

THE PROPHET'S TRUE SUCCESSOR

Before his death, the Prophet Muhammad appointed Imam as his successor to be the leader of the Muslim nation. The issue of succession was contentious, but among the Muslims there were none holding the merits and virtues of Imam Ali. The Prophet Muhammad would refer to him as his brother, friend, and vicegerent. He told Imam Ali, **"You are in the same position with respect to me as Aaron (Harun) was to Moses (Musa), except that there is no prophet after me."** These words allude to the Qur'anic verse describing how Moses asked God for a helper:

"He [Moses] said: 'O my Lord! Expand my chest for me, and make my affair easy to me, and loosen the knot from my tongue, (that) they may understand my word; and give to me an aide from my family: Aaron, my brother; strengthen my back by him, and associate him (with me) in my affair, so that we should glorify You much, and remember You often. Surely, You are aware of what we (do).' He said: 'You are indeed granted your petition, O Moses.'" (The Qur'an, Chapter 20, Verses 25-36)

In essence, Imam Ali had the same rank and role as the Prophet Aaron, except of course he wasn't a prophet since the prophethood ended with the Prophet Muhammad.

PERFECT LEADERSHIP

Tragically, many of the very people who had given their allegiance to Imam Ali during the time of the Prophet Muhammad betrayed their trust in order to gain power. As a result, Imam Ali was prevented from fully exercising his leadership of the Muslim nation until the last five years of his life.

When he became the undisputed ruler of the Islamic realm, he would walk in the streets and guide the lost and help the destitute. Imam Ali provided sustenance for untold numbers of people and refused to invest in opulent palaces as his enemies had. Whenever he was asked why he associated with the poor, Imam Ali would recite the following verse from the Holy Qur'an:

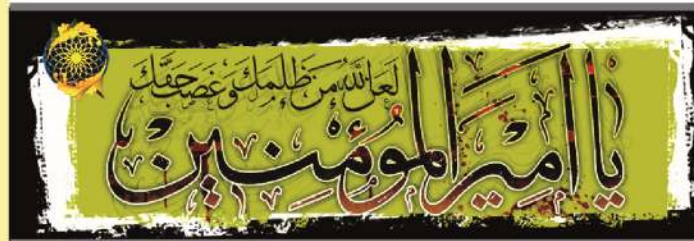
"(As for) that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief and the good end is for those who guard (against evil)." (The Qur'an, Chapter 28, Verse 83)

During the rule of the previous caliphs, the socio-economic status of Muslims was one of poverty and unequal distribution of wealth. Imam Ali's reign ushered in a wave of change and economic equality. He founded his government on four basic principles guaranteed to every citizen: the right to live, the right of thought, the right of action, and the right of racial equality.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Imam Ali's speeches and writings have left for the world an ocean of knowledge and virtue to gain from:

"The words of a wise man are behind his heart while the heart of a fool is behind his words."
"A fool's mind is at the mercy of his tongue and a wise man's tongue is under the control of his mind."
"Submission to Allah's Will is the best companion; wisdom is the noblest heritage; theoretical and practical knowledge are the best signs of distinction; deep thinking will present the clearest picture of every problem."



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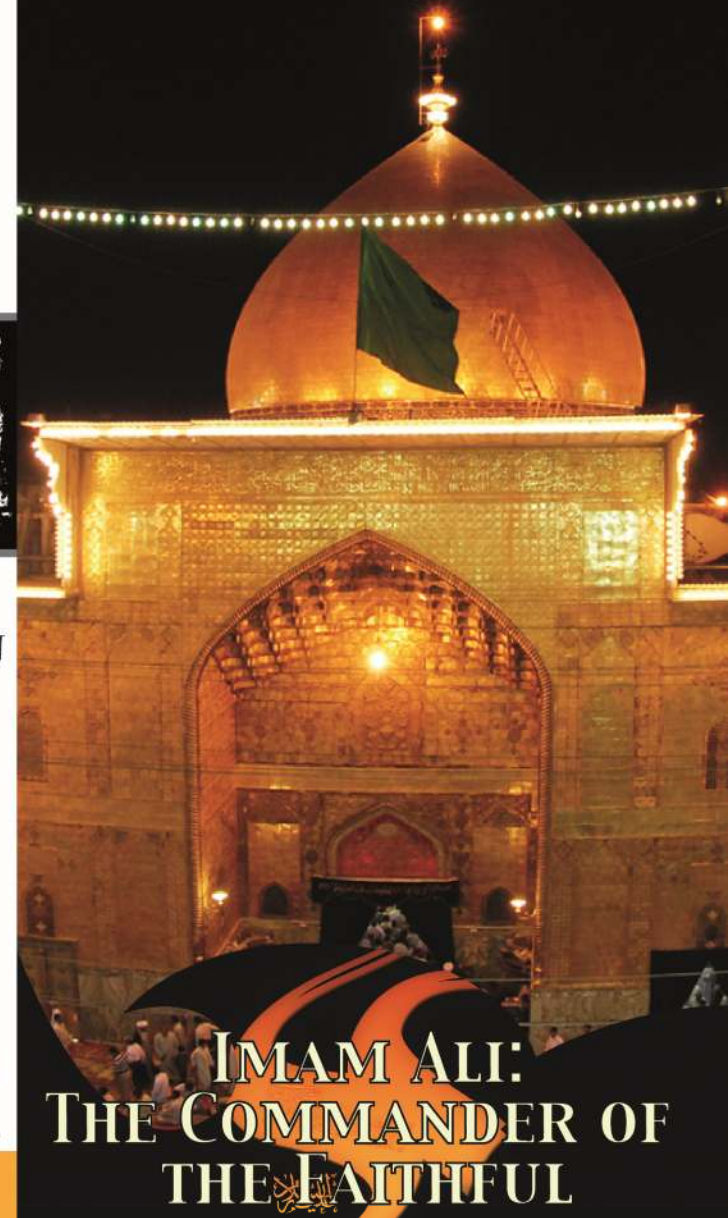
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Version 1.0



BACKGROUND

Philosopher, leader, poet, courageous soldier, and inspiring humanitarian. These are just a few of the identifiers used by historians, poets, philosophers, and writers ranging from Simon Ockley to Charles Mills to describe Ali, son of Abu Talib. One wonders: who was this person? How great must his presence have been, such that centuries have passed and the United Nations even today uses his words to inspire nations on how to conduct themselves?



WHO WAS IMAM ALI?

Twenty three years before the call to Islam was made, a child was born to Fatima, daughter of Asad, a noble lady of the Quraysh tribe. From his birth it was evident that this newborn, named Ali, would be unrivaled in his stature. As an indication of his exalted status, God opened the doors of His own sacred House (the Kaaba) in Mecca as his birthplace. His father Abu Talib was the uncle and guardian of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny).

Imam Ali was the first person to accept the Prophetic mission and was undeniably the most loyal and ardent supporter of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. God and His Prophet recognized his sacrifices by granting him the honor of being the Prophet's successor and vicegerent. Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali was entrusted with the prophetic legacy he had helped establish.

As a father and husband, Imam Ali was the best exemplar for all of mankind. His wife was Lady Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, who is regarded by Muslims as the greatest and most perfect woman of all time. Their union represented a match between the most perfect couple in history. The house of Lady Fatima and Imam Ali produced among the most exalted personalities in Islam, including the Prince of Martyrs, Imam Hussain.



THE CITY OF KNOWLEDGE

The Prophet Muhammad said, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate." Indeed, Imam Ali's immense knowledge spanned the disciplines of theology, metaphysics, biology, astronomy, medicine, and the origin of the universe. The scope of the scholarly work and study of Imam Ali is manifested in *The Peak of Eloquence*, a collection of his sayings and sermons.

Imam Ali trained and assigned under his supervision Abu al-Aswad al-Duali to formulate Arabic grammar. Eventually, Abu al-Aswad would regulate the syntax of the Holy Quran by fixing vowels and diacritical points using the knowledge he learned from Imam Ali. In the fields of medicine and physiology, many of Imam Ali's ideas and beliefs correspond to those held by scientists today. Imam Ali describes the human body as having three parts, "People have three parts: flesh, bones, and nerves." Here, he is referring to the human skeletal and nervous system and internal organs and tissues. Imam Ali has also offered health advice that is still followed today such as limiting overeating and how to maximize the digestive system.

THE ESSENCE OF NOBILITY

What has attracted both Muslims and non-Muslims to the character of Imam Ali? First and foremost, his devotion to God was unparalleled and is reminiscent of God's prophets and messengers. The humility of Imam Ali inspired Muslims at the time, and very often during his tenure as the leader of the Islamic world, he would go to bed hungry after giving up his already meager meals to the needy of his community.



The righteous speech and refined character of Imam Ali has inspired an immense literature of prose, poems, and sermons. The historian Edward Gibbons provides a glance at the life of the last of this great Muslim:

"The zeal and virtue of Ali were never outstripped by any recent proselyte. He united the qualifications of a poet, a soldier, and a saint; his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings; and every antagonist, in the combats of the tongue or of the sword, was subdued by his eloquence and valor. From the first hour of his mission to the last rites of his funeral, the Apostle was never forsaken by a generous friend, whom he delighted to name his brother, his vicegerent, and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses." (History of the Arabs, p. 183)

