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VIEWS & IDEAS OF DR. ABDULAZIZ A. SACHEDINA

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A. ISLAM
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1. Islam: first a political reality, then a religious phenomenon

"This is true of all Islamic concepts, since Islam as a religious phenomenon was subsequent to Islam as a political reality." (*Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* [Albany: State University of New York, 1981] p. 4)

2. Religious Pluralism: the idea that there are more than one right paths & that Islam does not Supersede other Religions

"The idea that Islam regards itself as the ultimate and perfect religion in the line of the Abrahamic tradition is not difficult from sources other than the Qur'ān. One might even suggest that the idea of Islam being the only monotheistic tradition that offers an indubitable guarantee of salvation in the hereafter is post-qur'anic... "It is remarkable that the Qur'ān is absolutely silent on the any notion, however rudimentary, about the abrogation or supersession of the previous Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Judaism" ("Political Implications of the Islamic Notion of 'Supersession' as Reflected in Islamic Jurisprudence," in *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 7 [1996] # 2, p. 159)

Then what is the basis of the Muslims' belief that Islam supersedes other religions? Dr. Sachedina writes:

"Muslim jurists were involved in the routinization of the qur'anic message about 'Islam being the only true religion with God' (Q. 3:19) in the context of the social and political position of the community. The interaction between the idea of Islam being the universal faith for all humankind and the existing predominance of Muslim political power [in the past] created the specific legal language that provided the justification to extend the notion of jihad beyond its strictly defensive meaning in the Qur'ãn to its being an offensive instrument for Muslim creation of a dominant political order." ("Political Implications" p. 159)

"[U]nless Muslim thinkers are willing to recognize the necessity to go beyond the epistemes provided in the classical sources, Islam will continue to remain unresponsive to the emerging pluralism in the global community today." ("Islamic Theology of Christian-Muslim Relations," *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, v. 8 [1997] # 1, p. 33)

Dr. Sachedina also touched on this theme in a lecture entitled 'Social Life in Islam' at Bayview Mosque, Toronto, in May 1990. In it he said:

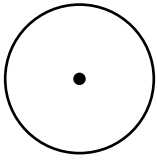
"If you ask a Christian, he will tell you very frankly that if are not a believer in Christ as Son of God, then you can't be saved. In order to belong to the Jewish community, your mother must be a Jew... And in Islam, masha Allãh, we all believe that we are ahlul janna. Janna has been promised to all of us. And masha Allãh, we the believers in the Imams (a.s.) we are the only ones [to be saved]...

"When Islam becomes part of the society, and if the religion is applied to what I call exclusive claims which all religions do have.

All religions are very particularistic; we do not want to see anybody else having salvation. We also say no other Muslim can ever be saved unless he or she accepts the way we think is the right interpretation of Islam And this creates a problem when Islam becomes then into open, into what I call human relationship in the society How are we going to deal with that situation?

"Here also I use a particular diagram.

"Islam, submission to God, looks at human relationship in the society in a very particular sense. And I want you to understand this very carefully. This is the key to our role in the society in which we are living with religions with other peoples. Let us remember this.

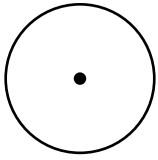


"This center here in this circle is what I call the Divine center; and I explain this to my American students and it makes perfect sense to them...

"We have an important question in our minds when we are dealing with the society. We say truth is only one; truth cannot be two, it cannot be three... The truth has to be only one and universal... a true position necessarily ought to be only one true position. In that case, if I as a Muslim say that I have the truth, I am on the truth, ana 'alal haqq. What does it mean that I possess the truth at the exclusion of the others. This is what I am saying, I am implying very clearly that I am on the truth and nobody else is. Now this creates a problem in the society; and the social role of Islam is not that. The social role of Islam is to create a better human understanding, it is to create a better human relationship. How is it going to help if I were to look at 'I possess the truth?' This is what all the believers believe: Muslims, Christians, Jews and all others: 'We have the truth.' This have is the have of possession. When I possess it, that means you can't have it. If you are not with me as a

Muslim, then you can't have it. So I am excluding you that you are not part of the truth that I possess.
"My whole question is to the Muslims: As Muslims, do we possess truth or are we related to the truth? I am asking a very important question. If we say we possess the truth, that means we have an ownership on the truth. On the contrary, we are related to the truth."
(Uses example of niyyat for salat: qurbatan ilal Lah. Allãh is the truth; I do not possess Allãh but I am related to Allãh as a creature... He is my Creator, I am the creature.)

"That understanding is very very important because it's going to help me to become a member of the society in which I don't have to fight all the time with the people, I don't have to confront, I don't have to be offensive all the time with the people. What I have to do is: I have to establish my relationship with God and work harder so that I do really become very close to God.
"Now let us look at this diagram.



"This **center** is our belief in **God**. And this center is only one. If the centers are multiple, then it is polytheism; then you have many gods claiming your loyalty. On the other hand, this Divine being can be considered very different notion by different people. And there is no harm because I don't have to be the judge. How are others conceiving of this of Divine being? I know that this is Allãh, s.t.; I am related to Him so I am actually moving towards him. As a member of society, I am actually continuously in movement. There is a sort of continuous motion in my goal towards this particular goal which is Allãh, s.t. This **circumference** is the **humanity**. There are human beings. And these are all the paths that human beings have created towards that Divine being. May be this path is going too far; maybe this path is

coming very close but they all are moving towards this universal goal which is the Divinity, the Divine being. That may be a different adjective or even a false conception of this Divine being. Who am I to judge? All are moving towards that.

"What I then need to do is that I must look at the fellow human being as a fellow traveler rather than a competitor, rather than a rival. When I begin to see that person as a fellow traveler, all of a sudden, there is common goal that I see in myself and in the other person. You are already creating a relationship. And this is what I call a human relationship...

"When the goal is the same, how can I be so indifferent; how can I be so righteous, how can I be so self-centered? I am looking at the center and I am moving towards the center. So you can see very clearly that when you understand other religions. I think this is very important...

"Allah ta'ala is saying in the Qur'an so many times; He has reminded us that We have given each one of you communities different laws, different prophets, and you are at variance with each other, and I will make the final judgement on the day of judgement who was right and who was wrong. For the moment, *fastabiqu bil khayrat* — compete with each other in doing good. So compete with each other in doing good is what I call compete with each other in establishing justice. You don't have to condemn each other; you don't have to kill each other; you don't have to hate each other; you don't have to teach your children to hate each other. To hate other religions; by doing so you are blocking, you are blocking an important aspect of the social relationship in which the human dignity must always be respected. Human beings must be respected. And instead of condemning others, you must feel sympathetic to them..."

Question from audience: "If there are many many paths, which is the right path?" Dr. Sachedina answered:

"...I just know one thing that Islam has taught us: *Innad dina 'indal*

lahil islam — the true path is one that submits to Him. I think islam here is not 'I' capital which is a historical Islamic religion starting in seventh century; but I think it is religion of the first human being; dinal fitra, a very natural religion. The path in the eyes of Allãh (s.w.t.) is one that leads to submission of God...

"So we don't have to make a decision today which path is the one that leads to submission of God. We know that we are submitted to God. We don't know that a Hindu who is sitting in front of Krishna whether there is submission to God or to Krishna. We don't read the mind of the Hindu. Therefore I don't think we have to sit in judgement. I don't think we should. This is my personal opinion. I don't hold anybody responsible for this opinion... We don't have to condemn them or oppress them. We should regard them as fellow human beings who are trying to understand the submission to God about which we have the knowledge through our Prophet. Maybe Bhuddism is the same thing. I don't know. So I don't want to sit in the place of God and say 'My dear Hindu, you are the best of my believers.' Or 'O my dear Muslims, jannat is all yours.' I don't want to sit in the place of God. I think one of the tragedies of human history is that we have acted as God. We have even cursed; this man does not believe in this. This man does not believe in that.. Unfortunately, that's none of our business; it's none of our business."

Dr. Sachedina has also mentioned this meaning of 'Islam' in the 2nd speech of Muharram 1419 in Toronto:

"The word '*islam*' does not occur in the Qur'ãn more than eight times, and always in the verbal form, never as a noun. Even the famous ayat '*in-nad deena 'indal lahil islam*.' The central word is not islam, it is *deen*... When Allãh (s.w.t.) says 'islam' it means nothing more than submission. '*in-nad deena 'indal lahil islam*' — our usual translation is what? 'Religion in the eyes of God is Islam.' Now I will give you the translation the way the Qur'an says: 'The right way of doing things before God is submitting yourselves.' Islam is not

name of a religion. No, you are mistaken. Islam is a name of an action. Like '*iman*,' '*islam*' (this is known as *babul if'ãl* in Arabic) that means you have firm commitment."

3. Meaning of "al-yawma akmaltu lakum dinakum"

"'*Al-yawma akmaltu lakum dinakum* has been interpreted differently than what I understand. 'This day I have perfected your path for you...' You remember the definition that I am using for *deen* is not simply 'religion.' It's a way of conducting your life. It's a way of responding to your life. It's a way of being capable of judging what you are doing. And therefore, *'al-yawma akmaltu lakum dinakum* — this day I have perfected the path for you...' Does it mean it has been perfected at that particular point? Or is the Muslim community supposed to progressively get into the religion and learn about it, discover it, recover it, so that it can lead itself to its final goal? There's a difference. There's one problem if you believe that the system has been perfected then your eyes are continously in the past. Why do you do that? Because it was perfected at one point in history. My argument is that it was not perfected at that time. Rather the promise was made by Allah (s.w.t.) that this religion will be perfected as human beings begin to discover their own nature and the perfection of their own nature. Because Islam is a religion of nature. It is connected with the human nature." (Speech # 8, Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

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B. THE PROPHET & THE QUR'ĀN

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1. Idealization of the Prophet lead to the belief in him being divinely chosen leader

"The idealization of the Prophet himself gave rise to the notion of his being something more than an ordinary man; he must have been divinely chosen and hence the true leader who could guide his people to salvation." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 3)

2. Should the Muslims change and conform in accordance with the Qur'ān or is the Qur'ān to conform to the changing values of the time?

"If this revelation was meant to endure as guidance for humanity as long as it remains on this earth, then it must be adaptable to changing conditions of life and the rethinking of many values. Religious fundamentalism in its extreme forms in the contemporary Muslim world, and even Sunni-Shi'i conservatism, are attempts to cling to the safety of the past, which can have only temporary success.

"I dare to suggest that the time has come for Muslims to start over again at the points in normative tradition where a system of practical reasoning... encouraged judgements of right and wrong by the human mind, without having to look to the revelation for validation of every instance of moral-legal decision." ("Islamic Theology," p. 33)

"The Qur'an remains in the hands of humans who have to decide how to make it relevant to their moral-spiritual existence at a given time and place in history." ("Islamic Theology", p 33)

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C. IMAMATE IN GENERAL

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1. Imamate began as a political issue & later on acquired religious emphasis

"Most of these early discussions on the Imamate took at first sight political form, but eventually the debate encompassed the religious implications of salvation. This is true of all Islamic concepts, since Islam as a religious phenomenon was subsequent to Islam as a political reality." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 4)

"From the early days of the civil war in A.D. 656, some Muslims not only thought about the question of leadership in political terms, but also laid religious emphasis on it." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 5)

Referring to the support of shi'a of Kufa for the claim of leaders for 'Alids, Dr. Sachedina writes:

"This support for the leadership of the 'Alids, at least in the beginning, did not imply any religious underpinning... The claim of leadership of the 'Alids became an exaggerated belief expressed in pious terms of the traditions attributed to the Prophet, and only gradually became part of the cardinal doctrine of the Imamate, the pivot on which the complete Shi'ite creed rotates." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 6)

After explaining the failures and the martyrdom of the religious leaders who rose against the authorities, he writes:

"This marked the beginnings of the development of a religious emphasis in the role of the 'Alid Imams..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18)

2. The Concept of Ahlul Bayt

"The *shi'a* took advantage of the intimate historical relationship of 'Ali with Muhammad and of the old Arab tribal concept of *ahl al-bayt* (people of the household)—the family from whom chiefs were chosen—and zealously supported the candidacy of the 'Alids..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 6)

3. The Shi'a Ideology

"The factor that contributed to the Shi'i disappointment was the absence of a concrete Shi'ite ideology until the times of the great Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765), a descendant of 'Ali through his son al-Husayn, at the time of the 'Abbasid victory. Under this Imam the Shi'ite doctrine of Imamate were formulated." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 8)

4. Evolution in the Concept of Imamate

"The doctrine of the Imamate... was the later systematization of what was known to the early adherents of this school as the idea of the messianic savior of the Islamic peoples. The evolution of the doctrine from a simple notion of a leader who would bring Islamic justice to the oppressed, to a highly complex concept of the eschatalogical Hidden Imam, provides an outline of the history of Shi'ism in Islam.

"In the beginning, because of the unbearable political as well as social circumstances, a group of Muslims had come to look forward to a charismatic leader, not unlike the Prophet himself, who would right all wrongs and deliver the community from misery and distress... But very soon such hopes were frustrated by a series of failures and by the martyrdom of the religious leaders who had attempted to redress the grievances of their supporters by rising against the authorities.

"This marked the beginnings of the development of a religious emphasis in the role of ʻAlid Imams, who were now held to be in concealment and whose return was confidently expected.
"The belief in the hidden messiahs was a clear shift in the Imam's temporal role as it has been stressed so far." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18)

"The doctrine of Imamate as maintained by the Imamites clearly shows its development **from** a simple exaggerated belief in the messianic role of the savior Imam **to** a dogma of the religious leadership with all its theological completes." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 23)

"From al-Sadiq's time there was a **definite shift** in the role of the Imam, and a period of reorientation of the belief in the Imamate toward pacific religious leadership seems to have begun at this time. The ʻAlid Imamate, more particularly the Husaynid line, **began to be conceived** as a divinely designated authority based on peculiar religious qualifications, not on a political claim." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 24)

This idea about the gradually evolution of belief is reaffirmed by Dr. Sachedina in his The Just Ruler *(New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) also:*

"In Shiʻite Islam, matters pertaining to the faith evolved gradually... It was the subsequent version of the Imamate that was passed down to the Imams. Although early disciples of the Imams did not conceive the Shiʻi Imamate in two spheres, temporal and religious, with the former being postponed for the future, this division gradually became obvious to them during the Imamate of the fifth and sixth Imams, al-Bãqir and al-Sãdiq." (*The Just Ruler* [1988] p. 36)
"However, with the reorientation of the Shiʻite toward a more

politically quietistic posture, by postponing the establishment of true Islamic government to the future, the Imamate became more or less a spiritual office, sustaining the Shi'i aspiration for creation of the ideal public order, with the potential of assuming temporal authonty when the time came for it." (*The Just Ruler* p. 36)

"Among the Shi'i Imams, it was during the Imamate of Ja'far al-Sãdiq (d A.D. 765) and his successors that the idea that the 'Alid Imam was the sole legitimate authority—by virtue of his being an infallible leader and authoritative interpreter of Islamic revelation, and therefore qualified to establish the Islamic state— became a distinctive feature of Imami Shi'ism." (*The Just Ruler*, p 89)

5. Wilaya: does it include political leadership or is it confined to religious leadership only?

(a) *In the 2nd Speech during Muharram 1419, Dr. Sachedina moves the Prophet, and consequently imamate, away from the political leadership. He says:*

"By the way, the Prophet (s.a.w.) was never recognized as the political leader. No, that is not correct at all. He was recognized as Rasul-lah, the envoy of God, the Messenger of Allãh (s.t.). There was no politics, there was no political language attached to it. It isn't that what the moderns are telling us; the way Iran is telling us time and again that the Prophet was a political leader. No. He was recognized fundamentally and essentially as a prophet of God.

"Task of prophethood was to lead the society to perfection. And that perfection could not be done individually — it had to be done as members of the community, the ummah. Ummah means a community under the Prophet as prophet, not a political leader.

"Now we know why '*man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu*' meant something very very important. The Prophet (s.a.w.) could have said, '*man kuntu khalifa fa hadha khalifa*.' He

could have said, '*man kuntu hakiman fa hadha hakiman*.' He is not using any of the terminology that we would use in the normal political sense of carrying on the authority of the political leader...

"Look at the word chosen by Allãh (s.t.) for guidance. After all the Prophet is '*ma yantiqu 'anil hawaa in huwa illa wahyun yuhaa*.' He is given instructions. '*Mawla*': what does the word 'mawla' mean? Allãh (s.t.) says in the Qur'ãn 'wal kafirun laysa lahum mawla.' The disbeliever has no mawla. They don't have a mawla — they don't have a protector, they don't have a patron, they don't have somebody who cares for them. This is the meaning of mawla...

"The Prophet (s.a.w.) when he introduces Imam 'Ali's authority in the community, what does he say? '*Man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu*.' What he means is that 'whoever regards me as a perfect example to be followed to the ultimate goal of salvation, 'Ali is the man who should be followed.' The question was of obedience. *Mawla*, one who should be obeyed, one who should not be disregarded. In that sense, Allãh is *Mawla*. Allãh is the *Mawla* of *deen*, that path on which you cannot afford to disobey Allãh (s.w.t.)...

"The Prophet never forced. After he returned to Medina from Ghadir; one night he was home with 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud. He tells 'Abdullah that the messenger has come and wants me to go; that I have received the news of my death. 'Abdullah says, by the way this is after Ghadir, 'Appoint a successor.' Yes, this exactly what he said. 'Why don't you appoint Abu Bakr?' The Prophet shakes his head and says, no. He mentions one after the other. (I don't know about the value of this hadith; Shaykh Mufid mentions it and I am mentioning it on the authority of Shaykh Mufid. I am not here to examine and judge how authentic is the hadith. But I am telling you it reflects the situation in the community. If it is authentic, if reflects the situation in the community...) 'Abdullah's hadith goes; and the Prophet is asking, 'What shall I do?' 'Abdullah says, 'Why don't you appoint 'Umar; why don't you appoint 'Uthman?' And

finally, 'Abdullah says, 'Why don't you appoint 'Ali?' And the Prophet says, and he is weak by this time, 'O I wish, they would obey. I wish they would obey.'

So apparently, there was a big question of the religious role that the Prophet (s.a.w.) was playing in the community. The community saw itself organized under the leadership of the Prophet (s.a.w.). When he was gone, someone had to replace him in the same position—in the same authority.

"And this is where today we are still searching for the interpretation."

(Then Dr. Sachedina talks about the interaction of history and faith and says:)

"The belief system says anybody who had any right to claim obedience after the Prophet Muhammad (saw.) is 'Ali bin Abi Talib That is the meaning of Imamate; it is nothing more than that. You open any book of *kalām*, you will find theologians describing Imam 'Ali has having the right to become mutã', obeyed, one should be obeyed by the people. Why should he be obeyed? Because he is exactly sitting in the place of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)...

"Imam 'Ali was the Imam from the day the Prophet Muhammad closed his eyes. Regardless whether he became a khalifa or not. How can he become an Imam without becoming a khalifa, without sitting on the throne? That was not the requirement. Because the obedience was to the position of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)."

(2nd speech of Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

(b) *Then in the 6th speech, Dr. Sachedina, in a way, contradicts his above statement:*

"... The fact remains that the Qur'ãn conceived the Prophet to be the leader of an *ummah*, an *ummah* that was religious, social and political. In other words, it was civil, moral community that was being guided by a person, who had some kind of comprehensive authority, which was not conceivable at that time even, by the Arab tribes. That was also the difficulty during Ghadir. When Ghadir

happened, one of the challenging dimensions of Ghadir was an introduction of the Qur'anic concept of leadership. *Wilayah* means that kind of leadership, which combines the civil and moral authority in one person. That means there is no separation of power. This is no church and state as such, rather the civil and moral authority combines in the person who holds the office of the wilayah. What was new about it? The new thing about it was this that in the Arab culture, the Arabs were never used to see a young person assuming the leadership. In Arab culture it was impossible for a thirty year old young man to become a leader because the Arabs believed that an older person has to become a leader... "

(c) Again in the 8th speech, Dr. Sachedina brings the political leadership back into the fold of nubuwwat. He says:

"The whole question is 'Is Islam a political system or it's a religious system?' There are two opinions about it. Many scholars are fighting the battle, including Ayatullah Khui, Ayatullah Mutahhair, Ayatullah Khumayni, in Egypt, al-Ashmaawi, al-Jaabiri in Morocco... For me there is a very important issue involved here. If we say that Islam is not a political system, and Islam is simply a religion that is concerned with moving humanity towards self-perfection and prepare humanity for the hereafter, then we are denying a very major role played by the Prophet in the establishment of the *ummah* itself...

"Nine-tenth of Islam is *mu'amalat*, how you deal with each other, how you conduct your affairs in this world because whatever you do in this world has an implication for the aakhirat. Now in that kind of religion, to say that Islam is simply a religion without any social system is to deny the fact of *wilayah*. By the way, if you remember my lecture on the sixth night because *wilayah* means moral, civil authority that can lead you to your ultimate goal of creation, and 'ultimate goal of creation' is not only knowing what is five times a day prayers, fasting, but knowing how to live as human beings in a

society. Otherwise there would not be civil authority, the Prophet could just be what we call *an-nabi ar-ruhi*..." (Speech # 8 at Toronto, Muharram 1419)

(d) *Najaf & Qum are alleged to have different views on "the role of the Imam":*

"...**Najaf and Qum** are divided on the whole debate about the Prophet's political role. Najaf as one of the most important centres of Shi'a learning, and Qum, now the most important centre of Shi'a learning **have maintained two different views about the role of the Imam... Najaf has maintained a conservative attitude to the role of the Imam.** They believe that religion has a moral function, an ethical function but not a political one, including Ayatullah Khui, whose opinions are well stated. He does not believe that the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) has any need for manifesting itself politically because the Imam remains the Imam as a spiritual, moral, ethical leader regardless whether people pay allegiance to him or not. That opinion was for the first time **contested by Ayatullah Khumayni** himself." (Speech # 9 at Toronto, Muharram 1419)

6. 'Ilm-e Ghayb of the Imams

After mentioning the evolution of Imamate (quoted earlier in # 4), Dr. Sachedina writes:

"The Imams were now believed to possess divine knowledge which enabled them to predict future events, including the proper time for the messianic Imam to strike. The highly speculative aspects of the doctrine of the Imamate should be attributed to the circusmstances in which the Imams manifested political quietism but did not object to certain extravagant claims made for them by their fanatical associates. These claims included the possession of esoteric knowledge inherited through designation by the Imam.

Later on, the very question of designation became one of the pillars of the Imamite doctrine of the Imamate." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18-19)

7. The Doctrine of Badã'

"The alteration of an earlier prophecy of seventy years, then of one hundred and forty to an indefinite future time implied a change of the earlier divine determination. In Imamite dogmatics this divine alteration is known as *badã.*'

"The doctrine of *badã'* was propounded by the early Shi'ite leaders, who, in order to justify their failure to establish a rule of justice in spite of their self-declared prophecies about their victory in a particular political venture, sought to explain the change in circumstances which caused God to alter His determination in their own interest...

"The failure of various Shi'i revolts was conveniently explained by accepting the *badã'* - the intervention of a new circumstances which had caused God to alter His early determination.

"*Badã'* also explained the delay in the appearance of the rightful successor of the Propeht to deliver the umma, which the prophecies like the one cited above had predicted and which should have taken place at a certain moment." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 153)

8. Badã' & the Imamate of Ismã'il bin Ja'far

"Furthermore, it [ie., *badã'*] served to demonstrate the limitations of the Imam's knowledge, more particularly when the succession to the Imamate was contested by more than one person. This happened in the case of **Isma'il, the son of al-Sadiq, who was previously designated as the Imam by his father** and who predeceased him. The change in the decision about the Imamate of Isma'il, designated by the Imam endowed with infallible knowledge, and which was now vested in al-Sadiq's other son, was explained as *badã.*' It implied

God's change of mind because of a new consideration, caused by the death of Isma'il." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 153)

9. The Concept of "al-Qur'ãn an-Nãtiq"

"The belief that the Imams were the 'speaking (*al-natiq*) Qur'ãn,' who knew the esoteric interpretation of the Book, most probably began during al-Baqir's time." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 15)

10. The Number of the Imams

"The dissension within the Imamiyya concerning the Imamate after al-'Askari seems to have reached such an extent that, even among the prominent theologians of this group, at least in the early days following the year 260/873-874, there was no agreement on the number of the Imams." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 54)

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D. THE IMAMATE OF AL-MAHDI

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1. The basis of believing in the Messiah

After saying that although the Qur'an did not envision the appearance of al-Mahdi, Dr. Sachedina gives two reasons as the basis for the belief in the Messiah: (1) exaltation of the Prophet; (2) unbearable political circumstances.

The first basis:
"...[I]t was, in all probability, the personal devotion of the faithful to the Prophet that made them await the advent of a divinely guided savior from his family (ahl al-bayt)." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 3)

The second basis:
"In the beginning, because of the unbearable political as well as social circumstances, a group of Muslims had come to look forward to a charismatic leader, not unlike the Prophet himself, who would right all wrongs and deliver the community from misery and distress. The fulfillment of such an expectation was believed to be possible only through a relative of the Prophet, more precisely a descendant of 'Ali and Fatima." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 18)

Both bases:
"The notional exaltation of the Prophet and his rightful successor as a second cause, in addition to the hope of the ill-treated mentioned earlier, gave rise to the very concept of messianic leadership from among the descendants of the Prophet, an Imam who could save the believers." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 5)

2. Sunnis' devotion to Ahlul Bayt & their belief in al-Mahdi is because of Shi'a influence

"The moderate Shi'ites, who were later on to form the bulk of the Shi'ites maintaining the Imamate of the twelve Imams, although insisting on the exalted status of the Imams and allegiance to the twelve successors of the Prophet, maintained relations with the community at large.
"The Imamite accommodation also warranted their continuity and, **indirectly, their pervasive influence in gaining a recognition for the elevated position of the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet) in Sunnite circles.** The *walaya* or love and devotion to that family was given an official status in the personal piety of all Muslims, and **the idea of the appearance of the Mahdi** from among the descendants of Fatima through her son al-Husayn **became a widespread Islamic belief.**" (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 13-14)

"By the early tenth century the Mahdi tradition had gained acceptance even among the Sunnites, especially the idea that the ideal ruler of the Mulims would be among the descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law 'Ali..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 69)

3. Was the Twelfth Imam "the Mahdi"?

"The study of the Imamite sources of this period leads one to assume that, at least at the beginning of the Imamite history, which should be placed at the end of the third/ninth and the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, the twelfth Imam's role was conceived more as al-Qa'im and Sahib al-amr, while no idea about his being al-Mahdi, the eschatological savior of Islam, had yet been accentuated. The title al-Mahdi, with its messianic implications became prominent feature of the Shi'ite creed in the period subsequent to the Short Occultation (A.D. 873-945)." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 59)

While talking about the Complete Occultation, Dr. Sachedina writes:

"The accentuation on the twelfth Imam's role as the promised Mahdi, the eschatological leader of the Islamic peoples, must be dated from this period when it had become clear to the Imamites that the Qa'im's appearance 'in the near future' was uncertain." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 100)

4. Meaning of "Al-Mahdi": from "ideal leader" to "eschatological sense"

By the time of al-Mufid, the Imamites "recognized the twelfth Imam as the *khatam al-hujaj* and the messianic Imam, the Mahdi, who would appear in the near future." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 59)

"The title al-Mahdi, which appeared sometimes along with the title al-Qa'im was, in the beginning, merely a designation for the ideal Islamic ruler. But with the delay in the great social transformation under al-Mahdi's command, the title took on eschatological tones in Imami Shi'ism." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 68)

"It is plausible to maintain that the prolonged occultation of the Imam was one of the factors which contributed toward interiorization of al-Mahdi's function, who became *al-mahdi al-muntazar* (the Awaited) and *mahdi akhir al-zaman* (of the Last Days)..." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 59-60)

"The eschatological significance of al-Mahdi seems to be a later concept, because even the word *mahdi*, as we have seen above, conveyed a different idea in the beginning, where it was used to show a special mark of the Shi'i Imam who was endowed with a knowledge of secret matters and of the revealed scriptures of God. This meaning should be contrasted with the much later meaning accepted even today by Imamite writers:

'The twelfth Imam is known as the Mahdi because he himself has found the way, and has been entrusted with the task of guiding mankind. Those who will live under his rule will all be Muslims and the followers of the Qur'an by the favor of his guidance.'" (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 65)

5. Ghaybat & its division into Sugra & Kubra

"The two forms of the ghayba are based on traditions, undoubtedly of later origin." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 83)

After quoting a hadith from al-Kulayni, Dr. Sachedina writes:

"The occultations in this tradition do not state the length of time. This suggests another fact, namely, that until the days of al-Kulayni, who died at the end of the so-called Short Occultation (329/940-41), the two forms of ghayba were not divided into sughra (Lesser) and kubra (Greater), as was the case much later. None of the early sources uses these two terms sughra and kubra for the two occultations. Al-Kulayni in another tradition on this subject uses the terms qasir (short) and tawil (long) for the two occultations...
"The terms *qasir* and *tawil*, as used above do not connote the meaning of *sughra* and *kubra*, which most probably originated in the writings of the Imamites during the Safavid period." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 84)

An-Nawbakhti and al-Kulayni have not mentioned the two types of occulation. (p. 57, 82-84) Al-Nu'mani for the first time spelled out the two forms of ghayba. (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 83)

Why were these two forms of ghayba 'fabricated'? Sachedina writes:

"Perhaps it is in the prolongation of the occultation that the reason for the two forms of ghayba for the twelfth Imam must be sought."

(*Islamic Messianism*, p. 83) On the same issue, he also writes: "In all probability, it was the confused situation caused by the ʻAbbasid atrocities committed against the descendants of al-Sadiq on one hand, and the confusion over the succession of the Imam Hasan al-ʻAskari (d. 260/873-74) in Samarra on the other, which became an important factor contributing to the theory of the occult Imamate of the Imami Shiʻism." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 24)

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E. ON *FIQH* & *FUQAHÃ'*

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1. On the two women witnesses being equal to one male witness

Dr. Sachedina describes the event that after the death of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) some of his companions went to see Hakima (the aunt of the deceased Imam) and asked her: 'Have you seen Sahebul Amr?' After quoting the positive reply from her, Dr. Sachedina says:

"And here I raise a very important point that we in the fiqh we raise: the two women witnesses for one man. **And this is all nonsense. It has no basis on the Qur'ãn.** If it had basis on the Qur'ãn, then the sahaba would have asked Hakima that we need another woman to tell that you are telling us honestly. It is a creation of the fuqaha. [They] had their own problems in understanding the situations. There were not ma'sum."
(Speech on 1 April 1988 / 15 Sha'ban 1408 at Bayview Mosque)

2. On the niyãbat-e 'ãmm (general deputyship) of the mujtahidin

"The important question that must be raised at this point is, where and when does the much later interpretation of the delegation, albeit indirect, of this prerogative of the niyaba to the Imamite jurists (mujtahidun) begin? The only tradition cited by the later Imamite scholars in support of the indirect niyaba of the Imamite jurists during the second occultation is contained in a letter from the twelfth Imam received by a person named Ishaq b. Ya'qub in reply to his enquiries about some religious questions...The tradition under consideration is as follows:

'As for the events which may occur [in future when you may need guidance in religious matters] refer to the transmitters (ruwat) of our sayings (hadith) who are my hujja to you and I am the Hujja of God to you all.'
"The text of the hadith as cited above seems to have been tampered with during the later period when tremendous importance must have been attached to this tradition. The text preserved by Tusi has the last part of the sentence as follows: '.. and I am the hujja to you all ('alaykum).' On the other hand, Majlisi's text reads: '...and I am the hujja to them (the transmitters) ('alayhim).' By this latter reading only the transmitters would become directly answerable to the Imam and not all the Shi'ites, who would have to follow the rulings of one of these ruwat, in case of difficulty. This would necessarily add to their power in deciding matters pertaining not only to religion but also to social and political problems." (*Islamic Messianism* [1981], p. 100-101)

After saying that the Persian translator of Majlisi's Bihār al-Anwar has interpreted the word 'transmitters' in the meaning of 'mujtahids', Dr. Sachedina comments:

"The absence of such an interpretation in Majlisi's text itself suggests that this interpretation of the ruwat as the mujtahids belongs to the Qajar period of Iranian history when the power of the mujtahids increased tremendously... In all probability, this rise of power of the mujtahids began in the Safavid period when persons like Majlisi rose to eminence." (*Islamic Messianism*, p. 101)

Dr. Sachedina reaffirms his opinion about 'intentional tampering' of the above hadith in his The Just Ruler (1988).

"I have discussed this rescript in my *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 100-101, where I have explained the problem, together with the preserved texts and variations in them, reflecting some intentional tampering with the rescript." (*The Just Ruler* [1988] p. 271)

3 A new concept of 'ijtihād' & 'niyābat' of Imam Zamāna (a.s.)

After talking about the principles of intizār and ijtihād as explained by Dr. 'Ali Shari'ati, Dr. Sachedina says:

"Now I will draw a larger conclusion here, a larger conclusion here, that as long as we treat each other with justice, as long as we treat each other with consideration, then we have the access to Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan's will among us. It cannot be otherwise. **That will of Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan is not in Najaf or Qum!** It is right here in this community! ...

"Without *ijtihād*, this community will die of Imam's presence. You cannot live without ijtihad, and my friends, *ijtihād* is not limited to five, six people. As Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq has taught us, as long as we have ethics, we have morals, we have spirituality, we can be sure that the Imam is with us. **Let us stop mystifying the Imam. This is mystification of the Imam.** Had it not been for Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan, this community would not have existed today. But he left with us a very dynamic principle. Think; my friends, *ijtihād*! *Rahmatullahi 'alayh*, Dr. 'Ali Shar'ati, they don't like him; they curse him. Yah, they curse him; they say he was kafir; I don't know, he was this, he was that. He was a Sunni, he was this, that. What a world we are living in my friends. It's not a tolerant world at all.

"You know the problem? We are faced with freedom around us, and we are frightened by it. We say, my God, the best thing is to go into the cocoons, withdraw and not face, like the ostrich. In the desert, it puts its head in the sand says, I will not worry about anything, this is my world. And Imam says no, this is your world. Go out, you are my ambassadors, you are my representatives. There is no Special representation. The specific niyabah of Imam (a.s.) ended with the four wukala. **Today, any Shi'a can represent the will of the Imam**. If you see a man of character; I am telling you, if you see a man of character, if you see a man of honesty, if you see a man of God, by

God it's not very difficult, it's very objective. Those who cheat you, look into their eyes, and see for a moment, and you will discover the lies. You can't hide lies for a long time. . . See into their eyes, and you will discover there are lies. **And there are people, who, without any pretensions, without any kind of hanging robes or turbans on their head, they represent Imam Saheb-uz Zamaan, in truth, in action.** (Speech # 9, Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

4. Tension between 'being part of the modern society' & 'being followers of Ahlul Bayt'

"There is a tension in our being part of the modern society and being the followers of the Ahlul Bayt, there is a tension.. There are severe tensions in our functioning as full members of the society because there is a conflict situation. We find our modern selves are not completely operative in the society the way we think we should be operative. There are certain teachings, there are certain understanding of Islam, the way we have understood it, and the way we have inherited it. And our inheritance sometimes becomes an obstruction to the right type of understanding of our religion...

"You want to see an example, I will give you an example.. that is in the book of Ayatullah Khui that I translated and Oxford is printing, *The Prolegomena to the Qur'ān*, and Ayatullah Khui, to my bafflement, I was, I was, I didn't like it when I read it. I will be honest with you, Ayatullah Khui was our marja-e taqlid, well and good, but as a scholar, I could not, and when I will tell you, you will say we too don't agree with him. For example, he criticizes one of the Egyptian scholars who says that slavery is irrelevant in the modern times even if the Qur'an says about it. He is talking about *al-Manaar*; Rashid Ridha is being criticized by Ayatullah Khui that Rashid Ridha is under the influence of modernity and he is criticizing the Qur'an. No I don't think; when I read, I checked al-Manaar, by the way, and I read that what he says that, that institution of slavery is not relevant today; it may have been

relevant at one point, it is no more relevant today. Ayatullah Khui is criticizing Rashid Ridha saying that no you can't say that an institution that is described in the Qur'an or is sanctioned by the Qur'an should become irrelevant today. In other words, there should be slavery, You and I will not agree with it even if he's the greatest 'alim of ours. Isn't that true?...And in my opinion, Ayatullah Khui's view point there is not correct. I don't think he is criticizing Rashid Ridha correctly."
(Speech # 10 in Muharram 1419 at Toronto)

* * *

ON THE IMÃMAT OF ʻALI BIN ABI TÃLIB (A.S.)

In 1995, Dr. Abdul ʻAziz Sachedina published an article in the Bio-Ethics Encyclopedia (vol. 3, p. 1289) entitled as "Islam" in which he has briefly presented the early history of Islam also. On the issue of succession (khilãfat), Dr. Sachedina writes:

> "Muhammad died in 632 C.E., having brought the whole of Arabia under the Medina government. However, he had left no explicit instructions regarding succession to his religious-political authority."

When this article was distributed on the Internet in the Shiʻa community, Dr. Sachedina became even more a controversial figure than before. And when Br. Muhsin Jaffer and Br. Murtaza Lakha sent some questions to him pertaining to the article, Dr. Sachedina insisted on the correctness of his writing and replied:

> "On the question whether there were no EXPLICIT instructions regarding succession to the Prophet's 'religious-political authority' let it be clear that the statement while asserting that there was no EXPLICIT (that is, distinctly expressed, clearly stated, not merely implied) instructions in the matter of succession to the 'Prophet's religious-political authority,' it asserts by implication that there was IMPLICIT (that is, necessarily involved though not plainly expressed) direction in the matter.
>
> "This implicit direction of the Prophet was expressed on several occasions in his life-time, including finally at al-Ghadir. It was also because of this absence of explicit statement

on these occasions that Imam ʻAli never used any of these occasions, including al-Ghadir, to put forward his candidacy as the only rightful successor of the Prophet."

After 21st of Ramadhan 1418, Dr. Sachedina issued a statement via the Internet in which he wrote:

"The foundation ot our faith, that is the Shiʻa faith, is based on this IMPLICIT sense. Historically (the only position that can be taken in the article here) the source of dissension in the early community was the absence of EXPLICIT directions regarding the succession in community.

"The statement of the wilaya (man kuntu mawa fa hadha ʻAliyyun mawla), which is the main documentation for the Shiʻa acclamation in support of the Imamate of Imam ʻAli, is regarded as an implicit rather than explicit statement of the Prophet regarding the 'succession of his comprehensive authority.' The reason is that the word mawla in Arabic is ambiguous as far as the 'succession' itself is concerned."

When the objections of some Shiʻa brothers increased, in the last days of Ramadhan 1418, Dr. Sachedina issued a general ciruclar addressed to the Shiʻas via the Internet:

"I am taking this opportunity to state in the most ABSOLUTE terms that not only do I believe in the unequivocal authenticity of the event of al-Ghadir which took place on the 18th of Dhul- Hijja, 11 AH/632 CE; I believe that the statement by the Prophet: 'Everyone whose master I am, also has ʻAli as a master,' to be the explicit desgination of the Imam ʻAli to the office of the Leadership of Muslim Community, as upheld in the Twelver Shiʻa faith."

* * *

Finally, after the Ashura of 1419, Dr. Sachedina faxed to some Shi'a brothers in Toronto copy of the letter that he had sent to the publishers of the Encyclopedia in which he had asked them to amend the problematic paragraph as follows:

> "Muhammad died in 632 C.E., having brought the whole of Arabia under the Medina government. However, although he had explicitly designated his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, to succeed him, he had left no written guidelines about the political process."

* * *

In the 4th speech of Muharram 1419, Dr. Sachedina talked about this controversy and while criticizing his opponents in Toronto, he said:

> "How can such a thing divide the community when it is such a trivial part, and it is not even part of the faith."

In the same speech, he also said:

> "That historical event, what does it have any connection with our belief system? So if I said in my article that the Prophet (s.a.w.) did not leave any explicit instruction about his successor, am I treading the path which is dangerous to the survival of the religion of the Ahlul Bayt? Or am exercising my right as a researcher to see what the documents say?"

Again, in the same speech, he said:

> "Yes, al-Ghadir is an explicit designation; it does not mean explicit instruction about the political process. No history supports that."

* * *

THE HISTORICAL MEETING WITH AYATULLAH AL-UZMA SAYYID ʻALI AS-SISTANI

As reported by
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi
On September 3, 1998

بسم الله الرحمـن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام على محمد وآله الطاهرين

وقل رب أدخلني مدخل صدق وأخرجني مخرج صدق واجعل لي من لدنك سلطانا نصيرا.

وقل جاء الحق وزهق الباطل ۚ إن الباطل كان زهوقا

(سوره ۷۱ الاية ۸۰-۸۱)

I stand tonight in front of you to talk about my trip to Najaf along with Dr. Abdul Aziz Sachedina. During the last four months I had maintained silence on this issue except to say that I needed time for preparation before undertaking this historical journey.

Tonight I would like to break my silence and make a statement on the controversy before I describe the historical meeting with the Ayatullah al-Uzma Sayyid as-Sistani and what transpired therein.

* * *

The Controversy Surrounding Dr. Sachedina

Those who have been around from the early days of this

community in Toronto, tell me that the controversy surrounding Dr. Sachedina has been there from the very beginning of this centre's opening. Sometimes the controversy would be suppressed; and sometimes it would erupt and come up again. The recent controversy started around the article of Dr. Sachedina in the *Bio-Ethics Encyclopedia*. This started in Rajab of last year, about ten months ago.

I have been living in Toronto for the last seven years; and I had decided not to enter into the controversy surrounding Dr. Sachedina **simply because** whenever someone criticized his book or statements, it was immediately given a political context. And some people are very good at contextualizing issues. All criticism was cut short by saying that this is a World Federation conspiracy. (This was, by the way, the main reason behind my hesitation in participating in the Open Forum.) The other common and handy response was the accusation that he is being quoted "out of context."

Having joined the Jamaat two years ago, my responsibilities changed. If a controversy surrounding a religious issue starts affecting everyone, then I have to make a statement. When I first read the article in the *Bio-Ethics Encyclopedia*, I didn't give it much of a thought. **Not because** I thought that it was all right, **but** I assumed that probably Dr. Sachedina was writing from the majority Sunni perspective. Then two brothers from the U.K., Muhsin Jaffer and Murtaza Lakha, wrote questions on that article to Dr. Sachedina. In the response to their questions, to my surprise, Dr. Sachedina insisted upon the correctness of his view to the extent of saying that Ghadir was also an implicit designation and that is why 'Ali did not use it as an argument for his caliphate. By that time, the issue had become talk of the town.

It was this response of Dr. Sachedina to the questions that

prompted me to break my silence. And, therefore, on the eves of 19th and 21st of Ramadhan last year, I discussed the issue thoroughly in an attempt to put to rest any doubts that might have arisen in minds of the youths about caliphate of Imam ʻAli not being explicitly and clearly declared by the Prophet (s.a.w.).

I am saying this because I have been questioned about the wisdom of talking on the issue of explicit vis-a-vis implicit caliphate in Ramadhan before calling up Dr. Sachedina and asking for clarification. **Well, I discussed only after** reading his response to questions sent from U.K. The questions had already been asked, there was no need for me to phone Dr. Saheb before discussing the issue. More so, when the article is already published and is in the public domain.

The recent controversy coincided with the invitation that had been extended by the West centre of our Jamaat to Dr. Sachedina for this year's Muharram. The President, Br. Nazir Gulamhussein, came to see me in the month of Dhil Qaʻda and talked about exploring the possibility of approaching the Marjaʻ to solve this problem.

I had not yet made up my mind about approaching the Marjaʻ, when on 10th of Dhil Hijja, the day of ʻIdul Adha, the President informed me that Dr. Sachedina has sent an e-mail saying that he is ready to go to Najaf even today. So now I was faced with two things: (1) the President, on behalf of the Jamaat, strongly inclined on the approach to the Marjaʻ; and (2) Dr. Sachedina's challenge to go to Najaf. Moreover, the President also assured me that the supporters of Dr. Sachedina agree with this approach and are willing to accept the consequences. I must also point out that unrelated to the Toronto Jamaat's view, the supporters of Dr. Sachedina in Africa as well as North America were also insisting upon the approach of the Marjaʻ.

Under such circumstances, I had no choice but to accept the idea of going to Najaf in spite of all the hesitations I had for personal and other reasons. **However**, what nobody, nobody at all, realized was that going to the Marja‘ is like taking the case to the Surpreme Court of Canada. The Marja‘ is the final authority during the ghaybat of Imam Zamana (a.s.). And that is why I said that I would go **but only** after preparation, and that would not be possible until after the Arbaeen. I also insisted that I will not only take this one paragraph of the Encyclopedia on implicit caliphate but all the controversial writings and statements of Dr. Sachedina — otherwise, I strongly believed that, we might have to go to Najaf more than one time!

Since I agreed to take the case to Najaf, I was not willing to make the decision whether Dr. Sachedina should be given mimbar for Muharram or not. For this I was harshly criticized from both sides: Sachedina's supporters were saying "If Maulana can criticize Aziz in majlis, why can't he go now? What preparations he needs to do?" while his opponents were saying, "You have disappointed us." Some of Sachedina's opponents even indirectly suggested that probably I was worried about my employment with the jamaat, and that I shouldn't worry because Allãh is the Provider! For both groups, I can only pray that may Allãh forgive them for what they said out of ignorance!

Nobody realized the extent of work that was involved. When the work of compilation and translation was completed in the last week of July 1998, the huge binder emerged. The binder consisted of five parts:

1. Views & Ideas of Dr. Sachedina — Farsi & English
   Direct quotations from his own words taken from the sources in parts 2-5.
2. Islamic Messianism — Farsi translation
   First two chapters complete; and excerpts from the rest of the book.

3. Imamate & Khilafat Farsi & English
   Consisted of the paragraph from the *Bio-Ehics Encyclopedia*, and the gradual responses of Dr. Sachedian to the controversy that followed; ending with the amendments that he has sent to the publishers for the next edition.
4. Religious Pluralism Farsi & English
   (The idea that more than one religion can guarantee salvation in the hereafter).
5. Fiqh & Fuqahã. Farsi & English
   Some of Dr. Sachedina's views on fiqhi and shar'i issues.

I gave two copies of this binder to the Jamaat: one to be sent to Dr. Sachedina so he knows what we are presenting to Ayatullah Sistani; and the other to be sent to Ayatullah Sistani.

* * *

The Journey to Najaf

I left on 16th from Toronto to London. From London, Dr. Sachedina, his son Ali Reza and myself took British Airways to Amman.

On 17th, Monday evening, we left Amman in a GMC jeep, and after 17 hours we reached Baghdad! From there, we went to Najaf, reaching at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, the 18th.

On 19th August, I phoned Ayatullah Sistani's office to see whether or not the binder had reached them. That binder also contained a covering letter from the Toronto Jamaat signed by Br. Nazir Gulamhussein. Upon hearing that no such binder had reached, I informed Agha's son, Sayyid Muhammad Reza, that I had my own copy which I could bring over for Agha to study before he accepted us in his audience. (Fearing that the binder might be taken away by the Iraqis at the Iraqi border, I had taken all precaution. I had

photocopied the entire binder in a reduced form, and had it bound like a small booklet. That I placed between the Qur'ãn and the Mafãtih in my briefcase. But al-hamdu lil-lãh, nothing was taken from us at the Iraqi customs.)

Hujjatul Islam Sayyid Muhammad Reza asked me to come with the file and also explain the purpose of the visit. I took the binder[1] and, relying on memory, conveyed the message which was there in Br. Nazir Gulamhussein's letter. Al-hamdu lillah, Agha agreed to meet with us the next day 20th August at 9 am.

I would like to inform the community about the meeting so that you may understand the background in which the Ayatullah's letter was issued, and also because I have been hearing, since I returned to Toronto, many rumours about what happened at the meeting.

The First Meeting: 20th August 1998

As soon as we sat down, Ayatullah Sistani (hereinafter referred to as Agha) began his talk addressing Dr. Sachedina directly. After listening for a few minutes, I realized that Agha had begun by referring to **a letter Dr. Sachedina had sent to him** earlier on this issue.

Agha began by saying that he would like to make some **opening remarks:**
First of all, he, unlike other personalities, is not easily influenced by anyone praising him or saying that, "I am your muqallid."

1 Did I deliver "package of letters" along with the binder? Absolutely not. I had gone alone and I only took the binder and had no letter, whatsoever, from anyone for Ayatullãh Sistani or his son. I didn't know that some people have 'ilmu '1-ghayb to know what I had in my plastic bag without being with me at that time! This story has been fabricated probably to counter what I have mentioned about Dr. Sachedina having sent a letter to the Ayatullãh.

Then Agha talked at length about his **own academic background. I sensed that he wanted to let us know that his opinion is based on full awareness of the issues, and that one should not assume that since he is in Najaf, he is unaware of what is happening around the world.** He talked about his studies in Mashad, in Qum, and then in Najaf. He was aware of the intellectual trends during the time when colonial and imperial powers had control of the region [during WWII]. He was also familiar with the activities and strategies of the Christian missionaries, and also with the trends of thought that amalgamated ideas from Islam and communism. He was also aware of the programs of Orientalists in their study of Islam and the Muslims.

His study was not only limited to Shi'a fiqh; he was fully acquainted with the fiqh of Sunni madhahib also and specially referred to the book *al-Umm* of ash-Shafi'i. Agha also mentioned that he has studied philosophy and 'irfan under recognized masters.

Thirdly, Agha said that he keeps himself up-to-date on the affairs of the Shi'as and Muslims all around the world. Reports are sent to him regularly from different parts: India, Pakistan, Europe, etc.

Agha talked on these issues for about 40 to 45 minutes.

* * *

Then Agha came specifically to the purpose of our visit. Referring to **the binder** that contained the views and ideas of Dr. Sachedina, **Agha asked me whether or not Dr. Sachedina had seen it?** I replied that yes this was given to him more than two weeks ago. Dr. Sachedina concurred to my answer.

Agha then asked Dr. Sachedina: **"Are these your words and statements? Is there any thing added into this?"** Dr. Sachedina answered: "Yes; these are my statements; however, I do not agree with the conclusions derived from them."

I had provided the originals of all his writings along with the translations; and also had the audiocassettes of his lectures and a cassette player with me at that meeting. But after Dr. Sachedina's answer in which he did not contest the authenticity of the statements attributed to him, there was no need to bring all those sources out.

Ayatullah Sistani's Assessment of Sachedina's Views:

After this, Agha, addressing Dr. Sachedina said that, "I would like you to **clearly understand what I am saying.** I am not of the nature to assassinate anyone's character or destroy one's dignity. What I intend to say is not to destroy your personality. What you have written to me, I take your good intentions at face value; and do not want to judge you."

"Having read through this file (and you should know that I have gone through it), it seems that you have not adequately studied the Qur'an and the sunnah." Agha referred to the example of the verse "*inna d-dina ʿindallãhi l-Islam* — verily the religion in sight of Allãh is Islam" where Dr. Sachedina had said that "al-Islam" in this verse is with small "i" not with a capital "I." (He means "islam" the religion of God from Adam to Muhammad, and not "Islam" the religion that started in seventh century of the Common Era). Agha said that if you had looked at it from Arabic grammatical point of view, you would not have made this mistake. Al-Islam means the Islam as brought and taught by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w).

Then Agha expressed his opinion about Dr. Sachedina's ideas in general. He described Dr.'s ideas and views as immature (*na pukhte* ناپخته) and unrefined (*nudj na shude* نضج نشده). Agha used these terms to describe Dr. Sachedina's ideas quite a few times during this meeting. It is important to remember that these are not remarks by an ordinary imam of a masjid or a mulla, it is the evaluation by the Marjaʿ, the highest religious authority in our community.

The Advice of Ayatullah Sistani

Having said that he does not want to get into the debate and prove the errors in the views of Dr. Sachedina, Agha finally came to the **main suggestion.** He said to Dr. Sachedina **"My advice to you, a brotherly advice, not an order as a Marja'-e taqlid, is that you yourself should freeze (*tajmid*) your views and not express your opinions (*ibda'-e ra'iy*). Rather you should translate the works of our 'ulamã' like Ayatullah al-Khu'i, 'Allãma Tabãtabã'i, and some works of Agha-e Mutahhari. Even in translations, refrain from expressing your opinions."**

Agha then talked about the **"freezing of ideas"** and "not expressing one's opinions." He said that what I am asking of you is not an easy thing to do, in doing so one has to kill his ego. "One of my philosophy teachers used to say that a person's ideas are more dearer to him than his own children." But it is not necessary to express your opinions.

Agha gave his **own example.** He said that before the demise of Ayatullah al-Khu'i he was not known except to the circle of the learned scholars. He used to give lectures to a limited circle of students, and had advised them against publishing or distributing his views during the life time of Ayatullah al-Khu'i. He has written fifteen volumes on Usûlu 'l-Fiqh (the Principles of Jurisprudence or the Methodology of Ijtihad) as compared to Ayatullah al-Khu'i's five volumes; but, till this day, they remain unpublished. And there are many views which are different from that of Ayatullah al-Khu'i.[2] "If I had died before Ayatullah al-Khu'i, then none would have become familiar with my views."

Then Agha gave the example of another mujtahid of the past: Agha

2 This is the only context in which the Ayatullah talked about differences between his and the late Ayatullah Khu'i's views. The issue of Sachedina having a different opinion from Ayatullah Khu'i on the latter's alleged position on slavery was never mentioned at all in both the meetings.

Mirza-e Shirazi. The masjid where he used to lead the prayers, a mulla used to read every day a few masa'il between the two namaz for the audience. However, the masa'il he was reading were not according to the fatwa of Mirza-e Shirazi but according to Ayatullah Yazdi. Some of the Mirza's followers suggested that this is an insult to you therefore you should not sit and listen to this. But the Mirza refused to give in to his ego, and continued to sit through the recitations of the masa'il based on Yazdi's fatwas.

Agha said that one of the problems of Shi'a community is that every one [Tom, Dick and Harry] thinks he has the right to express an opinion on Islam. Look at the Catholic church; in spite of all the differences among themselves, the official opinion is only that of the Pope. Look at the Salafi (the Wahhabis; but I call them Salafis because they prefer that name for themselves), it is only Bin Baz who gives the official opinion. But among the Shi'as, everyone thinks he has the right to express his 'expert' opinion. In our tradition, before a person gives his own opinion, it is customary to show it to two mujtahids; and once they approve the process used to reach the conclusion, then one expresses that opinion publicly.

Agha then came to the suggestion: **"It is my brotherly advice to you that you give me a written commitment that after talking to me you will not express your personal opinions on Islam in speech as well as in writing in all media of communication."**

Dr. Sachedina's Defence (i)

During his talks, Agha had repeatedly mentioned **two examples** from the writings of Dr. Sachedina: on the issue of religious pluralism, and on the issue of two women witnesses being equal to one male witness.

Dr. Sachedina protested that this example of two women witnesses

has been taken **out of context;** and that he was presenting it to counter the Western propaganda that Islam treats women as inferior to men; and that he wanted to show that one woman, Hakima Khatun, can be a sufficient witness.

I gestured with my hand to respond to this "out of context" defense; I wanted to bring up the actual text of his speech which is absolutely devoid of such a context which Dr. Sachedina gave in the meeting. However, **Agha** himself responded to Dr. Sachedina's protest. Agha said that **I accept that your intentions were good; but the way you have said it, there is more harm in it than benefit. To quote Agha's words exactly, "You wanted to fix the eyebrow, but ended up poking the eye!"** You leave an impression in the mind of people that the belief in Mahdi and his existence is based on one woman's testimony. In the same sources that you have used, *al-Ghayba* of Tusi that I have also read, there are many other cases of witnesses who had seen the Imam. Uthman al-ʿUmari, during the life time of Imam Hasan al-ʿAskari, came with fifty Shiʿas to the Imam, and they were shown the infant Imam al-Mahdi.

Back to the Advice

Agha again got back to **his advice** to Dr. Sachedina. He said that it is my brotherly advice to you that you yourself write the commitment; I do not want to condemn your personality. **Dr. Sachedina asked** whether such a commitment would solve the problem. I responded by saying that such a commitment would solve the problem provided it is in written form and is also attested by Agha himself. At that moment, I took out the copy of Toronto Jamaat's letter (which I had fortunately got from Dr. Sachedina the night before) and gave it to Agha. After reading the letter, Agha said that in order to put an end to disunity, you yourself write the commitment that I am asking for; and then there will be no need for me to even answer this letter.

Dr. Sachedina responded by saying that this might not solve the problem; they would like to declare me as kafir and munafiq; that is how they have banned me in Africa; and even they want the same thing!

Dr. Sachedina's Defence (ii)

Dr. Sachedina said that there was **no need to translate the book on Messianism.** He took out three books and placed in front of us: (l) Messianism; (2) Iftikhar-zadeh's Farsi translation of Dr. Liyakatali Takim's MA thesis comparing the views of Sachedina and Jassim Hussain; and (3) his own English translation of Ibrahim Amini's book on Imam Mahdi. Then pointing to the binder, Sachedina said, "What was the need of translating this book of eighteen years ago [referring to Messianism] because it had already been criticized in Qum [referring to the extensive notes of Iftikhar-zadeh in the translation of Dr. Takim's thesis], and it had already been corrected through his translation of Ibrahim Amini's book."[3]

3 Ayatullah Amini has an excellent book for the general readership on the Twelfth Imam entitled as *Dãdgustar-e Jahãn* which was translated by Dr. Sachedina as *al-Imam al-Mahdi: the Just Ruler of Humanity*. Has the translation of Ayatullah Amini's book by Dr. Sachedina really corrected the errors in the latter's *Messianism*? I do not think so for the following reasons: First of all, not all the issues discussed in *Messianism* have been touched upon in Amini's book. A comparison of the issues discussed in that book with the ideas of Sachedina presented earlier in this publication will prove this fact.

Secondly, *Messianism* was published by a university press and has found its place among university libraries, whereas the translation of Amini's book was published privately in Toronto and distributed mainly among the Khoja community. Its second print in Qum by a close friend of Ayatullah Amini (of course, without the translator's preface in which he has defended *Messianism*) has seen wider circulation but that also is limited to the Shi'a readership. In other words, *Messianism* is still standing alone in university libraries without the translation of Amini's book—the "error" is still there without its intended "antidote"!

Agha responded by saying that what I have seen in this binder are also statements that you have made this very year; I have looked at the dates very carefully![4] Then Agha again brought up the issue of the written commitment.

While waiting for the paper to write the draft of the commitment, **I took the opportunity to state to Dr. Sachedina in presence of Agha that I have nothing personally against him. I only have problems with his views and writings. It is not personal. And when he says that Messianism is a book written eighteen-years-ago and that it has been corrected by his translation of Ibrahim Amini's book, one should remember that in the preface of Amini's book, he has defended his eighteen years old book!** Upon this, Dr. Sachedina responded by saying that what I have said in the preface is that the conclusion of both the books is same.

Agha said that he is well aware of what Dr. Sachedina has written in the translator's preface defending his own book but he does not want to get into arguments and counter-arguments.

Draft of the Commitment

Finally Dr. Sachedina came about to write the commitment. He was asked to propose a draft and I was also asked to do the same. Agha Sayyid Muhammad Reza looked at both proposed drafts and then came up with a third one: **"After talking to Ayatullah Sistani, I give commitment that from this day I will refrain from lecturing and expressing opinions on Islamic beliefs and fiqh problems."**

4 Did Ayatullah Sistani degrade Ayatullah Amini's book and did he disrespectfully mention Ayatullah Lutfullah Safi while responding to Sachedina? Ayatullah did not degrade Amini's book nor did he talk about the letter written by Ayatullah Safi. Actually, Ayatullah Sistani never mentioned Ayatullah Safi's name. It is indeed a sorrowful situation to see Dr. Sachedina trying to play one Marjaʿ against the other high ranking scholars of Qum! But Allah is the best of planners.

The **understanding of Dr. Sachedina** was that this commitment only applies to the Khoja community or at most to the Shi'a people. But upon further discussion, **Agha made it quite clear that he wanted a total commitment covering Khoja and non-Khoja Shi'as, Sunnis, Christians and Jews also. Agha wanted Dr. Sachedina to commit that he will not express his opinions on Islamic issues totally and completely, not even to a non-Muslim audience! In the views of Ayatullah Sistani, the problem was not the audience but the person speaking to them.**

Dr. Sachedina talked about **his job at the university** and his involvement with the Sunni community. Agha said that we do not want you to abandon us and go to the Sunnis! No, you have also written things that Sunnis don't agree with. **Then Agha said that the only exception to the comprehensive commitment that he wants from Dr. Sachedina would be the task of teaching at the university.** When Dr. Sachedina insisted that part of the university activity is writing and publishing articles, Agha refused to exempt that and referred to the example of articles that Dr. Sachedina has written on religious pluralism in the Journal of Christian-Muslim Relations. Agha said that I do not agree that you go about expressing your views that all Abrahimic religions are equally valid.

Sachedina's Refusal

Finally, **Dr. Sachedina** asked for **tasbih** and saw **istakhara**, and then refused to sign a comprehensive commitment (with exception of teaching at the university) that Agha was asking from him. Dr. Sachedina asked for one night's time to work over an agreement that can be practical for him also. He said that he would also discuss this with me and come up with a mutually acceptable agreement. Agha reminded him that the wordings should also be acceptable to him.

* * *

The Second Meeting: 21st August 1998

Basis for Refusal by Sachedina

The meeting began at 9 a.m. with me informing Agha that Dr. Sachedina could not come up with the wordings that would be workable for him in light of his job at the university. Dr. Sachedina himself then explained his problem with the complete and comprehensive commitment of refraining from expressing his opinions on Islam.

Agha obviously felt disappointed and said that we have already exempted the issue of teaching at the university. It seems that you have not given any value to my advice. You saw istakhara and then refused to give the written commitment. I am surprised at your attitude.

Dr. Sachedina insisted on the issue of writing articles for academic journals. He talked about the pressures he faced being a Muslim and a Shi'a in the academic world. He said, "ask him [referring to me] who has also studied at a western university." Agha refused to exempt that by saying that I don't want you to go around airing your views about pluralism and even tolerance for idol-worshipping [referring to the example of a man siting in front of Krishna that the Dr. had given in one of his lectures]. As for the pressure, of course, you will then have to say that they like!

Ayatullah's Attempt to Advise Sachedina Further

Realizing that we are not going to get a written commitment from Dr. Sachedina, I said to Agha that in this case **I would need a written response** from you to the letter of the Jamaat.

Again Agha tried to advise Dr. Sachedina. He asked how much

he is **paid** by the university. On being told that he gets X number of dollars annually, Agha suggested that Dr. Sachedina leave the university job and that Agha will pay half his annual salary. **For the other half, Agha suggested that Dr. Sachedina should live a more humble life like that of himself. He said you must have heard about our Imams.** Then Agha rolled up his **qaba's sleeves** and showed us the sleeve of his shirt which had holes in it! He said even "the house that we are sitting in is not mine; and that it has been four months that I have been unable to go for ziyarat of Karbala. So leave the university, I will pay half of your salary, and bring yourself to my humble standard of living!"[5]
[This is a Marja' through whose accounts hundreds of thousands of dollars pass but he does not use it on his own person. He lives a very simple life. I thank Allãh, subhanahu wa ta'ala, for getting an opportunity to see a Marja' who reminds us of the lives of our Imams (a.s.).]

Sachedina Brings Up 'Freedom of Expression'

Dr. Sachedina still refused to give the commitment that Agha wanted **and talked about the freedom of thought and expression and that eventually he was answerable to God for his statements.** He also said that if I give such a commitment then I would not even be able to attend the workshop in Iran next week to which Iran's Foreign Ministry has invited me. Six other Christian and Jewish scholars [from USA] have been invited to attend the workshop on "civil society in Islam." I am the only Muslim scholar.

5 'Ayatullah Sistani tried his utmost so that the situation does not lead to him writing a letter against Dr. Sachedina; therefore, he goes out of his way to advise Sachedina to give the commitment. Since the main excuse presented by Sachedina for not giving the commitment was his university job, the Ayatullah even offered to pay half of his salary. Sachedina presents this as follows: "It was obvious to me that I was a considerable threat to the religious establishment of the Ayatullah to offer me such a generous pension." What a show of arrogance! Now he claims to have the ability to read the minds of other people and that also explicitly!

Agha responded by saying that this commitment does not prevent you from attending that workshop because it deals with Islamic civilization [which is a historical issue]. When Mr. Khatimi [the Iranian president] talks about "civil society," I know that he is referring to relationships between peoples, not religions. You can describe history and quote the historical issues related to civilization of the Muslims. I only want you to refrain from expressing your personal views on purely Islamic issues.

And as far as the issue of being invited by Iran is concerned, that is not that important! Even if ten Irans invite you, so what?![6] **You have not heeded to my advice; and it seems what you have written to me [in your letter] that "I am your muqallid" was just *tahsrifāti* (formal, insincere statement).** You have been overcome with personal desires and the fame that you get by expressing these views. It is hard for you to leave these things aside.

Dr. Sachedina's Defence (iii)

At this point, **Dr. Sachedina objected to the presentations made by us.** He said that "academic criticism has some principles: **alongside the negative points, one must also present the positive points. This binder has nothing but negative points about me. I gave twelve lectures, but excerpts have been selected from here and there only from three lectures! Yes, I have done khata-e ijtihadi; but I have not misled people. I do not know of anyone who has become Christian or Jew because of me."**

Agha himself responded to this objection by saying that in case of a hearing or judicial proceedings only the negative parts are brought up. Look at the example of the American President who is being investigated for illicit relations with a woman: in that case only his

6 This is not a criticism of Iran or its president, as Sachedina wants us to believe. It is the Ayatullah's response to the attempt of Sachedina to impress the Ayatullah by saying that Iran has invited him.

illicit relations is discussed and not his positive works! If a politician gives a talk or many talks, and then makes only one remark against the most sacred principles of the West (let us say, democracy), then only that one remark will come under scrutiny. If he said other good things, those good things will not justify or nullify the mistake in that one remark.

Farewell & the Letter of Ayatullah Sistani

At this point, Sayyid Muhammad Reza said that if no written commitment is coming from Dr. Sachedina then we should not waste Agha's time. He had already given us two hours yesterday. At this stage, I again asked for the written response to Jamaat's letter.

I was asked till when would I be in Najaf. When I said that we are scheduled to leave in two hours time, I was asked to come at 11 to receive Agha's answer.

Dr. Sachedina and his son left Agha's home, while I stayed behind. In less than half an hour the letter was ready:

> In the name of the Almighty.
> Respected Mr Nazir Gulamhussein, President of the Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Jamaat of Toronto, Canada.
>
> With conveyance of salaam and wishing *tawfiq* for yourself and the other brothers and sisters in *imān* in Toronto, and with thanks for the endeavours of the Respected Hujjatul Islam Aqa-e Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi (may his blessings continue), I wish to convey [the following]:
>
> I have looked at the presentation of the writings and statements of Dr. Abdul Aziz Sachedina that was sent [to me].

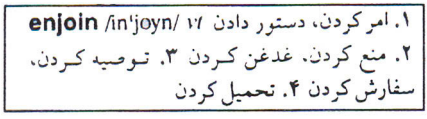
Whereas his views on issues presented are based on incorrect understandings, and are incompatible with religious and academic standards, and cause confusion in minds of the Mu'mineen, all the brothers and sisters in *imãn* (may Allãh help them in [gaining] His pleasure) are enjoined to refrain from inviting him for lecturing at religious gatherings, and not to approach him for seeking answers to questions pertaining to beliefs.

And Allãh is the Guide to the right path.

'Ali al-Husayni as-Sistani [signed & sealed]
28 Rabi ath-Thani 1419 [21 August 1998]

A Word on the Verdict

The verdict of Ayatullah Sistani is very clear. However, I know that since yesterday attempts have been underway to water down its implication. Questions have been asked about the origin of the word "enjoined." For those who understand, the Farsi word is "*tawsiyya*." I have an English-Farsi dictionary right here. Open the word "enjoin" and you will see that one of the equivalents of that word in Farsi is "*tawsiyya*."[7] So no one can claim that the translation is incorrect.


enjoin /in'joyn/ ۱.امر کردن، دستور دادن ۲. منع کردن، غدغن کردن ۳. توصیه کردن، سفارش کردن ۴. تحمیل کردن

There is also a good precedence in using the word "enjoin" for "tawsiyya." Pick the Qur'ãn, and look for the translation of those verses where Allãh says "*wa was-sayna 'l insãn* — We did *tawsiyya* to mankind." *Wassayna* is a verb from *tawsiyya*. You will see that translators use the word "enjoined" or "charged" for *wassayna*.

7 See Mohammad Reza Bateni & Fatemeh Azamehr, *Farhang Moaser English-Persian Dictionary* (Tehran: Farhang Moaser, 1996) p. 302. It was first published in 1993.

Some "experts" would like to see a milder choice of word like "recommendation." I just have two things to say: (1) first of all, even if you choose "recommend" instead of "enjoin," see whose recommendation it is—a Marja' taqlid, the supreme leader of the Shi'a during the time of ghaybat. Do you think you are going to reject the recommendation of a person of that status? (2) Secondly, you like to contextualize everything; why don't you look at the context of the letter? Look at the wordings before that: "Whereas his views on issues presented are based on incorrect understandings, and are incompatible with religious and academic standards..." This is very clear, very explicit. This is the evaluation of Dr. Sachedina's controversial writings by the highest religious authority of the Shi'a world. And in that context, the selection of the word "enjoin" is most appropriate.

In the context of the last controversy, it is "an explicit directive in writing." I hope those who were insisting in Africa and North America that let the Marja' make the final decision will stand true to their word and obey the verdict of the Marja' Ayatullah al-Uzma Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni as-Sistani.

Let me state clearly that the directive of the Ayatullah is for all the brothers and sisters in imãn: "Whereas... all the brothers and sisters in imãn... are enjoined..." It is not limited to Toronto. It would be absurd to think that the Ayatullah would forbid the Mu'mineen in Toronto to approach Dr. Sachedina for answers to questions on beliefs but allow others to do so!

Our community has great potentials and abilities; such controversies have always diverted us from positive action. Instead of using our time and energy in propagating Islam and defending ourselves against the enemies of the Ahlul Bayt (a s), we have had to divert our time and energy to deal with problems within. Let us close this chapter of the history of Toronto Jamaat, and move

forward with unity based on total commitment to the Shi'a Ithnã-'Ashari faith and on total loyalty to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s). Personalities will come and go; let us not allow our faith to be affected by personalities.

What is important is our faith, and not this world and its material and social status. Allãh says in the Qur'ãn that the torrent carries along swelling foam: "As for the foam, it passes away uselessly, and as for (the water) which profits men, it remains in the earth." (13:17) Situations like the one we have been through are just foams that come from time to time, your faith and wilaya is what remains and benefits you in the end.

* * *

Questions About the Report

1. Dr. Sachedina has written that the Ayatullah stated that "he was not in a position to comment on the contents of the binder. Such matters were not within the **jurisdiction** of his authority as the Marja'."

Ayatullah Sistani never made the statement that "he was not in a position to comment on the contents of the binder." This is contradicted by the examples that the Ayatullah has quoted from the binder in his talks—these examples are not only in my report; even Dr. Sachedina has quoted examples in his own statement. Moreover, Sachedina himself writes at one point that, "It was noticeable that the Ayatollah had examined the binder prepared and had read the letter prepared by me explaining the academic study of religion."

Secondly, in his letter, the Ayatullah states that, "I have looked at the presentation of the writings and statements of Dr. Abdul Aziz Sachedina that was sent [to me]. Whereas his views on

issues presented are based on incorrect understandings, and are incompatible with religious and academic standards..." Is this not a comment on the contents of the binder?

As for the issue of such matters not being within the jurisdiction at a Marja', this is also a fabrication. How could have the Ayatullah said this and then proceed on to give his assessment of Sachedina's views as "immature and unrefined, and not based on the Qur'ãn and sunnah"? If he had said that it was not within his jurisdiction, then he would not have written in his verdict that, "...all the brothers and sisters in imãn... are enjoined to refrain from inviting him for lecturing at religious gatherings, and not approach him for seeking answers to questions pertaining to beliefs."

Finally, and most importantly, it was Sachedina himself who challenged the Jamaat to go to the Marja' for the resolution to this problem. If it was not within the jurisdiction of the Marja' to decide on this matter, then why initiate the journey in the first place? He himself writes that "I went with full confidence in the integrity of the religious institution of the marja'iyya, and with the hope of seeing that justice will be done in keeping with Islam's absolute commitment to that moral principle."

After the first meeting, when I asked Sachedina about the letter he had written to the Ayatullah, he said, "I had written asking him to either re-instate me fully or make me *mamnu'u 'l-mimbar* (barred from the mimbar)." After submitting such a request to the Marja', I am really surprised at the question of jurisdiction being raised now about the Ayatullah's verdict. But again I should not be surprised because it is quite common to see a person questioning the integrity of the judge when the judgement is not in his favour.

2. It has been said that the Ayatullah never once mentioned the issue of **wilayat** of Imam 'Ali (a.s.).

Firstly, the Ayatullah had made it clear in the very beginning that he was not going to engage in *ibtãl* (proving wrong) of each item in the binder. If Sachedina thought that an ʿãlim of the level of Marjaʿ would sit down with him and item by item discuss the issues in the binder, then he has grossly over-estimated himself!

Secondly, when the Ayatullah found serious problems in Sachedina's views on religious pluralism that deals with the fundamentals of our faith, then there was no need to proceed further in discussion to the issue of imamate and wilãyat because these issues are secondary to nubuwaat of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and the universality of Islam. And on the issue of pluralism, the Ayatullah commented many times. He especially commented on Sachedina's tolerance for idol-worshippers. (See the beginning part of "Views & Ideas".)

3. Dr. Sachedina has said that the Ayatullah had received a request from Iran to evaluate another scholar's work (which in Sachedina's assumption referred to **Dr. Soroush**) but he had refused to give his opinion. And, therefore, Sachedina has concluded that, "The Ayatollah's judgement, even in form of 'recommendation' could not be merely based on my 'incorrect' interpretations. There had to be more to this than what appeared on the surface."

Firstly, comparing the present controversy to the case of Soroush (**if** the Ayatullah actually referred to him) is like comparing apples to oranges. How? In case of Dr. Sachedina, both parties (i.e., the Jamaat as well as Sachedina) agreed to go to the Marjaʿ and to accept his decision; both parties were familiar with the binder that was presented to the Marjaʿ; and, most importantly, both parties were present in the meeting with the Marjaʿ. In case of the other scholar, these important aspects were missing. So it was quite appropriate for the Ayatullah to refuse to make a decision in that case but agree to make a decision in the present case.

Secondly, the letter of the Jamaat, the content of which I verbally conveyed when I took the binder to the Ayatullah's house and a copy ot which was given to him in the first meeting, clearly emphasized to the Marja' that only his decision would be able to prevent the disunity in the Jamaat. This was the main reason for which the Ayatullah felt necessary to intervene and provide his guidance.

Finally, the Ayatullah's refusal to comment or intervene on other issues has no bearing, whatsoever, on the verdict he has issued on this case. It is like saying that since he has not declared any opinion on the issue of cloning, for example, therefore his fatwa on the issue taharat of Ahlul Kitab is not acceptable!

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