

Core Curriculum

2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.6 **Imāmah or divinely guided leadership in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad.**

Question: What is an Imām?

Answer: A divinely guided leader (after the Prophet) tasked to guide humankind and protect the message of Islam.

Question: What does the Qur'an say about Imāms?

Answer: It is the final state of spiritual ascension. A sinner (zālim) cannot be an Imām. See Q2:124.

Question: Who are 'Alī and the Mahdī?

Answer: 'Alī is the first of the 12 Imāms, and the Mahdī is the 12th and last of the Imāms.

Question: What is the difference between Imāmah in Sunnism and Shi'ism?

Answer: For Shi'ism, Imāmah is a form of divine leadership after the Prophet Muhammad in which God tasks Imāms in question to guide mankind. For Sunnism, Imāmah is more "secular", that is, it is a fallible enterprise and is not selected by God. Imāms for Sunnis can include Friday Prayers, or high ranking jurists.

Question: What is the difference between Imāmah after the Prophet Muhammad and Prophethood in general?

Answer: The Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) who succeeded the Prophet (s) do not receive direct revelation (wahī) from God which comes through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel, they only receive ilhām or divinely inspired knowledge without a medium, this form of knowledge is largely private and not conditioned upon propagation, as is the case with wahī.

Question: Do the Imāms have to be present in order to guide us?

Answer: No they can from a distance through their light, they instill good thoughts and guidance in our hearts.

Question: Can God enforce Imāmah upon mankind?

Answer: Allah does not do that, He gave mankind the choice to accept it or reject it.

Question: How is it possible for an Imām to indirectly guide so many people via his light?

Answer: How do computers compute so much information? How does Satan deviate so many people on his own (without the need for his legions)? Is a divinely appointed Imām any less?