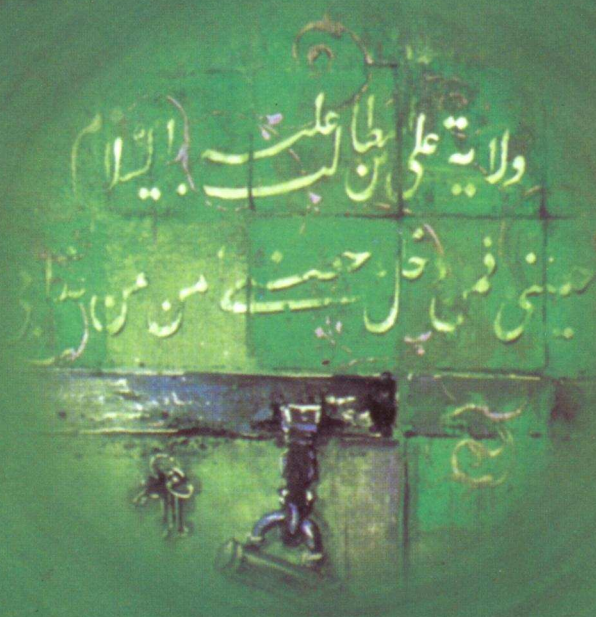


Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah

# Ghedir An Islamic Perspective

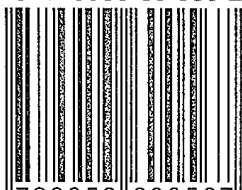
Translation  
S. As-Samarra'i



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# **GHEDIR**

**An Islamic Perspective**

**Sayyid**

**Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah**

**Translation**

**S. As-Samarra'i**

**Dar Al-Malak**

In the name of God the Gracious the Merciful

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## Preface

In the world we live in today, with its understanding of historical issues, many questions are raised that call for answers in a new approach that reflects the different social and political developments. In this regard, we find it important to point to an idea that his eminence Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah has been putting forward in response to more than one issue, which is that we have to develop our approach to presenting Islam and to our understanding of its issues. This is a matter that has led many to think, without basis, that he is proposing that we subject Islam to the modernity, when in fact his eminence has been using the concept of *ijtihad* (the formulation of rulings), in all its originality and vitality. This makes it imperative that research is carried out through what the *mojtehid* (Islamic jurist) understands, based on the rules of *ijtihad*, not through misplaced reverence of the thoughts of past scholars, whose views are not sacred; their thoughts should be respected through discussion, not by following it without proof. This is one side of the matter.

On the other, there is the issue of developing the way in which Islamic ideas are presented, on the basis that wisdom entails putting things in their proper place, and that eloquence of the speech should conform to the situation. This is because contemporary people think in a way that is different to how people thought in the past, and they need to understand Islam using their own thinking tools. As his eminence says, mentality is a language, -- and you cannot speak to a person's mentality except with the language that he understands and the particulars that he can imagine.

Also, and according to the scientific approach, you cannot propose any thought unless you agree with it on a firm basis that represents the beginning point of the dialogue; otherwise such dialogue will be fruitless, as the basis of thought that you adopt to build your convictions will not be adopted by the other party.

On this basis, his eminence has been presenting the issues related to Ahlul Bayt (as) using the language that contemporary people understand, so that they feel that Ahlul Bayt (as) are their role models in Islam, morals, politics and in other aspects, something that makes them feel that Islam is providing for their needs in these



aspects, through the pure examples that Ahlul Bayt (as) represent.

Research is part of this approach, and his eminence presents the issue of Imam Ali's *wilayah* (guardianship) in a way that shows how it conforms with the original ideas as they were presented in history, as well as with the contemporary particulars in all their social and political aspects. Readers will notice that a lot of what has happened in history is what is happening now in their contemporary world, and this makes them understand the issues realistically, and answers, through this, many of the questions raised in this field.

We would like to point out that his eminence - through what we have read - has noted that his presentation of the question of *wilayah* is based on narration proof of the Ghedir event, and the discussion on some of its meanings; and while he has emphasised the importance of this approach - since any Islamic issue, including *wilayah*, must be based on the scripture - he has tried to explain that such scripture in which Ali (as) was appointed as the successor of the Prophet (sawa) did not come without basis, but was the natural expected result of the life of Ali (as); indeed, it was his exclusive right among all of the companions of the Prophet (sawa).

The importance of this approach is that it presents the question of *wilayah* on two levels:

First: the level of scripture, which is the *hadith* of Ghedir;

Second: the level of the realistic study of the elements of Imam Ali's personality and the nature of the successor to the Prophet (sawa) position, which, as his eminence has explained, is different from any other – something which makes it imperative that certain qualities have to be present in any person to be fit for such position.

We leave it to the readers to explore this new presentation, which makes us feel that history is talking to us, and we talking to it, and that each of us can understand it by using our own thinking tools and terminology.

Finally, this is a compilation of two lectures which his eminence gave in his weekly function, arranged so that the ideas are presented in a logical and gradual way.

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## Introduction

There is no doubt that the issue of Ghedir, in all its implications and details, has left a deep mark on the whole of Islam, as it has resulted - in its interactions, and in both positive and negative stances towards it - in summarising the whole of the Islamic history in all its diversity, disputes and struggle.

In light of this, we cannot disregard it, as it continues to impose itself on us, exactly as has any historic issue that affects the present and future.

That said, we must distance the matter from partisanship or sectarianism, and study it in a scientific objective way, in terms of both its integral elements and the circumstances that accompanied it, through the whole of Muslim history, and through the fact that it represents a landmark in the history of Islam that must be studied and revealed in all its details.

Regardless of this, the question of Ghedir is one of those important issues that calls for objective, scientific research, since there are a lot of narrations that may reach the level of *tewator*<sup>1</sup>; as al-Amini mentions, in a

precise piece of scientific research, one hundred and ten companions narrated the Ghedir *hadith*, and the same goes for the *tabi'in*<sup>2</sup>.

Imam Ahmed bin Hanbel narrated that Zaid bin Arqam said: ‘We reached with the Messenger of God (sawa) a valley called “Khommm valley”, and he called for prayer and prayed on a hot day. Then he gave us a sermon - and the Messenger of God (sawa) had a robe thrown over a tree as to provide shade for him from the sun - and he said: “Do not you know? Do not you bear witness that I am *awla* (I have more right) over every believer than he does over himself?” They said: yes. He said: “Then, for whomever I am his *mawla* (guardian, leader, master), Ali is his *mawla*. O God, support whomever supports him and be the enemy of whomever becomes his enemy.”’<sup>3</sup>

Al-Hakim narrated in his *Mostedrek* (according to Zaid bin Arqam, following two different narrations which, he said, attained the level of *sahih* (correct), according to both Al-Bukhari and Muslim) that the Prophet (sawa) said: ‘I have left with you two precious things. One is greater than the other: the book of God and my progeny. See how you behave towards them after me, as they will never separate until they come to me at the *hawd* (pool, in

Paradise).’ Then he said: ‘God the almighty is my *mawla*, and I am the *mawla* of every believer.’ Then he took the hand of Ali and said: ‘For whomever I am his *weliyy* (guardian, leader, master), Ali is his *mawla*. O God, support whomever supports him and be the enemy of whomever becomes his enemy.’<sup>4</sup>

This *hadith* was narrated to the same effect in many books, such as at-Teberani, who narrated it through a correct narration, an-Nesa’i and others.

As far as we (the Shi’ah) are concerned, this *hadith* is *motewatir* (i.e. has attained the degree of *tewator*). Even some of the Sunni scholars have acknowledged its *tewator* status, as Sayyid Abdul Hosain Sherefuddin said in his *Moraje’at*; he said: ‘The author of *al-Fetawa al-Hamidiyyeh* - in spite of his inflexibility - admitted that the *hadith* is *motewatir* in his summarised work entitled *As-Selewat al-Fakhireh fil-Ahadith al-Motewatireh*’; then he said: ‘And as-Siyooti and other such narrators have confirmed this, such as Mohammed bin Jerir, the author of the famous (Qur’an) commentary and history, Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Sa’id bin Oqdeh and Mohammed bin Ahmed bin Othman ath-Thehebi, who studied its narrations, each of whom devoted a special work to it, with Ibn Jerir mentioning seventy-five narrations and Ibn

Oqdeh mentioning one hundred and five narrations; and ath-Thehebi - in spite of his strictness - acknowledged the correctness of many of its narrations...'<sup>5</sup>

This is why we have said that many of our Sunni brothers argue about the meanings of the *hadith* of Ghedir, but not about its narration chain (*sened*), which is because this *hadith* is one of the *hadiths* that were narrated by both the Sunnah and Shi'ah.

### Why the Ghedir?

The question here is: why did Mohammed (sawa) deliver/pronounce the Ghedir? And why Ali, not anyone else?

God says: 'O Messenger! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people' 5:67, which we believe was revealed with regard to Ali (as), something which the tone of the verses, and context of this verse, confirms. This is in addition to the reason for the revelation: it can be deduced that the Prophet (sawa) had already conveyed a lot of the message, or all its details. What some scholars have said in their commentaries is that the verse should



be understood as follows: that ‘God the almighty gave him security from the scheming of the Jews and Christians and commanded him to come out with the revelation in disregard to them’<sup>6</sup>; otherwise, most of it does not conform with the tone of the verses, so one can conclude from this there was an important matter that relates to the safety of the message, so that abstaining from proclaiming it (the matter) equals abstention from proclaiming the whole of the message. This is in addition to the fact that fearing the Jews, Christians and Quraysh contradicts his firm stance in conveying the message, from the start of the revelations and through the emigration stage, in the final days of which this verse was revealed.

On the basis of this, it becomes clear that the verse was revealed with regard to the *wilayah* of Ali (as), since the nearness of Ali (as) to the Prophet (sawa), being his cousin and son-in-law, would open the door to a lot of criticism that would link the position (of the Prophet) with emotions – something that required Divine defence, which was represented by God’s protection from all that.

In light of all this, we understand that, without doubt, the meaning of the word ‘*mawla*’ in the *hadith* of Ghedir is the *wilayah* (guardianship) in the realm of leadership. This

is supported by the Prophet's words: 'Am I not awla (have more right) over the believers than them over themselves', which means that he (sawa) wanted to make to Ali (as) what was to himself, which (first) he obtained their admission to, something which means leadership, not simply love and support as some commentators say; this is the first point.

The second is this: we note that the proclamation of the love for Ali (as) and the support of people for him would - according to such commentaries - deny any basis for criticism or dismissive comment from people, so it became a basis for God's protection.<sup>7</sup>

To answer the questions why the Ghedir, and why Ali, not anyone else, we say:

This matter requires looking first into the nature of the position, i.e. what is the role that the person who would succeed the Prophet (sawa) would play, and what are the qualities that he should have? After that, we should search to see who among the Muslims had the qualities that would enable him to undertake the mission.

## The role of the Messenger

The role of the Messenger is not merely the delivery of the message of God to the people, like a postman who delivers a message without having any interactive relation between him and the people. This is what we understand from the verse: 'He it is who raised among the inhabitants of Mecca (the unlettered, i.e. illiterate, in other translations) a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His communications and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, as they were before certainly in clear error' 62:2. The role of the messenger is to facilitate Islamic concepts in the process of changing the internal situation of the general psychology of the nation, which the word 'purifies' implies. This is in addition to his role in teaching the nation Islamic theory, on the levels of approach and content, and the practical implementation of the theory in reality, which would link knowledge to man's reality and that reality to the Book through the Qur'anic concepts, which enter the spirit through its materialistic content, so that it 'spiritualises' him, and enters the senses through its spiritual content. Thus it does not stay

in an abstract world away from reality and the world of the senses.

On this basis, we understand that the prophet's personality does not come from representing the message as a word only, but that the messenger manifests his message in reality, and in practical reality, so that people can see the image of the Islamic value in reality, just as they hear it in words.

Therefore, the Messenger of God (sawa) was Islam walking on earth, with the Muslims understanding his call through his behaviour after they hear it from his speech. This implies to them that it is not an idealistic thought that lurks in the realms of the unattainable and on the far horizons of imagination, rather it is thought that is manifest in practical reality through the personality of the caller.

From this we find that the Holy Qur'an presents the Messenger to us as a role model: **'Certainly you have in the Messenger of God a good exemplar for those who hope in God and the Final Day and who remember God much'** 33:21. This speech draws their attention to the Prophet's image, which represents the highest example for the message-bound Muslim, so that they behave accordingly.

Therefore, Islam did not proceed through the words of the message that the Messenger (sawa) conveyed to people, but through the practical manifestation of the message in reality in what the Messenger (sawa) represented. Islam proceeded, thus, through his mind, heart, approach, method, morals and calling, with him becoming the element that integrates with the Holy Qur'an, since the Messenger (sawa) was the speaking Qur'an, the Qur'an that is in practice in reality, where Muslims would witness – when a Qur'anic verse is revealed – the practical manifestation of the verse in the Prophet (sawa).

Therefore, we say: if God the almighty had revealed the Book to people without the presence of a person that would manifest the content of the Book, no one would have been attracted to it, because people have no use for the silent book, they need a speaking, practical, dynamic book. This is the meaning of the 'exemplar' that the Prophet (sawa) represented.

### **The nature of the Prophet's succession (*khilafeh*, caliphate)**

In light of the above, we say: the succession of the Prophet (sawa) had a meaning that is different to any

other, since the matter of succession here is not a person that is needed to lead a tribe, or to be a governor like nowadays; rather, it needs a person that continues the role of the Prophet (sawa). If God had sent His Messenger with this religion so that Islam enters into the hearts and minds of people and brings them from darkness to light, his successor must fulfil the same role, having in his mind the mind of the Messenger, in his heart the heart of the Messenger, and his conduct the conduct of the Messenger, in both content and approach.

Here you may wonder if the Messenger of God (sawa) was needed to complete the Message, since God says: **'This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion'** 5:3, or in the Prophet's words: **'There is nothing that brings you near to Paradise and distances you from Hell but I did command you to do, and nothing that brings you near to Hell and distances you from Paradise but I did forbid you to do'**<sup>8</sup>. If that is the case, what is the need for a person that has the qualities of the Prophet's personality in this regard?

The Islamic plan in the start of the Message was to guide people away from polytheism, so that they are entered in the Muslim society to breathe Islam within it,

to start the process of strengthening its roots in them - so the slogan was: 'Whoever says "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah" will have his possessions, blood and honour protected', and the Qur'an pointed to this: **'The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You do not believe, but say, We submit; for faith has not yet entered into your hearts'** 49:14. However, the battles and internal problems that the newly born Islamic state in Medina faced, through the hypocrites and Jews, prevented its programme of deepening Islam in Muslims and manifesting this in reality.

Also, Islam proceeded after the Prophet (sawa) through what those who succeeded him before Ali (as) failed to complete in the mission: it succeeded in taking Islam to the world, but this was on the surface only, while in reality it needed to stretch in profundity. This need could be felt through the intellectual challenges that faced Islamic reality then, whether internally in what related to jurisprudence, or externally in what related to the questions that the disbelievers raised, and which called for answers.

Therefore, we say that the Prophet (sawa) could convey the Message to the people, but could not complete his

practical programme in facilitating the Message in reality, so the matter called for someone to complete the mission after him.



## **True allegiance**

We mention all that Ali (as) manifested in his life so that we could learn from it, because we think that some of those who claim to observe Ali's *wilayah* have not learned from him and have not come near to his mind and spirit; rather, you see them look unto him from afar, and this is why backwardness has found a home within them even if they proclaim his name day and night. They have not learned from his heart, which embraced the whole of humanity, and this is why their hearts stayed shut in the face of love. They have not learned from his conduct in his knowledge and wide horizons, and this is why they have continued holding onto worthless things, and living in narrow world. Some may even transpose their backwardness on Ali (as) to give him their image; some even transpose their backwardness on the whole of Islam!

Our problem in the present is not limited to those who fight Islam, but it is the problem of those who follow the backwardness that they bring to Islam; those who talk about Islam from mythical position are in fact talking about a *minor area instead of opening up to the wide arena and horizon.*

From this we say: we have to start pursuing cultural means and to know how to formulate our concepts according to Islam, and how to open up to life in its entirety through Islam, in the image that Ali (as) presented to us. This is not a matter of visiting Ali (as) in history, but rather we have to invite him to visit us, not physically, but so that Ali (as) enters in our thought, politics, economics, management, relationships and all affairs with all the legacy of his thought, spirit and conduct in life which he left to us, so that we elevate to his high position, a position which is like 'the axis in relation to the hand-mill; the flood water flows down from him and the bird cannot fly up to him'<sup>9</sup>.

Following Ali (as) entails a high cost and a lot of trouble, because really following him is not a label, or a banner that you raise, but it is a course that you pursue, a conduct that you observe with all what truth means. Through this, we find Ali (as) explains the value in Islam: 'The nearest people to (the truest followers of) the prophets amongst people are the most knowledgeable of what they came with'<sup>10</sup>. Then he recited: 'Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe, and God is the guardian of the believers' 3:68.

So following is not a question of kinship, but it is related to the Message, belief and its course. Then he said: 'The *welyy* (follower, supporter) of Mohammed is he who, though not related (in kinship) to him, obeys God, and the enemy of Mohammed is he who, though related (in kinship) to him, disobeys God.'<sup>11</sup> Kinship is redefined as a relationship to the Message, its deeds and course, which is what we find in the Holy Qur'an in the dialogue between Noah (as) and his Lord: 'And Noah called upon his Lord and said: My Lord! Surely my son is of my family, and your promise is surely true, and You are the most just of the judges. He said: O Noah! Surely he is not of your family; surely he is (the doer of) other than good deeds' 11:45-46. This is something which the poet employed to portray the relation between the Message with Ahlul Bayt (as):

The love of Selman<sup>12</sup> to them was (regarded as) kinship,  
While between Noah and his son was no kinship.

### **True allegiance**

We would like to discuss the question of allegiance, and following Ali (as), so as to confirm the balanced approach as far as the truth and Islam are concerned.

Ali (as) saw a troubled and imbalanced reality in the question of allegiance as there were and still are those who love him, and there were also those who hated him; some deviated from the area of love into the trap of exaggeration (*ghuluw*), thinking that this is how to observe the allegiance of Ahlul Bayt (as).

Ali (as) said: 'If I struck the top of the nose of the believer with my sword so that he would hate me, he would not hate me; and if I poured all the wealth of the world onto the hypocrite so that he would love me, he would not love me - for this is a resolved matter, as expressed by the Prophet (sawa) when he said: "O Ali, a believer will not hate you and a hypocrite will not love you"'<sup>13</sup>.

Why did the Prophet (sawa) say that? Why, when the question of love and hate is related to the heart beats, which are not a subject of straight or balanced lines – as the heart does not have a rational basis, but goes about the matter of love and hate with disregard to ideology? Your heart may be beating with love for someone who is at odds with you, while it may be beating with hatred for someone who agrees with you in your principles?

If we study the matter in its depth as far as Ali (as) is concerned, we find that Ali (as) had a lot of human

qualities that can make a hypocrite love him, as he was the brave hero and the just man of wisdom. However, the depth of the matter that the Prophet (sawa) wanted to highlight and emphasise does not relate to this level, even though it is realistic, but it was related to the mind in its depth of awareness. Ali (as) embodied a belief in his whole being, so that nothing was left in his personality for a personal matter, since as he had 'sold' the whole of himself to God, as the Qur'an says: **'And among men is he who sells himself to seek the satisfaction of God; and God is Affectionate to the servants/' 2:207**; his mind was a mind of belief, his heart a heart of belief, his course is a course of belief; his courage, asceticism, justice and knowledge, all these stood within the circle of belief. Therefore, the believer who lives within his self in the full depth of belief must feel love and allegiance to anyone who manifests belief, and Ali (as) was the living and deep manifestation of the whole of belief.

The hypocrite, however, whose heart is full of atheism and who has no attachment to belief – as it is a word on his tongue and just a means to cover his scheming to destroy belief in the faith, Shari'ah and life – how could he love Ali who stands at the heart of the opposing side?!

## The exaggeration (*ghuluw*) problem

Then Ali (as) said: 'Two (kinds of) people will be damned on my account: an exaggeratedly loving person and a forsaking, hating person'<sup>14</sup>. Ali (as) loved God and His Messenger (sawa) and was humble to God and His Messenger (sawa), and did not want anyone to take him near the position of God the almighty in any way, nor to take him near the position of the Prophet (sawa). He used to emphasise his humbleness towards God as he expressed it in the supplication of Kumail: 'I, a weak, insignificant, humble, poor and destitute creature of You', showing how dear was his devotion to God, and seeing that the greatness of a human being lies in his pure devotion to God in mind, heart and conduct. The more devoted a person is, the nearer to God he will be, and the more he will feel the greatness of God in his life.

Therefore, Ali (as) wanted from such words that those loving him should stay balanced in what Islam wants, just as he wanted from those hating him to study the matter on the basis of the truth that Ali (as) represented. Those who exaggerate in the love for Ali (as) and his sons the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) should not be fooled that they are living in true loyalty and allegiance to Ali and his sons, for the test of loyalty to them is to be loyal to their

