he was Shiʿi.[42]

Al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1038), who was a contemporary of Raḍī, and author of the *Yatīmah*, says that

Raḍī composed his first poem shortly after the age of ten. He also suggests Raḍī as the best poet

of those from Quraysh. Moreover, he indicates that Raḍī assumed the responsibilities of *Niqābah*,

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[39] In *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* there are numerous examples of the seventh and eighth Shiʿi Imams, al-Kāẓim and al-Riḍā, calling the ʿAbbasid Caliphs Harūn al-Rashīd and al-Maʾmūn, respectively, with the title Amīr al-Muʾminīn. For some examples see: Ṣadūq (2006). *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamī. Qum: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, p. 78, 79, 85, 86, 161, 165.

[40] On that see, Ṣadūq (2006). *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamī. Qum: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, p. 74-76, and 84-86.

[41] *Dīwān* al-Sharīf al-Raḍī is a compilation of his poetry, demonstrating his great eloquence. It is debated whether he compiled his own poetry himself, or whether it was compiled during his life time by others. Al-Amīnī in *al-Ghadīr* suggests that he himself is the one who compiled his own poetry, because each poem has the date it was written and the reason for which it was written. Al-Amīnī (1995). *Al-Ghadīr*. Qum: Markaz Ghadīr lil-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, vol. 4, p. 275-276. The commentator on al-Raḍī's *Dīwān*, Dr. ʿAbd al-fattāḥ al-Ḥilū, agrees with al-Amīnī. Al-Raḍī (1976). *Dīwān*. Iraq: Ministry of Communication, p.128. Ibn Khallikān, however, says that the best person who compiled the poetry of Raḍī was Abū Ḥakīm al-Khabarī (d. 476/1083). Ibn Khallikān (1987). *Wafiyyāt al-Aʿyān*. Ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, vol. 4, p. 416.

[42] Al-Dhahabī (1996). *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*. Ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ and Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿIrqsūsī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, vol. 17, p. 285-286.

which is the highest position given to a Shiʿi under the ʿAbbasid regime, in the year 380/990, during the life of his father.[43] This shows the respect he achieved at such a young age from the Caliph, scholars of the time, and the Ṭālibiyyīn, those who are descendants of Imam ʿAlī.

Upon the death of his dear friend, Abū Isḥāq Ibrahīm al-Ṣābiʾī, who was another well-known poet at the time, Raḍī wrote an elaborate poetic eulogy

<div dir="rtl">

أرأيتَ مَنْ حملوا على الأعوادِ   أرأيتَ كيفَ خبا ضياءُ النادي
</div>

Do you see who they carried on the coffin
Do you see how the light of our gatherings has extinguished[44]

Al-Thaʿālibī describes the eulogy as, "A unique poem [in which] he [Raḍī] demonstrated his great poetic eloquence, and his high status in honouring friendship, and it stands out in its wonderful composure, lustrous style, and the quality of its vocabulary and meaning."[45] His eulogy also depicts a demonstration of his respect to people due to the knowledge they carry, irrespective of their faith, as Abū Isḥāq was Zoroastrian. This attitude carries significance in his approach to compiling NB, as will be described shortly below.[46]

Despite his short life of only forty-seven years, Raḍī compiled many books, wrote much poetry and left an admirable legacy. He wrote *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl*, translated as the *Truth of the Deeper Interpretation of Equivocal Verses*, a book about the meanings of the

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[43] Al-Thaʿālibī (1983). *Yatīmat al-Dahr*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 3, p. 155-178.
[44] Ibid, vol. 2, p. 362.
[45] Ibid.
[46] On Raḍī's ingenuity, see Thaver, T. (2013). *Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, and the Formation of Shiʿi identity in al-Sharif al-Radi's (d. 1015 C.E.) Qur'ān Commentary*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina.

different metaphors used in the Qur'ān, and their interpretation, which he completed in the year 402/1012.[47] In this book, he demonstrates how well engaged he was in theological discussions, and his good understanding of the opinions of the Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī schools, as he refers to them throughout the book either directly or indirectly.[48] He also wrote *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān* about the language used in some verses of the Qur'ān, which he completed in the year 401/1011,[49] and another book about the metaphors used in the Prophet's traditions, *Majāzat al-Āthār al-Nabawayyah*. Attested by al-Dhahabī, as indicated above, Raḍī's book on Qur'ān shows his deep knowledge and great eloquence.

Raḍī's *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān* was printed in 1955 with an introduction by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥasan who made a reference to Raḍī's *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*, *Majāzat al-Āthār al-Nabawayyah*, and *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Ḥasan states that with Raḍī writing these three books, "He [al-Raḍī] achieved the description of the one who strengthened Arabic eloquence (*al-balāghah al-ʿarabīyyah*), and the support for its foundation," until he says, "Which makes us consider him [al-Raḍī] as one of the elites in Arabic eloquence (*balāghah*) and rhetoric (*faṣāḥah*), who paved the way, through such high caliber and eloquent study of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, for those who came after him of the scholars of theoretical eloquence."[50]

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[47] The dates for the completion of Raḍī's books used here are the ones discussed by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥilū in his introduction to *Dīwān al-Sharīf al-Raḍī*, compiled by Abū Ḥakīm al-Khabarī (1976), Iraq: Ministry of Communication, p. 94-108.

[48] More will be mentioned about this below, when discussing reasons for the compilation of NB.

[49] Raḍī (1986). *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥasan. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā'.

[50] See the introduction by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥasan to Raḍī (1986). *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 95-96.

The words of praise about Raḍī from his contemporaries, as well as later scholars who knew him only through his works, depict him as a prominent Shiʿi thinker, poet and man of literature, *adīb*.

Raḍī's book on *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Aʾimmah*, which is a collection of some of the merits of Imam ʿAlī and his wise judgments, became his inspiration for compiling *Nahj al-Balāghah*. He started compiling the *Khaṣāʾiṣ* in the year 383/993, but he never finished it. He writes in the introduction to NB

> I was at the peak of my youth, I started writing a book about the merits of the Imams, peace be upon them, consisting of the best of their traditions, and the jewels of their speech, because of a reason I mentioned at the beginning of the book, and I made it the peak of all talk. I completed the merits of the Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Muʾminīn*) ʿAlī, peace be upon him, but the obstacles of life, and the procrastination of time, prevented me from completing the series [about the remaining Imams]."[51]

He also adds that when people read what he wrote about Imam ʿAlī in the *Khaṣāʾiṣ*, they encouraged him to compile a book about his sayings, which then became the seed for *Nahj al-Balāghah*.[52] Arguably, his most famous work, NB is the compilation of selected sermons, letters and words of Imam ʿAlī, which he completed in the year 400/1010.

1.4 Compilation of *Nahj al-Balāghah* (NB)

1.4.1 Eloquence

As demonstrated above, Raḍī was well versed in Arabic literature (*adab*), yet he remained puzzled

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[51] Raḍī (2015). *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Ed. Hāshim al-Mīlānī. Najaf: The Holy Shrine of Imam ʿAlī, p. 31-32.
[52] Ibid.

at the mesmerizing words of Imam ʿAlī. Reading his sermons and letters, Raḍī was very intrigued

by the depth and powerful messages Imam ʿAlī delivered, sometimes responding in a sentence

what may have taken a paragraph by others to describe with far less quality, as he clearly

indicated in his introduction to the book. Raḍī decided to compile selected sermons, letters and

sayings of Imam ʿAlī in a book he called *Nahj al-Balāghah*, literally translated as The Path to

Eloquence or the Peak of Eloquence. Raḍī states in his introduction to NB,

> And these were not collected in any other work, nor found together in any other book ... *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, peace be upon him, was the fountain of eloquence and (his utterances) the source of rhetoric. Through him hidden delicacies of eloquence and rhetoric came to light, and from him were learnt their principles and rules. Every speaker and orator had to tread on his footprints, and every eloquent preacher availed of his utterances. Even then they could not equal him, for the credit for being the first and foremost remained with him, because his utterances were those that carried the reflection of Divine knowledge and savour of the Prophet's utterances. Accordingly, I acceded to their request, as I knew that it meant great reward, handsome reputation and a treasure of recompense. The object of this compilation is that I should bring forth *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*'s greatness and superiority in the art of rhetoric which is in addition to his countless qualities and innumerable distinctions, and to show that he has risen to the highest pinnacle of this attainment, is one of a kind among all his predecessors whose utterances are quoted here and there, whereas his own utterances are like an onrushing and irresistible stream, and such a treasure of subtleties in language that is unmatched. Since I proudly trace my descent from him, I feel pleasure in quoting a couplet of al-Farazdaq:
>
> These are my forefathers, O Jarīr
> When we get together, can you cite any as their equal?[53]

According to the above passage, Raḍī implies that after the Prophet Muḥammad, Imam ʿAlī ibn

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[53] NB, p.33.

Abī Ṭalib surpassed everyone else in all aspects of life including knowledge and eloquence.[54]

Moreover, with him quoting the two verses of poetry at the end, he expresses a subtle attention

to the significance of Imam ʿAlī and his teachings, possibly suggesting that nothing can match

them. As such, the study of NB opens the door to a wonderful world of theology, politics,

asceticism, leadership, economics, science and much more, encouraging a dive in its wonders for

explorations and treasure hunting. Al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1178), a Shiʿi scholar who was among the

early interpreters of NB, says about the book, "It is words for the people of intellect and reflection

below the words of God and His Messenger but above the words of humans."[55] Some Sunni

scholars also interpreted NB and have high regards for it well.[56]

As mentioned earlier, al-Raḍī compiled selected sermons and letters of Imam ʿAlī and classified

them according to their respective category. Being a great poet himself, al-Raḍī appreciated

eloquence and had a good taste for it. He may have simply wanted to show the linguists and

poets of the time and generations to come the beauty and unique character of Imam ʿAlī's style,

expression, rhetoric and eloquence. This may explain why he only chose certain selections from

the sermons of Imam ʿAlī that he thought would highlight the Imam's magnificence. He clearly

states in the introduction translated above, "The object of this compilation is that I should bring

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[54] Ibid. Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār also makes such an argument in a section in his *al-Mughnī* titled What Certainly Proves that The Commander of the Faithful Peace be Upon Him is Better (*fīmā yadullu qaṭʿan ʿalā anna amīra al-muʾminīn ʿalahi assalām afḍal*). ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī*. (n.p.), vol. 20(2), p. 121.

[55] Al-Rāwandī (1985). *Minhāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Kūhkamrī. Qum: Maṭbaʿat al-Khayyām, p. 4.

[56] Among the notable Sunni interpreters of NB are Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī, Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and Dr. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ.

forth *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*'s greatness and superiority in the art of rhetoric which is in addition to his countless qualities and innumerable distinctions, and to show that he has risen to the highest pinnacle of this attainment."[57]

Moreover, even the style of NB is more in line with books of Arabic literature (*adab*) than it is with books of theology. Theological books of the fourth Islamic century are divided into thematic chapters and sections,[58] whereas NB does not appear to follow any apparent thematic classification. Such was the style of the books of literature written in that era.[59] Raḍī may have been driven by his love and desire to demonstrate the greatness of his great-grandfather, Imam ʿAlī, the first Imam of the Shiʿi sect he belonged to, through his mesmerizing words and wealth of knowledge.

Although there is no doubt that Raḍī was very impressed with Imam ʿAlī's style and eloquence, there may be more than one reason for the compilation of these sermons and letters into NB.

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[57] NB, p. 33.
[58] See, for example: Al-Ashʿarī. *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyīn*; Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, and *Iʿtiqādāt*; Mufīd. *Awā'il al-Muqālāt*, and *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*; Murtaḍā. *al-Dhakhīrah*; al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*; and, al-Juwaynī. *Kitāb al-Irshād*. All these books written on theology during the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries are organized in a thematic basis.
[59] See for example: Abū Misḥal al-Aʿrābī (d. early third Islamic century) (1961). *Kitāb al-Nawādir*. Ed. ʿAzzah Ḥasan. Damasus: Maṭbūʿāt Majmaʿ al-Lughat al-ʿArabīyyah; and Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. early fourth Islamic century). *Kitāb al-Awā'il*. Ed. Walīd Qaṣṣāb and Muḥammad al-Maṣrī, Riyad: Dār al-ʿUlūm lilṭibāʿah wal-Nashr; *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* (1981). Trans. ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Muqaffaʿ. Beirut: Dār al-Sharq. For more on Arabic literature, see Sazkīn, F. (1991). *Tārīkh al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*. Trans. M.F. Ḥijāzī. Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-Imam Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islamīyyah.

1.4.2 Preservation

Another possible motivation for the compilation of this work is Raḍī's aim to combine selections of Imam ʿAlī's words in one book, rather than keeping them scattered in different references that he probably had in his library. This was done in a probable attempt to help preserve these sermons and letters. For example, in Baghdad, there were two great libraries with hundreds of thousands of books titled *Dār al-ʿIlm* (House of Knowledge), established by Shapūr (Sabūr) son of Ardashīr, the vizier of the Buyid sultan Bahāʾ al-Dawla (d. 403/1012), in addition to the personal library of Raḍī's father. Both of those libraries were attacked during the life of Murtaḍā, Raḍi's brother, and burned due to anti Shiʿi uprisings in Baghdad.[60] Since Shiʿi works were subjected to much destruction over the centuries, having one source for some of Imam ʿAlī's sermons and letters was a good way to minimize the chance of them being lost and destroyed. In addition, it also allows readers for an easy access to these sermons and letters, instead of having to review several references, some of which may not have been very accessible at the time or may not have survived. This idea is supported by Raḍi's statement in his introduction that was quoted above about the content of NB, "And these were not collected in any other work, nor found together in any other book." Moreover, al-Rāwandī also mentions this aspect in his introduction, "Indeed, knowledge during this time is about to collapse and be buried, and one would recite the verse,

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[60] Ibn al-Athīr (n.d.). *Al-Kāmil fil-Tārīkh*. Ed. Abū Ṣuhaib al-Karamī. Riyad: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dūwaliyyah, p. 1462; Amir-Moezzi, M.A. (1994). *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press, p.27. For a detailed reference on the burning of Islamic libraries in the fifth and sixth Islamic centuries refer to Miḥsin, Z.M.Ḥ. (n.d.). *Ḥarq Khazāʾin al-Kutub fil-Tārīkh al-Islamī fil-Qarnayn al-Khāmis wal-Sādis al-Hijrīyyayn*. Samawah: Jamiʿat Al-Muthannā.

'As though it had not been in existence yesterday,' (10:24). However, God Almighty through His Grace and His Favours and Honourable Highness preserves the knowledge of religion and guides its people to reaching its perfection."[61]

1.4.3 Implicit Theological Reasons

Raḍī lived during a unique period of active Muʿtazilī, Ashʿarī and Imamī debates, and he was not foreign to them, rather immensely engaged in them. For example, in his *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*, when referring to Sūrat al-Mā'idah verse 64,[62] he says,

> And it is not intended here with the mention of hands the two that are more than the one, but rather what is intended is the exaggeration of describing the blessing. Just like one saying, 'I do not have two hands in this matter,' and he does not intend [by hands] the limbs, but rather the exaggeration in negating the power on doing something. And it might be said what is intended with that are the blessings of this World and the blessings of the Hereafter. And God knows which [of those] is more accurate.[63]

His statement, "And he does not intend [by hands] the limbs," is a clear argument against the anthropomorphists who give human attributes to God and claim that He has two hands, but they are unlike ours.

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[61] Al-Rāwandī (1985). *Minhāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Kūhkamrī. Qum: Maṭbaʿat al-Khayyām, p. 3-4.

[62] The verse says, "And the Jews said the hands of God are tied up! Their hands will be shackled and they are deprived of God's mercy for what they said. Rather, His hands are widely open, spending as He wills," (5:64).

[63] Raḍī (1986). *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥasan. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 133.

Discussing Sūrat Āl Imrān verse seven in Raḍī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl* about whether or not those who are well-versed in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fil-ʿilm*) know the deeper interpretation of the Qur'ān, *ta'wīl*, he says, "And this is what a group of early scholars went by [that the well-versed in knowledge do not know the deeper meaning of the Qu'ran]: Of them are al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and towards that also went Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī."[64] He also makes several references to Qāḍī al-Quḍāt Abū al-Ḥasan, meaning al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Asadābādī (d. 415/1025).[65] This shows al-Raḍī was well aware of Muʿtazilī thought and of the discussions that were taking place at that time. In fact, not only was al-Raḍī aware of Muʿtazilī ideologies, he was involved in showing where he agreed and disagreed with them. For example, in the introduction to his *al-Majāzāt al-Nabawīyah*, he writes, "And if it were not for Abū ʿAlī, Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, preceding to the interpretation of the metaphorical traditions (*mutashābih al-akhbār*) whose explicit meaning refer to anthropomorphism and personification, and its verbal [meaning suggests] God's unfair commands and injustice [to His creation], and he followed this meaning in his book titled *The Interpretation of Traditions* (*Sharḥ al-Ḥadīth*), and other groups of the scholars of justice (*ʿulamā' ahl al-ʿadl*) in parts of their books, then I would have implemented this comprehensive method [of clarifying the traditions] in a way that would reveal the metaphors, and clarify the ambiguity, using my style in my book titled *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl*."[66] This suggests, he agrees with the Muʿtazilī stand on God's Divine Justice,

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[64] Raḍī (1986). *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 8.
[65] Raḍī (1986). *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', see as for example. p. 10, p. 41, and p. 59.
[66] Raḍī (n.d.). *Al-Majāzāt al-Nabawīyah*. Qum: Maktabat Baṣīratī, p. 11-12.

an ideology Muʿtazilī scholars may have adopted from Imam ʿAlī, which will be discussed in the next chapter, as well as in chapter four.

Raḍī was extremely respectful of people of other faiths and those belonging to different Islamic sects. For example, he had a close friendship with Abū Isḥāq Ibrahīm ibn Hilal al-Ṣāb'ī, who was a Zoroastrian. He would also communicate with all scholars in a courteous manner, which earned him their respect. His position as a *naqīb*, the head of the ʿAlids, also made him approach everyone with regard. His pleasant and outgoing approach earned him the admiration of all his contemporaries, demonstrated in many attending his funeral and walking in it bare foot.[67]

In his *Khaṣā'iṣ al-A'immah*, Raḍī demonstrates his Imamī belief, stating in his introduction about a person who accused him of *waqf*, meaning that he only believes in the Imamah up to the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim,[68] "While he knows the Imamate is my faith (*al-Imamah madhhabī*), and on it is my covenant and my belief… So I [decided] to write this book as a declaration of my faith, and revealing what is hidden inside me."[69] However, he did not get to complete it and only wrote about Imam ʿAlī, in which he also added traditions showing Imam

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[67] See the introduction by Muḥammad Riḍā Kāshif Alghiṭā' in Raḍī (1986). *Ḥaqā'iq al-Ta'wīl fī Mutashābih al-Tanzīl* Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 111.

[68] After the death of the seventh Shiʿi Imam, al-Kāẓim, three of his close followers wanted to keep the money he entrusted them with. To do so, they declared that the Imam never died, and rather he is gone into occultation, and he will come back. They stopped at his Imamah, and hence, the name: *al-wāqifiyyah* (literally translated as the stoppers). They did not believe in the Imamah of the eighth Shiʿi Imam, al-Riḍā, but stopped at the seventh. However, they did not have much following, with most of them becoming Imamī, ithna-asharīs, and they did not proliferate. Ṣadūq (2006). *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamī. Qum: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, p. 103-104. Ṣadūq dedicates section 8 of the book about the proof of the death of the seventh Imam, and section 10 about the reason for *waqf*.

[69] Raḍī (1985). *Khaṣā'iṣ al-A'immah*. Mashad: Astāni Qudsī Raḍawī, p. 37-38.

ʿAlī's ability to perform miracles.[70] *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Aʾimmah* illustrates Raḍī's strong Imamī inclinations and his nullification of all other sects.

There are several reasons that would hint at Raḍī having a theological drive when compiling NB. First, while Raḍī did not explicitly state why he chose the order of the sermons and letters of NB, there seems to be some sort of a trend with the first few sermons dealing with theological aspects such as God, His attributes, Creation, Prophethood and Imamah. He later adds a few sermons demonstrating Imam ʿAlī's deep and diverse knowledge, such as his description of the peacock, the ant and the bat. Afterwards, using Imam ʿAlī's letters, Raḍī tries to show the Imam's great leadership and sense of social justice, leaving one to speculate whether one of his main motivations for compiling NB may have been to imply that recognition of God can only be achieved through the path of Imam ʿAlī, and that, in turn, leads to perfection in human religion, morale and ethics. Second, one of the most recurrent themes of NB is *taqwā*, which may be translated as God-wariness, God-consciousness or piety.[71] Imam ʿAlī keeps *taqwā* as the central pivot around which all actions and interactions revolve. Interestingly, that is the same pivotal point for actions and interactions found in the Qurʾān as well.[72] Third, Imam ʿAlī's use of the verses of the Qurʾān and how he intertwines them with his sermons and prayers (*adʿiyah*) demonstrate an embodiment of the Qurʾān as he himself stated, "That is the Qurʾān so get it to speak, and it

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[70] NB, p. 31.
[71] Qutbuddin, T. (2012). The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qurʾān and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia. *Anuario De Estudios Medievales*, p. 201-228.
[72] Maktabat al-Rawḍah al-Ḥaydariyyah (2011). *Al-Taqwā fī Nahj al-Balāghah*. Najaf: Al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah. Retrieved from https://www.haydarya.com/maktaba_moktasah/07/book_98/altaqwa.pdf

will not speak to you. I will speak to you about it. Indeed, it has the knowledge of what has passed

and the knowledge of what would come until the Day of Judgment; and the laws of what is among

you and the clarification for what you are in disagreement about. So, if you ask me then I will

teach you [about it]."[73] The Prophet also associated Imam ʿAlī to the Qurʾān when saying, "ʿAlī is

with the Qurʾān and the Qurʾān is with ʿAlī."[74] Fourth, there exists enormous theological corpus

in NB. Al-Raḍī's brother, al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) states that all of the theology of monotheism

(*tawḥīd*) and divine justice (*ʿadl*) are found in the words of Imam ʿAlī,[75] and that's what al-Raḍī

may have intended to prove. In fact, as indicated earlier, al-Raḍī's inspiration for writing NB came

from what he compiled about Imam ʿAlī in his *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Aʾimmah*, which he explicitly wrote to

demonstrate his Imamī belief. When he started adding some of the words of Imam ʿAlī, he then

decided to make a separate book containing his sermons, letters and short words of wisdom.

Thus, since the drive towards writing *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Aʾimmah* was to show the truth of Imamah, and

Khaṣāʾiṣ became the inspiration for NB, it is plausible to suggest that one of the intentions for

compiling NB was also to show the truth about Imamah. This may, in turn, explain the theology

contained in NB. As such, it is very reasonable, therefore, to consider that Raḍī's drive for

compiling NB is to demonstrate a complete Shiʿi theology in the words of Imam ʿAlī, and in turn,

refute all other theological beliefs, and do so in such a respectful and subtle manner.

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[73] Al-Kulaynī (2007). *Al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Fajr, vol. 1, section 20, *ḥadīth* No. 7, p. 36.
[74] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol.3, p. 134.
[75] Murtaḍā (1954). *Amālī*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍil Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyyah, vol.1, p. 148.

Being an astute scholar, Raḍī did not follow traditional books of theology which implement clear thematic classifications. He rather bridged between *adab* and theology. Since NB does not follow any specific thematic classification, it is more in line with the books of *adab* of that time. This approach would make NB appeal to a wider audience due to its apparent literary and eloquent nature. Moreover, this clever approach is in line with Raḍī's charismatic character and could be the reason why it was received so well at the time when it was written. This subtle approach may also be the reason for NB's apparent acceptance at the time when it was written. It was not until two centuries later that some started questioning the authenticity of NB, as will be discussed later. However, given the theological debates taking place at the time of Raḍī, and him being very familiar with them, he chose the first few sermons to have a detailed discussion on *tawḥīd*. Moreover, he also made selections of sermons, or parts of sermons, that would encompass a complete corpus of Shiʿi theology. As mentioned above, al-Murtaḍā, al-Raḍī's brother, asserts this notion by stating that the entire Shiʿi theology is found in the words from Imam ʿAlī.[76] Thus, NB can be considered a book demonstrating the entire corpus of Shiʿi theology.

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[76] Murtaḍā (1954). *Amālī*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍil Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyyah, vol.1, p. 148.

1.5 *Nahj al-Balāghah* (NB)

NB is arguably one of the most commented books in Shiʿi Islām after the Qur'ān.[77] It is a collection of specific sermons, letters and short words of wisdom of Imam ʿAlī selected by Raḍī. Depending on the edition, there are about 240 sermons, 79 letters and 468 short words of wisdom. Some authors choose to combine some of the sermons and the short words of wisdom together resulting in a slight variation in the numbers.

As indicated above, Raḍī did not follow a traditional, thematic approach in the compilation of NB, but rather, the ideas are scattered throughout the book. It comprises of many diverse topics that Imam ʿAlī spoke about, such as theology, eschatology, history, human life and psychology as well as politics, and religion.

While Raḍī did not clearly indicate how he obtained the content of NB, his introduction suggests that he reviewed different books containing the words of Imam ʿAlī. He stated that the reason there may be some repetition in the book, is due to differences in the narrations of the Imam's words. "There may be a selection made from one narration," Raḍī explains, "that comes in a different narration placed in a different form, either with additions or better wording, which

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[77] According to balaghah.net there are 109 interpretations of NB by Shi'a scholars, and thirteen by Sunni ones (http://arabic.balaghah.net/content/البلاغة-نهج-شروح). According to Al-Jubūrī, Ḥ.K. (2012). *Maṣādir al-Dirāsah ʿan Nahj Al-Balāghah*. Najaf: Al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah, there are over 590 works in Arabic and Persian about NB. On the significance of NB and how it is the most important book in the Shiʿi school after the Qur'ān see Thaver, T. (2013). *Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, and the Formation of Shiʿi identity in al-Sharif al-Radi's (d. 1015 C.E.) Qur'ān Commentary*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, p. 7, citing: Moktar Jebli, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, s.v. "Nahj al-Balagha," Brill Online, 2012, Retrieved from http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nahdj-albalagha-SIM_5752

necessitates repetition, to show the choice and difference of the words."[78] This implies that al-Raḍī was reading different texts, some containing different wording of the same tradition, while others may have had longer versions of the tradition. Moreover, this also suggests Raḍī had references documenting his work, and it is possible that some of these references no longer exist. Regardless, from the time of its publication, NB garnered significant appeal and interest, drawing immediate scholarship and study.

1.5.1 Major Interpretations of *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Among the first to study NB and narrate it were al-Naqībah, the daughter of al-Murtaḍā, as well as Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1068), the pupil of Murtaḍā.[79] Within just over a century, two interpretations were written about it: Saʿīd ibn Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177) and ʿAlī ibn Nāṣir al-Ḥusaynī al-Sarakhsī (d. unknown but in the sixth Islamic century). Al-Rāwandī narrates it from Abū al-Ṣamṣam Dhūl Faqār al-Ḥasanī who, in turn, narrates it from Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Halawānī, a student of Raḍī. He also narrates it from Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥalabī, who narrated it from Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī, a pupil of al-Raḍī.[80] Since then, many books, interpretations, papers and

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[78] Raḍī's introduction to NB, p. 34.
[79] Sarakhsī (1994). *Aʿlām Nahj al-Balaghah*. Ed. ʿAzīz Allāh ʿAṭāridī. Tehran: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wal-Irshād al-Islāmī, p. 12. Also see Al-Jalālī, M.Ḥ. (2001). *Dirāsah Ḥawl Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾssasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, p. 79-94, where he lists eight people among the early narrators of NB.
[80] Al-Rāwandī (1985). *Minhāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Qum: Maktabat Āyat Allāh al-Marʿashī al-ʿĀmmah, vol. 1, p. 4.

articles were written about NB or some aspect of it, counting to more than 590 manuscripts written in Arabic and Persian alone.[81]

Among the most notable interpretations of NB are the ones written by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī (d. 656/1258),[82] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. 679/1281),[83] and Ḥabībullāh al-Khūʾī (d. 1326/1908).[84] Ibn Abī al- Ḥadīd's interpretation is very linguistic and is very important because of the author's strong literary skills and historical background. Moreover, he makes references to early sources and personal discussions with scholars who add their expertise to his wealth of knowledge. In addition, he uses a textual analysis to conclude that all of NB is that of Imam Alī.[85] The numerous historical additions add to the elegance of the work. He does, however, approach the interpretation from a Muʿtazilī perspective, especially when discussing the third sermon, *al-Shiqshiqiyyah*. This is what made al-Khūʾī describe the interpretation as a "body without soul," and one that is full of extra and unnecessary information.[86]

Al-Baḥrānī approaches the interpretation of NB from a theological context. According to al-Khūʾī, his interpretation is the best one because he makes important and detailed commentaries; however, it lacks the use of the traditions of Ahlulbayt, consisting of the Prophet Muḥammad,

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[81] Al-Jubūrī, Ḥ.K. (2012). *Maṣādir al-Dirāsah ʿan Nahj Al-Balāghah*. Najaf: Al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah.
[82] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Edito Creps International.
[83] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Manāmah: Maktabat Fakhrāwī.
[84] Al-Khūʾī (1983). *Minhāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ.
[85] This will be discussed below when talking about the authenticity of NB.
[86] Al-Khūʾī (1983). *Minhāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ, p. 5.

his daughter Lady Faṭimah al-Zahrā' and the twelve Shiʿi Imams, which, according to al-Khūʾī, are necessary to develop a good understanding of the words of Imam ʿAlī.[87]

Al-Khūʾī is concerned with the language of NB (*bayān*), as well as emphasizing Shiʿi theology and ideology, using the traditions of the Ahlulbayt. This approach, according to him, is the best one as it considers theology and language in the context of Imamī traditions. Moreover, he tried to complete the sermons from which Raḍī may have made some selections to demonstrate the whole greatness of the words of Imam ʿAlī.[88]

Recently, Ṣādiq al-Mūsawī published *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* where he compiled the complete sermons that Raḍī only took parts from. Al-Mūsawī says that to help readers understand the meaning of the words of NB in his compilation of *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, he combined the interpretation of al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1170), which contains the interpretation of al-Wabarī (d. 483/1090), with the interpretation of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and the meaning of the words from Ṣubḥī Ṣāleḥ.[89] Moreover, Muḥammad Ḥusayan al-Jalālī also wrote *Dirāsah Ḥawl Nahj al-Balāghah* where he divided his discussions in three categories: the narrators of the sermons of NB (*isnād*), narrations of Imams who came after Imam ʿAlī about his sermons (*taʿqībāt*), and the narration of these sermons in Sunni sources (*muwāfaqāt*).[90]

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid, p. 7-9.
[89] Al-Mūsawī, Ṣ (1993). *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: al-Dār al-Islamiyyah, p. 8. On al-Bayhaqī and al-Wabarī, see Tabatabāī, ʿA.ʿA (1993). *Nahj al-Balāghah ʿAbr al-Qurūn*. Retrieved from http://rafed.net/turathona/37/37-3.html
[90] Al-Jalālī, M.Ḥ. (2001). *Dirāsah Ḥawl Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾssasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt.

The notable interpretations of NB suggest it is a text that is respected among both Shiʿi and Sunni scholars and indicate its acceptance at the time of its publication. For the purpose of this work, mostly the interpretations by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī, Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī, and Ḥabībullāh al-Khūʾī, as well as al-Mūsawī's compilation will be referenced.

1.5.2 *Nahj al-Balāghah* Received Good Acceptance When it was Written

NB was published at a time when Shiʿi and Sunni scholars were actively engaged in polemical works and publications supporting one's beliefs and refuting the other. For example, when ʿAbd al-Jabbār wrote his famous work, *al-Mughnī*, and presented arguments about Imamate, Murtaḍā wrote *al-Shāfī*, which is a four-volume polemical response to *al-Mughnī*. Upon the publication of *al-Shāfī*, Abu al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣri (d. 436/1046) wrote *Naqḍ al-Shāfī*, a polemical work against *al-Shāfī*. That is when Murtaḍā ordered his pupil, Salār bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 448/1058) to refute it, resulting in *Naqḍ Naqḍ al-Shāfī*.[91] Thus, many major *kalām* or theological, manuscripts produced in that era, were immediately examined, discussed, and if necessary, refuted.

When Raḍī compiled NB in 400/1010, it appears to have received wide popularity and acceptance. Men and women started memorizing it and narrating it immediately upon it was written.[92] This may suggest that at the time of its publication, all sermons, letters and words of wisdom found in NB may have been widely accepted by Raḍī and his contemporaries to belong

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[91] Subḥanī, J. (n.d.). *Rasāʾil wa Maqālāt*. Retrieved from
http://imamsadeq.com/ar/index/book?bookID=61&page=16
[92] Al-Jalālī, M.Ḥ. (2001). *Dirāsah Ḥawl Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾssasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, p. 125-177, where he lists the interpretations and works done on NB shortly after al-Raḍī.

to Imam ʿAlī, without any contest or objections. At a time when scholars were actively engaged in writing polemics, and ʿAbd al-Jabbār living an additional sixteen years after the compilation of NB, no work was written questioning the authenticity of NB. In fact, it was not until more than two centuries later that the first work questioning the authenticity of NB was published. This suggests that NB was well-received by its contemporaries, and hence, it may be plausible to suggest that at the time, there was a consensus among the scholars that all of its content was unquestionably that of Imam ʿAlī. This is how NB will be treated in this work, as will be indicated later when discussing methodology.

1.6 Authenticity of *Nahj al-Balāghah*

While it is not the aim of this thesis to investigate the authenticity of NB, but rather, to explore the content of the sermons, it is of some merit, nonetheless, to briefly touch on some of the arguments against the authenticity of NB.

As indicated above, at the time of Raḍī, NB was widely accepted to be the words of Imam ʿAlī. The first objection to NB was published more than two centuries later by Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), and then some writers followed, expressing concerns over the authenticity of NB being attributed to Imam ʿAlī. Doubts around the authenticity of NB can be divided in six categories: lack of the chain of narrators, disrespect towards certain companions, contradictions, linguistics (use of *sajʿ*), the similarity between some of its content and Prophetic traditions, and knowledge about futuristic events. These six points will be briefly discussed below.

1.6.1 Lack of Chain of Narrators

The first person to object to the authentic attribution of NB to Imam ʿAlī was Ibn Khallikān, when

he wrote under the description of al-Murtaḍā,[93]

> People disputed the book, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which is a compilation of the sayings
> of Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him. Did he compile it or his
> brother al-Raḍī? And it is said that these are not the sayings of ʿAlī, but rather the
> one who compiled it [the book] and attributed it to him [Imam ʿAlī] is the one who
> put it together, and God knows [best].[94]

Ibn Khallikān appears to be unsure as to who compiled NB, al-Murtaḍā or al-Raḍī.

Then came Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) who strongly argued against NB and its attribution to

Imam ʿAlī,

> These sermons transcribed in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, if they were all from ʿAlī and of
> his sayings, then they would have existed before the compiler, narrated from ʿAlī
> through sources and other [means]. So, if an expert in narrations identifies that
> many of them, rather the majority, were not recognized before then, it becomes
> clear that these are lies. Otherwise, let the transcriber identify in which book it
> was mentioned? And who narrated it from ʿAlī? And what is its chain [of
> narrators]? Otherwise, the isolated claim is possible for anyone.[95]

Later, Shams al-Dīn Al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1374) stated,

> He [al-Murtaḍā] is the compiler of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, whose words are attributed
> to Imam ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, and there are no chains of narrators

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[93] For a detailed account of the political motives behind Ibn Khallikān's and Ibn Taymiyyah's refutation of NB, see
Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation,
University of Edinburgh. Moreover, the author also describes Western and modern writers who doubted the
authenticity of NB, and he discusses their arguments. Hassan also comes to the conclusion that NB is Imam ʿAlī's
words.

[94] Ibn Khallikān (1978). *Wafiyyāt al-Aʿyān*. Ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, vol. 3, p. 313.

[95] Ibn Taymiyyah (1986). *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah*. (n.p.), vol. 8, p. 56.

for that [claim], and some of them [the sayings found in NB] are false, and there is truth in it, but there are topics that can never be claimed the Imam has spoken of, but where is the fair [evaluator]?! It is also claimed that his brother, al-Raḍī, compiled it.[96]

Interestingly, both Ibn Khallikān and al-Dhahabī attribute the compilation of NB to Murtaḍā but suggest that it can be claimed that Raḍī compiled it. This doubt suggests they may not have researched its authorship well enough to conclusively indicate the identity of the compiler, and make one wonder whether or not they may have even read NB.[97]

It is noteworthy to mention that the Ashʿarī and Salafī schools put much emphasis on concurrent reports (*al-khabar al-mutawātir*) compared to unit-reports (*khabar al-wāḥid*, pl. *akhbār al-āḥād*).[98] For example, Juwaynī rejects the tradition of *Ghadīr* where the Prophet said, "Whoever I am his master, ʿAlī is his master," as he considers it among the unit-reports (*āḥād*).[99] Hence, it is not surprising if the Ashʿarī and Salafī schools do not accept the authenticity of NB because of the lack of the chain of narrators. However, it was not the intention of al-Raḍī to treat NB as a source of *hadīth*, stating its sermons' chain of narrators. Rather, it was the text that he wanted people to be concerned with. In addition, al-Raḍī was not the first to compile traditions without stating the chain of narrators. When Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) wrote the one hundred proverbs of Imam ʿAlī

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[96] Al-Dhahabī (1996). *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, vol. 17, p. 589.

[97] Both editors of al-Dhahabī's *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, Shuʿaib al-Arnaʾūṭ and Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿArqsūsī say in the footnote that it was al-Raḍī who compiled NB, vol. 17, p. 589.

[98] Zyzow, A. (2013). The Authentication of Prophetic Traditions in *The Economy of Certainty*. Atlanta: Lockwood Press, p. 7-48.

[99] Al-Juwaynī, A. (1995). *Kitāb al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 168. Interestingly, al-Amīnī in his *al-Ghadīr* encyclopedia of eleven volumes proves that the event of *Ghadīr Khum* is not a unit report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) but rather a concurrent report (*al-khabar al-mutawātir*). Al-Amīnī, ʿA.A. (1995). *Al-Ghadīr*. Qum: Markaz Ghadīr lil-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah.

at the request of his friend, Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir, he did not write the chain of narrators because

he was concerned with demonstrating the wisdom and eloquence of the Imam rather than have

the work as a traditional book of *ḥadīth*.[100] Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī (d. 454/1062), who was a

contemporary of Raḍī, compiled some sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad in a book he titled *al-*

Shihāb, without stating the chain of narrators.[101] He wrote in his introduction to his *Dastūr al-*

Ḥikam, "When I compiled one thousand two hundred of the traditions of the Messenger of God,

peace be upon him and his progeny, [containing some] of his admonishments, maxims, counsels

and direction for refined behaviour, and I put them together in a book that I titled *al-Shihāb*, a

brother asked me to compile the words of Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib , God's blessings

and peace be upon him. A similar number of his mentioned proverbs, relying in doing so on what

I narrate and find in books of who I trust and accept, and to write them without mentioning the

chain of narrators, as I did in my book, *al-Shihāb*."[102] Thus, it was accepted at the time that when

some authors were concerned with the eloquence or the wisdom found in the words of the

Prophet and Imam ʿAlī that were widely accepted as authentic, they would write them without

mentioning the chain of narrators. This may suggest that at the time of Raḍī, the sermons, letters

and words he compiled in NB were known to be of Imam ʿAlī and that not much dispute about

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[100] Al-Jāḥiẓ (2013). *Miʾat Kalimah min Kalām Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Trans. Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press.

[101] Traditions in *Al-Shihāb* were interpreted and sourced by ʿAbd al-Qādir bin Badrān al-Dūmī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1346/1928), edited recently by Nūr al-Dīn Ṭālib. Retrieved from https://ia800301.us.archive.org/7/items/waq85174/85174.pdf It is interesting to note that there is no issue raised about the authenticity of *al-Shihāb* despite it not having a chain of narrators.

[102] Al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī (2013). *A Treasury of Virtues*. Trans. Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press, p. 4.

its authenticity existed when the book was written. In addition, as described earlier, Raḍī bridged between theology and literature (*adab*) when writing NB, and hence, did not add the chain of narrators, as was common for the books of *adab* at the time.[103]

Recently, the matter of the chain of narrators of NB was addressed by Sayyid ʿAbd al-Zahrā al-Ḥusaynī al-Khaṭīb in his four-volume work *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah wa Asānīduh*, in which he traced back all the sermons of NB to sources preceding Raḍī.[104] Moreover, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayan al-Jalālī authored a book titled *Dirāsah Ḥawl Nahj al-Balāghah*, where he also affirms that NB consists of the words of Imam ʿAlī.[105] Additionally, as indicated above, Sayyid Ṣādiq al-Mūsawī published *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*,[106] compiling the complete sermons of Imam ʿAlī as opposed to the extracts from the sermons that Raḍī selected for NB.

In a contemporary academic discussion, both Zavieh and Hassan examined the issue of the authenticity of NB and concluded that it was compiled by Raḍī, and its sermons are those of Imam ʿAlī.[107] Therefore, the issue about the authenticity of NB due to the lack of the chain of narrators is sufficiently addressed.

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[103] See, for example, Abū Misḥal al-Aʿrābī (d. early third Islamic century) (1961). *Kitāb al-Nawādir*. Ed. ʿAzzah Ḥasan. Damasus: Maṭbūʿāt Majmaʿ al-Lughat al-ʿArabiyyah; and Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. early fourth Islamic century). *Kitāb al-Awāʾil*. Ed. Walīd Qaṣṣāb and Muḥammad al-Maṣrī, Riyad: Dār al-ʿUlūm liltibāʿah wal-Nashr.

[104] Al-Khaṭīb, ʿAbd al-Zahrā al-Ḥusaynī (1985). *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāgha wa Asānīduh*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ.

[105] Al-Jalālī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn (2001). *Dirāsah Ḥawl Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾssasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt.

[106] Al-Mūsawī, Ṣ (1993). *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Islamiyyah.

[107] S. Mohammad H. Ghassemi Zavieh (1994). *Authenticity of Nahj Al-Balāghah*. M.Sc. dissertation, McGill University; Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

1.6.2 Disrespect Towards Certain Companions

The critical issue about disrespect of certain companions in NB arises from its third sermon,

known as *al-Shiqshiqiyyah*. In fact, the essence of all arguments against NB and its attribution to

Imam ʿAlī is due to this sermon.[108]

Ibn Taymiyyah, who is responsible for the majority of the claims against NB, lists among his

objections,

> Also, most of the sermons narrated by the compiler of *Nahj al-Balāghah* are lies
> attributed to ʿAlī. ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, is greater and higher in status
> than saying such words; however, those [people] fabricate lies and they think it's
> a praise [to Imam ʿAlī]. It's not truth nor is it a praise.[109]

Al-Dhahabī states,

> ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawī, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍa, the Muʿtazilī, the author of
> many books. He died in the year 430 at the age of eighty, and he is the one accused
> of putting [together] the book *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and he has strong participation
> in the science [of *kalām*]. And whoever looks through his book, *Nahj al-Balāghah*,
> becomes certain that it is falsely attributed to Amīr al-Muʾminīn, may God be
> pleased with him, because in it there is evident curse and degradation of the two
> leaders: Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.[110]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes about a conversation that took place between his teacher, Muṣaddiq ibn

Shabīb al-Wāsiṭī, and Muḥammad ibn al-Khashshāb about the authenticity of *al-Shiqshiqiyyah*,

and whether or not it is from the invention of Raḍī himself. Ibn al-Khashshāb told him that he has

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[108] Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, p. 139.

[109] Ibn Taymiyyah (1986). *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah*. (n.p.), vol. 8, p. 55.

[110] Al-Dhahabī (1963). *Mīzān al-Iʿtidāl fī Maʿrifat al-Rijāl*. Ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, Beirut: Dār al-Maʾrifah, vol. 3, p. 124.

references to *al-Shiqshiqiyyah* dating back to before the birth of the father of Raḍī. Moreover, he also stated that from a literary context, *al-Shiqshiqiyyah* does not carry the linguistic spirit and tone of Raḍī; rather it is of the language of Imam ʿAlī's eloquence.[111] The latter point is extremely important as Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd uses a similar textual analysis of the literary language and tone of NB to arrive at the conclusion that the entire book carries the linguistic and eloquent spirit of Imam ʿAlī. Hence, he asserts that all of NB is attributed to Imam ʿAlī saying, "Many people who follow their desires claim, 'Most of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is made up of new sermons [i.e. not from Imam ʿAlī but delivered after him]; made up by some of the most eloquent Shiʿa.' They may also attribute part of it to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Raḍī. These are people who are blinded by hate, so they missed the clear path and rode the way with misguidance, with little knowledge of the methodology of speech."[112]

In *al-Shiqshiqiyyah*, Imam ʿAlī was describing his right to the leadership after the Prophet's demise, and how it was usurped by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar as they deliberately took the leadership away from him when they were unfit for it, while thoroughly recognizing it is his right.[113] The sermon does not consist of any disrespectful language but rather statements of facts. Nonetheless, its content is what made some question the authenticity of NB. While studying NB

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[111] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 85.
[112] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 10, p. 47.
[113] Ḥabībullāh al-Khūʾī states that this sermon consists of Imam ʿAlī's complaint of the oppression of his predecessors and it is a proof of how they usurped the caliphate. Al-Khūʾī, Ḥabībullāh (1983). *Minhāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ, vol. 2, p. 345.

and *al-Shiqshiqiyyah* from an academic perspective, Hassan also arrives at the conclusion that it belongs to Imam ʿAlī.[114]

1.6.3 Contradictions in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Al-Dhahabī states,

> And in it [NB] of contradiction and weak language and statements…[115]

Although Al-Dhahabī does not mention what the contradictions are, he might be referring to such statements as the following: Imam ʿAlī was asked about predetermination (*qadar*), and he replied, "A deep ocean so do not dive into it." When the man repeats his question again, the Imam answered, "A dark route so do not take it." The man repeats his question a third time and the Imam asserted, "It is God's secret so do not put the effort to learn it."[116] However, when asked on a different occasion about predetermination, he stated, "Surely God ordered His creation and gave them choice, and forbade them out of warning, and he mandated what is little, and did not mandate what is difficult [to follow], and gave for the little [deeds they perform] lots [of reward]. He was not disobeyed because He is weak, nor was He obeyed by forcing [people]."[117]

It may appear contradictory when the Imam does not respond to one person and tells him instead not to worry about predetermination while he answers the other. However, the Imam may have

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[114] Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

[115] Al-Dhahabī (1963). *Mīzān al-Iʿtidāl*. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, vol. 3, p. 124.

[116] NB, short words of wisdom No. 278, p. 618.

[117] NB, short words of wisdom No. 73, p. 575.

assessed the circumstances and replied appropriately depending on the situation and the person making the inquiry. The circumstances in the first case may not have allowed the Imam to respond, or the person may not have had the ability to fully comprehend the meaning of predetermination, while in the latter case the situation was favourable for the Imam to reply. Moreover, before coming to a conclusion about contradictions in NB, one must understand the context of Imam ʿAlī's words, and whether or not to take his words literally or figuratively. Otherwise, a similar argument would be made about the Qurʾān. To understand there are no contradictions in the Qurʾān, one must analyze the verses and deeply understand them. A similar approach is required when dealing with NB. When it is explored in such manner, one can conclude that there do not exist any contradictions in NB; rather, each part complements the other.

1.6.4 Language: Use of *Sajʿ* in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Sajaʿ is having rhyming words without using poetic stanzas.[118] NB consists of many such rhymes, which are usually used to assist the listener in memorizing the text and making the sound of the statements smoother and more beautiful to listen to. This is common in Arabic eloquence.[119]

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[118] ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad Al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413). *Muʿjam al-Taʿrīfāt*. Ed. Muḥammad Ṣiddīq al-Munshāwī. Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīlah, p. 101.

[119] Qutbuddin, T. (2012). The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qurʾān and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia. *Anuario De Estudios Medievales*, p. 201-228; Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, p. 192-199.

Ibn Taymiyyah utilized the use of *saja'* in NB as one of the reasons to dismiss its attribution to Imam ʿAlī because, according to him, *saja'* is not as eloquent since a person has to put in effort to produce the rhyming words, and this, in turn, reduces the quality of the talk.[120] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd considers such an argument as invalid and explains that the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions are full of such language. Moreover, he also argues that *saja'* can only be weak if one has to put in effort to produce it and think hard to arrange the rhymes, not when the words come spontaneously, as they do for Imam ʿAlī.[121] These are similar arguments to those presented by Hassan and Qutbuddin.[122]

1.6.5 Overlap Between Prophetic Sayings and *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Ibn Taymiyyah claims that many of the sayings in NB do not even belong to Imam ʿAlī; rather, al-Raḍī took them from various sources and attributed them to the Imam. Some of the sayings found in NB may have also been attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. For example, in short words of wisdom, the last section of NB, Imam ʿAlī states, "Contentment is the wealth that does not run out."[123] Raḍī adds, "And some have narrated these words from the Prophet." Also, after short

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[120] Ibn Taymiyyah (1986). *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah*. (n.p.), vol. 8, p. 53-55.
[121] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 54.
[122] Qutbuddin, T. (2012). The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qur'ān and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia. *Anuario De Estudios Medievales*, p. 201-228; Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, p. 192-199.
[123] NB, short words of wisdom, No. 463, p.651.

words of wisdom 116, al-Raḍī writes, "And of people is he who attributes these words to the Messenger of God."[124]

Just because some of the sayings of Imam ʿAlī may overlap with that of the Prophet Muḥammad, one cannot arrive at the conclusion that the whole of NB is not that of Imam ʿAlī's. For example, the famous tradition, "One who recognizes his self, recognizes his Lord," has been attributed to both the Prophet[125] and to Imam ʿAlī.[126] The Imam grew up in Prophet Muḥammad's house and was very close to him. As such, it is not surprising that he might repeat some of his quotes.

1.6.6 Knowledge of the Unseen

Another issue that may be contested against NB being the words of Imam ʿAlī is the prophecies, or references to events that will happen in the future and for those events actually occurring. This includes the Imam mentioning the coming of the Turks and Moguls,[127] the power of Muʿāwiyah and the Umayyads as well as their demise,[128] and the governorship of al-Ḥajjāj al-Thaqafī over Iraq.[129] It is argued that only God knows of the unseen; hence, it is impossible for Imam ʿAlī to have such knowledge. In response to this argument, three points may be discussed.

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[124] NB, short words of wisdom, No. 116, p.585.
[125] ʿAbd al-Wahhab al-Anṣārī Al-Shaʿrānī (d. 898/1493) (n.d.). *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*. (n.p.), p. 358. Retrieved from http://tijania.com/livrett16_0.pdf
[126] ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Muḥammad Al-Āmudī (d. 550/1155) (1992). *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kilam*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥasan Duhaynī. Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, No. 1011, p. 352.
[127] NB, sermon 128, p. 234-235.
[128] NB, sermon 100, p. 185-187.
[129] NB, sermon 115, p. 219.

First, according to Shiʿi belief, only God has the knowledge of the unseen; however, He may relay some of this knowledge to some of His creation. Here are three examples to support this argument from the Qur'ān:

"Knower of the unseen. So, He does not reveal His unseen to anyone; except to any messenger with whom He is pleased," (72:26-27).

"I [Jesus son of Mary] surely can create for you of clay in the form of a flying creature and blow in it so it flies by the permission of God, and heal the blind and the leprous and revive the dead by the permission of God, and I inform you of what you eat and what you save [of food] in your homes," (3:49).

"He [Joseph son of Jacob] said, 'There will not be any food, with which you are sustained, coming to you, but that I inform you of what it is before it comes to you," (12:37).

Second, Shiʿi scholars believe that the twelve Imams succeeding the Prophet Muḥammad are divinely appointed by God; hence, they are taught the knowledge of the unseen, just like Prophets Joseph and Jesus.[130]

Third, Imam ʿAlī was asked in NB, "Do you have the knowledge of the unseen?" He replied, "No I do not, but it is knowledge that I gained from the one who is knowledgeable."[131] Thus, Imam ʿAlī suggests that his knowledge of the unseen is not inherent, like that of God's, but it is rather acquired from Prophet Muḥammad who, in turn, acquired it from God. Imam ʿAlī may have also acquired the knowledge of the unseen through an inspiration directly from God. Thus, if he gained the knowledge from Prophet Muḥammad, then he learned it from the one who is knowledgeable. However, if he acquired his knowledge from God, then his knowledge comes

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[130] For more on Imams' divinely inspired knowledge, refer to Amir-Moezzi (1994). *Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*. Trans. David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press. There exist discussions in the literature about whether the Imam's knowledge is divinely inspired or whether it is inherited from the Prophet. See, for example, Bayhom-Daou, T. (2001). The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260A.H./874 A.D.). *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 64(2), p. 188-207; and, Modarressi, H. (1993). *Crisis and Consolidation*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc. However, Ṣaffār narrates the following tradition from the sixth Shiʿi Imam, al-Ṣādiq, in *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*, "On the eve of Friday [Thursday night], the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, and the Imams with him arrive at the Throne [reference to God's Power and Knowledge], and we arrive with them. Our souls do not come back to our bodies but with useful knowledge. If it were not for that then we would have run out [of knowledge]." Ṣaffār (2007). *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*. Ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Muʿallim. Beirut: Dār Jawād al-Aʾimmah, vol. 1, p. 267. Moreover, there are several sections about the knowledge of the Imams in Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fajr, vol. 1, sections 99-107, p.150-158. Notable is *ḥadīth* No. 4 in section 102, p. 153 from Imam al-Ṣādiq being asked about the Imam knowing the unseen. The Imam replied, "No, but if he wants to know something then God teaches him." Thus, what the Imams are suggesting is that they do not have the knowledge of the unseen on their own; rather, they know it through God. Hence, the Imam's knowledge can be inspired by God. In addition, *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī* (2009). Beirut: Dār al-Ḥawrāʾ, p. 368, narrates the following quote from ibn ʿAbbās, "The Imams are of the family of the Prophet, the fountains of the message, the revelation of the Book, the [place of] descendance of revelation, and the visits of the angels." Hence, according to the earliest surviving Shiʿi texts, Imams' knowledge comes from an inspiration from God and an inheritance from the Prophet. This matter will be discussed in additional detail in chapter 6 when discussing the knowledge of the Imam.

[131] NB, sermon 128, p. 234-236.

from the One who is Knowledgeable. Moreover, the Imam also said, "The Messenger of God taught me one thousand gates of knowledge, each gate opens to another one thousand gates."[132]

The same reply can be given about Imam ʿAlī discussing issues that were not raised until about a century later, such as the existence of God and His attributes, and the concept of free will and predetermination. He can be considered the founder of the science of *kalām*, or theological discussions about God, His existence and His attributes as he was the first to discuss such matters.

1.6.7 Textual Analysis Argument

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd presents the following three arguments for the authenticity of NB: none of the sermons of NB are that of Imam ʿAlī; some of its sermons are Imam ʿAlī's but some are not; and, all of NB is that of the Imam. He refutes the first argument as some of the sermons can clearly be attributed and referenced to Imam ʿAlī. Using textual analysis, described earlier, he negates the second argument. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that all of NB is Imam ʿAlī's words.[133] This is the same conclusion arrived at by Zavieh in his Masters thesis.[134]

Therefore, all of NB, with all its diverse themes and topics, can be attributed to Imam ʿAlī. Moreover, there is no doubt that Raḍī was convinced all of NB consisted of the words of Imam ʿAlī. Thus, for the purpose of this work, this consideration will be used.

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[132] Mufīd (2008). *Al-Irshād fī Maʿrifat Ḥujaj Allāh ʿalā al-ʿIbād*. Beirut: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, vol. 1, p. 34.
[133] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 10, p. 47.
[134] Zavieh, M.G. (1994). *Authenticity of Nahj Al-Balaghah*. Masters dissertation, McGill University.

1.7 Themes of *Nahj al-Balāghah*

NB consists of diverse topics and themes, ranging from zoology, to psychology, politics and leadership, to history and theology. When reading the words of Imam ʿAlī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905), who is one of the Sunni scholars who commented on NB, was inspired by the personality of the Imam. He is amazed at the deep knowledge of Imam ʿAlī in various and extremely opposite topics:

> Whenever I move from one section to another section, I feel the change in the scenes, and the transformation of the actions. At one point, I find myself in a world filled with high meanings by elevated spirits… Sometimes, the words would reveal grinning faces, cutting canines, spirits in the form of tigers, claws of vultures, ready to jump… Sometimes, I would see an illuminating mind that does not look like a human form, separated from the Divine, and connected to the human soul.[135]

On that note, ʿAbduh appears to have taken the idea for his introduction of the interpretation of NB from Ṣafiyy al-Dīn al-Ḥillī's poetry (d. 750/1349) addressing Imam ʿAlī:

> The opposite attributes have been united in you
> And therefore, there are no likes of you
> Ascetic, but a ruler, forbearing, yet brave
> Devout worshipper, but fierce warrior, poor, yet generous
> Attributes never combined in a human before
> Nor have the worshippers achieved the likes of them[136]

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[135] Muḥammad ʿAbduh (2010). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgh*. Beirut: Dār al-Jawadayn, vol. 1, p. 5-6.

[136] Al-Ḥillī, Ṣ.A. (n.d.). *Dīwān Ṣafiyy al-Dīn Al-Ḥillī*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, p. 88. He writes that his inspiration for the poem came from the words of Ibn ʿAbbās describing Imam ʿAlī, "Combined in ʿAlī are opposite attributes that were never found before in a human."

Despite its variable topics, among the notable themes of NB are *taqwā*, God-wariness or piety, a continuous reminder of preparing for the Hereafter in a homiletics manner, as well as, numerous theological topics.

1.7.1 God-Wariness (*Taqwā*) and Preparation for the Hereafter

A dominant theme in Imam ʿAlī's words is God-wariness or piety (*taqwā*), reminding people of the Hereafter and warning them of the attachment to the materialistic world and its desires, as well as, the devotion to God and His Messenger.[137] He combined his words with Qurʾānic verses and rational argumentation, moving the hearts and minds of his listeners and later readers,[138] such that throughout his interpretation of NB, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī (d. 656/1258) repeatedly expressed his amazement at the Imam and praised his piety.

1.7.2 Theology

By the fourth Islamic century, the following five pillars were established as the roots of the religion for the Shiʿi Imamī school, known as *uṣūl al-dīn*: monotheism (*tawḥīd*),[139] divine justice

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[137] Qutbuddin, T. (2012). The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qurʾān and the Oral, Nature-based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia. *Anuario De Estudios Medievales*, 42(1): 201-228; Maktabat al-Rawḍah al-Ḥaydariyyah (2011). *Al-Taqwā fī Nahj al-Balāghah*. Najaf: Al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah. Retrieved from
https://www.haydarya.com/maktaba_moktasah/07/book_98/altaqwa.pdf

[138] See, for example, NB, sermons 28, p.85; 82, p. 130; 198, p. 385; 219, p. 413; 220, p. 413; 221, p. 419; 222, p. 421; and letter 45, p.504.

[139] The translation of *tawḥīd* as monotheism is a contested notion. See, for example, Rizvi, S. (2018). God Is One but Unlike Any Other: Theological Argumentation on Tawḥīd in Islam. In *Monotheism and Its Complexities*. Eds. Mosher, L. and Marshall, D. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, p. 121-135. Nonetheless, monotheism is a belief in a singular deity and the word *tawḥīd* renders that. As such, monotheism will be used throughout this thesis to refer to *tawḥīd*.

(*ʿadālah*), prophethood (*nubūwah*), divinely appointed leadership (*Imamah*), and resurrection and the afterlife (*maʿād*). Examination of texts written during that time clearly indicate this. For example, the section referring to the roots of the religion, titled *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* of *Kitāb al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), consists of the following titles: The Book of Reason and Ignorance, the Book of Monotheism (*tawḥīd*), the Book of the Proof (*ḥujjah*), which discusses both Prophethood and Imamah, the Book of Belief and Disbelief, which includes topics of divine justice and the afterlife.[140] Moreover, *Kitāb al-Iʿtiqadat* by al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) discusses similar topics as well.[141] Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd also makes analogous references in his *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*,[142] and in *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*.[143] In addition, al-Murtaḍā describes similar themes in his *al-Dhakhīrah*.[144]

There are numerous theological discussions found in NB as well. Many of its sermons discuss God and His attributes. The first sermon, for example, consists of thought-provoking analyses about the magnificence of God.[145] The concept of predetermination and free will, which were not discussed by Muslim scholars until late in the first Islamic century, and which are integral arguments when discussing divine justice, are well-defined in NB.[146] Moreover, there are several sermons that describe prophethood in general and the Prophet Muhammad in particular.[147]

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[140] Kulaynī (n.d.). *Al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Fajr, vol. 1 and 2.
[141] Ṣādūq (2011). *Al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Beirut: Dār al-Jawādayn.
[142] Mufīd (1992). *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Tehran: 1000th Anniversary International Congress of Shaykh Mufīd.
[143] Mufīd (1992). *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd.
[144] Murtaḍā (2010). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī.
[145] NB, sermon 1, p. 39-42.
[146] NB, short words of wisdom No. 73, p. 575.
[147] See, for example, NB, sermons 1; p. 39; 2, p. 48; 103, p.190; 104, p. 190; 105, p. 193; 108, p. 199; and 161, p. 285.

Imamate, or divinely appointed leadership, is another common theme in NB.[148] Finally, the Day

of Resurrection and preparation for the eternal abode is repeatedly discussed in NB.[149] In fact, it

will be argued in this thesis that NB consists of all the five *uṣūl al-dīn*, making it not only a book

of wisdom and admonishment, but also a book of theology.

1.8 This Work and Methodology

There are many works on the early and formative Shiʿi thought. Such works include, but are not

limited to, Wilferd Madelung's *Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology*,[150] Martin McDermott's *The

Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd* (1978),[151] Hossein Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation* (1993),[152]

Amir-Moezzi's *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism* (1994),[153] Meir Bar-Asher's *Scripture and

Exegenesis in Early Imamī Shiʿism* (1999),[154] Arzina Lalani's *Early Shiʿi Thought* (2000),[155] Andrew

Newman's *The Formative Period of Twelver Shiʿism* (2000),[156] and Maria Massi Dakake's *The

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[148] See, for example, NB, sermons, 2, p. 48; 3, p. 50; 4, p.59; 5, p. 60; 16, p. 65; 22, p. 74; 24, p. 77; 34, p. 95; 86, p. 145; 119, p.222; 197, p. 384; 216, p. 407; 232, p. 434; and 234, p. 435; and letters 10, p.451; 28, p. 468; 30, p. 474; and 45, p.504.

[149] See, for example, NB, sermons 28, p.85; 82, p. 130; 198, p. 385; 219, p. 413; 220, p. 413; 221, p. 419; 222, p. 421; and letter 45, p.504.

[150] Madelung, W (1968). Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology, in T. Fahd (ed.). *Le Shīʿism Imamite. Colloque de Strasbourg*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p. 13-29.

[151] McDermott, M.J. (1978). *Theology of Shaykh Al-Mufid*, Beirut: Dar El-Machareq Éditeurs.

[152] Modarressi, H. (1993). *Crisis and Consolidation*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc.

[153] Amir-Moezzi, M.A. (1994). *Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight, Albany: State University of New York Press.

[154] Bar-Asher, M.M. (1999). *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiʿism*, Boston: Brill.

[155] Lalani, A. (2000). *Early Shiʿi Thought*. New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

[156] Newman, A. (2000). *The Formative Period of Twelver Shiʿism*, New York: Psychology Press.

Charismatic Community (2007).[157] In addition, there is much more work on Islamic theology, especially by Josef van Ess,[158] Montgomery Watt,[159] Michael Cook,[160] and others.

Despite all these works on Imamī Shī'ism, there still exist very few academic works in English about Imam ʿAlī. In his introduction to *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam: The Teachings of ʿAli ibn Abi Talib*, published in 2006, Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, "It is astonishing that the *Nahj al-balaghah*, which is one of the most important works in Islamic civilization, has never been translated into elegant English directly from the Arabic and English which would be worthy to some extent of the remarkable eloquence of the original Arabic. It is also strange that so little exists in European languages on ʿAli in general while there are hundreds of books on him in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and other Islamic languages."[161]

If, according to Nasr, it is "astonishing" there exists little scholarship in European languages on Imam ʿAlī, then it is equally surprising to have only a handful of academic works in English on NB, which is, as quoted by Nasr above, "One of the most important works in Islamic civilization." According to the author's best knowledge, the first thesis written on NB is Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan's Ph.D. dissertation titled *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha* in 1979 at the University of Edinburgh, where he also discusses the authenticity of NB, especially that of the

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[157] Dakake, M.M. (2007). *The Charismatic Community*, New York: State University of New York Press.
[158] van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane and Gwendolin Goldbloom. Boston: Brill, vol. 1-3.
[159] Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
[160] Cook, M.A. (1980). The Origins of "Kalām." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, No. 43(1), p. 32-43.
[161] Nasr, S. H. (2006). *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam*. Ed. Lakhani, M.A. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., p. xv.

third sermon, *al-Shiqshaqiyyah*, arriving at the conclusion that it is the word of Imam ʿAlī.[162] The

second work on NB is a Masters thesis by Mohammad Ghassemi Zavieh, *Authenticity of Nahj Al-*

Balāghah in 1994 at McGill University, in which he discusses the authenticity of NB, and, again,

arrives at the conclusion that the sermons contained in the book are the words of Imam ʿAlī.[163]

The third academic work about some of the sermons of NB is Amina Inloes's examination of Imam

ʿAlī's perspective on women in NB in her paper *Was Imam ʿAli a Misogynist? The Portrayal of*

Women in Nahj al-Balaghah and Kitab Sulaym ibn Qays.[164] She argues that some sermons of NB

that appear to speak low of women may not be attributed to Imam ʿAlī as he would not put down

women, for it is in clear contradiction to the Qurʾān. However, Najwā Sāleḥ Al-Jawād in her book,

Al-Marʾah fī Nahj al-Balāghah, argues that the sermons and proverbs about women in NB are

indeed the words of Imam ʿAlī. She suggests the Imam is condemning one's desire in the excessive

love for women, just like when he does the same about those who love this world (*dunyā*). People

should not forget their Creator and neglect their duties towards their Lord due to their

attachment to this world and to women.[165]

Kuhsari and Redhaei's paper on the *Psychological Analysis on Autogenesis as Preface to God*

Cognition (A Comparative Analysis of View Point of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib – peace be upon him-

and scholars of Education and Pedagogy) deals with the concept of being God-wary in the words

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[162] Syed Mohammad Waris Hassan (1979). *A Critical Study of Nahj Al-Balāgha*. Published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

[163] Zavieh, M.G. (1994). *Authenticity of Nahj Al-Balaghah*. Masters dissertation, McGill University.

[164] Inloes, A. (2015). Was Imam ʿAli a Misogynist? The Portrayal of Women in Nahj al-Balaghah and Kitab Sulaym ibn Qays. *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies*, vol. 8(3), p. 325-365.

[165] Al-Jawād, N.S. (1999). *Al-Marʾah fī Nahj al-Balāghah*. London: Maʿhad al-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabīyyah wal-Islamīyyah.

of NB.[166] Reza Shah-Kazemi's *Justice and Remembrance* looks at the spirituality of Imam ʿAlī through NB.[167] The book quoted earlier, edited by Lakhani, titled *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam* reviews the teachings of Imam ʿAlī and his justice.[168] Even in the Arabic language, many of the academic theses in Arabic about NB relate to the grammar and language of Imam ʿAlī.[169] Finally, Tahera Qutbuddin published two works on Imam ʿAlī recently: a manuscript titled *The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qurʾān and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia*[170] as well as a book named *Al-Qāḍī Al-Quḍāʿī A Treasury of Virtues* published in 2013.[171] None of the above references discuss theological aspects of NB or view NB as a book of Shiʿi theology. Therefore, this work is not only among the handful of publications available on NB, it also discusses NB from a theological perspective that is not yet explored by European academics.

There are many classical Shiʿi theological writings. The early works include, but are not limited to, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* by al-Shaykh al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941),[172] *al-Iʿtiqādāt*[173] and *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*[174] by al-

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[166] Kuhsari, S.E.H. & Redhaei, A.M.R. (2014). Psychological Analysis on Autogenesis as Preface to God Cognition (A Comparative Analysis of View Point of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib --peace be upon him-and Scholars of Education and Pedagogy). *International Journal of Nusantara Islam*, vol. 2, p. 116-127.

[167] Shah-Kazemi, R (2006). *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ʿAlī*. New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

[168] Lakhanī, M.A. (2006). *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam*. Ed. Lakhani, M.A. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc.

[169] For a comprehensive list of academic and non-academic work on NB please refer to http://arabic.balaghah.net/content/البلاغة-نهج-في-كتب-ما-فهرس; and al-Jubūrī, H.K. (2012). *Maṣādir al-Dirāsah ʿan Nahj al-Balāghah*. Najaf: al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah.

[170] Qutbuddin, T. (2012). The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qurʾān and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia. *Anuario De Estudios Medievales*, p. 201-228.

[171] Qutbuddin, T. (2013). *Al-Qāḍī Al-Quḍāʿī: A Treasury of Virtues*. New York: New York University Press.

[172] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1 and 2.

[173] Ṣāḍūq (2011). *Al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Beirut: Dār al-Jawādayn.

[174] Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī.

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*,[175] *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*[176] and *al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*[177] by al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), as well as *al-Dharīʿah*,[178] *al-Shāfī*[179] and *al-Dhakhīrah*[180] by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044). Seventh Islamic century writing by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273) *Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*, as well as its interpretation, *Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*, by his pupil al-Ḥasan ibn Yusuf al-Ḥillī, also known as al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325).[181] Al-Ḥillī's *Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād* and *al-Bāb al-Ḥādī ʿAshar*[182] are monumental, since they categorically classified Shiʿi theology in well-organized topics, and the books became foundational in paving the way for contemporary writing styles in Shiʿi belief. While some Shiʿi theological works rely on excerpts of NB in shaping their arguments and clarifying Shiʿi beliefs on various topics, at the time when this work began, no work existed that treated NB as a book of theology. Recently, however, Luṭfullah Ṣāfī Golpayganī's Persian book *Ilāhiyyāt dar Nahj al-Balāghah* was published to examine this matter.[183] Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, an academic analysis of the theology of NB does not exist in the English scholarship.

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[175] Mufīd (1992). *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Tehran: 1000th Anniversary International Congress of Shaykh Mufīd.

[176] Mufīd (1992). *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd.

[177] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ.

[178] Murtaḍā (2008). *Al-Dharīʿah ilā Uṣūl al-Sharīʿah*. Ed. Al-Lujnah al-ʿIlmiyyah fī Muʾassasat al-Imam al-Ṣādiq. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Imam al-Ṣādiq.

[179] Murtaḍā (1993). *Al-Shāfī fil-Imamah*. Ed. Sayyid ʿAbd al-Zahrāʾ al-Khaṭīb. Tehran: Muʾassasat al-Ṣādiq lil-Ṭibāʿah wal-Nashr.

[180] Murtaḍā (2010). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī.

[181] Al-Ḥillī, Jamāl al-Dīn (al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī) (2011). *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī.

[182] Al-Ḥillī, Jamāl al-Dīn (al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī) (1989). *Al-Bāb al-Ḥādī ʿAshar*. Ed. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq. Mashad: Muʾassasat Chāp wa Intishārāt Astāni Razavī.

[183] Luṭfullah Ṣāfī Golpaygānī (n.d.). *Ilāhiyyāt dar Nahj al-Balāghah*. Isfihān: Daftar Intishārāt Islāmī. Retrieved from http://www.ghbook.ir/index.php?option=com_dbook&task=viewbook&book_id=8309&lang=fa

There are several reasons for the significance of NB among Shiʿi and Sunni scholars, demonstrated by its numerous interpretations. First, according to almost all Shiʿi scholars, and some Sunni ones as well, all of NB is the word of Imam ʿAlī, as discussed above. Being the first Shiʿi Imam who is divinely appointed and inspired by God, Imam ʿAlī's words carry much meaning and religious implementations. Even among Sunni scholars, being the fourth Caliph and the Gate to the City of Knowledge,[184] Imam ʿAlī holds special reverence. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the leader of the Ḥanbalī rite, says, "None of the companions [of the Prophet] have as many merits as what was said [by the Prophet] about ʿAlī,"[185] and he even wrote a book on the merits of Imam ʿAlī.[186] Also, al-Nisāʾī, the author of the famous *Sunan*, one of the six major books of Sunni *ḥadīth*, wrote *Khaṣāʾis Amir al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, a book devoted exclusively to Prophetic traditions about the merits of Imam ʿAlī.[187]

Second, the eloquence of the words of Imam ʿAlī found in NB are intriguing. As indicated above, many scholars are fascinated by his style, language, and ability to capture the audience and his skillful interwoven use of the Qurʾān in his prayers and sermons that flow so smoothly and make his words even more powerful. For example, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says about the first paragraph of

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[184] As per the Prophetic tradition, "I am the City of Knowledge and ʿAlī is its Gate. Whosoever seeks Knowledge, let him come through the Gate." Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol.3, p. 137; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (2009). *Al-Ṣawāʾiq al-Muḥriqah fil-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Bidaʿ wal-Zandaqah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah (DKI), p. 189.

[185] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (2009). *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqah fil-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Biaʿ wal-Zandaqah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah (DKI), p. 186.

[186] Ibn Ḥanbal (2005). *Faḍāʾil Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Qum: Markaz al-Ṭibāʿah wal-Nashr lil-Majmaʿ al-ʿĀlamī li-Ahlilbayt ʿalaihim assalam

[187] Nisāʾī (1986). *Khaṣāʾṣ Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Kuwait: Maktabat al-Muʿallā. The book was translated into English by Michael Mumisa. Ibn al-Athīr narrates that Nisāʾī was killed because of this book.

the *Shiqshaqiyyah* sermon, the third sermon in NB, that it contains ten examples of eloquence never used before.[188] In addition to his eloquence, the Imam spoke sincerely which made his sermons have an everlasting effect that touches the hearts of people.[189]

Third, NB contains many diverse topics such as theology, history, admonishment, politics, philosophy, and more. Thus, academic analyses of these different aspects may shed light on important historical contexts of that era, insights into people's way of thinking and psychology, political systems of justice and eradication of poverty, and other concepts.

Finally, Islamic theology occupied the minds of Muslim theologians for centuries and continues to do so until today. NB contains many theological discussions. As such, this thesis aims to be the first major work to demonstrate that NB contains a complete corpus of Shiʿi Imamī theology. Imam ʿAlī's discussions and sermons on *tawḥīd*, *ʿadālah*, *nubuwwah*, *Imamah* and *maʿād*, represent the essence of Shiʿi belief. This is in line with Murtaḍā's affirmation that all Shiʿi theology is learned from Imam ʿAlī. While the term *ʿilm al-kalām*, or the study of and discussions about Islamic theology, was not coined at the time of Imam ʿAlī, he is still considered to be its founder. As mentioned earlier, in the section defending *kalām*, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1112) states, "And the first who established discussions against the innovators to bring them to the truth was ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him."[190] This is of extreme significance as it

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[188] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 63-64.
[189] See for example Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's comments about sermon 216 of NB, which discusses Imam ʿAlī's interpretation of Sūrat al-Takāthur, vol. 11, p. 57.
[190] Al-Ghazālī, M. (2005). *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, p. 113-114.

demonstrates that theological discussions were not adopted from Christian influence, but rather are the core of Islam.[191] Moreover, it also shows that Imam ʿAlī started the Islamic discussions about God, His attributes, His creation, and about Prophets, Imams, the Day of Resurrection, as well as addressing issues about predeterminism and free will decades before any other Islamic scholar. It is commonly stated that Muslims did not start talking about these concepts until the second and third Islamic centuries;[192] however, NB shows that Imam ʿAlī discussed such complicated questions long before then. In addition, his style is similar to that of the Qurʾān, which shows that he does not depart from its teachings.

The study of the theology of NB will be done in six chapters. The second chapter will discuss the state of *kalām* in the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries. This will be accomplished through an analysis and critique of Martin McDermott's *The Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd* (1978), and *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Būyid Shīʿism: The Contribution of Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā* by Hussein Ali Abdulsater (2013). It will be argued that Shiʿi scholars in that era were not influenced by Muʿtazilī thoughts but rather the opposite is true. Moreover, the rich topics discussed by Mufīd and Murtaḍā provide a good understanding of the theological debates of that era. Understanding the discussions that were taking place at that time may help shed some light on

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[191] Both Cook, M.A. (1980). The Origins of "Kalām." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, No. 43(1), p. 32-43; and, Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 182-186, suggest that Islamic theological discussions had a Christian influence.

[192] Ansari, H. (2009). ʿIlm Al-Kalām fīl-Islām. Al-Khiṭāb wal-tārīkh. *Al-Masār*, No. 10(3), p. 63–120; Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 182-186.

the compilation of NB, and aid in understanding Raḍī's attempt at bridging classical traditions with logical reasoning.

The next chapter will investigate *tawḥīd*, or the belief in One God, His attributes and His Knowledge, according to Imam ʿAlī. This will be accomplished using parts of the first sermon of NB that discusses God and His attributes. It will be demonstrated that a complete corpus of *tawḥīd* is presented by Imam ʿAlī, and careful analysis of his words show the basis for Imamī *tawḥīd*.

Chapter four will explore two important concepts associated with God's divine justice or *ʿadālah*: free will and predetermination. Imam ʿAlī's description of free will and predetermination will be explored from his discussion in the Short Words of Wisdom, Number 73. NB also briefly touches on other aspects commonly associated with *ʿadālah* that were discussed in the fourth Islamic century such as evil, and ability (*istiṭāʿah*). This may further suggest that discussions on divine justice (*ʿadālah*) found in NB are those of Imam ʿAlī as they pre-date and are different in style to the kind of discussions taking place in the fourth Islamic century. Moreover, this chapter will be somewhat different from the other chapters as it will only contain few quotations from NB and will not consist of a comprehensive discussion of the topics of *ʿadālah* discussed in the fourth Islamic century. It will rather focus on what NB states about free will, predetermination, evil, and ability.

Chapter five will examine *nubūwah*, also known as the belief in prophets and in their scriptures and missions. The discussions about *nubūwah* found in NB will be divided in seven main topics

that will be explained in the introduction of the chapter. It will be demonstrated that prophets are impeccable and infallible.

The sixth chapter will explore the Imamate, or divinely appointed succession. It will also be shown that Imams are also impeccable and infallible, and that they get their knowledge from God. Moreover, Imam ʿAlī's right of leadership, *khilāfah*, will also be discussed. This will be accomplished using excerpts from sermons 1, 2, 3 and 192, as well as some of the sentences appearing in letter number 28.

The seventh chapter will investigate the belief in *maʿād*, or the belief in the Day of Resurrection and eschatology. Imam ʿAlī makes continuous references to the Hereafter and repeatedly states that he will not commit any injustice in this short life at the expense of the eternal life. Hence, the believe in the Hereafter will be explored through excerpts of sermons 28 and 220, and the impact of such belief on one's life will be discussed.

The copy of NB that will be used and quoted throughout the thesis is the one published in the city of Najaf by the holy shrine of Imam ʿAlī (*al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAlawiyyah al-Muqaddasah*) in 2015, edited by Sayyid Hāshim al-Mīlānī. Moreover, the main interpretations of NB that will be used in this work are the following: Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, al-Khūʾī, Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī, and the recently published book *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah* by Ṣādiq al-Mūsawī. These interpretations will be used for the reasons described earlier in Section 1.5.1. All sermons will be translated by the author or, when indicated, will be adapted from *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul-Balagha*. Ed. Al-Jibouri, Y.T.

(2009). New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾān, Inc. Qurʾānic verses will be adapted from The Qurʾān, translated by ʿAlī Quli Qaraʾi, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾān, Inc.

This study will utilize a textual analysis of the words of Imam ʿAlī in NB, with an attempt at looking in the texts and studying the meaning to possibly seek new interpretations of the sermons. Rhetorical figures and metaphors will be investigated and compared to those with the Qurʾān. This methodology is more closely related to Skinner's conventionalism[193] since the words of the Imam will be compared to the Qurʾān. In addition, the state of *kalām* in the third and fourth Islamic centuries will be reviewed because that is the era in which NB was compiled. However, for the purpose of our discussions, NB will be considered to be the words of Imam ʿAlī, and the text will be analyzed in the context of its relevance to the Qurʾān and how it is comprised of a complete theological system. As indicated above, according to Raḍī and all his contemporary scholars, NB consists of the words of Imam ʿAlī. Raḍī selected these sermons, letters and words of wisdom as they are useful for his time, since they represent a certain style that is attractive to people, and they contain theology that presents the Shiʿi ideology. Moreover, NB resembles the living words of Imam ʿAlī; rather, they present the Imam himself. Despite his death, Imam ʿAlī's lovers and followers feel his presence over the centuries through his words and examples. In the words of Shah-Kazemi, "The fact that these teachings have been so significant for an entire spiritual tradition means that they cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of their documented historicity. For those seeking meaning within the tradition, spiritual profundity is clearly far more

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[193] Bevir, M (Oct. 2000). The role of contexts in understanding and explanation. *Human Studies*, vol. 23(4), p. 395-411.

important a criterion than historical exactitude."[194] He quotes ʿAllama Ṭabṭābāʾī's saying about NB, "In order to understand what it contains, it is best to take it phenomenologically, that is to say, according to its explicit intention; whoever holds the pen, it is the Imam who speaks. It is to this it owes its influence."[195] Imam ʿAlī says, "Consider not who said a thing, rather, look at what he said."[196] Thus, for the purpose of this work, whenever it is stated that NB says, it is inferred that Imam ʿAlī says, and vice versa. The words of Imam ʿAlī will be taken in congruency of the Qur'ān, in an attempt to demonstrate that his methodology in *kalām* is in alignment with the Qur'ān. This will, in essence, show that Shiʿi theology predates other schools of *kalām* and will also bring to fruition the complete corpus of theology presented by Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in NB.

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[194] Shah-Kazemi, R (2006). *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ʿAlī*. New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, p. 4.
[195] Ibid, p. 5.
[196] Al-Jāḥiẓ (2013). *One Hundred Proverbs from the Words of the Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*. Trans. Tahera Qutbuddin. New York: New York University Press, p. 224.

Chapter 2: **MUʿTAZILĪ AND SHIʿI THOUGHT IN THE FOURTH ISLAMIC CENTURY**

2.1 Introduction

The third and fourth Islamic centuries witnessed numerous theological debates. The Ashʿarī school consolidated its doctrine, including pre-determinism, with Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936) and his *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*.[197] Similar views were held by Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767),[198] but the ideologies were shaped and expressed by al-Ashʿarī.[199]

The Muʿtazilī school, conventionally ascribed to Waṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748) and ʿAmr ibn ʿUbaid (d. 144/761), became divided into the Baṣran school and the Baghdādī one. The Baṣran branch matured further with Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915) and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933) as well as al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025). The Baghdādī Muʿtazila school was established by Bishr ibn al-Muʿtamir (d. 210/825)[200] and was later headed by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Khayyaṭ (d. 290/903) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī (d. 317/929).[201]

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[197] *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. Ed. in Chief Richard C. Martin. New York: MacMillan, vol. 1, p. 82-84.

[198] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, p. 43-4.

[199] There does not exist any evidence that Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī was directly influenced by Abū Ḥanīfah; however, it is important to note here that there were influential individuals who lived long before al-Ashʿarī who stated similar views of predeterminism.

[200] van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom. Boston: Brill, vol. 3, p. 115.

[201] Al-Khayyūn, R. (1997). *Muʿtazilat al-Baṣrah wa Baghdad*. London: Dār al-Ḥikmah; *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1913-1938). Leiden: E.J. Brill, vol. 2, p. 787-793. Retrieved from
https://ia801603.us.archive.org/2/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.529973/2015.529973.encyclopaedia-of.pdf

The Imamī school is divided into three main rites that are all surviving today: Zaydīs, Ismailīs as well as the Shiʿi Ithnā-Asharī (twelver), with the latter being the largest of the three. The Twelver Imamī school experienced the major occultation of the twelfth Imam, al-Mahdī, in 329/940, who ordered his followers before his occultation to refer to God-fearing scholars for religious matters.[202] The Imamī school quickly adjusted to the occultation of the twelfth Imam, relying on the derivation of Islamic laws, also known as *uṣūl al-fiqh*, based on foundations established by the Shiʿi Imams themselves, especially in cases where a clear law does not exist from the Qurʾān and traditions. Imamī scholars then engaged in theological discussions with Muʿtazilī leaders about fundamental concepts such as *tawḥid* and *Imamah*, with added attention to the importance of the Imam even when in occultation.[203]

The Būyids era, from 322-454/933-1066, encouraged scholars from different schools of thought to freely express their opinions. Leading scholars from different schools wrote about their beliefs and various opinions of other scholars, indicating their involvement and awareness of the diversity.[204] Especially important and relevant to this work were discussions between Muʿtazilī

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[202] Ṣadūq (2004). *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Niʿmah*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusain al-Aʿlamī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 440.

[203] Sachedina, A. (1978). A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam. *Studia Islamica*, No. 48, p. 109-124; Ṣadūq (2004). *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Niʿmah*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusain al-Aʿlamī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī. In fact, Ṣadūq wrote this book to specifically address the necessity for the Imam even while in occultation, citing the occultation of some prophets as examples.

[204] Marcinkowski, M.I. (2001). Rapprochement and Fealty during the Būyids and Early Saljūqs: The Life and Times of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. *Islamic Studies*, vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 273-296; Ali, A. H. (2007). Imamite Rationalism in the Buyid era. Unpublished Masters dissertation, McGill University; Ansari, H., & Schmidtke, S. (2017). Al-Šayḫ al-Ṭūsī: His Writings on Theology and Their Reception. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press, p. 311-330.

and Shiʿi Ithna Asharī scholars.[205] The significance of these discussions stems from claims that those two schools are related. Moreover, it is also suggested that early Shiʿi scholars are influenced by Muʿtazilī thought.[206] Careful analysis of the two schools, however, demonstrates they were fundamentally distinct. They differed on the most vital issue of Imamah, and other views such God and His attributes, as well as the concept of free will and predestination in human actions.[207] More notable, however, is the fact that it is during this era of heated debates between these two schools of thought that al-Raḍī compiled NB.

This chapter will attempt to explore the state of *kalām* in the third and fourth Islamic centuries with special attention to Muʿtazilī and Imamī *kalām*. At first, it will look into the beginning of *kalām*. It will then review the twelver Imamī school of thought, reviewing its rich historiography. To explore Shiʿi and Muʿtazilī discussions, two works will be examined: *Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd* by Martin McDermott,[208] and *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Būyid Shīʿism: The Contribution of Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā* by Hussein Ali Abdulsater.[209] The premise of these two works is that early Shiʿi scholars were influenced by Muʿtazilī thought, which will be discussed

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[205] Ansari, H., Schimdtke, S. (2017). The Twelver Šīʿī Reception of Muʿtazilism. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta: Lockwood Press.

[206] McDermott, M.J. (1978). *The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*. Beirut: Dār El-Machreq Éditeurs; Abdulsater, H.A. (2013). *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Būyid Shīʿism: The Contribution of Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā*. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University.

[207] Madelung, W (1968). Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology, in T. Fahd (ed.). *Le Shīʿism Imamite. Colloque de Strasbourg*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p. 13-29. Some of these differences will be discussed in later chapters.

[208] McDermott, M.J. (1978). The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd. Beirut: Dār El-Machreq Éditeurs.

[209] Abdulsater, H.A. (2013). *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Būyid Shīʿism: The Contribution of Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā*. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University. Also, Abdulsater, H.A. (2017). Shiʿi Doctrine, Muʿtazili theology. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

throughout the chapter. Moreover, topics of discussion from Mufīd and Murtaḍā listed by these two works, respectively, indicate areas of theological debates that were taking place at that time. Realizing the kinds of discussions about God and His attributes will help pave the way for the next chapter where *tawḥīd* will be discussed as per the teachings of NB.

2.2 *Kalām*

The word *kalām* is from the root word, *kallama*, which literally means "to talk". Talk about theology such as epistemology, eschatology, prophethood and divinely appointed leadership (*Imamah*) became known as ʿ*ilm al-kalām*, or the science of theology. It is suggested that *kalām* arose around the second Islamic century in Baṣra and Baghdad, just before ʿAbbasid rulers encouraged the translation of Greek science, medicine and philosophy into Arabic.[210] Theological discussions were presented in the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728).[211] Two other names appear at around the same time: Maʿbad al-Juhanī (d. 80/699) and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 106/724) who propagated the concept of free will, and were both killed.[212] Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d.

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[210] Sabra, A. I. (2009). The Simple Ontology of Kalām Atomism: An Outline. *Early Science and Medicine*, Vol. 14, No. 1/3, Evidence and Interpretation: Studies on Early Science and Medicine in Honor of John E. Murdoch, p. 68-78; Ansari, H. (2009). ʿIlm Al-Kalām fīl-Islām. Al-Khiṭāb wal-tārīkh. *Al-Masār*, No. 10(3), p. 63–120; Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 182-186; van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom. Boston: Brill, vol. 2.

[211] Al-Baṣrī was an antagonist of Imam ʿAlī who did not fight against the Imam in any battle but criticized the Imam's wars. The Imam described him as, "Indeed, each community has a Sāmirī [one who misguides it, just as the Sāmirī misguided the tribe of Prophet Mūsā as per verses 85 and 87 of Sūrat Ṭāhā (20)] and this is the Sāmirī of this nation." Sayyid Ṣādiq Al-Shīrāzī (2015). *Politics the very Heart of Islam*. Trans. Salim Rossier. Unknown: Fountain Books, p. 138.

[212] van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 83; Muṭahharī, M. (1992). *Al-Kalām wal-ʿIrfān*. Trans. ʿAlī Khāzim. Beirut: al-Dār al-Islāmiyyah Publishers, p. 10-11.

131/748) was initially a student of Abū Hāshim, the son of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, who is the son of Imam ʿAlī,[213] and then joined al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. It is Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ and his brother-in-law, ʿAmr ibn ʿUbaid (d. 144/761) who left the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and founded the Muʿtazilī school of thought.

However, careful examination of NB indicates that Imam ʿAlī is the father of *kalām* as there are numerous theological questions about God, His attributes, free will and predetermination (*qadar*) existing in NB. These questions emerged shortly after the death of Prophet Muḥammad, and in many instances, Imam ʿAlī replied using logical, rational answers. For example, when a man asked Imam ʿAlī, "How did you recognize your Lord?" he replied, "I recognized God, the Exalted, through alteration of determinations, change of my intentions, and negation of mettle. When I decide [to do something] but my decision is not carried out, and when I am determined [on doing something] but my determination is deterred by [God's] decree, then I learnt the Planner is other than me."[214] In this example, Imam ʿAlī used a purely logical response to the question, not quoting any verses of the Qurʾān nor any Prophetic tradition. In a different sermon where he describes the angel of death and the way in which he takes possession of the soul, he states, "Do you feel him when he enters a house? Or do you see him when he takes one's soul? Rather, how does he take the soul of the foetus in the womb of the mother? Does he enter to him from some of her organs? Or does the soul respond to him by the command of its Lord? Or

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[213] Murtaḍā. *Amālī*. vol. 1, p. 164-165; Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Edito Creps International, vol. 1, p. 12.
[214] Al-Mūsawī, Ṣ (1993). *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Islamiyyah, p.418.

does he live with (the foetus) inside her womb? How can one describe His God, when he cannot even describe a creation [of God] like him?!"[215] As such, Imam ʿAlī used rational examples to discuss such concepts as the existence or description of God, and hence, he may be considered as the founder of *ʿilm al-kalām*.

It is noteworthy here to mention that a group of Muslim scholars, the most prominent of them were Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah, were against *kalām* and supported the exclusive use of the Qurʾān and traditions, *sunnah*, instead of *kalām*.[216] This group, known as the traditionalist, *ahl al-ḥadīth* or *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, also recognized as *ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah*, or adherents of right practice and communal solidarity, criticized those who used *kalām*, the rationalists, calling them *ahl al-raʾy* or *aṣḥāb al-raʾy*.[217] Regardless, however, according to Ansari, *kalām* or *ʿilm al-kalām* in Islam was established to defend the religion, something which all Muslims agree about its significance. Thus, many Muslims scholars viewed *kalām* as an accepted practice by *ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah*, including the influential thinker, al-Ghazālī.[218] In fact, al-Ghazālī declared Imam ʿAlī as the founder of *kalām*, which was the same view held by Murtaḍā as well.[219]

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[215] NB, sermon 111, p. 210.

[216] Melchert, C. (1997). The Adversaries of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. *Arabica, 44*(2), 234-253; Makdisi, G. (1979). The Significance of Sunni Schools of Law in Islamic Religious History. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (1), p. 1-8.

[217] Makdisi, G. (1979). The Significance of Sunni Schools of Law in Islamic Religious History. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (1), p. 1-8; Crone, P. (2005). The Ḥadīth Party. In *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, p. 125-142; Ansari, H. (2009). ʿIlm Al-Kalām fīl-Islām. Al-Khiṭāb wal-tārīkh. *Al-Masār*, No. 10(3), p. 102.

[218] Ansari, H. (2009). ʿIlm Al-Kalām fīl-Islām. Al-Khiṭāb wal-tārīkh. *Al-Masār*, No. 10(3), p. 102-105.

[219] Al-Ghazālī, M. (2005). *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, p. 113-114; Murtaḍā (1954). *Amālī*. Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍil Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyyah, vol.1, p. 148.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258) also asserted that Imam ʿAlī was the first to discuss theology and *kalām* when he said, "And you are aware that the most honourable of sciences is the knowledge about the Divine (*al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*) because the honour of the science is gained from the honour of what is studied, and His existence is the best of all. Therefore, it is the best of sciences. And it [theology and *kalām*] was gained from his words [Imam ʿAlī], peace be upon him (*ʿalaihi assalam*), and from him it was narrated, and to him is its source."[220]

The significance of this rests in demonstrating several points. First, theological discussions started in the early Islamic century, shortly after the death of Prophet Muḥammad. Second, Shiʿi scholars were not influenced by the Muʿtazila due to their use of reason and deductive thinking as such a rational approach is applied by the Qur'ān and Shiʿi Imams, including Imam ʿAlī in NB.[221] Even dialectical methodology, which is attributed to Christian theology, can be found in the Qur'ān and the words of Imam ʿAlī. See, for example, 2:111, 6:37, and 10:38.[222] Ṣadūq narrates a discussion that took place in Masjid al-Kūfa as to why Amīr al-Mu'minīn did not dispute the Caliphate with the three who preceded him: Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān, as he did with Ṭalḥa, Zubair, ʿĀyishah and Muʿāwiyah. When he heard of the question, he ordered people be gathered, and inquired from them about whether or not they were discussing this issue. People then

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[220] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Edito Creps International, vol. 1, p. 12.

[221] For a more detailed analysis on this concept see Ali, A.H. (2007). *Imamite Rationalism in the Buyid Era*. Unpublished MA dissertation, McGill University.

[222] "And they say, 'No one shall enter Paradise except he who is Jewish or Christian.' This is their hope. Say, 'Bring your proof if you are truthful'," (2:111); "And they said, 'If only a sign is sent down to him from his Lord. Say, 'Indeed God is capable of sending down a sign but the majority of them do not believe'," (6:37); "Or do they say he forged it. Say, 'come up with one chapter like it, and call whoever you can other than God if you are truthful'," (10:38).

affirmed that they were having such a conversation. He then addressed the question in a dialectical method, as follows,

I have examples in the traditions of the prophets. God, the Exalted, says in His book, "Indeed, in the tradition of the Messenger of God is a virtuous example for you," (33:21). They asked, "Who are the prophets, O Amīr al-Mu'minīn?" He replied, "The first of them is Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*) when he said to his people, "I shall keep away from you and from what you worship other than God," (19:48). So if you were to say that Abraham kept away from his people without a harm he encountered from them then you would have deviated (*kafartum*); and if you were to say he kept away from them due to the harm he received from them, then the successor of the Prophet (*al-waṣī*) is more excused [in keeping away]. I also have in his cousin, Lot (*Lūṭ*) an example when he said to his people, "If I had the power to suppress you, or I shall have to recourse to a strong support," (11:80). So, if you were to say that Lot had the power [to suppress them, but he did not], then you have deviated; and if you say that he did not have the power, then the successor of the Prophet is more excused. I also have an example in Joseph (Yūsuf) when he said, "My Lord! Prison is more beloved to me that what they are calling me for," (12:33). So if you were to say that Joseph called his Lord and asked for the prison because He [God] was unpleased with him, then you have deviated; and if you say that he chose prison so He would not become unpleased with him, then the successor of the Prophet is more excused. I also have an example in Moses (*Mūsā*) when he said, "I ran away from you when I feared you," (26:21). So, if you were to say that he ran away without fear he had from them, then you would have deviated; and if you say he feared them, then the successor of the Prophet is more excused. I also have an example in my brother Aaron (*Hārūn*), when he said to his brother, "O son of my mother! Indeed, the people weakened me, and they were about to kill me," (9:150). So if you were to say that they did not weaken him, nor were they about to kill him, then you have deviated; and if you say they weakened him and almost killed him, and for that reason he kept quiet about [what they did], then the successor of the Prophet is more excused. I also have an example in Muḥammad, God's blessings be bestowed upon him and his family, when he ran away from his people and went to the cave of his fear of them, and he made me sleep on his bed. So, if you were to say that he ran away from his people not due to him fearing them then you would have deviated, and if you say he feared them, and he made me sleep on his bed and he went to the

cave out of his fear of them, then the successor of the Prophet is more excused [in doing what he did].[223]

Thus, when Shiʿi scholars implement such rational, and even dialectical, approaches, they are justified in doing so, based on the teachings of their Imams.

Third, with Imam ʿAlī being the father and master of *kalām* it suggests that all those who practiced *kalām*, were influenced, either directly or indirectly by his teachings and approach.

It is claimed that what Shiʿi Imams intended by theology was *tawḥīd* or *ʿilm al-tawḥīd* and never *kalām*.[224] Moreover, it is also stated that the Imams forbid their followers to engage in *kalām*.[225] However, this may be due to an incomplete reading of the text in *al-Kāfī*. According to a conversation between Imam al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shiʿi Imam, and Yūnus ibn Yaʿqūb, when a man from Syria (*Shāmī*) came to discuss with the Imam, Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "O Yūnus, if you were good at *kalām* then I would have let you discuss with him." Yūnus pondered, "What a regret!" and continued, "May I be sacrificed for you, I surely heard you forbidding people to engage in *kalām* and say, 'Woe to the people of *kalām*. They say, 'This leads [to the truth] and that does not, and this follows [to the truth] and that does not, and this is something we comprehend and that we do not'." Imam al-Ṣādiq then clarified, "What I said was, 'Woe to them if they leave what I say and go on to what they want [to say]'." The Imam then called upon some of his companions,

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[223] Ṣadūq (2006). *ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ*. Beirut: Dār al-Murtaḍā, vol. 1, p. 149-150.
[224] Amir-Moezzi, M.A. (1994). *Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight, Albany: State University of New York Press, p.27; Madelung, W (1968). Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology, in T. Fahd (ed.). *Le Shīʿism Imamite. Colloque de Strasbourg*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p. 13-29.
[225] Ibid.

such as Ḥumrān ibn Aʿyan, Muḥammad ibn Nuʿmān al- Aḥwal (also known as Muʾmin al-Ṭāq), Hishām ibn Sālim and Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam and asked them to debate the Syrian man.[226] What is apparent from this early Imamī tradition is that the Imams allowed *kalām*, as long as that it was based on their teachings. Moreover, they also forbade certain individuals from *kalām* because they were not qualified to engage in the discussion, not because *kalām* itself is forbidden. Early Shiʿi scholars, such as Shaykh al-Mufīd (henceforth Mufīd), are well aware of those discussions and he referred to them when engaging with Muʿtazilī theologians (*mutakallimīn*).[227] Therefore, Shiʿi Imams may be considered among the first *mutakallimīn*, encouraging those who they considered qualified of their followers, such as Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), to engage in *kalām*, but forbidding others from it because they were unfit to do so.

2.3 Twelver Shiʿi School

The Shiʿi school believes in the Imamate, divinely appointed successors to Prophet Muḥammad, starting with Imam ʿAlī. The Ithnā-ʿasharī, Twelver, Imamī school believes in twelve Imams succeeding Prophet Muḥammad, with the twelfth Imam being al-Mahdī (born 255/868). All Twelver Shiʿi s believe that al-Mahdī was born, went into occultation, and as per the tradition of Prophet Muḥammad, he will come at the end of time to fill this earth with justice as it will be

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[226] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 58, *hadīth* No. 3, p. 99-100.
[227] Mufīd. *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 71.

filled with tyranny and oppression.[228] It is the belief in the Imamate and in Imam ʿAlī as the divinely

appointed and first successor to Prophet Muḥammad that sets the Shiʿi belief aside from Sunnis.

Moreover, engagement of the followers of Imam ʿAlī, such as Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū Dharr al-

Ghifārī, ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, and Miqdād ibn al-Aswad, in defending the Imamate and Caliphate of

Imam ʿAlī made them among the first to establish theological discussions in support of *Imamate*,

and that is what branched Imamate as a separate root and pillar of religion.[229] In addition, they

were also among the early ones to be referred to as *Shiʿat ʿAlī*, or the followers of ʿAlī.[230] It is

noteworthy to mention that the term *Shīʿah* was given by the Prophet Muḥammad himself to the

followers of Imam ʿAlī,[231] which suggests that Shiʿism is not an ideology that was formulated in

later Islamic centuries; rather, it is the core of Islam itself, and the Imams were declared by the

Prophet himself as the source of guidance.[232]

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[228] Sachedina, A (1978). A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam. *Studia Islamica*, No. 48, p. 109-124.

[229] See *al-Iḥtijāj* for numerous discussions by those companions of Imam ʿAlī defending his Imamate and right to succession. Ṭabrisī (1983). *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj*. Beirut: Muʾassasat Al-Aʿlamī.

[230] Ibid.

[231] With regards to verse 7 in Sūrah al-Bayyinah, number 98, "Indeed, those who believe and perform virtuous deeds are the best of the creatures," Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) narrates from Jābir ibn ʿAbdillāh al-Anṣārī saying, "We were sitting with the Prophet and then ʿAlī came. The Prophet then said, "I swear by the One who has myself [God], surely him [Imam ʿAlī] and his followers (*Shiʿah*) are indeed the winners on the Day of Judgment. Then the verse, 'Indeed, those who believe and perform virtuous deeds are the best of the creatures,' was revealed. Thus, when the companions used to see ʿAlī they used to say, 'The best of the creatures has come'." He also narrates another tradition where the Prophet tells Imam ʿAlī after the verse was revealed, "It is you and your followers (*Shiʿah*) on the Day of Judgment pleased and pleasing." Al-Ṭūsī (1993). *Al-Amālī*. Ed. Qism al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah – Muʾassasat al-Biʿthah. Qum: Dār al-Thaqāfah, p. 251; Al-Suyūṭī (2011). *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, vol. 8, p. 589.

[232] Dakake, M.M. (2007). *The Charismatic Community*, New York: State University of New York Press, p. 1; Ṣadūq (2006). *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamī. Qum: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, vol. 1, p. 47-69; also, the Sunni scholar Sulaymān al-Ḥanafī al-Qundūzī (d. 1294/1877) narrates numerous prophetic traditions from several references about the Imams after the Prophet being twelve and the Prophet listed all their names from ʿAlī to al-Mahdī. Al-Qandūzī, S. (1992). *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*. Qum: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, vol. 1, p. 307 and vol. 2 p. 583-584.

Companions of the Imams, such as those mentioned above, always turned to their leadership for guidance. When it comes to theological discussions, Shiʿi scholars always sought assistance from their Imams for interpretations on questions about God and His attributes, Imamate, free will and many other topics that intrigued early Muslim scholars. They also acted within the framework and guidelines established by the Imams in addressing such matters. These questions and beliefs were also reflected on their views of humanity and impacted their social interactions.[233] Moreover, these early Shiʿi scholars, who were contemporary to the Imams, authored several books about *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the origin of jurisprudence, which is the derivation of Islamic laws based on the Qur'ān, traditions (*sunna*) of the Prophet and the Imams as well as the use of ʿaql, reason, only when it is based on the Qur'ān and the *sunna*. Among such scholars and their books are the following:

a. Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, student of sixth and seventh Shiʿi Imams, al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim, respectively, wrote *Kitāb al-Alfāẓ*, which is a book about language used by a religious jurist to derive religious laws;

b. Yūnus ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 203/818) wrote *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth wa Masā'ilih*;

c. Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAlī ibn Isḥāq ibn Abī Sahl ibn Nawbakht (d. 311/923), lived during the times of the tenth and eleventh Shiʿi Imams, al-Hādī and al-ʿAskarī, respectively, as well as the time

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[233] *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* by Ṣadūq and *al-Kāfī* by Kulaynī contain numerous accounts of Shiʿi scholars and individuals asking their Imams complex theological questions. Among such scholars were Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam's accounts with sixth and seventh Shiʿi Imams, al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim, respectively.

of the minor occultation of the twelfth Imam, wrote *al-Khuṣūṣ wa al-ʿUmūm* and *Ibṭāl al-Qiyās*; and

d. Al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. unknown but third Islamic century) wrote *al-Khuṣūṣ wa al-ʿUmūm* and *al-Khabar al-Wāḥid wa al-ʿAmal bihi*.[234]

Having such strong foundation in Islamic jurisprudence and basis for the derivation of Islamic laws, Imamī scholars continued studying Prophetic and Imamī traditions with the aim of deriving laws from them during the period of the minor occultation of the twelfth Shiʿi Imam, al-Mahdī, which lasted almost seventy years (260/874 to 329/940), and after his major occultation, which began in 329/940.

It is important to mention that some of the early Shiʿi scholars, who lived in areas that were predominantly Shiʿi populated, did not need to engage in theological discussions, unlike those who lived among scholars with different theological backgrounds. Such was al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Bābuwayh al-Qummī (henceforth Ṣadūq) (d. 381/991), who is known as a traditionalist (*muḥaddith*), or narrator of Prophetic and Imamī traditions, *ḥadīth*. While in Qum, a predominantly Shiʿi community, he did not need to engage in much theological discussions. Upon moving to Rayy, however, he was forced to get involved with Muʿtazilī theologians, and in

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[234] Modarressi, H. (2003). *Tradition and Survival - A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shiite Literature*. Oxford: Oneworld. In his *Rationalism and Traditionalism*, Hossein Modarressi starts the list of early books on Shiʿi jurisprudence with Mufīd's *al-Tadhkirah bi-uṣūl al-fiqh*. Modarressi, H. (1984). Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shiʿi Jurisprudence: A Preliminary Survey. *Studia Islamica*, No. 59, p. 141-158. Subḥānī, J. (n.d.). *Awḍāʾ ʿalā ʿAqāʾid al-Shīʿah al-Imāmiyyah*. Retrieved from
http://shiaweb.org/shia/aqaed_12/pa33.html citing al-Najāshī's *Rijāl* and al-Ṭūsī's *al-Fihrist*, as well as *al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm.

fact, wrote *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* to defend Shiʿi belief against anthropomorphism and predetermination. Although he was opposed to *kalām*, yet the structure of the work reflects contemporary *kalām* works.[235] On the other hand, Mufīd (d. 413/1022), and his student, Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) lived in Baghdad, which was a metropolitan city composed of great Muʿtazilī scholars such al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) and al-Rummanī (d. 384/994). As such, Mufīd and Murtaḍā were in constant debates and discussions with Muʿtazilī scholars and had to use Muʿtazilī-based discourse to refute their arguments.[236] This is why it was claimed that Mufīd and Murtaḍā were influenced by Muʿtazilī thought,[237] or as van Ess stated about Murtaḍā that he was both "Shīʿite and Muʿtazilite."[238]

2.4 Mufīd and Muʿtazilī Influence

One major work, claiming the influence of the Baghdadī Muʿtazilī school on Mufīd is the *Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd* by Martin McDermott.[239] In this work, the author explores the contribution of Mufīd to the development of Imamī Shiʿi theology, in comparison to that of Muʿtazilī thought. He also compares the system of Mufīd with that of his predecessor, Ṣadūq, as well as his student and successor, Murtaḍā. The author tries to demonstrate Mufīd's shift from the traditionalist,

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[235] See Ansari, H., Schimdtke, S. (2017). The Twelver Šīʿī Reception of Muʿtazilism. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta: Lockwood Press; McDermott. *Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*, 13, 315–369.

[236] Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (n.d.). *Al-Ḥikāyāt*. Retrieved from http://shiaonlinelibrary.com

[237] Ansari, H., Schimdtke, S. (2017). The Twelver Šīʿī Reception of Muʿtazilism. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta: Lockwood Press, p. 298.

[238] van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 422.

[239] McDermott, M.J. (1978). *The Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd*. Beirut: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs.

juristic position of his teacher to one that is more influenced by the Baghdadī Muʿtazilī school, while his pupil, Murtaḍā tends to be influenced by the Basran Muʿtazilī school in his theology, changing position from his teacher. Hence, the author divides the book in three parts, where, in the first part, he examines the theology of Mufīd against that of the Basran Muʿtazilī, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who was the dominant Muʿtazilī scholar during his time. In the second and third part of the book, a comparison is made between Mufīd and his predecessor, Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), and his student and successor, Murtaḍā, respectively.

The author attributes the start of a Muʿtazilī influence in Imamī thought to Mufīd and his pupils, namely Murtaḍā and Ṭusī (d. 460/1067). He appears to be driving the point that Imamī scholars depended on Muʿtazilī theologians on the development of Imamī theology. This idea is also stated by Madelung,[240] and others;[241] however, it is not recent and has been mentioned by several authors such as the well-known Shiʿi critic, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328),[242] and al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1374) who describes Murtaḍā as, "[Of] the intelligent devout believers (*awliyā'*), who was well versed in theology and Muʿtazilī theology (*Iʿtizāl*), and literature and poetry, but he is a staunch Imamī. We ask God for forgiveness."[243]

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[240] Madelung, W (1968). Imamism and Muʿtazilite Theology, in T. Fahd (ed.). *Le Shīʿism Imamite. Colloque de Strasbourg*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p. 13-29.

[241] For a good reference see Ali, A.H. (2007). *Imamite Rationalism in the Buyid Era*. Unpublished MA dissertation, McGill University.

[242] Ibn Taymiyyah (1986). *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah*. (n.p.), vol. 1, p. 70.

[243] Al-Dhahabī (1996). *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*. Ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ and Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿIrqsūsī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, vol. 17, p. 589.

The list of theological topics mentioned by Mufīd suggests the kinds of discussions that were taking place at that time. Some of the topics mentioned include: man's first obligation; how the obligation is known; basis of moral obligation; man's best interests; God's help; God's irresistible help; God as Knowing, Hearer, Seer and Willing; God as Speaker, and God's justice.

2.4.1 Mufīd and Baṣran Muʿtazilī Influence

In the first part of the work, McDermott uses selective works of Mufīd, ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ashʿarī to convince the reader that Mufīd's system appears to be influenced by Baghdadī Muʿtazilī thought but differs from the Baṣrans'. Mufīd's thought is shown to be in agreement with Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī (d. 317/929), a leading Baghdadī Muʿtazilī, but in contrast to Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915) and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933) as well as al-Qaḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024), who are among the leaders of the Baṣran Muʿtazila. A wide range of theological topics are discussed in this part of the study, including, but not limited to, moral obligation and the role of reason, man's best interests and God's help, prophecy, Imamate, God's attributes, and others, where in each topic, Mufīd's ideas are put forth referencing some of his works such as *Taṣḥīḥ Iʿtiqādāt al-Imamiyyah* and *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*. His system is then compared to Baghdadī and Baṣran Muʿtazila, using references such as ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, *al-Muḥīṭ bil-Taklīf*, and *al-Mughnī*, as well as al-Ashʿarī's *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyīn*. The work is very detailed and gives a good indication of the state of *kalām* in the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries.

It has been suggested that *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* is the commentary, *taʿlīq*, of Abū al-Ḥusayn

Aḥmad ibn Abī Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Qazwīnī, Mānkdīm Shashdīw (d. 425/1034) the Zaydī thinker

on the lost *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* of ʿAbd al-Jabbār.[244]

The main argument that is repeatedly stated, or implied by the author throughout the text, is

that Mufīd is influenced by the Muʿtazila. This idea is introduced from the first page where the

author quotes Anawati stating that Shiʿi theologians depended on Muʿtazilite *kalām*.[245] Several

such examples exist throughout the book. For example, when talking about moral obligation and

the role of reason, the author states, "Here he would be influenced by Abu l-Qāsim al-Balkhī,"

who was a Baghdadī Muʿtazilī.[246] Going to man's best interests and God's help, he adds that

Mufīd's views are "keeping with the view of the Baghdad school."[247] In his discussion of Mufīd's

theology on Imamate, the author says, "And he defends the occultation of the twelfth Imam by

using the Muʿtazilī doctrine of best interests. This means that al-Mufīd's blend of Muʿtazilism and

Shiʿi theology is more than a mere adoption of the doctrines of God's Unity of Justice."[248]

Moreover, while discussing God's attributes, the author states, "Al-Mufīd's doctrine on the

attributes is a rejection of Abū Hāshim's refinement and a return to the position of the elder al-

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[244] Thomas, D. (2010). Taʿlīq Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa. In *Christian-Muslim Relations 600 - 1500*. Ed. David Thomas. Retrieved from http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1877-8054_cmri_COM_22587; and Thomas, D. (2010). Mānkdīm Shashdīw. In *Christian-Muslim Relations 600 - 1500*. Ed. David Thomas. Retrieved from http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1877-8054_cmri_COM_22586. For the purpose of this thesis, the *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* will be attributed to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, as it is his opinions that are stated.
[245] McDermott, M.J. (1978). *The Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd*. Beirut: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, p. 1.
[246] Ibid, p. 67.
[247] Ibid, p. 73-74.
[248] Ibid, p. 132.

Jubbā'ī, who al-Balkhī also followed."[249] These are a few of such examples that are found

throughout the book, where the author claims Muʿtazilī influence on Mufīd.

2.4.2 Arguments Against Mufīd Being Influenced by Muʿtazilī Thought

There are two drawbacks in claiming Muʿtazilī influence on Mufīd: deductive and textual,

resulting in a method of analysis that is subjective and selective as will be explained below.

When discussing Mufīd's system, not once does the author consider that the Imamī doctrine is

over a century older than the founders of Muʿtazilites and Ashāʿrites, and hence, it is them who

may have been influenced by Imamī *kalām*. For example, when discussing *ʿiṣma*, or impeccability,

the author indicates that the Muʿtazilites differ significantly from the Ashāʿrites in that they see

the prophet's credibility cannot be compromised by him committing a sin.[250] This idea is discussed

by Imam al-Riḍā (d. 203/811), the eighth Shiʿi Imam, in his response to the ʿAbbasid Caliph, al-

Ma'mūn (d. 218/833), when addressing his questions about the impeccability of the prophets.[251]

Imam al-Riḍā was in al-Ma'mūn's court from the years 201-203/809-811, over a century before

ʿAbd al-Jabbār, al-Jubbā'ī and al-Ashʿarī. Moreover, some of the leaders of Muʿtazilī thought used

to frequent the court of al-Ma'mūn, such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 235/840), and it may be

plausible that they heard the arguments of Imam al-Riḍā or some of his companions and may

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[249] Ibid, p. 139.
[250] Ibid, p. 99.
[251] Ṭabrasī (1983). *Al-Iḥtijāj*. Beirut: Mu'assasat Al-Aʿlamī, p. 426-431.

have been influenced by them.[252] In addition, Mufīd was certainly aware of such traditions, which existed in Ṣadūq's *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. As such, deducing that Mufīd was influenced by the Muʿtazilites of Baghdad neglects the fact that he is influenced by the traditions of the Imams who came long before the Muʿtazilite leaders of the third and fourth Islamic centuries. In fact, the author states that ʿAbd al-Jabbār is of the opinion that man's first obligation is to reason to the knowledge of God.[253] The author then quotes Mufīd stating a tradition by Imam al-Ṣādiq on which he bases his views that man's first moral obligation is to know God.[254] This example suggests that Mufīd is not influenced by the Muʿtazilites in his theology, but rather he is stating his arguments on the basis of the teachings of Shiʿi Imams, who he firmly believes in their divinely inspired knowledge and in their impeccability.

The method used by the author is also very subjective. Reading the original texts the author references, one can see a strong Imamī, and not Muʿtazilī influence on Mufīd. For example, the title of one of the sections in Mufīd's *Awāi'l al-Maqālāt* is "What I chose as part of the principles as per what is in agreement with what the traditions narrated from the Imams of guidance of the progeny of Muḥammad (*sallā Allāhu ʿalaihī wa ālihī wa sallam*) and mentioning who agrees with that from the people of the doctrines."[255] The title itself suggests that Mufīd keeps the teachings

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[252] Mufīd mentions some encounters between Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf and Abū al- Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Maytham who was one of the companions of Imam al-Riḍā. Moreover, he also mentions a discussion between Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr and Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. Therefore, there may be numerous such discussions that occurred between Shiʿi Imams and their companions with Muʿtazilī scholars that may have influenced the opinions of the latter. Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 6, 9-10.
[253] McDermott, *Theology*, p. 58.
[254] Ibid, p. 58.
[255] Mufīd (1992). *Awāi'l al-Maqālāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʿtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 51.

of the twelve Imams as the base in understanding the principles of the religion. If he holds such

a strong belief in the Imams, it seems ironic that he would follow the example of Muʿtazilīs and

be influenced by them.

There are several examples in Mufīd's *Awāʾil* alone to suggest that he was critical of Muʿtazilī

thought. McDermott, for example, quotes Mufīd's opinion on the creation of the holy Qurʾān, "I

say the Qurʾān is God's speech and inspiration, and it is produced in time (*muḥdath*), as God

Himself has described it. And I refuse to say unreservedly that it is created. Traditions have been

handed down to this effect from the Truthful Ones - on them be peace. All the Imamīs, except a

few eccentrics hold this view. And it is the thesis of the majority of the Baghdad Muʿtazilites and

many of the Murjiʾites, Zaydīs, and traditionists."[256] When the author quotes Mufīd, he adds,

"Besides the authority of traditions from the Imams, Mufīd's argument rests on the expression

of the Qurʾān itself."[257] Here, McDermott admits that Mufīd is using the Qurʾān and traditions of

the Imams as the basis for his belief, and that is what the text of Mufīd implies. However, when

quoting Mufīd on another topic, Willing, the author says, "Most Baghdadīs, and al-Mufīd with

them, reduced God's willing to His action or His command,"[258] suggesting that Mufīd is siding with

the Baghdadī school in this matter. Examination of Mufīd's quote itself, "Traditions to this effect

have come from the Imams of Guidance of the family of Muḥammad," clearly indicates that while

the Baghdadī Muʿtazilites might be in agreement with Mufīd in this matter, his opinion, however,

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[256] Mufīd. *Awāʾil*, p. 53; and McDermott. *Theology*, p. 90.
[257] McDermott. *Theology*, p. 90.
[258] Ibid, p. 147.

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is based on the traditions of the Imams. Therefore, a plausible interpretation of the text suggests Mufīd's influence is by the traditions of the Imams, and not by the Baghdadī school of Muʿtazilites.

Finally, the author compares Mufīd with his predecessor, Ṣadūq and then with his student, Murtaḍā. The essence of this comparison is to show Mufīd's system of theology differing from that of Ṣadūq's, whom the author considers as a traditionalist. Moreover, the author tries to imply that Mufīd's influence by the Muʿtazilites was carried through to his pupil, Murtaḍā, although the latter is suggested to be more influenced by the Baṣran school.

The author's arguments sometimes appear contradictory and somewhat selective. For example, the author states that Ṣadūq limits the use of *kalām* to the experts and that its user must depend on traditions.[259] Mufīd essentially agrees with Ṣadūq, and states the same thing, but differently. Mufīd cites traditions from *al-Kāfī* where Imam al- Ṣādiq applauds some of his companions for using deductive reasoning to prove their arguments,[260] and as a jurist, he concludes that the use of reason within such limits is not only permitted, but rather encouraged. This indicates that Mufīd is not only a theologian, but he is also a traditionalist, in the sense he bases his ideologies on traditions. Moreover, the author quotes and confirms Ṣadūq using *kalām* arguments to prove the eternity of God,[261] an indication that while he relied mostly on traditions, he also uses *kalām* to prove some of his arguments. This, in turn, suggests that while Ṣadūq may have been a

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[259] Ibid, p. 315.
[260] Ibid, p. 315.
[261] Ibid, p. 324.

traditionalist, he was also a theologian. In addition, Ṣadūq, according to the author, wrote *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and added several of his own comments and explanations, as a response to the Muʿtazilites as well as other groups such as the Ashāʿirites, whom Ṣadūq calls "determinists."[262] This means that Ṣadūq is familiar with Muʿtazilī ideologies, and when he wanted to prove them wrong, he did not resort only to traditions; rather, he applied the use of reason and rational thinking, including *kalām*.[263] However, as indicated earlier, given that Ṣadūq lived in Qum, which was predominantly Shiʿi, he did not need to engage in many theological debates and discussions but relied mostly on traditions. Mufīd, and Murtaḍā, on the other hand, lived in Baghdad, among the Muʿtazilīs, in an environment that was somewhat hostile to Shiʿi thought, and hence, they could not rely only on the use of traditions to prove their points. They applied methods of deductive reasoning, rational thinking and discussions to validate their arguments. This idea is never examined by the author, which can help explain the different approaches between Ṣadūq, Mufīd and Murtaḍā in using the verses of the Qurʾān and traditions of the Imams. That use of deductive arguments is what some may refer to as ontological influence of Muʿtazilī scholars on Mūfīd and Murtaḍā; however, it is not an influence, but rather an adoption of a style similar to the opponent's, to nullify his/her arguments.

It is important to note that although the approaches of Ṣadūq, Mufīd and Murtaḍā may have been different, they all fall within the boundaries assigned by the Imams. For example, when the

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[262] Ibid, p. 323.
[263] See, for example, Ṣadūq, al-Tawḥīd p. 119 and p. 137. In addition, refer to p. 384 where Ṣadūq gives a detailed description of the meaning of God's "decree" and discusses it.

traditions of the Imams are examined, one finds that they sometimes responded to inquiries using verses of the Qur'ān and traditions accepted by the group they are discussing with, while at other times, they used pure reason and logic. *Al-Tawḥīd* and *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* by Ṣadūq and *al-Iḥtijāj* by Ṭabrisī contains several such discussions from the Prophet Muḥammad, Faṭimah al-Zahrā' and all twelve Shiʿi Imams.[264]

The author states that Murtaḍā was a student of ʿAbd al-Jabbār. This may have been for such a short period that it may not have had any influence on him.[265] Although, Murtaḍā studied poetry, literature (*adab*) and grammar with some Muʿtazilīs such as al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994) and al-Rummānī (d. 384/994),[266] it may not be necessary that he was influenced by them in his theology. While it is argued that Murtaḍā takes the Baṣran Muʿtazilī stand, he was very aware of Mufīd's criticism of it, where in his *Awā'il*, Mufīd repeatedly criticizes Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī's ideologies. In fact, Mufīd has a section in *Awā'il*, number twenty-three, titled, "The say about Abū Hāshim's lone claim of the states (*Aḥwāl*)."[267] With such disagreement, Murtaḍā was fully aware of Muʿtazilī ideologies and did not agree with them. In fact, he was the one who actually wrote *al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*, which is a record of discussions and debates that his teacher, Mufīd, had with various groups, including the leaders of the Muʿtazila on several occasions. In one of them, he

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[264] See, for example, the discussions in *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā and al-Iḥtijāj* of the eighth Shiʿi Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā in the court of Ma'mūn. His discourse when discussing with Muslims is different from when engaged in talks with people of other faiths, such as Imrān the Zoroastrian. Also see discussions of Imam al-Ṣādiq with atheists in *Al-Tawḥīd* and *al-Iḥtijāj*.

[265] Abdulsater, H.A. (2013). *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Buyid Shiʿism*. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, p. 18. The author states, "It   is unclear whether he studied with ʿAbd al- Jabbār; but if so it must have been for a short period."

[266] Ibid, p. 17.

[267] Mufīd. *Awā'il*, p. 56.

demonstrates to them that their laws are baseless because they do not follow Imam ʿAlī.[268]

Nonetheless, more on Murtaḍā will be discussed when examining *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Buyid Shi'ism* below.

2.5 Murtaḍā and Muʿtazilī Influence

The thesis titled *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Būyid Shīʿism: The Contribution of Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā* by Hussein Ali Abdulsater mentions several theological themes discussed by Murtaḍā. The author displays his knowledge of the texts and awareness of *kalām* during Murtaḍā's era. He does, however, fall short sometimes in understanding the essence of the text and tends to follow the academic tradition of attributing the influence of Murtaḍā by the Baṣran school of Muʿtazilites, while stating that Mufīd was more influenced by the Baghdadī school.[269]

The author admits that Murtaḍā clearly indicates that "origins of theological speculation on God's unicity and justice are to be found in the words of ʿAlī and the Imams."[270] Therefore, attributing any Muʿtazilī influence on Murtaḍā is a clear contradiction of what he overtly stated. As mentioned earlier, Imamī scholars are not influenced by the Muʿtazilīs, or any other school of thought, but rather they base their judgments and theological discussions on the teachings of

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[268] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, p. 127.
[269] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 29-36. Towards the end of this thesis, Abdulsater published his Ph.D. dissertation in a book: Abdulsater, H.A. (2017). Shi'i Doctrine, Muʿtazili theology. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. However, references throughout this work will be made to the Ph.D. dissertation.
[270] Ibid, p. 85.

the Qur'ān and Ahlulbayt. The teachings of Ahlulbayt expand over a period of approximately two hundred fifty years, which enable Imamī scholars to employ this large corpus of *ḥadīth* when required, and, at times, use more than one strategy appropriate to the context.

In the first chapter, Abdulsater uses statements such as, "Mufīd promoted a brand of Imamī Shi'ism whose connection to Baghdadī Muʿtazilism cannot be mistaken."[271] His tone shifts to less assertive when he talks about Murtaḍā, saying, "It may be said in general that Murtaḍā agrees with the Baṣran Muʿtazila whenever Mufīd sides with the Baghdadīs,"[272] and "In all of these, he comes closest to the Baṣran Muʿtazilī school."[273] The reason for such ideas is Murtaḍā's claimed studentship with the Muʿtazilī theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), and the former's influence on the latter's ideologies.[274] It is claimed that many of Murtaḍā's views about reason,[275] and his stand on the divine attributes of God[276] are closely associated with the Baṣran Muʿtazila. However, Murtaḍā's encounter with ʿAbd al-Jabbār is questioned, or if it took place, it may have been a short one, for those who made such claims might be confusing Raḍī with Murtaḍā.[277] Moreover, Murtaḍā engaged in many discussions against Muʿtazilī scholars and even wrote polemical manuscripts invalidating their ideologies. One such works is his famous *al-Shāfī*, which is a polemic to ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *al-Mughnī*. Therefore, the claim of any inclination of Murtaḍā's

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[271] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 29.
[272] Ibid, p. 32.
[273] Ibid, p. 85.
[274] McDermott. *Theology*, p. 373.
[275] McDermott. *Theology*, p. 374; Abdulsater, *Climax*, p. 33.
[276] McDermott. *Theology*, p. 375; Abdulsater, *Climax*, p. 33.
[277] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 18.

theology towards the Baṣran Muʿtazila is not supported with volumes of works and time Murtaḍā

invested refuting their arguments.

Murtaḍā studied grammar with al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), who was from the Baghdadī school,[278]

but there is no question about any influence from that school over his theology.

In the second chapter, the author attempts to examine the relationship between divine essence

and attributes, God's corporeality, His speech and the proper manner to speak of Him.[279] He also

studies the definition of the human being and his relationship with God.[280] The main works of

Murtaḍā used to examine these concepts are *Dhakhīra*, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, *Rasā'il*, and *Sharḥ Jumal*.

Here, too, Murtaḍā's views are suggested to be in agreement with that of the Baṣran Muʿtazila.

For example, his critique of Abū Rashīd al-Naysāburī's (d. 440/1048) classification of accidents

(*aʿrāḍ*) in *Rasā'il*[281] is taken as an endorsement of Baṣran Muʿtazilī theology.[282] This claim is

somewhat strange because Abū Rashīd himself is a student of al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d.

415/1026), a leading Baṣran Muʿtazilī.[283] Moreover, even when Murtaḍā critiques Abu Rashīd's

classification of accidents by mentioning that the examples the latter used differ from Abū

Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī's, it does not mean Murtaḍā is influenced by al-Jubbā'ī or is in agreement with

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[278] Retrieved from http://www.ltakim.com/booklets/shiaghaiba.html
[279] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 83.
[280] Ibid, p. 84.
[281] Murtaḍā (1985-1990). *Rasā'il al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā*. Ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī. Qum: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, vol. 4, p. 310-315.
[282] Ibid, p. 95.
[283] Khair al-Dīn al-Zarkalī (2002). *Al-Aʿlām*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, vol. 3, p. 101.

him. He may be implying that although Abū Rashīd is a student of the Baṣran Muʿtazilī tradition, he did not quite understand the definition of accidents according to some of the teachers of that school.

Another example is found on page 101, where Abdulsater states in the footnote, "In his position on necessary causality, Murtaḍā is being a faithful follower of the Baṣran Muʿtazilī school, contrary to Mufīd." As for Murtaḍā's position on miracles, which led the author to his claim in the above statement, there appears to be a gap of what Murtaḍā intended and what was understood from the text. In *al-Shāfī*, Murtaḍā writes about one of the conditions of miracles is them being beyond the norm. However, if it is something that can be done repeatedly, in the sense that many people can do it, then it is not a miracle,[284] because another condition of a miracle is the inability of people to produce anything like it.[285] Again, Murtaḍā's opinion is not stemming from the Muʿtazilī school, and even when it has some agreements with such schools, it is not because he is influenced by them; rather, it is because they may have some similarities with the Shiʿi Imamī school. In fact, the Baṣran Muʿtazila differ in their opinions amongst each other. Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī, for example, differs from his father, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī with regards to God's attributes, where the latter indicates that God's knowledge is in His essence, not meaning an attribute of the state of knowledge (*ʿālimān ṣifatan hiya ḥalu ʿilm*), whereas the former means that His state is a known attribute beyond His essential attribute (*thū ḥalatin hiya*

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[284] Murtaḍā. *Al-Shāfī*, vol. 1, p. 198.
[285] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab (2001). *ʿUyūn al-Muʿjizāt*. Ed. Sayyid Falāḥ al-Sharīfī. Unknown: Muʾassasat Bint al-Rasūl, p. 74.

ṣifatun maʿlūmatun waraʾ kawnihi dhātan mawjūdatan).[286] In the Shiʿi Imamī school, the attributes of God are of His essence, and not an added entity. This is rejected because it would make Him composed of parts, and hence, incomplete. This is affirmed by the eighth Shiʿi Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, in his reply to al-Ḥusayn ibn Khālid, "God, the Blessed the Exalted, has always been All-Knowing, All-Powerful, Ever-Living (*ḥayy*), Ever-Lasting (*qadīm*), All-Hearing, and All-Seeing." Al-Ḥusayn ibn Khālid then asked, "O son of the Messenger of God! There is a group that says, 'God has always been All-Knowing with Knowledge, All-Powerful with His Might, Ever-Living with His Life, Ever-Lasting with His Past, All-Hearing with His Hearing, and All-Seeing with His Sight." Imam Al-Riḍā then answered, "Verily, whoever says this and believes in it, is a polytheist. He is not among our followers at all." He then added, "God, the Mighty and High, has always been All-Knowing, All-Powerful, Ever-Living, Ever-Lasting, All-Hearing and All-Seeing by His Essence. Exalted is He, the Elevated, the Great, of what the polytheists and anthropomorphists say."[287]

A similar meaning is found in the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, where Imam ʿAlī says,

> And the perfection of the sincere belief in Him is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that is different from that to which it is attributed and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute. Thus, whoever attaches attributes to God recognizes His like, and whoever recognizes His like regards Him as two, and whoever regards Him as two recognizes parts for Him, and whoever recognizes parts for Him mistook Him, and whoever mistook

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[286] Sharhristānī (1992). *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. Beiut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 1, p. 69.
[287] Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 140.

Him pointed at Him, and whoever pointed at Him admitted limitations to Him; and whoever admitted limitations to Him numbered Him.

Murtaḍā was most certainly aware of such traditions, and Abdulsater states his ideas about the attributes as "God must be qualified by these attributes by virtue of His self. Therefore, they are pre-eternal, necessary and essential."[288]

Therefore, it is apparent that Murtaḍā's theology is influenced by the teachings of Shiʿi Imams, starting with Imam ʿAlī and ending with the twelfth Imam, al-Mahdī, and is not swayed by any Muʿtazilī thought.

2.5.1 Mufīd and Murtaḍā Rely on Traditions and Rational Reasoning

It is noteworthy to mention a point raised sometimes in the comparison of Murtaḍā to Mufīd, which is that the latter would support his arguments on a matter based only on traditions, whereas the former used rational arguments. An example is found in Abdulsater's *Climax* on page 133 in footnote 448, concerning the ideas of Mufīd about God willing compared to Murtaḍā. Another example is on page 145 in footnote 481, with regards to God's attributes.

Mufīd uses rational arguments many times, and hence, the claim that he is influenced by the Baghdadī Muʿtazilī school.[289] However, Mufīd also relies on traditions to support his arguments and conclusions. Murtaḍā's style is similar, in that he also relies on traditions to support his

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[288] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 119.
[289] See McDermott's *Theology* for many such claims and examples.

arguments as well. Prophet Muḥammad and Shiʿi Imams used rational arguments to prove their

points as well, depending on who they were discussing with. When Imamī scholars, such as

Ṣadūq, Mufīd, Murtaḍā, Ṭūsī and even contemporary ones, study such teachings, they would

derive lessons from them that can be applied to their era, or try to discover new meanings that

may have been overlooked by earlier scholars. For example, there continues to be Imamī

interpreters of the Qurʾān throughout the centuries, each one making a new discovery or adding

a new idea to the interpretation, most of them based on the teachings of the Imams and not

influenced by any other school of thought. A specific example can be inferred from the attributes

of God. Mūfīd is of the opinion that only those attributes found in the Qurʾān or the traditions of

the twelve Imams can be used. He suggests that the traditions from the Prophet Muḥammad's

progeny support this idea (*taṭābaqat al-akhbār ʿan āli Muḥammad ʿalaihim assalām*).[290] In fact,

Kulaynī (d. 329/940) in his *al-Kāfī* has a whole section titled *Prohibition on Attributing to God*

What He Himself has not Done so.[291] Among such traditions is one narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq,

> ʿAlī ibn Ibrahīm has narrated from al-ʿAbbāss ibn Maʿrūf from ibn abū Najrān from Ḥammād ibn ʿUthmān from ʿAbd al-Rahīm ibn ʿUtayk al-Qusayr who has said the following. "I wrote through ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Aʿyan to Imam abu ʿAbdillāh, peace be upon him, "In Iraq there are people who describe God in pictures and forms. If you consider it proper, may God take my soul in your service, please write to me the correct belief in the Oneness of God."
>
> The Imam wrote to me, "May God grant you blessings. You have asked about the Oneness of God and the belief of the group before you. Exalted is God, to Who nothing is similar. He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing. God is above what certain people attribute to Him and compare Him with His creatures and the lies of those who speak lies about Him. Note that the true doctrine on the Oneness of God is

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[290] Mufīd. *Awāi'l*, 53-54.
[291] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 32, p. 58.

what is revealed in the Qur'ān about the attributes of God, the Almighty, the Exalted. Keep away from the belief in God, the Most High, all ideas that amount to ignoring His existence altogether and those that amount to comparing Him with the creatures. Neither should His existence be negated, nor should He be considered similar to anything. He, God, Not-Changing (*Thābit*), Existing (*Mawjūd*). Exalted is He and far above what is falsely attributed to Him. Do not exceed the limits of the Qur'ān lest you go astray after the clear presentation of Truth."[292]

Some Shiʿi scholars, such as Ṣadūq and Mufīd, abide by such traditions, where the sixth Shiʿi Imam clearly indicates, "Do not exceed the limits of the Qur'ān," when it comes to the attributes of God. However, since the Imams themselves arrived at some conclusions using rational reasoning, careful examination of the text suggests that the Imam is forbidding people from assigning human attributes to Him, "God is above what certain people attribute to Him and compare Him with His creatures and the lies of those who speak untruthfully about Him." Thus, the Imam is not forbidding using attributes not found in the Qur'ān, as he himself used two attributes not found in the Qur'ān: Non-changing (*Thābit*) and existing (*Mawjūd*). Hence, Imamī scholars such as Murtaḍā, working within the framework of Shiʿi Imams, take the same text and analyze it further to come to the conclusion that as long as an attribute does not contradict a theological precept, nor is it expressly prohibited by revelation, it can be attributed to God.[293] As such, it can be suggested that neither group of Imamī scholars are influenced by any Muʿtazilī thought, but rather it is a different approach to reading and analyzing the text within the framework taught by the Imams themselves.

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[292] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 32, *hadīth* No. 1, p. 58-59.
[293] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 145.

2.5.2 Murtaḍā Using Rational Reasoning to Refute Muʿtazilī Theology

Abdulsater may appear sometimes to be selective in his reading. For example, he indicates there

are works by Shiʿi scholars who refute the argument of Murtaḍā being influenced by Muʿtazilī

schools, such as *Aʿyān al-Shīʿa*, and *al-Ghadīr*.[294] However, throughout his work, he does not

mention the arguments presented by such scholars, but rather makes continuous references to

McDermott's work on the *Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mūfīd*, which was discussed earlier.

Another issue with the work of Abdulsater is that he sometimes does not reference the Imam

from whom the tradition was narrated but rather jumps to the narrator without adding further

comments. On page 135, footnote 453, for example, he mentions Murtaḍā's acceptance of calling

God "a thing unlike other things" but not "a body unlike bodies". Here, he mentions that Murtaḍā

denies most of what is ascribed to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam in matters related to God's attributes

and anthropomorphism, but that he accepts this report narrated by Ḥishām. Abdulsater does not

reference the tradition, but he is referring to a tradition narrated by Hishām from Imam Jaʿfar al-

Ṣādiq, when he was asked by an atheist, "What is He?" in reference to God. Imam al-Ṣādiq

answered, "He is a thing unlike things. If you consider the meaning of the word 'thing,' He is

indeed a Thing by definition (*al-shay'īyyah*), with the exception that He has neither substance nor

shape."[295] Moreover, there is another tradition narrated from the fifth Shiʿi Imam, Imam

Muḥammad al-Bāqir, when he was asked, "Is it permissible to say that God, the Mighty and High,

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[294] Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 4-5.
[295] Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Mu'assasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 104.

is a Thing?" He replied, "Yes, to the extent that it removes Him from both extremes: annulment (*taʿṭīl*) and anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*)."[296] Based on these two traditions, both of which are narrated by the sixth and fifth Shi'a Imams, respectively, and reported by Ṣadūq in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Murtaḍā comes to the conclusion that God can be called a "thing" and not a "body". Not mentioning these two traditions, and just stating Murtaḍā's stand from Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam,[297] gives an incomplete picture as it suggests that Murtaḍā is not deriving his conclusions based on reputable Imamī traditions. Again, it must be emphasized that while Imamī scholars base their conclusions on the interpretation of the Qur'ān and reputable traditions from the twelve Imams, they also analyze the context of the traditions and try to derive implications that are suitable for the times they lived through. The author makes an implicit acknowledgement of this when discussing Murtaḍā's wording on God's Attributes of the Essence on page 142, footnote number 475, "This phrasing should not be taken to mean that he was wavering but rather as an argumentative technique since both positions are good enough to refute his opponents." Hence, it is important to approach Murtaḍā's text with the understanding that he is refuting his opponents' arguments, but in order to do so convincingly, he is using their language. Such understanding helps one realize that early Shi'i scholars such as Mufīd, Murtaḍā and Ṭūsī were

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[296] Ibid.

[297] It is noteworthy to mention that Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam was accused of personifying God (*tajsīm*). Sayyid Abūlqāsim al-Khū'ī in his *Muʿjam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth* refutes these arguments and states that they were put forth by his enemies out of their jealousy against him. Al-Khū'ī (n.d.). *Muʿjam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*. (n.p.), vol. 20. Retrieved from https://www.al-khoei.us/books/?id=8032. For a detailed discussion on Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, see van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 410-445.

not influenced by Muʿtazilī or any other thought, but rather used such language to nullify their opponents' arguments and prove their own belief.

2.6 Shiʿi Influence on Muʿtazilī Thought

According to al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*, almost all early Muʿtazila were either students of Shiʿi scholars or were very closely associated with the Shīʿa.[298] For example, when he lists the first layer, or the earliest Muʿtazilī thinkers among the Prophet's companions, he starts with "Amīr al-Muʾminīn *alaihi assalām* [Imam ʿAlī]," followed by Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, Ibn Masʿūd, Ibn ʿAbbās, and Ibn ʿUmar. It is interesting to note that he considers Imam ʿAlī even before Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. Moreover, there is little doubt about ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās's loyalty (*tashayyuʿ*) to Imam ʿAlī, and even ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd's inclination to Imam ʿAlī.[299]

When it comes to the second layer, he includes Imams Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, who he says that he adds to the second layer to have their blessings, otherwise they truly belong to the first layer. He also mentions Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, the son of Imam ʿAlī, and Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab among the second layer. The influence of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah's father is not questionable, and as far as Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab is concerned, he is narrated to be among the sincere trustees of the fourth Shiʿi Imam, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sajjād.[300]

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[298] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 214-250.
[299] For commentary and references see http://www.aqaed.com/faq/3118/ for ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās, and http://www.aqaed.com/faq/2510/ for ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd.
[300] Imam al-Ṣādiq says, "Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr and Abū Khālid al-Kābulī were among the trustees of ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (*alaihima assalam*)." Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 176, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p.

Among the third layer, he mentions Abū Hāshim ʿAbdullāh ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, his brother Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Abū Bakr ibn Sīrīn. He also mentions that Abū Hāshim was the teacher of Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ, and states that Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ learned from "him [Abū Hāshim] and from his father these roots (al-uṣūl)."[301] He also adds to this group the fourth Shiʿi Imam, ʿAlī al-Sajjād, as well as "al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan, ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Ḥasan, and Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, may God have mercy on them. Their matter is clear in declaring justice (ẓāhirun fil-qawli bil-ʿadl), and the clarity of [the matter] makes it unnecessary to discuss it."[302]

It is important to mention that ʿAbd al-Jabbār counts Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748) among the fourth layer, and Wāṣil is also considered to be the founder of the Muʿtazilī school.[303] Moreover, ʿAbd al-Jabbār also states that Wāṣil was influenced by Abū Hāshim and his father, Muḥammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah. In fact, Wāṣil had inclinations towards Imam ʿAlī which made the Umayyad rulers around 130/747 persecute his followers in Yemen due to the accusation they were Shiʿis.[304] This can explain the many theological similarities observed between the Shiʿi school and the Muʿtazilīs.

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[301] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah. Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 215.
[302] Ibid, p. 226.
[303] Murtaḍā. Amālī, vol. 1, p. 164-165; Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah. Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 164-165; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 12.
[304] van Ess, J. (2017). Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom. Boston: Brill, vol. 2, p. 286. van Ess also argues that Wāṣil had ʿAlid inclinations.

Some writers object to the idea of Wāṣil being a student of Abū Hāshim because Abū Hāshim died in 98/717, which makes Wāṣil only 18 years of age, and because Wāṣil differs with some of his opinions from Abū Hāshim.[305] However, the arguments presented may not be valid because there are many students who spent years studying with Shiʿi Imams but held very different views, such as Abū Ḥanīfa and Sufyān al-Thawrī who studied with Imam al-Ṣādiq but did not even attest to his Imamate.[306] Moreover, students in those days would attend lessons of prominent teachers from a young age. In fact, if Wāṣil attended the classes of Abū Hāshim at such a young age, it is possible he may have been heavily influenced by his teachings, which may explain why he stayed for only two years with al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī before disagreeing with him and deserting his circle.

Therefore, much of the Muʿtazilī thoughts may be influenced by Shiʿi theology, and hence, it explains some of the similarities. Moreover, Shiʿi influence on Muʿtazilī theology is apparent, especially when considering that many of the early people who spoke of God's justice were actually Shiʿi Imams and scholars. In addition, the founder of the Muʿtazilī school as well as its early scholars, such as Bashīr al-Raḥḥāl,[307] were students of, or closely affiliated with Shiʿi leaders. Thus, when the Muʿtazilī school shares some of its ideologies with the Shiʿi school, it is not because of the latter being influenced by the former, but rather the opposite.

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[305] Al-Naṣrallāh, J.K. (2008). Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ Mutakalliman. *Markaz Dirāsāt al-Kūfa*, No. 9, p. 235-265.

[306] Haydar, A. (1992). *Imam Al-Ṣādiq wal-Madhāhib al-Arbaʿah*. Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr.

[307] Bashīr al-Raḥḥāl was a Muʿtazilī who joined and was killed in the revolution of Ibrahīm ibn ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Ḥasan against the Abbasid caliph, al-Manṣur. See Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 226.

2.7 Shiʿi Roots of the Religion (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*)

Examination of Shiʿi texts written in the third, fourth and fifth Islamic centuries suggests that by then, the Imamī Shiʿi school had formalized the roots of the religion to be the following five: monotheism (*tawḥīd*), God's divine justice (*ʿadālah*), prophethood (*nubūwah*), divinely appointed succession to prophethood (*Imamah*), and resurrection (*maʿād*).[308]

Reviewing early texts such as Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, one finds sections titled: *kitāb al-tawḥīd*, which consists of discussions on both *tawḥid* and *ʿadālah* as well as *kitāb al-ḥujjah*, which includes traditions about *nubūwah* and *Imamah*, and *kitāb al-īmān wal-kufr*, which consists of moral and ethical values and discusses rewards and punishments, all of which are themes related to *maʿād*. Interestingly, though, the first section in *al-Kāfī* is titled *kitāb al-ʿaql wal-jahl*, which comes even before *kitāb al-tawḥīd*. This suggests the significance of the *ʿaql*, which can be translated as the intellect, reason, or the mind, in Shiʿi theology, and this underscores the discussions above about Shiʿi scholars using logical, rational and deductive reasoning to prove their point, something they learned from the Imams who practiced this approach, rather than taking it from the Muʿtazila.[309]

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[308] Ansari, H. (2009). ʿIlm Al-Kalām fīl-Islām. Al-Khiṭāb wal-tārīkh. *Al-Masār*, No. 10(3), p. 63–120; McDermott, M.J. (1978). *The Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd*. Beirut: Dar El-Machreq; Abdulsater, H.A. (2013). *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Buyid Shiʿism*. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University; Ansari, H., & Schmidtke, S. (2017). Al-Šayẖ al-Ṭūsī: His Writings on Theology and Their Reception. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press. p. 311-330; Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[309] On the significance of *ʿaql* among Shiʿi Imams see Amir-Moezzi (1994). *Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press.

The same themes of the five *uṣūl al-dīn* also appear in *al-I'tiqādāt* by Ṣadūq, both *Awā'il al-Maqālāt* and *Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqādāt* by Mufīd, as well as *Dhakhīrah* by Murtaḍā. While some of Ṭūsī's works were lost, theological topics discussed by him are also along the same line.[310] Therefore, these five themes of Imamī *uṣūl al-dīn* were formally accepted by all Shiʿi scholars to make up the foundation of the faith.

2.8 Conclusion

The numerous theological discussions presented above, provide a good glimpse of the active state of *kalām* in the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries and the different kinds of discourses that were taking place at the time. Furthermore, it is demonstrated above that Shiʿi and Muʿtazilī scholars were actively engaged in theological debates about topics such as man's first obligation, how the obligation is known, basis for moral obligation, man's best interests and God's help, God's attributes and justice as well as prophecy and Imamate. Shiʿi scholars, such as Mufīd and Murtaḍā, used the teachings of the Imams as the basis to formulate their arguments but may have resorted to using a language similar to the Muʿtazila to prove them wrong. Hence, they were not influenced by Muʿtazilī thought but rather implemented Muʿtazilī strategies to convince their opponents of their ideologies.

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[310] Ansari, H., & Schmidtke, S. (2017). Al-Šayḫ al-Ṭūsī: His Writings on Theology and Their Reception. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press. p. 311-330.

Examination of early Muʿtazilī theologians shows that they were students or close associates of Shiʿi Imams or Shiʿi scholars. This close association explains the many similarities observed between the Muʿtazilīs and the Shiʿis. It is also apparent that Shiʿi thought influenced the Muʿtazilī school, as the latter adopted many roots that are closely related to the Shiʿis.

Western scholarship investigated the dynamic debates amongst Imamī, Muʿtazilī, and Ashʿarī scholars. Ideologies of Ashāʿrites and other rites and sects, as well as discussions between Muʿtazilī and Imamī leaders are well documented. Such writings include, but are not limited to, Modarressi,[311] Amir-Moezzi,[312] Sabra,[313] Nawas,[314] van Ess,[315] Watt,[316] Ansari and Schmidtke,[317] as well as Nasr who lists six major works about this field: Munk, Steinschneider, Horovitz and Horten, Gardet and H. A. Wolfson.[318]

[311] Modarressi, H. (1984). Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shiʿi Jurisprudence: A Preliminary Survey. *Studia Islamica*, No. 59, p. 141-158; Modarressi, H. (1993). *Crisis and Consolidation*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc.

[312] Amir-Moezzi (1994). *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press.

[313] Sabra, A. I. (2009). The Simple Ontology of Kalām Atomism: An Outline. *Early Science and Medicine*, Vol. 14, No. 1/3, Evidence and Interpretation: Studies on Early Science and Medicine in Honor of John E. Murdoch, pp. 68-78.

[314] Nawas, J.A. (2015). The Muʿtazilism, The Shiʿism, and the ʿAlid Hypotheses, in *Al-Ma'mun, the Inquisition, and the Quest for Caliphal Authority*. Atlanta: Lockwood Press, p. 31-49.

[315] van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane and Gwendolin Goldbloom. Boston: Brill, vol. 1-3.

[316] Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[317] Ansari, H., & Schmidtke, S. (2017). Al-Šayḫ al-Ṭūsī: His Writings on Theology and Their Reception. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press, p. 311-330; Ansari, H., & Schmidtke, S. (2017). Al-Šayḫ al-Ṭūsī's Muqaddama fī l-Madḫal ilā ʿIlm al-Kalām: A Critical Edition. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press, p. 331-348; Ansari, H., & Schmidtke, S. (2017). The Twelver Šīʿī Reception of Muʿtazilism. In *Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press, p. 293-310; Ansari, H. (2009). ʿIlm Al-Kalām fīl-Islām. Al-Khiṭāb wal-tārīkh. *Al-Masār*, No. 10(3), p. 63–120.

[318] Nasr, S.H. (1971). Al-Ḥikmat Al-Ilāhiyyah and Kalām. *Studia Islamica*, No. 34, p. 139-149.

Examination of Mufīd's and Murtaḍā's works indicate they took a direct approach towards expressing Shiʿi theology and addressing different *kalām* issues such as God and His attributes, justice (*ʿadl*), prophethood (*nubūwah*), divinely appointed leadership (*Imamah*), and resurrection and afterlife (*maʿād*), and they both engaged in active debates and discussions with Muʿtazilī and other Sunni scholars. These writings help us develop a better understanding of the theological dynamics of the era in which Raḍī compiled NB.

Raḍī was very familiar with all the debates and discussions taking place amongst the Shiʿi, Muʿtazilī, and Ashʿarī schools. As indicated in chapter 1, his books suggest he knew of the ideologies presented by other schools of thought as he wrote about many of their arguments. Interestingly, however, he did not engage in many explicit debates with other scholars. It may be because he was occupied with *Niqābat al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, and in such a position, he may have wanted to play more of a diplomatic role than engaging in explicit theological debates. Additionally, it is plausible he used language and poetry as implicit means of propagating Shiʿi, Imamī theology. As will be seen in the next chapters, sermons and letters he selected from Imam ʿAlī in NB contain a complete corpus of theology. NB, with all its theological corpus, was widely accepted at the time when Raḍī compiled it, as people were more intrigued by its eloquence than its *kalām* content. Given the dynamic theological discussions that were taking place at that time, Raḍī may have thought that NB was exactly what was needed to educate people about the essence of Islam and Shiʿi theology. This theological corpus will be explored in the next few chapters.

Chapter 3: **TAWḤĪD IN NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH**

3.1 Introduction

Faith provides a system of laws to those individuals who adhere to it. In the Islamic faith, monotheistic belief in One God is fundamental to the religion. Numerous Qur'ānic verses emphasize the significance of believing in One God. Here are five examples of many such verses:

1) "God, Who there is no god but Him," (2:255);

2) "Indeed! I turn my face toward He Who created the Heavens and Earth, not deviating from the truth, nor am I of those who associate others with God," (6:79);

3) "He is the Ever-Living, no god but He, so worship Him with sincerity of the religion," (40:65);

4) "He is God, Whom there is no god but Him," (59:22); and,

5) "Say! He God is One," (112:1).

In this chapter, two main concepts will be discussed. First, the importance of genuine belief in God will be addressed from the Qur'ānic and Shiʿi traditional perspectives in order to contextualize NB. Second, a textual analysis of the conceptual description of *tawḥīd* (monotheism) based on the first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah* (NB) will be examined.

This chapter will begin with discussions about faith and its significance, the recognition of God through reason, and the necessity of the Imam for the true recognition of God. The discussion of God through NB will focus on the first sermon, where Imam ʿAlī talks about God and His

attributes. An analysis will also be made comparing Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī thoughts to those of

Imam ʿAlī's in NB. It will be highlighted throughout the chapter that NB's theological approach is

very similar to the Qur'ān. While Imam ʿAlī uses several deductive and rational arguments, his

style is uniquely canonical, providing a novel interpretation to the Prophetic tradition, "ʿAlī is with

the Qur'ān, and the Qur'ān is with ʿAlī."[319] Moreover, the similarity between NB's approach to

theology and that of the Qur'ān is an indication that its sermons were developed much earlier

than the fourth Islamic century, because its style is different from *kalām* texts produced in that

period. Finally, it will also be argued that the entire Shiʿi corpus on *tawḥīd* is either directly stated

or implied in NB.

3.2 Faith and its Significance

Islam is centralized around two important pillars: the belief in God, and the belief in the Prophet

Muḥammad.[320] Qur'ānic and Prophetic teachings emphasize the significance of true

understanding of theological concepts and warn of the dangers of misinterpretations and lack of

understanding. The Qur'ān states, "This indeed is my straight path, so follow it, and do not follow

[other] ways, for they will separate you from His way. This is what He enjoins upon you so that

you may be Godwary" (6:153). Moreover, in the first chapter of the Qur'ān, the Opening, *al-*

Fātiḥa, which Muslims recite twice in each of their five daily prayers, it is stated, "Guide us (O

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[319] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshabūrī. *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 3, p. 124; Retrieved from
https://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=74&ID=4501

[320] The association of the obedience of God and Prophet Muhammad appears eleven times in the Qur'ān: 3:32, 3:132, 4:59, 5:92, 8:1, 8:20, 8:46, 24:54, 47:33, 58:13, and 64:12. Some of the verses in the Qur'ān that emphasize the belief in God alone without other gods are as follows: 4:36, 7:59, 11:50, 16:36, 23:59, and 24:55.

Lord) to the straight path. The path of those whom you have blessed; not those who angered You, nor the misguided ones," (1:5-7).

A man asked Prophet Muḥammad to teach him some unique aspects of knowledge. The Prophet replied with the question, "What have you grasped of the essence of knowledge to learn about the unique aspects of it?" The man then inquires, "What is the essence of knowledge, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet replies, "Recognizing God the way He should be recognized." The man requests further clarification, "And how should He be recognized?" The Prophet then explains, "Knowing Him not resembling anything (*bilā mithl*), nor looking like anything (*wa lā shibh*), nor having anything equal to Him (*wa lā nid*), and that He is One (*Wāḥid*), nothing like Him (*Aḥad*), He is Apparent (*Ẓāhir*), Hidden (*Bāṭin*), First (*Awwal*), Last (*Ākhir*), there is no match to Him (*lā kufwa lahu*), and no likes to Him (*wa lā naẓīr*). That is His true recognition."[321]

Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib highlights the significance of genuine theological understanding when he says, "Sleeping in a state of firm faith is better than praying in a state of doubtfulness."[322]

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[321] Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 284-285.

[322] NB, short words of wisdom No. 91, p. 579. Imam ʿAlī emphasizes the importance of true belief, especially after the deviation of the Kharijites (*Khawārij*) from his camp in the battle of Ṣiffīn, which led to them fighting against him in the battle of Nahrawān. Although the *Khawārij* used to believe in God, pray, fast, pay charity, recite and memorize the Qur'ān, and perform Islamic obligations, however, the Prophet classified them as "leavers" of the religion, i.e. non-believers, because they rose against and fought Imam ʿAlī. The Prophet states, "O ʿAlī! You will fight after me those who will negate your allegiance (*al-nākithīn*), the deviants (*al-qaṣiṭīn*), and the leavers (*al-māriqīn*), those who will leave from the religion like an arrow leaving a bow," al-Ḥākim al-Nayshabūrī. *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol. 3, p. 139. As such, according to Imam ʿAlī, sleeping while recognizing the Imam, and on state of true faith, is better than staying up the night praying without proper understanding of the faith and recognition of the Imam and his divine status.

Many such references as those stated above exist in Islamic traditions, emphasizing the significance of genuine understanding of monotheism. Obtaining a deep, thorough and clear understanding of the essence of knowledge is linked to the teachings of the Qur'ān, Prophet Muḥammad, and the Imams succeeding him as per the prophetic tradition, "I am leaving among you two things, the Book of God... and my progeny my family. I remind you of my family, I remind you of my family, I remind you of my family."[323] This tradition is also narrated by *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, "O people, I am leaving among you what if you hold on to, (then) you will never go astray: the Book of God and my progeny, my family."[324] According to Imam ʿAlī, failing to understand the essence of monotheism and following the Imam leads to deviation from the straight path.[325]

While Imam ʿAlī was facing his enemies at the battle of *al-Jamal* (the Camel), a man approached him and asked, "O Commander of the faithful; do you say that surely God is One (*wāḥid*)?" People then criticized the man, telling him, "O nomad! Do you not see the state of division in the mind of the Commander of the faithful?" Imam ʿAlī then commented, "Leave him! Surely what this nomad wants is what we want from these people?" He then added, "Saying God is One falls in four categories: two are not permitted for Him and two are. The two that are not permitted are a person saying 'One' meaning numeration. The One who has no 'two' cannot be turned into a

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[323] Muslim al-Nayshābūrī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 3, *ḥadīth* No. 2408, p. 128.
[324] Al-Tirmidhī (1999). *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*. Riyad: Bayt al-Afkār al-Duwaliyyah, *ḥadīth* No. 3786, p. 589.
[325] In verses 5-7 of the first chapter of the Qur'ān, *al-Fatiḥa*, it states, "Guide us to the straight path (*ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*); the path of those whom You have blessed; not those who angered You, nor the misguided ones." The straight path of guidance is interpreted as the path of Muḥammad and his family. Al-Ḥākim al-Ḥasakānī (1990). *Shawāhid at-Tanzīl*. Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Ṭabʿ wal-Nashr, vol. 1, p. 74.

number. Do you not see that if a person says, '[He is] One of three,' he denounces the firm belief in Him? And a person saying, 'He is One of the people' meaning a part of something, and this is not permissible because it is making Him like something, and there is nothing like Him, the Exalted the High. The two categories that are permissible, is one saying, 'He is One with nothing like Him,' and that is how our Lord is; and one saying, 'He is One (aḥadī) in the essence,' meaning that He cannot be divided in existence, by mind or thought. That is how our Lord is the Exalted the High."[326]

Imam ʿAlī's statement, "Surely what the nomad wants is what we want from the people," is an indication that had his opponents understood the essence of monotheism, they would not have come to fight against him.

Despite such heavy emphasis on accurately understanding Islamic theology and its consequences, early Muslim theologians were divided on many aspects of it and formulated several theories that are in some ways contradictory. It will be argued through this work that Imam ʿAlī's teachings compiled in *Nahj al-Balāghah* constitute a complete and comprehensive

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[326] Ṣadūq (1990). *Al-Khiṣāl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 2.

corpus of Shiʿi *kalām*. This chapter will discuss the concept of *tawḥīd*, monotheism, as described by the Commander of the Faithful.[327]

3.3 Recognition of God through Reason[328]

Imam ʿAlī and the Shiʿi Imams believe that understanding of the existence of God can be achieved through reason. The Qur'ān states, "So set your heart as a person of pure faith on this religion, the original nature endowed by Allah according to which He originated mankind (*fiṭrata Allahī allatī faṭara annāsa ʿalaihā*)," (30:30). Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam asks Imam al-Ṣadiq, "What is the original nature endowed by God?" The Imam replied, "Monotheism (*tawḥīd*)."[329]

When discussing the reasons for sending prophets, Imam ʿAlī states in the first sermon of NB that one of them is to "make them [people] provide the covenant of His original nature (*fiṭratihi*)." Since the Qur'ān indicates that people inherently can recognize the existence of God, Shiʿi Imams provided rational proofs about the existence of God to intrigue the minds of people. For example, a man asks Imam ʿAlī, "How did you recognize the existence of a God?" The Imam replied, "I

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[327] The Commander of the Faithful, *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, is the exclusive title of Imam ʿAlī given to him by the Prophet Muḥammad. It is narrated that the Prophet Muḥammad said, "If people were to know when ʿAlī was called Amīr al-Mu'minīn then they would not dispute his merit. He was called that during the process of the creation of Adam, when He (Allah) said, 'Am I not your Lord!' They replied, 'Yes.' So, He, the Exalted, said, 'I am your Lord, Muḥammad is your Prophet and ʿAlī is your Commander.'" This is in reference to the Qur'ānic verse 7:172, "And when Your Lord took of the progeny of Adam of their successors, and He made them witnesses on themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify.' Such that you do not say on the Day of Judgment we were not aware of this." *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Biʿthah, vol. 1, p. 443-444.

[328] The Arabic word for recognition is *maʿrifah*, as it is deeper in meaning than to know. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word recognize means: know from having encountered before; accept as genuinue, legal or valid; or show official appreciation of. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Sixth Edition. Eds. Hole, G. and Hawker, S. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 462. See section 3.5.2.1 for a detailed discussion on the word ʿarafa.

[329] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, section 6, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p. 11.

recognized God through the halt in one's determination, change in one's decisions, and negation of one's intentions. When I am determined to do something, but another thing arises that stops me from doing it, and when I intend on doing something but a situation arises that prevents me from executing my intention, then I recognized that the Planner is One other than me."[330] Imam ʿAlī's reply is purely logical, in the sense that it does not contain any verse from the Qur'ān nor any sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad.

The Qur'ān uses several logical proofs about the existence of God. The first is signs of creation, among which the following are some examples:

1) "Do they not observe the camel, [to see] how it has been created? and the sky, how it has been raised? and the mountains, how they have been set? and the earth, how it has been surfaced? So admonish, for you are only an admonisher; and not a taskmaster over them," (88:17-22);

2) "Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. There are indeed signs in that for those who know. And of His signs is your sleep by night and day, and your pursuit of His bounty. There are indeed signs in that for a people who listen. And of His signs is that He shows you the lightning, arousing fear and hope, and He sends down water from the sky, and with it revives the earth after its death. There are indeed signs in that for people who exercise their reason," (30:22-24);

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[330] Al-Mūsawī. *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, short words of wisdom, No. 2; Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 288.

3) "And in earth are neighbouring plots and gardens of grapevines and crops of palm trees, [growing] several from a root or otherwise, watered with one [kind] of water; but We make some of them exceed others in [quality of] fruit. Indeed, in that are signs for people who reason," (13: 9);

4) "He created the heavens without any pillars that you may see and cast firm mountains in the earth lest it should shake with you, and He has scattered in it every kind of animal. And We sent down water from the sky and caused every splendid kind [of plant] to grow on it. This is the creation of God. Now show me what others besides Him have created. Indeed, the wrongdoers are in manifest error!" (31:10-11);

5) "If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and earth?' they will surely say, 'God.' Say, 'All praise belongs to God!' But most of them do not know," (31:25); and,

6) "When waves cover them like awnings; they invoke God, putting exclusive faith in Him. But when He delivers them towards land, [only] some of them remain unswerving. No one will impugn Our signs except an ungrateful traitor," (31:32).

With regards to the last example, (6), a man came to the sixth Shiʿi Imam, al-Ṣādiq, and asked him to prove to him the existence of God. The Imam asked if the man has ever been on a ship, and the man answered with affirmation. The Imam then asked him if he's experienced a major storm that almost sunk the ship. The man further confirmed such an experience. The Imam then asked, "So as the ship was swinging right and left [due to the storm] and you felt that the ship will break and you will drown; when you lost all hope, did you feel your heart connected to some Power

that can save you?" The man answered, "Yes." The Imam then replied, "That's God!"[331]

In a different narration, Imam ʿAlī states, "He [God] is a maker (ṣāniʿ) who is not made. Through God's making, one proves His [Existence]. He made the creation a sign that leads to Him."[332] On a similar note, Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked, "What is the proof for the existence of a Maker to the world?" He replied, "The presence of objects (afāʿīl) that prove their maker (ṣāniʿ) made them. Do you not see when you look at a well-built building, you would know it had a builder, even if you did not see him?"[333] Here, the Imam is discussing the existence of a maker, and he replies using Aristotelian logic, clearly indicating rational, deductive reasoning.

Two additional important traditions indicate the proof of the Maker, al-Ṣāniʿ. Imam ʿAlī was asked about the proof of the existence of a Maker. He answered, "The feces of a camel indicate its presence; the bowel of a mule shows its existence; and footsteps reveal a walker; so an elevated structure of such subtleness [the skies], and a lower centre of such density [the earth], how can they not point to the Well-Encompassed (al-Laṭīf), All-Aware (al-Khabīr)."[334] Moreover, the sixth Shiʿi Imam also referred to God as the Maker when replying to an atheist who asked him about proving there are messengers.[335] Again, deductive reasoning is employed by both Imams to demonstrate the existence of a Maker.

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[331] Ṣadūq (1990). *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 4-5.
[332] Mufīd. *Al-Irshād*, vol. 1, p. 223-224.
[333] Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, section 36, p. 244.
[334] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Sabzawārī (1993). *Jāmiʿ al-Akhbār*. Ed. ʿAlā Āl Jaʿfar, Beirut: Muʾassasat Aāl al-Bait li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, p. 35.
[335] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 58, ḥadīth No. 1, p. 97.

Thus, the Imams of the Shiʿi school of thought used and approved of using logic and reason to prove the existence of God. However, the Imams stressed that to truly recognize God and His attributes, one must learn about Him through a divinely appointed Imam.

3.4 Recognition of God through the Imam

Twelver Shiʿi theologians and scholars work within the framework outlined by the Qur'ān and the fourteen infallibles or the *Ahlulbayt*. According to Shiʿi Imams, true belief and recognition of God can only be achieved through a divinely appointed Imam. While reason can deduce the existence of God and the Imams used logical arguments to prove that, as indicated in the previous section, it is through the knowledge and teachings of the Imams that His recognition (*maʿrifah*) can be achieved.

It is stated in *Rasāel al-Ghaybah* by Mūfīd,

> "One who dies without recognizing the Imam of his time dies the death of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*)."
>
> This tradition is [widely] accepted by the community (*ummah*) for its accuracy and acceptance.
>
> Mufīd says about it: [This is an] accepted narration (*khabar*) attested by the unity of people of narrators [i.e. widely narrated by Sunni and Shiʿi scholars].
>
> And he [Mufīd] said in *al-Ifṣāḥ*: It is indeed a well-authenticated narration (*khabar mutawātir*).
>
> And is narrated by scholars of all grand Islamic rites: Imamī Shiʿi, Zaidī, and Sunni.
>
> And the issue about its authenticity is not even debated, and hence, the Shaykh [Mufīd] did not invest time to argue it. But rather, he discussed its meaning and interpretation.

So, he mentioned first: The Qur'ān attests to its meaning in clear verses. Of them are

"When We call each community by their Leader (*Imam*)," (17:71).

"And how about when We bring a witness of each community and We bring you as a witness on those [people]?" (4:41).

And the interpretation of the narration (*ḥadīth*) is that a human being's lack of recognition of the Imam of his time results in him dying the death of the time of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) not on the religion of Islam. So "ignorance of the Imam strips one of his Islam," as Mufīd states in *al-Ifṣāḥ* (p. 28).[336]

As per the above narration and Mufīd's commentary, it is mandatory to recognize the Imam of the time. The Imam is the gateway to knowledge,[337] and he is the path of guidance to the genuine worship of God. Moreover, according to Mufīd, without the Imam, one cannot truly recognize God and may be even considered a deviant from the religion.

Sūrat Al-Aʿrāf verse 180 states, "God has the virtuous names, so worship Him through them," (7:180). Imam al-Ṣādiq says, "We, swearing by God, are the virtuous names who God will not accept from worshippers any deed except through our recognition,"[338] He also says, "It is through us that God is recognized; through us He is worshipped; and through us He is [declared] as One. Muḥammad is the link between God and his creation."[339]

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[336] Mufīd (1992). *Rasāel al-Ghaybah*. Ed. ʿAlā Āl Jaʿfar. Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 4.

[337] Prophet Muhammad states, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate. One who seeks the city, must enter through the gate." Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah, vol.3, p. 137; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (2009). *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqah fil-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Bidaʿ wal-Zandaqah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah (DKI), p. 189.

[338] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 45, *ḥadīth* No. 4, p. 83.

[339] Ṣaffār (2007). *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*. Ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Muʿallim. Beirut: Dār Jawād al-Aʾimmah, vol. 2, p.144.

Moreover, Imam Ḥusayn indicates that one main reason for the essence of creation is to recognize God through the recognition of the Imam. He says, "O people! God did not create this creation but to recognize Him (yaʿrifūh); when they recognize Him they would worship Him; when they worship Him, they would not be in need to worship any[thing] other than Him." A man then asked, "O son of the Messenger of God, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you, what is the recognition of God?" The Imam replied, "The recognition (maʿrifah) of the people of every era the Imam of their time, who is mandated [upon them] to obey him."[340]

In another tradition, Imam al-Ṣadiq thought provokingly states, "Whoever worships God through [his own] imagination, then he is an atheist. And whoever worships the attribute without the Essence,[341] then he is an atheist. And whoever worships the attribute and the Essence, then he associated in His belief.[342] And whoever worships the Essence, by giving Him the Names of the attributes He attributed to Himself[343] and he believed in this whole heartedly, and his tongue professed it privately and publicly, then those are truly the companions of the Commander of the

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[340] Ṣadūq (2007). ʿIlal Al-Sharāʾiʿ. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, vol. 1, p. 9.
[341] Worshipping the attribute without the essence is in reference to worshipping the attributes of God without worshiping Who they attribute them to. For example, among His attributes are the Creator, the Ever Lasting, the One, the Ever Living, the Beneficent, the Merciful and the Compassionate. If someone were to worship the attributes without worshiping the deity to Whom they belong, God, then that is atheism, because then the individual is worshiping many gods with different attributes.
[342] Worshiped the Attribute and Essence meaning that one considers the attribute as an added entity to the Essence of God. This is the belief of the Ashāʿira. See Aḍwāʾ ʿAlā ʿAqāʾed Al-Shiʿa Al-Imamiyyah by Jāfar Subḥānī. Retrieved from http://shiaweb.org/shia/aqaed_12/pa49.html.
[343] The belief of the Imamī Shiʿis is that the attributes of God are His Essence, and not different to the Essence, nor acquired by the Essence, as will be discussed below.

Faithful[344]."[345]

Imam ʿAlī clearly states that God can only be recognized through the Imam. In reference to the divinely appointed family of Prophet Muḥammad, he states in sermon 237 of NB, "They (āli Muḥammad) are revivers of knowledge, and [they are] death to ignorance. Their forbearance is a demonstration of their [vast] knowledge; and their exterior shows their interior; and their silence explains the wisdom of their speech. They never deviate from truth, nor do they ever differ in their adherence to it. They are the pillars of Islam, and the essence to hold on to.[346] Through them, truth was brought back to its root; and falsehood was removed from its place; and the speech of [falsehood] was cut from its cause. They understood religion [with] a complete and inherent understanding; not through hearing and narration. For surely there are many who pass on knowledge, but few who fully understand it."[347] The Imam refers to *Ahlulbayt*, the divinely appointed family of Prophet Muḥammad, as the "pillars of Islam." Without them, religion would be distorted, and rather, destroyed. As such, one must turn to the impeccable Imam for the pure understanding of Islam.

Therefore, according to Shiʿi theology, true recognition of God cannot be achieved without the

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[344] Commander of the Faithful is an attribute the Prophet assigned to Imam ʿAlī. Shiʿi Imams clearly indicated that this title is exclusively given to Imam ʿAlī. Al-ʿAyyāshī (2000). *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Tehran: Muʾassasat al-Biʿthah, vol. 1, p. 443-444.

[345] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 27, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p. 51.

[346] In reference to the verse, "And behold on to the rope of God, and do not divide," (3:102). The fifth Shiʿi Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, states, "We [Ahlulbayt] are the rope of God." Al-ʿAyyāshī (2000). *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Tehran: Muʾassasat al-Biʿthah, vol. 1, p. 334.

[347] NB, sermon 237, p. 437-438.

Imam.

3.5 Belief in God (*tawḥīd*) through *Nahj Al-Balāghah*

Although theological discussions were not yet termed *ʿilm al-kalām*, Imam ʿAlī is considered the first to use the science of *kalām*. As mentioned earlier, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1112), states in the section defending *kalām*, "And the first who established discussions against the innovators to bring them to the truth was ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him."[348]

Imam ʿAlī's approach to theology is very similar to the Qur'ān. His proofs and deductions are intended to lead one to the recognition (*maʿrifah*) of God. As will be discussed later, Imam ʿAlī states, "The foremost in religion is His recognition."[349] Muṭahharī says, "Only in the Holy Qur'ān can be found a precedent for *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Apart from the Holy Qur'ān, we do not find any other source that provides some ground for the discourses of *Nahj al-Balāghah*."[350]

The first sermon of NB is probably one of the most comprehensive about the belief in God and His attributes, where Imam ʿAlī provides a meticulous description of the Creator. He explicitly states the belief in God in an eloquent and thoughtful manner. In this section, parts of this sermon will be translated and discussed.

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[348] Al-Ghazālī, M. (2005). *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. Beirut: Dār ibn Ḥazm, p. 113-114.
[349] NB, sermon 1, p. 39.
[350] Muṭahharī, M. (2009), in *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul-Balagh*. Ed. Al-Jibouri, Y.T. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc., p. 46.

3.5.1 Part I: Praising and Exalting God

The first sermon of NB:

> All the praise be to God whose praise cannot be achieved by speakers, whose bounties cannot be counted by calculators and whose rightful obedience cannot be satisfied by those who attempt to do so. Whom the pinnacle of intellectual thought cannot perceive [Him], and the deepest dive into the ocean of understanding Him cannot reach [Him]; He, whose attributes are not confined within any limit, no description of Him exists, no time is ordained, and no duration is fixed. He initiated creation through His Omnipotence, dispersed winds through His Compassion, and rooted with rocks His unstable earth.

The Imam commences the sermon by praising God (*alḥamdulillāh* – الحَمْدُ لله). The phrase

alḥamdulillāh appears repeatedly in the Qur'ān (more than twenty times). It is mostly associated

with divine versus materialistic blessings. The following are some examples:

1) All the praise be to God the Lord of the worlds – *alḥamdulillāhi rabbil-ʿālamīn*

(1:2);

2) All the praise be to God the One Who created the heavens and the earth and made

the darkness and the light – *alḥamdulillāhi alladhī khalaqa al-samāwāti wal-arḍa wa*

jaʿala al-ẓulumāti wal-nūr (6:1);

3) So the roots of the people who were unjust were cut off, and all the praise be to

God the Lord of the worlds – *fa quṭiʿa dābiru al-qawmil-ladhīn ẓalamū wal-ḥamdulillāhi*

rabbil-ʿālamīn (6:45);

4) And say, "All the praise be to God the One Who did not take son, and Who has no

partner in the kingdom, and Who has no helper to save Him from disgrace, and proclaim

His greatness greatly" – *wa qulil-ḥamdulillāhi alladhī lam yattakhidh ṣāḥibatan wa lā*

waladan wa lam yakun lahu sharīkun fil-mulk wa lam yakun lahu waliyyun minal-dhul wa

kabbirhu takbīran (17:111);

5)   All the praise be to God the one who revealed the Book to His servant – *al-*

ḥamdulillāhi alladhī anzala ʿalā ʿabdihi al-kitāb (18:1); and

6)   And say, "All the praise be to God; He will show you His signs that you shall

recognize them" – *wa qulil-ḥamdulillāhi sayurīkum ayātihi fataʿrifūnahā* (27:93).

The verses above seek to make the believers pay attention to praising and thanking God for divine

blessings they may not perceive, such as Him being the Lord of the worlds, the Creator, the One

Who destroys oppressors, the One Who revealed the Book and the One Who shows them His

signs. This may assert the definition of *al-hamd* as gratitude for bounties that may not directly

reach the blessed, whereas *shukr* is thankfulness for bounties that directly reach the one blessed

with it.[351] For example, *al-ḥamdulillāhi rabbil-ʿālamīn*: all praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.[352]

Such a bounty is not directly given to humans. Whereas, "O believers! Eat of the good We

sustained you with and be thankful (*washkurū*) to God, if He, you are worshiping."[353] Here, people

directly received the bounties of food, and hence, after directly receiving them, they perform

shukr to God.

Prophet Muḥammad started his sermons with praising God, and hence, Imam ʿAlī followed the

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[351] Al-Khū'ī. *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 294.
[352] Qur'ān (1:2)
[353] Qur'ān (2:172)

examples of the Qur'ān and Prophet Muḥammad.[354]

In Arabic eloquence, there exists what is known as the eloquence of commencing a sermon,

barāʿatul istihlāl.[355] The opening words of a sermon or poem or letter in Arabic literature provide

an indication of the content of the discussion.

The beginning of the above-mentioned sermon sets the tone for Imam ʿAlī's discourse about God

and His attributes. According to the opening statements, Imam ʿAlī clearly indicates that God

cannot be understood nor described even by the greatest minds and attempts. This resembles

the theology of Imamī belief, as will be described later in the sermon. This stems from the Qur'ān,

"Immaculate is He, and greatly exalted above what they say," (17:43). Imam ʿAlī is trying to clarify

to those listening that even his attempt in describing God, despite its eloquence, will not do

justice to Him.

As stated above, the sermon begins by praising God, the One Who no matter how much people

praise Him and try to describe Him, will never be able to rightfully do so. In sermon 111 of NB,

Imam ʿAlī states about the Angel of Death and the departure of the soul:

> Do you feel when the Angel of Death enters a house, or do you see him when he
> takes out the life of anyone? How does he take out the life of a foetus in the womb
> of its mother? Does he reach it through any part of her body or the does the soul
> respond to his call with the permission of God? Or does he stay with the foetus in

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[354] For references about several of Prophet Muḥammad's sermons one can refer to Zanjanī, Mūsa (1984). *Madīnat al-Balāghah*. Tehran: Maktabat Kaʿbah.

[355] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah. *Al-Fawā'id al-Mushawwiq ilā ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān wa ʿilm al-Bayān*, p.206. Retrieved from http://books.rafed.net/view.php?type=c_fbook&b_id=864&page=206

the mother's womb? How can he who is unable to describe a creature [of God] like this, then tries to describe God Himself?![356]

Again, Imamī belief is that the true essence of God cannot be described in words or reached in thought. As such, no matter how much speakers try to praise Him or appreciate Him, they will never be able to do justice to Him. This recognition that His true Essence cannot be described nor appreciated is the pinnacle of submission.[357]

The sermon then explains that the bounties of God cannot be counted, as affirmed in the Qur'ān, "And if you count the bounties of God you will not be able to do so," (16:18). It then states that no matter how much people try to worship Him, they will never be able to worship Him the way He deserves. The Qur'ān also states, "O you who have faith! Be wary of God with the wariness due to Him (*ittaqū Allāha ḥaqqa tuqātihī*)," (3:102). Since it is difficult to be grateful to God with the wariness due to Him, God made it easier by stating in another part of the Qur'ān, "So be wary of God as much as you can," (64:16). Nonetheless, even when being wary of God with the wariness due to Him, one can never reach any level near that of which He deserves in gratitude. According to the supplication of Those Who are Thankful in *Ṣaḥīfa Sajjādiyyah*, the fourth Shiʿi Imam, al-Sajjād (d. 95/713) states, "So how can I achieve thanksgiving, for my thanking Thee requires thanksgiving. Whenever I say, 'To Thee belongs praise!' It becomes thereby incumbent

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[356] NB, sermon 111, p. 210.

[357] It is narrated that God revealed to prophet Moses, "O Moses! Be grateful to Me as is worthy of being grateful to Me." Moses then replied, "My Lord! How can I be grateful to You with any gratitude that is worthy of You, when every gratitude I make to You is, in itself, a blessing from You?" God then replies, "O Moses, now you are grateful to Me knowing that [being grateful] is a blessing from Me." Al-Khūʾī. *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 247.

upon me to say, 'To Thee belongs praise'!"[358]

Imam ʿAlī continues in stating that no mind can explain what He is, based on the Qur'ānic verse, "There is nothing like Him," (42:11). In other words, he is already setting the tone that God cannot be described by any human, and hence, those who make such attempts will never have an accurate description of Him. Therefore, the Imam clearly states, "He, Whose attributes are not confined within any limit, no description of Him exists, no time is ordained and no duration is fixed." In stating this, Imam ʿAlī is refuting what later became the Ashāʿrites' description of God, that He has personified characteristics, such as He can be seen on the Day of Judgment,[359] He sits on the Throne,[360] and He has limbs.[361] Moreover, Imam ʿAlī further clarifies that God is not confined in time or space, for He has no beginning, nor does he have an end, and there is nothing materialistic about Him.[362] In addition, the Imam clearly indicates that God has attributes, but they are not limited in any way, nor are they confined in time and space. In other words, he appears to be suggesting that His attributes are of His Essence, and not added acquisitions to His Divine Deity. This point will be explained in greater detail below as it defies the Muʿtazilī concept

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[358] *Ṣaḥīfa Sajjādiyyah* translated as *Psalms of Islam* by William Chittick (2007). London: Muhammadi Trust, p. 260.

[359] Ibn Kathīr writes in his *Tafsīr*, when interpreting verses 22-23 of chapter 75, "And the narrations about seeing God on the Day of Judgment are plenty and are authentic." Ibn Kathīr (1999). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*. Riyad: Dār Ṭībah lil-Ṭibāʿah wal-Nashr, vol. 8, p. 279.

[360] Ibn Taymiyyah (1986). *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah*. (n.p.), vol. 1, p. 377.

[361] *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, interpretation of verse 30 of chapter 50 of the Qur'ān, "God will take His foot and place it in the Hell Fire, so the Fire will then respond, 'Enough! Enough!'" Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 3, p. 165. Imāmī scholars reject such traditions as per the traditions of Shiʿi Imams and verses of the Qur'ān God cannot be personified. See Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī.

[362] Ṣadūq (1990). *Al-Khiṣāl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat Al-Aʿlamī, p. 2.

of *aḥwāl*, as well as the Ashʿarī belief of the attributes being "added" on the Essence.[363]

The sermon then describes God's greatness in creating the wind and mountains. What is interesting about Imam ʿAlī's choice of the wind and mountains is that the former is invisible and so light (*laṭīf*), while the latter is dense, large and magnificent (*kathīf*). It is a beautiful demonstration of his great eloquence in giving a materialistic hint that everything in this World from the lightest to the heaviest is the creation of One Great Creator. Moreover, both references have their Qur'ānic analogy, "He is the One who sends winds facilitating rain (of His mercy)," (7:57); and, "And the mountains are rooted," (78:7), as well as, "And He put in the earth mountains such that it would not be unstable with you," (16:15).

The next section of Imam ʿAlī's sermon eloquently summarizes the Imamī belief in God and His attributes. It contains some deep theological discussions at a time when the entire science of *kalām* was not yet founded or even discussed. It is, therefore, safe to say that while the Qur'ān and Prophet Muḥammad laid the foundation for *kalām*, it was Imam ʿAlī who established it, discussing topics such as God and His attributes, as well as free will, much earlier than any Muslim thinker, philosopher or theologian.[364] In addition, like the Qur'ān, words of Shiʿi Imams appear to have an explicit, apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*), but also contain an implicit hidden message (*bāṭin*).[365]

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[363] Subḥānī, J (unknown). *Buḥūth fī al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 2, p. 85-94. Retrieved from https://research.rafed.net/الفرق-والمذاهب/496-السنة/الأشعرية/الأشعري-آراء-الأشعري/2255-صفاته-زائدة-على-ذاته

[364] See Ghazālī's and Murtaḍā's comments on p. 8 and p.2, respectively.

[365] Imam ʿAlī says about the Qur'ān, "Its apparent [message] is beautiful (*ẓāhiruhu anīq*), and its hidden [message] is deep (*bāṭinuhu ʿamīq*)," NB, sermon 18, p. 72. Moreover, just like the Qur'ān, according to Shiʿi traditions, the sayings of the Imams can also have a *ẓāhir* and a *bāṭin*. Sixth Imam, al-Ṣadiq states to Mu'min al-Ṭāq, "You [plural: *antum*] are the most learned of people as long as you understand the meaning of our talk. Our talk can have seventy interpretations." Ṣaffār. *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, vol. 1, p. 126.

The hidden, deeper message of Imam ʿAlī's words can be referred to as the ʿAlawī revelations. It is important to note, however, that all ʿAlawī revelations stem from Imam ʿAlī's deep understanding and thorough knowledge of the Qurʾān.[366] Hence, one can observe that his theological method branches from the Qurʾān as per the Prophetic tradition, "ʿAlī is with the Qurʾān and the Qurʾān is with ʿAlī, they will not separate until they arrive to the river [of Paradise]."[367]

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[366] There is a section in *al-Kāfī* titled, "Referring to the Qurʾān and tradition and there is nothing that is lawful or forbidden and everything that people need but there is a verse revealed or a tradition about it (*Al-Rad ilā al-kitāb wal-sunnah wa annahu laysa shayʾun min al-ḥalāl wal-ḥarām wa jamīʿ ma yaḥtaju al-nās ilayhi illā wa qad jāʾ fīhi kitābun aw sunnah*)." In that section, *ḥadīth* number six, it is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq, "There is no matter that two individuals discuss about but has a root in the Book of God the Exalted the High. However, the minds of people cannot reach it." In *ḥadīth* number eight of the same section, again the sixth Shiʿi Imam states, "The Messenger of God gave birth to me [i.e. he is my grandfather] and I know the Book of God and in it is the beginning of the creation and whatever is going to happen until the Day of Judgment, and in it is the information of the skies, and information of the earth, and information of Paradise, and information of the Hell Fire, and the information of what happened and what will happen. I know this [information] as well as looking in my palm. God says [about the Qurʾān], 'In it is the information of everything,'." Therefore, Imamī belief is that the Shiʿi Imams have the knowledge of the holy Qurʾān and that whatever they say stems from it. Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 20, *ḥadīth* No. 7 & 8, p. 36.

[367] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah, vol.3, p. 134. Ayatullāh Sayyid ʿAlī Mīlānī states that this *ḥadīth* asserts the following three points, "First, it means impeccability, which is not going beyond the Qurʾān. Second, this being a must condition found in the Imam. Third, this is found in Imam ʿAlī." Mīlānī, ʿAlī (1992). *Al-Imāmah fī Aham al-Kutub al-Kalāmiyyah wa ʿAqīdat al-Shīʿah*. Qum: Manshūrāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, p. 53. Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī states in his introduction, "And our Imam, the Master of the Successors and the Commander of the Faithful, the one with the amazing signs and clear lights, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib *alaihi assalam*, was in all that came of his discourse and performed of his actions and laws, intending to all that is contained in the honourable laws (*al-sharʿ al-karīm*) of means and intentions, explaining what the wise Qurʾān contained of laws and basis, to the point that one cannot find a word from him not on this path as we will show that shortly and will explain it in detail. Hence, there is no doubt his words were of those that had the touch of God and in it is a remaining from Prophetic talk (*fa lā jurma kāna kalāmuhu al-kalām al-ladhī ʿalayhi masḥatun min al-kalām al-ilāhī wa fīhi ʿabqatun min al-kalām al-nabawīy*). Ibn Maytham (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Manamah: Maktabat Fakhrāwī, p. 14. On a similar note, al-Khūʾī in his introduction states two verses of poetry without mentioning the poet,

كِتابٌ كَأَنَّ اللّهَ رَصَّعَ لَفْظَهُ   بِجَوْهَرِ آياتِ الكِتابِ المُنَزَّلِ

حَوى حِكماً كالدُّرِّ تَنْطِقُ صادِقاً   فَلا فَرْقَ إِلّاَ أَنَّهُ غَيْرُ مُنَزَّلِ

A book as if God aligned its speech with gems of the verses of the revealed Book

It contains wisdom like pearls speak truthfully   So there is no difference except that it is not revealed

Al-Khūʾī (1983). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Wafāʾ, vol. 1, p. 245.

3.5.2 Part II: God and His Attributes

Imam ʿAlī continues,

> The essence of religion is His recognition; the perfection of recognizing Him is to believe in to Him; the perfection of believing in Him is to declare His Oneness; the perfection of declaring His Oneness is to be sincere to Him; and, the perfection of being sincere to Him is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed to, and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute.

> Thus, whoever attaches attributes to God recognizes His like; and, whoever recognizes His like regards Him [as] two; and, whoever regards Him [as] two declares parts for Him; and, whoever declares parts for Him mistook Him; and, whoever mistook Him pointed at Him; and, whoever pointed at Him admitted limitations for Him; and, whoever admitted limitations for Him numbered Him. Whoever said: 'In what is He?' held that He is contained; and whoever said: 'On what is He?' held that He is on something [but not something] else.

> He is a Being, but not through the phenomenon of coming into existence. He exists but not from non-existence. He is with everything but not spatially. He is different from everything but not in physical separation. He acts but without connotation of movements and instruments. He sees even when there is none to be looked at from among His creation. He is only One, such that there is none with whom He may keep company or whom He may miss in its absence.

> He initiated creation without prior existence of any material, and commenced it originally, without undergoing reflection, without making use of any experiment, without innovating any movement, and without any hesitation due to self-disturbance. He turned things to specific times, fitted between their variations, gave them their properties, and determined their features knowing them before creating them, realizing fully their limits and confines and recognizing their propensities and intricacies.

Imam ʿAlī's description of the belief in God in this portion of the sermon is very detailed and meticulously stated. This portion of the sermon represents the entire belief of Islamic

monotheism,[368] and it will be divided into five sections.

3.5.2.1 Recognition of God (*maʿrifah*)

Imam ʿAlī describes the essence of religion as the recognition of God. This sentence may have several meanings. The Imam here uses the word *ʿarafa*, to recognize, which is different from *ʿalima*, to know. *Arafa* may mean to remember something that was forgotten.[369] For example, one might say, "Do you know John?" The other person can reply, "Yes, but I do not recognize him." Here, recognition is deeper than knowing, as it entails more than knowing; it entails developing an understanding of who is the person, i.e. John, in this case. If this meaning is intended, then the Imam's statement in Arabic may be translated into English as, "The beginning of religion is His recognition." Sūrat *Al-Aʿrāf*, chapter 7 in the Qur'ān, verse 172 states, "When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [He said to them], 'Am I not your Lord?' They replied, 'Yes, indeed! We bear witness.' [This], lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed we were unaware of this.'" As per this "witness," humans gave a covenant to their Lord and attested to His existence. This is referenced in the words of Imam ʿAlī when he says that one of the roles of prophets is to, "make them [people] provide the covenant of His original nature (*fiṭratihi*)."[370]

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[368] Al-Khū'ī states, "Be aware, this section of the sermon, despite how brief it is, contains most of the Godly descriptions, with its clear proofs. Hence, the well learned are confused about understanding its meaning; the intellects and the minds are unable to arrive to its [true] meaning." *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 319.

[369] Al-Anṣārī, M.Ḥ. (2011). *Nihāyat al-Maʿrifah*. Qum: Mu'assasat al-Shaykh al-Anṣārī, p. 85-90; and *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 262.

[370] NB, sermon 1, p. 45.

Moreover, it is narrated from Zurārah ibn Aʿyan (d. 150/767) on accounts of the fifth Shiʿi Imam, Al-Bāqir, who asked him about verse 172 of Surah *Al-Aʿrāf*, "He brought [into being] all the progeny of Adam until the Day of Judgment, so they came out like dust particles seen in the ray of the sun (or very small ants) (*dharr*) – or may even be translated as atoms – so He revealed Himself to them and made them recognize Him, and if it were not for that, then no one would have recognized his/her Lord."[371] Therefore, according to Shiʿi belief, all humans 'know' of the existence of God as part of their inner or natural instinct, *fiṭrah*, but some forget about Him. Thus, once they are guided to believing in Him, they 'recognize' Him, rather than 'know' Him, as He was already known to them but forgotten about. As such, this meaning of *maʿrifatih*, may suggest that the beginning of the journey towards getting closer to God is through recognizing Him, by recognizing His existence, and that He is the Creator and Maker of the World and everything that exists within it. This is the meaning that Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, and Al-Khūʾī refer to in their interpretation of NB.[372] It is also one of the two meanings Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī uses as well.[373]

Another meaning of *ʿarafa* is to recognize the deeper meaning of something.[374] Here, '*awwal*' may not refer to 'first' or 'beginning', but rather to 'essence' or 'greatest'. Hence, the sentence of NB would be more accurately translated as, "the essence of religion is His recognition." This is what al-Baḥrānī refers to in his second definition of *maʿrifah*, calling it *al-maʿrifah al-ʿaqlīyah*, or

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[371] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*. vol. 2, section 6, *ḥadīth* No. 4, p. 11. The statement "He revealed Himself to them" here means God demonstrated His Magnificence to their minds, not their physical eyes. Al-Māzandarānī, M.S. (2008). *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Ed. Sayyid ʿAlī ʿĀshūr. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 8, p. 39-40.
[372] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 32; Al-Khūʾī, vol. 1, p. 319-320.
[373] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī (2007). *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*. Manamah: Maktabat Fakhrāwī, p. 80-81.
[374] Al-Anṣārī, M.Ḥ. (2011). *Nihāyat al-Maʿrifah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Shaykh al-Anṣārī, p. 85-90.

recognition through the intellect. Imam ʿAlī may be referring to the pinnacle of religion, and the

first of its priorities, as being able to recognize God, which is developing a deep understanding of

His greatness.[375] This may include, but not limited to, recognizing that He is One, with no partners;

cannot be described in words; cannot be imagined or perceived; cannot be limited and confined;

and is greater than ever being comprehended. Imam al-Ṣādiq states, "Surely God cannot be

described, and how can He be described when He states in His Book, 'They did not regard God

with the regard due to Him.'[376] So He is not described in any form, but He is greater than that."[377]

In a different part of NB, Imam ʿAlī states, "He did not make the minds realize limits to His

attributes; nor did He veil [the minds] from the necessity of His recognition."[378] Also, Sixth Shiʿi

Imam, al-Ṣādiq says, "Indeed, God's command (amr Allāh) is all wonderful, but He proved [His

argument] over them [people] (iḥtajja ʿalaihim) by what He made them recognize of Himself."[379]

Since God's attributes are not limited, not confined, not finite, not restricted, not acquired, and

not added to His Essence but are rather His Essence, then they cannot be realized by the human

mind, which is of limited understanding. However, the recognition of the existence of a Creator,

a Designer, a Maker is achieved through the reflection of the intellect. This recognition of God is

a "necessity" as without it one cannot realize His existence, and hence, believe in Him. Moreover,

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[375] To fully comprehend the Essence of God is not possible, and hence, it is forbidden. Al-Haydary interprets this as the impossibility of understanding *Thātu Allāh*, or the Essence of God, but the ability to ponder and reflect on His attributes (*Ṣifāt*) and His actions (*Afʿāl*). Several traditions are also narrated about this matter. Imam ʿAlī states, "One who reflects upon the Essence of God becomes a disbeliever." In another tradition he says, "One who reflects upon the Essence of God leaves the religion." Al-Haydary, K. (2007). *Maʿrifat Allāh*. Qum: Dār Farāqid, p. 235-236.
[376] Qurʾān: 6:91
[377] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 32, ḥadīth No. 11, p. 60.
[378] NB, sermon 49, p. 107.
[379] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 26, ḥadīth No. 3, p. 51.

this statement suggests the use of the intellect in recognizing the existence of God, indicating an influence of Imam ʿAlī's theology over Muʿtazilī scholars, and not vice versa.[380]

Al-Juwaynī writes in al-Irshād, "The first obligation upon the sound [person] when he reaches [the age] of adulthood, either by completing the years of adulthood or by reaching puberty according to religious law, is the intention to the correct reason (*al-naẓar*) that leads to the knowledge in the making of this world (*ḥadath al-ʿālam*). And the reason (*al-naẓar*) according to the people of monotheism (*al-muwaḥḥidīn*) is the reflection (*al-fikr*) that is sought when seeking knowledge or overcoming doubt."[381]

In his *Theology*, McDermott writes that according to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, man's first moral obligation is to reason to the knowledge of God.[382] In the words of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, "If one asks, 'What is the first [thing] that God mandated upon you?' Say, 'Reason (*al-naẓar*) that leads to the recognition (*maʿrifah*) of God the Exalted."[383] McDermott also states that according to Mufīd, on the other hand, man's first duty is to know God,[384] which the author says is the position of the Baghdadī Muʿtazilīs. In essence, this is what Imam ʿAlī says as "the first [obligation] is to recognize Him," and hence, Mufīd is in line with the teachings of the first Shiʿi Imam.

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[380] As was discussed in the previous chapter. See, Ali, A.H. (2007). *Imamite Rationalism in the Buyid Era*. McGill University.
[381] Al-Juwaynī, A. (1995). *Kitāb al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 7.
[382] McDermott, M.J. (1978). *The Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd*. Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, p. 58.
[383] ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 39.
[384] McDermott, M.J. (1978). *The Theology of Al-Shaykh Al-Mufīd*. Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, p. 58.

3.5.2.2 Belief in God and His Oneness

Imam ʿAlī continues,

> The perfection of recognizing Him is to believe in Him; the perfection of believing in Him is to declare His Oneness; the perfection of declaring His Oneness is to be sincere to Him.

According to NB, spiritual ascension towards God has levels, the pinnacle of which is to recognize Him. The perfection of recognizing Him is to believe in Him. Many people may recognize the existence of God but do not testify to Him.[385] The Qurʾān states, "If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' they will surely say, 'God!' Say, 'All praise belongs to God!' But most of them do not know," (31:25). Moreover, although some people recognize God as the Creator, their degree in believing in Him varies. Some may have a higher level of faith than others. Imam ʿAlī himself states, "If the secrets of the Worlds were revealed [to humans] my certainty [in God] would not increase."[386] So he's already reached the pinnacle of belief, whereas many people are far from that degree of faith. Hence, the next sentence in the sermon states, "The perfection of testifying to Him is to believe in His Oneness."

Based on the traditions from Ahlulbayt, Ṣadūq divides *Tawḥīd* in three categories: Unity of the Essence (*tawḥīd al-Dhāt*), Unity of the Attributes (*tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt*), Unity of the Actions (*tawḥīd*

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[385] The meaning of "recognize" here is referring to realizing the existence of God.

[386] Al-Haytamī, A. b. Ḥajar (2009). *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqah fī al-Rad ʿalā ahl al-Bidaʿ wal-Zandaqah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 199. Imam ʿAlī's certainty in his belief in God, along with his immense knowledge make him the best personality after the Prophet Muḥammad to describe theology, and the best reference for its pure understanding.

al-Afʿāl).[387] The Unity of the Essence is further divided in two branches: simplicity of the Essence

(*aḥadiyyah*) and uniqueness of the Essence (*wāḥidiyyah*). There is nothing like Him, and hence,

He is One, but not in a numerical sense because numerically, after one comes two, and after two

comes three, and so on. God does not have a "two," then a "three," etc. He is only One.

Moreover, numbers are limited in the sense that when one is finished, comes two, and when two

is completed, comes three, etc. God has no limits, hence, anyone who puts a limit to Him then

numerates Him, in the sense that numbers have limits. As such, God is One ontologically and not

numerically, and there is nothing like Him (*wāḥidiyyah*). Simplicity of the Essence (*aḥadiyyah*)

refers to God as having no composites, but rather His Essence is simple.[388] For example, water

consists of two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom. The atoms are further divided into

subatomic particles. Hence, while water maybe pure, it is made up of different composites. Even

elements, such as gold, for example, consist of subatomic particles: protons, electrons and

neutrons. Thus, they consist of different particles. God, however, does not have any

composites.[389] Henceforth, Unity of the Attributes is the belief that His attributes (*ṣifāt*) are His

Essence (*ʿaynu dhātihi*) and are not added on to the Essence (*zā'idah ʿalā al-dhāt*), hence, they

do not separate from Him.

Some of God's attributes are considered as His Essential attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhātiyyah*). The eighth

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[387] Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 84-88, 139 and 148.
[388] Ibid, p. 84-88.
[389] The Qurʾān states, "He is the One (*al-Wāḥid*), the Supreme," (13:16); "There is no god but the One (*al-Wāḥid*), the Supreme," (38:65). It also states, "Say, He is God the One (*Aḥad*)," (112:1). Imam ʿAlī describes the terms *wāḥid* and *aḥad* to the Arab man who asked him about the terms during the Battle of the Camel. Ṣadūq (1990). *Al-Khiṣāl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 2.

Imam, Al-Riḍā states six of these attributes that Ṣadūq keeps under the section titled *Bāb ṣifāt al-dhāt wa ṣifāt al-afʿāl,* "God the Exalted, the High, is eternally (*lam yazal Allāhu tabāraka wa taʿālā*) Knowledgeable (*ʿĀlīman*), Powerful (*Qādiran*), Ever Living (*Ḥayyan*), Ever-Existing (Qadīman), All-Hearing (*Samīʿan*), All-seeing (*Baṣīran*)."[390] Ṣadūq says that *ṣifāt al-dhāt* are those that the opposite of Essential attributes cannot be given to God. For example, the opposite of Ever Living (*Ḥay*) is no life, and hence, once we attribute Life to Him, then we negate any end to Him.[391] Mufīd states that *ṣifāt al-dhāt* are those attributes that are of His Essence and not relating to an action. For example, He is Ever Living, Powerful and Knowledgeable and these attributes are of His Essence not requiring an action, whereas the attribute Creator (*khāliq*), Mufīd says that He cannot be called that until He creates, and hence, it is of *ṣifāt al-afʿāl*.[392] Moreover, Unity of the Actions is also the belief that all actions ultimately stem from God. He gave power to people to perform actions and provided them with the free will to make choices; however, if He chooses to withdraw the power from anyone, He can do so. Moreover, Unity of the Actions consists of attributes of God that relate to His creations. For example, Creator, Sustainer relate to Him creating and sustaining. For as long as God has not yet created, He is not yet a "Creator" or a "Sustainer" of His creation. However, He has the Power and Knowledge to Create.[393]

These classifications can be found in the traditions of Shiʿi Imams. Imam ʿAlī says in letter 31 of

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[390] Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 140.
[391] Ibid, p. 148.
[392] Mufīd (1992). *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 41;
[393] Al-Shīrāzī, M. (2009). *Buḥūth fī al-ʿAqīdah wa al-Sulūk*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿUlūm, p. 85-90; al-Haydarī, K. (2011). *Durūs fī al-Tawḥīd*, Beirut: Dār Al-Murtaḍā; Milani, F.H. (2011). *Al-ʿAqāʾed al-Islāmīyah*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Balāgh.

NB to his son Imam al-Ḥasan, "And be aware my son! If your Lord had an associate, then his messengers would have come to you, and you would have seen the signs of his ownership and power, and you would have recognized his actions and attributes." Even though the Imam was speaking about the lack of existence of another deity besides God, he distinguished between "actions" and "attributes."[394] Moreover, eighth Shiʻi Imam, al-Riḍā, says, "His names are an expression. His actions are to develop understanding. His Essence is truth."[395] Thus, Imam al-Riḍā differentiates between God's names, and between His actions and His Essence.

The pinnacle of belief in God, according to NB, is to worship Him alone with no partners or associates while the perfection of declaring His Oneness is sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*). Chapter 112 of the Qur'ān, titled *al-Ikhlāṣ* or *al-Tawḥīd*, states, "Say, 'He is God, the One. God the Needless. He neither begat, nor was begotten. Nor has He any equal." The true belief in God is to believe in Him, the One that has no partners nor associates, submit to Him and do all deeds for His pleasure only. The Qur'ān says, "Say [O Muḥammad], 'Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of God, the Lord of all the worlds. He has no partner, and I have been commanded [to follow] this [creed], and I am the first of those who submit [to God]'," (6:162-163). In the Prophetic tradition stated at the beginning of the chapter, the Prophet explains to a man who asked him how to truly recognize God, "Knowing Him not resembling anything (*bilā mithl*), nor looking like anything (*wa lā shibh*), nor having anything equal to Him (*wa lā nid*), and that He is One (*Wāḥid*), nothing like Him (*Aḥad*), He is Apparent (*Ẓāhir*), Hidden (*Bāṭin*), First

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[394] NB, letter 31, p. 481.
[395] Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Mu'assasat al-Aʻlamī, p. 36.

(*Awwal*), Last (*Ākhir*), there is no match to Him (*lā kufwa lahu*), and no likes to Him (*wa lā naẓīr*). That is His true recognition."[396]

Another meaning for *ikhlāṣ* could be to remove any impurity or contaminants from something. In other words, not to attribute anything to God that may not be suitable for His Greatness and Absolute Perfection. In such case, the meaning of the sentence in NB would be, "the perfection of declaring His Oneness is not attributing anything to Him that is unworthy of Him." It suggests the necessity of keeping away from Him all limitations, personifications, and attributes that are unworthy of Him. This also sets the stage for the next section, where His attributes will be discussed.

3.5.2.3 God's Attributes

Imam ʿAlī says,

> And the perfection of being sincere to Him is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed to, and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute.
>
> Thus, whoever attaches attributes to God, the Exalted, recognizes an associate for Him, and whoever recognizes an associate for Him regards Him [as] two; and whoever regards Him [as] two declares parts for Him; and whoever declares parts for Him mistook Him; and whoever mistook Him pointed at Him; and whoever pointed at Him admitted limitations for Him; and whoever admitted limitations for Him numbered Him. Whoever said: 'In what is He?' held that He is contained; and whoever said: 'On what is He?' held He is not on something else.

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[396] Ṣadūq (n.d.). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 284-285.

These sentences of Imam ʿAlī about God's attributes are crucial but require a meaningful reflection.

At a first glance, the Imam's words may suggest refutation of assigning attributes to God. However, a few sentences earlier he stated, "He, Whose attributes are not confined within any limit." Moreover, in sermon 49 he says, "He did not give the minds [the ability] to describe His attributes."[397] As such, the Imam *does* accept attributes to God, but his description of the attributes is important, as will discussed below.

The above few sentences of Imam ʿAlī are essential as they negate the Ashʿarī description of God and His attributes as well as the Muʿtazilī concept of *aḥwāl*. Before engaging in Imam ʿAlī's definition of the attributes, the Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī belief of God and His attributes will be briefly discussed.

3.5.2.3.1 Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī belief of God and His Attributes

The Ashāʿrites belief according to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/929) himself is as follows,

> What we say and the religion that we follow is as follows: holding on to the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger peace be upon him, and what is narrated from the companions and the companions of the companions. We are holding steadfastly on to that, and on to what Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal followed, may God blossom his face, elevate his status and increase his reward, and [say] what he says, and go against those who went against [what] he says. Because he is the honourable Imam and the perfect leader, whom God clarified the truth through him when falsehood appeared."[398]

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[397] NB, sermon 49, p. 107.
[398] Al-Ashʿarī (2011). *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Riyad: Dār Muslim lil-Nashr, p. 211.

The main belief relating to Ashāʿrites' claims about God and His attributes can be summarized in the following three points:

1) God's attributes are not of His Essence, rather, He had eternal attributes such as knowledge, sight, speech and that by these He is Knowing, Seeing, Speaking, etc;

2) God can be literally seen in the Hereafter but in a manner that we cannot comprehend; and,

3) God created everything, including the actions of people and everything they do is through His will.[399]

The Muʿtazilī belief is well summarized by al-Ashʿarī himself in his *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*. It briefly states that they believe in God as a deity Who cannot be seen, and Who does not exhibit any human characteristics, and Whose attributes take the place of His Essence.[400] Moreover, they also believe that humans have the power over their own actions, and hence, are responsible for their deeds.[401]

Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/916) went with the idea that God's attributes are of His Essence: Knowledgeable by His Essence, Powerful, Ever-Living by His Essence (*ʿālimun lidhātih, qādirun, ḥayyun lidhātih*). His son, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī al-Muʿtazilī (d. 321/933), however, introduced the concept of states (*aḥwāl*), where he tried to explain that the attributes are not a separate

[399] See Al-Ashʿarī (1990). *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*. Beirut: al-Maṭbʿah al-ʿAṣriyyah; Al-Ashʿarī (1955). *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*. Cairo: al-Maṭbʿah al-Maṣriyyah; and, Al-Ashʿarī (2011). *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Riyad: Dār Muslim lil-Nashr.
[400] Al-Ashʿarī. *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*, p. 235.
[401] Shahristānī (1992). *Al-Milāl wal-Niḥal*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah , p. 39.

entity from the Essence, but they are states the Essence achieves.[402] Both of those concepts are

the opinion of the majority of Muʿtazilī scholars, including al-Qāḍī abd al-Jabbār (415/1025),[403]

which made al-Hakīm al-Sabzawarī state in his *Manẓūmah*,

<div dir="rtl">

والأشعرية بازدياد قائلة * وقال بالنيابة المعتزلة

</div>

Ashāʿrites speak of "addition" * While the Muʿtazila of "taking place"[404]

Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī's stand on attributes is close to the Shiʿi belief; however, both al-Ashʿarī's and

Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī's descriptions are not very clear and do not adhere to the Shiʿi teachings

of God and His attributes. In fact, Murtaḍā quotes Mufīd saying, "Three things are impossible to

logically accept, and theologians worked hard to achieve their meanings from their sources

through every means, but did not arrive at anything but statements that contradict one another:

Christian trinity (where the three are One and the One is three); the *kasb*[405] of Najjāriyyah, and

the states (*aḥwāl*) of the Bahshamiyyah."[406] Moreover, Mufīd has a section in his *Awāʾil al-*

Maqālāt, titled, "The response to what Abū Hāshim alone declared about the states," (*al-radd*

ʿalā ma infarada bihi Abū Hāshim min al-aḥwāl) where he says that "Abū Hāshim moved away

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[402] See, Shahristānī (1992). *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah , p. 69; and Subḥānī, J (n.d.). *Buḥūth fī al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. vol. 3, p. 326. Retrieved from
http://books.rafed.net/view.php?type=c_fbook&b_id=61&page=260

[403] See the opinion of ʿAbd al-Jabbār in *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah. p. 183.

[404] Subḥānī, J (n.d.). *Buḥūth fī al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. vol. 2, p. 87. Retrieved from
https://research.rafed.net/الفرق-والمذاهب/496-السنة/الأشعرية/آراء-الأشعري/2255-صفاته-زائدة-على-ذاته

[405] Which deals with the concept that all human actions are done by the Will of God, but the human will be punished or rewarded for participating in the action.

[406] Mufīd (1992). *Al-Ḥikāyāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 45-47.

from all the people of monotheism" including his father.[407] In fact, even some Muʿtazilī scholars

do not concur with such opinions. Abu Hudhail al-ʿAllāf (d. 235/840), one of the grand Muʿtazilī

scholars, says, "He [God] is Knowing with Knowledge that is He [of His Essence]; Powerful with

Power that is He [of His Essence]; Living with Life that is He [of His Essence]."[408] This opinion

corresponds to the Shiʿi belief, that God's attributes are of His Essence.[409]

While some clear differences exist between Muʿtazilī belief of monotheism and that of Shiʿi

Imamī, there are some similarities as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, that may be due

to Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ being a student of Abū Hāshim, the son of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, who

is the son of Imam ʿAlī, and many of the early Muʿtazilī thinkers being close associates with the

Shiʿa.[410]

3.5.2.3.2 Imam ʿAlī's description of the Attributes

Imam ʿAlī clearly indicates that the perfection of God's purification lies in refuting the idea that

God's attributes are "added" to His Essence, as per what the Ashāʿrites belief, or that they "take

the place" of the Essence, or that they are "states," like what Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī claims. If one

suggests that His attributes are "added" to His Essence, it means that they are worshiping

multiple gods: knowledge is added to His Essence; Power is added to His Essence; Life is added

to His Essence; etc. This suggests that God the Knowledgeable is not the same as God the

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[407] Mufīd. *Awāʾil*, p. 56.
[408] ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah. p. 183.
[409] Mufīd. *Awāʾil*, p. 52.
[410] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 234; Murtaḍā (1954). *Amālī al-Murtaḍā*. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 1, p. 164-165; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 1, p. 12.

Powerful, nor is the same as God the Living, and so on. The Imam says that the attribute is different from the One having it, while the One having it is also different form the attribute. Additionally, this suggests that God's attributes are acquired rather than exhibited by His Essence. In other words, if one says, "John is knowledgeable," one understands that John is one entity and knowledge is another entity that was added to John. The two entities, John and knowledge, however, are different. That is why the Imam considers anyone making such a claim as making an "associate" to God since one will be adding knowledge, as in our example, to His Deity. This addition makes a duality of His Oneness: knowledge as one deity, and God as another; power as one deity, and God as another; living as one deity and God as another; and so on. Thus, there will be a duality for every attribute and God. Moreover, this would also suggest that knowledge is eternal, power is eternal, life is eternal, in parallel to God's eternity. Imamī belief, however, is that God alone is eternal, has no beginning nor an end, and since His attributes are of His Essence, there is nothing "associated" with His eternity.

Adding "duality" to Him will, in turn, divide Him into parts. For example, if one thinks of an engine, all parts of the engine are important to its essence: screws, gasket, belt, etc. These parts are added on to the engine, and when they are engineered in a particular combination, the unity that results is then called "engine." By ascribing attributes that are added to God's Essence, one is adding these parts to the Essence, which would then make God's Essence in need of each of these attributes. This would not make Him Self-Sufficient or Needless anymore but give the impression that He is dependent on His attributes. This makes the one making such claims ignorant about God, since it results in one imagining Him, which, in turn, limits Him or confines Him to a

boundary. For example, if one imagines any concept, whether it is concrete (i.e. house), or abstract (i.e. bravery), then one immediately associates the concept with its physical meaning, as in the case of the house, or with an experience, as in the case of bravery. In the case of the latter, when one imagines bravery, the thought of a fire fighter risking his life to save the lives of others, for example, might come to mind; or the thought of a shy person reading a poem in public may be conceptualized.[411] As such, conceptualization creates confining parameters that would add limitations such as time, space and dimension to what is being imagined. Hence, Imam ʿAlī was once asked about *tawḥīd* (Oneness) and *ʿadl* (Divine Justice), and he eloquently replied, "*Tawḥīd* is that you do not conceptualize Him, and *ʿadl* is that you do not accuse Him."[412]

According to Subḥānī, Muʿtazilī scholars refute the idea that God's attributes are of His Essence, because, according to them, they will be different to His Essence. Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār claims

> And the proofs for what we say in that is if He, the Exalted, were Omniscient through a knowledge, then it is either He is known, or He is not known. If He were not known, then He could not be proven, because proving what is not known opens the gate of multiplicities. If He were known, then it is either He is existent or non-existent. He cannot be non-existent. If He were existent, then it is either He is Eternal or contingent, and all those divisions are invalid, so nothing remains but that He is Omniscient by [taking place of] His Essence (*lidhātihi*) as we say.[413]

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[411] Hayes, J.C., Kraemer, D.J. (2017). Grounded understanding of abstract concepts: the case of STEM learning. *Cognitive Research*, 2(1): 7.

[412] NB, short words of wisdom No. 458, p. 650.

[413] Abd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah. p. 183. Subḥānī, J., comments on the above after stating it, "Those are known as rejectors of the attributes, to save the Oneness [of God] and refusing multiplicity of the eternals, and what they intend in saying *lidhātihi* is that His Essence, the Exalted, through its simplicity and unicity, takes place of the attributes." Subḥānī, J. *Buḥūth fī al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 2, p. 85-94. Retrieved from https://research.rafed.net/الفرق-والمذاهب/496-السنة/الأشعرية/الأشعري-آراء-2255/صفاته-زائدة-على-ذاته

This belief is the reason that made Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī claim that Imam ʿAlī's description of God's attributes explains Muʿtazilī belief.[414] However, the Imam stated earlier in the sermon that His attributes, "do not have any limits," and he also mentioned, "The perfection of declaring His Oneness is not attributing anything to Him that is unworthy of Him." As such, the Imam is accepting that God has attributes but that His attributes are of His Essence.[415] This is not the same as Muʿtazilī thought, and hence, it suggests that Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd may not have fully understood Imam ʿAlī's intent.

Imam ʿAlī then continues, "Whoever conceptualized Him admitted limitations for Him; and whoever admitted limitations for Him numbered Him. Whoever said: 'In what is He?' held that He is contained; and whoever said: 'On what is He?' held He is not on something else."

Since God is not physical, He cannot be limited, and doing so would account Him among the contingent (*muḥdath*). As such, He is not confined to any place, and hence, one cannot say, "In what is He?" because that would suggest He is in one place and not in another. On a similar note, one cannot say, "On what is He?" as that would also suggest He is on something and is not on another thing.

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[414] Ibn Abī al- Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 33.

[415] Eighth Shiʿi Imam, al-Riḍā, says, "God, the Mighty and High, has always been All-Knowing, All-Powerful, Ever-Living, Ever-Lasting, All-Hearing, and All-Seeing by His Essence. Exalted is He, the Elevated, the Great, from what the polytheists and anthropomorphists say." Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 139-140.

3.5.2.3.3 Interpretation of some verses of the Qur'ān suggesting anthropomorphism

Some verses of the Qur'ān may suggest the anthropomorphism of God, such as Him having a hand,[416] a face,[417] or Him sitting on a throne.[418] According to Milani, there are five different opinions on the interpretation of these verses.[419]

The first are the anthropomorphists (*Ḥashawiyah*) who believe that people are able to shake hands with God and may even be able to hug him.

The second opinion is that of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī and the Ashāʿirites who claim that while we do not attribute any similarity of the Lord with His creation, we should not ask any questions about what is stated in the Qur'ān, but rather take it literally.[420] This is also the opinion of the Salafī school, supported by Ibn Taymiyyah.[421] However, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), although a prominent Ashʿarī, rejected such an opinion and stated that *ta'wīl*, or an alternate explanation, is necessary when it comes to such verses.[422]

The third suggestion by al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) claims such verses among the equivocal ones (*mutashābihāt*), and God condemned those who try to mislead others by misinterpreting

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[416] Literal translation of Qur'ān 48:10, "The Hand of God is above their hands;" and 38:75, "I created [Adam] with both my hands."
[417] Literal translation of Qur'ān 55:27, "But remains the Face of your Lord the Glorious the Honourable."
[418] Literal translation of Qur'ān 20:5, "The Beneficent sat on the throne."
[419] Milani, F. H. (2016). *Islamic Theology*. London: Islam in English Press, p. 77-78. In his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Ṣadūq has sections where he interprets such verses on the basis of the traditions of Ahlulbayt, and he denounces those who suggest anthropomorphism to God. Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 149-172.
[420] Al-Ashʿarī (2011). *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Riyad: Madār al-Muslim lil-Nashr, p. 201, 213-215.
[421] Ibn Taymiyyah (1991). *Al-Istiqāmah*. Ed. Muḥammad Rashād Salim. Giza: Hajr, p, 76-78; Ibn Taymiyyah (1998). *Al-Fatwā Al-Ḥumawiyyah al-Kubrā*. Ed. Ḥamad ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Tuwayjirī. Riyad: Dar Al-Ṣumayʿī Lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, p. 272-273.
[422] Al-Ghazālī (2003). *Al-Iqtiṣād fil-Iʿtiqād*. Ed. Inṣāf Ramaḍān. Beirut: Dār Qutaybah, p. 58-59.

such verses. Hence, we must leave the meaning of such attributes to God and not comment upon them.

The fourth idea is that of the Muʿtazila who implement logical reasoning when it comes to interpreting such verses. As such, they claim that such verses must not be taken literally but must rather be subjected to an interpretation that can be deduced through logical rationalization.

Imamī theologians, however, have a fifth interpretation that is different from the above four. Based on traditions from the Prophet Muḥammad and the Imams, it is the criterion rather than the apparent meaning that must be taken into consideration when interpreting such verses. Imamī traditions reject anthropomorphism, and the idea that we should accept verses as they are without asking questions. Hence, the first three opinions are nullified. With regards to the opinion of Muʿtazilī scholars, Imamī scholars, based on traditions, reject such an approach. Interpreting the Qur'ān according to one's own logical reasoning is not any better than the above three opinions, as one risks falling into the pit of a logical fallacy: what appears like a logical answer but is not sound in reality. As such, Imamī scholars take each one of these verses individually and try to understand its meaning based on traditions of an impeccable or logical reasoning that is based on Imamī traditions.[423] That is why Ṣadūq wrote *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, where he included a whole section on traditions about the interpretation of such equivocal verses.

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[423] Milani, F. H. (2016). *Islamic Theology*. London: Islam in English Press, p. 77-78.

Moreover, al-Raḍī wrote *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*,[424] where he discusses Ashʿarī,

Muʿtazilī and Shiʿi opinions about several equivocal verses in the Qu'ran.

3.5.3 Part III: Existence of God

In the next section of Imam ʿAlī's sermon he says,

> [He is] Existing, not by contingency; Present, not from non-existence; with everything, not by association; different from everything but not through comparison; Maker, but not through movements and tools; All-Seeing, even when there was nothing to be seen of His creation; Single, with no companion to find tranquillity with, or miss his presence.

This section of the sermon proves God's eternity: He was always present, and He originated

everything.

3.5.3.1 The Necessary Existence: An Ontological Argument

Imam ʿAlī indicates that God is the beginning of everything, while He does not have a beginning.

This is what some philosophers refer to as the Necessary Existence. Ibn Sīna (Avicenna) (d.

428/1037) says, "An existent is either the Necessary Existent or a contingent existent. If it is the

Necessary Existent, the point is proven; and if it is a contingent existent, it must ultimately lead

to the Necessary Existent in order to avoid a circle or regression."[425] Imam ʿAlī refers to this as

"Existing, not by contingency; Present, not from non-existence."

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[424] Raḍī (1986). *Talkhīṣ al-Bayān fī Majāzāt al-Qur'ān*. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥasan. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā'.
[425] McGinnis, J. (2011). Old Complexes and New Possibilities: Ibn Sīnā's Modal Metaphysics in Context. *Journal of Islamic Philosophy*, 7, p. 3–34; Milani, F. H. (2016). Islamic Theology. London: Islam in English Press, p. 10-11.

He then adds that God is with everything, but not by the means of physical association. The Qur'ān states, "And He is with you wherever you are," (57:4). It also mentions, "There isn't a group privately conversing: three [people] but He is the Fourth; or five but He is their Sixth," (58:7). Here, the Imam explains that by being "with" His creation, God is not present in the physical materialistic sense, and hence, numerically added (i.e. a third added to two). Rather, He is aware of everything people do, as He says, "And We are closer to him [the human] than his jugular veins" (50:16). Imam ʿAlī also refers to this in the prayer attributed to him, known as the Prayer of the Morning (*Duʿāʾ al-Ṣabāḥ*), "O One Who guided to His Essence through His Essence; and He Exalted from associating with His creation. O One Who is near to the thoughts of the minds; and is far from the sight of the eyes."[426]

The Imam then clearly indicates that while God is different from anyone or anything, He cannot be compared to anyone or anything. This is evidently against what the anthropomorphists claim. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī in his *Maqālāt* writes,

> And they are divided about the "eye," the "hand" and the "face"[427] in four groups:

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[426] Qummī, A. (1991). *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*. Beirut: Al-Aʿlamī, p. 93.

[427] This is regarding God having "eyes," "hands," and a "face." This is taken literally from the Qur'ān as per the following examples: "And make the ship with Our eyes," (11:37); "Be patient with the command of your Lord, for you are in Our eyes," (52:48); "O Iblīs! What prevented you from prostrating to what I created by My hands," (38:75); "Indeed! Those who shake your hands [in allegiance] surely pledge their allegiance to God; the hand of God is over their hand," (48:10). "Everything over it will perish, but remains the face of your Lord, the Exalted, the Honourable," (55:27). Shiʿi belief is to interpret these verses metaphorically, as God cannot be personified. In fact, one of the reasons Ṣadūq wrote *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, is to refute such arguments. He dedicated an entire section in the book about interpreting equivocal verses based on the traditions of Shiʿi Imams. This same opinion is adopted by Muʿtazilī scholars, which they probably attained from Shiʿi influence, as mentioned earlier.

The anthropomorphists (*al-mujassimah*) say: He has hands, feet, a face, eyes and a side, intending the limbs and parts.

The people of tradition (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) say: We do not say about that except what God the Exalted said or the tradition came from the Messenger, God's blessings upon him. So, we say: A face but without [asking] how; and hands and eyes but with [asking] how.

ʿAbdullāh ibn Kullāb says: Giving the hand, the eye and the face as statements, because God stated that, and nothing other than that was given; hence, I say: They are God's, The Exalted, attributes, just as He said about knowledge, power and life as attributes.

Muʿtazila deny that, except the face; they interpret the hand as blessing; and Him saying, "It travels in "Our eyes"," (54:14) meaning in Our Knowledge; and the side (*al-janb*) meaning command. They said about Him saying, "A soul would say woe to me for what I wasted in the "side" of God," (39:56), meaning in the command of God. They said, the "self" of the Creator is He, and also His Essence is He. They interpreted Him saying, "The Needless (*al-Ṣamad*)" (112:2) in two meanings: one that He is the Master, and the other is that He is sought for needs.[428]

Imam ʿAlī's statements refute the first three opinions stated above, as God cannot be personified in any way. Hence, he says, "different from everything but not through comparison."

With regards to Muʿtazilī thought, it is interesting how close it is to Imam ʿAlī's description. They claim that such verses must be interpreted, and not taken literally, which is the opinion of Shiʿi Imams including that of Imam ʿAlī. Again, this suggests clear Imamī influence on Muʿtazilī theology, as asserted by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī.[429]

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[428] Al-Ashʿarī (1990). *Maqālāt*. Ed. Muḥammad Muḥieddīne ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAsriyyah, vol. 1, p. 290. Some of the verses quoted were translated literally to be in line with what the author intended.

[429] As indicated earlier, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says the founders of Muʿtazilī theology were indirect students of Imam ʿAlī, and hence, influenced by his ideas and opinions. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 12. This was also mentioned by ʿAbd al-Jabbār in his *Ṭabaqāt*, and Murtaḍā in his *Amālī*, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

3.5.3.2 God the Maker

The Imam then discusses how God made things without the need for tools. If He needs tools, then He is incomplete, as His need would indicate His deficiency. Since He is *Samad*, the needless, all-sufficient, He can make things without anything existing before them. Hence, the Imam asserts this position saying, "Maker, but not through movements and tools."

In addition, the Imam rejects any "movements," which may refer to philosophical, neuronal, or physical movements. On a philosophical note, an action or movement consists of six processes: drawing a mental picture of the action, then believing in its benefit, then being inclined towards performing it, followed by assertion, then determination, and finally certainty of the need or intention for action.[430] From a neuropsychological perspective, several studies describe the activity of the brain in making decisions;[431] however, discussing them is beyond the scope of this thesis. Physical movements refer to the actions of a physical body. All such movements are not attributed to God. Imam al-Kāẓim, the seventh Shiʿi Imam, was asked, "Inform me about the Will (*irādah*). Is it part of God or is it of the creation?" The Imam replied, "The will is part of the created conscience, and it manifests itself in action. As for the Will of God, the Mighty and High, then it is His Making (*iḥdāth*) and none other than that because He does not reflect, does not imagine, and does not think. These attributes cannot be applied to Him as they are attributes of creation.

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[430] Milani, F.H. (2011). *Al-ʿAqāʾid al-Islāmīyah*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Balāgh, p. 113.
[431] See for example: Wunderlich, K., Rangel, A., and O'Doherty, J.P. (2009). Neural computations underlying action-based decision making in the human brain. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*, vol. 106(40), p. 17199-204; Rosenbloom, M.H., Schmahmann, J.D., and Price, B.H. (2012). The functional neuroanatomy of decision-making. *J Neuropsychiatry Clin Neurosci*, vol. 24(3), p. 266-77; and Thomas, E., Snyder, P.J., Pietrzak, R.H., and Maruff, P. (2014). Behavior at the choice point: decision making in hidden pathway maze learning. *Neuropsychol Rev*, vol. 24(4), p. 514-36.

Thus, God's Will is action and nothing else. He says to it, 'Be and it becomes,' without a word or speech expressed by tongue, by imagination or by thought. His Will is expressed without form in the same way that He is without form."[432] As such, according to Imamī belief, movement, in all its forms, cannot be attributed to God.

3.5.3.3 God as All-Seeing

The next sentence of Imam ʿAlī's sermon states, "All-Seeing, even when there was nothing to be seen of His creation." As mentioned above, the Ashʿarī school suggests that He sees with eyes, but in a way, we do not understand, nor should even be questioned.[433] However, Shiʿi belief is that God cannot be personified, and such terms must be used with an allegorical meaning. In a long tradition (ḥadīth), of which only excerpts will be used here, Imam al-Riḍā explains, "A man is sometimes called a dog, a donkey, a bull or a lion just like he can be called sweet or bitter. All of these words are used with an allegorical meaning which differs from their literal meaning. A man cannot literally be a lion or a dog. Please pay close attention to this, may God have mercy on you!" The Imam later elaborates, "Our Lord is called All-Hearing. However, this is not through a body part or a sensory organ without which He could not hear the sound as is the case with us. We cannot see with the part with which we hear. However, He has told us that no sound is hidden from Him. His hearing is not limited, as it is in our case. Here again, the name hearing is used in both cases, but its meaning is different. The same applies for seeing. He does not see by means

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[432] Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 147.
[433] Al-Ashʿarī (1990). *Maqālāt*. Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAsriyyah, vol. 1, p. 290.

of an eye as we do. We see using a body part which serves that sole purpose. However, God is

All-Seeing, and is never unaware of any individual. Again, the same name is used in both cases,

but its meaning is different."[434] Therefore, Shiʿi Imams clearly indicate that God does not see

through an organ or a means. Moreover, God is inherently All-Seeing, even when there is no

creation to be seen or observed. This is a demonstration of His eternal deity. He never was non-

existent to become existent, and hence, He was All-Seeing even before any of His creation was

created. This is in contrast to Muʿtazilī belief, as Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd claims with regards to this

sentence of Imam ʿAlī, "It is the truthful tradition of Abū Hāshim and his companions, because

they call Him in the eternal that He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, while there is no one to be heard or

to be seen. That means He is in a state that He can realize all things that are heard or seen when

they come into existence. This goes back to Him being Live without any defect in Him. Also, they

do not call Him All-Hearing, All-Seeing in the eternal sense, because the hearing and seeing is one

who achieves so in the action, not only having the ability to do so."[435] This is refuted by Al-Khūʾī

as it suggests that God does not realize the audible and the visible until it is created, but rather

He has the potential to achieve the knowledge and realization. This does not represent Shiʿi

theology, as He is All-Knowledgeable, and knows His creation even before their coming into

existence and is All-Hearing and All-Seeing while they are still non-existent.[436] Imam al-Ṣādiq

confirms, "God, the Exalted, the High, our Lord was always and the knowledge is His essence,

without a thing/one that is known [in existence] (*lam yazal Allāhū ʿazza wa jall rabbunā wal-ʿilm*

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[434] Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 60-66.
[435] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 35.
[436] Al-Khūʾī. *Minhāj al-Baraʿah*, vol. 1, p. 348.

dhātuhu wa lā maʿlūm), Hearing is His essence without anything/anyone audible (*wal-samʿu dhātuhu wa lā masmūʿ*); Seeing is His essence without anything/anyone visible (*wal-baṣaru dhātuhu wa lā mubṣir*); Power is His essence without anything/anyone whose Power is onto [in existence] (*wal-Qudratu thātuhu wa lā maqdūr*). So, when He initiated things and the known became [into existence], His Knowledge bestowed upon the known, the Hearing on the audible, and the Seeing on the visible, and the Power on the thing onto who His Power is bestowed."[437]

Moreover, when Dhiʿlib al-Yamānī asked Imam ʿAlī, "Did you see your Lord, O Commander of the faithful?" Imam ʿAlī replied, "So do I worship what I cannot see?" Dhiʿlib then inquired, "How do you see Him?" The Imam then clarified as follows,

> The eyes cannot see Him with the physical sight, but the hearts reach Him through truthful belief. [He] is near things but is not [a body that is] touching; far from them but not unnoticed; [He is] a Speaker without [a pause of] reflection;[438] [He] Wants but without assertion [or delay in doing what He wants]; a Maker without a limb; Unseen but is not described as hidden; [He is] Big but is not described as neglectful; [He] is All-Seeing but is not described through the sense; Merciful, but is not described as soft; faces are humbled to His Greatness, and hearts are moved of His fear."[439]

So, God is All-Knowing, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, All-Powerful even without the creation coming into existence. All beings are in His Knowledge, and He can See them, Hears them and Knows of them, even before they come into being. Upon coming into being, then the Hearing is bestowed

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[437] Al-Khūʾī. *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 348-9.

[438] God speaking is Him creating a voice that speaks to a prophet, such as Moses directly, without the need of an angel for revelation. That is what Imam ʿAlī clarifies in sermon 182 of NB, p. 325-326, when he says, "The One who spoke to Moses directly [without an angel], and He showed His great signs, without any limbs or tools, and without speech or the uvula." This is in reference to the Qur'ān 4:164, "And God spoke to Moses directly."

[439] N.B. sermon 179, p. 320.

upon them without anything differing except that they are now in existence, but that does not have any effect on Him, nor were there any states that changed, as the Lord does not have any states. He cannot be seen through the eyesight as He is not physical and does what He wants without the need to stop and think about what He wants to do, nor assert and determine the action. Rather, His want is His action.[440]

Moreover, Imam al-Ṣādiq was questioned by Ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ,[441] who was a leading naturalist (*zindīq*)[442] of his time and had several encounters with the sixth Shiʿi Imam, "You mention God but referred to a hidden." The Imam replied, "Woe to you! How can He be hidden Who is with His creation as a Witness and is closer to them than their jugular veins; He hears their discourse, sees their being, and knows their secrets." Ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ then inquired, "Is He everywhere? Is it not that if He is in the skies then how can He be on Earth? And if He is on Earth then how can He be in the skies?" Imam al-Ṣādiq explained, "Indeed, you have described the creation, who when he moves from one place, he occupies another place, and is no longer present in his [original] space, and hence, he would not know in his current place what happened in his former

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[440] "Indeed, His command when He wants something to say to it 'Be' and it becomes," Qurʾān 36:82. As narrated above from Imam al-Kāẓim, "He says to it, 'Be and it becomes,' without a word or speech expressed by tongue, by imagination or by thought. His Will is expressed without form in the same way that He is without form." Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 147.

[441] On him see van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 515-517.

[442] On the zanādiqa see van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 511.

space. As for God the Exalted in Status, the King, the Assessor (*al-Dayyān*)[443] no place is vacant of

Him, nor does He occupy any space, nor is He closer to one place than He is to another."[444] As

such, God is seeing the actions of His creation and He is not confined to any time or space.

3.5.3.4 The Impact of the Realization of God as All-Seeing

There is another perspective when viewing the above statement, as it may be a reminder to

people. When appreciating the greatness of God, one can realize his/her limitations. A person

who is aware that God is All-Seeing, will be careful about his/her actions.

In sermon 223 of NB, Imam ʿAlī says,

> I swear by God, it is more beloved to me to spend the nights [lying] on the thorns
> of plants sleepless, or be dragged tied in chains, than meeting God and His
> Messenger on the Day of Judgment having done injustice against some of the
> servants [of God], and usurping to something of this unworthy world. And how
> can I oppress anyone? For a self that will soon perish and remain for long [buried]
> in the sand?!
>
> I swear to God, I saw ʿAqīl,[445] and he is so poor, requesting me to provide him with
> three kilograms of your wheat.[446] I saw his boys with their hair messy, and their
> skin dusty due to their poverty, as if their faces were painted black. He approached
> me emphatically and repeated his request again and again. So [one day] I paid
> attention to him, and he thought I would sell him my religion, and would follow

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[443] *Al-Dayyān* is the One who assesses people and either rewards or punishes them for their actions. See Ṣadūq's
Tawḥīd, p. 216. *Al-Dayyān* is sometimes translated as "The Rewarder." However, this may not be accurate as the
word *jazā'* does not necessarily mean "reward" but can also mean "punishment." Hence, the Assessor may be a
better translation.

[444] Al-Khū'ī. *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 346.

[445] ʿAqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 50/670), Imam ʿAlī's brother from the same parents. He was twenty years senior to Imam
ʿAlī and at the time of this incident was in his early to mid-eighties and had lost his eye sight. He was extremely
generous that he would overspend and end up living the rest of his month in poverty.

[446] The Arabic word for 3 kilograms is *Ṣāʿ*. ʿAqīl wanted three extra kilograms of wheat from the Muslims' Treasury.
That is why Imam ʿAlī refused to give him more than his fair share, and stated that this wheat belongs to Muslims,
and hence, "your wheat."

him away from my tradition [of justice]. As such, I heated an iron bar for him, and brought it near his body so he would learn from it. He shouted loudly from its pain, like one suffering from illness, and was about to be burnt from its heat. So, I said to him, "May you have died, O ʿAqīl![447] Are you crying from an iron bar that was heated by man to teach, but you are dragging me into a Fire ignited by its Magnificent Master for those who anger Him?! Are you crying from the pain, and I shall not cry from its burn?!"[448]

With his complete understanding of God as All-Seeing, All-Aware of his actions, Imam ʿAlī would not compromise His obedience to God. He lived by justice, compassion, mercy and God-wariness, such that even when his own siblings were to ask him for more than their share, he would not hesitate to turn them away. Therefore, according to Imam ʿAlī, being conscious of God as All-Seeing will have a significant impact on one's actions.

3.5.3.5 God has no Partners

Imam ʿAlī then goes on to say, "Single, with no companion to find tranquillity with, or miss his presence." Here, the Imam uses the word *mutawaḥḥid*, which may be translated as "Single." We discussed earlier about the difference between *wāḥid* and *aḥad* (see section 3.5.2.2 Belief in God and His Oneness). The word *mutawaḥḥid* literally means single, but not in the sense that He lacks a partner with whom He would socialize. Rather, He is Single in His Power and Kingdom, without any associates or partners.[449] Being single implies a feeling of loneliness, and such descriptions

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[447] A famous Arabic expression for praying against someone: *thakalatka ummuk*, or, as in this case, *thakalatka al-thawākil*. It literally means in the former, "May your mother have lost you," or in the latter, "May the ladies who mourn weep over your loss!"

[448] NB, sermon 223, p. 424-425.

[449] Al-Khūʾī. *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*, vol. 1, p. 349; Mughniyyeh, M.J. (2007). *Fī Ẓilāl Nahj al-Balāghah*. Qum: Intishārāt Kalimat al-Ḥaqq, vol. 1, p. 26-27.

cannot be attributed to God. Moreover, it is an indication of a need, and He does not have any needs. This may also hint at Imam ʿAlī's rejection of the claim of God having any children, as some Christians believe.[450] However, as was indicated, God does not have any need to have a child. In chapter 112 of the Qur'ān, titles *al-Ikhlāṣ*, or The Sincerity, God says, "Say! He God is One; The Needless; He was not given birth to, nor did He give birth [to anyone]; And there is no one like Him." So, God does not have any needs, nor is He deficient in anything, and hence, He does not require any partner, children or associates. Moreover, He is Powerful in His Greatness, His Might and His Kingdom, and He rules over the entire creation where there is no match to Him.

3.5.4 Part IV: Creation of the World

After describing God and His attributes, Imam ʿAlī describes His creation.[451] In this section of the sermon, Imam ʿAlī shifts to the World coming into existence

> He initiated the creation directly and started it without anything. No delay was required [for Him] due to time for reflection, or an experiment to benefit from [its trial], nor a movement he originated, nor a feeling of worry for missing [something] or losing it. He allocated all things their [appropriate] time, and cohesively aligned their variations; gave them their functions and properties. He is knowledgeable of them before starting their creation, fully aware of their limits and finites, recognizing their essences and boundaries.

There are several, very important theological discussions about the start of the creation discussed here by Imam ʿAlī.

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[450] "And the Jews say, ʿUzair is the son of God; and the Christians say, the Messiah is the son of God," Qur'ān 9:30.
[451] This will be the last section to analyze of this sermon, as it serves the purpose of the discussion.

3.5.4.1 God Bringing the Existence into Being

First, the Imam starts by saying that God initiated creation *ex nihilo* (*ansha'ahu*). This implies that He originated it without any existing materials. He created the materials and all that is necessary to begin the creation. Moreover, the Imam adds that "He started it (*ibtada'ahu*) without anything," which is different than saying "He started it from nothing."

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says that the two words: *ansha'a* and *ibtada'a* are identical in their meaning. He provides Qur'ānic references to such usage: 35:35 and 5:48.[452] Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah also states that the two meanings are identical.[453] Al-Baḥrānī says that from a linguistic view, he could not find a difference between the two words. However, to protect the Imam from repetition, he suggests that in this context, *ansha'a* may refer to creation that no one did anything similar to it prior to the Creator, while *ibtada'a* may refer to the creation that the creator did for the first time.[454] Al-Khū'ī, however, writes that *ansha'a* means "He created them without any pre-existing materials or without there being any originator existing before Him." *Ibtada'a* on the other hand means, "He originated them without any need to reflect upon how to create them, nor Him being in need of them [i.e. to have a social companion]."[455] He further adds that these two sentences indicate He is not the same as His creation when making things. Humans need to have a clear picture of what they are making and a plan for making it, a reason or a benefit for making it, the materials needed to make it, and, of course, the maker himself/herself.

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[452] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 35.
[453] Mughniyyah, M.J. (2007). *Fī Ẓilāl Nahj al-Balāghah*. Qum: Intishārāt Kalimat al-Ḥaqq, vol. 1, p. 28.
[454] Al-Baḥrānī, vol. 1, p. 87.
[455] Al-Khū'ī, vol. 1, p. 354.

These are known as the four causes required for humans to make something, and without which nothing can come into existence.[456] God, however, creates materials required to make whatever He wants, and does not need to have a picture of what He makes, as He designs the form of what He is making. In addition, His cause for creation is not for His own benefit, but rather for theirs. So, He originates and makes, but unlike how His creation makes."[457] In addition, when He makes, He does not require time to design and a period to complete the work, rather, it is done instantaneously. Moreover, He does not make something and worry about it not looking perfect, or experiments first and then perfects. Rather, His design is perfect, and He created everything in the most excellent form.[458]

3.5.4.2 Made without Anything

It is noteworthy to indicate that Imam ʿAlī, as well as Faṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, in her sermon titled *al-Fadakīyah*,[459] clearly state that God created the creation without anything (the former says: *ansha'a al-khalqa inshā'an, wa ibtada'ahu ibtidā'an*; and the latter indicates: *khalaqa al-ashyā'a lā min shay'in kāna qablaha*). In a theological context, the following two statements would have different meanings: He created this creation from nothing (*khalaqa al-khalqa min lā shay'*); and, He created this creation without anything (*khalaqa al-khalqa lā min shay'*). The first would imply

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[456] Known in Arabic as *al-ʿilal al-arbaʿah* (the four causes). Al-Muẓaffar, M.R. (2004). *Al-Manṭiq*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tarīkh al-ʿArabī, p. 294-5.
[457] Al-Khūʾī, vol. 1, p. 354.
[458] Qur'ān 27:88, "The making of God Who perfects everything."
[459] She delivered this sermon at the Prophet's Mosque in Madīna, after Abū Bakr seized her land of Fadak, and deprived her of her rights. This made her desert him and die angry at him. Bukhārī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 2, *ḥadīth* No. 3093, p. 139. For a reference of her complete sermon see Ṭabrisī (1993). *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, vol. 1, p. 97-107.

there existed a "nothing" from which God created things. It would suggest that "nothing" is eternal in beginning (*azalī*) and ever-existing (*qadīm*), and that would not be possible, because God is the only thing that is eternal and ever-existing. The latter statement, however, indicates that God created everything without anything existing before the creation. This is congruent with what is indicated by Imam ʿAlī and the Shiʿi Imamī belief. So, He initiated, originated, created and brought into existence all that was non-existent. In addition, this also asserts that all this order and all the laws we observe in the universe cannot exist from nothing, and were brought into existence randomly, but rather they were designed by One who has the Knowledge and the Power to bring them into being. That First Cause[460] of all causes is God, the Grand Designers

3.5.4.3 Not a Random, Lawless Creation

Imam ʿAlī describes the creation coming into existence by a meticulous Maker, through a careful design that did not miss the slightest of detail. It is impossible for such existence to have come into being through a random, lawless background that suddenly generated laws and an order of perfection. Imam ʿAlī states there has to be a Maker, a Designer who started the whole process of existence without anything. Moreover, this Maker is only One, as everything in this universe exists coherently, indicating the Oneness of the Designer. Imam ʿAlī wrote to his son, Imam Ḥasan,

> And be aware son, if your Lord had a partner, then his messengers would have come to you, and you would have seen the signs of his kingdom and power, and

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[460] On the argument of God as the First Cause, see McGinnis, J. (2011). Old Complexes and New Possibilities: Ibn Sīnā's Modal Metaphysics in Context. *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 7, p. 3–34.

you would have recognized his actions and attributes. However, it is One God as He described Himself. No one opposes Him in His Kingdom, nor does He ever perish and He always was [in existence]. The first of things not through numbers, and the last of things not through an end. Great is He for not being realized by the encompassment of the heart nor the sight.[461]

God did not bring the world into existence, created laws, and then let the universe carry its being on its own through its laws. Rather, He is also in constant observation and maintenance of the universe, and if He lets go of it, then it will perish completely. As such, Imam ʿAlī says that God brings every being into existence at a calculated time, and for a purpose, knowing all their aspects before them coming into existence. He designed their limitations and is All-Aware of their essences and boundaries. This is Prophet Moses's reply to the Pharaoh of Egypt when asked to describe his God, "He said, 'Our Lord is the One Who gave everything its existence and then guided [it];" (20:50). What is referred to in the verse is He designed everything, with all aspects of its creation, and is constantly looking after it and sustains its existence. That is also the definition of God's attribute, *al-Qayyūm*, as in, "God, there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the All-Sustainer [*al-Qayyūm*]," (2:255).

3.6 Conclusion to *Tawḥīd*

Having an accurate belief in God is considered the most important aspect of Islam. Muslims' approach to God and His attributes varies, with some personifying Him, while others limiting His Knowledge and Power, and yet others attributing to Him different states. Reducing God to a

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[461] NB, letter 31, p. 481.

physical being who may be confined in time and space results in people not worrying about His Might and Power, which in turn, reflects on their actions and deeds.

Imam ʿAlī's description of God and His attributes summarizes Shiʿi belief about *tawḥīd*. His words encompass a detailed analysis of the belief in God and is the foundation for Shiʿi theology. Moreover, the reason Muʿtazilī belief is somewhat similar to Shiʿi's, may be due to the fact that the founders of the rite and its early scholars were influenced by the words of Imam ʿAlī. Although not termed *kalām* at that time, nonetheless, it is difficult to argue that someone before Imam ʿAlī engaged in such deep and detailed theology about God and His attributes, which may earn him the title as the founder of ʿ*ilm al-kalām*. This belief is considered very important among Muslims, and especially the Shiʿa.

Prophet Muḥammad noticed a young man sitting at the mosque one day after the morning prayers. The young man appeared pale and very tired. The Prophet inquired about the reason for his fatigue. The young man replied, "O Messenger of God, I [achieved] the state of certainty." The Prophet answered, "[Those who achieve] certainty have signs. What is your sign?" He replied, "My certainty is what made me in grief, and kept me sleepless at night, thirsty during the day, so I became uninterested in this world and all that is in it. As if I see the Throne of my Lord and it is set up for judgment, and the people are resurrected for that, and I am among them. It is as if I see the people of Paradise enjoying in Paradise, meeting one another, and sitting on the couches. As if I see the people of Hell and they are being punished in it, screaming [for help]. As if I can hear the exhalation of Hell buzzing in my ear. The Prophet then said to his companions, "This is a servant [of God] who God enlightened his heart with faith." He then told the young man, "Stay

the way you are."[462] So the correct belief in God enlightens one's heart and transforms him towards God. Such genuine belief can only be acquired through guidance of divinely chosen people, such as the Prophets. Moreover, this belief results in one believing in God's divine Justice, *ʿadālah*, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[462] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, section 26, *ḥadīth* No. 2, p. 36.

Chapter 4: ʿADĀLAH IN NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH

4.1 Introduction

Does the human have free will? Or is he predestined by God for success or failure? There are verses in the Qurʾān that, at first glance, may suggest predeterminism, while others that assert free will. How do we interpret these verses?

By the middle of the first Islamic century, these questions preoccupied many Muslim thinkers and scholars, confused many, and were the reason for the establishment of what became known as the Ashʿarī school and the Muʿtazilī school as well as a naturalist group who rejected religion all together. Interestingly, the founder of the Muʿtazilī school, Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748) was a student of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and so was Ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ (d. after 160/777), a leading naturalist (*zindīq*). Both defected from al-Baṣrī's circle; the former started his own rite, the Muʿtazilī school, and the latter rejected religion all together. When asked about him leaving the path of his "companion," referring to al-Baṣrī, Ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ replied, "My companion used to confuse [students]. Sometimes, he speaks of free will, while other times he would say of predeterminism. I cannot remember him adopting a belief that he actually maintained and

followed."[463] This may be the reason Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ left the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and hence,

al-Baṣrī said, "He left us (iʿtazalanā)," and therefore, his group became known as the Muʿtazilī.[464]

Among the early speakers of free will were Maʿbad al-Juhanī (d. 80/699) and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī

(d. 106/724), who were both killed by Umayyad rulers.[465] On the other hand, Abū Ḥanīfa al-

Nuʿmān (d. 150/767), who is the founder of the Ḥanafī legal school, leaned towards

predeterminism. His belief can be deduced from a series of discussions he had with the sixth and

seventh Shiʿi Imams, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim respectively. In one such account he asks

the seventh Imam, "May I be sacrificed for you, who is responsible for the sin?" The Imam replied,

"Indeed, sin have to be committed either by the servant, his Creator, or both of them. If it were

from God the Exalted, then He is more Just and Fair to oppress His servant and punish him for

what he did not commit [on his own will]; if it were from both of them, then He is a partner [in

the sin], and the strong [partner] is better deserved to [treat] His weak servant fairly; and if it

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[463] Ṭabrisī. *Al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 2, p. 74. Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Montgomery Watt suggests that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī "had once been inclined towards a Qadarite view and had then turned away from it," p.100. He also says, "The two opposing lines in his teaching did not become distinct from one another," p. 104. In his *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*, al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār names al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as the one of the third levels (ṭabaqah) of the Muʿtazilah, and mentions his letter to the Umayyad ruler ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan and communications with ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-Azīz, who also appointed him as a judge. As such, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī saw legitimacy to the Umayyad power, and he criticized revolutions against them, which earned him the respect of the governor of Kūfa, al-Ḥajjāj. ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 215-225. Also available online:
http://zaidiah.com/sites/default/files/articles_files/fdl_ltzl_wtbqt_lmtzl.pdf
[464] Faraj Allāh, A. (2006). *Tārīkh Jadīd Lil-Tārīkh: al-Muʿtazilah bayn al-Ḥaqīqah wal-Wahm*. Baghdad: Shabakat al-Imamayn al-Ḥasanayn (ʿalayhima assalām) Lil-Tturāth wal-Fikr.
[465] van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 83; Muṭahharī, M. (1992). *Al-Kalām wal-ʿIrfān*. Trans. ʿAlī Khāzim. Beirut: al-Dār al-Islāmiyyah Publishers, p. 10-11.

were from the servant only, then the matter falls on him and to him is the forbiddance directed

and has the right to be rewarded or punished and Paradise or Hell is prescribed to him."[466]

By the fourth Islamic century, theological discussions on divine Justice, ʿadālah, included topics

such as free will and predetermination, and whether or not the human is responsible for his own

actions as well as ability (istiṭāʿah), existence of what appears to be harmful (ḍarar) such as pain

(alam), theodicy and evil.[467] NB discusses all these topics but not in much detail. Therefore, this

while this chapter will explore these topics, not much discussion from NB will be mentioned

about them. Moreover, the chapter will also examine the opinions of the three schools: Muʿtazila,

Ashāʿira and Imamīyyah, especially when it comes to free will and predetermination. It will

commence by introducing Muʿtazilī, Ashʿarī and Imamī thoughts on compulsion (jabr), delegation

(tafwīḍ) as well as predetermination and free will (al-qaḍāʾ wal-qadar)[468]. The words of Imam ʿAlī

on predetermination and free will are going to be discussed based on his response to a person

who asked him about al-qaḍāʾ wal-qadar, according to short words of wisdom number 73. The

concept of ability (istiṭāʾah) is not found in the main discourse of NB; however, in *Tamām Nahj*

al-Balāghah by al-Mūsawī there is a very brief excerpt on it that will be discussed. Finally, NB has

some short statements about illness, theodicy and evil that will be explored in light of the

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[466] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, p. 43-4.

[467] ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 299-548; al-Ashʿarī (2011). *al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Riyad: Madār al-Muslim lil-Nashr, p. 511-588; Murtaḍā (2010). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 186-321; and Martin, R.C., Woodward, M.R., and Atmaja, D.S. (2003). *Defenders of Reason in Islam. Muʿtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oxford: Oneworld Publication; p. 96-102.

[468] *Al-qaḍāʾ wal-qadar* is also translated as God's decree and predetermination, respectively. Hamza, F., Q. (2017). Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty: Muslim Perspectives, in *God's Creativity and Human Action*, Eds. Mosher, L., and Marshall, D. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press. The author translates *jabr* both as compulsion, p. 131, and as predestination, p. 133, while *qadar* is translated as free will, p. 133.

discussions that were taking place by the *mutakallimīn* in the fourth Islamic century. The views

of NB on these three topics will be examined in relationship to the established ideologies of the

Ashʿarī and Muʿtazilī schools and compared to the Imamī thought.

4.2 Free Will and Predetermination

The topics of free will and predetermination were contentious issues that were the subject of

heavy debates in the formative Islamic period. Discussions divided groups in two major

categories: those who claim that a human's fate is predetermined, and others who suggest the

human has free will and is responsible for his actions, which, in turn, will determine his eternal

consequence. Each of these two groups accused the other of being the Qadariyyah, due to the

ḥadīth of the Prophet Muḥammad, "[There are] two groups of my ummah [that] God cursed

them on the tongue of seventy prophets: the Qadariyyah and the Murji'a, who say that faith is

belief without action." He also said, "Every nation has *Majūs* [see footnote], and the *Majūs* of my

Ummah are the Qadariyyah."[469] By the third Islamic century, both groups materialized as the

Ashʿarī and the Muʿtazilī schools, where the former believes in predeterminism, while the latter

suggests free will. The Imamī stance on this issue is a famous *ḥadīth* attributed to the sixth Shiʿi

Imam, al-Ṣādiq, saying, "It is not predeterminism, nor free will, but a matter in between the two

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[469] Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (n.d.). *Kanz al-ʿUmmal fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wal-Afʿāl*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 1, p. 82-3. The word *Majūs* indicated in the *ḥadīth* literally means Mazdaism; however, in the context of the *ḥadīth*, it is referring to a deviant group. Imam ʿAlī also makes a similar reference in NB, short words of wisdom number 73. The full version of this tradition appears in Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p. 89-90. For the accusation of each group being Qadariyyah, see Mutahhari, M. (1987). *Al-Insān wal-Qadar*. Trans. Muḥammad ʿAlī Taskhīrī. Tehran: Muʿāwiniyyat al-ʿIlāqāt al-Duwaliyyah, p. 32.

(*lā jabra wa lā tafwīḍ wa lākin amrun bayna amrayn*)."[470] For the purpose of the discussion, the focus of the attention will only be on these three groups, and their beliefs regarding this matter will be discussed below.

4.3 The Ashʿarī School and Predetermination (*al-jabr*)

Examination of early reports of Islamic history suggests that the first to attribute all actions to God was Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, when he appointed his son, Yazīd, as his successor.[471] When ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar objected to the appointment, Muʿāwiyah addressed him saying, "I warn you from dividing Muslims, and working towards separating their unity, and shedding their blood. Indeed, the matter of Yazīd was a decree of the decree [of God] (*kāna qaḍā'an min al-qaḍā'*), and people do not have a choice of their own (*wa laysa lil-ʿibādi khīratan min amrihim*)."[472]

It may be argued, however, that ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab (d. 23/644) may be considered the first to make such inference. In the battle of Ḥunayn, when initially many Muslims were seen retreating, Abā Qutādah says, "Muslims ran away, and I ran away with them. I saw ʿUmar running away. I asked him, 'What is it with people?' He replied, 'It is the command of God'."[473] In his

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[470] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 13, p. 92.
[471] Subḥānī (2010) *Al-Ilāhiyyāt ʿalā Hudā al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah wal-ʿAql*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Imam al-Ṣādiq, vol. 2, p. 166-9. ʿAbd al-Jabbār also concurs that Muʿāwiyah was the first to speak of predeterminism. ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī*. (n.p.), vol. 8, p. 4.
[472] Al-Dīnawarī, Ibn Qutaybah (1990). *Al-Imamah wal-Siyāsah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', vol. 1, p. 210.
[473] Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, *ḥadīth* No. 4322, vol. 3, p. 55-56.

interpretation, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqlānī says, "The command of God, meaning what God has dictated."[474]

Although Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān may have been the first to attribute all actions to God to justify his actions, it is suggested that the first to formally discuss the idea of predeterminism was Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), whose followers were known as the Jahmites. Some of his claims describe the essence of predeterminism. Among his claims is that the human being has no power over anything and is compelled in his acts. He adds that the human has no power or will or choice of his own, but rather it is God Who creates the acts in the human being just as He creates them in all the inanimate objects. Acts are attributed to the human being figuratively, in the same way they are attributed to inanimate objects, like, for example, when it is said that a tree bears fruit, water runs, a rock moves, the sun rises and sets, the sky clouds over and rains, the earth quakes and sprouts, and so on.[475]

It may be argued that it would not be appropriate of God to have such control over people. However, in his al-Lumaʿ, al-Ashʿarī refutes such an argument. According to him, God, being the Supreme Power, does not do anything that may appear bad (qabīḥ), since He is not violating any deity's guidelines. He says, "The proof that He can do everything He does is that He is the King, the Supreme, Who is not owned, nor above Him is one who gives Him permission, or command,

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[474] Ibn Ḥajar Al-ʿAsqalānī. *Fatḥ al-Bārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*. Ed. Shuʿayb al-Arna'ūṭ and ʿĀdil Murshid. Beirut: Al-Risālah al-ʿĀlamiyyah, *ḥadīth* No. 4322, vol. 12, p. 563.

[475] Renard, J. (2014). Theological Schools and Principles, in *Islamic Theological Themes*. Oakland: University of California Press, p. 143; van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom. Boston: Brill, vol. 2, p. 556-571.

or forbids, or warns, nor one who drew plans for Him or applied boundaries to Him; so if He were

as such, then nothing comes from Him that is bad (*qabīḥ*), for an act may be bad from us because

we transgress the boundaries and the plans provided to us, and we take what we cannot achieve;

however, since the Maker is not given power [by anyone], nor is He under [anyone's] command,

then nothing bad can come from Him."[476]

About predeterminism, al-Ashʿarī states,

> If they ask, "Why do you call us *Qadariyyah*?" It is replied to them, "Because you claim in your actions that you determine them and perform them with a power you have independent of your Creator (*li annakum tazʿumūn fī aksābikum annakum tuqaddirūnahā wa tafʿalūnahā maqdiratan lakum dūna khāliqikum*). The Qadarī is one who attributes that to himself, just like the goldsmith is the one who confesses that he makes [the gold] rather than the one who is made for, and the carpenter is the one who shapes the wood rather the one who has it made for him and does not make anything. Therefore, a *Qadarī* is one who claims that he makes his actions with a power other than his Lord, and claims that his Lord does not do anything of his actions."

> Thus, if he says, "Then you have to be *Qadariyyah*, because you prove [the existence] of *qadar*." It is replied to them, "We prove that God, the Exalted, determined our actions and created them predetermined for us, and we do not prove that to ourselves. So whoever proves determination and power to God and claims that the actions are all determined by his Lord, then he is not a *qadarī*, just like the one who proves that the maker of the gold and the wood is other than himself, while he is not a goldsmith nor a carpenter."[477]

It is clear from the above that al-Ashʿarī believes that people have no control over their actions,

and that God is responsible for all the actions as He has the Power, *qudrah*, not the people.

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[476] Al-Ashʿarī (1955). *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Miṣriyyah, p. 117.
[477] Ibid, p. 90-91.

Since Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī developed the idea of predeterminism, wrote about it, and thoroughly discussed it, comparing it to the beliefs of other rites, the idea became associated with the Ashʿarī school. However, as demonstrated earlier, the belief was held by Abū Ḥanīfa[478] and others well before Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī.

4.3.1 Supporting Arguments for Predeterminism

Arguments supporting predeterminism can be summarized in three points.[479]

The first argument suggests that God is the Absolute Creator, and hence, all actions must be ascribed to Him. If humans have any power over their own actions, then that would override God's Power, or at least they would be equals to Him. Since that is impossible, for He is the Absolute Power, then it must be that humans have no free will, and hence, all their actions are predetermined by God. Several verses of the Qur'ān are used to prove such claims, for example: 6:102, 13:16, 23:91, 35:3, 39:62 and 59:24.

Imam al-Ḥaramayn, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd Allāh Al-Juwaynī Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 478/1086), who is one of the Imams of the Ashʿarī[480] school, states,

> It is impossible for the Exalted Creator to be an Owner of what He has no ability over [to control], and a God of what is not considered within His abilities. There has to be a creator and a lord for every creation, and if the servant is the creator of his own actions, then he has to be its lord and god, since he has the sole ability

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[478] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, p. 43-4.
[479] Milani, F.H. (2016). *Islamic Theology*. London: Islam in English Press, p. 169-172; Al-Juwaynī, A. (1995). *Kitāb al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 79-85.
[480] Shahristānī, M. (1992). *Al-Milal wal-Niḥal*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, vol. 1, p. 85.

over it. This [claim] is a major [deviation] in religion, no blessed person would say that. And the essence of the revelation surely proves that, for the Best of Speakers says, "Then every god would have gone with what he has created, and some would rise above others," (23:91).[481]

He later adds,

> And of the Qur'ānic proofs, His saying, the Exalted, "That is God, your Lord. There is no god but He, the Creator of everything," (6:102). The verse dictates the Unisom of the Exalted Creator in creating every creation and using it as a proof supports that we know that its essence consists of praise for the invention and the bringing into existence, and the oneness in creating everything."[482]

He further supports his argument by quoting the following Qur'ānic verses: 37:91, "And God created you and what you make;" 2:284, "And God is capable of everything." Since God is the Creator of everything, He creates the actions of humans and they do not have a choice of their own, because He is capable of everything.

The second argument for predeterminism suggests that since Muslims believe all actions are performed by the Will of God, then it must entail that God is the One Who predetermines all actions. If God Wills, then either His Will executes or it does not. If it does not, then He cannot be all Powerful, and if it does, then people do not have a will of their own. Moreover, it cannot be that people will and God wills, as they will then be associated with God in His Will. Since there cannot be any associates with God, then, according to the Ashʿarī school, it must be that God predetermines all actions.[483]

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[481] Al-Juwaynī, A. (1995). *Kitāb al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 83.
[482] Ibid. p. 83-84.
[483] Ibid, p. 79-80.

The third argument in support of predeterminism suggests that if God is All-Knowing, then He already knows who is destined to go to Heaven and who will go to the Hell Fire. If He does not know, then He is not God, and if He does, then He already predetermined one's fate: either in Paradise or the Hell Fire.[484]

4.3.2 Political Clout for Predeterminism

The ideology of predeterminism was adopted by many Muslims, and it resonated well with Umayyad rulers. As indicated earlier, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān is considered to be the first who used it to justify political motives. Montgomery Watt, Josef van Ess and Michael Cook suggest a political essence to such theological discussions.[485] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) says, "And our teacher, Abū ʿAlī, may God have mercy on him, said, 'The first to state predeterminism and show it was Muʿāwiyah. He publicly announced that what he gets [power and money] is through God's determination (qaḍā' Allāh) and from His creation, to make it an excuse for what he gets, and to fool them that he is appointed in it

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[484] Responses to these three arguments will be discussed later.

[485] For the political drive for predetermination see Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 82-85; Hamza, F.Q. (2017). Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty: Muslim Perspectives, in *God's Creativity and Human Action*. Eds. Mosher, L. and Marshall D. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press. Hamza states the opinions of Watt, van Ess and Cook; however, he argues that the motive behind such ideologies was not political, because the opposition to the Umayyads, the Kharijites, Murji'ites and the Shiʿa "were all in the early period determinists," p. 132. The Shiʿa being "determinists" is a misinterpretation of traditions by the sixth Shiʿi Imam that state, "Indeed God molded our clay and the clay of our Shiʿa, so He mixed them with us and mixed us with them. Thus, if any of His creation has something of our clay then he feels for us. Therefore, you are of us," Saffār (2007). *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*. Ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Muʿallim. Beirut: Dār Jawād al-A'immah ʿalaihi assalam, vol. 1, p. 55.

[Caliphate], and that God made him a leader and gave him the power. This [ideology and behavior] then spread quickly among the rulers of the Umayyads."[486]

The eighth Umayyad ruler, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 101/720) had some discussions with Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 106/724) about predeterminism and free will, indicating the former's belief in God being the Absolute Creator of all deeds and human actions.[487] He once told Ghaylān, "I heard you talk about free will (*qadar*)." Ghaylān affirmed this. Then ʿUmar discussed with him the following verse, "And they do not will but what God wills. Indeed, God is Knowledgeable, Wise," (76:30), asking, "Is God Wise about what He Knows or what He does not Know?" Ghaylān answered, "Rather He is Wise about what He Knows. You have revived me may God make you live. By God, it is as if I were not aware this was of the Book of God."[488] In a different instant, again with Ghaylān, he more clearly indicated his belief when quoting verses 36:9-10, "We made chains in their hands to their necks so they are tied. And whether you warn them or do not warn them they will not believe." ʿUmar stated that it is God who tied them up and He is the One responsible for their belief or disbelief. These conversations suggest that ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz believed in predeterminism, just like Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān.

Ghaylān continued talking about free will, until he was crucified by the tenth Umayyad Caliph, Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 125/743). Hishām asked him, "Do you claim that what's in this world

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[486] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī*. (n.p.), vol. 8, p. 4.
[487] Judd, S. (1999). Ghaylan al-Dimashqi: The Isolation of a Heretic in Islamic Historiography. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 31*(2), 161-184.
[488] Ibn ʿAsākir (1994). *Tārīkh Dimishq*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, vol. 48, p. 197.

is not what God has given us [meaning the Umayyads' power to rule is given to them by God]?"

Ghaylān replied, "I seek refuge in the Might of God, that He trusts one who is extremely

betraying, or that He keeps of His creation as leaders those who are extremely licentious. Indeed

His [chosen] leaders (*Imams*) are those who always establish His laws; fear His Status; those who

work diligently to establish justice among their state, and fear an end that they cannot escape

[death]; they do not find excuses; they spend the night and rest, while their status is in the highest

[of ranks]; their nights are witnessed [by God] through their prolonged prayers and prostration.

God does not appoint a leader who constantly jumps at indecency, or regularly committing the

sins, or continuously making false testimony, or persistently drinks wines." That is when Hishām

ordered his arrest and execution.[489] As such, Umayyad rulers used the idea of predeterminism to

convince people that their right to the Caliphate is God-given, and hence, anyone who opposes

them, rises or speaks against them, or works towards their disposition is considered a non-

believer who is trying to oppose God's determination and command. This, in essence, would give

them religious powers to persecute such individuals. They would also encourage religious leaders

with such belief to convince people of their legitimacy to the throne and dissuade people from

any uprisings.

The belief of predeterminism was not only held by the Umayyads. Even the Abbasids supported

it, as it served their needs as well. The second Abbasid Caliph, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr favoured Abū

Ḥanīfah, the founder of the Ḥanafī school, and had numerous meetings with him. As mentioned

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[489] Al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 233. Also available online: http://zaidiah.com/sites/default/files/articles_files/fdl_ltzl_wtbqt_lmtzl.pdf

above, Abū Ḥanīfah believed in predeterminism.[490] Several times, Al-Maṣūr would order him to debate with Imam al-Ṣādiq.[491] Even after the Caliph imprisoned Abū Ḥanīfah, where he died in the prison in 150/767, the appointment of Abū Yūsuf, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī and Ḥasan ibn Ziyād al-Lu'lu'ī as judges promoted his ideologies and opinions because they were all his students and propagated his school of thought.[492]

Therefore, political powers encouraged the predeterminist ideology and supported those who propagated it.

4.4 The Muʿtazilī School and Free will

The Muʿtazilī school believes that it is unjust of God to predetermine all people's actions, be responsible for them, and then punish those who disobey Him. In his *al-Mughnī*, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār states, "The agreement of the people of justice (*ahl al-ʿadl*)[493] is that the actions of people is from their own doing, getting up and sitting down, created from their own [way], and that God the Honourable, the Exalted, enabled them to doing them. There is no doer or creator [of their

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[490] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 43-4.
[491] Ḥaydar, A. (1993). *Al-Imam al-Ṣādiq wal-Madhāhib al-Arbaʿah*. Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr, vol. 2, p. 315-6. For more of such debates, see *al-Iḥtijāj* by Ṭabrisī.
[492] Ḥaydar, A. (1993). *Al-Imam al-Ṣādiq wal-Madhāhib al-Arbaʿah*. Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr, vol. 1, p. 162. In fact, the author states that the appointment of these three individuals is what led to the survival and propagation of the Ḥanafī school. Also see van Ess, J. (2017). *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Trans. John O'Kane. Boston: Brill, vol. 1, p. 210-241.
[493] The people of justice (*ahl al-ʿadl*) is a term used about the Muʿtazila, and can also be applied to the Shiʿa, who believe that humans have free will. Another term used is *al-ʿAdliyyah*.

actions] but them. Whoever says that God, Glorified be He, is its Creator or Maker, then he has

made a great error."[494] In *Sharḥ al-Usūl al-Khamsah*, he says (adapted from the reference below),

> Then if it is asked: What is the proof that human acts are not created (*laysat bi-makhlūqāt*) by God but that they are done with His knowledge? Say to him: If they were done by God then what good would there be in His commanding those that are ethically good and prohibiting those that are ethically bad, and praising and rewarding obedience but blaming and punishing disobedience? In the same way, it would not be good for Him to command His acts in us, such as color, shape, health, and sickness, or to prohibit such, or lay blame for such. Moreover, if God were the agent of our acts then they would not have happened according to our purposes and motivation. Moreover, [even] a wise man cannot create his own abuse, or condemn and vilify [himself]; for how could it be said that every abuse and vilification [addressed] to him is of his own doing? And moreover, who ever commits injustice and transgression must be unjust and a transgressor. Thus, if God committed injustice He would be unjust, just as if He acted justly He would be just, and whoever says [otherwise] is an unbeliever. He has said, "You will see no disharmony in the creation of [God] the Beneficent" (67:3), and, "He who has made good everything that He has created" (32:7), and, "[Such is] the artistry of God, who disposes of all things in perfect order" (27:88). [These verses] indicate that these ethically bad acts are not created by God but that they are the acts of humans, and on that basis they deserve blame and punishment. How can it be possible for God to create erroneous behavior in them and then punish them, thus saying: "Why do you disbelieve?" Isn't that the same as someone commanding his slave to do something, then punishing him for it? And that would clearly be corrupt.[495]

In his *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār defends the Muʿtazilīs from being called

qadariyyah, which is a group the Prophet condemned. He writes

> And if one then asks: Why are you commended, as far as calling yourselves Muʿtazilah? You are more deserving of condemnation as your opposition claimed you to be *qadariyyah*. And it has been confirmed of him [Prophet Muḥammad], may God's blessings be bestowed upon him, in a different report the

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[494] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī*. (n.p.), vol. 8, p. 3.
[495] Martin, R.C., Woodward, M.R., and Atmaja, D.S. (2003). *Defenders of Reason in Islam. Muʿtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oxford: Oneworld Publication; p. 97.

condemnation of that, until it was narrated from him that he said, "The *qadariyyah* are the Zoroastrians of this nation."

In response to him [we say]: Indeed, this title [*qadariyyah*] did not affirm to us like that title [*Muʿtazilah*], because we claim this title [*qadariyyah*] is for he who opposes us in the justice, and we claim that the actions of people are of the creation of God, and they are by his decree and determination (*wa annahā be-qaḍāʾihi wa qadarih*). So how can one hold us [to a title] that is in dispute, as we mentioned, rather than that is affirmed and united on.

Moreover, we do not make the title as a proof of our rite (*madhhab*). Rather, the truth of the rite is the truth of the proof. We mentioned that to be understood that the title is in agreement with the rite.

As for the *qadariyyah*, they are those who claim that He, the Exalted, determined the sins, and they made that as an excuse for the sinner, to the point that some of them believe that nothing can be determined and performed of him [the sinner] except what God, the Exalted, determined for him. He cannot be described that way except through affirmation, not negation. Our companions negated the sins [coming] from God, and they [the *qadariyyah*] affirm it; so therefore, it is mandated that the title [*qadariyyah*] be associated with them, since they say that there is no one determining sins except Him, the Exalted (*lā muqaddira lil-maʿāṣī illā huwa taʿālā*).[496]

As can be indicated from the above passage, and the one examined earlier from al-Ashʿarī, each group accuses the other of being the *qadariyyah*. Moreover, ʿAbd al-Jabbār makes it clear that while the ultimate Power rests with God, He gave the human the ability to decide the action he/she wants to take. This decision will then determine whether or not the human gets rewarded or punished.

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[496] Al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār (n.d.).*Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*. Tunis: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, p. 167. Also available online: http://zaidiah.com/sites/default/files/articles_files/fdl_ltzl_wtbqt_lmtzl.pdf

It is noteworthy to mention that al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār defines *Iʿtizāl* as "holding on to *tawḥid* and *ʿadl*, and what is included in it [*Iʿtizāl*] about sayings of Judgment Day (*waʿīd*), prophethood (*nubūwāt*) and the laws (*sharāʾiʿ*)."[497]

Some of the Qurʾānic verses the Muʿtazila use to prove that the human is responsible for his choices are as follows: 2:28, 6:79, 9:82, 17:94, 18:29, 38:27, 46:14, 51:56, 55:60, 57:8, 64:2, and 74:49.[498] For example, after stating the following three verses: "A reward for what they did," (46:14); "A recompense for what they earned," (9:82); and "Is not the reward for kindness but kindness?" (55:60), al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār writes, "If it were not that we do and make, [then] these words would be a lie, and the compensation for what He creates in us would be bad (*qabīḥ*)."[499] Moreover, when quoting the verse, "So whoever wills [he] can believe, and whoever wills [he] can disbelief," (18:29), he says, "He delegated the command in that up to our choice (*fawwaḍa al-amra fī dhālika ilā ikhtiyarinā*)."[500] For this reason, Muʿtazilīa are known as the *mufawwiḍah*, those who claim that God created His creation and then delegated their actions to them.[501]

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[497] Ibid, p. 213.
[498] All these verses are taken from Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, p. 360-363.
[499] Ibid, p. 361.
[500] Ibid, p. 362.
[501] Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 94.

4.5 The Shiʿi Imamī School

Both the Muʿtazilī and the Shiʿi schools believe in God's divine Justice (ʿadl), and hence, they are called *Ahl al-ʿAdl* or *ʿAdliyyah*.[502] However, they differ in some of the details.

The sixth Shiʿi Imam, al-Ṣādiq has a famous quote that was mentioned earlier, "It is not predeterminism, nor free will, but a matter in between the two (*lā jabra wa lā tafwīḍ wa lākin amrun bayna amrayn*)."[503] The discussion mentioned earlier between Abū Ḥanīfa and the seventh Shiʿi Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim also indicates that humans are responsible for their own actions.[504] However, the power given to humans stems from God.

Mufīd explains the above tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq in his *Al-Nukat fī Muqaddamāt al-Uṣūl* by dividing God's will (*irādah*) into two: His will for His actions, and His will for the actions of His creation.[505] The will for His actions is "His knowledge that mandates an action at one time and not another due to it encompassing benefit for [the action] being at this time and not another."[506] Whereas His will for the actions of His creation is "Him asking them to do it on the matter of choice."[507] In normative terms, the will for His actions is called the "creative will" (*irādah takwīniyyah*) in which God did not give a choice to humans. For example, people do not choose

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[502] Ibid, p. 230.
[503] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 13, p. 92.
[504] Mufīd (1985). *Al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', p. 43-4.
[505] Mufīd (1992). *Al-Nukat fī Muqaddamāt al-Uṣūl*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 26; Mufīd (1992). *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 47-53;
[506] Ibid.
[507] Ibid.

their parents, their own genes, their siblings, and so on. In such matters, God creates them in their forms. However, when it comes to legislation, or "legislative will" (*irādah tashrīʿiyyah*), then humans can make a decision whether or not to obey God. Hence, based on their actions, they will be either rewarded or punished.[508]

Some of the verses that indicate free will are as follows:

"Say [O Muḥammad]! The truth [has now come] from your Lord, so let those who wish believe it; and let those who wish reject it," (18:29);

"Those who commit good deeds benefit themselves while those who commit evil deeds burden their selves. The Lord is not unjust to His servants," (41:46);

"Each person is to be held responsible for what they have done," (52:21);

"Indeed, We surely shown [the human] the way [and it rests with himself to prove himself] grateful or ungrateful," (76:3); and,

"By the self, and that which perfected it, inspired it [with the faculty to discern between] what is evil and what is good. Those who purify it succeed, and those who corrupt it fail," (91:7-10).

The following examples of Qur'ānic verses indicate that without the permissions of God, the human being will not be able to do anything:

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[508] Milani, F. (2016). *Islamic Theology*. London: Islam in English Press, p. 166-178.

"Regardless of not being able to harm anyone without God's permission," (2:102);

"No human being can ever attain faith other than by God's permission," (10:100); and,

"Without the permission of the Lord of the Worlds you will not be able to make a choice," (81:29).

To combine between the two sets of verses, Shiʿi Imams stated that while the Absolute Power belongs to God, He can give power to whoever He wills.[509] Moreover, He sometimes attributes certain things to their natural causes that He created. For example, He states that vegetation grows due to the water coming from rain (32:27). In addition, God states that "He causes death and takes souls," (39:42), but also mentions that he allocated this task to the Angel of Death, "Say! The Angel of Death takes your souls," (4:81). The ultimate power is God's, but He can delegate that task to another of His creation. This does not contradict the belief in God's Absolute Power, and it answers the Ashʿarī argument indicated above. In addition, claiming that God "created you and what you do," (37:96), was in reference to Prophet Abraham talking to the idol worshippers, indicating to them that God is their Creator and He created the power that He gave them to make these sculpted images. This verse is specifically in reference to this and should not be taken out of context to generalize that God creates all actions of people. As for God's Knowledge, Imamī scholars indicate that while God is All-Knowing and is aware of whether a

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[509] Khawājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) has a section in his *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* titled "The deeds of the servants are performed by the Power of God the Exalted" (*afʿāl al-ʿibād wāqiʿah biqudrat Allāh taʿālā*). In the same section, he also lists ten kinds of verses of the Qurʾān that prove his point. ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī lists the same verses in his *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*. Khawājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1985). *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, p. 325-333; al-Ḥillī (2011). *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 428-430.

person will go to Paradise or Hell, His prior knowledge does not affect people's decisions.[510] Imam

ʿAlī al-Riḍā, the eighth Shiʿi Imam was asked about whether or not God knows if something were

not to occur then what would happen? The Imam answered, "Surely God the Exalted is the

Knowledgeable of things before the things come into existence…God's knowledge always

precedes things before He creates it. Glorified our Lord, God the Exalted, and praised greatly. He

created things and His knowledge of them precedes it as He wills. That is our Lord who always is

Knowledgeable, All-Seeing, All-Hearing."[511] When asked in about people's action, he clearly

indicated that His prior knowledge of their actions does not interfere in them choosing their

decisions, "Is it created by God?" He replied, "If He were its Creator then He would not

disassociate Himself from it. He, the Exalted, said, 'Indeed God and His messenger are

disassociated from the those who associate [with Him]," (9:3). He did not disassociate from

creating them, but rather from their association [with Him other deities] and their bad actions."[512]

Therefore, the human being is responsible for all his actions, and, depending on his deeds, on the

Day of Judgment he will either be rewarded or punished.

In a different tradition, the eighth Imam defines predetermination (*qadar*) as "engineering and

putting the limits of remaining and perishing," and he defines decree (*qaḍāʾ*) as "determining and

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[510] An example that can clarify the issue may be as follows: A smart teacher looks at the profile of his students at the beginning of the year and makes a prediction that students X and Y will achieve high grades, but Z will fail. At the end of the term, when the teacher's predictions come true, student Z cannot blame his failure on the teacher for predicting he was going to fail. The teacher's "knowledge" did not interfere with the student's choices, actions and free will. Hence, the student cannot object. This, of course, is only an example. God has the Absolute Knowledge about the future of all His creation, but that Knowledge does not deprive them of their choices. Thus, if one does good, then he/she will be rewarded, and if one does bad then he/she may be punished.

[511] Ṣadūq (2006*). ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Ed. Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Aʿlamī. Qum: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, p. 108-109.

[512] Mufīd (1992). *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 42-47.

following through the laws as per His wisdom."[513] Thus, predetermination (*qadar*) is the combination of all causes that can make something occur. Decree (*qaḍā'*), on the other hand, is the effect of all those causes when they are combined, in the absence of any matter that prevents it from occurring. For example, the combination of all the causes of fire: a spark, oxygen, and a combustible material (i.e. paper) will ignite a fire and the paper will burn. The combination of all these materials are required to cause fire, and that is *qadar*. In other words, without the combination of all these materials, fire will not be produced. When all these materials are combined, and there is nothing that prevents the paper from burning (i.e. an anti-inflammatory chemical layer), then the paper will burn, and that is the decree (*qaḍā'*).

Imam ʿAlī was once sitting under a wall that was about to collapse. He moved from underneath it to another place. A man then shouted, "Do you run away from the decree of God, O Commander of the Faithful?" The Imam replied, "Yes, I run from His decree (*qaḍā'ihi*) to His predetermination (*qadarihi*)."[514] What the Imam meant is that if I remain under the wall, then it will collapse, and that will cause me harm, which is the combination of the factors that can cause harm to a person. However, when I go to another place, the combination of the factors to cause me harm from the collapsed wall will not exist, and hence, I run from His decree to His preordainment.

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[513] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 4, p. 90.
[514] Ṣadūq. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 369.

The Qur'ān says, "We created everything to a measure (*biqadar*)," (54:49), and, "And there is not a thing but We have its treasures, and We do not send it down but in a known measure," (15:21). Thus, God created measures for everything in this creation: how big it will be; what dimensions it will have; what volume it will occupy; what is necessary for a phenomenon to occur, etc. That is known as *qadar*.[515]

As for Qur'ānic definition of *qaḍā'*, Mufīd provides five meanings to the word as follows:

Created: "And He created them (*qaḍāhunna*) seven heavens in two stages," (41:12);

Command: "And your Lord commanded (*wa qaḍā rabbuka*) that you do not worship but Him, and be virtuous with parents," (17:23);

Giving news/telling: "And We told (*qaḍaynā*) the Children of Israel in the Book," (17:4).

Rule/judge: "So judge (*fa'qḍi*) what you are judging," (20:72); and

Finished/completed: "The matter that you inquired about is completed (*quḍiya*)," (12:41).[516]

To summarize the Shiʻi Imamī belief, God created humans and determined when each individual one of them will come into existence, what he/she will look like and all the factors surrounding

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[515] Hamza, F., Rizvi, S. H., Mayer, F (2010). An anthology of Qur'ānic commentaries. Volume 1: On the nature of the divine. Ed. Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi, with Farhana Mayer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 10.

[516] Mufīd. *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 54-55. The contemporary Shaykh Nāṣir Makārim Shīrāzī provides an additional three meanings to the word *qaḍā*: Wants: "When He wants (*qaḍā*) a matter He says 'Be,' and it becomes," (3:47); Killed: "Moses hit him and he killed (*qaḍā*) him," (28:15); and Promised: "When We promised (*qaḍaynā*) that matter to Moses," (28:44). Shīrāzī, N.M. (2001). *Al-Amthal fī Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-Munzal*. Qum: Madrasat al-Imam ʿAlī, vol. 8, p. 448-449. The author suggests some interpreters of the Qur'ān have listed over 13 definitions for the word.

his/her creation. These matters of their creation they do not have control over. He gave them the necessary tools so they can carry out their actions, such as the brain, intellect, sight, strength, etc. He also knows of their choices in life and who will end up in Paradise versus who will go to the Hell Fire. Moreover, He has the ultimate Power over them, which is known as *tawḥīd al-afʿāl*, unity of the actions as discussed in the earlier chapter. However, His divine Knowledge and His Power does not interfere with the choices they make with regards to His laws and legislation, and their interactions with other people, animals, the environment, and the world. He has given them free will, and hence, He will hold them accountable for their deeds on the Day of Judgment. In addition, He designed a system of laws in the universe and preordained it. In order for humans to accomplish certain matters, they have to use these natural laws. Once all the parameters to execute an issue are combined, and there is not some factor that will prevent the matter from being executed, then it will carry through. Mufīd narrates the following tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq, "When God the Exalted resurrects the creation, He will ask them about what He conveyed to them, and He will not ask them about what He ordained upon them."[517]

4.6 Predetermination, Free Will and Preordainment in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Imam ʿAlī realized that some people are not able to comprehend God's decree (*qaḍā'*) and preordainment (*qadar*) due to their limited understanding of the Qur'ān and its interpretation. Therefore, he sometimes ordered people to stay away from asking such questions as they may

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[517] Mufīd. *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 59. For a normative definition of *qaḍā'* and *qadar* see Muṭahhari, M. (1987). *Al-Insān wal-Qadar*. Trans. Muḥammad ʿAlī Taskhīrī. Tehran: Muʿāwiniyyat al-ʿIlāqāt al-Duwaliyyah.

be too complicated for people to grasp, and may cause much confusion, which may lead to deviation.[518] For example, a man once asked him about *qaḍāʾ*, and the Imam replied, "A deep ocean so do not dive into it." When the man repeated his question again, the Imam answered, "A dark route so do not take it." The man repeated his question a third time and the Imam asserted, "It is a secret of God so do not bother to learn it."[519] His response was probably out of caution as he might have known the dilemma that would result to the individual from the discussions about *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar*.

In *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, al-Mūsawī narrates the whole tradition of Imam ʿAlī when asked about the *qadar* as follows,

> A dark route, so, do not take it. A deep ocean, so, do not dive into it. The secret of God so do not bother to learn it. Surely, the decree (*al-qadar*) is a secret of the secrets of God; a hidden [matter] of God's hidden matters; a protection of the protection of God; carried in the barrier of God (*marfūʿun fī ḥijāb Allāh*); covered [away] from the creation of God; sealed by the seal of God. God did not burden His creation with its knowledge; and elevated it beyond their senses and the endeavours of their intellects, because they do not achieve it through the truth of the Lordship, nor through the power of the Needless, nor through the greatness of the Light, nor through the exalt of the Oneness, because it is indeed a treasure-full sea exclusive for God, the Exalted, the High. Its depth is what is between the skies and the earth; its width is what is between the east and the west. Black, like the darkness of the night. It has many snakes and whales. It rises in a crest at some point and goes low in a trough another. At its lowest point is a bright sun, no one is to see it but God, the One, the Only (*al-Fard*). Whoever seeks it, then he has [gone] in opposition to God, the Exalted, the High, in His Wisdom, and fought Him

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[518] The Qurʾān asserts this approach with some individuals, "O those who believe! Do not ask about things that if they are revealed to you they would trouble you," (5:101). The next verse states, "Indeed, people before you had asked such questions, then they became disbelievers on account of them," (5:102).

[519] NB, short words of wisdom No. 278, p. 618.

in His Kingdom, and revealed a veil of His veils, and "he shall certainly earn God's wrath, and his destiny is the Hell Fire, an evil destination.[520]"[521]

In the above text, Imam ʿAlī appears to be vehemently opposed to people asking about or even wasting time learning and thinking about God's decree (*qadar*). Al-Mūsawī suggests that according to al-Wabarī,[522] what Imam ʿAlī is referring to as *qadar* in the above excerpt is God's infinite Knowledge that no one can achieve, as there is not path to Him and to His Powers and Knowledge. Others suggest that the *qadar* that Imam ʿAlī appears to dissuade people from trying to comprehend or even attempt to learn is God's hidden Knowledge that no one knows, and people are not burdened with worrying about it. Thus, every person should go about his/her daily affairs, looking after what matters to him/her, and should not engage in matters that are beyond him/her and will not yield them any fruit as these matters are beyond the scope of human comprehension and understanding. This meaning may also be derived from the tradition of Imam al-Riḍā quoted above describing *qadar* as "engineering and putting the limits of remaining and perishing,"[523] which are all in God's Knowledge.

On a different occasion, however, Imam ʿAlī clarified the issue. After the battle of Ṣiffīn, Imam ʿAlī was asked by a man from Damascus (*Shāmī*), "Was it by God's decree (*qaḍāʾ*) and His preordainment (*qadar*) that we went [to fight] in *Shām*? Imam ʿAlī initially replied, "I swear by the One Who splits the seed [to enable the growth of the plant], and created the breeze, you

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[520] Qur'ān (9:16).
[521] Al-Mūsawī (1993). *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*. Beirut: al-Dār al-Islāmiyyah, p. 418-419.
[522] On al-Bayhaqī and al-Wabarī, see Ṭabaṭabāī (1993). *Nahj al-Balāghah ʿabr al-Qurūn*. Retrieved from http://rafed.net/turathona/37/37-3.html
[523] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 4, p. 90.

never go over a hill, or down a valley, without God's decree and predetermination." The man then said, "Then I will attribute my difficulties to God, O Commander of the Faithful, as I do not gain any reward [for doing this]." The Imam then replied, "Rather, He gave you ample reward for your travel and return, and in none of your states were you ever forced, or [pushed] against your will." The man then inquired, "But how? When the decree and the predetermination drove us?"[524] The man did not understand the Imam's words as he took them to refer to predetermination, in the sense that the human has no power over his actions. What the Imam meant, however, is that all human actions cannot be performed against the Will of God, and they are known to Him in His Divine Knowledge. God knows of what actions people are going to take, and what decisions they will make. That is God's Command (*qaḍā'*). In addition, He gave humans the necessary tools to execute their actions, and without putting these tools to use, the human cannot carry out the functions he intends on performing. That is God's predetermination (*qadar*). Since the Imam's army made their own choice to support the Imam in his battle against Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, God will reward them greatly for doing so. As such, the Imam then continued to clarify,

> Woe upon you! Did you think it was a predetermined decree and inevitable predetermination! If it were as such, then the reward and punishment would have been nullified, and the promises and warnings [of God] would have failed. Indeed, God ordered His creation and gave them choice, and forbid them out of warning, and He mandated what is little, and did not mandate what is difficult [to follow], and gave for the little [deeds they perform] lots [of reward]. He was not disobeyed

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[524] This part of the discussion is not found in NB. It is narrated by ʿAbd al-Jabbār in *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*, p. 146, and in *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p. 89.

because He is weak, nor was He obeyed by forcing [people].[525] He did not send the Prophets [to people] in vanity, nor did He reveal the Books to the servants purposelessly, nor did He create the Heavens and the Earth and what is between them falsely. "That is the opinion of the disbelievers, so woe to the disbelievers from the Fire" (38:27).[526] The man then got up gladly and recited these lines of poetry:

You are the Imam who we seek pleasure in his obedience on the Day of Judgment

You clarify of our religion what is doubtful, may your Lord reward you on our behalf with virtue.[527]

The above tradition states the Imamī belief in free will. Imam ʿAlī clarifies that if our actions are predetermined by God, then there would not be any sense for punishment and reward. That may be because one of God's attributes is the Wisdom, and it would be contrary to God's wisdom to compel a person to sin and then punish him for it, or force him to do good and then reward him for it as such a reward would be meaningless. Moreover, another attribute of God is Justice, and hence, it would not be fair of God to push someone to disobey Him and then punish him for it. In fact, Imam ʿAlī views God not only as Just (ʿĀdil), but as the absolute justice itself (ʿAdl).[528]

Imam ʿAlī then lists ten points necessary for God's legislative imposition of duty (taklīf) and human's choice (ikhtiyār).

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[525] In al-Kāfī another sentence is added, "And He did not give ownership [to the human] through delegation (mufawwiḍan)."
[526] NB, short words of wisdom No. 73, p. 575.
[527] These two verses of poetry are not mentioned in NB but are found in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah, p. 147, and in al-Kāfī, vol. 1, section 52, ḥadīth No. 1, p. 89.
[528] On that see Nasr, S.H. (2006). The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam. Ed. Lakhani, M.A. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., p. xi.

The first is that He commanded His creation but allowed them the choice whether or not to follow his commands. This is the "legislative will". God says in the Qur'ān, "There is no compulsion in the religion," (2:256).

Second, He forbade His creation from disobeying Him as a warning, not forcing them to obey Him. The Qur'ān states, "Do the believers not know that if God wills He would have surely guided all the people?" (13:31). So the human makes the choice whether or not to believe in God.

Third, God ordered His creation to do what is feasible for them to implement. In fact, He obligated upon them what is easy for them to follow to encourage them to obey Him. The Qur'ān says, "God desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty," (2:185).

Fourth, He did not mandate what is difficult upon them so they would not have to experience difficulty in performing their obligations, and feel that the laws are unbearable, which may then drive them to disobey Him.

Fifth, out of His Generosity and Grace, He gives them much for the little they do. The Qur'ān says, "If you are grateful then I will increase you," (14:7); "Whoever performs a virtuous deed will be rewarded ten times, and whoever comes with a bad deed will be recompensed with the like of it, and they will not be [treated] unfairly," (6:160); and, "The example of those who spend in the way of God is like that of a grain growing seven ears, with a hundred grains in every ear, and God multiplies for whoever He wills, and God is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing," (2:261).

Sixth, when people disobey God, it is not because He is weak and incapable of punishing them. God states, "And if God were to punish people for their oppression then He would not have left

a single thing on it [earth]; but He delays them to an appointed time," (16:61). So, He keeps them out of His mercy to give them opportunities to repent.

Seventh, God was not worshipped and obeyed by forcing anyone against his/her will. He lets humans choose whether or not to obey Him.

Eighth, He sent the Prophets as "bearers of glad tidings or as those who warn," (6:48). He does not send them in vanity. Their duty is to guide humanity and show them the path of truth, "Just like we sent among you a Messenger of you to recite upon you our signs, and purify you, and teach you the scripture and the wisdom [laws], teach you of what you did not know," (2:151).

Ninth, He sent the scriptures for the purpose of guiding people, indicating to them His laws and their obligations so they can establish justice on earth. He says in the Qur'ān, "Certainly, We sent Our apostles with clear proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that humankind may maintain justice," (57:25). He also demonstrates to them their limits and then lets them have the choice, either to follow His path and be rewarded, or transgress His boundaries and risk being punished.

Last, He created the Heavens and the earth for a purpose. He says in the Qur'ān, "We did not create the heaven and the earth and whatever is between them for play," (21:16). Rather, the Qur'ān states, "Indeed, in the creation of the Heavens and the earth are signs for those who reflect," (3:190).

Therefore, it is clear from the discourse above that according to Imam ʿAlī, the human being is responsible for his actions. God gave him the free will and did not predetermine his fate. God, in His Knowledge, is aware of the individual's fate, and it is through His Power that people do things.

That is what the Imam initially referred to when he said, "You never go over a hill, or down a valley, without God's decree and predetermination." However, God's knowledge does not interfere with the human's decisions, and hence, He rewards and punishes accordingly. Moreover, in the version of the tradition narrated in *al-Kāfī*, the Imam also says, "And He did not give ownership [to the human] through delegation (*wa lam yumallik tafwīḍan*),"[529] and hence, this refutes the opinion of the *mufawwiḍah*.[530]

This is what Imam al-Ṣādiq is referring to when he said, "It is not compulsion, nor delegation, but a matter between the two (*lā jabra wa lā tafwīḍ, wa lākin amrun bayna amrayn*)." A person then inquired, "What is a matter between the two?" The Imam replied, "An example of that is a man you find sinning, and you forbid him but he does not stop, so you left him and he then commits that sin. It is not because he did not accept from you, and you left him, that you were the one who ordered him to commit the sin."[531]

In *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, al-Mūsawī includes the following addition in the conversation between the man from Damascus (*Shāmī*) and Imam ʿAlī, which underscores our discussion above,

> The man then asked him [Imam ʿAlī], "So what is [the meaning] decree (*qaḍāʾ*) and predetermination (*qadar*) for you?" So he, peace be upon him, said, "The command form God, the High, for obedience, and forbidding the disobedience, and the ability (*tamakkun*) of doing the good and leaving the bad, and the assistance [from God] for seeking nearness to Him, and letting down he who disobeys Him, and the promise and the warning (*al-waʿdu wal-waʿīd*). All that is

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[529] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p. 89.
[530] Watt, M. (1973). *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 94.
[531] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 52, *ḥadīth* No. 13, p. 92.

the decree (*qaḍāʾ*) of God in our actions and his predetermination (*qadaruhu*) for our deeds." The Imam then recited, "And your Lord decreed that you do not worship but Him, and be virtuous with parents," (17:23); and, "And God's command (*amr*) is ordained by a precise ordaining," (33:38). He, peace be upon him, then said, "Do not think of anything other than that, for indeed, doubt of Him fails the deeds."[532]

The above statements from Imam ʿAlī demonstrate God's "legislative will," commanding His servants to obey Him and forbidding them from His disobedience, as demonstrated by quoting verse 17:23 where *qaḍā* means "commanded." However, God gave people the free will to choose whether or not to follow His commands, and hence, to encourage them to obey Him, He promised them reward (*waʿd*) and to dissuade them from His disobedience He warned them of His punishment (*waʿīd*).

4.7 Ability (*istiṭāʿah*)

One of the discussions about Justice in the fourth Islamic century was regarding ability, or *istiṭāʿah*.

In *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, ʿAbd al-Jabbār defines *istiṭāʿah* as, "The power [to do an action] precedes the action and is not associated with it."[533] As per the Muʿtazilī and the Imamī schools, God gave the power (*qudrah*) to the human preceding the action, whereas the Ashʿarī school

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[532] Al-Mūsawī. *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 420-421.
[533] ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 390.

claims that when God wants a person to do an action, He creates the *qudrah*, or power, for him

to perform it.[534]

In *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, Imam ʿAlī asserts the Imamī stand when a group of people asked

about the *qadar*,

> He answered, "Whatever mercy God unfolds for the people, no one can withhold
> it; and whatever He withholds no one can release it except Him," (35:2). They said,
> "O Commander of the Faithful, we were asking you about the limit of the ability
> (*istiṭāʿah*) with which we stand and sit." He then clarified, "Having ability with God
> or without Him? If you say that you have the ability with God, then I will kill you,
> and if you say you have it without God, then I will kill you." So, they asked, "Hence,
> what shall we say, O Commander of the Faithful?" He said, "You have it through
> the One Who has it above you. If He grants it to you, then that is of His favour [to
> you], and if He takes it away from you, then that is His test [for you]. Indeed, He is
> the owner of what He gives you [to have], and the Powerful over the power He
> enables you to have.[535] Do you not hear what the servants say, and they ask Him
> the intervention and the power when they say, 'No intervention, nor power but
> through God (*lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*)'." He was asked about the
> interpretation of the last sentence, and he stated, "No intervention from sin (*lā
> ḥawla min al-dhunūb)* but through His protection, and no power over His
> obedience (*wa lā quwwata ʿalā ṭāʿatih*) but through His help."[536]

In the above excerpt, Imam ʿAlī explains that the ultimate power comes from God, and He gives

it to His creation, and that is what is referred to as *tawḥīd al-afʿāl* or the unity of the actions.

However, He may choose to take the ability away from some people, and hence, one may lose

the ability to move his hands, for example, or one would lose the ability to move her legs. He

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[534] ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 390; Mufīd. *Tasḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 63-64; Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 80; al-Ashʿarī (1955). *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Miṣriyyah, p. 93-99; al-Juwaynī (1995). *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, p. 89-106; and al-Māzandarānī (2008). *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 5, p. 41.

[535] Up to this point, this tradition is also found in Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥarrānī (d. unknown but in the fourth Islamic century) (2002). *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl ʿan Āl al-Rasūl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, p. 150.

[536] Al-Mūsawī. *Tamām Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 419.

gives them the power, which makes them have the ability to perform their actions. His creation

should seek His guidance when doing their deeds so that they can have a virtuous conduct and

refrain from His disobedience. This is a clear indication of free will, and a person having the choice

to perform his deeds based on the power given to Him by God. As such, power is given to the

person before the action, and it is the person who decides how to use this ability to either pursue

virtue or evil.

4.8 Pain

Murtaḍā argues that God inflicts pain either as a punishment they deserve or a consideration,

which may be a trial. Moreover, inflicting pain on Zayd may cause ʿAmr not to harm Zayd

anymore, and hence, the pain is a blessing to ʿAmr, for he was saved from committing the

wrongdoing against Zayd. Thus, pain can be seen as a good thing.[537]

Murtaḍā writes,

> No one should claim that the compensation (ʿawaḍ) for the pain is compared to
> the respect and reverence like the reward. The reason for that is reward is
> associated with [respect and reverence] because it is achieved on the basis of
> obedience, which deserves praise and respect, whereas pain is not of what
> deserves praise, for that [praise] is deserved on the basis of exchange or price, and
> there is nothing in that [requiring] respect.[538]

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[537] Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 223-232. For a detailed analysis on Murtaḍā's views on pain see Abdulster, *Climax*, p. 240-249.
[538] Ibid, p. 230.

ʿAbd al-Jabbār views pain as a blessing as well[539] whereas the Ashāʿrah claim that anything coming from God is good, regardless of what it is, as He is the absolute Owner, and He may choose to do whatsoever He wishes.[540]

According to NB, Imam Alī says to one of his companions who became ill,

> May God make what you complain of [in pain] forgiveness for your sins. For, surely, there is no reward for illness, but it removes sins, and makes them fall like leaves [in the fall]. Reward, rather, is for deeds performed by the tongue and actions with the hands and the feet. God enters Paradise those [who have] sincere intentions and virtuous feelings of whoever He wishes of His servants.[541]

Raḍī adds after this excerpt,

> He is right, peace be upon him, in saying, "Surely, there is no reward for illness," because it is not [an act] of what one deserves a compensation (awaḍ) because the compensation is deserved in exchange for the action of God, the Exalted, to the servant in [inflicting] pain and illnesses, and what is considered as such. Whereas the pay and reward are deserved on what was in exchange of the action of the servant. Thus, there is a difference between them, that he, peace be upon him, clarified, as is dictated by his precise knowledge and accurate opinion.

Raḍī's comment is in agreement with Murtaḍā, as in, God does not reward for illnesses, as they are not an act of worship, deserving reward. However, pain is a good thing in that it decreases one's sins. Moreover, it is interesting to see Imam ʿAlī describing pain two centuries before the mutakallimīn address the issue.

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[539] ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 483-493.

[540] Al-Ashʿarī (1955). *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Miṣriyyah, p. 115-118; al-Juwaynī (1995). *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, p. 112-113.

[541] NB, short words of wisdom No. 38, p. 570.

4.9 Does God Do What is Ethically Wrong (*Qabīḥ*)?

Among the discussions that were taking place among theologians in the fourth Islamic century was the following: does God perform that which is ethically wrong (*qabīḥ*)? ʿAbd al-Jabbār states (adapted from the reference below)

> Then if it is asked: What is the proof that God does not do that which is ethically wrong (*lā yafʿalu al-qabīḥ*)? Say to him: Because He knows the immorality of all unethical acts (pl. *qabāʾiḥ*) and that He is self-sufficient without them, and it is impossible for Him to do them. For one of us who knows the immorality of injustice and lying, if he knows that he is self-sufficient without them and has no need of them, it would be impossible for him to choose them, in so far as he knows of their immorality and his sufficiency without them. Therefore, if God is sufficient without need of any unethical thing it necessarily follows that He would not choose [the unethical], based on His knowledge of its immorality. Thus, every immoral thing that happens in the world must be a human act, for God transcends doing [immoral acts].[542]

Al-Murtaḍā has a similar opinion in *al-Mulakhaṣ*.[543]

Imam ʿAlī states in NB, "For surely He did not order but good (*ḥasan*) and did not forbid you but from every wrong (*qabīḥ*)."[544] Moreover, he also states about God's power, "He differentiated from things by Him enforcing them to His Omnipotence, and His Power… And a Lord Who has no lord over Him; Powerful not overtaken by power."[545] Therefore, God is Powerful and Omnipotent

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[542] Martin, R.C., Woodward, M.R., and Atmaja, D.S. (2003). *Defenders of Reason in Islam. Muʿtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oxford: Oneworld Publication; p. 96. ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 315.

[543] Murtaḍā (2002). *Al-Mulakhaṣ fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*. Ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Anṣārī Qummī. Tehran: Markaz Nashr Dānishgāhī Islāmī, p. 324-330.

[544] NB, letter 31, p. 482.

[545] NB, sermon 152, p. 266.

and capable of doing what He wants. However, He does not do anything that is wrong, nor does He order anything but good for His creation.

4.10 Evil

Al-Ashʿarī states, "Do you say that evil is from God?... I say, 'Indeed, evil is from God in that He created it as evil is for others not for Himself."[546]

In a tradition narrated in *al-Kāfī*, Imam al-Ṣādiq says, "God the Exalted, the High, said, 'I am God. There is no god but me. The Creator of good and evil. So, a good end [in the Hereafter] to him who I spread good through him, and woe unto him who I spread evil through him.' Woe to the one who says, 'How is this and how is that?" The narrator of the tradition then added, "Meaning the one who denies this matter with his own understanding."[547] Al-Māzandarānī (d. 1081/1671) in his commentary (*sharḥ*) of *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, states this tradition requires interpretation as its apparent meaning would reflect the opinion of those who speak of predetermination (*al-mujabbirah*). He explains that what is meant in the tradition is that God decreed what is good and what is evil. Those who determine to do good, then He will guide them to Paradise, while those who choose to do evil will be deprived of His guidance, and hence, end up in the Hell fire.[548]

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[546] Al-Ashʿarī. *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, p. 84.
[547] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 51, *ḥadīth* No. 3, p. 89.
[548] Muḥammad Saliḥ al-Māzandarānī (2008). *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Ed. Sayyid ʿAlī ʿĀshūr. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 4, p. 293.

While NB does not contain much regarding this topic, however, it confirms the explanation of al-Māzandarānī. Imam ʿAlī attributes evil (*sharr*) to people, "Surely the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, used to say, 'O son of Adam! Do good and forego evil',"[549] and, "The one who does good is better than the good [itself], and the one who does evil is worse than the evil [itself]."[550] Moreover, he also said, "Surely God revealed a Book of Guidance in which He clarified good and evil."[551] Therefore, unlike what al-Ashʿarī said, evil does not come from God. God is the One Who decreed good and evil, and He ordered His creation to do good and refrain from doing evil. Those who choose to do good, will be rewarded with Paradise, while those who commit evil will be punished.

4.11 Conclusion

The tenth Shiʿi Imam, al-Hādī clarifies the Imamī position on predetermination versus free will, and discusses ability (*istiṭāʿah*), by explaining Imam al-Ṣādiq's tradition of "a matter between the two," in a very long letter in which he writes,[552] "We say, surely God, the Honourable, the High, created the creation with His Power (*biqudratih*), and He gave them an ability (*istiṭāʿah*) that He [ordered them] to worship Him through [it]. So, He ordered them and forbade them of what He wants, and He accepted from them following His command and was pleased of that for them. He forbade them from disobeying Him and condemned [he] who disobeyed Him and punished him

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[549] NB, sermon 176, p. 317.
[550] NB, short words of wisdom No. 28, p. 568.
[551] NB, sermon 167, p. 303.
[552] Only excerpts of the letter will be referenced here. For the complete letter see Al-Ḥarrānī (2002). *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl ʿan Āl al-Rasūl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, p. 337-346.

for that; and to God is the choice in commanding and forbidding. He chooses what He wants and commands it and forbids what He hates and punishes [who commits it], through the ability He gave to his servants to follow His command and refrain from His disobedience; because He is the sign of justice, fairness and the complete wisdom." The Imam then continues, "He did not permit them choosing on their own desires and did not accept from them but following His commands and refraining from what He forbid through who He chose [the Messenger]. So, whoever obeys Him then He is following the right way, and whoever disobeys Him then he is misguided and transgressed, and the proof against him is through what ability (*istiṭāʿah*) He gave him to follow His command and to refrain from what He forbid. That is why He deprived him of his reward and put him down with His punishment."[553]

Thus, according to the eleventh Imam, "a matter between the two" is referring to God's obedience, and His disobedience. He created the creation with His Power and gave them the ability, and He can take away their ability through His Power as He is Omnipotent. He commanded His creation to obey Him and forbade them from disobeying Him. He did not force them to obey nor to disobey Him, as that would be unjust of Him, which is what the Ashʿarī school suggests. Nor did He leave His commands up to them to pick and choose what is right and what wrong, or what's obligated and what's not, as that would demonstrate His weakness, which is what some Muʿtazilīs say. He created them and gave them the ability with which they are able to obey Him or disobey Him, and He sent Messengers to guide them and give them His laws, and then He left

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[553] Al-Ḥarrānī (2002). *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl ʿan Āl al-Rasūl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, p. 337-346.

it up to them to choose, through their ability, which of the two paths they would follow: His obedience or disobedience, which suggests the Shiʿi Imamī belief.

According to Imam ʿAlī, the human has choice over his actions and is not forced against his will. This is a similar view to the Muʿtazilah, which makes the two schools known as *ahl al-ʿadl wal-tawḥīd*, or the *ʿadliyyah*, meaning the people of justice and unity. Moreover, this is the opposite view of the Ashʿarī school, which suggests predeterminism. Furthermore, according to NB, God gave the ability to people and ordered them to obey Him and refrain from His disobedience. In addition, when it comes to pain, people are not rewarded for it as it is not an act of worship, but rather He decreases their sins in lieu of it. Thus, even pain is a blessing from God. Moreover, while God is capable of doing what is wrong, He never does it because it contradicts His Justice and Wisdom. Hence, God does not do evil; rather, He showed His creation what is good and what is evil and commanded them to do what is good and refrain from committing the evil.

Imam ʿAlī's brief, yet deep discussions in the examined short words of wisdom demonstrate Shiʿi belief and again show that Shiʿi theology superseded the foundation of the Muʿtazila by at least half a century. In addition, Raḍī's use of the Imam's "precise knowledge and accurate opinion," per the words of Raḍī, imply the necessity for having a divinely appointed guide to teach the people the truth, and keep them away from fabricating their own "false" opinions. It is mandatory to have guides who inspire and illuminate people's minds for matters the intellect cannot perceive on its own, and hence, God sent the prophets to teach people what is good and what is evil. They guide the creation of God to following His path, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: **NUBŪWAH IN NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH**

5.1 Introduction

The belief in the Prophet Muḥammad is an essential principle of Islam. Al-Juwaynī considers proving Prophethood "among the greatest pillars of religion."[554] Confession of Muḥammad's Prophethood is one of the two fundamentals of the Islamic *shahādah*, or profession of faith, "I bear witness that there is no god except God (*Allāh*), and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God."[555] Hence, there is no disagreement among all Muslims about the greatness and Prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad. In the words of Karen Armstrong, "The life of the Prophet Muḥammad (C. 570 – 632 CE) was as crucial to the unfolding Islamic ideal as it is today. His career revealed the inscrutable God's activity in the world, and illustrated the perfect surrender (in Arabic, the word for "surrender" is *islam*) that every human being should make to the divine. Beginning during the Prophet's lifetime, Muslims had to strive to understand the meaning of life and apply it to their own. A little more than a hundred years after Muḥammad's death, as Islam continued to spread to new territories and gain converts, Muslim scholars began to compile the great collections of Muḥammad's sayings (*aḥādīth*) and customary practice (*sunnah*), which would form the basis of Muslim law. The *sunnah* taught Muslims to imitate the way Muḥammad spoke, ate, loved, washed, and worshipped, so that in the smallest details of

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[554] Al-Juwaynī (1995). *Al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 242.
[555] Ayoub, M. M. (2012). *Islam: Faith and History*. London: Oneworld Publications, p. 18.

their daily existence, they reproduced his life on earth in the hope that they would acquire his internal disposition of total surrender to God."[556]

By the fourth Islamic century, Muslim theologians and scholars were having discussions about the need for Prophets, and about the magnitude of the impeccability (ʿiṣmah) of prophets in general, and the Prophet Muḥammad in particular.

There seems to be an agreement amongst Muslim scholars in the fourth Islamic century about the intellect or reason (ʿaql) not being sufficient to guide one to the Divine, and the necessity for Prophets.[557] Al-Juwaynī, who belonged to the Ashʿarī school, in *al-Irshād* states that part of the essence of belief (uṣul al-ʿaqāʾid) is what cannot be achieved by reason but only through traditions (samʿ), such as the laws of obligation (aḥkām al-taklīf).[558] On a similar note, ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Muʿtazilī wrote about the knowledge of the necessity of the Imam "is not permitted through reason but we know of it through the laws (al-sharʿ)."[559] He also mentions that there are four proofs (dalālah): the sign of reason (ʿaql), the Book [the Qurʾān] (al-kitāb), the traditions

[556] Armstrong, K. (2006). *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., p. 8.
[557] See for example Al-Juwaynī (1995). *Al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah; Mufīd. *Awāʾil*; Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah; Murtaḍā (2009). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī. Also see McDermott's discussion on Prophecy in his *Theology*, where he demonstrates the views of Mufīd and ʿAbd al-Jabbār, p. 83-103. Murtaḍā's arguments for the rational need of Imams can also be extended to Prophets as well. See Abdulsater's *Climax*, p. 285. Also see, Stroumsa, S. (1985). The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature. *The Harvard Theological Review, 78*(1/2), 101-114.
[558] Al-Juwaynī (1995). *Al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 144.
[559] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, p. 758.

(*sunnah*) and consensus (*ijmāʿ*).[560] As for the Imāmī school, Murtaḍā mentions in *al-Dhakhīrah*

the necessity for God sending Prophets as reason alone does not arrive at all answers.[561]

Regarding the impeccability of the prophets, however, there seems to be a disagreement. Al-

Juwaynī suggests that while prophets are impeccable against major sins, they may commit minor

sins.[562] ʿAbd al-Jabbār is of the opinion that major sins definitely cannot be attributed to prophets,

whether before they receive a message or after. However, committing minor sins that "would

decrease the reward [of the prophet] without driving people away from him" may be committed

by prophets.[563] While Mufīd indicated that prophets may commit a mistake that does not

decrease their status before God,[564] Murtaḍā affirms that both major and minor sins cannot be

committed by prophets whether before they receive the message of the Divine or after.[565]

Raḍī appears to deal with these concepts with his selection of sermons in NB. Examination of the

text in NB referring to the Prophet Muḥammad may be classified in seven topics. The first

mentions God's reason for sending messengers and apostles. The second refers to God choosing

the Prophet Muḥammad and sending His revelation to Him. The third describes the nomadic and

estranged life in Arabia prior to the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad, and how his coming

transformed their lives. The fourth portrays the Prophet's miracles and discusses his great

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[560] Ibid, p. 88.
[561] Murtaḍā (2009). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 323-327.
[562] Al-Juwaynī (1995). *Al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 143-144.
[563] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, p. 575.
[564] Mufīd. *Awāʾil*, p. 62.
[565] Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 337-338.

manners and his magnificence, which also includes a description of the holy Qur'ān. The fifth

illustrates people's love and submission to the Prophet, and the sixth talks about his death. The

seventh clearly explains Imam ʿAlī's spiritual proximity and kin to the Prophet as they

demonstrate the Imam's superiority over all companions, rather over all of God's creation except

the Prophet himself. After defining the word *nabī*, this chapter will explore all those seven topics.

It will be demonstrated that Raḍī's choice of the sermons of NB that discuss prophethood

suggests a similar opinion as Murtaḍā's, revealing the magnificence and impeccability of all

prophets, especially the Prophet Muḥammad. Moreover, Imam ʿAlī's exposure of the wonders

and radiance of the Prophet establishes his own authority and demonstrates his *Imamah*.

5.2 Meaning of Nabī

Murtaḍā writes,

> With regards to his description as *nabī*, then if it were with a *hamzah* (ء) [*nabī'* - نبيئ], then it comes from news and events; however, if it were with a *shaddah* [*nabī* - نبيّ] without *hamzah*, then it comes from par excellence and high status, coming from [the word] *al-nabāwah* [النباوة].

> Both of those descriptions can be attributed to the Messenger because these meanings are combined in him. However, to intend respecting his greatness, then the *hamzah* must be left.

> Not every [thing/one] of high status can be described as *nabī*, rather this specific use of the word is for one whose status was raised due to his responsibility of delivering the message and determination to do so.

> It is preferred that this word be used only for humans with such a description, unlike what some people said about the angels being described as such.

The general use of *nabī*, with a *hamzah* or without, is specific to one who takes the responsibility of carrying the message of God the Exalted, not anyone's else, just like what we said about the general use of the word *rasūl*.[566]

Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār has a very similar definition of *nabī* as well, and he also quotes a tradition where a person called the Prophet Muḥammad, "O the one who received news from God [yā nabī' Allāh]." The Prophet immediately replied, "I am not a *nabī' Allāh*; rather, I am *nabī Allāh*."[567]

Thus, according to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, both are acceptable; however, the latter is more appropriately attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad.

5.3 Sending of Prophets

After describing the merits and attributes of God, the first sermon of NB goes on to say,

> And He, The Glorified, chose of his [Adam's] children prophets who He took their covenant for His revelation, and their trust on delivering the message, when the majority of His creation changed God's confidence to them, and hence, they ignored His right, and made equals to Him. The devils pushed them away from His recognition and moved them away from worshipping Him. Therefore, He sent among them His messengers, and delivered to them at different time intervals His prophets so that they take their instinctual covenant; remind them of His forgotten blessings; exhort them by delivering the message; unveil to them the buried intellect; and show them the signs of His Power such as the skies [like a ceiling] raised above them, the earth laid underneath them, jobs that make them survive, deaths that end their lives, difficulties that make them weak, and events that accumulate successively over them.

> The Glorified did not leave His creation without an apostle sent with a message, or a revealed book, or an abiding proof, or a solid path [to follow]. Messengers who by their few numbers did not cause any shortcomings [in their ability to deliver the message], nor did the large numbers of their beliers. Of them are the early who was named by the one who came after him, and the later who was

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[566] Murtaḍā (2009). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 322.
[567] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, p. 567.

identified by who was before him. On that basis the generations lapsed, times went on, parents preceded, and children followed [taking their place].

Until God the Glorified deputed Muḥammad as His Messenger, God's blessings be upon him and his family, to accomplish His promise, and complete His Prophethood. Taking on the apostles their allegiance to him, his characteristics were well known, and honourable was his birth. The people of Earth at the time were divided in different groups, with various desires, and separated clusters. Among them were those who anthropomorphed Him, or those who associated in His Name, or pointed to a deity other than Him. So, He guided them through him [Muḥammad] from misguidance, and saved them through his efforts from ignorance.

Then He, the Glorified, chose for Muḥammad, God's blessings be upon him and his family, to meet Him, and He was pleased with him what He had [prepared for him], and honoured him away from this world, and He chose to keep him away from [this world of continued] calamities. He took [his soul] honourably, God's blessing be upon him and his family.

The above excerpts of the first sermon deal with the following four topics: God sending prophets, choosing Prophet Muḥammad, the death of the Prophet, and the Qur'ān. The first topic will be discussed here and the latter three will be dealt with in later sections.

According to NB, prophets are chosen by God after submitting their pledge to Him for His revelation and giving their trust to the Lord for delivering His message. The NB passage above is in accordance with the following Qur'ānic verses:

"And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness on themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we bear witness." Such that you do not say on the Day of Judgment, "We were surely unaware of this.","" (7:172);

"And when God took a covenant of the prophets, "What I have given you of Book and wisdom, then a messenger came to you verifying that which is with you, you [must] believe in him and support him." He said, "Do you affirm and took [people's pledge] on this matter?" They said, "We affirm." He said, "Bear witness and I am among the witnesses," (2:81);

"Those who fulfill the promise of God and do not break the covenant," (13:20);

"And when We took the covenant from the prophets and from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus son of Mary; and We took from them a strong covenant. That He may question the truthful of about their truth; and He has prepared for the unbelievers a painful punishment," (33:7-8);

"And what reason have you that you should not believe in God, and the Messenger is calling you to believe in your Lord, and surely He took your covenant if you are believers," (57:8);

"Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the balance [justice] so that people can act with equity," (57:25);

"And most people are not believers even if you try eagerly," (12:103);

"And we would not punish until We send a messenger," (17:15);

4:165 : "Messengers bringing glad tidings, and warners, such that people would not have a plea against God after the messengers. Indeed, God is Mighty, Wise," (4:165).

"And had We destroyed them with chastisement before this, they would certainly have said, "Our Lord! Why did you not send us a messenger so we would have followed Your commands before we are faced with disgrace and shame?" (20:134); and

"Say, 'God has the complete proof [the irrefutable argument],' so if He wills, He would have guided you all," (6:149).

The above verses suggest that prior to coming into this World, God took the covenant of all humans to profess of His Lordship (7:172 and 57:8). In addition, He also took a covenant from the Prophets to believe in the Prophet Muḥammad and his family, and to pledge their allegiance to them (2:81 and 33:7-8).[568] According to *al-Kāfī*, God took the covenant of all prophets to believe in the Prophet Muḥammad and in Imam ʿAlī as well as all the Shiʿi Imams after him including al-Mahdī. As part of this covenant, all prophets had to educate their communities about the coming of Muḥammad as the last messenger and about his progeny.[569] On this note, Imam al-Ṣādiq says, "Whoever sends the blessings on the Prophet (*ṣallā ʿalā al-Nabī ṣallā Allāhu ʿalaihi wa ālihi wa sallam*) then it means, 'I am on the covenant and the pledge that I accepted when He [God] said, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes,' (7:172)."[570] Furthermore, God praises those who fulfill His promise, and among those are the prophets, who God took their covenant to deliver His message

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[568] Ṭūsī (d. 460/1068) writes, "Surely God took the covenant of the previous prophets in believing in Muḥammad, God's peace be upon him and his family. This is per the narration of ʿAlī, peace be upon him, ʿAbdullah ibn ʿAbbās, may God have mercy on him, Qatādah and al-Suddī." Ṭūsī (n.d.). *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 2, p. 513-514.

[569] See the section about traditions (*aḥadīth*) regarding *ṭīnat al-muʾmin wa ṭīnat al-kāfir* (the clay of the believer and the clay of the disbeliever). Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, section 3, *ḥadīth* No.1, p. 8.

[570] Ṣadūq (1990). *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 115-116.

to His creation (13:20 and 33-7-8). God also states that He would not punish unless He sends humanity a messenger to guide them (17:15), so that they do not have an argument against God that had He sent them a messenger, they would have believed (20:134). Prophet Muḥammad said, "God, the Honourable the Exalted, created 124,000 prophets, and I am the best of them, without taking pride [i.e. not saying it out of arrogance]; and He created 124,000 divinely appointed successors to prophets (waṣī), and ʿAlī is their most honoured before God among them and the best."[571] Therefore, every group and every nation has had a prophet sent to them. He also sent scriptures with the Prophets so the message continues and people live in justice and equity (57:25). Despite sending all these messengers to guide, educate and purify people, the majority of humanity chooses to reject their call and reject God (12:103). Therefore, according to NB and the Qur'ān, God chose those certain creations of His to carry His revelation and deliver His message to humanity, because they were the most sincere of all of His creation and they were the first to pledge their covenant to Him. Moreover, they were the ones entrusted with delivering His pure message to humanity without altering it, regardless of the opposition or persecution they face. In addition, God did not leave a community without sending it a messenger to guide it, and revealed scriptures, so the message becomes everlasting and people continue abiding by them.

In agreement with the Qur'ānic verses, NB states five reasons for God sending Prophets. The first is to remind them of the covenant they gave to their Lord, which is also referred to as the instinct

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[571] Ṣadūq (1990). *Al-Khiṣāl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 641.

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or natural belief in God (*fiṭrah*), as in verse 30 of Chapter 30, *Al-Rūm*, "Then set your face upright for the religion without deviation. The instinct (*fiṭrah*) God created people with. There is no change in the creation of God. That is the assigned religion, however, most people do not know." When the sixth Imam, al-Ṣādiq was asked about the *fiṭrah*, he replied, "It is submission (*islām*). God made it in their instinct when He took their covenant for believing in His Oneness, "Am I not Your Lord? They said, 'Yes'." And among them are the believer and disbeliever."[572] He also said, "God made the belief in His Oneness in their instinct."[573] Since people are made to instinctually believe in God, they have a tendency that naturally pulls them towards Him. Even the disbelievers in Makkah did not reject the existence of God, "And if you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth, and who made the sun and the moon subservient?' They will certainly say, 'God.' So why do they then belie?" (29:61); "And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will say, 'God.' Say, 'Praise be to God.' Surely, most of them do not know," (31:25). Thus, prophets try to awaken that instinct in people to help connect them to God.

The second role of the Prophets is to remind people of God's favours upon them. These are the materialistic favours, which are the explicit favours, as well as the spiritual ones, which are the hidden ones. "And out of His mercy, is that He made for you the night and day so that you can rest in it and seek of His grace, and you may be grateful," (28:73); "And remember the favour of God upon you when you were enemies, then He united amongst your hearts, so then you became, through His favour, brothers; and you were on the verge of falling off into the pit of the

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[572] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, section 6, *ḥadīth* No. 1-4, p. 11.
[573] Ibid.

Hell Fire, so then He saved you from it. That is how God clarifies His signs for you such that you might achieve guidance," (3:103); "Whoever obeys God and the Messenger, so then they are among those who God favoured [blessed] of the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the virtuous, and what a good company they are," (4:69). Therefore, some of the favours or blessings mentioned in the Qur'ān are materialistic, such as the creation of the night and day, or the creation of the cattle, and other creations that bring much benefit to humanity. Other blessings are, however, spiritual such as guiding the faithful to believe in Him and rewarding them with Heaven among the prophets. God's apostles reminded their communities of God's blessings and favours upon them in an attempt to raise their attention to worshiping Him alone.

The third role of sending prophets, as per the first sermon of NB, is so that people do not have an excuse on the Day of Judgment for not believing in God or not following His commands. This is an important reason, because it suggests that God knew His creation needs a guide, and hence, He provided them with one. One of the reasons they need a divinely appointed guide is because some may not be able to arrive at the natural conclusion of the existence of God due to the environment they are raised in. Hence, God's apostles take them out of their customs and traditions and raise their awareness towards His existence and worship: "And if they are told to follow what God sent down, they say, 'rather we follow what we found our fathers upon;' What if their fathers did not understand anything nor were they guided," (2:170). Thus, God, out of His Care and Compassion, or Grace (*luṭf*), sent His entrusted messengers to show people the right path, and teach their communities about the details of religion that they can never perceive on their own. The Qur'ān explains in 42:17-20, "God is Whom revealed the Book with truth and

balance [justice]. And how do you know, the Time [of Judgment] is not soon? Those who do not

believe in it rush about its coming. Those who believe are in fear of it, and they know it is the

truth. Indeed, those who argue about the Time [of Judgment] are in great misguidance. God is

Graceful (*Laṭīf*) to His servants; He provides whoever He wills, and He is the Strong, the Mighty.

Whoever wants of gain of the Hereafter, We will increase to him in his gain; and whoever wants

of the gain of this world We will give him of it, but in the Hereafter, he does not have a portion."

In addition, in 57:25 the Qur'ān adds, "Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and

We sent down with them the Book and the balance [justice] so that people can act with equity."

These two groups of verses, combined, suggest that it is God's Grace, or *luṭf*, that He sends

messengers to His creation. Through these apostles, God sends the revelation and teaches

humanity about establishing justice. God is aware of humanity's need for guidance, and it would

not be just, nor wise, nor caring of Him to deprive them of such requirement when He is Mighty

and capable of doing so. It is for this reason the Qur'ān states in 17:15, "And we would not punish

until We send a messenger." Moreover, it also mentions in 4:165, "Messengers bringing glad

tidings, and warners, such that people would not have a proof (*ḥujjah*) against God after the

messengers. Indeed, God is Mighty, Wise." In addition to fulfilling their need, sending the

messengers also takes away the opportunity for the disbelievers to object on the Day of

Judgment against God, that had He sent guides, they would have believed, as in 20:134, "And

had We destroyed them with chastisement before this, they would certainly have said, 'Our Lord!

Why did you not send us a messenger so we would have followed Your commands before we are

faced with disgrace and shame?'" Thus, God sent messengers and revealed through them

scriptures so that people can establish justice, because of His Grace (*luṭf*) to His creation, and so

that the messengers can guide their communities towards worshiping God, bringing them glad tidings and warnings. God's *luṭf* enables people to find the truth, and prevents them from having a proof (*ḥujjah*) on the Day of Judgment to excuse themselves from God's punishment. Therefore, the third reason mentioned in the first sermon of NB for God sending messengers indirectly refers to God's *luṭf* in delivering His apostles to humanity.[574]

The fourth reason indicated by NB for God sending apostles is to unveil to them the buried intellect (*yuthīrū lahum dafā'ina al-ʿuqūl*).[575] The first section of *al-Kāfī* starts with the Book of the intellect and ignorance (*kitāb al-ʿaql wal-jahl*). This suggests the significance of *ʿaql*, rational and deductive reasoning in the Imamī school.

In a long tradition by the seventh Shiʿi Imam, al-Kāẓim to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, he states, "Surely God, the Glorified and the Exalted, completed for people the proofs through the intellect, and made the prophets victorious through eloquent communication, and He guided them to His

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[574] The rule of *luṭf* is referred to by both Muʿtazilī and Imamī scholars, as a necessity for God to send messengers to guide humanity to worshipping Him as their intellect is not sufficient enough to make them achieve that. See Mufīd (1992). *Al-Nukat fī Muqaddamāt al-Uṣūl*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 41; Mufīd (1992). *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿAālamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, p. 59-60; Murtaḍā (2009). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 323-327; Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, p. 575; Al-Ḥillī (Jamāl al-Dīn; al-ʿAllāmah al- Ḥillī, d. 726/1326) (2011). *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 470-471. In the same book, Ṭūsī, M (Khawājah Naṣīr al-Dīn; d. 672/1274) also writes about the *luṭf* of God for the necessity (*wujūb*) of sending prophets, in the original text of *Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*.

[575] Amir-Moezzi refers to *ʿaql* as hiero-intelligence and reason. He writes, "The *ʿaql* that is translated, depending on the context, by "reason," "intellect," "intelligence," or even "science" or "discernment" is a complex and delicate notion that covers a great semantic field, especially in the first centuries of Islam and previous to its conceptual quasi-stability aft her the systemization of Islamic dogmatic theology and philosophy. Islamologists and Arabists continue to research the precise early meaning of the word and to shed light on its many facets." Amir-Moezzi, M.A. (1994). *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 6.

Lordship through signs," until he said, "Surely God has two proofs over people: one manifest and one hidden. As for the manifest one, it is the messengers, the prophets and the Imams, peace be upon them. With regards to the hidden one, it is the intellect." He then added, "The [religion of] truth was established for God's obedience, and there is no salvation without obedience, and obedience is achieved through knowledge, while knowledge is achieved through learning, and learning is understood through the intellect, and no knowledge can come but from a Godly scholar, while knowledge is recognized through the intellect." The next section of the seventh Imam's narration may explain some of the meaning of what Imam ʿAlī may have intended by the messengers unveiling the buried intellect of people, as it demonstrates the qualities of a person identified with intellect, "O Hishām, Amīr al-Muʾminīn used to say, 'God was not worshiped with anything better than the intellect. The intellect of a person is not perfected unless he has several traits: disbelief and evil are not feared from him, while right guidance and goodness are expected from him; the excess of his wealth is spent [in the way of God], while the excess of his speech is withheld; his share of this world is the required substance for survival. He is hungry for knowledge his entire life. He prefers humility with God than honour with anyone other than Him. Humbleness is more beloved to him than integrity [with arrogance]. He appreciates the little good others do unto him [finding it too much], while he feels whatever he does of good unto others is too little. In his heart, he finds all people are better than him, while he is the worst of them, and that is the end of the list [of traits]."[576] In another tradition, Imam al-Ṣādiq describes

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[576] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vo.l 1, section 1, *ḥadith* No. 12, p. 6-10.

the intellect (*ʿaql*) as having seventy-five soldiers (*jund*), or traits, to strengthen and support it, while ignorance also has another seventy-five soldiers to help it. The following are the first twenty soldiers of the intellect: virtue and it is the senior executive of the intellect, faith, attestation to belief, hope, justice, content, gratitude, greed [in attaining spiritual good], reliance on God, compassion, mercy, knowledge, understanding, chastity, asceticism, leniency, fear [of God due to their understanding of His Magnificence], humility, delay [as in reflecting before acting], and forbearance.[577] Therefore, prophets try to unveil the buried intellects by raising people's awareness to all these merits, and bringing their attention to how adhering to these positive characteristics will keep them connected to God.

Another possible meaning for unveiling the buried intellect is that the essence of all knowledge stems from prophets.[578] For example, according to the Qur'ān, "And we taught him [David] the making of armors for you to protect you during wartimes. Will you then be grateful?" (21:80). Thus, it was David who showed people how to mold iron into an armor. Moreover, it is narrated that Prophet Idrīs is the first to write with a pen, and the first to sew clothes, and hence, he was the one who taught people to write and to sew.[579] Similarly, it may be suggested that Prophet Muḥammad ignited people's interests in learning and development, and hence, he may be

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[577] Ibid, p. 11-12. The tradition lists seventy-five merits of which only twenty are mentioned here for the sake of brevity.

[578] ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī and Khawājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al- Ṭūsī refer to the requirement of the Prophets to teach humans about the "tools" they need for their survival and gaining knowledge for development and progress. Al-Ḥillī (2011). *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 469-470. In the same book, Ṭūsī also mentions that in his *Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*.

[579] Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153) (2006). *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿUlūm, vol. 6, p. 329.

considered the father of modern civilization. Therefore, another possible interpretation of unveiling the buried intellect may be referring to the essence of knowledge going back to prophets teaching their communities. In other words, if it were not for the prophets, societies and civilizations would not have advanced.

The fifth and last reason mentioned in NB for God sending the apostles is to show people His signs of creation such as the skies, the earth, and all the changes that they experience in life within themselves and around them. The Qur'ān says in 41:53, "We will show them Our signs in the universe and in the themselves, until it becomes clear for them that He is the Truth. Is it not sufficient that Your Lord is a Witness on everything?" These signs will be demonstrated to them through the prophets.

The sermon then provides four examples of how God keeps people connected to His message. It is either through an apostle or a scripture, such as the Torah, the Bible or the Qur'ān, a proof (ḥujjah), or a clear path for them to follow. According to the Imamī school, the latter three continue to exist in Islam: a scripture, the Qur'ān; a proof, the Imam who guides people and shows them the clear path they must follow.[580]

The sermon then goes on to say that all apostles delivered their messages dutifully, not bothered by people's opposition, nor weakening because they were outnumbered by their opponents. Moreover, they all mentioned the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad and his family to their

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[580] More will be discussed about the necessity of the Imam or the proof (ḥujjah) in the next chapter.

communities, suggesting that one of the important tasks for all prophets was to pave the way for the coming of the last messenger and his family.[581]

It is noteworthy to conclude this section with the following tradition from *al-Kāfī* about an atheist who asked the sixth Imam, al-Ṣādiq, "How can you prove there are prophets and messengers?" The Imam replied, "When we proved that we have a Creator, a Maker, who is elevated above us and above all that He created. That Maker is Wise, elevated [above His creation], not possible for His creation to see Him, nor touch Him so they can communicate with Him and He communicates with them directly, nor discuss with Him while He directly discusses with them. It is then proven that He surely has deputies among His creation, who communicate on His behalf to His creation and servants, guiding them to their interests and benefits, and to doing what will keep them [saved in Heavens], and what if they do not perform, then they would perish [punished in the Hell Fire]. Therefore, it is proven there are those who command and forbid from the Wise, the Knowledgeable, among His creation; those who communicate on His behalf, the Exalted and Mighty, and they are the prophets, and the chosen ones of His creation. They are wise, disciplined with wisdom, sent with it. Even though they are equal in their physical creation and form to the people, they are, however, not equal to them in anything of their matters. They are guided from the Wise, the Knowledgeable, through wisdom. Then, it is [also] proven in every era and time, in what the messengers and the prophets brought of signs and proofs, such that Earth would not be without a proof (*ḥujjah*) who has with him knowledge proving his truthful saying and evident

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[581] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vo.l 2, section 3, *ḥadith* No. 1, p. 8.

to his justice."[582] Having a proof who is always present on earth is what may be intended by NB when it states, "On that basis the generations lapsed, times went on, parents preceded, and children followed [taking their place]."

5.4 God Choosing and Sending the Prophet Muḥammad

When discussing God choosing the Prophet Muḥammad, it is stated in the first sermon of NB,

> Until God the Glorified deputed Muḥammad as His Messenger, God's blessings be upon him and his family, to accomplish His promise, and complete His Prophethood. Taking on the apostles their allegiance to him, his characteristics were well known, and honourable was his birth. The people of Earth at the time were divided in different groups, with various desires, and separated clusters. Among them were those who anthropomorph Him, or those who associated in His Name, or pointed to a deity other than Him. So, He guided them through him [Muḥammad] from misguidance, and saved them through his efforts from ignorance.

As indicated in the previous section, God chose the prophets before their creation, and took their allegiance to deliver His message and to teach their respective communities about the coming of Prophet Muḥammad and his family. This is affirmed in the above mentioned section of NB when stating, "Taking on the apostles their allegiance to him". Moreover, it is through the message of the Prophet that the promise of God is fulfilled.

When describing Prophet Muḥammad, NB refers to him as having noble characteristics and an honourable birth. The Qur'ān says in 68:4, "And you surely you have the greatest of character."

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[582] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vo.l 1, section 58, *ḥadith* No. 1, p. 97.

It also refers to the Prophet as "Mercy to the Worlds," (21:107). The Qur'ān further gives two traits to the Prophet that are of God's attributes, "Indeed, a messenger has come to you who is from among yourselves; grievous to him the difficulties you experience; very caring for you. To the believers he is compassionate, merciful (*ra'ūf, raḥīm*)," (9:128), and in 24:20, "And surely God is Compassionate, Merciful (*Ra'ūf, Raḥīm*)."

NB adds in the second sermon,

> And I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger. He sent him with the well-known religion, the adage knowledge, the inscribed Book, illuminated light, lustrous beam, and the command that destroys falsehood. He [Prophet Muḥammad] removed confusions, argued with proofs, warned with signs, and made people afraid of [God's] punishments.

In sermon 103,

> Then surely God the Exalted sent Muḥammad, God's peace be upon him and his family, and there were none among the Arabs who read any scripture or claimed prophethood or [receiving] revelation. He, then, fought with his supporters against his enemies, driving them towards salvation, and warning them of the Time [of Judgment Day] before it befalls upon them. He invested time with the one whose faith weakens, or struggles to understand the truth, until he [the Prophet] helps him reach his goal [in achieving salvation], unless he is a person who wishes to ignore [the Prophet's call] and chooses to perish. Until he made them see the [path to their] salvation and helped them reach it. Consequently, their matters became solid, and their power strengthened. I swear by God, I surely was among its guides from the beginning, until it gained momentum, and united in strength. I never felt weak, nor was ever a coward, nor did I ever betray, nor lost my strength. I swear by God, I will tear the stomach of falsehood until I bring the truth out of it.

Here, NB describes the compassionate, merciful, and dedicated character of the Prophet as he worked tirelessly guiding people. The Qur'ān says in 26:3, "Perhaps you will imperil your life [out of distress] that they will not believe." He helped the people follow the path of truth until their

strength solidified, and they became a powerful force. Imam ʿAlī describes himself as the pillar who assisted the Prophet in strengthening the religion of God, and that he will continue fighting falsehood, as per the Prophetic tradition that Imam ʿAlī will fight for the interpretation of the Qur'ān just like the Prophet fought for its revelation.[583]

In sermon 104, NB states,

> Until God sent Muḥammad, God's blessing be upon him and his family, as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, a warner. The best of the creation as a baby, and the most honourable of it as an adult. The purest of all those who are pure in character, and the best of those sought for virtue.

The Qur'ān describes Prophet Muḥammad as, "O Prophet! We sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner. And a caller to God, with His permission, and an illuminated light," (33:45-46). Imam ʿAlī refers to the Prophet as "the best of the creation as a baby." Al-Khū'ī states that being the best is achieved through virtuous deeds, good manners and following the path of truth, suggesting that the Prophet achieved that since his infancy.[584] This is important as it suggests the Prophet was fully aware of his prophethood before receiving the revelation as will be discussed later in this chapter.

By calling him the "purest of the pure," Imam ʿAlī may be referring to two things. First, the Prophet is the greatest of all prophets. Such a preference is mentioned in the Qur'ān, "These are the messengers who we favoured some over others," (2:253). Thus, the Prophet is among the

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[583] Al-Qandūzī (1992). *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*. Qum: Intishārāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, vol. 1, p. 247.
[584] Al-Khū'ī. *Minhāj al-Barāʿah*. vol. 7, p. 218.

purest of them, and hence, he is the most favoured of them. This is in line with the tradition of

Imam al-Ṣādiq who says, "The Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family,

was asked, 'How did you become the best of the prophets, while you were the last one sent

amongst them and their seal?' He answered, 'I was the first to believe in my Lord, and the first

to answer when He took the covenant of the prophets, and made them witness over themselves,

Am I not Your Lord? So, I was the first to respond, 'Yes,' and hence, I confessed before them.'"[585]

The second meaning that could be inferred from the statement, "purest of the pure," may be

referring to Ahlulbayt, the Prophet's impeccable family. Verse 33:33 says, "Surely God wants to

remove all impurities away from you Ahlulbayt and purify you, a thorough purification." In a

tradition narrated by Muslim, on the account of ʿĀyesha, "The Prophet left one morning, and he

had a cloak covering him, made of black hair. Then came Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī, so he got him inside it;

then came al-Ḥusayn, so he got him inside it; then came Fāṭimah, so he got her inside it; then

came ʿAlī, so he got him inside it. He then said, "Surely God wants to remove all impurities away

from you Ahlalbayt and purify you, a thorough purification."[586] Moreover, according to al-Rāzī (d.

604/1210), in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, the verse includes the five mentioned in the tradition by

Muslim.[587] According to Imamī traditions, the verse includes all the twelve Imams, and it is a proof

of their *ʿiṣma*, or impeccability.[588] Moreover, the knowledge of the Imams exceeds the knowledge

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[585] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, section 4, *ḥadīth* No. 1, p. 9-10.
[586] Muslim al-Nayshābūrī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 3, p. 133.
[587] Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn (1981). *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, vol. 25, p. 210.
[588] Ṭūsī (n.d.). *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 8, p. 339-341; Murtaḍā (2010). *Tafsīr Nafāʾis al-Taʾwīl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat Al-Aʿlamī, vol. 3, p. 222-226.

of all the prophets except Muḥammad.[589] As such, it may be inferred from the statement in NB that by "purest of the pure," Imam ʿAlī may be saying that the Prophet Muḥammad is best of God's creation, as he clearly stated in the sentence before this, and that the Imams are the best of God's creation after him, as they are the family who God purified with a thorough purification.

In sermon 105, it is narrated,

> Until he [Prophet Muḥammad] brought out the truth clear and known, and a guide to one seeking guidance. For he is your entrusted trustee. Your witness on the Day of Judgment. The one who you sent as a blessing from You. Your messenger with truth as a mercy. O God! Grant him your Justice and reward him multitudes of Your Grace. O God! Raise his religion above others and grace his eternal abode. Honour his status before You and give him the means [of Your Pleasure]. Illuminate his status and grant his glory. Resurrect us among him not disgraced, nor regretful, nor deviants, nor pledge-breakers, nor misguided, nor tempted.[590]

In sermon 107, NB again praises the Prophet's roots,

> He [God] chose him from the tree of prophets; the essence of light; the pinnacle of honour; the greatest of families; the lights against darkness; and the fountains of wisdom.[591]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes,

> I asked the Naqīb Abū Jaʿfar, and he was a fair man, far from being bias. I said, "I reflected on the sayings of the companions and their sermons, and I never saw among them anyone who reveres and glorifies the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, the way this man does [referring to Imam ʿAlī], nor anyone who prays the way he prays. I studied *Nahj al-Balāghah*, and other works on many such themes similar to this one, demonstrating great respect, and significant praise he has to the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family. He replied, "And where can we find sayings of anyone

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[589] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 89, *ḥadīth* No. 6, p. 132.
[590] NB, sermon 105, p. 194.
[591] NB, sermon 107, p. 196.

else of the companions other than him, so we can learn from them how they mention the Prophet, God's blessings be upon him and his family? Have we found anything but scattered words, with no value to them?" He then added, "Certainly ʿAlī, peace be upon him, had a strong faith in the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, and he was a great believer in him. His certainty was unshaken, sure of the command, and was well-aware of his right. In addition to all of that, he loved the messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, due to his relationship to him, and due to him being raised by him, and because he chose him [ʿAlī] over the companions. Moreover, his [ʿAlī's] honouring him [the Prophet] because they are one self in two bodies: one father, one house, and the manners are comparable. Therefore, when he honours him he has honoured himself, and if he prays for him, he prays for himself, and if he wishes to see the call of Islam spread east and west, because the beauty of that would reap back to him and benefits him. So how can he not glorify him and work hard in praising him?"[592]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd later asked him about what good did ʿAlī see from supporting the Prophet, as he got killed, so did his sons, and his women were taken as prisoners by the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiyah. The Naqīb Abū Jaʿfar answered, "Surely God kept this material world away from his virtuous servants, and those who are sincere to him, because He did not see it worthy as a prize for their worship, nor a match to their sincerity. He delayed their reward to another abode other than this world. In it, let the competitors compete!"[593]

Interestingly, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's comment above, indirectly implies the Imamate for ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as Naqīb Abū Jaʿfar's statement that ʿAlī is the "self" of the Prophet, is an admission that Imam ʿAlī is impeccable because the Prophet is impeccable. Moreover, it also entails Imamah, as Muslims agree that the Prophet is the best of God's creation, and for Imam ʿAlī to be his "self" means that he is the second best of God's creation after the Prophet, and hence, he is the one

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[592] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 7, p. 67-68.
[593] Ibid.

worthy of leadership after him. The eighth Shiʿi Imam, al-Riḍā, says that in the verse of

Mubahalah (3:61), God describes Imam ʿAlī as the "self" of the Prophet, and that is a proof of his

leadership, as well as being the greatest merit for Imam ʿAlī.[594] Nonetheless, Imamah will be

discussed in more details in the next chapter.

Sermon 161 further asserts the greatness of the Prophet,

> He sent him with the illuminated light, evident proofs, the clear path, and the
> guiding Book. His family is the best of families, and his tree is the best of trees. Its
> branches are straight, and its fruits are far reaching.[595] His birth was in Makkah,
> and his migration was to Ṭībah.[596] From it, his name rose high, and his voice spread
> far and wide. He sent him with a complete plea, a convincing admonishment, and
> a call for virtue. He disclosed through him the unknown Divine laws, and destroyed
> through him the innovations added to religion, and he clarified through him the
> detailed laws.[597]

The above excerpt states how the Prophet's message illuminated people's minds and brought a

clear understanding that removed doubts and transformed lives. In addition, his family is clearly

stated as the best of families. In sermon 214, Imam ʿAlī adds, "And I bear witness that Muḥammad

is His servant and messenger, and the master of His creation. Whenever He divided the creation

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[594] Ṣadūq (2006). *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Qum: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, vol. 1, p. 209-210.
[595] The straight branches may be in reference to the great manners his family is known of, such as Hāshim, his great
grandfather, being known for his generousity and good character, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, his grandfather, being wise
and the master of Quraysh. With regards to its fruit being out reaching, may refer to how approachable they are
to ask for help and how much knowledge spread from them.
[596] Ṭībah is one of the names of the city of Madīnah.
[597] NB, sermon 167, p. 285-287.

in two groups, He made him among the best of them.[598] None of his foreparents was ever an

adulterer, nor a wicked person."[599]

Finally, in sermon 108, NB states,

> He loathed the materialistic world and looked down on it. He held it contemptible
> and despised it. He knew that God took [its pleasures] away from him by [his]
> choice, and gave it to other than him by way of contempt. Therefore, he turned
> his heart away from this world, and made himself forget about it. He liked to see
> its ornaments stay away from him, so that he does not wear any of its fancy attires,
> or hopes to live in it eternally. He delivered the message of His Lord without
> leaving people any argument against Him. He admonished his community as a
> warner; he called them for Paradise as a conveyor of glad tidings; and he made
> them fear from the Hell Fire with caution.
>
> We are the tree of Prophethood. The place for the [revelation] of the Message,
> and where the angels keep on descending. [We are] the sources of knowledge,
> and the fountains of wisdom. Our supporter and lover awaits [God's] mercy, while
> our enemy and the one who hates us awaits [God's] punishment.[600]

The above passage describes the Prophet's life of modesty and His true love to God. When he

established his state in the city of Madīnah he was able to live like kings. Yet, he did not keep any

of the worldly treasures and lived a humble life.

All above descriptions of the Prophet Muḥammad in NB clearly show his merits and demonstrate

his greatness and impeccability. God chose him before he came into this world and made him

the best of His creation. His lineage is the best and the purest, and he is the greatest of all

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[598] This is a very important statement. It states that all the fathers and mothers who carried the Prophet Muḥammad in their loins and wombs all the way up to Adam, were among the best of God's creation. This suggests that the forefathers of the Prophet, who were the children of Ishmael, Abraham's eldest son, were all better than the children of Isaac, at their relative corresponding times.
[599] NB, sermon 214, p. 405.
[600] NB, sermon 108, p. 205.

prophets, rather of anything and everything God ever created. God took allegiance from all the

prophets for him and his family, and they were sent to guide their communities to worshipping

God alone and to bring their awareness to the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Divinely

appointed successors. He delivered God's message with the pinnacle of diligence and sincerity,

caring for people and living amongst them with humility, mercy and compassion. His manners

were the best and most perfect, and his traits were godly. He illuminated the hearts and minds

of people and transformed their lives into unity through belief in God and His love. These

attributes of the Prophet Muḥammad imply the belief of Raḍī in the Prophet, which appears to

be very similar to that of his brother's, Murtaḍā, as demonstrated in the latter's *al-Dhakhīrah*.

5.5 The Transformation

NB describes the lives of the people of the earth, as well as the nomadic life of the Arabs, and the

transformation that occurred through the Prophet Muḥammad. In the first sermon it states the

following,

> The people of Earth at the time were divided in different groups, with various
> desires, and separated clusters. Among them were those who anthropomorph
> Him, or those who associated in His Name, or pointed to a deity other than Him.
> So, He guided them through him [Muḥammad] from misguidance and saved them
> through his efforts from ignorance.

The above passage describes the state of the majority of the people of earth at the time of the

coming of the Prophet Muḥammad. According to NB, they were divided into three groups, and

their belief in God was misguided. The first group personified God with human attributes, such

as having a body, hands and eyes, "And the Jews said, 'The hand of God is tied.','" (5:64).[601] The

second associated names with Him, "They are but names you and your fathers have made up,

God did not send any authority to [following] them. They only follow conjecture and what they

desire. Surely, guidance has come to them from their Lord," (53:23). The third referred to other

than Him, such as the idol worshippers who claimed their idols as daughters of God, or those who

alleged the Jinn[602] as His associates, "And they made the Jinn associates with God, while He

created them. And they falsely attributed to Him sons and daughters, without any knowledge.

Glorified be He and Exalted above what they ascribe [to Him]," (6:100). The Qur'ān also speaks

of Christian and Jewish theologies in 9:30, "And the Jews say ʿUzair is the son of God; and the

Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. These are their sayings with their own mouths. They

imitate the words of the faithless of former times. May God assail them, where they astray."

Thus, even the followers of monotheistic religions were not adhering completely to the teachings

of the Divine. While there were a few monotheists, *mowaḥḥidīn* or *ḥanīfiyyīn*, such as the

Prophet's parents, grandparents and ancestors,[603] the majority of the people were not on the

right path.[604]

As for Arabia, NB says in sermons 2 and 26, the following two paragraphs, respectively,

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[601] We saw in the third chapter how Shiʿi Imams criticized those who give human attributes to God. In fact, one of
the reasons Shaykh al-Ṣadūq wrote *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* was to refute the arguments of the anthropomorphists.
[602] Jinn are creatures who God made from fire (55:15), and Iblīs, or Satan, is among them (18:50). There is a chapter
in the Qur'ān, number 72, titled al-Jinn, which indicates that some of them are believers while others are devils.
[603] As discussed in the excerpt of sermon 214 of NB in the previous section.
[604] Ayoub, M. M. (2012). *Islam: Faith and History*. London: Oneworld Publications, p. 22.

At that time, people had fallen into distortion of faith where the rope of religion was severed, and the pillars of certainty were demolished. People's mindset was disturbed, their matter scattered, where the way out was not visible, and the passage was dark. Guidance was scarce and darkness prevailed. The Beneficent was being disobeyed. The devils were followed and supported, while faith was let down such that its support collapsed, its signs became unrecognizable, its paths were buried, and its way was gone. They obeyed the devil so they followed its path and drank from his fountains. Their paths were paved by the devil as he raised his banner towards misguidance that crushed them under its hoofs and trampled upon them with its feet and shoe horns. So, they were lost, confused, ignorant, misguided in the best of God's land, but among the worst of neighbours. They were unable to sleep, while tears covered their eyes, in a land where its scholar is ignored and its ignorant is honoured.[605]

Surely God sent Muḥammad, God's peace be upon him and his family, as a warner to the Worlds, and a trustee over the revelation, while you, the Arabs, were on the worst of religions, and in the worst of environments, surrounded by rough rocks, and dangerous snakes. You used to drink rotten water and eat filthy food. You shed your own blood, did not care for your kin. Idols were standing tall among you and you were bound to sin [drowning in sin].[606]

What can be understood from the above is that the Arabs were living a state of lawlessness. The tribe of Quraysh, to whom the Prophet belonged, lived in Makkah, a holy land that was revered by the Arabs. The environment they lived in was very rough: a desert with high, rocky mountains and a difficult climate. Other than Makkah, which was secured from attacks, other areas and tribes were living in constant fear of being ambushed. There were no political, financial, social or spiritual systems, but rather a tribal rule that only understood power. Such was life in most of Arabia and its surroundings. In addition, people were living in complete ignorance, without an idea, or even the thought of transforming their lives.

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[605] NB, sermon 2, p. 48-49.
[606] NB, sermon 26, p. 80-81.

As discussed in the previous section, the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad revolutionized Arabia. Within about a century of his coming, the Arabs were ruling about a third of the globe, with an established political system comprised of governors and leaders, and a comprehensive economic system. They were united in worshiping God, praying five times a day, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, going to the pilgrimage in Makkah, memorizing the Qur'ān and performing the Islamic rituals. In addition, the Prophet developed a social system where people cared for each other and sacrificed for one another. The Qur'ān praised such qualities, "And they prefer to give [to others] over themselves, even if they are afflicted with need," (59:9). And it also reminds them of their transformation in 3:103, "And remember the blessing of your Lord when you were enemies, so he united among your hearts, so you became, through His blessings, brothers. And you were about to fall into the pit of the Fire, but He saved you from it."

5.6 Miracles[607]

By the fourth Islamic century, it was already established that one of the criteria to prove the prophethood of any prophet, was the ability of the prophet to perform miracles.[608] Therefore, it is extremely important for NB to consist of discussions about the miracles performed by the Prophet Muḥammad, as that would be among the proofs of his prophethood.

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[607] A miracle must have conditions, "That is be effected by God; it breaks the norm for whoever the miracle is addressed to; and, it be restricted to the claimant in such ways to verify his claims." Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 359, citing from Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 328.

[608] See for example, Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 328-332; ʿAbd al-Jabbār. *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 568; and, Al-Juwaynī. *Al-Irashād*, p. 245-251.

NB describes two miracles of the Prophet Muḥammad: a tree responding to his command and

the Qurʾān. Thus, the former is a temporal miracle while the latter is a spiritual, everlasting one.

5.6.1 The Tree Responding to his Call

In sermon 192, known as *al-Qāṣiʿah*, NB states,

> And I was with him, God's blessings be upon him and his family, when a group of Quraysh came and asked him, "O Muḥammad! Surely you have made a great claim that none of your earlier forefathers or family members ever claimed anything like it [i.e. Prophethood]. We will ask you for something. If you do it and show it to us, then we would know you are a messenger, but if you cannot accomplish it, then we would come to know that you are a lying magician."
>
> So, he asked them, "And what do you want to ask?"
>
> They replied, "Call this tree such that its roots get uplifted and comes standing in front of you."
>
> He answered, "God is capable of everything. If I do that for you, then would you believe and testify to the truth?" They replied affirmatively. So he said, "I will surely show you what you want [to see], and I am certain that you will not have a good end [i.e. you would die unfaithful]. There are among you who will be thrown into the well, and those who will gather armed men [against me]." Then he said, "O tree! If you believe in God and the Hereafter, and you know that I am surely the Messenger of God, then be uprooted from your root until you stand before me by the will of God."
>
> I swear by the One who sent him truthfully as a Prophet, it was uprooted from its roots, and it had a thunderous sound and a loud noise like the flapping of the wings of the bird, until it came standing before the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, waving its branches, and kept its branch on the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, while keeping its other branches on my shoulder, as I was on his right, peace be upon him.
>
> When the people saw that, they said in arrogance and pride, "Now order it such that half of it comes to you, while its other half remains in its place." So, he ordered it to do that, and only half of it came to him in such an amazing manner, and even louder noise. It was about to go around the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, until they said, in disbelief and rebellion,

"Now order this half to go back to the other half as it was." So, he ordered it, and it went back as it was. So, I said, "There is no deity but God. I am surely the first to believe in you O Messenger of God, and the first to believe that the tree did what it did by the command of God, to prove your prophethood, and as a respect to your word."

That's when all people said, "Rather, he is a lying magician! He does wonderful sorcery and does it so adeptly. And can anyone really believe in your matter other than him?" As they were referring to me. I am certainly among a group of people who cares less in Divinely matters about what people say. Their [the devotional group of people] looks are those of the truthful ones, and their speech is that of the virtuous. They stay up at night [in devotion to God], and beacons [of truth] in the day. Holding on to the rope of the Qur'ān [i.e. its teachings]. They revive the traditions of God and those of His Messenger. They do not boast, nor self-conceit, nor do they betray, and nor do they cause corruption. Their hearts are in Paradise, while their bodies are at work.[609]

According to the above passage, the Prophet demonstrated a clear miracle to some of the people of Quraysh, indicating this incident happened during the early days of Islam in Makkah. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says, "As for the matter of the tree that the Messenger of God called, may God's blessings be upon him and his family, the narrations about it are plenty, and the transmitters of traditions (muḥaddithūn) mentioned it in their books."[610] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī and al-Khū'ī make similar statements in their interpretation as well.[611]

Moreover, not only did the Prophet respond to the challenge of those who asked, he also knew that they would not believe in him as a messenger of God, and he informed them of what will some of them do in the future, and how some of them would die when he said, "I am certain that

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[609] NB, sermon 192, p. 373-374.
[610] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 13, p. 81.
[611] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 776; al-Khū'ī. *Mihāj al-Barā'ah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 12, p. 101.

you will not have a good end [i.e. you would die unfaithful]. There are among you who will be thrown into the well, and those who will gather armed men [against me]." ʿUtbah and Shaybah sons of Rabīʿah, as well as Abū Jahal, Umayyah ibn ʿAbd Shams, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah and others were thrown into the well after they killed in Badr, while Abū Sufyān, ʿUmr ibn Wadd, Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah, ʿAkramah ibn Abī Jahl, Sahl ibn ʿUmr were among those who gathered armed men against him.[612]

The passage also indicates Imam ʿAlī's deep faith in God and His Messenger as it appears from the excerpt that he was the only one among those who witnessed this event to confess his faith in God and attest to the Prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad. This indicates his spiritual proximity to the holy Prophet as will be discussed in later sections of this chapter. Al-Khūʾī indicates that the beginning of this sermon deals with vilification of the arrogant starting with the devil, Iblīs, while the latter part is criticism of those who deviated away from him: the ones who usurped the Caliphate, those who negated their allegiance to him [the people who organized and fought the battle of the Camel against him], the oppressors [those who fought against him in Ṣiffīn], and the deviants [the *khawārij* who fought against him the battle of Nahrawān].[613]

The other miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad mentioned in NB is the Qurʾān.

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[612] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 776; al-Khūʾī. *Mihāj al-Barāʾah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 12, p. 96.
[613] Al-Khūʾī. *Mihāj al-Barāʾah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 12, p. 102.

5.6.2 The Qur'ān

In the first sermon of NB, as was mentioned earlier, it was stated that God did not leave His creation without either sending them a messenger, or revealing to them a Book, or having an accompanying proof (*ḥujjah*), or a clear, standing path. For Muslims, the Qur'ān is a divinely revealed Book and the direct word of God brought to the Prophet Muḥammad to guide humanity, "Surely, this Qur'ān guides to that which is most upright, and brings glad tidings to the believers who perform good deeds that they shall have a great reward," (17:9). It is a Book of spiritual healing, "And We bring down of the Qur'ān what is a cure and mercy to the believers, and it only adds a loss to the oppressors," (17:82). In the words of Marmaduke Pickthall, "the very sounds of which move men to tears,"[614] as it states, "If We were to reveal this Qur'ān on a mountain, you would find it shaking and breaking from the fear of God. Indeed, We give these examples such that people can reflect," (59:21). It is a miraculous Book of wonders revealed for all of God's creation, "Say, it has been revealed to me that a group of Jinn listened, and said, 'We surely heard a wonderful Qur'ān. It guides to the right path, so we believed in it, and we will not associate anything with our Lord'," (72:1-2). It is essential to Islamic legislation since the time of its revelation.[615] Muslims, throughout the centuries, memorized it, and treat it with utmost reverence. It is considered the living miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad, as it challenged and mesmerized people from the time of its revelation, and continues to do so. "Then he said, 'This

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[614] Pickthall, M.M. (1970). *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, p. i.
[615] On the significance of the Qur'ān to the *Sharī'a*, or the formation of Islamic Law, see Hallaq, W.B. (2009). Groundwork of the Moral Law: A New Look at the Qur'ān and the Genesis of Sharī'a. *Islamic Law and Society*, 16, p. 239-279.

is but magic that is narrated from others. It is just the word of a human," (74:24-25), referring to

al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah when he challenged the Prophet and accused him of magic. The Qur'ān

replied to such accusations on many occasions, "Do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān? And if it

were from [one] other than God, then they would have found many differences within it," (4:82);

"And if you were in doubt of what We revealed to Our servant, then come up with a chapter like

it, and call your witnesses, other than God, if you were truthful," (2:23); and, "Say, if all humans

and Jinn unite together to come up with anything like this Qur'ān then they will not be able to do

so, even if they were assisting each other [to do so]," (17:88).[616]

There are numerous references to the Qur'ān in NB. Only three such references will be

mentioned here, as it will suffice for the discussion.

5.6.2.1 The First Sermon

In the first sermon, NB states,

> He [Muḥammad] left among you what other apostles have left amongst their communities, as they did not leave them carelessly, without (setting) a clear path for them, or without an apparently lasting sign, the Book of your Lord amongst you. It demonstrates its permissible and forbidden, its obligations and discretions, its reformed laws and repealed ones, its allowed and compulsory actions, its specific and general, its morals and examples, its unbound and limited, its evident [verses] and those requiring interpretation [equivocal], interpreting its undefined and clarifying its hidden [messages].
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> Among [its content] is what is required in knowledge, or what is excused on the worshippers to be ignorant about. What is established in the Book regarding its obligation, and what is known through the tradition (*sunnah*) of its change. What

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[616] Hasan, A. (1999). The Qur'ān: The Primary Source of "Fiqh". *Islamic Studies*, vol. 38, No. 4, p. 475-502.

is made compulsory through the tradition but is permitted by the Book to be left. What is obligated at its [given] time but is not applicable in a future time. What the differences are among [the magnitude] of its sins, of which are the major [sins] that He promised His Fires [Hell], or minor ones for which He prepared His forgiveness. And [sins] for which He accepts the minimum [penalty] or gave room in [performing] its maximum [consequence].

As discussed earlier, the essence of sending prophets is to guide people towards worshipping God the way He wants them to worship Him, and to teach them about the seal of His prophets, Muḥammad and his family, through whom God will complete and perfect the religion. Moreover, prophets also teach people how to live in justice and harmony among each other. In order to accomplish these tasks, and to warrant continuation of the message, it was necessary to reveal scriptures that would serve as a guide to the community, especially after the death or departure of their respective prophets. For the Muslim community, the Qurʾān was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad to ensure the continuation and perfection of the final message.

The above excerpt from the first sermon of NB clearly shows that the Qurʾān is multi-faceted, containing laws that are divided into the obligatory, such prayer; the forbidden, such as taking usury; the permissible, such as giving non-mandatory charities (ṣadaqah); and those that one better avoided, such as eating too much. These laws are further divided where some are to a

specific group while others are general. Moreover, some laws were changed by other laws.[617] The

Qur'ān also contains many examples and morals.[618]

One important aspect of the Qur'ān is its evident (*muḥkam*) verses and those that are equivocal

(*mutashābah*) and require interpretation. Imamī and Muʿtazilī scholars are of the opinion that

some verses in the Qur'ān cannot be taken literally, but rather figuratively or metaphorically.

Some other Islamic schools, however, claim that the Qur'ān must be taken literally. For example,

the verse, "God's hand is over their hand," (48:10) is considered one of those requiring

interpretation (*mutashābah*). While some scholars suggest God has a hand, but it is not like ours,

such an opinion is refuted by Imamī and Muʿtazilī scholars, as per many Imamī traditions,

suggesting "hand" is figuratively referring to Power, as was used in the Arabic language. That is

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[617] For example, alcohol was very widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia. Hence, Islam forbade it in stages. First, the Qur'ān said in 2:219, "They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say, they have benefits, but their sin is greater than their profit." Later, however, it made it completely forbidden in 5:90, "O believers! Surely intoxicants, gambling, sacrificing to stones and games of chances are filth of the doing of the devils, so then stay away from it such that you may succeed." See Al-Kāshānī, Muḥsin (1998). *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*. Ed. Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ḥusaynī al-Amīnī. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, vol. 1, p. 385-387. Another example is in 58:12 where God ordered the Muslims to pay a charity before having private discussions with the Prophet. When they found it difficult to implement, God repealed the law in the next verse. Some interpreters of the Qur'ān suggest God wanted to test the Muslims and teach them a lesson in not taking much of the Prophet's valuable time. None of them adhered to this law except Imam ʿAlī who is famously quoted saying, "There is a law in the Book of God that only I performed. No one did it other than me and no one will do it after me," referring to 58:12, where he gave charity ten times, so that he could have a private conversation with the Prophet. Ṭūsī (n.d.). *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 9, p. 550-.552; Al-Baḥrānī (2006). *Tafsīr al-Burhān*. Beirut: Al-Aʿlamī, vol. 7, p. 478-485; Shīrāzī, N.M. (2001). *Al-Amthal fī Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-Munzal*. Qum: Madrasat al-Imam ʿAlī, vol. 18, p. 132-138.

[618] "And give them an example of the people of the city…" (36:13); "Indeed, in their stories are morals for those who have a mind [to reflect]," (12:111). There are numerous such examples and morals in the Qur'ān.

because the evident verse in the Qur'ān states, "Nothing is like Him," (42:11), and hence, God

cannot have hands or be personified, as the anthropomorphists were suggesting.[619]

While the Qur'ān is very important for Muslims and for Islamic Jurisprudence, the Prophetic

traditions, the *sunnah*, is equally significant. For example, while the Qur'ān repeatedly highlights

the importance of prayers, it is the Prophet's tradition that taught Muslims the methodology of

the five obligatory prayers Muslims must perform on a daily basis. Therefore, Prophetic traditions

enrich Islamic teachings and elaborate Qur'ānic definitions.

5.6.2.2 The Eighteenth Sermon

An excerpt of sermon 18 of NB states,

> And God the Glorified said, "We did not leave out anything from this Book."[620] In
> it is the clarification for everything. He mentioned that one part verifies the other,
> and there is no variation in it. He, the Glorified, said, "And if it were from one other
> than God then they would have found many discrepancies in it."[621] Surely, the
> explicit [text] of the Qur'ān (*ẓāhir*) is very elegant, while its hidden [messages]
> (*bāṭin*) are so deep. Its wonders do not end, and its amazement does not cease.
> Intricacies [of misguidance] can not be cleared but through it.[622]

This sermon indicates the wonders of the Qur'ān. While Imam ʿAlī does not use the word

"miracle" for the Qur'ān, he makes many references to it that suggest it is the living miracle of

the Prophet Muḥammad. He states the Qur'ān is a complete and comprehensive Book that

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[619] This topic was discussed in detail in 3.5.3.1 The Necessary Existence: An Ontological Argument, so the reader is
requested to refer back to it there.
[620] Qur'ān 6:38
[621] Qur'ān 4:82
[622] NB, sermon 18, p. 71-72.

contains no errors; rather, it contains absolute truth. It is a Book of wonder that all of God's creation cannot replicate, even if they were to come together to do so.

Another important aspect of the above passage is its reference to the explicit text of the Qur'ān (*ẓāhir*) and its implicit messages (*bāṭin*). The fifth Shiʿi Imam, al-Bāqir, explains, "Its explicit text is its revelation (*tanzīluh*), while its implicit message is its deeper interpretation (*ta'wīluh*). Of it is what happened and what has not yet occurred. It runs just like the sun and the moon [i.e. as long as the world lasts]. Just like a deeper interpretation of it may have applied to those who died, it may also apply to those who are alive. God said, "No one knows its deeper interpretation but God and those who are well versed in knowledge."[623] We know it."[624] Thus, according to Imamī scholars, only the fourteen impeccable Imams have the true knowledge of the Qur'ān, and no one truly knows its essence but them. A famous narration from Imam al-Bāqir to Qatadah, one of the leading Sunni interpreters of the Qur'ān and a highly respected scholar in the Sunni school, states, "Woe upon you O Qatadah! If you interpret the Qur'ān from your own thinking, then you perished and will perish [those who follow you], and if you interpret the Qur'ān from what you heard of men [other than us], then you perished and will perish [those who follow you]." The Imam then added, "Woe upon you O Qatadah! Only those who the Qur'ān was spoken to know it."[625] Thus, according to Imamī thought, the true interpretation of the Qur'ān is based on the teachings of the fourteen impeccables, as they are the only ones who truly understand the Qur'ān

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[623] Qur'ān 3:7.
[624] Ṣaffār (2007). *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*. Ed. Sayyid Muḥammad Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Muʿallim. Beirut: Dār Jawad al-A'immah ʿalaihi assalam, vol. 1, p. 388-389.
[625] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Fajr, vol. 8, *ḥadīth* No. 485, p. 167.

and know its explicit meaning (*ẓāhir*), its interpretation (*tafsīr*), and its implicit messages (*bāṭin*).

Imam ʿAlī refers to this in sermon 154 of NB, when he says about the Ahlulbayt that "the honours of the Qur'ān are revealed about them, and they are the treasures of the Beneficent. When they speak, they say the truth, and when they keep silent, it is not because anyone went ahead of them [in knowledge]."[626]

NB also adds in sermon 86, "Where will you go?[627] And where do you go stray?[628] While the heads [of guidance] are present, the signs are clear, and lights are turned on.[629] So where are you taken astray? Rather how can you face confusion [in religious affairs], when your Prophet's progeny is amongst you? They are the reigns of truth and the banners of the religion, and the speakers of honesty. So refer to them and follow them just as you follow the Qur'ān, and rush to learning from them just like how thirsty cattle rushes to fetch water." This passage clearly tells people to refer to the progeny of the Prophet as the teachers of the Qur'ān, just like the Prophetic tradition we presented in chapter 3 stated, "I am leaving among you two things, the Book of God… and my progeny my family. I remind you of my family, I remind you of my family, I remind you of my family."[630] These traditions make the progeny of the Prophet equal to the Qur'ān and the guides to it.

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[626] NB, sermon 154, p. 269.

[627] Qur'ān 81:26

[628] Qur'ān 6:95, 10:34, 35:3, 40:62

[629] Imam ʿAlī is referring to Ahlulbayt as the clear heads of guidance, the signs of God that are so apparent, and the lights of guidance. Regarding verse 7:157, it is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq, "And they followed the light that was sent down with him," that the light "in this instance is ʿAlī, the Commander of the Believers, and the Imams." Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 70, *ḥadīth* No. 2, p. 114.

[630] Muslim al-Nayshābūrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 3, *ḥadīth* number 2408, page 128.

Finally, NB also talks about the Qur'ān in sermon 176,

> And be aware that this Qur'ān is the admonisher that does not deceive, the Guide that does not deviate, and the speaker that does not lie. No one sits [to read and reflect upon] this Qur'ān but leaves with an increase or a decrease: an increase in guidance and a decrease in misguidance.
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> And be aware that no one is in need for guidance after the Qur'ān, nor do those who try to take what is before the Qu'ran have any suffice. So, seek it as a cure for your illnesses, and use it for help against your difficulties, for surely in it is the cure of the greatest of illnesses, and they are disbelieving, hypocrisy, transgression and deviation. Thus, ask God through it, and turn to Him through its love, and do not ask people through it, for people do not turn to God through anything like it.
>
> And be aware that it intercedes, and its intercession will be accepted. It is a speaker who is believed. Whoever the Qur'ān intercedes for on the Day of Judgment then its intercession will be accepted, and whoever it speaks down of then it will also be believed, as a caller will announce on the Day of Judgment, "Indeed, everyone who sows a crop will be in distress except those who sow the crops of the Qur'ān." So, be among the sowers of the Qur'ān and its followers and take it as the means to finding your Lord. Seek its advice for yourselves, and if your opinions go against it then accuse [your opinions] and regard your desires as deceitful that can be restored through the Qur'ān.[631]

Indeed, this kind of reverence for the Qur'ān can only come from the man who asserts "indeed the Book is with me, and I did not separate from it from the time I accompanied it,"[632] and, "so if the Book of God is used truthfully to judge, we are the most worthy of it, and if the tradition of the Messenger of God is used to judge, then we are the most truthful and deserving of it."[633] He also said in sermon 158, "He [Prophet Muḥammad] came with [a Book] confirming what came before him, and the light that can be followed for guidance. That is the Qur'ān, so get it to speak

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[631] NB, sermon 176, p. 313-315.
[632] NB, sermon 121, p. 226.
[633] NB, sermon 125, p. 230.

to you (*istanṭiqūh*), but it will not speak! However, I will inform you about it. It has the knowledge of what will come, the stories of the past, a cure for your illness and [contains what is required] for you to become organized [in your affairs]."[634] Thus, Imam ʿAlī refers to himself as the "speaking" Qurʾān, who can inform people of its details, or does *istinṭāq*, and hence, his description of the Quʾran is unequivocal.

The above passage of sermon 176 describes the Qurʾān as a book of constant guidance for those who reflect upon its verses, and a cure for spiritual illnesses such as misbelief, hypocrisy, transgression and deviation. It also highlights the significance of love since love can be the drive for passion, and the sermon inspires people to turn to God through it. The Qurʾān will also intercede for people on the Day of Judgment, making it an extraordinary Book, that "records" people's interactions with it in a dynamic matter, whereby the Book is personified in the Hereafter to praise some and condemn others. Indeed, such an aspect of a Book is nothing less than a miracle on its own.

5.7 The Love of the Followers of the Prophet Muḥammad for Him

Some of the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad had great love and submission to him. To show Imam ʿAlī's love and submission to the Prophet is a demonstration of his loyalty to him and is a clear sign that he is not among those described in the Qurʾān, in verse 3:144, "And Muḥammad

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[634] NB, sermon 158, p. 279. Paya published an article about a critical rationalist approach to understanding the Qurʾān, where he states that this "approach will be analyzed *vis-a-vis* the method of *istinṭāq* (interrogation) introduced by ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib in *Nahj al-Balāgah*." Paya, A. (2014). What and How Can We Learn from the Qurʾān? A Critical Rationalist Perspective. *Islamic Studies*, vol. 53, No. 3/4, p. 175-200.

is but a messenger. Other messengers came before him and died. So, if he dies or gets killed, then you turn back [on your religion]? And whoever turns back then he will not harm God at all. And God will reward those who are grateful."[635]

In sermons 55 and 121, NB describes how the sincere Muslims fought and sacrificed next to the Prophet, defending the religion of Islam against even their parents, siblings and family members. In sermon 55, it states,

> And we were with the Messenger of God, God's blessings upon him and his family, killing our parents, children, brothers and uncles. That would only increase our faith and submission, as we continue on the clear path, while being patient on the difficulties of pain, and keen on fighting the enemies.

Similarly, in sermon 121 it says,

> We surely were with the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, while death would roam among fathers, sons, brothers and kin, and we only increase, while experiencing calamities and difficulties, in faith, determination on the truth, submission to the matter, and patience on the painful wounds.

Thus, while the above two excerpts demonstrate some of the Prophet's companions' submission to him as they steadfastly fought their own relatives defending the religion of Islam and the Prophet, they evidently show the greatness of Imam ʿAlī as a warrior. The Qurʾān states in 4:95, "God favoured those who strive (*mujāhidīn*) with their money and themselves over those who

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[635] This verse is revealed about those Muslims who ran away on the day of Uḥud, which resulted in Muslims losing the battle and the killing of seventy of the Prophet's companions including the Prophet's uncle, Ḥamzah ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. Imam ʿAlī was among the few who stayed behind to defend the Prophet, until the angel Gabriel was heard from heaven calling, "There is no strong believer like ʿAlī, and there is no sword like Dhulfiqar," (*Lā fatā illā ʿAlī wa lā saifa illā Dhulfiqār*). Watt, M. and McDonald, M.V. (trans.) (1988). *The History of al-Ṭabarī*. New York: New York Press, vol. 2, 119–220;

do not do so by a degree. And God favoured those who strive over those who do not by a great reward."

In sermon 197, NB quotes Imam ʿAlī saying, "And surely the trusted companions of Muḥammad know that I certainly never ever argued against [the commands of] God and His Messenger. Indeed, I comforted him with myself in the battles where the heroes retreated, and the feet do not move forward, through a bravery that God honoured me with."[636] Thus, exhibiting the participation of Imam ʿAlī in the battles next to the Prophet *de facto* demonstrates the magnificence of the Imam over other companions, especially those who took the reins of leadership before him.

5.8 The Prophet's Death

NB displays many historical accounts, such as sermon 146, consisting of the response Imam ʿAlī provided the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, when the latter consulted him about fighting the Persians. It also describes the state of affairs when the Imam became the Caliph, his wars, and many other aspects of history. Among those is a detailed description of the Prophet's death, which is mentioned in two sermons: 197 and 234. In sermon 197 it states,

> Indeed, the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, died, and surely his head was on my chest. Certainly, his soul poured over my hand, and

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[636] NB, sermon 197, p. 384. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd in his *Sharḥ* of this sermon, which is number 190 in his interpretation, says, "And this is what is unique to him, peace be upon him, without anyone else sharing this quality with him. He stood next to him [the Prophet] in Uḥud while people ran away, and stood with him in Ḥunayn while people retreated, and he held steadfast under the banner of Khaybar when he conquered it, while those before him ran away." *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 10, p. 65.

hence, I wiped it over my face. I took care of his burial, God's blessings be upon him and his family, with the angels being my helpers. The house and the spaces became so busy: a group [of angels] descends and another ascends, and my ear did not miss a single subtle sound of theirs. They were praying over him, until we buried him in his grave.

So, who can have more rights with him, [whether he is] alive or dead? So, let your minds guide you, and your intentions take you against your enemy, for I swear by the One Who there is no god but He, I am surely on the straight path, and they certainly are on deviating path of wrongdoing. I say what you hear, and I ask God for forgives for me and you.

And in sermon 234, Imam ʿAlī talks to the Prophet as he was washing his body,

May my father and mother be sacrificed for you. Indeed, with your death ceased what was not stopped by the death of others than you, of prophethood, the revelation and the news of the heavens. Your tragedy is only for your family such that they do not feel any other calamity after your loss, while people feel the difficulty [of your loss]. If you had not ordered [us] to be patient, and forbid [us] from wailing, we would have cried for you abundantly. Even then, the pain will not subside, and the grief is associated with us, and that is too little for you. However, it is what we are unable to prevent, nor can we stop. May my father and mother be sacrificed for you, remember us before your Lord, and keep us in your care.

The above two passages talk about the time when the Prophet died, and none of the companions came to attend his funeral. Imam ʿAlī attended to him with none beside him save the angels. In the aforementioned sermon, he may be contesting against people who, in their eagerness to wrest the leadership from Imam ʿAlī, left the Prophet's side even before his burial.

In addition, the above passage highlights the metaphysical aspect of Imam ʿAlī, as he was able to "see" and "feel" the soul of the Prophet as it left his body. Indeed, with such indicators, it becomes difficult to reject the greatness of Imam ʿAlī. Raḍī's choice of these sermons truly reflects his conviction in the Imam, and his portrayal of the Imam's magnificence.

5.9 Imam ʿAlī's Proximity to the Prophet

In the above passages, Imam ʿAlī explicitly describes his close proximity to the Prophet, both in the physical and familial context, as well as spiritually numerous times. To add to the above, Imam ʿAli says in sermon 192, al-Qāṣiʿah,

> Indeed, I used to follow him like a baby camel follows its mother. Every day, he demonstrates to me a sign of his manners, and he orders me to follow him.
>
> And he surely used to go every year to Ḥirāʾ, and I would see him while none other than me would see him. There was not a single house whom all its inhabitants were united in Islam except the Messenger of God, God's blessings upon him and his family, Khadījah, and I am the third among them. I see the light of revelation and the message, and smell the fragrance of Prophethood.
>
> I surely heard the cry of the devil [Satan] when the revelation descended upon him, God's blessings be upon him and his family. So, I asked, "O Messenger of God! What was this cry?" So, he replied, "This is the devil, giving up hope from people worshipping him. You surely listen to what I listen to, and see what I see, except that you are not a prophet, but you surely are fine."[637]

While the topic of Imamah, divinely appointed leaders, will be discussed in the next chapter, this passage is a clear indication of the Imamah of Imam ʿAlī. Aḥmand ibn Ḥanbal mentioned that none of the companions have merits as much as that of Imam ʿAlī.[638] In spite of not being a prophet, the Imam was able to hear the revelation, and see it when he was just a child no more than ten years of age. He was raised in the house of prophethood and nurtured from it. Moreover, he knew of the Prophet being a Messenger of God, as he called him as such, upon

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[637] NB, sermon 192, p. 372.
[638] Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (2009). *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqah fil-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Bidaʿ wal-Zandaqah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah (DKI), p. 186.

seeing him receive the revelation. Thus, according to NB, the Prophet knew God had chosen hims

as a Messenger, and the Prophet did not need to confirm his divine appointment through his wife

or anyone else.[639] Moreover, Imam ʿAlī picked up the manners of the Prophet until he became

the self of the Prophet, as he was quoted in sermon 197, above, saying, "I swear by the One Who

there is no god but He, I am surely on the straight path, and they certainly are on deviating path

of wrongdoing."[640] Thus, according to NB, the Imam ʿAlī is the closest to the Prophet and he is the

one worthy of being his successor.

5.10 Conclusion

The sections of NB describing the Prophet Muḥammad demonstrate a strong belief of Raḍī in the

Prophet being completely impeccable. He knew of himself as a Messenger of God and performed

miracles to demonstrate his Prophethood. He was chosen before his creation, and all messengers

were ordered to pledge their allegiance to him and his progeny, and to inform their communities

about them. Moreover, the sermons that discuss the greatness of the Prophet extend to describe

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[639] Such a tradition is narrated in the first section of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* titled *kitāb bad' nuzūl al-waḥī*, section 3, *ḥadīth* No. 3. Al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1, p 11-12. Many Sunni books discussing the life of the Prophet Muḥammad use this tradition to describe the beginning of the revelation. This tradition is not accepted by Shiʿi scholars as they assert that prophets are born knowing they are prophets. The Qur'ān quotes Jesus son of Mary speaking in the cradle as a baby saying, "He said, 'I am indeed the servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet," (19:30). Moreover, this narration of Imam ʿAlī in NB suggest the Prophet was fully aware he is a Messenger of God and knew the cry of the devil as he described it to Imam ʿAlī. Many books written as an introduction to Islam in English use al-Bukhārī's version to describe the first revelation, suggesting the Prophet was not aware of himself being a Messenger, and that he consulted his wife Khadījah who, in turn, took him to her Christian cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal to affirm that he is a prophet of God. See, for example, Ayoub, M. M. (2012). *Islam: Faith and History*. London: Oneworld Publications, p. 25-26; Daftary, F., Hirji, Z. (2018). Islam an Ilustrated Journey. London: Azimuth Editions in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, p. 54; and Denny, F.M. (2011). *An Introduction to Islam 4th Ed*. New York: Prentice Hall, p. 54.

[640] NB, sermon 197, p. 385.

the greatness of Imam ʿAlī. This may be another subtle gesture from Raḍī that Imamah is God's

Divinely appointed succession, and continuation of Prophethood, as will be discussed in the next

chapter.

Chapter 6: **IMAMAH IN NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH**

6.1 Introduction

Imamate, or divinely appointed leadership, and succession to Prophet Muḥammad is the most contentious theological issue in Islam. In fact, it may be safe to say that it was the first root of the religion that was ever contested and debated in Islam, as the earliest surviving Shiʿi books such as *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays*[641] and *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt* were written to support Imamate.

Immediately after the Prophet's death, some individuals seized the opportunity that presented itself when Imam ʿAlī was preparing the Prophet's body for burial, and chose Abū Bakr as the successor to the Prophet, or Caliph. Sunnis claim that Abū Bakr had the credentials and the consent of the Muslims to become the Caliph. Shiʿi s, however, argue that the Prophet nominated Imam ʿAlī as his successor, and officially took the pledge of allegiance from the Muslims to Imam ʿAlī at the event of *Ghadīr Khumm*, when the Prophet raised Imam ʿAlī's hand and said, "Whoever I am his master (*mawlā*) then ʿAlī is his master. O God, support those who support him and go against those who go against him (*man kuntu mawalāh fa hādhā ʿAliyyun mawlāh. Allāhumma wālī man wālāh wa ʿādī man ʿādāh*)."[642] Those who remained loyal to Imam ʿAlī were known as

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[641] While it may be contested as to whether or not the book available currently by the name of *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* is the same original one written by Sulaym ibn Qays, yet the main issue of its content supports the discussion about Imamate. Moreover, Amīna Inloes uses the current version of the book for her academic analysis. Inloes, A. (2015). Was Imam ʿAli a Misogynist? The Portrayal of Women in Nahj al-Balaghah and Kitab Sulaym ibn Qays. *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies*, vol. 8 (3), p. 325-365.

[642] For a thorough account of *Ghadir Khumm*, refer to the ten volumes work of al-Amīnī, *al-Ghadīr*. On Walāyah and the Shiʿi community, see Dakake, M.M. (2007). *The Charismatic Community*, New York: State University of New York Press.

the followers of ʿAlī, or *Shīʿatu ʿAlī*, while those who accepted Abū Bakr as the Caliph were later called Sunnis.[643]

Imam ʿAlī repeatedly objected to the appointment of Abū Bakr, and expressed his opposition to him as well as to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, considered to be the mastermind behind Abū Bakr's nomination. He also reminded them of their pledge of allegiance and constantly spoke of the Prophet nominating him as his successor, and that leadership of the religion after the Prophet is by divine choice, and not by vote.[644]

During the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries, many debates about Imamah took place, and several books were written about it. Murtaḍā, for example, wrote a four volumes collection on Imamah, titled *al-Shāfī fīl-Imamah*, which was designed to refute ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *al-Mughnī*. Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣri (d. 436/1046) wrote *Naqḍ al-Shāfī*, a polemical work against *al-Shāfī*, and Murtaḍā then ordered his pupil, Sālār bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 448/1058) to refute it, resulting in *Naqḍ Naqḍ al-Shāfī*.[645] In addition, while Imamī scholars considered Imamah among the major roots of

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[643] As indicated in chapter 2, it was the Prophet who called the followers of Imam ʿAlī *Shīʿat ʿAlī*.

[644] For a detailed account of how Abū Bakr was chosen, see al-Bukhārī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 4, Bāb Rajm al-Ḥublā, *ḥadīth* No. 6830, p. 117; for Imam ʿAlī's objection and discussions see Ṭabrisī. *Al-Iḥtijāj*; and Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī (1993). *Al-Naṣ wal-Ijtihād*. Qum: Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ, for complete references that describe the events that took place after the Prophet's death. Also see, Al-Dīnawarī, Ibn Qutaybah (1990). *Al-Imamah wal-Siyāsah*. Ed. ʿAlī Shīrī. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, vol. 1, p. 21-25; Al-Masʿūdī (2005). *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Maʿādin al-Jawhar*. Beirut: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿAṣriyyah, vol. 2, p. 237. Also see, Madelung, W. (1997). *The Succession to Muḥammad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. NB also contains several statements from Imam ʿAlī objecting to the leadership of his predecessors: sermon 3, p. 50; sermon 5, p. 60; sermon 66, p. 118; sermon 150, p. 260; sermon 162, p. 287; sermon 172, p. 307; and letter 62, p. 544. In sermon 136, p. 244, Imam ʿAlī says, "Your pledge to me was not a rushed mistake (*faltah*)," in reference to what ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab called the pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr as stated in al-Bukhārī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 4, Bāb Rajm al-Ḥublā, *ḥadīth* No. 6830, p. 117. See section 6.7 for a detailed discussion on ʿUmar calling the allegiance to Abū Bakr *faltah*.

[645] Subḥāni (n.d.). *Rasāʾil wa Maqālāt*, p. 366, Retrieved from
http://imamsadeq.com/ar/index/book?bookID=61&page=16

the religion, while Sunni scholars did not. Al-Juwaynī's first sentence in the section discussing Imamah states, "The discussion about this section is not of the root of the belief,"[646] which suggests the issue was heavily discussed at that time, and that the Imamī scholars had accepted it to be among the roots of the religion.

6.2 Definition of Imamah

According to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, the Imam needs to be a master of strategy and politics. Hence, anyone who is well-versed in those two, and is God-fearing, can be an imam. If, however, he experiences something that makes him lose his mind and sense of judgment, or if he explicitly performs a vile act, then he loses the right for imamah.[647] Thus, according to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, anyone can be chosen as the imam as long as he fulfills the indicated criteria.

Murtaḍā, however, writes,[648]

> The essence of Imamah is the absolute leadership, which is the obligation of obedience, and the execution of command and forbiddance [of the law]. There is no difference between the leader who we described being a prophet receiving revelation and carrying a message, or not being as such. Also, there is no difference between him being an executor of the law and an establisher of the rights of the law or not. It is necessary for the leader we described not to have a

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[646] Al-Juwaynī. *Al-Irashād*, p. 163.
[647] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī*. (n.p.), vol. 20 (2), p.169-172.
[648] Murtaḍā's definition is used because it is the one accepted by most Shiʿi scholars after him, and it appears to be the one Raḍī believes in as well, making it relevant to our discussion. The Sunni definition of Imamah can be viewed in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *al-Mughnī*, as quoted above, and al-Juwaynī's *al-Irshād*, which does not mandate impeccability, nor designation by the Prophet.

leader above his leadership, nor a command over his command, and it is for this reason we obligate his impeccability.[649]

Therefore, according to Murtaḍā, Imamate is the "absolute leadership" in all facets and obedience to the Imam is a must. This leadership is not limited to religious matters only, but rather extends to all aspects of life, including political leadership. He explains in *al-Dhakhīrah*, "And what must be added [to his knowledge] is him [the Imam] knowing about the political matters, because that is a law that does not dissociate from the [Divine] message, and the Imam cannot be left without it. Therefore, his knowledge about politics is mandated by reason."[650] Moreover, as indicated above, impeccability (*ʿiṣmah*) is among the requirements for the Imam, since he cannot be in need of anyone, but rather people are in need of him, and hence, he should have the ultimate command over them. Hence, it is a rational necessity for God to designate Imamate and provide Imams as a part of His Grace (*luṭf*).

6.3 Necessity for the Imam

Murtaḍā argued extensively for the necessity of having an Imam who is divinely appointed by God, and most of his discussions are presented in *al-Shāfī*. Abdulsater thoroughly explains Murtaḍā's discussions on Imamate based on *al-Shāfī*.[651] Murtaḍā puts much emphasis on the significance of the Imam and his qualities, arguing that ʿAbd al-Jabbār's main flaw in his argument

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[649] Murtaḍā (2014). *Mawsūʿat Turāth al-Sayed al-Murtaḍā fī ʿilm al-Kalām wa Radd al-Shubuhāt*. Karbala: Al-ʿAtabah al-ʿAbbāsiyyah al-Muqaddasah, vol. 1, p. 281, from Murtaḍā's *al-Ḥudūd wal-Ḥaqāʾiq*; also, Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 409.
[650] Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 429.
[651] See chapter 4 of Abdulsater, H.A. (2013). *The Climax of Speculative Theology in Būyid Shīʿism: The Contribution of Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā*. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, p. 283-349.

against Imamah is the latter's emphasis on the number of Imams. According to Murtaḍā, it is the characteristics of the Imam that are important and not necessarily the number. He mentions that prophets are Imams, but there may be Imams who are not prophets. Hence, leadership does not depend on revelation, and Imamah is presented as leadership in general.[652]

Murtaḍā presents two arguments for the necessity of having an Imam: one rational and one revelational. The rational argument is based on the Grace of God (*luṭf*) argument that was presented for the necessity of Prophets, which was discussed in chapter 5.3. Since Imamate is an extension of *nubūwah*, the arguments for it are essentially similar.[653] Murtaḍā's logical reasoning for the Imam is that his presence drives people to doing good and refraining from committing evil, and hence, it is God's Grace that necessitates the presence of the Imam in every era.[654] The revelational argument suggests that since God's message must be complete, there must be someone who can explain it to the people. After the Prophet's death, none other than a divinely appointed Imam can have this responsibility of clarifying the religion to people.[655] Therefore, it is necessary to have an Imam in every time to guide people, and be a source of their religious needs, and separate truth from falsehood.

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[652] Murtaḍā (1993). *Al-Shāfī fil-Imamah*. Ed. Sayyid ʿAbd al-Zahrā' al-Khaṭīb, vol. 1, p. 45, 50, 57; Murtaḍā. *al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 409-410.

[653] Murtaḍā (1998). *Sharḥ Jumal al-ʿIlm wal-ʿAmal*. Ed. Yaʿqūb Jaʿfarī al-Marāghī. Qum: Dār al-Uswah, p. 191-218. It may be argued that even Mufīd describes Imamah as an extension to Nubūwah. See Mufīd. *Awā'il*, p. 64. The *luṭf* argument is mentioned by Ṭūsī in the *Tajrīd* and discussed in *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd* as well. Ḥillī (2010). *Kashf al-Murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād*. Qum: Mu'assassat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, p. 490.

[654] Murtaḍā. *Al-Shāfī*, vol. 1, p. 47, 102 & 179-180; Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 285-290.

[655] Murtaḍā. *Al-Shāfī*, vol. 1, p. 102; Abdulsater. *Climax*, p. 290-292.

6.4 Characteristics of the Imam

Murtaḍā lists seven characteristics the Imam must have, and he proves each one rationally.[656]

The first is the impeccability of the Imam (ʿiṣmah) from every vice and every sin. Because people

need to resort to him, he has to be perfect, or else, he will be in need for a person above him to

guide him.[657] The second is designation, which is to be named either by God or one who

represents Him (naṣṣ), and have knowledge that people cannot achieve. Impeccability cannot be

obtained except by one who God has chosen, and hence, it is a must to have a clear indication of

who is the Imam.[658] The third characteristic is to be the most knowledgeable of all living people

with regards to religious laws, again because he is impeccable and people must resort to him.

The fourth is that he must be the most learned in politics and leadership. This does not differ

from the message he is conveying to the people, and hence, he must have all the answers and

know how to lead a nation. The fifth is to be the best of humans and achieve the most reward,

because no one can be better than him. The sixth is to be the bravest of people because he is the

master of fighting adversaries. The seventh characteristic is that no one is considered a leader

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[656] Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 429.

[657] It is important to note here that Murtaḍā's definition of impeccability (ʿiṣmah) differs from Mufīd, who suggests that it may be alright for prophets, except the Prophet Muḥammad, and Imams to commit a minor error that does not belittle their status or deprive them of people's trust. See his *Awāʾil*, p. 62 and 65. Murtaḍā, however, argues that Imams cannot sin nor err, not even minor errors, and this appears to be the consensus among Shiʿi scholars after Murtaḍā. See *al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 429-432; as well as, Al-Ḥillī's *Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād* and *al-Bāb al-Ḥādī ʿAshar*. For the different views of early Imamī scholars on ʿiṣmah, see Madelung, W. ʿiṣmah, in Encyclopedia Islamica; and, Pierce, M. (2016). *Twelve Infallible Men: The Imams and the Making of Shiʿism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. For a review of the Sunni perspective of ʿiṣmah as described by al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), see Faruki, K (1965). Tawḥīd and the Doctrine of ʿiṣmah. *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 4(1), p. 31-43.

[658] Although he lived much later, however, Majlisī (d. 1111/1700) in his *Biḥār al-Anwār* dedicated a section for each Imam about the naming of the Imam by his predecessor(s) to ensure fulfillment of the criteria of designation (naṣṣ). Majlisī, M.B. (2008). *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī.

over his leadership and no one can be his associate in Imamah. Although the material world may regard an individual to be higher in office than him, there is, in reality, nobody truly above him. Murtaḍā clarifies that the "Imam" is a divinely appointed leader, above whom there is no leader.[659]

6.5 Imamah in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Interestingly, the sermons of NB that discuss Imamah encompass the seven above attributes of the Imam, except the explicit designation (*naṣṣ*), which is implied rather than stated. Raḍī's choice of these sermons suggests that he supports Murtaḍā's criteria for the Imam. Although the sermons and letters about Imamah may be scattered throughout the book, which may have been done intentionally to avoid the obvious connection, careful examination of the texts may reflect similar views of Imamah as Murtaḍā's.

In this chapter, some excerpts from different sermons, letters, and short words of wisdom of NB will be used to demonstrate that the Imams are indeed impeccable and exhibit all the seven characteristics presented by Murtaḍā. Moreover, the issue of whether or not the Prophet Muḥammad appointed someone to succeed him after his death, or whether he left this important issue up to the Muslim nation (the *ummah*) to decide will be discussed based on the third sermon of NB, known as *al-Shiqshiqiyyah*. It may be suggested that Raḍī used the powerful language of Imam ʿAlī's oratory, as well as the choice of his sermons, as the means to eloquently

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[659] Murtaḍā. *Al-Dhakhīrah*, p. 429-437.

prove his Imamah, as well as his right to the leadership of the *ummah*. In addition, there are some sermons of Imam ʿAlī mentioned in *al-Kāfī*, such the sermon known as *al-Wasīlah* and *al-Ṭālūtiyyah*,[660] where the Imam clearly expresses his disapproval of the leadership of the three Caliphs before him, that Raḍī did not add to NB. The reason for not adding them is unclear, but one may speculate that Raḍī may have felt that the words of the Imam in these sermons may be too explicit for people to accept. Hence, he may have resorted to *al-Shiqshaqiyyah* as he thought it would be better received. This may demonstrate the intelligent appraoch of Raḍī in putting NB together and ensuring it appeals to the wider Muslim community.[662]

As indicated above, this chapter will discuss the seven characteristics of the Imam that Murtaḍā lists. Since the excerpts of NB that will be examined overlap with the different attributes, such that one piece may, for example, emphasize the impeccability of the Imam as well as the knowledge of the Imam, a different approach will be taken in presenting the excerpts of NB in this chapter. All sermons, letters and short words of wisdom of NB that are going to be discussed on the issue of Imamah, with the exception of *al-Shiqshaqiyyah*, will be translated first, and will be discussed later in the context of each of the seven characteristics.

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[660] These sermons are found in *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, vol. 8.
[662] On Raḍī's combination of eloquence and theology see Thaver, T (2013). *Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, and the Formation of Shiʿi identity in al-Sharif al-Radi's (d. 1015 C.E.) Qurʾān Commentary*. Ph.D. thesis published by the University of North Carolina.

6.6 ʿIṣmah of the Imam in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

While Raḍī may not have used a sermon of Imam ʿAlī in NB where he explicitly says the Imams are impeccable (*maʿṣūmīn*), he uses numerous other sermons that either directly or indirectly imply their impeccability (*ʿiṣmah*), and that the impeccability is given by God to whoever He chooses of His creation. In fact, it may be argued that Raḍī intended to demonstrate in the whole of NB the *ʿiṣmah* of Imam ʿAlī. What human being has the ability, after all, to provide such profoundly eloquent content on such diverse topics ranging from God-wariness, to politics, to leadership, to economics, to creation, and many other subjects, unless he was an impeccable being? Nonetheless, a few sermons and excerpts of sermons and letters will be mentioned below to demonstrate the impeccability of the Prophet's family, or the *Ahlulbayt*.

6.6.1 Sermon 2

> They are the carriers of [God's] secrets, those entrusted with His commands, the source of His Knowledge, the resource of His laws, the agents of His scriptures, and those who hold His religion firmly [against deviation]. Through them He perfected it [the religion], and removed any unclarities… No one of this nation can be matched to *Āl Muḥammad*,[663] nor can they be compared to those who they bestow their favours upon. They are the essence of religion and the pillars of

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[663] It is apparent from Shiʿi traditions that by mentioning *Āli Muḥammad*, one is referring to all the Imams of the progeny of the Prophet Muḥammad. In one tradition narrated by Ṣadūq in *Thawāb al-Aʿmāl wa ʿIqāb al-Aʿmāl*, a man said in front of Imam al-Ṣādiq, "O God, bless Muḥammad and his house hold (*Allahumma ṣallī ʿalā Muḥammadin wa ahli baytih*)." The sixth Imam corrected him saying, "O man! You have narrowed it on us? Do you not know that his house hold are the five people of the cloak?" referring to the Prophet Muḥammad, Imam ʿAlī, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā, Imam Ḥasan and Imam Ḥusayn. The man then inquired, "So, what shall I say?" The Imam then clarified, "Say, O God, bless Muḥammad and his progeny (*Allahumma ṣallī ʿalā Muḥammadin wa āli Muḥammad*). You would have then included us and our Shiʿa." Ṣadūq (1989). *Thawāb al-Aʿmāl wa ʿIqāb al-Aʿmāl*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, p. 191. Thus, according to this tradition, when Imam ʿAlī says, "No one of this nation can be matched to *Āli Muḥammad*, he may be suggesting that the Prophet and the Imams are the best of God's creation, and their followers, who may also be included in the *Āl*, are the next best among all people.

certainty. To them revert those who elevate them to the status of God, and those who are not following their path need to adhere to them. They have the specific characteristics of viceregency, and about them is [the Prophet's] will and his succession. It is now that the right has been given back to its people and reverted to its position.[664]

In this sermon, the Imam makes it clear that there is no match to *Āl Muḥammad*, which indicates they are better than anyone else, and hence, more deserving to be the leaders of the *ummah*. While Zaidīs do not say the best of the *ummah* deserves to be the leader, the Zaidī imam, al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (d. 298/911), writes that the imamah can only be in the progeny of Imam Ḥasan and Imam Ḥusayn because God made them better than the rest of the ummah and he kept the imamah in them and their progeny.[665] Moreover, Imam ʿAlī does not explicitly mention *ʿiṣmah*, however, he gives many words that refer to it. For example, in the above passage, Imam ʿAlī refers to *Āali Muḥammad* as "the source of His Knowledge, the resource of His laws, the agents of His scriptures, and those who hold His religion firmly [against deviation]. Through them, He perfected it [the religion], and removed any unclarities." Since the scriptures are impeccable, as they are believed to be God's word revealed to the Prophet, then their agents also have to be impeccable, to ensure the complete and accurate delivery of their pure message.

Regarding the statement that no one is a match to *Āl Muḥammad*, al-Khūʾī writes that it has three important meanings. First, they are the essence of all blessings. Second, their blessings are ongoing to humanity for as long as they live on this earth. Third, to compare them to anyone else

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[664] NB, sermon 2, p. 49.

[665] Al-Hādi ilā al-Ḥaqq (n.d.). *Majmūʿ Kutub wa Rasāʾil al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq al-Qawīm Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim*. (unknown): al-Jamʿiyyah al-ʿIlmiyyah Linashr ʿUlūm Ahlulbayt ʿalaihim assalam, p. 48-50. Retrieved from http://althaqaleen.com/UploadedBooks/majmoea_alhadi_yehia.pdf

is invalid because the one who bestows favours cannot be equated to the one receiving the

favours.[666]

6.6.2 Sermon 4

> It is through us that you were guided through the darknesses [of ignorance],
> reached the pinnacle of status, and through us you achieved the light [of
> guidance]. Deaf are ears that do not hear the calls [for guidance]. One who does
> not listen the clear call [of God and His Messenger] then how can he benefit [from
> my admonishment]. Tranquil is the heart that never stops fearing [God].
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> I am expecting treachery from you, and I can see you bearing the garments of
> deceit, but the religion limits me from [punishing] you,[667] and [my] truthful
> intentions made me recognize your [intentions]. I clarified for you the path of
> truth out of my fear over you falling in misguidance, where you would act without
> a sign, unable to reach the truth.
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> Today, I make my proofs so clear that even the cattle would speak of it. Far away
> [from the truth] is he who keeps away from my path. I never doubted the truth
> since I saw it. Moses did not fear for himself,[668] rather he was worried about the
> victory of ignorance and the spread of misguidance. Today, we are clear who is on
> the right [path] verses those who are on falsehood. One who trusts the water [i.e.
> follows the truth, and not a mirage] does not become thirsty [i.e. does not become
> misguided].[669]

In the above passage, the Imam refers to "us" when speaking of guidance. So being a guide is not

limited to the Prophet but rather extends to the Imams. As guides, they carry the impeccability

of the Prophet, since they are a continuation of his message. Moreover, the Imam clearly states,

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[666] Al-Khū'ī. *Minhāj al-Barā'ah*, vol. 2, p. 326.

[667] Imam ʿAlī avoids oppressing anyone, and he judges them according to the religion. His fear of God keeps him from forcefully enforcing the religion as taught by the Prophet Muḥammad.

[668] This is in reference to the Qur'ān 20:66-68, "He [Moses] said, 'Throw!' Then their ropes and sticks would appear as if they were running from their magic. So, fear was conceived in the mind of Moses. We said, 'Do not fear! You are the upper [one]'."

[669] NB, sermon 4, p. 59.

"I never doubted truth since I saw it." In other words, he never deviated or disobey God, nor will

he ever deviate. In addition, he is also implying that those who are against him are "on falsehood"

while he is on the "right path." All these remarks are indications of the Imam's impeccability, as

he does not err, and he is among the Imams who are chosen by God as guides.

6.6.3 Sermon 24

> [I swear by] the One who has my life, I do not sweet talk nor become weak in
> fighting those who negate the truth. So, fear God, O servants of God! Turn from
> Him to Him, follow the path He designated for you, and do as He commanded you
> to do. For ʿAlī guarantees your success in the future [Hereafter], if you do not
> achieve it now [in this world].[670]

Imam ʿAlī was known as the one who is extremely truthful (ṣiddīq). He himself says, "I am the

greatest truthful (anā al-ṣiddīq al-akbar)," and this is one of the traditions ʿAbd al-Jabbār uses to

affirm that Imam ʿAlī is better than Abū Bakr.[671] Moreover, after affirming his truthfulness, he

guarantees the worldly and heavenly success of those who follow the command of God and obey

the Imam. Since the Imam is truthful, it means that he is certain that his path is the path of those

whom God has blessed, and hence, he is sure that those who follow him will go to Paradise. If he

were unsure, there would be doubt, and hence, he would not be completely truthful, and he

would be acting on the basis of speculation. Thus, it indicates that he is truthful, he is certain that

he does not and will not commit any act of deviation, and hence, he is impeccable.

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[670] NB, sermon 24, p. 77.
[671] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). Al-Mughnī. (n.p.), vol. 20 (2), p.143.

6.6.4 Letter 28

> We are the ones made by our Lord [to possess] everything [such that we did not take anything from people], and the people are made for us.[672]

The above statement demonstrates the greatness of the Prophet's family (*Ahlulbayt*) and indicates their impeccability and knowledge. NB refers to Ahlulbayt as the "carriers of God's secrets." They are the ones who people must turn to for all matters, yet they do not need anyone in any matter. They are the ones who guide others, and through them people achieve the pinnacle of status, and they are the distinction between truth and falsehood.[673] Imam ʿAlī also states that all of God's favours come to humanity through them, and that they cannot be matched with any of God's creation.

In the Qur'ān, God says to Moses, "And I made you for myself," (20: 42). Imam ʿAlī says in the above passage, "We are the ones made by our Lord." Al-Khū'ī writes,

> The words of the eighth Imam, peace be upon him, about that were mentioned where he said, "When God, the Hounourable, the Exalted, chooses a servant, He prepares his chest for that, and keeps in his heart the fountains of widsodm, and grants him thorough knowledge such that he never fails to answer any question and deviates from correctness (*ṣawāb*). He is impeccable (*maʿsūm*), supported, made successful (*muwaffaq*) [by God], guided, is made to feel safe from [ever] being wrong, incorrect or failing. God specifically gave him these [blessings] so that he becomes a proof (*ḥujjah*) over His servants and His witness over His

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[672] NB, letter 28, p. 470.
[673] The Prophet said about Imam ʿAlī, "'Alī is with the truth and the truth is with ʿAlī." Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī. *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol.3, p. 135.

creation, 'and that is the grace (*faḍl*) of God He gives to whoever He wills, and surely God is the most Gracious (*wa Allāhu dhūl-faḍli al-ʿaẓīm*)'[674]."[675]

And what he [Imam ʿAlī], peace be upon him, indicated in his statement, "And the people are made for us," is that they [the Imams], peace be upon them, are the means of delivering the blessings (*faiḍ*) between God and His creation. Also, with him saying, "We are the ones made by our Lord," surely there are no means between them and God Almighty.[676]

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says regarding the excerpt mentioned from Letter 28,

These are great words, above all words, and their meaning is very deep, deeper than all meanings! The one who is made by the king is one who the king chooses and raises his status. He [Imam ʿAlī] says, 'None of the people has a favour over us, rather God favoured us, such that there is no intermediate between us and Him, while all people are our making, such that we are the intermediate between them and God.' This is an exalted status. Its meaning is what is heard, yet its hidden implication is they are indeed the servants of God, while surely the people are their servants."[677]

Hence, the above statements clearly indicate the impeccability of *Ahlulbayt* as they are always with the truth, guide to it and their path guarantees Paradise. Moreover, *Āl Muḥammad* are chosen by God to be the intermediaries between Him and His creation with all that comes to Him. This may be one interpretation for the tradition of Imam al-Ṣādiq, "If Earth were left without a proof (*ḥujjah*) then it would be destroyed."[678] Finally, the above statements also imply that it is God who chose *Āl Muḥammad* to lead and guide, and hence, it is not up to the people to choose when there is a *naṣṣ*, a clear Qurʾānic or Prophetic designation about their right for leadership.

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[674] Qurʾān 57:21
[675] The statements in quotation are a tradition from the eighth Shiʿi Imam, al-Riḍā from Al-Nuʿmānī, M. (d. 360/971) (2011). *Al-Ghaybah*. Ed. Fāris Ḥassūn Karīm. Beirut: Dār al-Jawādayn, p. 230.
[676] Al-Khūʾī, vol. 19, p. 116-117.
[677] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 15, p. 73.
[678] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 62, *ḥadīth* No. 10, p. 104.

6.7 The Designation of the Imam (*naṣṣ*)

There are no references in NB that directly quote Imam ʿAlī stating something along the lines "The Messenger of God appointed me." This is what made Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd boldly claim that while the Imam complains of his three predecessors taking a position he is more entitled to, it does not mean the Prophet appointed him.[679] However, al-Khū'ī refutes his arguments in great detail.[680]

The issue of whether or not the Prophet appointed Imam ʿAlī as his successor may be viewed as the essence of the Shīʿī-Sunni divide. Al-Khū'ī presents three kinds of proofs to suggest that Imam ʿAlī was appointed. The first proof is the Qur'ānic evidence, while the second is the Prophetic traditions, and both of those are referred to as *al-adillah al-naqliyyah*, or the narrated proofs. The third, however, is a logical proof, or *al-adillah al-ʿaqliyyah*.[681] Since this is not the topic of discussion of this thesis, it will not be discussed in more detail. However, NB makes numerous indications that suggest Imam ʿAlī was to be the leader of the *ummah* after the Prophet. Such suggestions include what was mentioned in some of the passages discussing *nubūwah*, such as the fact that he was raised in the house of the Prophet and was associated with him in every step he made. He was with the Prophet when he received the message, fought next to him, married his daughter, and was with him at the time of his death. He heard the angels and communicated with them while washing the body of the Prophet. Moreover, when ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was dying, he assigned six people who should discuss among themselves and choose a leader from

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[679] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 1, p. 65.
[680] Al-Khū'ī, vol. 2, p. 414-420.
[681] Al-Khū'ī, vol. 2, p. 349-414.

within them: Imam ʿAlī, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, Ṭalḥah, Zubayr, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf. Imam ʿAlī clearly states in *al-Shiqshiqyyah*, "When was there any doubt about [me being better than] the first, such that now I am being compared to such people?"[682] In addition, the Imam's clear expression of discontent and disapproval of his three predecessors[683] demonstrates that he was the designated leader of the *ummah*. According to sermon 5 of NB, upon the death of the Prophet, Abū Sufyān and al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, Imam ʿAlī's uncle, came to him to pledge their allegiance to him as the Caliph of the Muslims. He refused their pledge, but stated, "O people, tear down the waves of turbulence (*fitan*) with the arks of safety."[684] The Imam is referring to the Prophetic tradition, "Indeed, my example and the example of my family (*ahlu baytī*) among you is like that of the ark of Noah. Whoever rides it will be saved, and whoever leaves it will drown."[685] Hence, the Imam is referring to the leadership of Abū Bakr as *fitnah*, or distortion of the truth, and reminding people to adhere to the Prophet's family. In sermon 16, he further adds, "Perished is he who makes false claims, and a loser is he who belies. One who disputes with the people of truth will perish, and it is enough ignorance for a person not to recognize his worth."[686] Here, the Imam is indirectly stating that those who disputed his right, and took it away from him are going to perish, which indicates them not gaining Paradise.

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[682] NB, sermon 3, p. 56.
[683] See NB, sermons 3, 5, 16, 17 and 18 as examples.
[684] NB, sermon 5, p. 60.
[685] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī. *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol.13, p. 151.
[686] NB, sermon 16, p. 66.

He also refers to his predecessors in sermons 17[687] and 18[688] as not knowing how to judge and distinguish between truth and falsehood due to their ignorance.

Finally, in letter 28 to Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, Imam ʿAlī writes, "And the migrants (*muhājirūn*) [those who are from Makkah] argued against the supporters (*al-anṣār*) [the people of Medīna] on the day of Saqīfah,[689] with their close kinship to the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family, they won the argument against them. If success comes [to the right of leadership] through him [the Prophet], then the right is ours not theirs [the *muhājirūn*], but if it were through another argument, then the *anṣār* are rightful with their claim."[690]

In fact, in sermon 136, Imam ʿAlī explicitly indicates after people pledged their allegiance to him as the leader of the Muslims, "Your pledge of allegiance to me was not a rushed mistake (*faltah*), nor is my command and yours are the same!"[691] Imam ʿAlī is referring to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb calling the choice of Abū Bakr as the leader of the Muslims a rushed mistake (*faltah*), "may God protect the Muslims from its evil!"[692] Moreover, he indicates that he is not the same as those who may be chosen by people. He is implying that he is an Imam, chosen by God, "We are the ones

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[687] NB, sermon 17, p. 67-68.

[688] NB, sermon 18, p. 69-72.

[689] Saqīfat banī Sāʿidah, was the location where Abū Bakr, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUbaidah ibn al-Jarraḥ along with a few others from the *muhājirūn*, gathered with few members of the *anṣār* to choose a leader immediately after the Prophet's death. It is then that Abū Bakr was put forth by ʿUmar as the leader of the Muslims. See al-Bukhārī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 4, Bāb Rajm al-Ḥublā, *ḥadīth* No. 6830, p. 117.

[690] NB, letter 28, p. 471.

[691] NB, sermon 136, p. 244.

[692] al-Bukhārī (2010). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: DKI, vol. 4, Bāb Rajm al-Ḥublā, *ḥadīth* No. 6830, p. 117. It is interesting to see ʿUmar, the one who orchestrated the leadership of Abū Bakr and forced Muslims to accept it, calling it an "evil" and praying to God to protect the Muslims from its consequences.

made by our Lord [to possess] everything [such that we did not take anything from people], and the people are made for us."[693]

Therefore, NB consists of several sermons that clearly demonstrate Imam ʿAlī's right to the Caliphate and imply that he was designated by the Prophet as the leader of the *ummah*, while contesting the Caliphate of his predecessors.

Despite the presence of these numerous statements, though, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd claims that Imam ʿAlī approved of the leadership of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān because of letter number six in NB.[694] Imam ʿAlī wrote this letter to Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān soon after people pledged their allegiance to him and he became the Caliph,

> Indeed, the people who pledged their allegiance to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān pledged their allegiance to me on the same terms they pledged their allegiance to them. Thus, the one who was present did not have the right to make a choice, nor did the one who was not present have the right to object. The counsel (*shūrā*) is only for the migrants (*muhājrīn*) and the supporters (*anṣār*). So, if they unite in choosing a man and they call him a leader (*imām*) then that was pleasing to God. Hence, if one goes out of their command through an attack or an innovation, then they have to bring him back of what he left; if he refuses, then they fight him for following a path other than that of the believers, and God will turn him to that which he has (himself) turned.[695] I swear by my life, O Muʿāwiyah, if you were to reflect with your mind instead of your desire, you will find me the most innocent of people from the blood of ʿUthmān, and you know I kept away from him. Unless you want to accuse, then accuse all you want, *wa al-salām*.[696]

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[693] NB, letter 28, p. 470.

[694] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 14, p. 13-14.

[695] This last sentence is a reference to verse 115 of Sūrah al-Nisāʾ (4:115), "And whoever acts hostilely to the Messenger after that guidance has become clear to him, and follows a path other than that of the believers, We will turn him to that to which he has (himself) turned and make him enter hell; and it is an evil resort."

[696] NB, letter 6, p. 447-448.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd wrote, "Beware, this section clearly indicates that choice [i.e. people choosing a leader instead of designation by the Prophet (naṣṣ)] is the path for leadership (imāmah) as our theologian companions (aṣḥābunā al-mutakallimūn) stated."[697] Shi'i interpreters, however, including the Zaydī scholar, al-Sayyid Yaḥyā ibn Ibrahīm al-Jaḥḥāf (d. 1102/1691), contest Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's view. Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī discusses, "Indeed, he [Imam ʿAlī], peace be upon him, argued with the people [i.e. Muʿāwiyah] about consensus (ijmāʿ) because of their belief in that he was not the designated [Imam]. Thus, if he had argued about himself being designated [by the Prophet (naṣṣ)] then it would not have been accepted from him nor [would Muʿāwiyah have] agreed with him."[698] Al-Khū'ī states, "These statements do not indicate that he, peace be upon him, affirmed his Caliphate with people's pledge and their consensus, but rather argued with the people [i.e. Muʿāwiyah] using people's acceptance and their consensus of his leadership on the basis of submission and going along [with their own claim] and on the basis of their own belief that when they believed that the essence of Caliphate and choosing the imām is based on the pledge instead of the appointment [by the Prophet], then they are obligated to accept his Caliphate and leadership, and submission to and following his command. If he argued against them through designation (naṣṣ) they would not have accepted it from him nor agreed with him. Otherwise, his Caliphate (khilāfah) is uncontestably proven by an appointment from God and His Messenger, as we pointed to that when interpreting sermon 237. The Imam must be appointed by God, the Exalted, because imamah, is His charge, the Exalted, and no one gets it except those

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[697] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 14, p. 14.
[698] Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī. *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 787.

He chooses."[699] The Zaydī scholar, al-Jaḥḥāf, asserts the discussions presented by Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī and al-Khū'ī. In addition, with regards to the following sentence in the above passage, "So, if they unite in choosing a man and they call him a leader (imam) then that was in the pleasure of God.", al-Jaḥḥāf writes, "We say, what he intended by a 'man' is himself [Imam ʿAlī]. The essence of his statement is that the people of the counsel (ahl al-shūrā) who claim it is the means to leadership (imamah) were united on calling me Imam. Their agreement on that was aligned with the command of God and His Messenger about me, and hence, it was in the pleasure of God. It cannot be said that he [Imam ʿAlī] wanted to say that what they united on of my Imamah and the imamah of those other than me was pleasure of God as he was forever disputing it the allegiance to Abū Bakr, and after him, showing its invalidity, saying that if he had found the support he would have ended it with the sword. Hence, if it were in the pleasure of God, then he would not have detested it and wanted to end it with the sword."[700] Sayyid Hāshim al-Mīlānī who commented on NB that was printed by the Shrine of Imam ʿAlī references al-Jaḥḥāf and asserts his comments.[701]

Therefore, NB contains several passages that suggest Imams are appointed and chosen by God and His Messenger. Moreover, Imam ʿAlī's statements demonstrate his evident disagreement with the leadership of his three predecessors, and indicate they took his right unjustly and

[699] Al-Khū'ī. *Mihāj al-Barāʿah fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 17, p. 197-198.
[700] Al-Sayyid Yaḥyā ibn Ibrahīm al-Jaḥḥāf (2001). *Irshād al-Mu'minīn ilā Maʿrifat Nahj al-Balāghah al-Mubīn*. Ed. Muḥammad Jawād Al-Jalālī. Qum: Dalīl Ma, vol. 3, p. 20.
[701] Al-Mīlānī, H. (2015). *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Ed. Sayyid Hāshim al-Mīlānī. Najaf: Holy Shrine of Imam ʿAlī, p. 447-448.

unlawfully. In addition, they constantly resorted to him for advice and help, as he was more

knowledgeable than them.[702]

6.8 The Knowledge of the Imam

One of the characteristics of the Imam is to have knowledge. The knowledge of Imam ʿAlī is

uncontested, as he is the gate to the City of Knowledge,[703] and an examination of NB reveals that

his knowledge is in diverse subjects. In sermon 5, he states, "I contain hidden knowledge, that if

I were to reveal it, you would shake like loose ropes in deep wells."[704] Moreover, in short words

of wisdom number 137, in his conversation with Kumayl ibn Ziyād, he says while pointing to his

chest, "Indeed, in here is great knowledge, only if I can find [people] who can carry it."[705]

What is more interesting is the Imam's knowledge about the unseen. The Qurʾān states that

knowledge of the unseen is only for God; however, He may choose to give knowledge about the

future to whoever He chooses of His servants, "The Knower of the Unseen. He does not reveal to

anyone about His hidden knowledge, except he who He wills of His messengers," (72:26-27).[706]

Moreover, when discussing the story of the virtuous servant (al-ʿabd al-ṣāliḥ) in Sūrat al-Kahf, the

Qurʾān refers to him as having knowledge from the Divine, "They found one of Our servants, who

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[702] ʿAbd al-Jabbār (n.d.). *Al-Mughnī*. (n.p.), vol. 20 (2), p. 122-133.

[703] Al-Ḥākim al-Nayshābūrī (2002). *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah (DKI), vol.3, p. 137; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (2009). *Al-Ṣawāʾiq al-Muḥriqah fil-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Biaʿ wal-Zandaqah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah (DKI), p. 189.

[704] NB, sermon 5, p. 60.

[705] NB, short words of wisdom No. 137, p. 590-592.

[706] Ṭūsī (n.d.). *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, vol. 10, p. 158;

We had granted a mercy from Us, and taught him a knowledge from Our own (*min ladunnā*)," (18:65). The knowledge imparted directly from the Divine, is referred to as *ʿilm ladunnī*.[707]

NB consists of several sermons about events that will occur in the future (*malāḥim*). The inclusion of these sermons in NB may suggest Raḍī's conviction in the *ladunnī* knowledge of the Imam. In sermon 100, Imam ʿAlī speaks of a malicious man who will rise in Damascus, whose oppression will reach Kūfa, and who will rule ruthlessly. Some interpreters of NB suggest it is Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, and indeed, he ruled without any mercy. It may also be referring to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān who appointed al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī as the governor of Ḥijāz and Iraq, in which he killed tens of thousands of people.

In sermon 102, Imam ʿAlī speaks of how people will be at the "end of time", or much later in time, where sin would be propagated, announced and advertised, and the religion would be ignored, while those who practice sin would be praised and followed. Similar themes are also discussed in sermons 107 and 150, where he describes the state of people when sin becomes prevalent and neglecting religion is popular.

Not to confuse the knowledge of the unseen with God's, Raḍī included sermon 128, in which a man from the tribe of Kalb indicated to Imam ʿAlī, "Are you given the knowledge of the unseen, O Commander of the Faithful?" Imam ʿAlī then explained,

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[707] On the knowledge (*ʿilm*) of Imams, see Amir-Moezzi (1994). *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*. Trans. David Streight, Albany: State University of New York Press.

O brother of Kalb! It is not the knowledge of the unseen, but rather knowledge of the one who possesses knowledge. Indeed, the knowledge of the unseen is the knowledge of the Day of Judgment, and what God listed, "Surely, God has the knowledge of the time [of Judgment], and sends down rain, and knows what is in the wombs. No one knows what it shall earn tomorrow, or in which land will he die. Indeed, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware," (31:34). So, He knows what is in the wombs of a male or female, ugly or beautiful, generous or stingy, blessed or wicked, and whoever is going to be a fuel for the Hell Fire, or in Paradise associating with the Prophets. That is the knowledge of the unseen that no one other than God knows. Other than that, it is knowledge taught by God to His Messenger, and he, in turn, taught it to me, and prayed that it is encompassed in my chest and remains within me.[708]

What Raḍī may have wanted to achieve by this is to demonstrate that Shiʿi Imams know the future. However, this knowledge comes to them from God, and is not independent of God. The latter would suggest they are associates with God, and hence, would not be acceptable. Moreover, it answers the claims some might have of the knowledge of the unseen being exclusive to God. NB here asserts that God is the One Who knows everything, and that He revealed some of that knowledge to His Messenger, who, in turn, taught it to Imam ʿAlī.

Moreover, NB also consists of sermon 155, where Imam ʿAlī describes the creation of the bats, sermon 165 in which he speaks of the wonders of the peacock, and sermon 185 that discusses the marvels of the ant. Thus, Imam ʿAlī's knowledge is not only confined to religious matters, but rather extends to various fields and realms such as zoology. In addition, the description the Imam given of these animals is so detailed, it is difficult for someone to have achieved this kind of

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[708] NB, sermon 128, p. 236.

knowledge unless he invested years studying them. Hence, the knowledge of the Imams appears

to be *ladunnī*.

Therefore, by including sermons in NB that depict Imam ʿAlī's knowledge of the future, as well as

his knowledge in diverse fields, Raḍī may be trying to demonstrate the Imam's divinely acquired

knowledge. Hence, it may be his way of implying to people that since none of the companions of

the Prophet have a fraction of the knowledge of Imam ʿAlī, this definitely makes him worthy of

being the successor of the Prophet.

6.9 Knowledge of the Imam in Political Matters

Another important attribute of the Imam is his knowledge in political matters, because, according

to Murtaḍā, politics cannot be dissociated from religion. NB consists of much evidence of Imam

ʿAlī's deep knowledge and understanding of political matters. The most notable is letter 53 to

Mālik al-Ashtar when he made him the governor of Egypt. Raḍī describes it as Imam ʿAlī's "longest

letter and one that combines the most values."[709] Indeed, in this letter, Imam ʿAlī establishes the

essence of leadership and governance. In fact, in 1997, at the celebration of the 50th Anniversary

for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at the University of Tehran, in Iran, then United

Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan quoted an excerpt from this letter of Imam ʿAlī,

> Imam Ali, the fourth Khalifa after Prophet Muhammed, instructed the governor of
> Egypt to rule with mercy and tolerance towards all his subjects:

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[709] NB, letter 53, p. 515.

> "... Let the dearest of your treasuries be the treasury of righteous action... Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your subjects. Be not in the face of them a voracious animal, counting them as easy prey, for they are of two kinds: either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation."[710]

Thus, the declaration of Imam ʿAlī regarding the essence of governance resonates throughout time and is viewed as a model that must be examined.[711]

With regards to leadership, Imam ʿAlī says, "Patience is the essence of leadership."[712] Moreover, he gives six attributes that should not be in a leader, "And you know that one should not be in charge of the private parts [rights of marriage and the kin], the blood [judging among killings and murder cases], the income [money earned by the state], the religious laws, and the leadership of the Muslims who [has one of the six attributes]: the stingy as he will restrict their money; nor the ignorant as he will misguide them through his ignorance; nor the bad tempered as he will keep them away from him because of his ill-temper; nor the oppressor as he will distribute the wealth among certain people but deprive others; nor the one who takes bribes as he will not respect the rights [of people] and would not apply God's limits; nor the one who does not follow the tradition

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[710] The full speech is found on the un.org website: https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/1997-12-10/universal-declaration-human-rights-enshrines-and-illuminates-global
The last quote by Imam ʿAlī describes the essence of Islamic pluralism, which is about respecting people of all faiths: for they [people] are of two kinds: either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation. On Sunday, December 7th, 2014, I was invited to speak at the Voices of Peace from Abraham's Children interfaith gathering, organized at the City Hall in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, by the Phoenix Interfaith Society of Harmony, where I mentioned this quote of Imam ʿAlī. After the session, I was approached by two individuals. One was a professor of music at the University of Alberta who said this quote of Imam ʿAlī is so inspirational that he will be teaching it to his children and to his students. The other person introduced himself as a Jewish poet, and also said that he found the quote inspiring and will use it as an inspiration for some of his poetry.

[711] Two books are published discussing Imam ʿAlī's justice, his letter to Malik al-Ashtar and his system of governance: Shah-Kazemi, R. (2006). *Justice and Remembrance*, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers; and *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam* (2006). Ed. Lakhani, M.A. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc.

[712] NB, short words of wisdom No. 166, p. 596.

of the Prophet (the *sunnah*) as he will destroy the *ummah*."[713] It is important to note here that by becoming the leader of Muslims, Imam ʿAlī asserts he does not exhibit any of these six characteristics; rather, he has all the best attributes and qualifications to make him the Imam of the *ummah*. He lucidly indicates in the same sermon, "O God! You are aware that we did not do what we did [taking the reins of leadership] as a competition for power, nor seeking any excess of this worthless [world], but rather to restore the teachings of Your religion, demonstrate the virtue in Your land, so that the oppressed of Your servants find security, and the altered laws of Your rules would be restored."[714] In addition, he clearly indicates his reasons for leading Muslims to his cousin, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās, in sermon 33, when he shows him a sandal he was fixing and asks him to give it a value. Ibn ʿAbbās said that the sandal had no value, and, Imam ʿAlī replied, "By God, it [this worthless sandal] is more beloved to me than your leadership [the leadership of Muslims], unless I establish justice and prevent oppression."[715] It is this kind of just leadership that made George Jordac describe Imam ʿAlī as the *Voice of Human Justice*.[716]

6.10 The Imam is the Best of all Creation

The fifth attribute of the Imam, according to Murtaḍā, is to be the best of all of God's creation at his time. There are numerous such references by Imam ʿAlī in NB. In sermon 131 he states, "O

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[713] NB, sermon 131, p. 238-239.
[714] Ibid.
[715] NB, sermon 33, p. 92.
[716] Jordac, G (2007). *Voice of Human Justice*, trans. M. Fazal.Haq, Qum: Ansariyan Publications.

God! I am the first to turn to You and listen and answer [Your call]. No one was before me to

pray, other than the Messenger of God, God's blessings be upon him and his family."[717]

In sermon 86, Imam ʿAlī states,

> Where will you go?[718] And how do you go stray?[719] While the heads [of guidance]
> are present, the signs are clear, and lights are turned on.[720] So where are you taken
> astray? Rather how can you face confusion [in religious affairs], when your
> Prophet's progeny is amongst you? They are the reigns of truth and the banners
> of the religion, and the speakers of honesty. So, refer to them and follow them
> just as you follow the Qur'ān, and rush to learning from them just like how thirsty
> cattle rushes to fetch water.
>
> O people! Take it from the saying of your Prophet, God's blessings be upon him
> and his family, "Indeed, one of us dies, yet he is not dead![721] One of us may
> deteriorate yet he does not deteriorate." So, do not speak of which you do not
> know, for surely most of the truth lies [in matters] you do not understand. And
> obey the one who you have no excuse not to follow, and that is me! Did I not lead
> you [according] to the Major Weight (*al-thiql al-akbar*)[722] and leave among you the
> minor weight (*al-thiql al-asghar*)? I embedded in you the banner of faith, taught
> you the limits of what is lawful and what is unlawful. I made you flourish through
> my justice, and you did not observe of my talk and action but virtue. I
> demonstrated to you the honourable manners [by making you observe me and
> how I deal with you – as teaching through demonstration is better than teaching
> through admonishment only]. Hence, do not use your opinion [in the affairs] that

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[717] NB, sermon 131, p. 238-239.

[718] Qur'ān 81:26

[719] Qur'ān 6:95, 10:34, 35:3, 40:62

[720] Imam ʿAlī is referring to Ahlulbayt as the clear heads of guidance, the signs of God that are so apparent, and the lights of guidance. Regarding verse 7:157, it is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq, "And they followed the light that was sent down with him," that the light "in this instance is ʿAlī, the Commander of the Believers, and the Imams." Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 70, *ḥadīth* No. 2, p. 114.

[721] The Imam may be referring to verse 3:169, "And do not consider those who died in the way of God as dead. Rather, they are alive and being sustained by their Lord." Alternatively, he might be referring to the knowledge and the legacy they leave behind, which keeps their remembrance alive all the time.

[722] This is in reference to the Prophetic tradition, "I am leaving among you two weighty things, the major weight is the Book of God... and the minor weight is my progeny my family. I remind you of my family, I remind you of my family, I remind you of my family." Al-Hindī, ʿA. (n.d.). *Kanz al-ʿUmmāl*. Ed. Ṣafwah al-Saqā and Bakrī al-Hayyānī. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, vol.1 , p. 185-186.

cannot be perceived by limited understanding, nor be perceived by mere thoughts.[723]

In the sermon above, Imam ʿAlī evidently argues that people must resort to him, follow him, and obey him. He demonstrates that the Imam is the guide who puts people on the illuminating path of the Divine, and hence, with him being present, people should not refer to anyone other than him. Moreover, he indicates that the Imam does not use his own opinion when it comes to the laws of the religion, but rather implements the intended teachings of God and His Messenger. The last sentence may also be interpreted as forbidding the use of *qiyās*, which is deriving religious laws by method of comparative analogy to other laws. Imam al-Riḍā says that God said, "And he is not on my religion the one who uses *qiyās* in my religion."[724] Moreover, Mufīd writes, "I say, surely *ijtihād*[725] and *qiyās* are not suitable for the one who uses *ijtihād* and the one who uses *qiyās*. Indeed, for every issue that arises, there is a tradition about it from the Truthful Ones, peace be upon them, that should be used to rule in the matter, and one should not transgress. With this [opinion] came the authentic traditions and known history from them [Ahlulbayt],

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[723] NB, sermon 86, p. 145-148.

[724] Ṣadūq. *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, p. 107.

[725] The word *ijtihād*, which literally mean putting effort, was used at the time to mean deriving laws without Qurʾānic or traditional basis. Hence, there are numerous traditions from Shiʿi Imams forbidding *ijtihād*. Moreover, Shiʿi scholars at the time would not call themselves *mujtahidīn*, those who put in effort, because of the negative connotation attached to the word. It was not until the seventh Islamic century, when al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1278) used the literal meaning of the word and claimed that Shiʿi scholars put in much effort at deriving religious laws based on the Qurʾān and the traditions of the Ahlulbayt, and hence, they deserve the title of *ijtihād* and should be called *mujtadīn*. See Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (2007). *Durūs fī ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*. Qum: Dār al-Ṣadr, vol. 1, p. 57-62.

peace be upon them. This is the belief of the Imamiyyah only [*madhab al-Imamiyyah khāṣṣah*),

and it contradicts the theologians and the jurists of the [different] cities."[726]

This is similar to what was indicated in the earlier section about Imam ʿAlī seeking the leadership

of Muslims to implement the pure message of Islam as taught by the Prophet. Moreover, this is

also an indication that he disapproves of the leadership of his three predecessors, as he sees

them judging matters per their own limited understanding of religion, rather than acting upon

the teachings of the Qurʾān and the *sunnah*, tradition of the Prophet. He states in sermon 18,

> An issue arises to one of them with regards to a law of jurisprudence, so he rules [on the issue] based on his opinion. Then, a similar issue comes to another person, and he acts in a manner contrary to the ruling of the other one. Then, the judgments of both are presented to their leader (*Imamihim*), and he agrees with both of them. Since their God is One, their Prophet is one, and their Book is one, then did God, the Almighty, order them to differ, and they obeyed Him? Or did He forbid them from differing in religious matters, so they disobeyed Him? Or did God, Almighty, reveal an incomplete religion, and He used their help to complete it? Or do they consider themselves as associates to Him such that they can dictate, and He has to listen to them? Or did God reveal a perfect religion but the Messenger, God's blessings be upon him, did not deliver it in its complete form, while God states, "We did not leave anything out of the Book?" In it [the Qurʾān] is the clarification for everything, and He indicated that some of the Book approves the whole, and there is no discrepancy that exists within it, as He, Almighty, said, "And if it [the Qurʾān] were from any [one] other than God then they would have found many discrepancies in it."[727]

As can be seen in the words of Imam ʿAlī, he says that their 'Imam' approves of their different

judgments, and he argues against that. Thus, he is disapproving of the judgments of his

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[726] Mufīd. *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*, p. 139. For normative reviews on *qiyās* and *ijtihād* see Haydar, A (1992). *Imam Al-Ṣādiq wal-Madhāhib al-Arbaʿah*. Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr; and al-Mūsawī, S.S. (1993). *Al-Naṣ wal-Ijtihād*. Qum: Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ.

[727] NB, sermon 18, p. 69-72.

predecessors as he finds them erroneous, and that they are not capable of understanding nor implementing the truth.

Imam ʿAlī also states, "It is through us that you were guided in the darknesses [of ignorance]."[728] He also indicates the greatness of the Imams over the creation, "Indeed, only the Imams are the ones overlooking (quwwāmūn ʿalā) God's creation."[729] Not only are the Imams guides in the darkness of ignorance, they are constantly overlooking and responsible for (quwwāmūn ʿalā) God's creation. They are a necessity for existence, as Imam al-Ṣādiq says, "If earth were left without an Imam it would be destroyed."[730] Moreover, Imam al-Riḍā clearly indicates in a long tradition, "Indeed, Imamate is higher status, greater matter, more elevated in position, beyond the parameter, and deeper than what people can achieve through their intellect, or achieve it through their opinion, or establish it through their opinions…The Imam is the one of his time, no one compares to him, no scholar is equal to him, and there is no replacement for him nor is there a like to him. He is chosen with the whole honour without him asking for it nor working to attain it (iktisāb) [i.e. it comes from God directly], but from the Honourable, the Giver (al-Mufḍil al-Wahhāb). So, who is he who can attain the recognition of the Imam, or can choose him? Never, Never (hayhāt hayhāt)!"[731] Furthermore, in a different tradition, Imam al-Ṣādiq also repeats similar statements as Imam ʿAlī with more additions, "He [God] appointed him [the Imam] a clear sign for His creation, and made him the proof (ḥujjah) over the people of His world, an

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[728] NB, sermon 4, p. 59.
[729] NB, sermon 152, p. 266.
[730] Kulaynī. Al-Kāfī, vol. 1, section 63, ḥadīth No. 10, p. 104.
[731] Kulaynī. Al-Kāfī, vol. 1, section 72, ḥadīth No. 1, p. 117-120.

illuminating light for the people of His religion, and overlooking His servants (*al-qayyim ʿalā*

ʿibādih)."[732]

Therefore, NB is clearly indicating that the Imams are above everyone in knowledge and status,

and they are the best of God's creation. This is evidently portrayed in the Imam's quote that was

discussed earlier, "We are the ones made by our Lord [to possess] everything [such that we did

not take anything from people], and the people are made for us."[733] His presence is a necessity,

and people must refer to him, or else they would be led astray.

6.11 The Bravery of the Imam

There is no question about the bravery of Imam ʿAlī. The contemporary Egyptian writer, ʿAbbās

Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, wrote a book titled *The Genius of Imam ʿAlī* (*ʿAbqariyyat al-Imam ʿAlī*) in

which he contends the Imam's valour in Badr, Uḥud, Khaybar, Ḥunayn and all the battles he

participated in, is uncontested.[734] On the Day of ʿĀshūra, as the enemies were fighting against

Imam Ḥusayn, ʿUmar ibn Saʿd, who was commanding the Umayyad army, shouted at his men as

they were retreating from fighting Imam Ḥusayn, and said, "This is the son of the killer of the

ʿArabs!"[735]

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[732] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, section 72, *ḥadīth* No. 2, p. 120-121.
[733] NB, letter 28, p. 470.
[734] Al-ʿAqqād, ʿA.M. (1967). *ʿAbqariyyat al-Imam ʿAlī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, p. 28-29.
[735] Ibn Shahr Āshūb (d. 588/1192) (1991). *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*. Ed. Yūsuf al-Baqāʿī. Beirut: Dār Al-Aḍwāʾ, vol. 4, p. 120.

NB consists of several indications of the bravery of Imam ʿAlī. In sermon 5 he says, "I swear by

God, the son of Abī Ṭālib enjoys death more than a baby enjoying breast feeding of his mother."[736]

In letter 10 to Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, he writes,

> You invoked war, so leave people aside and come out to me, relieving both sides
> from the fight, so that you can realize which one of us is blinded by sin and desire!
> I am the father of Ḥasan (*Abū al-Ḥasan*), who killed your grandfather, uncle and
> brother by cutting through their bodies on the day of Badr. That sword is still with
> me, and with the same bravery[737] I face my enemy! I did not change my faith, nor
> did I recently believe in a Prophet. Rather, surely I am on the path [of truth] that
> you left willingly, and only came into it by force.[738]

The tone of the letter spills bravery, coming from a man who explicitly says that death by, "a

thousand strike with a sword is better than dying on bed,"[739] and also says, "By God I swear, if all

the Arabs unite to fight me, I will never turn my back to it."[740] This is demonstrated by Imam

Ḥusayn in the battle of Karbalā as Ibn Shahr Āshūb narrates that all the arrows that hit the body

of the Imam were on the front of his body, none on his back,[741] suggesting the Imam never turned

his back on his enemies.

In fact, Imam ʿAlī's bravery is attested by Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd narrates in

his *Sharḥ* that in the battle of Ṣiffīn, Muʿāwiyah had a slave by the name of Ḥurayth, who was a

very experienced fighter. Muʿāwiyah ordered Ḥurayth, "Keep away from ʿAlī, but hit your spear

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[736] NB, sermon 5, p. 60.
[737] Imam ʿAlī uses *qalb*, which may be translated in this context as bravery.
[738] NB, letter 10, p. 452.
[739] NB, sermon 122, p. 227.
[740] NB, letter 45, p. 507.
[741] Ibn Shahr Āshūb (1991). *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*. Beirut: Dār Al-Aḍwā', vol. 4, p. 120.

at whoever you want." As Ḥurayth was about to leave to fight, Muʿāwiyah's right hand man, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, told him that Muʿāwiyah does not want him to gain the prize for killing Imam ʿAlī, and hence, he encouraged him to fight the Imam. Upon calling Imam ʿAlī to fight him, it only took one strike by Imam ʿAlī's sword to kill Ḥurayth. Muʿāwiyah was in pain for the loss of Ḥurayth and he blamed ʿAmr for fooling him into fighting Imam ʿAlī. Muʿāwiyah then recited verses of poetry as a eulogy for the loss of Ḥurayth, of which the following are the first two verses

حُرِيثُ ألَم تَعْلَم وَ جَهْلُك ضائِرُ   بِأنَّ عَلِيًّا للفَوارِسِ قاهِرُ
وَ أنَّ عَلِيًّا لم يُبارِزْهُ فارِسٌ   مِنَ النَّاسِ إلاَّ أقْصَدَتْهُ الأظافِر

Ḥurayth! Did you not know? And your ignorance is harmful That ʿAlī is the killer of the heroes?
And surely, [there is] not a single hero of the people [who] fights ʿAlī   but he gets killed

Then, Imam ʿAlī invited Muʿāwiyah to fight him, but he refused. Hence, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ then recited this verse condemning Muʿāwiyah for not answering Imam ʿAlī's call to fight, as the Arabs deemed that as something disgraceful,

وَلَوْ بارَزْتَهُ بارَزْتَ لَيْثًا   حَديدَ النَّابِ يَخْطِفُ كُلَّ بازي

And if you had fought against him [ʿAlī]
then you would have fought a lion with sharp canines who kills every falcon![742]

Hence, NB does not stop short of lucidly indicating the bravery of Imam ʿAlī, demonstrating the fulfillment of this criteria of the Imam.

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[742] Ibn abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 5. P. 81.

6.12 No Leadership above the Imam

This concept was discussed earlier when looking at the ʿiṣmah and the knowledge of the Imam. NB stresses that the Imam is chosen by God, and not by the people. Hence, people must refer to the Imam for guidance in this world and for success in the Hereafter. Moreover, NB emphasizes that whether or not the Imam is kept by the people as their leader, or another leader is chosen, he remains the true leader and the true Imam.

Among the examples illustrating the above are the following, "We are the ones made by our Lord [to possess] everything [such that we did not take anything from people], and the people are made for us."[743] In addition, "No one of this nation can be matched to Āl Muḥammad, nor can they be compared to those who they bestow their favours upon. They are the essence of religion and the pillars of certainty."[744] Moreover, Imam ʿAlī describes himself as "ʿAlī guarantees your eventual success, if you do not provide me with your support now."[745] Furthermore, NB demonstrates the need of his predecessors to his constant consultation, but never him asking for anyone's consultation. For example, in sermon 134, Imam ʿAlī admonishes ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he wanted to fight the Romans.[746] Yet, Imam ʿAlī tells his cousin, ʿAbdullāh ibn al-ʿAbbās, "You have the right to tell me your opinion, and I will see. However, if I disobey you, then you obey me!"[747] Since the Imams are divinely guided, their doing is inspired by God, and hence, while

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[743] NB, letter 28, p. 470.
[744] NB, sermon 2, p. 50.
[745] NB, sermon 24, p. 77.
[746] NB, sermon 134, p. 242-243.
[747] NB, short words of wisdom No. 312.

people may inform the Imam of their opinion, it is imperative they follow the Imam in all his actions.

Therefore, careful examination of NB suggests that Imams are indeed above God's creation during their time, and that people are in need for them; however, they are not in need of anyone.

6.13 Conclusion

According to Shiʿi Islam, Imamate is the essence of religion, and it is among the first discussed and defended root of the religion of Islam. By the third Islamic century (10th century A.D.), Shiʿi scholars considered believing in Imamate an essential aspect for the proclamation of faith. *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, for example, consists of numerous sections dedicated specifically for the need of the Imam, the requirement of having a *ḥujjah*, a proof, the deep knowledge of the Imam, and all the details required to prove the character of the Imam, and how those criteria are all found in the twelve Shiʿi Imams. Similar arguments are found in the books of Ṣadūq, such as *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, and the *Amālī*, as well as in the writings of Mufīd. Murtaḍā's monumental four volumes work of *al-Shāfī* vehemently defends Imamate and clearly demonstrates its significance to the faith, rather to the religion.

In NB, Raḍī appears to take a stand similar to his brother's on Imamate, yet in a more subtle manner, taking advantage of his established and accepted status as a respected poet. Moreover, he applied his relationship with Muslim scholars of other sects, as well as scholars of other faiths, to spread the words of Imam ʿAlī through the manners of literature, *adab*, thus succeeding in his objective of appealing to a wider audience. The analyses provided in this chapter demonstrate

that NB clearly illustrates the requirements and characteristics of Imamate classified by Murtaḍā, through the words of Imam ʿAlī, suggesting Raḍī's beliefs in Imamate are similar to his brother's. Moreover, the excerpts selected from NB suggest the significant need for the Imam as an impeccable guide to people, who, if they were to obey him, would be led to ultimate happiness in this world and the Hereafter. If Raḍī had any theological motivation in the compilation of NB, which is indeed affirmed in this work, then anyone with an understanding of the value of Imamate, understands that he succeeded in proving the following: the greatness of Imam ʿAlī, the essence of Imamate, its importance as one of the roots of religion, and the refutation of all other sects, in a manner not short of being brilliant. The words of NB suggest that anything other than following the Imam is a deviation from the truth, yet, Raḍī managed to get away with this idea without losing any respect or value to his status among his contemporaries. Moreover, Raḍī successfully indicates in NB that the belief in Imamate will lead to success in this world and the Hereafter. Achieving this kind of objective is very clever and truly demonstrates his strong Imami belief and faith as well as his ingenious character.

Finally, Imam ʿAlī stated, "ʿAlī guarantees your eventual success."[748] It can be safely deduced from the words of the Imam that following his path guarantees success in this world and the Hereafter, a journey that every person should prepare for and a goal people should strive to achieve, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[748] NB, sermon 24, p. 77.

Chapter 7: **MAʿĀD IN NAHJ AL-BALĀGHAH**

7.1 Introduction

The belief in the Day of Judgment, that God will resurrect humanity to judge them and then reward some with Paradise and punish others in the Hell Fire is among the roots of the Islamic religion, and there are numerous verses in the Qur'ān discussing resurrection and afterlife, *maʿād*. By the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries, the discussion about *maʿād* is found in all major theological works.[749]

NB consists of many sermons about the reminder of resurrection and the afterlife, and turning to God, as it is a common theme throughout the text.[750] After discussing the wisdom of resurrection, this chapter will explore three main sermons about this topic: 220, 204, and 82. The content of these sermons will suffice in demonstrating the Imamī belief in the afterlife. The sermons will be discussed in the order listed as they demonstrate the grave, a reminder and awareness to the Hereafter, and then the Hereafter.

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[749] In the Ashʿarī school, see al-Ashʿarī (2010). *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Riyadh: Dār Muslim Lilnashr; and al-Juwaynī (1995). *Kitāb al-Irshād*. Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah. In the Muʿtazilī school, see ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1996). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah. In the Imamī school, see Ṣadūq (2011). *Al-Iʿtiqādāt*. Beirut: Dār al-Jawādayn; Mufīd (1992). *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, and *Awāʾil al-Maqālāt*. Tehran: Al-Muʾtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd; and, Murtaḍā (2009). *Al-Dhakhīrah*. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī.

[750] Qutbuddin, T. (2012). The Sermons of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qur'ān and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia. *Anuario De Estudios Medievales*, p. 201-228.

7.2 Wisdom of the Afterlife

Imam ʿAlī's reply to a man from Damascus who asked him about *qaḍā'* of God, which was discussed in detail in chapter 4, makes an indirect, yet very logical argument for the necessity of afterlife. Imam ʿAlī stated, "Woe upon you! Did you think it was a predetermined decree and inevitable preordainment?! If it were as such, then the reward and punishment would have been nullified, and the promises and warnings [of God] would have failed."[751] The argument suggests that one of the logical reasons for the afterlife is establishing God's justice. As we discussed in chapter 6, the main reason for God sending Prophets and Apostles is so that justice can be accomplished. The Afterlife will achieve that as those who transgressed will be punished after being judged, while those who obeyed God will be rewarded. Moreover, those who suffered in this world will find peace while those who may have been at peace in this world, may suffer as a result of oppressing others. Hence, true justice may only be achieved in the Hereafter, and without that, this world would be a mere vanity.[752]

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[751] NB, short words of wisdom No. 73, p. 575.

[752] A study from the University of Oregon demonstrated that nations who predominantly believe in the punishment of Hell have lower crime rates than nations who predominantly believe in Heaven only. While the study links religious beliefs to cross-national pro- and anti-social behavior, it demonstrates the impact of belief in a consequence on individuals. Shariff, A.F., Rhemtulla M. (2012). Divergent Effects of Beliefs in Heaven and Hell on National Crime Rates. *PLoS ONE*, 7(6): e39048.

7.3 The Grave and the Soul

According to NB, Imam ʿAlī delivered sermon 220 after reciting the first two verses of Chapter 102 of the Qurʾān, which consists of eight verses as follows:

> In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful
>
> [Acquiring] Abundance has kept you busy.
>
> Until you arrived in the graves [i.e. died].
>
> No! You shall know.
>
> Then No! You shall know.
>
> No! If you were to know the certain knowledge.
>
> Then you would have surely seen the Hell Fire.
>
> Then you will see it with the eye of certainty.
>
> Then you will be asked on that Day about the bounties.

It is narrated that the reason for the revelation of this chapter was that two tribes started boasting about which one of them had the greater number of men. When they could not come to a conclusion, they decided to go to the cemetery to count the number of graves of the men from each tribe so that their claim could be proven.[753]

One of Imam ʿAlī's best description of death and what the human experiences in the grave in terms of shock and bodily decay is described in sermon 220 of NB. Imam ʿAlī thoroughly analyzes the state of *barazakh* in this sermon. The word *barzakh* literally means barrier. In Sūrah 23 of the

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[753] Shīrāzī, N.M. (2001). *Al-Amthal fī Tafsīr Kitāb Allāhi al-Munzal*. Qum: Madrasat al-Imam ʿAlī, vol. 20, p. 417.

Qur'ān, verse 100 it states, "And before them is *barzakh* until the Day they are resurrected." So, the Qur'ān refers to the time between this world and the Day of Judgment as a transition state, or *barzakh*, that is a barrier between the two worlds. Mufīd describes what happens after death in his *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt* and mentions these traditions, "This world is the prison of the believer, the grave is his rest and Paradise is His abode. This world is the paradise of the disbeliever, the grave is his prison and the Hell Fire is his abode," and "All the good is after death and all the evil is after death."[754] Thus, it is the state where the believers feel comfort and see the pleasures of their faith, while the disbelievers experience the pain of their actions.

The Imam begins the sermon as follows,[755]

> What a far [from achievement] is their hope, and what unaware visitors [they are], and what a grave danger it is! They remembered them in vanity, rather their discussion is farfetched. Do they boast about the dead bodies of their forefathers, or do they regard the number of dead persons as a ground for boasting about their number?! They want to revive the bodies that have fallen, and whose movements have ceased. They are more entitled to be a source of admonishment than a source of pride and boasting. They are more suitable for being a source of humility than of honour.
>
> They looked at them with weak understanding, descending into the hollow of ignorance. If they ask about them the vacant houses and empty courtyards, they would have said that they went into earth in the state of misguidance, and you, too, are following ignorantly towards them. You walk over their heads, farm crops [that receive nutrients] from their [degraded] corpses, graze of what they left, and you are living in houses they destroyed. The days [that lie] between them and you are crying over you and mourning you.

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[754] Mufīd. *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 94-102.

[755] Adapted from *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul-Balagha*. Ed. Al-Jibouri, Y.T. (2009). New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc., p. 683-686. NB, sermon 220, p. 413-419.

These are the ones who reached [death] before you, and they drank from [the understanding of death] prior to you. They had positions of honour and plenty of pride. They were rulers and followers. Now they have gone into the deep state of *barzakh* where Earth is in control over their bodies, eating their flesh and drinking their blood. They lie in the hollows of their graves lifeless, growing no more, hidden, not to be found. The approach of dangers does not frighten them; the adversity of circumstances does not grieve them. They do not mind earthquakes, nor do they heed thunder. They are gone and not expected [to come] back [to this world]. They are existent but unseen. They were united but are now dispersed. They were together and are now are separated.

Their records are unknown, and their houses are silent, not because of length of time or distance of place, but because they have been made to drink the cup [of death] which has changed their speech into muteness, their hearing into deafness, and their movements into stillness. It seems as if they are fallen in slumber. They are neighbours not feeling joy among each other, and friends who do not visit one another. The bonds of them knowing each other have been worn out; the regards of their brotherhood have been cut asunder. Everyone of them is, therefore, alone although they are a group; they are strangers though they are friends. They are unaware of morning after a night, nor of evening after a day. Whether they departed [this world] at night or during the day, then that becomes eternal [for them]. They witnessed the dangers of their place of stay to be more serious than they had feared. They saw that of its signs greater than what they had estimated. The two objectives [Paradise and Hell] have been stretched for them up to a point beyond the reach of either fear or hope. Had they been able to speak, they would not have been able to describe what they witnessed and saw.

In the above passages, Imam ʿAlī is referring to the tribes who went to the cemetery to take pride in the number of graves. He says they should have used the graves to reflect upon their own consequences and learn that nothing can be taken with you to the grave. The houses they left behind are now inhabited. Their corpses are degraded and became a part of the soil on which vegetation grows and becomes food for cattle. Those people who are now in their graves used to be rulers and inhabitants of this world. Now, however, they are complete strangers, in shock of the reality that has fallen upon them. They can feel, see and realize what is happening, but they do not have much connection to this materialistic world. Thus, there is nothing to boast

about them. Rather, those who are alive should be admonished from the reality of life and what happens to people when they leave this world.

On his way back from Ṣiffīn, Imam ʿAlī stopped at a cemetery near Kūfa and said,[756]

> O inhabitants of the scary homes, and the places of solitude, and the dark graves. O people buried in the sand. O people who are estranged. O people of loneliness. O people of the [scary] residence. You went before us, and we shall follow you. As for the houses [you lived in], they are now inhabited. With regards to your spouses, they are now remarried. In terms of the money, it is now divided [among the inheritors]. This is what we have of news, so what news do you have?
>
> Imam ʿAlī then turned to his companions and said, "If permission is granted for them to speak, they would have told you that surely the best provision is piety."[757]

Thus, Imam ʿAlī used to educate his companions of the reality of this materialistic world. Moreover, he speaks to those who are dead with full realization they can hear and understand him. Hence, in the last sentence of the above passages from sermon 220 he says, "Had they been able to speak, they would not have been able to describe what they witnessed and saw," due to their great shock. Nonetheless, if they were able to talk, then they would admonish people to be God-conscious and always prepare for the afterlife.

The Imam then continues in sermon 220,

> Even though their traces have been wiped out, and their news has stopped, sights are capable of drawing a lesson, as they looked at them; ears of the intellect heard from them, and they spoke without uttering words, and said, "The wonderful faces have changed. The soft bodies have been destroyed. We wore the clothes that have deteriorated. We've become tired of our tight residence, and inherited

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[756] NB, short words of wisdom No. 123, p. 587.
[757] In reference to the verse of the Qur'ān (2:197), "And make provision, for surely the best provision is piety, and fear me O people of understanding."

loneliness, while the land has befallen upon us [from deterioration], and hence, the beauty of our bodies has been wiped out, and our faces have become unrecognizable. Our stay in strangeness have become long, and we do not find relief from calamity, nor ease from difficulty."

Now, if you depict them in your mind, or if the curtains concealing them are removed for you, in such a state, when their ears have lost their power, turning deaf, their eyes have been filled with sand, making them sink, their tongues that were eloquent have been disintegrated, their hearts that were awake have become motionless in their chests. In every limb of theirs a peculiar decay has taken place which has deformed it and paved the way for pests towards it, while they are powerless, with no hand to defend them, no heart to grieve over them. It is then that you would certainly realize the grief of their hearts and the dirt of their eyes. Every trouble of theirs is such that its condition does not change, and the distress does not clear away.

How many a prestigious body and amazing beauty which earth has destroyed; although when in the world he enjoyed abundant pleasures and was nurtured in honour? He clung to enjoyments (even) in the hour of grief. If distress befell him, he would seek refuge in consolation through the pleasures of life, playing and being indulged in games. He was laughing at the world while the world was laughing at him because of a life full of forgetfulness. Then time trampled him like thorns, the days weakened his energy and death began to look at him from near. Then he was overtaken by a grief which he had never felt; ailments appeared in place of the health which he previously used to enjoy.

Here, the Imam is eloquently describing the decay of the body in the grave. The imagery used by the Imam vividly pictures what happens. The description is so detailed that it does not seem to be coming from someone who merely heard about it, but rather from someone who witnessed it. Moreover, he explains that this world is not worth getting upset over or stressing about it and being in constant grief for it. However, when problems arise in one's life, he/she should seek refuge in God, and not "seek refuge in consolation through the pleasures of life, playing and being indulged in games," as God condemns this action, "Those who take their religion for diversion and games and whom the life of the world had deceived them. So today We will forget them as they forgot the encounter of this day of theirs, and as they used to impugn Our signs," (7:51). In

other words, one must always be connected to God, be in the remembrance of God and be conscious of Him.

In the last few passages of sermon 220, the Imam says,

> He then turned to that with which the physicians had made him familiar, namely suppressing the hot (diseases) with cold (medicines) and curing the cold with hot doses. But the cold things did nothing save the hot ailments, while the hot ones did nothing except to increase the coldness. Nor did he acquire temperateness in his constitution. Rather, every ailment of his increased till his physicians became helpless, his attendants grew loathsome and his own people felt disgusted from describing his disease, avoided answering those who inquired about him and quarreled in front of him about the serious news which they were concealing from him. Thus, someone would say that his condition is what it is and would console them with hopes of his recovery, while another would advocate patience on missing him, recalling to them the calamities that had befallen the earlier generations.
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> In this state, when he was getting ready to depart from the world and leave his beloved ones, such a serious choking overtook him that his senses became bewildered and the dampness of his tongue dried up. Now, there was many an important question whose reply he knew, but he could not answer, and a voice that was painful to his heart that he heard but remained (unmoved), as though he was deaf to the voice of either; an elder who he used to respect, or a youth who he used to have mercy over. The pangs of death are too hideous to be covered by description or be appreciated by the hearts of the people in this world.[758]

When interpreting this sermon, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd al-Muʿtazilī writes,

> And I swear by whom all nations swear by Him, I have surely read this sermon for the past fifty years, and until now, over one thousand times, and not a single time did I ever read it without it causing a scare and fear and admonishment, and moving my heart with anxiety, and shaking my organs with worry. Nor have I ever reflected upon it without remembering those who are dead from my family and relatives, and friends, and imagined in my mind 'I am this person who he, peace be upon him (*ʿalaihi assalām*), is describing his state.' And how many admonishers,

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[758] NB, sermon 220, p.413-419.

lecturers and eloquent individuals have spoken about this concept! And many times have I read and reviewed what they said! But I never found anything of the effect of these words on myself. And that is it because of my conviction in the person who said these words, or because his intentions were good, and his certainty was unshaken, and his sincerity was so pure, and hence, the effects of his words on the selves are greater and the approach of his admonishment to the hearts is far more effective.[759]

The above description is a good summary of the eloquent sermon above. What is important, however, is that NB refers to those who are dead being rather "living", in the sense they are aware of what is happening, and are capable of talking, only if God had given them permission to do so. This is an implication that death is the separation of the soul from the body, as Imam ʿAlī states in sermon 111 of NB, which was mentioned earlier in chapter 2, when describing the angel of death,[760]

Do you feel him when he enters a house? Or do you see him when he takes one's soul? Rather, how does he take the soul of the foetus in the womb of the mother? Does he enter to him from some of her organs? Or does the soul respond to him by the command of its Lord? Or does he live with (the foetus) inside her womb? How can one describe His God, when he cannot even describe a creation of God?!

Hence, the soul "responds" to the angel of death and leaves the body, resulting in death. Mufīd states about one who dies, "The soul left from him, referring to life [leaving him]." Moreover, he also agrees that people in the grave experience questioning by angels, and he says, "And angels do not descend but upon a living [person]."[761] Therefore, death is nothing more than another life.

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[759] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, sermon 216, vol. 11, p. 57.
[760] Reference to the angel of death taking the souls is found in the Qurʾān in 32:11, "Say, the angel of death, who is commissioned of you, takes your soul, and then to your Lord you shall return."
[761] Mufīd. *Taṣḥīḥ al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 80 and 100.

Moreover, the new "residence" the body takes is frightening. It is dark, and the soul feels the deterioration of the body. Imam ʿAlī's description is so vivid, as if it comes from a person who has witnessed what happens in the grave, rather than from one who can only narrate what he knows about it. It is as if he experienced it all. His words encourage people not to be fooled by this materialistic world, which perishes, leaving one without anything other than his deeds. This thought induces people to be modest and to act with humility and kindness. That is why it is narrated by the Prophet Muḥammad, "Increase your remembrance of death as it is the destroyer of the pleasures."[762] Thus, Imam ʿAlī used to constantly remind people of the Hereafter as well.

7.3 Reminder of the Hereafter

In sermon 204, NB states,[763]

> Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him) provided the following general advice to his companions, warning them about the perils of the Day of Judgment
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> May God have mercy on you! Prepare provisions for the [imminent] journey [to the life to come] because the call for departure has been announced. Regard your stay in this world as very short, and return (to God) with the best provisions with you because surely, in front of you lies a valley that is difficult to climb, and places of stay full of fears and dangers. You have to get there and will permanently stay. And be admonished that the eyes of death are approaching you, and they are fixed on you. It is as though you are (already) in the talons of death, and it has struck you. Difficult affairs and distressing dangers have crushed you into it. You should, therefore, cut away all the attachments of this world and seek assistance with the provision of the fear of God.

[762] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, sermon 67, vol. 6, p. 29.

[763] Adapted from *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul-Balagha*. Ed. Al-Jibouri, Y.T. (2009). New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾān, Inc., p. 659. NB, sermon 204, p. 395-396.

Imam ʿAlī constantly reminded people of the Hereafter, and NB is full of such sermons. In sermon 182, for example, he says, "If anyone was capable of finding the means of staying alive, and pushing death away [from himself], then it would have been Solomon, son of David, peace be upon him, who God submitted the *jinn* and humans for him, and with his high status of prophethood."[764] Also, in 225 he describes this world as, "A place full of calamities, and known for betrayal. Its conditions do not last, and its settlers are not safe [from it]," until he says, "And be aware, O servants of God, that surely you and what you have in this world are on the path of those who were before you. Those who lived longer than you, had more visible homes than you [i.e. archeological findings of old buildings], and their signs were even more everlasting [than you]. They are now quiet voices, silent movements, deteriorated bodies, empty homes, and destroyed establishments."[765] Moreover, in 229, "You have to work hard, and be prepared, and provide your provisions. Do not be fooled by the world as it fooled the nations who came before you."[766] In addition, many other sermons and admonishments exist in NB encouraging people to prepare for the eternal abode and not be taken in by this materialistic life and succumb to the temptations of this world.

Since such admonishment comes from Imam ʿAlī, who himself despised this world and completely submitted to God, it has a great impact. He wrote in letter 45, "Indeed, it is my self that I tame through piety so that it comes at peace on the Day of the Great Fear, and it stays firm

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[764] NB, sermon 182, p. 326.
[765] NB, sermon 225, p. 427.
[766] NB, sermon 229, p. 432.

on the slippery path." He adds, "Do I become satisfied to be called Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Mu'minīn*), and I do not share with them [people] the difficulties of the time? Or by not being a role model for them in the hardships of life? I was not created to only be busy with eating the best of foods, like a cow that is tied and its only concern is to feed itself, or the sheep to graze with its mouth! Feeding itself, not aware of what it is being raised for [i.e. to be served as food]. Nor [was I created] to be left without accountability, or be neglected if I were causing harm, or to misguide, or to become lost [away from] the path [of truth]."[767] His example with his brother, ʿAqīl, that was discussed in chapter 3 (see 3.5.3.4 The Impact of the Realization of God as All-Seeing) is a great demonstration of his piety, righteousness, and devotion to God. As such, Imam ʿAlī's words about the Hereafter are most powerful, attested by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, as indicated when interpreting sermon 220 above.

7.4 The Hereafter

In sermon 82, known as *al-Gharrā'*, or the one that is well-respected or well-known, NB says,[768]

> You are tested in this world and have to render an accounting. Certainly, this world is a dirty watering place and a muddy source of drinking.
>
> Its appearance is attractive, and its inside is destructive. It is a delible deception, a vanishing reflection and a bent pillar. When its despiser begins to like it and he who is not acquainted with it feels satisfied with it, then it praises and puts down its feet (in joy). It entraps him in its trap, makes him the target of its arrows and puts round his neck the rope of death taking him to the narrow grave and fearful abode in order to show him his place of stay and the recompense of his acts. This

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[767] NB, letter 45, p. 506.
[768] Adapted from *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul-Balagha*. Ed. Al-Jibouri, Y.T. (2009). New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, Inc., p. 431-434. NB, sermon 82, p. 130-141.

goes on from generation to generation. Neither death stops from cutting them asunder nor do the survivors keep aloof from committing sins.

They are emulating each other and proceeding in groups towards the final objective and the rendezvous of death, till when matters come to a close, the world dies, and resurrection draws near. God will take them out from the corners of the graves, the birds' nests, the beasts' dens and the centers of death. They will hasten towards His command and towards the place fixed for their final return group by group, quiet, standing and arrayed in rows. They will be within God's sight and He will hear everyone whom He calls.

He will be wearing the outfit of helplessness and the covering of submission and indignity. (At this time) contrivances will disappear, desires will be cut, hearts will quietly sink, voices will be curbed, sweat will choke the throat, fear will increase, and ears will resound with the thundering voice of the announcer calling them towards final judgement, awarding recompense, striking with punishment and paying rewards.

People have been created as a proof of (His) power. They have been brought up with authority, they are made to die through pangs and placed in graves where they turn into crumbs. Then they will be resurrected one by one, awarded their recompense and will have to account for their actions, each one separately. They had been allowed time to seek deliverance, had been shown the right path and had been allowed to live and seek favors. The darkness of doubts had been removed. They had been let free in this period of life as a training place in order to make preparation for the race on the Day of Judgement, to search for the objective with thoughtfulness, to get time necessary to secure benefits and provide for the next place of stay.

How appropriate are these illustrations and effective admonitions provided they are received by pure hearts, open ears, firm views and sharp wits. Fear God like him who listened (from good advice) and bowed before it, when he committed sin, he admitted it, when he felt fear he acted virtuously. When he apprehended, he hastened (towards good deeds), when he believed he performed virtuous acts, when he was asked to take lesson (from the happenings of this world) he learned. When he was asked to desist he abstained (from evil), when he responded to the call (of God) he leaned (towards him), when he turned back (to evil) be repented, when he followed, he almost imitated and when he was shown (the right path) he saw it.

Such a man was busy in search of truth and got rid (of the worldly evils) by running away. He collected provision (of good deeds) for himself, purified his inner self, built for the next world and took provision for the day of his departure, keeping in

view his journey, his requirement and the status of his need. He sent ahead for the abode of his stay (in the next world).

O servants of Allah! Fear God keeping in view the reason why He created you and be afraid of Him to the extent He has advised you to do. Make yourself deserve what He has promised you, by having confidence in the truth of His promise and entertaining fear for the Day of Judgment.

After quoting the above sermon, Raḍī says, "It is mentioned that when he, peace be upon him, gave this sermon, people began to tremble, tears flowed from the eyes, and hearts were frightened. Some people call this sermon The Pinnacle (*al-Gharrā'*)."[769]

Again, Imam ʿAlī's description of the events of the Day of Judgment are mesmerizing. His description stems from his genuine belief in God. He is so detailed in his depiction of death, the grave and the Hereafter that he speaks of it as if he has seen it. When describing the pious ones (*al-muttaqīn*) in sermon 193, he says that among their attributes is "when it comes to Paradise, they are like those who have seen it, and hence, they are feeling its blessings; and when it comes to the Hell Fire, they are like those who have seen it, and hence, they are feeling its torment."[770] This is the pinnacle of recognition and belief: worshipping as if seeing and feeling the blessings of reward and the torments of punishment.

7.4.1 Physical Resurrection

The above passage also asserts that on the Day of Judgment bodies "will be resurrected one by one, awarded their recompense and will have to account for their actions, each one separately."

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[769] NB, sermon 82, p. 130-141.
[770] NB, sermon 193, p. 376.

This is a confirmation of *al-maʿād al-jismānī*,[771] or the physical resurrection of the bodies. The Qur'ān makes several references about the bodies of those who died being resurrected again and reformed in their exact shapes. Such examples include the following verses: 70:43, "The Day when they shall hasten from their graves as if to rush toward a direction indicator;" 54:7, "They shall emerge from their graves like a swarm of locusts with eyes downcast;" 36:51, "When the Trumpet is blown, they shall hasten to their Lord from their graves;" and, 75:1-4, "I swear by the Day of Resurrection; and I swear by the blaming self; does man suppose that We shall not put together his bones? Yes indeed, We are able to proportion even his fingertips." Moreover, the Qur'ān also makes references about the body parts testifying against an individual who committed sins: 36:65 "Their hands shall speak to us and their feet shall bear witness to all their doings;" and, 41:20 "Until they arrive [at the gates of Hell Fire] their ears, eyes and skin will testify against what they used to do."

This belief appears to be agreed upon by Sunni and Imāmī Shiʿi scholars. Ṣadūq writes, "Our belief in the resurrection after death is that it is true."[772] Al-Ashʿarī has a very similar statement where he writes, "And the resurrection after death is true."[773] However, the Ismāʿīlī Shiʿa spoke of only the spiritual resurrection, *al-maʿād al-rūḥī*. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) states in his *Faḍāʾiḥ al-*

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[771] The concept of *al-maʿād al-jismānī* refers to the physical resurrection of the bodies on the Day of Judgment. It goes against those who speak of *al-maʿād al-rūḥī*, where they claim that on the Day of Judgment only the souls will be present, and the bodies will not be resurrected again. Allāma Majlisī (d. 1111/1700) writes, "Beware, that saying the resurrection of the body (*al-maʿād al-jismanī*) is what is agreed upon by the people of religion (*al-milliyyīn*) and it is of the important aspects of the religion, and anyone who disputes it is not among the Muslims." Majlsī (2008). *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Beirut: Muʾassassat al-Aʿlamī, vol. 7, p. 40.

[772] Ṣadūq (2011). *Al-Iʿtiqādāt*. (unknown): Dār al-Jawadain, p. 157.

[773] Al-Ashʿarī (2011). *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Riyad: Dār Muslim lil-Nashr, p. 238.

Bāṭiniyyah about the Ismāʾilīs, "The soul unites, after leaving the body, with the spiritual world that it was separated from, and it is pleased by going back to its original home, and that is why it is called "return" when the Qurʾān says, "Return to you Lord, pleased and in the pleasure [of God]," (89:28)."[774] However, the above passages in NB clearly indicate that resurrection will be physical and not spiritual as the Ismāʾilīs believed.

7.5 Conclusion

Raḍī successfully portrays Imamī belief in the Day of Resurrection through his selection of sermons of NB that discuss the topic. They demonstrate death as a separation of the soul from the body, and the start of a journey that one takes through three stages. The first is the state of *barzakh*, which occurs in the grave where the body deteriorates, but the soul experiences torment or reward. The second is the physical resurrection on the Day of Judgment where people will be held accountable for their actions. The third and final stage is after the Day of Judgment where people will be rewarded in Paradise or punished in the Hell Fire. The logical necessity for this belief is to provide purpose to life and establish justice among the creation. Hence, when one faces calamity, the Qurʾān encourages by saying, "To God we belong and to Him we shall return,"[775] about which Imam ʿAlī says, "To God we belong, is a confession on ourselves of the

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[774] Al-Ghazālī (1964). *Faḍāʾiḥ al-Bāṭiniyyah*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī. Kuwait: Muʾassasat Dār al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, p. 45. On the Ismāʿilī belief in the spiritual resurrection see De Smet, D. (2016). Ismaʿili-Shiʿi Visions of Hell: From the "Spiritual" Torment of the Fāṭimids to the Ṭayyibī Rock of Sijjīn. In Lange C. (Ed.), *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions* (pp. 241-267). LEIDEN; BOSTON: Brill.

[775] Qurʾān 2:156.

Mastery of God; and to Him we shall return, is a confession on ourselves that we are perishing."[776]

As such, a person should always be connected to God, recognize Him and His greatness, and work towards developing a better understanding of his or her world, realizing that we are leaving it behind, and will only have our deeds carried over to face our Lord.

Such homiletics drive one towards improving his or her character and being an agent of establishing God's message of justice, "Certainly We sent Our apostles with clear proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance [justice], so that humankind may maintain justice," (Qur'ān 57:25).

Imam ʿAlī's system of justice is very comprehensive.[777] In letter 53 of NB to Mālik al-Ashtar when appointing him as a governor to Egypt, Imam ʿAlī details a thorough system of social values and human rights.[778] It contains the famous statement, "[People] are of two kinds: either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation," which demonstrates the value of human rights.[779] Moreover, Imam ʿAlī's fairness is exhibited when his brother, ʿAqīl, wanted to get more money from the Muslim Treasury during his Caliphate, as was discussed in 3.5.3.4. To him, justice with people stems from being submissive God. In letter 53, he writes to Mālik, "Give them of your forgiveness and pardon that which you would like God to give you of His forgiveness and pardon. For you are above them, and the commander of the matter is above you, and God is above he

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[776] NB, short words of wisdom No. 93, p. 579.
[777] See for example, Shah-Kazemi, R. (2006). *Justice and Remembrance*, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers; and *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam* (2006), Ed. Lakhani, M.A. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc.
[778] NB, letter 53, p. 515.
[779] See section 6.9 for details.

who gave you the governorship."[780] Therefore, to Imam ʿAlī, one should always remember his Lord and realize that he is not eternal in this world nor does one exhibit an absolute power. Hence, one should prepare for the Hereafter and one of the things one can do is to be kind and just when dealing with people.

[780] NB, letter 53, p. 516-517.

Chapter 8: **CONCLUSION**

The words of Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib compiled in *Nahj al-Balāghah* intrigued many Shiʿi scholars across the centuries. When asked about *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the contemporary prominent Shiʿi cleric, Sayyid ʿAlī al-Sīstānī wrote the following,[781]

> Surely what is contained in this noble book of the words of our master *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, peace be upon him, is considered to be the pinnacle of words, after the words of God the Exalted and the words of His chosen Prophet, God's blessings be upon him and his family, due to what it contains from clear words about the instinctive path for reflection, thought about the world and its truth, clear indications of Islamic essences (*al-uṣūl al-Islāmiyyah*), clarification about the nature of life and the rules its built on, indication to ways of self-purification and training, clear indication to the intentions of the religion and what is built on it from laws, as well as a reminder of the ethics of leadership, its rules and duties, and an education about the way to praise God and pray before Him, and many other things.
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> At the same time, it is a truthful mirror looking at the Islamic history and what events took place after the Prophet, God's peace be upon him and his family, especially at the time of the Caliphate of the Imam, peace be upon him. It also consists of an important aspect of his tradition, character, manners, knowledge and his deep understanding. It is important for all Muslims to gain the teachings and purification of their religious understanding from this book and pay attention, especially the youth of them, to reading it, reflecting on it and memorizing part of it. It is also worthy for those who claim to love the Imam, peace be upon him, and wish to have lived at his time to listen to his admonishments, be guided through his guidance and walk on his path, to do that through the illumination of what is found in this book. He, peace be upon him, surely said in the battle of the Camel that there is a group of people who participated with him in this battle who are still in the loins of the men and wombs of the women. He intended with that those who God knows their sincere intentions of their wish of being at his time and to follow him in their actions. Those are the people who will be resurrected with his sincere followers, peace be upon him, on the Day when every person will be resurrected following his leader, and that is because they followed the truth

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[781] Sīstānī, ʿA. (2013). *Inquiry about Nahj al-Balāghah*. Retrieved from https://www.sistani.org/arabic/qa/02411/

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without finding excuses in the doubts and try to belong to him through an ornamental wishful thinking. It is also necessary for the Muslim people in leadership roles to implement what he described of similar duties, and follow his example, and follow his steps in their morals and their actions. They should think of themselves as if they were his governors and workers so they can see how much they follow him and implement his path.

Much is written about Shiʿi theology, history, jurisprudence, culture and beliefs. Surprisingly, however, there is not much Western academic literature about the fourteen impeccables (*al-maʿsūmīn al-arbaʿat ʿashar*) or the Ahlulbayt. Early Shiʿi scholars worked diligently to document the teachings of the Ahlulbayt.[782] While Shiʿis are the minority among Muslims, their contributions to Islamic theology cannot be undermined. Moreover, Imamī Shiʿis do not consider themselves as a sect of Islam; rather, they are the essence of the religion itself, because the Imams are not just teachers of the religion, they are divinely appointed guides to preserve the religion of Islam. Therefore, Shiʿism did not develop after the Prophet's death, nor is it a political movement or an ideology that emerged in the second Islamic century. Shi'ism *is* the Islamic religion taught by the Prophet Muḥammad.[783] Hence, to truly understand Islamic theology, one must examine the lives, history and traditions of all fourteen impeccables.

Theology in Islam was the topic that occupied many of the early Islamic writings. During the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, people were mostly concerned with learning the religion of Islam, the Qurʾān, and were occupied defending the religion. Therefore, they did not ask many questions about complex theological matters. However, after the death of the Prophet, Imam

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[782] For a survey of early Shiʿi writings see Modarressi, H. (2003). *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature,* vol. 1. Oxford: One World Publication.
[783] Dakake, M.M. (2007). *The Charismatic Community*. New York: State University of New York Press.

ʿAlī began discussing, explaining and clarifying the teachings of the Prophet and the verses of the Qurʾān. Much of his teachings were compiled by renowned fourth Islamic century Shiʿi scholar and poet, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015) in a book that Raḍī called *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Some writers about *Nahj al-Balāghah* (NB) refer to the book as "the writings of Imam ʿAlī."[784]

This thesis examined theological concepts discussed in the *writings* of Imam ʿAlī found in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. By the fourth Islamic century, it was established that the roots of the religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) in the Imamī Shiʿi school consisted of the following five beliefs: *tawḥīd* (monotheism), *ʿadālah* (divine justice), *nubūwah* (prophethood), *Imamah* (divinely appointed leadership), and *maʿād* (resurrection and afterlife). Imam ʿAlī discussed all these beliefs in *Nahj al-Balāghah* and his methodology is different from the style of theologians in the fourth Islamic century, indicating that while *Nahj al-Balāghah* was compiled in the fourth Islamic century, it is not the words of Raḍī or any other scholar contemporary to Raḍī. In addition, Raḍī ensured to include the Imam's discussions about all these essential theological topics to possibly demonstrate the greatness of Imam ʿAlī, and in a subtle manner, to show the true beliefs of the Shiʿi school. Furthermore, since Imam ʿAlī was the first to follow the Prophet and is praised by all Muslims for his contributions to Islam, examining these deep theological topics shows that Shiʿi theology and Shīʿism in all its aspects *is* the true Islamic theology and teachings. All other Islamic schools drank from its fountains and gained from its knowledge.

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[784] Lakhani, M.A. (2006). *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam* (2006), Ed. Lakhani, M.A. Indiana: World Wisdom Inc.

This work demonstrated that Imam ʿAlī discussed fine details about *tawḥīd* (monotheism) such as God's Oneness, *waḥidiyyah*, His simple deity, *aḥadiyyah*, and His attributes being that of His essence. Regarding ʿ*adālah* (divine justice), Imam ʿAlī clearly states that while all power is from God, He showed people what is good and what is evil and gave human beings the ability to choose their deeds and provided them with the power to perform their actions. He makes them experience difficulties in this world, such as pain, to reduce their sins and help them achieve Paradise. In order to help the creation understand His message, and to clarify to them the good from the evil, He sent Prophets, who are perfect, impeccable humans, to guide humanity and supported those Prophets with miracles and scriptures. The last Messenger was the Prophet Muḥammad, who God sent him with a comprehensive message that was completed with the Ahlulbayt: Lady Faṭimah al-Zahrā' and the twelve impeccable Imams, starting with Imam ʿAlī and concluding with the twelfth Imam, al-Mahdī. The Ahlulbayt are the best of God's creation as they are impeccable, and they are the guides for people. The belief in Imamah and adhesion to the teachings of the Imams lead a person to the straight path God ordered people to follow, "And surely this is My straight path so follow it, and do not follow other paths that would lead you away from His way. That is what He ordered you with such that you can achieve piety," (6:153). Holding on to the teachings of the Prophet and the Ahlulbayt guarantees one success in this world and in the Hereafter. Imam ʿAlī continuously reminded people of the Hereafter and ordered them to follow his example in detaching themselves from this materialistic world and preparing for the eternal abode through piety and God-consciousness.

This piece is among the few Western scholarships on Imam ʿAlī, and it is the first to discuss the theology of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. This study will hopefully open the doors for others to investigate this valuable book, with all its diverse knowledge. For example, among the topics that can be thoroughly examined in *Nahj al-Balāghah* can be the following: historical context,[785] angels, the devil, homiletics, the Imam's description of the ant, the bat and the peacock and comparing that to zoological discoveries, the perspective of leadership in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, prayers (*duʿāʾ*) in Islamic traditions, and Islamic political thought especially through an in-depth analysis of letter 53.

Furthermore, this work may also encourage studies on theology, morality, politics and science based on the teachings attributed to the fourth Shiʿi Imam, ʿAlī al-Sajjad in *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjadiyyah*, and *Risalat al-Ḥuqūq*. In addition, it would be good to analyze the lives of the sixth Shiʿi Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq as well as the eighth Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, as their teachings can provide a thorough understanding of Shiʿi theology and political thought.

Nahj al-Balāghah demonstrates that Imam ʿAlī is the first to discuss complex theological matters, and hence, he is to be considered as the father of Islamic theology, or *ʿilm al-kalām*, as attested by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd. This, in turn, as Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd confirms,

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[785] For example, NB's description of the Prophet Muḥammad receiving the revelation is completely different from some Sunni accounts that describe him as being confused and not aware of what's happening. For an academic reference on the Sunni description of the Prophet Muḥammad receiving the message, see Ayoub, M. M. (2012). *Islam: Faith and History*. London: Oneworld Publications, p. 25-26. For NB's perspective, see the chapter on *nubūwah*. Moreover, the wars of Imam ʿAlī can be examined from his own perspective, which can shed light on the true events and what really happened in history.

shows that Shiʿi theology had an influence on all Islamic theologies and that Imamī scholars were not influenced by any Muʿtazilī opinions. Moreover, *Nahj al-Balāghah* also resonates the words of Imam ʿAlī and personifies them to the point where one can picture the Imam himself delivering these powerful sermons. The Imam's *writings*, or as referred to earlier in this book, his ʿAlawī revelations, moved people throughout the centuries and will continue to do so in a similar manner to the words of the Qur'ān. Imam ʿAlī's eloquent choice of words, metaphors, analogies, poetry and its amalgamation with the words of the Qur'ān results in a rich texture of language that has not been attained by anyone other than the Prophet himself. His actions and character that personify the Qur'ān, his fusion of the verses of the Qur'ān along with his words in a manner that results in such a harmonious blend, and his resonating, moving and inspirational words, as well as his ʿAlawī revelations which are as precious as pearls that continue to live on, indeed, derive a new meaning for the Prophetic saying, "ʿAlī is with the Qur'ān, and the Qur'ān is with ʿAlī."

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