

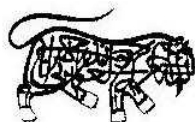
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## ***The Preeminence of Imām Ali***

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## Preface

The reasons for the preeminence of Imām Ali (a) are not limited to the priceless words of the Apostle (ﷺ) of God and to his efforts to establish Imām Ali's (a) preeminence in the minds of the believers. In addition to these efforts, there are many revelations (āyās) which have been revealed such that there are two scriptural bases in support of this position.

An examination of the hadīth reports corpus<sup>1</sup> clearly indicates Imām Ali's preeminence over the rest of the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ), and these scriptural sources also indicate that this preeminence is not limited to a simple quantitative difference, but that the differences are qualitative as well. In fact, these scriptural sources indicate that Imām Ali (a) is the only person who was qualified, on account of his divinely-

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<sup>1</sup> Hadīth: a report of a saying or deed of the Prophet, or in Shī'ī usage, of the Twelve Imams and Lady Fātema. One of the features of the present book (and of the Shī'a Doctrinal Series more generally) is that reliance is made almost exclusively on Sunnī hadīth sources (unless otherwise noted).

## *The Preeminence of Imām Ali*

inspired innate attributes, to be vested with the office of the imāmate<sup>2</sup> after the passing of the Prophet ﷺ from the material plane.

Even if we were to ignore Imām Ali's ﷺ being endowed with intrinsic knowledge and immaculacy<sup>3</sup> (esma'), his preeminence stands out clearly and cannot be denied. In other words, if we were to judge Imām Ali ﷺ on the basis of the criteria of the School of the Caliphs<sup>4</sup> (which considers Imām Ali ﷺ to be just another Companion among the other

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<sup>2</sup> The religio-political leadership of the community. In the Shī'a conception of the leadership of the community, the functions of statesmanship, the discovery, interpretation and implementation of the sacred or revealed law, and the spiritual guidance of the community is integrated and vested in one person: the Imām; whereas in the Sunnī conception these functions were trifurcated and vested, respectively, in the caliph (and later the sultans), the faqahā (the jurists/doctors), and the heads of the Sufī orders.

<sup>3</sup> Here again the Shī'a conception of immaculacy differs from that of our Sunnī brothers in faith. In Shī'a Islam, immaculacy is considered to be an attribute that the Prophet ﷺ (and the Imāms) were vested with throughout their lives, and it is an attribute which consists of inerrancy (being immune to errors both intentional and unintentional) as well as sinlessness, whereas most Sunnī theorists maintain that esma' is a state of inerrancy that the Prophet had with respect to his function as bringer of revelation and nothing more.

<sup>4</sup> Reference to the various sects within Sunnī Islam, all of which fell in line behind the caliphs and supported them in their reigns, from the Omayyads and Abbāsids all the way down to the Ottomans.

Companions of the Apostle ﷺ of God), Imām Ali would still be the most preeminent person<sup>5</sup> on account of his knowledge, learning and personal and social attributes.

Thus, we shall proceed to enumerate these attributes in the pages which follow with the objective of establishing Imām Ali's superiority of merit relative to the other Companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

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<sup>5</sup> And thus the most eminently qualified to lead the community after the death of the prophet.