



The Centre for Intra-Muslim Studies (CIMS)
cims.almahdi.edu

THE SUCCESSION OF THE PROPHET AND THE ISSUE OF QIRTAS | SHIA PERSPECTIVE

As the Prophet lay on his deathbed with his companions by his side, he tells them “Let me write for you something, after which you never go astray” to which one of the companions, reportedly to be Umar ibn Khattab, replies “The Prophet is delirious (*hajara*), the book of God is enough”. This results in the companions arguing and raising their voices in the Prophet’s presence, who orders them to leave. The Shia interpret the Prophet’s desire to write something down as his desire to put down on paper what he had mentioned on multiple occasions regarding his successor being Ali bin Abi Talib. Shaykh Mahmood Dhalla presented the Shia perspective on this incident at the Centre for Intra-Muslim Studies (CIMS).

Shaykh Mahmood using the Quran and hadith critiqued arguments used to justify the actions of the companions who denied the Prophet’s request in writing something down at his deathbed. He then went on to conclude, evidenced by hadith, that the Prophet had indeed wanted to write a will and that the will was in regard his successor being Ali.

Critiquing the claim that the companions didn’t want to burden the Prophet and hence did not hand him a paper out of care, Shaykh Mahmood pointed out that this was in contradiction to Qur’anic injunctions such as the verse “O you who have faith! Answer Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life.”¹ In addition to this, based on the assumption that Prophet wanted to write a will which is an obligatory act (*wājib*), and since preventing one from carrying out an obligation is prohibited (*ḥarām*), those that prevented the Prophet from this act would therefore be engaging in a prohibition. Perhaps a stronger argument used in justifying the companions’ acts is that in the few days after the incident and before his death, the Prophet could have written a will. The Shaykh pointed out, citing the

¹ See Quran 8:24, 24:51



narration of Hudhayfa², that had the Prophet written anything down in this time, it would have further divided the community and the will would not have been followed. Justifying the Shia view that the Prophet's wanting to write something down was regarding succession and in particular regarding Ali, Shaykh Mahmood constructed his argument as follows. Firstly, it was the Sunna of the Prophet in appointing a leader (*amīr*) in his absence when going for a battle or expedition, and therefore he would not have left this world without appointing someone to lead the community. Furthermore, the Prophet had explicitly mentioned on multiple occasions that Ali is his successor such as at Ghadeer where he mentioned that Ali is the *mawlā*, or where he alluded to it in *ḥadīth manzila*³. This is irrefutable evidence for the Shia according to the Shaykh that the Prophet did indeed want to write a will expressing his successor as being Ali.

Amongst the points raised in the discussion was that companions not following the Prophet's commands in providing him with paper could be taken as a failure in his mission, and thus should be dismissed as a possibility. However, this was rejected as a weak argument as the disobedience of a people is not an indication of success or indeed failure of prophets or for that matter God. Of the more interesting points raised during the discussion was the acknowledgement by certain Sunni scholars that the Prophet had indeed wanted Ali to be the successor, however since this was a communal matter, it was up to the community to decide ultimately i.e., the Prophet's words were just advice and not binding.

² Hākim (A 4th century Hijri Muhaddith and faqih from 4th century hijra) narrates from the chain of Shurayq ibn Abdillah, from Uthmaan ibn Umar, from Shaqeeq ibn Maslamah, who narrated from the great companion Huzayfa ibn Yaman who narrated that some companions asked the Prophet: "Would you appoint a khalifah for us?" The Prophet replied: "If I appoint a khalifah for you, you would disobey him and then the punishment would descend. They asked (again): "Would you appoint 'Ali as a khalifah for us (that would be suitable)? The Prophet replied: "You will not do it (i.e., you will not obey him). And if you did (obey him) you will find him a guide and guided, and he will lead you onto the right way." See Izalatul Khafā' 'an Khilāfatil Khulafā', p 335.

³ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Musnad, vol. 1, p. 277; vol. 3, p. 417; Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, vol. 5, p. 129