

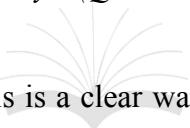
Imamat in the Holy Qur'an

Syed-Mohsin Naquvi

The most explicit mention of the concept of Imamat, its need for the Muslims, as well its necessity for salvation is given in the following verse:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ
يَقْرَأُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا ﴿٧١﴾

"(Remember) the Day when We will call every people with their Imam; then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with unjustly." (Q.17:71)



Mohsena Memorial Foundation

This is a clear warning to everyone to look for, recognize, and choose the right Imam and follow him. The Sunni scholars, on the other hand, have opined variously when commenting on this verse. In their opinion, the word Imam could mean the leader, the apostle, the Book, or the list of deeds.

One of the great Sunni scholars, Mulla Ali Qari, has stated in his *Sharh-e-Fiqh-e-Akbar*, that there is a famous hadith of the Prophet (pbuh), which goes like this:

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ إِمَامَ زَمَانِهِ فَقَدْ مَاتَ مِيتَةَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ

"Anyone who dies without knowing the Imam of his time, dies the death of jahiliyya."

Please note that the Shi'a scholar Mulla Baqir Majlisi has quoted this same hadith from sixteen different sources in his monumental work *Bihar al-Anwar* (102 volumes), and they are all from our Imams through the chain of Shi'a narrators. The wording of the hadith is exactly the same. We have given here the Sunni source. This hadith, when read in conjunction with the Qur'anic verse (17:71), does not leave any doubt for an intelligent person that the word imam here means for what it is - *the imam of the time*.

Abdullah Yusufali writes in reference to this verse, as follows:

“Some understand the meaning to be that each People or group will appear with its Leader, who will bear witness to its virtues or sins. Another view is that the imam is their revelation, their Book. A third is that the imam is the record of deeds spoken of in the next clause. I prefer the first¹.”

The belief in divinely inspired infallible leaders, or Imams, is based on verses in the Holy Qur'an as explained by the Prophet himself and other members of the holy Ahl-ul-Bayt. There are twelve verses in the Qur'an which list the attributes, qualifications and requirements of an Imam, and according to the Shi'a faith, there are twelve Imams after our Prophet (may Allah's peace and our salams be unto them all). What a beautiful coincidence that is! Or maybe, that is also a subtle indication of the truthfulness of this belief for the followers of the Truth. The verses are listed below:


Mohsena Memorial Foundation
 Conveying Communities Through Education
 2:124, 9:12, 11:17, 15:79, 17:71, 21:73, 25:74, 28:5, 28:41, 32:24, 36:12, 46:12

The first indication of this concept in the Qur'an is in the story of Ibraheem:

﴿وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۚ
 قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ۝﴾

"And when His Lord tried him with some words and he completed them, He said: I will make you an Imam of men. And from my children? Asked Ibraheem. He said: My covenant does not include the unjust." (Q.2:124)

:9:12

¹ Abdullah Yusufali, Qur'an - Translation and Commentary, Note: 2266

وَإِنْ تَكْفُرُوا أَتَيْنَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ عَهْدِهِمْ وَطَعَنُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ فَقَاتِلُوا أَئِمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَا أَيْمَانَ لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْتَهُونَ.

“And if they break their pledges after their treaty (hath been made with you) and assail your religion, then fight the heads of disbelief - Lo! they have no binding oaths - in order that they may desist.”

11:17:

أَفَمَنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ وَيَتْلُوهُ شَاهِدٌ مِّنْهُ وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَىٰ إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهِ ۚ مِنَ الْأَحْزَابِ ۖ فَالْنَارُ مَوْعِدُهُ ۚ فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّنْهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ.

“Is he (to be counted equal with them) who relieth on a clear proof from his Lord, and a witness from Him reciteth it, and before it was the Book of Moses, an example and a mercy? Such believe therein, and Whoso disbelieveth therein of the clans, the Fire is his appointed place. So be not thou in doubt concerning it. Lo! it is the Truth from thy Lord; but most of mankind believe not.”

15:79:

فَأَنْتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمَا لَبِإِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ

“So We took vengeance on them; and lo! they both are on a high road, plain to see.”

17:71:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ ۖ فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينَةٍ ۖ فَاقْرَأْهُ ۖ وَكِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا

Beware of the Day We will summon every people with their leader. So whoever will be given their record in their right hand will read it 'happily' and will not be wronged even by the width of the thread of a date stone

21:73:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا
عَبِيدِينَ

“And We made them chiefs who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and the right establishment of worship and the giving of alms and they were worshippers of Us (alone).”

25:74:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا.

And who say: Our Lord! Vouchsafe us comfort of our wives and of our offspring, and make us patterns for (all) those who ward off (evil).

28:5:

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ.

And We desired to show favor unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors,

28:41:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ.

And We made them patterns that invite unto the Fire, and on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped.

32:24,

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ.

And when they became steadfast and believed firmly in Our revelations, We appointed from among them leaders who guided by Our command.

36:12

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَءَاتَاهُمْ ۚ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ

46:12:

وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَىٰ إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً ۚ وَهَٰذَا كِتَابٌ مُّصَدِّقٌ لِّسَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّيُنذِرَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا
وَيُبَشِّرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ.

When before it there was the Scripture of Moses, an example and a mercy; and this is a confirming Scripture in the Arabic language, that it may warn those who do wrong and bring good tidings for the righteous.



Mohsena Memorial Foundation
Connecting Communities Through Education