

2.1 Imām ‘Alī’s Strength and Submission

OBJECTIVES

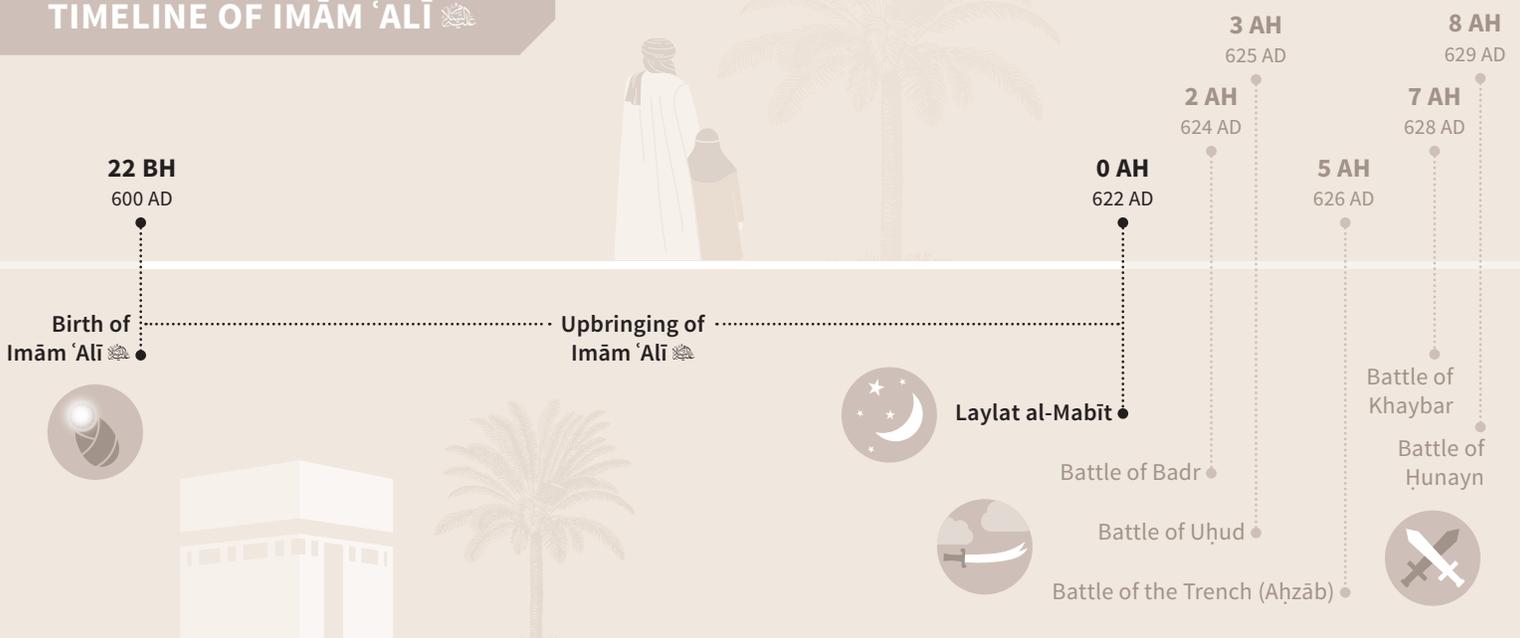
WE WILL:

- Identify the circumstances surrounding the birth of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ and how it was a miracle.
- Analyze the importance of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ being raised by the Prophet ﷺ.
- Outline the events surrounding the invitation of the Prophet’s family members to Islam.
- Analyze the actions of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ during *Laylat al-Mabīt*.
- Explain how Imām ‘Alī ﷺ demonstrated strength and submission by supporting the Prophet ﷺ in various circumstances.

AN OVERVIEW OF IMĀM ‘ALĪ ﷺ

Name	‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ
Kunyah	Abul Ḥasan, Abul Ḥasanayn, Abū Turāb
Title	Amīrul Mu’minīn
Parents	Ḥaḍrat Abū Ṭālib and Lady Fāṭimah bint Asad
Date of Birth	13th Rajab 22 BH (600 AD), 30 ‘Ām al-Fil
Birthplace	Inside of the Noble Ka’bah, Mecca, Arabia
Ring Inscription	اَلْمَلِكُ لِلّٰهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ - The Kingdom belongs exclusively to Allah, the One, the Almighty
Number of Children	27
Duration of Imāmah	30 Years
Date of Martyrdom	21st of the month of Ramaḍān, 40 AH
Place of Martyrdom	Masjid al-Kūfah, Iraq
Cause of Martyrdom	Struck by Ibn Muljim while offering <i>Fajr</i> prayers
Lifespan	63 Years
Location of Shrine	Najaf al-Ashraf, Iraq

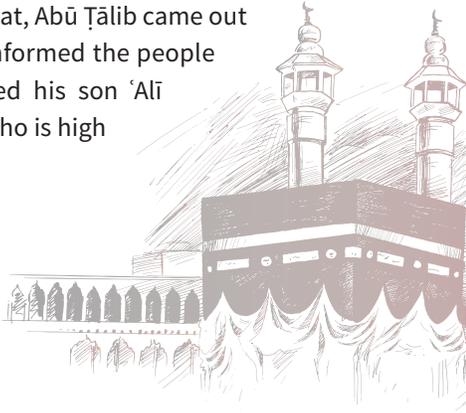
TIMELINE OF IMĀM ‘ALĪ ﷺ



A DIVINE BIRTH

One Friday morning on the 13th of Rajab, a pious woman—Lady Fāṭimah bint Asad—made her way toward the Ka’bah, praying out loud to Allah ﷻ. Suddenly, onlookers watched in awe as the walls of the Ka’bah cracked open, allowing her to enter inside of it, then closed behind her. People were unable to enter inside the actual Ka’bah for the next three days.¹ On the fourth day, Lady Fāṭimah bint Asad emerged from the Ka’bah, from the same crack that had split for her to enter, holding a precious baby boy in her arms.

According to some sources, when her husband and the father of this baby, Abū Ṭālib, found out about the birth of his son, he went to the Ka’bah and asked Allah ﷻ to inspire to him about what name they should give to their son. As a result, Almighty Allah ﷻ inspired him to name his newborn child, ‘Alī. Immediately after that, Abū Ṭālib came out of the Ka’bah and informed the people about having named his son ‘Alī which means ‘one who is high and superior.’



1 Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Al-Amālī*, P. 132;

2 ‘Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 35, P. 9, Ḥadīth #11.

3 Dimishqī, Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah*, Vol. 3, P. 25.

According to some sources, Lady Fāṭimah bint Asad narrates:

As I wanted to leave [the Ka’bah], a voice called out to me: “O Fāṭimah! Name him ‘Alī for surely he is ‘alī (exalted); and Allah, the Exalted and Sublime, says that ‘I have derived his name from My name, I have refined him with My etiquettes (adab), and I have made him aware of the hidden treasures of My knowledge. He is the one who will break the idols in My house. He is the one who will recite the call to prayer (adhān) on top of My house. He will sanctify Me, glorify Me, and testify to My Oneness. He is the Imām after My beloved—My Prophet, and My choicest of all creations, Muḥammad, My Messenger—and he will be his successor. So blessed be the one who loves him and helps him, and woe be upon the one who disobeys him, disgraces him, and denies him his rights.”²



STOP AND REFLECT: When Imām ‘Alī ﷺ was born, Allah ﷻ had already chosen him as the successor of the Prophet ﷺ. What is the importance of people knowing this from the very beginning?

Imām ‘Alī ﷺ was born ten years before the appointment (*mab’ath*) of the Prophet ﷺ. Six years later, there was a drought in Mecca, and Ḥaḍrat Abū Ṭālib’s financial position was not that good, so Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ asked him for permission³ to take Imām ‘Alī ﷺ into his home, care for him, and help raise him.



As Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ once said: “I chose to nurture that individual who Allah chose for me.”⁴ This relationship was one that was loved and desired by Allah ﷻ.

The Prophet ﷺ also said that:
“Allah created me and ‘Alī from the exact same *nūr* (light).”⁵

BI‘THAH:

The event where Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received the command from Allah ﷻ to begin his Prophetic mission, which occurred on the 27th of Rajab, when he was 40 years old.

MAB‘ATH:

official appointment of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ



STOP AND REFLECT: What do you think is the significance of Imām ‘Alī ؑ being raised by the Prophet ﷺ?

The life of Imām ‘Alī ؑ can be divided into five periods:

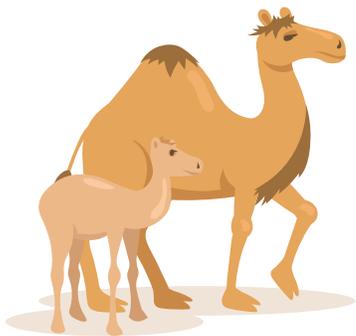
1. Birth to the Prophet’s appointment to Prophethood (*Bi‘that*).
2. *Bi‘that* to when the Prophet ﷺ and his companions left for Medina (*Hijrah*).
3. *Hijrah* to the Prophet’s death (*Riḥlah*).
4. *Riḥlah* to when Imām ‘Alī ؑ became the open caliph (*Khilāfah*).
5. *Khilāfah* to the martyrdom (*Shahādah*) of Imām ‘Alī ؑ.

THE BEST UPBRINGING (TARBIYAH)

We cannot even imagine the type of childhood that Imām ‘Alī ؑ must have had being nurtured by the Prophet ﷺ of Allah ﷻ himself! Sometimes the Prophet ﷺ would put him against his chest so that he could fall asleep there. He would even feed Imām ‘Alī ؑ with his own hands.

When he became an adult, Imām ‘Alī ؑ once said: “I followed him [the Prophet] wherever he went, just like a baby-camel follows its mother. Each day, I would learn a new aspect about his character and morals (*akhlāq*), then I would accept it and follow it like a command.”⁷

The event where the Prophet ﷺ received the command from Allah ﷻ to begin his Prophetic mission is known as the *bi‘thah* (appointment to Prophethood). When the Prophet ﷺ shared this command of Allah ﷻ with Imām ‘Alī ؑ, he ؑ became the first man to embrace Islam openly at the young age of 10 years old. From the first hours after the *mab‘ath* up until the last moments of the Prophet’s blessed life, Imām ‘Alī ؑ was right by his side. Tirelessly, Imām ‘Alī ؑ struggled in the path of Allah ﷻ to first establish Islam, then later safeguard it. When nobody else had the courage to stand up and act, it was Imām ‘Alī ؑ who came forward. Even when the pressures on him were immense, he remained steadfast. Whatever he had, he gave in the path of upholding the truth, and it is indeed through him that Islam and the truth were kept alive.



4 Al-Ḥasanī, Hāshim Ma’rūf, *Zindagānī Dawāzdah Imām ؑ*, Vol. 1, Pp. 149-150.

5 *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 38, P. 150.

6 *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 192, P. 222.

7 *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 192, P. 222.

Throughout his entire life, the Imām ﷺ showed how to fully submit to Allah ﷻ in multiple ways—through obeying the commands of the Prophet ﷺ, and acting in ways that showed his submission in extraordinary circumstances.

DA‘WAT DHŪL ‘ASHĪRAH (INVITATION OF THE RELATIVES)

During the first three years after his appointment, the Prophet ﷺ was commanded by Allah ﷻ not to spread Islam openly, but rather only to convey the teachings to a small, close group of people. After three years, he then received the following command by the Almighty:

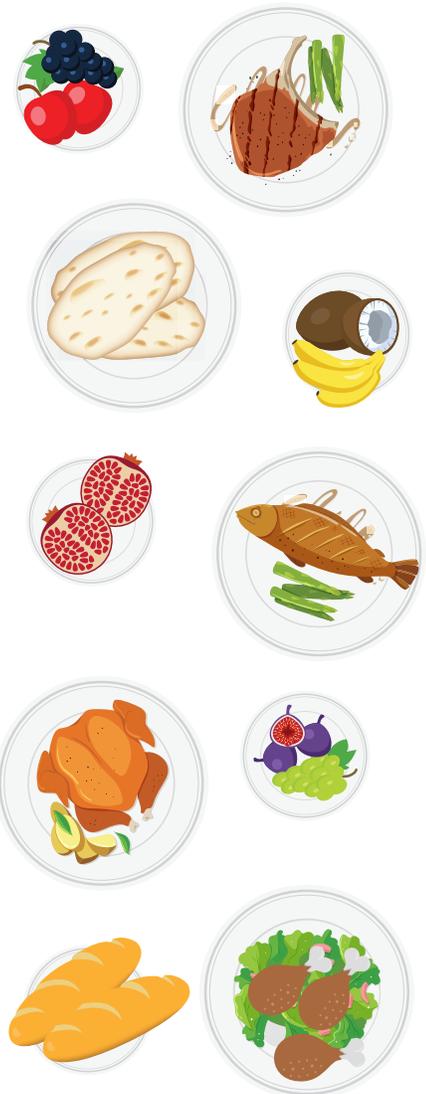
وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ
 “And warn your nearest relatives.”⁸

Upon receiving this command, the Prophet ﷺ called Imām ‘Alī ﷺ and told him: “O ‘Alī! Please go and prepare a meal, and invite all of the children of ‘Abdul Muṭṭalib (our family)!”⁹

That evening, about 40 men¹⁰ from the Banī Hāshim gathered to enjoy a great feast. To their surprise, no matter how much food they took, it did not decrease at all! After they ate to their heart’s content, the Prophet ﷺ told them that he wanted to speak to them. However, before he could deliver his message, his uncle Abū Lahab stood up and accused him of being a magician, and then convinced everyone to leave. The next day, the same thing happened.

For the third day in a row, Imām ‘Alī ﷺ prepared another feast and invited the relatives. This time, the Prophet ﷺ immediately stood up and addressed his relatives, including his uncles. He told them that he had been entrusted by Allah ﷻ to deliver the final religion—which is Islam. He said that Islam teaches humankind that there is no deity (god) except Allah ﷻ, and that everyone has been created equally as a servant of Allah ﷻ. He then asked the people: “Who amongst you will support me so that he can become my successor and leader (*khalīfah*) after me?”

At this point, only Imām ‘Alī ﷺ stood up and said: “I will, O Messenger of Allah.” The Prophet ﷺ asked him to sit back down, and again he asked the same question. Once more, Imām ‘Alī ﷺ stood up, and the Prophet ﷺ asked him to sit down. When he asked the question the third time, Imām ‘Alī ﷺ again stood up, and this time the Prophet ﷺ said: “O ‘Alī, you will be my successor after me.”¹¹ This was the first of many times where the Prophet ﷺ publicly announced who his successor would be. The Prophet’s family left the gathering laughing at how the Prophet ﷺ had appointed such a young successor after him.



The Prophet ﷺ said:

“O ‘Alī, you will be my successor after me.”

8 Noble Qur’ān, Sūrah ash-Shu‘arā’(26), Verse 214.

9 Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, *Tārīkh at-Ṭabarī*, 1357 Hijri, Egypt, Vol. 2, P. 62.

10 Ibn Ishāq, *As-Siyar wal-Maghāzī*, P. 146.

11 *Bihār al-Anwār*, Vol. 38, P. 221.

WAHĪ: divine revelation

ISLAM: complete submission to Allah ﷻ

UMMAH: the collective of the global Muslim population

LAYLAT AL-MABĪT: The Night of Sleeping, when Prophet Muhammad ﷺ migrated to Medina, and asked Imām ‘Alī ﷺ to stay behind and sleep in his bed so he safely could escape from Mecca.

In his early days, Imām ‘Alī ﷺ dedicated himself to the task of spreading Islam, and he became a pillar of support for the Prophet ﷺ. He was neither scared of the hardships that they faced, nor the threats of the enemies of Islam.



STOP AND REFLECT: One of the arguments against Imām Alī ﷺ being the successor of the Prophet ﷺ was that he was too young compared to the other companions. How does the story above show that his age did not matter?

Time after time, the Prophet ﷺ would announce that Imām ‘Alī ﷺ was his true successor. This story shows that some of the Muslims knew—even before the event of Ghadīr Khumm—that Imām ‘Alī ﷺ was supposed to be the leader after the death of the Prophet ﷺ.

Imām ‘Alī ﷺ was chosen by Allah ﷻ to be the Imām, and the Prophet ﷺ showed the status of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ at various events.

This initial event of feeding the relatives came to be known as *Da‘wat Dhūl ‘Ashīrah*. After this event, the Prophet ﷺ began spreading Islam openly throughout Mecca.

Many Arabs began accepting Islam, especially the poor and downtrodden people, who found Islam’s message of justice and equality appealing. Seeing how Islam was spreading, the Quraysh began to fear that they would lose their power and status. The earliest Muslims endured many hardships at the hands of the Quraysh to the extent that many of them had to migrate to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in order to seek refuge there.¹²



¹² *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 18, P. 191.



LAYLAT AL-MABĪT

Islam also began to spread to Medina, and a group of influential people from Medina invited the Prophet ﷺ to come and live among them, and establish an Islamic government there. The Quraysh devised a plan to murder the Prophet ﷺ. They decided that each tribe would send one person to the house of the Prophet ﷺ the night he planned to leave Mecca, and they would collectively kill the Prophet ﷺ so no one person or tribe could be blamed.

Allah ﷻ informed the Prophet ﷺ about the Quraysh's plan through Divine revelation (*wahī*), so the Prophet ﷺ decided to migrate to Medina that same night. He asked Imām 'Alī ﷺ to stay behind and sleep in his bed so he could escape from there. Some time during that night, the group of men designated to kill the Prophet ﷺ burst into the house. When they were just about to attack the bed, they realized that it was Imām 'Alī ﷺ sleeping there, not the Prophet ﷺ. They became very angry and tried to track the Prophet's movements.

In later years, Imām 'Alī ﷺ said that he never slept as peacefully as he did that one night. Due to the help of Allah ﷻ and loyalty of Imām 'Alī ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ was able to successfully leave Mecca and safely make it to Qubā', a city on the outskirts of Medina.¹³

Whenever we are doing any action for the pleasure of Allah ﷻ, however difficult the situation may be, we have to endeavor to make sure that our intention remains purely for the sake of Allah ﷻ, not for anyone else or even our own good. Once we do this, Allah ﷻ will elevate our status and give us the full rewards of that action.



STOP AND REFLECT: Why do you think Imām 'Alī ﷺ described his sleep that night as the most peaceful one? What is this description meant to show us?

The true meaning of the word Islam is **complete submission** to what Allah ﷻ wills, as opposed to our own desires. Imām 'Alī ﷺ is the perfect example of true submission. This event, before the Muslims migrated to Medina, was just the start of Imām 'Alī ﷺ demonstrating his full obedience to the commands of Allah ﷻ. In later years, we will learn how he displayed his submission and courage in various battles; and how after the Prophet's death, he preserved true Islam during periods of unrest and chaos in the Muslim nation (*ummah*).

13 Shaykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Amālī*, P. 466.

Activity 2.1a: Review Questions

1. Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ once said: “*I have chosen to nurture that individual who Allah has chosen for me.*” Think about this statement. What does nurturing mean, and why was it important that Imām ‘Alī ؑ be nurtured by Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ?

2. All of the Prophet’s relatives were from which tribe?
 - a. Quraysh
 - b. Aws
 - c. Khazraj
3. The true meaning of the word Islam is _____.
4. *Laylat al-Mabīt* was the night when:
 - a. The Prophet ﷺ received the first revelation
 - b. The night Imām ‘Alī ؑ slept in the Prophet’s bed so that he could leave for Mecca
 - c. Another name for the night of *Mi‘rāj*
5. In this lesson we discussed that whenever we are doing any action for the pleasure of Allah ﷻ, however difficult the situation may become, we have to endeavor to make sure that our intention remains purely for the sake of Allah ﷻ. How did Imām ‘Alī ؑ show that his actions were only for the sake of Allah ﷻ on the night of the migration (*Hijrah*)?

Activity 2.1b: Skit

Imagine that you are a relative of the Prophet who was invited to the event of *Da'wat Dhūl 'Ashīrah*. Before the Prophet ﷺ gives his speech, what do you imagine the atmosphere to be like? During the speech, are people attentive or dismissive?

Create a short skit with your classmates reflecting on this event. Be sure to include the full script. Use the rubric below to guide your work.

	1 Ineffective	2 Somewhat Effective	3 Considerably Effective	4 Highly Effective
Body Language/ Etiquette	Struggled to maintain respectful language during the dialogue/skit.	Language used was somewhat respectful, but there was room for improvement.	Language used was respectful, but body language could have been improved.	Maintained respectful language and body language during the entire dialogue/skit.
Grammar	There are 5 or more grammatical mistakes.	There are 3-5 grammatical mistakes.	There are 1-2 grammatical mistakes.	There are no grammatical mistakes in the poster/script.
Islamic Principles / Accuracy	Content does not meet Islamic Principles mentioned in the lesson.	Content meets Islamic Principles, however there is a lack of accuracy in item description.	Content presented meets almost all of the Islamic Principles mentioned above, while maintaining accuracy of item description.	Content presented was according to all Islamic Principles mentioned above, while maintaining accuracy of item description.
Creativity	Skit lacked organization and cohesiveness.	Skit presented somewhat creatively, but left the audience wanting more.	Skit was presented in an engaging manner, but lacked cohesiveness.	Skit was presented in an engaging and catchy way in terms of content and cohesiveness.
Quality	Content presented was not convincing or compelling.	Content presented did not serve the intended purpose and lacked quality.	Content presented did not serve the intended purpose, but still demonstrated quality work.	Content presented was extremely compelling and convincing.

Activity 2.1c: Discuss and Write

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions with a partner.

1. Did the Prophet ﷺ know that Imām ‘Alī ؑ would be his successor before the event of *Da‘wat Dhūl ‘Ashīrah*? Support your answer with proof.

2. In the event of *Da‘wat Dhūl ‘Ashīrah*, the Prophet ﷺ announced that Imām ‘Alī ؑ will be his successor after he asked who would support him three times. Why do you think he did this instead of just announcing to his family who his successor will be after him?

3. Imām ‘Alī ؑ said that he had the most peaceful and soundest sleep on that night of *Laylat al-Mabīt*. Why do you think that was the case?

4. Using your answers above and what you know about the nurturing (*tarbiyah*) of Imām ‘Alī ؑ, and any other events from his life, explain why the status of Imām ‘Alī ؑ should have been clear to the people.

Activity 2.1d: Scenarios

Fill in the empty boxes below with an appropriate response for each scenario discussing what the clouded intention in a scenario can be and how to improve oneself by following the examples of Imām ‘Alī ؑ. The first one has been done for you.

Then, use the last two rows to identify a place in your daily routine where you have a clouded intention, and how you can improve yourself. Do not share this with others.

SCENARIO	CLOUDED INTENTION	HOW TO IMPROVE
<p>Recitation of the Qur’ān</p>	<p>Someone likes to show off how good their recitation is, and so they recite it out loud anytime someone might be nearby.</p>	<p>Changing your intention to recite the Qur’ān only for the sake of Allah <small>ﷻ</small>.</p> <p>If someone praises your recitation, then thank Allah <small>ﷻ</small>, and remember that your good voice and ability to recite was gifted by Allah <small>ﷻ</small>.</p>
<p>Eating a healthy diet</p>	<p>I want people to praise me for how healthy the food I am eating is, so I eat very healthy when others are around.</p>	
<p>Wearing nice, clean clothes</p>		<p>Believers (<i>mu’minīn</i>) should remain neat and clean, and look nice for the sake of Allah <small>ﷻ</small> because He has told them to be clean; and so that they represent their values well.</p>
<p>Praying at the mosque or center</p>		

2.2 From Prophethood (Nubuwwah) to Imamate (Imāmah)

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Outline the ways in which Islam is the complete and final religion until the Day of Judgment.
- Recognize the need for a Divinely-sent guide who can help explain the religion to humankind, guide humanity, and be a perfect role model for people to follow, acknowledging the fact that Islam has not and will not change.
- Compare and contrast the perspectives about the leadership of Imām ‘Alī عليه السلام held by various Muslims after the death of Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم.
- Identify that the Imāms عليهم السلام have access to Divine knowledge, and are all from one light (*nūrun wāḥid*).

ḤALĀL:
permissible and lawful

ḤARĀM:
impermissible and forbidden



STOP AND REFLECT: What does *Imāmah* mean to you? How does it play a role in your daily life?

In order for us to become closer to Allah ﷻ, He has given us a clear set of guidelines in the form of a Divine religion. He also sent Prophets to communicate these guidelines and explain them to the people. Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم was the final Prophet sent by Allah ﷻ, and he brought the last and complete religion, Islam. However, what about after the Prophets—what happens then? Do we not need Divine guides after the Prophets as well? Who are our role models after Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم passed away?

THE DIVINE LAW (SHARĪ‘AH) IS COMPLETE

We previously learned that Islam is a complete way of life, and it incorporates everything that we need to become closer to Allah ﷻ. There is a famous tradition (*ḥadīth*) that discusses this:

“The *ḥalāl* of Muḥammad will be *ḥalāl* until the Day of Judgment, and the *ḥarām* of Muḥammad will be *ḥarām* until the Day of Judgment.”¹



STOP AND REFLECT: What does this above *ḥadīth* mean?

It means that we will never need a new religion or a new set of instructions and guidelines because Islam is the best and most complete religion.

However, even though we have a perfect and all-inclusive religion, we still need someone who is the closest to Allah ﷻ to teach us and provide us with explanations of the laws. We also need the best role models to help show us the way. So even though we do not have new laws after the death of Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, we still have to have Divine leaders, known as the 12 Imāms عليهم السلام, who help us apply the laws and guidelines.

AFTER THE PROPHET صلى الله عليه وسلم

After Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم passed away, the Muslims split over who they wanted to lead the Muslim nation (*ummah*). Throughout the Prophet’s life, he was extremely close to Imām ‘Alī عليه السلام and even raised him in his home when he was a young child. Imām ‘Alī عليه السلام was the first Muslim man to believe in the Prophet’s message, even though he was a young man at the time. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم would teach him everything that was revealed to him from Allah ﷻ, and Imām ‘Alī عليه السلام learned the complete religion of Islam and the entire interpretation of the Qur’ān directly from the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

1 Shaykh Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Vol. 1, P. 58.

Near the end of the Prophet's life, he gathered all of the Muslims in a place called Ghadīr Khumm. He told them that Imām 'Alī ؑ was their leader and master, and that when he passed away, the Muslim nation (*ummah*) had to hold onto two things: the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt ؑ. He raised Imām 'Alī's arm high in the air as he declared him as his successor; and on that day, many Muslims gave their allegiance to Imām 'Alī ؑ and congratulated him on the status that he had earned. This was not the only time when the Prophet ﷺ made it clear that Imām 'Alī ؑ was meant to be the Divine leader after he passed away. Imām 'Alī's ؑ job was to guide the people, and continue the message that had been sent by Allah ﷻ, and to explain, clarify, and lead the Muslims in all different aspects of life.

However, when the Prophet ﷺ passed away, the Muslims became divided. Some of them appointed a leader whom they themselves wanted instead of following what the Prophet ﷺ had instructed them. Before the Prophet ﷺ was even buried, a few influential individuals gathered together and decided that Abū Bakr would lead the Muslim community. They believed that there was no need for a Divinely-appointed leader, and they could just choose the leader they wanted since they already had the final religion of Islam. They felt that the Qur'an was enough of a guide, and the Muslims just needed a political leader without the same special spiritual qualifications that a Prophet had.



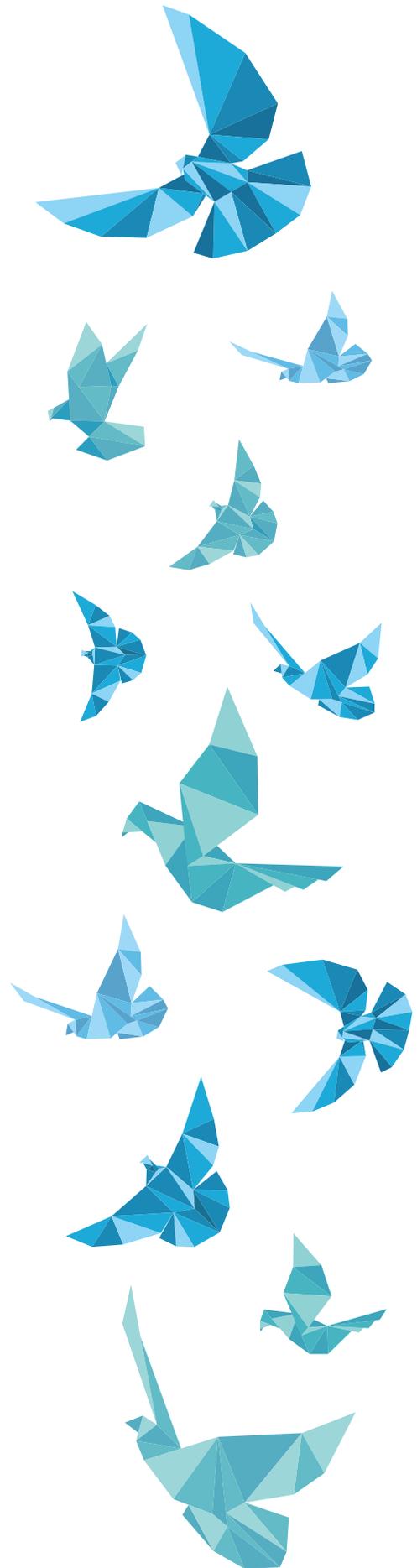
STOP AND REFLECT: Why is it a problem to only have a political leader without the spiritual qualifications?

The majority of Muslims decided to follow Abū Bakr and he became the caliph (*khalīfah*)—the political leader of the Muslims. This group of Muslims later on came to be known as the Sunnis.

Imām 'Alī ؑ and Sayyidah Fāṭimah ؑ informed whoever they could that what these people were doing was incorrect, and not what Allah ﷻ had instructed or wanted, but very few people supported them, and most of them decided not to adhere to this Divine command. When Imām 'Alī ؑ saw that people did not want to follow him, he did not force them, even though they were wrong. He wanted them to become truly guided, but the Muslim nation was very fragile, and he did not want to do anything that would lead to the destruction of the *ummah*. However, he and the other Imāms ؑ continued to guide the people as role models, and explained the laws of Islam to them, and taught the knowledge of the Qur'an.

Even though they did not have the political power that Allah ﷻ wanted them to have and had appointed for them, the Imāms ؑ always helped the people and guided them in whatever way they could.

We always need to follow a leader and role model who has the highest spiritual qualifications so that they can guide us and lead us to become as close as we can to Allah ﷻ, and help us practice all of the teachings of Islam. Furthermore, we always need a proper connection and access to Divine knowledge; and the Imāms ؑ are that connection to Allah ﷻ and the Prophets, and they have been given all of the knowledge that is necessary for our guidance. This is the role of the Imāms ؑ.



THE DIVINE GUIDES

The Muslims who believe that the leaders were appointed by Allah ﷻ after the final Prophet ﷺ and the completion of Prophethood are the Shī'ahs! There are 12 Imāms ﷺ who were Divinely-appointed by Allah ﷻ as leaders of the nation after the death of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ—beginning with Imām 'Alī ﷺ, and ending with Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ and they hold the highest rank after the final Messenger ﷺ. They are not Prophets, but reached a spiritual status that was higher than some of the Prophets even—other than Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Even though the Imāms ﷺ did not bring any new laws from Allah ﷻ, they teach, implement, and guide us to follow the perfect religion brought by Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

As we mentioned earlier, the Prophet ﷺ himself told us about the important role of his family, the Ahlul Bayt ﷺ. The above narration mentions how he told the people that he was leaving behind two very weighty (i.e. valuable) resources: the Qur'ān and the Ahlul Bayt ﷺ, and how these two will always be together and hand-in-hand guide the people until the Day of Judgment. He then said that whoever follows these two resources will always remain on the Straight Path! This tradition (*ḥadīth*) is known as *Ḥadīth ath-Thaqalayn*, and has been narrated by 25 companions of the Prophet ﷺ in Sunnī sources, and in 82 different Shī'ah sources.

After the Prophet ﷺ gave this sermon at Ghadīr Khumm, Allah ﷻ revealed the final verse of the Qur'ān, and said that it was on that day that He “perfected for you your religion;” and “completed [His] blessings” upon us; and “approved Islam as [our] religion.”²

From this event, the Prophet's words, and the revelation of this verse, we can see that *Imāmah* is a very important part of Islam. In fact, it is so important that Islam was complete **only** after Allah ﷻ introduced the concept of *Imāmah*.

Before we learn about the lives of these Imāms ﷺ, we must first understand one very important point. Although the Imāms ﷺ are 12 different individuals, they are *nūrun wāḥid*³—‘one light.’

This means that although every Imām ﷺ lived during different times and circumstances, each of them acted in the exact same way as any other Imām would have if they were in those circumstances. For example, if Imām Ḥusayn ﷺ was in the place of Imām Ḥasan ﷺ, he too would have made a peace treaty, rather than fight. The circumstances that Imām Ḥasan ﷺ and Imām Ḥusayn ﷺ were in differed, which is why they responded the way they did accordingly. Their knowledge was from Allah ﷻ, thus it was complete and entirely perfect. They did not act on their own desires, but rather they acted according to the Will of Allah ﷻ. The Imāms ﷺ all shared a common goal—to guide all of humanity towards their purpose in life—and each Imām ﷺ performed their actions according to the commands of Allah ﷻ, and laid the foundation to help others achieve this goal.



STOP AND REFLECT: Consider what would be the consequences of having leaders who do not share a common God-centric goal. What is one modern-day example of this?

Keeping this in mind, we can view the approximately 250 years from the *Imāmah* of Imām 'Alī ﷺ to the martyrdom (*shahādah*) of Imām al-'Askarī ﷺ as one continuous span. This in itself is one of the miracles of *Imāmah*. These were 11 separate individuals, yet throughout the span of their 250 years or so, there were no contradictions between the decisions or actions of any of the Imāms ﷺ.

² Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5), Verse 3.

³ *Ziyārat al-Jāmi'ah al-Kabīrah*.

IMĀMAH AND KHILĀFAH

It is important to understand the distinction between *Imāmah* and *khilāfah*. As we know, there must always be a Divinely-sent guide on Earth in order for there to be a connection between us and Allah ﷻ. Logically, we can come to the conclusion that a person who is immaculate and free from committing any sins would be best fit to lead the nation (*ummah*)—both religiously, socially, and politically. The 12 Imāms ﷺ were the only ones who were worthy of fulfilling these responsibilities, but unfortunately most of them were not able to lead politically and openly because other people sought this power for themselves.

Political leadership is called *khilāfah*—caliphate, and a political ruler is called a *khalīfah*—or caliph. This is why when we talk about the first four caliphs, or say that Imām ‘Alī ﷺ was the fourth caliph (*khalīfah*), it means that he became the fourth of the political rulers after the death of the Noble Prophet ﷺ. The right to rule—or the right to be the true *khalīfah*—was always with the Imāms ﷺ, but we say that other people were caliphs because in history, they were the political rulers.

This span of 260 years of *Imāmah* (until the 12th Imām went into occultation) can be divided into four periods:

1. The Period of Patience and Standing Firm (25 Years):

Death (*riḥlah*) of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ until the apparent political rulership (*khilāfah*) of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ.

2. The Period of Reaching Power:

Caliphate (*khilāfah*) of Imām ‘Alī ﷺ (4 years and 9 months), and Imām Ḥasan ﷺ (6 months and 3 days).

3. Creating a Foundation for an Islamic Government:

Treaty of Imām Ḥasan ﷺ to the martyrdom (*shahādah*) of Imām Ḥusayn ﷺ.

4. Long-term Preparation for an Islamic Government:

Martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn ﷺ until the advent and reappearance (*zuhūr*) of Imām az-Zamān ﷺ.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that Divinely-sent guides play a significant role in helping us become closer to Allah ﷻ. Without these leaders and immaculate individuals, we would not have continuous guidance on how to make good choices and follow Allah’s commands completely. After the last Prophet ﷺ was sent to teach Islam, the final religion for all of humanity, the Imāms ﷺ were then appointed to be the Divine leaders who continue to explain the true message and perfect religion. They teach people about Islam and help human beings remain steadfast on the right path. They also serve as role models, and guide and teach humankind to become as spiritually close to Allah ﷻ as they can be. Following in their footsteps is like following in the footsteps of the Prophet ﷺ toward Allah ﷻ.



Activity 2.2a: Making Inferences

Consider the titles of the four periods in which the 260 years of *Imāmah* have been broken up. Explain why you think each title is appropriate for that period using your knowledge thus far.

1. **The Period of Patience and Standing Firm (25 Years):** Death (*riḥlah*) of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ until the apparent political rulership (*khilāfah*) of Imām ‘Alī ؑ.

2. **The Age of Reaching Power:** Caliphate of Imām ‘Alī ؑ (4 years and 9 months) and Imām Ḥasan ؑ (6 months and 3 days).

3. **Creating a Foundation for an Islamic Government:** Treaty of Imām Ḥasan ؑ to the martyrdom (*shahādah*) of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ.

4. **Long-term Preparation for an Islamic Government:** Martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ until the advent and reappearance of Imām az-Zamān ؑ.



REFLECTION: Why do you think the last period spans all the way from the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ to the return of Imām al-Mahdī ؑ?

Activity 2.2b: Review Questions

Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. The following verse was revealed on the Day of Ghadīr. What does it tell us about *Imāmah*?

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَمَّمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

Today, I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessings upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion. ⁴

2. Shī'ahs and Sunnīs have different beliefs about *Imāmah*. What is this difference, and why do the Shī'ahs believe in the necessity of *Imāmah*?
3. What happened after the death of the Prophet ﷺ? What did Imām 'Alī ؑ do, and why did he not take his right of becoming the caliph?
4. Why do we need *Imāms* after the Prophets?
5. What are the *thaqalayn*? When did the Prophet ﷺ tell us what this is?
6. What is the difference between a Divinely-appointed leader, and a leader that people choose?

⁴ Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5), Verse 3.