# The 12 Shīʿah Imāms: Infallible or Imaginary?

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**Abstract of Thesis**

The 12 Shīʿah Imāms: Infallible or Imaginary?

In Twelver Shīʿah Islam, the line of 12 Imāms occupies the highest religious authority after God and the Prophet. While the Imāms are venerated in Shīʿah communities and amongst Shīʿah scholars, the extent of the Imāms' abilities and their exact level of purity have been debated extensively by scholars. Contemporary Shīʿah scholars do not agree on the nature of Imāmate and hold different viewpoints on the status of the Imāms in terms of their infallibility. It is critical to harken back to the original Shīʿah community and analyze their beliefs concerning the Imāms' infallibility. This will create a lasting dialogue between the Shīʿah and Sunnī branches, and this dialogue will serve as a means of understanding theological differences and rapprochement efforts between the two branches. Ultimately, this thesis argues that the infallibility of the 12 Shīʿah Imāms is grounded in early Shīʿah literature, has shaped Shīʿah theology, and has become a significant part of Shīʿah identity today.

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# Introduction

In Twelver Shīʿah Islam, the line of 12 Imāms occupies the highest religious authority after God and the Prophet. While the Imāms are venerated in Shīʿah communities and amongst Shīʿah scholars, the extent of the Imāms' abilities and their exact level of purity have been debated extensively by scholars. Contemporary Shīʿah scholars do not agree on the nature of Imāmate and hold different viewpoints on the status of the Imāms in terms of their infallibility. It is critical to harken back to the original Shīʿah community and analyze their beliefs concerning the Imāms' infallibility. This will create a lasting dialogue between the Shīʿah and Sunnī branches, and this dialogue will serve as a means of understanding theological differences and rapprochement efforts between the two branches.

This study exposes many contemporary issues at stake. Researching the Shīʿah belief in Imāmate, how infallibility has evolved, and which factors played into this evolution, will show how the Shīʿah belief in infallibility is misunderstood as a political instrument in today's world. As Shīʿism does not exist in seclusion, this thesis will also research comparative Shīʿah-Sunnī theology on Imāmate and infallibility, and how this has manifested into different cultural and socio-political norms in society. This text will address whether "true" Shīʿism, as dictated by the Prophet and his family, has stood the test of time.

Some research questions this thesis will address include, how did early Shīʿah communities demonstrate the Imāms as the absolute means to seeking God? How is the early Shīʿah community's perception of the Imāms similar to and different from the modern Shīʿah community's view of the Imāms? How does infallibility factor into these

perceptions? To what extent did the Shīʿah community's perception of the 12 Imāms shift over time? What socio-political factors can account for these changes? How has the belief in the infallible nature of the Imāms shaped Shīʿah communities and identity today? Does lack of belief in the infallibility of the Imām diminish anything from their qualities and function? Why is there a clash of ideologies on the infallibility of the Shīʿah Imāms?

This text will take both a historiographical and theological approach to answer these critical research questions. Following the introduction, the thesis will be evaluated in the critical literature review section. Scholars who support the infallible nature and those scholars who believe infallibility to be an exaggeration will be cross analyzed and referenced in contrast with each other. These contemporary scholars include a multitude of Eastern, Western, Muslim, and non-Muslim scholars. This will guarantee a broad representation of faith traditions, thus transcending the bounds of typical sectarian discourse. Why does each scholar believe what they believe, and what evidence do they use to support their beliefs? Next, the thesis will offer a theological methodology for understanding the complexities of Imāmi infallibility as it is believed by the Shīʿah community today. First, the Qurʾānic verses concerning infallibility and relevant exegesis (*tafsīr*) will be reviewed in detail. Then the infallibility of the Prophet will be discussed as a context for unraveling the nature of the Imāms' infallibility. A discussion on the reliability of *ḥadīth* literature will set the stage for a detailed conversation on Shīʿah and Sunnī *ḥadīth* on infallibility. Additionally, the thesis will explore how the Shīʿah belief in the infallibility of the Imāms impacted Shīʿah theology over the past 1,400 years. Lastly, the thesis will demonstrate how the infallible nature of the Imāms has shaped Shīʿah

identity. The Imāms have become irreplaceable role models for theological understanding within Shīʿism. It is only by respecting the status of the Imāms according to the Shīʿah and the relationship between the Shīʿah and the Imāms that understanding can begin to occur between Sunnī and Shīʿah branches.

To reiterate the hypothesis of the thesis, the infallibility of the 12 Shīʿah Imāms is grounded in early Shīʿah literature, has shaped Shīʿah theology, and has become a significant part of Shīʿah identity today.

Lastly, a few notes on important definitions and terms for this thesis:

1) The word infallible has already been used several times and will be the main focus of this thesis. Infallible is in reference to the Arabic word "*ʻiṣmah.*" While *ʻiṣmah* is commonly translated as infallible, perhaps a better translation would be "inerrancy." It is difficult to completely encapsulate the true meaning of *ʻiṣmah* in the English language. When the word *ʻiṣmah* is broken down to its core, its root letters (ع ص م) denote the protection of God from committing human error or sins. Thus, its literal meaning emphasizes the aspect of *protection* from sin. Someone who possesses this level of *ʻiṣmah* is known as *ma`sūm* — the passive form of the word — one who has been rendered sinless and impeccable by God. In this work, infallible is used in reference to mean one who has been protected by God from the ability to sin.
2) *Aḥadīth* (singular - *ḥadīth*) are narrations of the sayings and traditions of the Prophet. The importance of oral tradition and trains of transmission are just a couple of the integral parts of analyzing *ḥadīth*. A later section of the thesis will disclose further information on how to deduce the reliability and authenticity of a

particular *ḥadīth* at hand. On the topic of *ḥadīth*, *rawayāt* are the sayings and traditions of the 12 Shīʿah Imāms. Note, whenever this paper uses the term *ḥadīth*, it is also used in reference to the Imāms' statements, following the accepted practices of the vast majority of Shīʿah scholars today.

3) The early Shīʿah community is in reference to the Shīʿah that lived during the time of the first Shīʿah Imām, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, through the major occultation (*al-Ghaybah al-Kubrā*) of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the 12th Shīʿah Imām, in the year 941CE / 329AH.

## Contemporary Critical Literature Review

This section will pinpoint the opinions of contemporary scholars on the infallibility of the Imāms. On one side of the discussion, scholars such as Mohsen Kadivar, Liyakat N. Takim, and Colin Turner, argue that the infallibility of the Imāms is an irrational claim. They cite many socio-political and historical reasons to back up their arguments. On the other side of the discussion, scholars such as Sajjad Rizvi, Andrew Newman, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Robert Gleave, Martin J. McDermott, and Wilfred Madelung, support the belief in the infallibility of the Imāms with a variety of textual and rational proofs that this section will delve deeper into. The evidence of each scholar will be compared and contrasted to analyze which argument builds a stronger conclusion on the nature of the infallibility of the Imāms.

Some contemporary scholars argue that the 12 Shīʿah Imāms were pious figures but their supernatural abilities, including infallibility, were inaccurately constructed by the later Shīʿah community. The Iranian and Duke University scholar, Mohsen Kadivar, is among those that share this belief. It is important to note that most of his writings on this subject of the nature of Imāmate were published in Arabic and Persian, so Kadivar's audience was most likely trained jurists and traditionally trained scholars, and he was responding to the Shīʿah belief of the Imāms' superior station. Additionally, Kadivar has a background of speaking out against the Iranian jurists and their theological and political beliefs.[1] For example, he is a staunch opponent of Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*wilāyah al faqīh)*, and he has a pattern of relying on his rational arguments as evidence

[1] Ahmad Sadri. "Mohsen Kadivar." In The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. Nov 30, 2021. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0961>.

to corroborate his claims.[2]

In 2006, Mohsen Kadivar openly discussed his view of the exaggerated concept of Imāmate in his article titled, "Qarāʿat-i Farāmush Shudah," translated as "Forgotten Interpretation: Theory of Virtuous Scholars as the First Approach of Shīʿī Islam on the Position of Imāms."[3] As explicitly suggested by the article title, Kadivar centered his argument around the comparison of how early Shīʿism was practiced and how "new" Shīʿah theology is practiced — Shīʿism then versus Shīʿism now. He labeled many *aḥadīth* in *al-Kāfī* on the station of the Imāms as exaggerated, and he called for a complete reevaluation of how the first two centuries of Shīʿah Islam during the lifetime of the Imāms should be observed. After his analysis, he concludes that the early Shīʿah community did not believe in the supernatural image of the Imāms as Shīʿah communities believe today.[4] Instead, he argues that the infallible nature of the Imāms is a new concept in order to garner the support of the Shīʿah masses. According to Kadivar, the Imāms possessed an unimaginable level of knowledge, but they were not perfect beings incapable of committing sin. They were still human. Thus, they were able to commit sins in their judgment and action. Furthermore, this exalted level of knowledge the Imāms possessed was only limited to matters of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and was not all-encompassing.

To arrive at this conclusion, Kadivar is particular about which pieces of evidence he used to articulate his arguments. He draws mainly from political and socio-economic circumstances to substantiate his claims. For instance, he discusses how after the Imāms'

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Mohsen Kadivar. "Qarāʿat-i farāmush shudah: Baz-khani-yi naẒarīyah ʿulamaʿ-yi abrār, talāqī-yi avvaliyah Islām-i Shīʿī az asl-i imāmat (Forgotten Interpretation: Theory of Virtuous Scholars as the First Approach of Shīʿī Islam on the Position of Imāms)." *Madrese1*, no. 3 (May 2006): 92–102.
[4] Ibid.

lifetimes, the Shīʿah community was marginalized and would spread stories about the supernatural position of the Imāms to non-Shīʿah members of society. He cites how the Shīʿah community aimed to verify its own social status and draw people towards Shīʿah theology.[5] The Shīʿah community was able to market itself as superior because its leaders were the infallible Imāms. However, there are many flaws with Kadivar's arguments. For example, Kadivar prioritizes political and socio-economic circumstances over *ḥadīth* collections from the same time period. By dismissing all of these narrations without proper evaluation and instead opting for alternative socio-political explanations, Kadivar emphasizes his own rationale for understanding historical circumstances. In effect, he shows that rational arguments trump and even overrule textual evidence.

Mohsen Kadivar remained rigid in his beliefs on the nature of Imāmate, and in 2019 he published a full-length text on the same subject titled, *Kitab Al Ulama' Al' Abrar,* translated as *The Book of the Righteous Scholars*.[6] In this text, Kadivar builds upon his previous claims and provides a theoretical re-reading of the position of the Imāms. He argues that the 12 Imāms were indeed righteous or pious scholars, but they were nothing more than exactly that — the 12 pious scholars.[7] In the text, he cites several of his past articles and lectures. Another of his key arguments centers around the event of Ashura, in the first month of the Islamic calendar, which marks the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson and the third Shīʿah Imām, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, in the year 61 AH/ 680 CE. Kadivar argues that the Shīʿah view of Imāmate was transformed with the occurrence of Ashura and the martyrdom of the third Imām.[8] Ultimately, this led to the tremendous

[5] Ibid.
[6] Mohsen Kadivar. كتاب العلماء الأبرار (*The Book of the Righteous Scholars*). 2019. https://ar.kadivar.com/17534/
[7] Ibid.
[8] [إعادة قراءة مفهوم الإمامة في ضوء النهضة الحسينية، (نصّ محاضرة ليلة عاشوراء في حسينية الإرشاد، 8 شباط 2006)، 107-136.]

development of commemoration practices and social developments that later became incorporated into Shīʿah theology until the two became completely inseparable. The lamentation practices for the third Shīʿah Imām, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, began to symbolize the sinless nature of the Imām because of the sacrifices he made for his family, his community, and the entire branch of Shīʿism.[9] Ḥusayn was transformed into an interminable figure larger than life. Kadivar cites that Ashura changed the way that the Shīʿah community regarded the Imāms and emphasized the third Imām's traits for their own spiritual and socio-political purposes – to bring together persecuted people against the common enemy, the same enemy Ḥusayn laid down his life facing. Thus, this contributed to the idea that the Imāms were God-like figures incapable of doing anything wrong. Once again, Kadivar responds to this idea by claiming that the Imāms were simply renowned scholars. Kadivar ultimately diminishes the position of the Imāms by arguing that the Shīʿah elevated the station of the Imāms after the events of Muharram. However, Kadivar does not account for the many narrations that cite the Prophet himself crying for Ḥusayn. In addition, he fails to acknowledge that all of the Imāms upheld the traditions of commemoration amongst their followers.[10]

Similar to Mohsen Kadivar, Liyakat N. Takim, a Professor in Islamic Studies at McMaster University in Canada, argues that the 12 Imāms are just charismatic figures whose roles were exaggerated to benefit the socio-political agendas of the marginalized Shīʿah community.[11] Throughout his book, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shīʿahte Islam*, Takim refers to the Imāms as "scholars," in a

Translation: Mohsen Kadivar. "Re-reading the concept of the Imāmate in the light of the Ḥusayn renaissance." (Text of Ashura night lecture in Husayniyah al-Irshad, February 8, 2006), 107-136.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Muḥammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī. *Tarikh al-Ṭabarī*. Vol. 4. p. 353.
[11] Liyakat N. Takim. *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shīʿahte Islam*. SUNY Press: 2012.

derogatory manner. The implicit reading is that the Shīʿah Imāms were on the same level as any other early Shīʿah scholar. Even his first chapter title, "The Scholars Are Heirs of the Prophets," is a declarative sentence that exclusively refers to the Imāms as scholars in place of their actual title, *Imāms*.[12] By calling the Imāms "the heirs of the prophet" and "scholars," Takim is limiting the Imāms' role to the successors of knowledge or teachers. This stands in contrast to the widespread Shīʿah belief that the Imāms were the leaders of mankind and occupied a role of religious authority *in addition to* possessing religious knowledge.

One of Takim's key arguments that he repeats throughout the text is that "Shīʿism in the eighth century manifests a major variation from the traditionally accepted Weberian understanding of the rise of routinized charisma."[13] According to Takim, the Imāms exhibited charismatic qualities during their lifetime in order to possess authoritative guidance over their followers in their proximity as well as "to provide religious guidance to their followers in far-flung areas."[14] In other words, Takim argues that the Imāms had to display a charismatic and larger-than-life role in order to gain more followers in farther areas out of their immediate jurisdiction. Takim expands on this argument, and he explains how during the eighth and ninth centuries, the Shīʿah community faced many challenges by the Mu'tazilis who "refuted the central doctrine of the imamate as it was enunciated by the Shīʿah. The Mu'tazilis' disputations were predicated mainly on speculative theological (*kalam*) arguments and other forms of rational tools to vindicate their doctrinal positions."[15] In response, the Shīʿah "became

[12] Ibid., 1.
[13] Ibid., 79.
[14] Ibid., 79.
[15] Liyakat N. Takim. *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shīʿahte Islam.* SUNY Press: 2012, 124.

more concerned with the legal and theological underpinnings of their faith."[16] Takim concludes that this development led to the Shīʿah community greatly emphasizing the role of the Imāms and their charismatic leadership as the center of Shīʿism.[17] According to Takim, in response to external threats, the Shīʿah community created the idea of Imāmi infallibility in order to ground their communal identity.

On the same wavelength as Mohsen Kadivar and Liyakat N. Takim, Colin Turner, an English convert to Islam who is fluent in both Arabic and Persian, is also critical of Shīʿah theology and the belief in the infallibility of the Imāms.[18] In *Islam Without Allah? The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran*, Colin Turner promptly implies by the title of his text that there is a disconnect between practicing Shīʿism and truly believing in God. Turner also implies that the Imāms take over the status and function of God in Shīʿism. He makes the argument that during the post-Safavid period, Shīʿism became more practiced and popular, so Shīʿah scholars wanted to build their reputation and greatly expand their community of followers.[19] Therefore, they began to exaggerate the figures of the Imāms and held them to a higher standard of infallibility to attract greater numbers.[20] Turner explains how this development created the shining image of a charismatic community following the ultimate charismatic figures. Since the Shīʿah community had emerged from a lengthy period of persecution, this was all an attempt to gain credibility in society and be recognized by other socio-political groups.[21]

However, Turner's arguments possess some shortcomings. He fails to take into

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[16] Ibid., 124.
[17] Ibid., 142.
[18] Colin Turner. *Islam Without Allah? The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran*. Taylor & Francis, 2013.
[19] Ibid., 178.
[20] Ibid., 232.
[21] Ibid., 234.

account that Shīʿism existed well before the rise of the Safavid period. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the Iranian-American philosopher and professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University, offers an opinion on the development of Shīʿism before the Safavid period. Although this was the first time in Islamic history that Shīʿism became the official religion of the state, Nasr illustrates that the Shīʿah community was already developed as a school of theology before the rise of Safavid Persia.[22] Therefore, the centrality of the Imāms to Shīʿism existed well before the Safavid period.

Ultimately, according to Turner's arguments and that of these aforementioned contemporary scholars, this version of Shīʿism is marked by extremism and the exaggerated roles of the 12 Imāms. The Shīʿism that exists today is modeled after this period of extremism. Shīʿah communities today have centered around cultural practices that commemorate this image of the Imāms through the beating of the chest (*matam*), peaceful processions (*juloos*) in major cities, and passion plays (*taʿziyyah*) that reenact the event of the Imāms such as Ashura. Turner claims that Shīʿism was completely retransformed from focusing on a God and Qurʾān-centric community to an Imāmate-centric community, and this has led to extremist views of the Imāms and Twelver Shīʿism.

In response to Colin Turner, a number of scholars have reproached his work. To give an example, Sajjad Rizvi, a Shīʿah professor at Exeter University in England, published a book review in response to Turner's arguments in *Islam Without Allah? The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran*.[23] In his review, Rizvi rebukes Turner's research, methodology, and conclusions; "Based on questionable assumptions and

[22] Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition*. Harper Collins. 2010. 118.
[23] Sajjad Rizvi. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 3 (2003): 365–70. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26200279.

methodology, and quite bizarre source-readings, Turner's work misses the opportunity of providing a historical account both of the religious policy of the Safavids and the shifts in the discursive practices and theology of Twelver Shīʿism."[24] Turner's reliance on the primary source material is limited. Rizvi's main rebuttal to Turner's argument is that Shīʿism and Imāmate are *mutually* dependent on each other.[25] Overall, Rizvi presents a robust argument with more accurate evidence and understanding of Shīʿah practices during the Safavid period and before then. As Rizvi highlights, according to the principles of Shīʿah jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Imāms are appointed by God as the divine representatives of the truth for mankind to follow in their footsteps. They are not God-like figures themselves. God has granted the Imāms special abilities such as infallibility. While Turner's framework diminishes the position of the Imāms in Shīʿism, Rizvi seeks to highlight the Imāms' centrality to Shīʿah theology. On the surface level, scholars like Colin Turner are preoccupied with whether the infallibility of the Imāms is valid or not. On a deeper plane of existence, Rizvi attempts to unravel the implications of infallibility to Shīʿah theology and tradition.

On the complete opposite end of the spectrum as Mohsen Kadivar, Liyakat N. Takim, and Colin Turner — Andrew Newman, a Western non-Muslim scholar, states his view on the nature of Imāmate and infallibility in *The Formative Period of Twelver Shīʿism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad*. In his book, he outlines early *ḥadīth* texts that demonstrate the early community *did* believe in the unique knowledge and power of the Imāms.[26] Similar to how the general Islamic community harkens back to

[24] Ibid., 365.
[25] Ibid., 366.
[26] Andrew J. Newman. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad.* Taylor & Francis. 2000.

the prophetic community, the Shīʿah community models itself after the early Shīʿah community during the time of the Imāms. The structure of Newman's text is conducive to this study at hand. In the first three chapters of his book, he breaks down his analysis into three distinct periods/locations: the Shīʿah perspective in 1) Baghdad in the early ninth century, 2) Baghdad in the late ninth century, and 3) Qom in the ninth century.[27]

In subsequent chapters, Newman outlines the ḥadīth scholarship of early prominent Shīʿah scholars. For example, Newman discusses the work of Muḥammad ibn al-Hasan al-Saffar, titled *Baṣaʾir al-darajāt* which included very early Shīʿah sources.[28] Al-Saffar himself was a contemporary scholar in the time of the later Imāms, namely the eleventh Imām, al-Hasan al-'Askari. Remarkably, *Baṣaʾir al-darajāt* assumes a theological methodology to analyze the *ḥadīth* about the nature of Imāmate, the qualifications of an Imām, and the virtues of the Prophet and his family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). Al-Saffar collected similar narrations that spoke to the same qualities that the Imāms were seen and known to possess. To name a handful, the Imāms were able to speak to angels and *jinns*, possessed authentic versions of *tafsīr*, knew the names of future world leaders, had access to secret books of God's knowledge (such as *Mushaf Fāṭimah — The Book of Fāṭimah*) and were the sole possessors of God's knowledge on earth.[29] In order to be the recipients of this knowledge, God purified the Imāms and bestowed upon them *ʿiṣmah*. To reiterate this point, *ʿiṣmah* was a prerequisite for divine knowledge. Divine knowledge was a benefit from possessing *ʿiṣmah*. If one claims that the Imāms did not possess divine knowledge, then one brings into question their *ʿiṣmah*. If one questions the *ʿiṣmah* of the Imāms, then one also denies the divine knowledge of the Imāms. Thus,

[27] Ibid., vii-ix.
[28] Ibid., 71.
[29] Ibid., 67-85.

Newman uses Al-Saffar's text to argue that the early Shīʿah community believed that *ismah* and divine knowledge are intertwined and dependent on one another.

Newman definitively concludes that there is a relationship between *ʻiṣmah* and divine knowledge after reviewing the chain of transmissions of numerous narrations to verify their authenticity.[30] He concludes from these sources that the Imāms were very heavily revered and perceived as humans with special faculties as an extension of their position as ordained by God. No other beings were able to perform these same abilities, and this guarantees the unique status of the Imāms. *Ismah*, along with other special abilities, were granted by God to the Imāms.

Next, Newman also compares the later-compiled text of *Ḥadīth al-Kāfī* with *Baṣaʾir al-darajāt*, and he concludes that the two have many similarities, and *al-Kāfī* also underlines "the Imāms' special authority in matters of both doctrine and practice."[31] As shown above, some contemporary scholars have already disagreed with Newman's approach. However, the position of the Imāms is not exaggerated as compared to the early Shīʿah community. Rather, how the Imāms are perceived today is similar to the venerated status of the Imāms during their lifetimes. The Imāms possessed miraculous knowledge as well as special powers and abilities.[32] Logically speaking, if the Imāms did not agree with how they were portrayed by their contemporaries and especially their students, then they would have noted this to their followers and students. Newman reveals many important conclusions about the development of the perception of Imāmate in Shīʿism that must be taken into account. In summary, Newman appropriately labels the position of the Imāms in today's Shīʿah community as the extension of what the early

[30] Ibid., 73.
[31] Ibid., 96.
[32] Ibid., 84.

Shīʿah community believed.

Additionally, the renowned 20th-century Shīʿah scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) argues a more traditional perspective on the historical origins and growth of Shīʿah Islam. Tabataba'i changed the way that the West perceived Shīʿah Islam in its entirety, and he redefined how Shīʿah Islam is studied in the modern world. As an esteemed Iranian scholar with a traditional background and education, he symbolized the beginning of intellectual revitalization with his prolific writings, including an extensive exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Qurʾān, *Tafsīr al-Mizan*, which has been translated and commonly cited worldwide. In addition, Tabataba'i did not live in the seclusion of a Shīʿah state. As a worldly scholar, he prided himself on learning about other faith traditions and how these traditions viewed Shīʿism. He considered it his personal responsibility to respond to detrimental beliefs about Shīʿism, including the status of the Imāms and *ʿiṣmah*.

In *Shi'ite Islam*, Tabataba'i argues that *both* Sunnī and Shīʿah have evidence for, according to their respective *ḥadīth* literature, of the infallible nature of the Imāms.[33] Both branches believed that absolute spiritual knowledge was only reserved for the Imāms. As previously mentioned, this level of spiritual knowledge requires perfection of the being. Furthermore, Tabataba'i discusses how the goal of Shīʿism is to create a "true vision of the world and men based on the real nature of things," and this is only possible through the "clarifications of Islamic teachings" and sciences.[34] There must be a leader who can occupy both these roles, and this leader must be free of all claims of corruption and inerrancy. Thus, the leader of the Islamic community is protected by God from the exposure of faults in order to guide the community forward to the right path.

[33]Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī. *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. and ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 34.
[34] Ibid., 37.

In support of Andrew Newman's earlier arguments, Tabataba'i also discusses the divine knowledge of the Imāms.[35] In its essence, this knowledge is beyond ordinary human comprehension.[36] The knowledge of the Prophet was passed down from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to the lines of the Imāms.[37] The book of the daughter of the Prophet, Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, filled with the secrets of this world and the next is believed to be in the possession of Muḥammad al-Mahdi, the 12th and last Shīʿah Imām. The knowledge of the Imāms encompassed all affairs and is not limited to theology, Islamic law, or political leadership.[38] The Imāms had as complete an understanding as humanly possible of the Qurʾān and were gifted with divine knowledge. Thus, the Imāms were the best guide for mankind. The 12 Imāms are the key to obtaining closeness to God and seeking their intercession is the fastest way to grow nearer to the Prophet and God.[39] According to Shīʿah theology and the well known *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn*, the two things the true believer should never lose hold of are the Qurʾān and the *Ahl al-Bayt.*[40] The *Ahl al-Bayt* were the best teachers of the Qurʾān, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib himself was known as the gatekeeper of knowledge.

In *Encyclopedia Iranica*, the Western scholar on Islam, Robert Gleave provides a brief overview of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shīʿah Imām, and he includes the Imām's own logic for his Imāmate and divine designation.[41] Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq believed that he was chosen by God to lead the Shīʿah by his predecessor, the fifth Shīʿah Imām, Muḥammad

[35] Ibid., 150-168.
[36] Ibid., 153-154.
[37] Ibid., 164.
[38] Ibid., 161.
[39] Ibid., 163.
[40] Ibid., 156.
[41] Robert Gleave. "Ja'far al-Sadeq" *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 350. https://iranicaonline.org/articles/jafar-al-sadeq-i-life

al-Bāqir, and this concept became known as clear designation (*nass*).[42] This clear designation also lays the foundation for infallibility (*ismah*). This guarantees that the Imām is free from error, and the Imām should be so pious to be infallible. In turn, this level of perfection allows the Imām to be human role models for their followers and humanity at large.

Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq was a model figure for Sunnī-Shīʿah rapprochement himself. He was respected by Sunnī and Shīʿah figures alike, and many sought guidance and knowledge from him. As the founder of the contemporary Twelver Shīʿah school of law, al-Ṣādiq was the first Imām who had the chance to spread his knowledge to the extent that he did in both Medina and Kufa. The socio-political circumstances of his time allowed him to participate in centers of learning. Perhaps this is one reason why al Ṣādiq supported the political quietest stance that began with his father, Muḥammad al-Bāqer. This allowed him to focus on spreading Islamic knowledge as represented by the Imāms, whereas the prior Imāms did not get the chance to do so due to persecution.

In *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid*, Martin J. McDermott, the Western scholar of Islamic Studies, also outlines the belief in infallibility.[43] He discusses how Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.1022), one of the great Shīʿah scholars of the 10th - 11th centuries and a master of Shīʿah jurisprudence, theology, and *ḥadīth*, provided detailed proofs for the Shīʿah belief in the infallibility (*ʻiṣmah*) of the Imāms. This evidence is derived from al Ṣādiq himself, transmitted from the Imām to Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 795) to Shaykh al-Mufīd. Hishām b. al-Ḥakam was one of the best students of al Ṣādiq and a renowned Shīʿah scholar. From this evidence, al-Mufīd states that one must believe in the infallible

[42] Ibid., 352.
[43] Martin J. McDermott. *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022)*. 1978. 48.

principle of the Imāms, and al-Mufīd goes as far as to relate all his other doctrines to this matter.[44] Additionally, it is the responsibility of humanity to know the Imām. If this is the case as al-Mufīd states, then it becomes the responsibility of every individual to learn about the true nature of the Imāms, including their status of human perfection. If the Imāms were held to this status, then rationally they would not be able to make any errors. Using sound reasoning (*ʻaql*), one can conclude that Shaykh al-Mufīd and the early Shīʿah community would not attempt to get to know the Imāms as closely as possible if the Imāms did not possess this status. In today's society, especially in Shīʿah communities, the Imāms continue to hold this esteemed position of reverence. As McDermott discusses, Shaykh al-Mufīd illustrates the exact status of the Imāms from the viewpoint of the early Shīʿah community.

As the transmitter of *ḥadīth* from al-Mufīd's narrations, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam deserves an analysis of his position in early Shīʿism. Wilfred Madelung gives an extensive overview of the figure Hishām b. al-Ḥakam in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.[45] Madelung's perspective is important because he represents the rise of learning about Shīʿism in the Western non-Muslim world at the turn of the 21st century. As a professor of Arabic studies at Oxford University, Madelung is able to contextualize primary sources including the Qurʾān, relevant *tafsir*, and *ḥadīth* collections, in the original Arabic language. He relies on sources in Arabic rather than translations and commentaries in other languages. Madelung notes how al-Ḥakam has become an integral part of Shīʿah doctrine and theological belief today because he believed that this world

[44] Ibid., 50.
[45] Wilfred Madelung, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/hisham-b-al-hakam-SIM_2906?s.num=91&s.start=80

and humanity required a permanent need for a divinely guided Imām. The world can not exist without the divine presence of the Imām. Al-Ḥakam stated that the role of the Imām was the teacher of humanity and the authoritative figure of all religious matters. In this regard, the Imām occupied the utmost spiritual role of guidance and perfection. A major difference between the Imāms and the prophets is that the Imāms did not receive divine messages (*wahy*). While both Prophet Muḥammad and the Imāms were infallible, the Prophet had received the divine miracle of the Qurʾān while the Imāms were given no equivalent. Therefore, the role of the Imāms is not to reveal a new divine message, but the job of the Imāms is to guide humanity to the true path. If the Imāms are to guide humanity effectively then they must be thoroughly pure. Overall, Madelung makes it very clear that al-Ḥakam believed in the infallibility of the Imāms. According to contemporaries of the Imāms, such as al-Ḥakam, the infallibility of the Imāms is rationally and textually vital to the existence and success of all of mankind.[46]

Early Shīʿah sources would respond to these contemporary scholars and agree with such scholars as Sajjad Rizvi, Andrew Newman, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Robert Gleave, Martin J. McDermott, and Wilfred Madelung. As previously mentioned, *Kitab Al-Kāfī* was compiled during the occultation of the 12th Imām, al-Mahdi. There are hundreds of narrations that discuss the station of the 12 Imāms. Kulaynī and Ibn Bābawayh have both authentically narrated from the sixth Shīʿah Imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq: "If there were only two people left in the world, one of them must be the Imām."[47] In other words, this narration is highlighting the early Shīʿah theological belief that the

[46] Ibid.
[47] Muhammad Baqir Majlisi. *Hayat Al-Qulub Vol.3, Part 1.* Trans. Sayyid Athar Husayn S.H. Rizvi. Ansariyan Publications - Qum. https://www.al-islam.org/hayat-al-qulub-vol3-muhammad-baqir-majlisi
Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī.*
Shaykh Ṣadūq. *Maʿānī l-akhbār.*

presence of the Imām on this earth is critical to the survival of the universe. The Imāms are held to such a high regard because of their status of infallibility. This is just one example of the early Shīʿah community's reverence for the 12 Shīʿah Imāms, and their view of the lofty nature of the Imāms.

In today's society, it is undeniable that the Shīʿah community has become Imām-centric. At the center of every Shīʿah community is the importance of the third Shīʿah Imām, Ḥusayn, and mourning his tragedy. Perhaps, certain Shīʿah communities also exaggerate the role of visitation to the Imāms' holy shrines (*zīyārah*). Some go as far as to claim that they are exempt from the five daily prayers obligatory upon every Muslim after completing the *zīyārah*. While these beliefs are detrimental to the Shīʿah community and theological practices, they are born from periods of persecution. Yes, Shīʿah communities are Imām-centric, and they do emphasize the role of Imāms, but the high station and infallible status that the Imāms occupy are images that originated from the early Shīʿah community. The venerated and infallible status of the Imāms is not new to Shīʿah communities today.

Understanding Infallibility in Shīʿah Theology

1) Infallibility in the Qurʾān

وَقَرنَ في بُيوتِكُنَّ وَلا تَبَرَّجنَ تَبَرُّجَ الجاهِلِيَّةِ الأولىٰ ۖ وَأَقِمنَ الصَّلاةَ وَآتينَ الزَّكاةَ وَأَطِعنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسولَهُ ۚ إِنَّما يُريدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجسَ أَهلَ البَيتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُم تَطهيرًا

> *Stay in your houses and do not display your finery with the display of the former [days of] ignorance. Maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt and obey Allah and His Apostle.* ***Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification*** [Qurʾān 33:33].

This chapter will analyze the Qurʾānic verses that discuss the definition and nature of infallibility. Qurʾānic translations will be discussed, and both Sunnī and Shīʿah *tafsīr* will be used to analyze the meaning of these verses. Then, these verses will be contextualized in their socio-cultural and theological contexts. Finally, these verses will be implemented to examine the validity or lack thereof of infallibility as a theological concept. This section will respond to those who do not interpret these verses as proof of infallibility. Ultimately, this section will argue that infallibility as a concept was founded in the Qurʾān and existed during the time of the Prophet.

One of the main reasons that Shīʿah communities today uphold the station of the Imāms is due to a verse in the Qurʾān: *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*, literally translated as "the Verse of Purification." *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* is the 33rd verse of the 33rd chapter, "The Confederates" (*Sūrah Ah-Aḥzāb*). In ʿAlī Quli Qarai's translation of the Qurʾān, *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* is translated as follows: "Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification."[48] In this verse, God is addressing the "People of the Household" directly, in the second person. This address is

[48] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 33:33]

made clear in the translation by the offsetting of the "you," followed by a comma and the direct object of the verbal sentence. This is the same case in the original Arabic form of the verse. When God says the pronoun ʿ*ankumu* (from you), He further follows it with ʾ*ahla l-bayti*. This places extra emphasis on the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Up to this point, every scholar of the Qurʾān would agree. However, the difference in opinion lies within the question: who is considered to be the "People of the Household" (*Ahl al-Bayt*)? This discussion of whom God is referring to in this verse varies from Shīʿah to Sunnī scholars, so the context of revelation must be analyzed in detail from both perspectives to understand what scholars from different theological backgrounds believe and why.

The prominent 10th century Shīʿah historian Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 991), compiled the text *Maʿānī l-akhbār*, in which he provides his interpretation of over 500 Qurʾānic terms, *ḥadīth*, theology, and jurisprudence. In *Maʿānī l-akhbār*, al-Ṣadūq discusses the revelation of *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*, in an event known as the Event of the Cloak (*Ḥadīth al-Kisa*). All commentators on the Qurʾān agree that *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* is in reference to *Ḥadīth al-Kisa* and its sequence of figures and events, although they may vary slightly.[49] The narrator of this event is the daughter of the Prophet, Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ herself, and the transmitter of this *ḥadīth*, Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ansārī (d. 697), was one of the most reliable companions of the Prophet as well as a prolific compiler of *ḥadīth*.[50]

*Ḥadīth al-Kisa* is narrated as follows. Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima, his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and his two grandsons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were in ʾUmm Salamah's house when the Prophet wrapped a cloak around the five of

[49] Mahdī Pooya. *Pooya Tafsīr.* Sūrah 33, p. 64
[50] Gholam Hossein Masoud. "Ḥadīth al-Kisa, The Narration of the Cloak." *Al-Islam.org.* https://www.al-islam.org/message-thaqalayn/vol-13-no-1-spring-2012/Ḥadīth-al-kisa-narration-cloak-gholam-hossein-masoud/Ḥadīth

them (the Prophet, Fāṭimah, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn). The Prophet then declared that these were the People of his Household; "The Messenger of God, took both sides of the cloak, pointed to the sky with his right hand and said, 'These are the true members of my family… And remove from them impurity [and flaws] and purify them with a thorough purification.'"[51] It was then that angel Gabriel descended with God's permission and revealed *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* to the Prophet.[52] The events of this narration are very similar across different texts from both Shīʿah and Sunnī sources, including but not limited to *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Tirmidhī*, *Khaṣāʾiṣ Amīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, Muʻjam al-Ṣaghīr,* and *Al-Mustadrak ʻalá al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*.[53] This has been reported so numerously, by so many different narrators, and through various chains of transmission that it automatically produces certainty (*mutawātir*). The overwhelming number of reliable sources that narrate this series of events point to the fact that there is no doubt that this occurred. Given the extreme authenticity of this event, it is clear that Fāṭimah, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn were held in high esteem by the Prophet. To what effect the Prophet regarded these figures and the exact level of purity these figures possessed varies in different scholars' opinions.

The interpretation of *Ḥadīth al-Kisa* differs between Shīʿah and Sunnī scholars. According to Shīʿah scholars, the People of the Household (*Ahl al-Bayt)* commonly

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[51] Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī.* Vol. 1. P 287-288.
Please refer here for the entirety of the Prophet's speech under the cloak.
[52] Ibid.
[53]Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (241 H) "Musnad" (Egypt: 131 H) pages 259, 285, 292.
Muslim bin Hajjaj Nayshapuri (261 H) Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim" (Egypt: 1349) vol. 4, page 116.
Abi Isa Muhammad Tirmidhī (275 or 279 H) "Ṣaḥīḥ Tirmidhī" (Sharah ibnul Arabi) (Egypt: 1352 H) vol. 13 pages 200, 248.
Ahmed ibn Shu-ayb Nisa-i (303 H) "Khasa-is" (Egypt: 1348 H) page 4.
Ibn Jarir Ṭabarī (310 H) "Tafsīr Ṭabarī" (Jama ul Bayan fi Tafsīr il Qurʾān) (Egypt: 1331 H) vol.22, page 5.
Sulayman bin Ahmad Al Tibrani (360 H) "Al Mu-jam Al Saghir" (Dehli: 1311 H), page 34, 75.
Hakim Nayshapuri (405 H) "Al Mustadrak" (Hyderabad Deccan: 1334 H), pages 146, 147, 148.

refers to the Prophet, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.[54] Until today, *Ḥadīth al-Kisa* is frequently recited in Shīʿah communities as proof of their status and to venerate these five figures on a regular basis. Additionally, since ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the first Shīʿah Imām, the same purity that is applied to ʿAlī is further extended down the chain of the 12 Imāms according to Shīʿah scholars. Thus, the *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to these five. Mirza Mahdī Pooya (d. 1973), a traditional Shīʿah scholar who produced a complete *tafsīr* of the Qurʾān, narrated that when ʾUmm Salamah, one of the Prophet's wives, asked his permission to be included with the five under the blanket, he politely refused.[55] In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, one of the six authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections, it states, "By Allah, the wives of the Holy Prophet cannot be included in the *Ahl al-Bayt* at all, because after the pronouncement of divorce the wives are reverted to their parent; moreover, charity (*sadaqah*) is prohibited to be given to the *Ahl al-Bayt*."[56] This *ḥadīth* shows that according to both the Shīʿah and Sunnī, the Prophet's wives did not have the same status as the five of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* states that because the Prophet's wives were able to receive charity, whereas the *Ahl al-Bayt* were not, they were not of the same lofty status. From the Shīʿah perspective as well as many reliable Sunnī *aḥadīth*, the Prophet's wives were not included in the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

On the contrary, some Sunnī scholars believe that the *Ahl al-Bayt* is expanded to include the Prophet's pure wives and does *not* include the line of Imāms after ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as they did not live during the time of the Prophet and could not benefit from his unique presence or lessons.[57] Despite this belief, the majority of Sunnī scholars agree

[54] Ṣadūq. *Maʿānī l-akhbār*, vol. 2, p. 403.
[55] Mahdī Pooya. *Pooya Tafsir.* Sūrah 33, p. 66
[56] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Vol. 2. p. 280
[57] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi. *Tafhim al-Qurʾān.*

that in this verse, the *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to the same five members of the *Ḥadīth al-Kisa*, *excluding* the Prophet's wives.[58] In one of the main six authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, Tirmidhī also narrates the circumstances of the revelation of *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*. This narration verifies the previously mentioned *ḥadīth* by al-Ṣadūq, and Tirmidhī also narrates the question that ʾUmm Salamah posed to the Prophet; "Am I part of *Ahl al-Bayt*," to which the Prophet replied negatively.[59] Again, this emphasizes the status of the five members of *Ḥadīth al-Kisa* and the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Despite these authentic Sunnī narrations, some contemporary Sunnī scholars argue that in *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*, the *Ahl al-Bayt* must also refer to the Prophet's wives. For example, in *Tafhim al-Qurʾān*, Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi uses his own knowledge of the Arabic lexicon and reasoning to argue that the Prophet's wives are included in the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Mawdudi argues that just because the "Prophet did not cover ʿĀʾishah and ʾUmm Salamah under the sheet of cloth which he put on the four members of his family, that does not mean that he had excluded those ladies from his 'household.'"[60] Among other Sunnī scholars, Mawdudi uses this claim to argue that the *Ahl al-Bayt* is inclusive of the Prophet's wives. Mawdudi's understanding of the apparent meaning of the word "household" (*ahl*), translated literally as "the people of," automatically "includes all the members of a man's family," including his wife. He cites the usage of the Qurʾānic verse concerning the *ahlul* of Prophet Moses which was inclusive of his wife and argues that "thus, the Arabic idiom and the usage of the Qurʾān and the context of this verse, all point clearly to the fact that the Prophet's (peace be upon him) wives, as well as his

[58] Tirmidhī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 5, p. 699
[59] Tirmidhī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 5, p. 699
[60] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi. *Tafhim al-Qurʾān.* Sūrah 33. Note 50. http://www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=33&verse=28

children, are included in his *Ahl al-Bayt*."[61] Simply by the status of wifehood, the Prophet's wives were automatically part of the household of the Prophet. This argument belonging to contemporary Sunnī scholars elevates the status of the Prophet's wives and diminishes the distinct station only belonging to the five members of the *Ḥadīth al-Kisa*.

However, there are many flaws in Mawdudi's argument. Firstly, he contradicts authentic Sunnī narrations, including that of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* previously discussed, that claim the Prophet's wives are not part of the *Ahl al-Bayt* on the basis that "anything which has been clearly stated in the Qurʾān cannot be contradicted based on a *ḥadīth*."[62] The first flaw here is that Mawdudi himself relies extensively on *ḥadīth* to support his arguments. For example, he cites a narration from the Prophet himself and that from Ibn Abī Ḥātim claiming the *Ahl al-Bayt* includes the Prophet's wives. At the same time, he also argues that *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* are invalid because they contradict the Qurʾān. Mawdudi's method of choosing *ḥadīth* that support his argument and refuting *ḥadīth* simply because they do not support his argument is careless and shows he does not abide by methods of reliability and deduction in analyzing *ḥadīth*.

While it is indisputable that the Qurʾān is the ultimate source of authority, Mawdudi argues that the Qurʾān implicitly includes the wives as part of the household. However, in the Qurʾān, many of the prophet's wives were harborers of wrongdoing. For example, Prophet Noah and Prophet Lot were both tested by their wives, and their wives were condemned in the Qurʾān; "Allah draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against Allah, and it was said [to

[61] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi. *Tafhim al-Qurʾān.* Sūrah 33. Note 50.
[62] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi. *Tafhim al-Qurʾān.* Sūrah 33. Note 50.

them], 'Enter the Fire, along with those who enter [it].'"[63] The example of Prophet Moses' wife cannot automatically be applied to argue that *all* prophets' wives were virtuous and deserving of the same honorifics. Thus, it was with precedent that the state of wifehood did not automatically guarantee a position of virtue or righteousness. Furthermore, no verse in the Qurʾān explicitly states that the Prophet's wives were of the status of the *Ahl al-Bayt.*

Additionally, while Mawdudi claims to be a master of Qurʾānic Arabic, he does not address or even acknowledge grammatical aspects of this verse that would weaken his argument. Many Shīʿah scholars including al-Ṣadūq (d. 991), argue that since the verse uses the address "ʿ*ankumu*" signaling the second person plural masculine, then it is only applied to the Prophet's blood relatives.[64] Since the Prophet's wives are not related to him by blood then they would not be included in the five members *of* the *Ahl al-Bayt* but simply *among* those of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, i.e. those who were in proximity to the *Ahl al-Bay*t but not belonging to the *Ahl al-Bayt* themselves. Ultimately, Mawdudi contradicts the Qurʾān and relies on his reasoning and contemporary usage of Arabic rather than its applicability in the Qurʾān and the context of revelation. While this can be viewed as an act of erasure of Shīʿah belief systems, this also can be viewed as the rewriting of Sunnī history. Mawdudi's treatment of infallibility as an unsound theological concept opposes that of many Sunnī scholars closer to the time of the Prophet and the Islamic community.

It is also important to note here that the abridged translated version of *Tafhim al-Qurʾān,* titled *Towards Understanding the Qur'an: Abridged Version of Tafhim al-Qurʾān*, completely leaves out the entire discussion on this verse. Even in the full text

[63] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 66:10]
[64] Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *The Study Qurʾān: A New Translation and Commentary*. HarperOne. 2015. 3200.

of *Tafhim al-Qurʾān*, Mawdudi often refuses to name Shīʿah by their identity and instead refers to Shīʿah beliefs and scholars as "the view of those people also is not correct," or "a section of the people have not only misconstrued this verse…"[65] The extent to which Mawdudi refuses to acknowledge the validity of other belief traditions is cause for concern. Mawdudi's inability to portray an unbiased view, or at the very least appropriately support his views with substantial and reliable evidence, invalidates his claims. His argument would benefit from the inclusion of specific Qurʾānic verses that support his view that *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* and the *Ahl al-Bayt* include the Prophet's wives and why *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* does not indicate infallibility or even the superior status of the five members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* over the Prophet's wives.

Thus, according to Shīʿah and most Sunnī scholars, this verse extols the status of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. According to Shīʿah scholars, this status is afforded to the 12 Shīʿah Imāms by extension. Moreover, both branches agree that the five members from *Ḥadīth al-Kisa* are referred to in this verse, even though some Sunnī scholars include more figures in the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Now that the context of revelation and the address of *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* have been explained, the diction of the verse must now be analyzed. A significant observation about *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* is the repetitive emphasis on "purity." The first connotation of purity in this verse is marked by its antonym: "impurity," or "*rijsa*." This single word, "*rijsa,*" has been the cause for many diverging beliefs on infallibility especially as afforded to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and Imāms. Across Shīʿah narrations, *rijsa* is commonly translated as "impurity

[65] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi. *Tafhim al-Qurʾān.* Sūrah 33. Note 50.

[flaws].”[66] According to its linguistic meaning, the root letters of *rijsa* (ر ج س) denote a dirty or filthy act, to commit a shameful act, or to do something disgraceful or dirty.[67]

In the well-known Shīʿah *Tafsīr al-Pooya*, Mirza Mahdī Pooya clarifies that this *rijsa* signals that “the Ahl al-Bayt have only been thoroughly purified by Allah because of their total submission to Allah's will and their state of being always in communion with Allah.”[68] Pooya makes this argument based on the definite article attached to *rijsa,* i.e., “*al-rijsa*” as it appears in the verse. This translates literally as “the impurity”[69] or “the defilement.”[70] Defilement better captures the complexity of this type of purification. In other words, the *Ahl al-Bayt* is free from defilement. Nothing can tarnish the thoughts, actions, or souls of these five individuals. The usage of “*al-rijsa*” is also used similarly in another verse in the ninth chapter of the Qurʾān, “The Repentance” (*Sūrah Al-Tawbah*); “But as for those in whose heart is a sickness, it only adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are faithless.”[71]

In both these instances, “*al-rijsa*” is connected to the range of the heart’s purity. A dirty heart is a heart filled with acts of deviance. A pious believer would be free from these qualities and strive to purify the heart and soul from deviant behaviors. In *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*, God Himself does not specify from which impurity because it is all-inclusive of every type of impurity such as ignorance, hypocrisy, polytheism, infidelity, and, above all else, sins – which are all enumerated throughout the verses of Qurʾān.

According to traditional Shīʿah scholars like Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī in *Tafsīr al-Mizan*, God’s will in removing *al-rijsa* from the five members of the *Ahl al-Bayt*

[66] “Ḥadīth Kisa.” *Duas.org*. https://www.duas.org/mobile/Ḥadīth-kisa.html
[67] *Lughatuna Dictionary*. https://www.livingarabic.com/
[68] Pooya. *Pooya Tafsīr.* Sūrah 33, p. 71
[69] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 33:33]
[70] Nasr, *The Study Qurʾān: A New Translation and Commentary*, 3200.
[71] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 9:125]

is to remove them from incorrect actions and belief and replace them with innate protection against such *al-rijsa.* In other words, it is God-given insight or protection against human tendencies such as false beliefs and bad deeds (*ismah*).[72] God bestows on them this special knowledge that prevents them from going astray from His path. From the Shīʿah perspective, *al-rijsa* acts as a purifier of the heart and soul, creating the role model human being for humanity to follow as their beacon towards gaining closeness to God. Ultimately, all sense of impurity, in every sense of the word *al-rijsa*, is negated from these five figures of the Prophet's family.

Whereas God removes impurity from the *Ahl al-Bayt*, He at once places purity in their hearts. This repetition of purity adds multiple layers of emphasis on the status of their purity. The removal of impurity is followed by the bestowal of purity with two keywords in this verse — with common root letters (ط ه ر) denoting purity, cleanliness, and virtue: 1) "*yuṭahhirakum*" the verb (form II) in second-person address, translated directly as "purify you all," and 2) "*taṭhīran*" the verbal noun (form II), translated as "(with thorough) purification."[73] This verbal noun (form II) derivative of "purity" is the only one of its kind throughout the entire Qurʾān. Perhaps, God purposely placed *even greater* emphasis, in addition to the "*with thorough*," that is added in every translation, on the stature of the People of the House. This would place the People of the House above all others, amongst God's most favored servants and role models for humanity. The People of the Household have been removed from all impurities. Out of God's will, a connection is established between God and His *Ahl al-Bayt*.

[72] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī. *Tafsīr al-Mizan.* Vol. 16, p. 311
[73] "Ṭā hā rā." *The Quranic Arabic Corpus*. https://corpus.quran.com/

From the above arguments, it is clear that the Qurʾān and *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* indicate the validity of the removal of all impurity, also known as infallibility, of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. While some may argue that one can be completely pure and still prone to making mistakes, this contradicts the logical and linguistic basis of the verse, as detailed above. According to the Qurʾān and supporting Shīʿah and Sunnī *tafsīr*, the belief in spiritual purity existed during early Islamic history.

In addition to *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*, scholars also cite many narratives concerning the unique status of the Imāms and their infallibility. While these narrations will be discussed in great detail in the following sections of this paper, it is important to emphasize the superiority of the Qurʾān over the *sunnah* and *ḥadīth* literature. In the Islamic tradition, the verses of the Qurʾān are themselves infallible, and they should be treated accordingly. Thus, the Qurʾān is a trustworthy source, and *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* is prioritized even over relevant *ḥadīth* literature.

Moreover, after the Prophet, ʿAlī possessed the most extensive knowledge and the true meaning of the Qurʾān and its application. The Prophet taught ʿAlī the wisdom being every verse of the Qurʾān, and ʿAlī would take notes along the margins in a personal copy of the Qurʾān.[74] This gave another dimension to the position of Imām as those with a pure heart and soul can understand the real nature of the Qurʾān. This thesis will apply theological deductions on relevant literature to argue that the Shīʿah community believed in the infallible nature of the Imāms both according to the Qurʾān, as already proven, as well as the *ḥadīth* literature. The next section of this thesis will analyze the exact nature of infallibility as pertaining to the Prophet himself.

[74] Moojan Momen. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*. Yale University Press. 1985. 150.

2) Infallibility of the Prophet

As previously discussed, *Ayat Al-Taṭhīr* proves that infallibility is a theological concept established in the Qurʾān. The issue of the infallibility of the Prophet must be discussed first to 1) create a context for the following discussions of infallibility, and 2) connect the infallibility of the Imāms to that of the Prophet.

Furthermore, this chapter will pose the questions, what are the different theological beliefs of infallibility as pertaining to Prophet Muḥammad? How did the Prophet embody the characteristics of infallibility? In which domains were he considered infallible? How did the early Islamic community perceive the Prophet's infallibility? Is this applicable to the Imāms? What are the similarities and differences between the Prophet and the Imāms in terms of infallibility? It is important to emphasize that all Muslims believe that the Prophet was at the peak of perfection. While the Shīʿah Imāms are held to a high station, this station is not higher than or equal to the Prophet in any regard.

In accordance with the early Islamic community, this thesis argues that the Prophet was free from all acts of sin. The two main questions concerning the Prophet's infallibility are first, when did he become infallible, and second, in which manners was he infallible. There are four general interpretations of the time in which the Prophet became infallibility: 1) the Prophet was infallible since his birth,[75] 2) the Prophet became infallible during the incident when his heart was cleansed by angel Gabriel,[76] 3) the Prophet became infallible at the age of his prophecy, 40-years-old, and 4) the Prophet was

[75] Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi. *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*. Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania. 2014. 6.
[76] *Sahih Muslim*. Chapter 1, "Faith (Kitab Al Iman)," Hadith 310 and Hadith 311

not infallible at all. The fourth belief is unpopular and significantly decreased the status of the Prophet. The argument that the Prophet was free from error is rationally and textually based on Qurʾānic principles and verses. The main cause for debate is *when* the Prophet became infallible.

The claim that the prophet embodied the characteristics of infallibility can be proved rationally. Before Muḥammad's prophecy, he was known to the tribe of the Quraysh and the people of Mecca as *al-ʾAmīn*, the trustworthy. In his business, his mannerisms, and his character, the Prophet exhibited the utmost morality, respect, and virtue. One of the reasons that Khadīja, the Prophet's wife and the formidable businesswoman of her time, was attracted to the Prophet, was due to his renowned and trustworthy character — his ethical standards of business practices and the respect that every merchant and tradesman held for him.[77] This opinion of the Prophet was not held by his wife alone. Muḥammad had gained the trust of his people before his revelation so that they could not make the excuse of disregarding his message due to his poor character. The Prophet's trustworthy nature gave him credibility, and his character provided substantial reasoning for the people to follow his guidance and example as dictated to him by God.

Similarly, this trust is essential to infallibility; a major rational proof for the infallibility of the Prophet is that the Prophet must gain as well as *uphold* his followers' trust. To fully believe in the Prophet, is to fully believe in his message and the Qurʾān. Muslims believe that the Prophet was the most perfect follower of the Qurʾān. Therefore, there cannot be any proof for the Prophet's followers or opponents to claim that the Prophet was a hypocrite. This trust could easily be corrupted if one of the Prophet's

[77] Ja'far Sobhani. *The Message: The Holy Prophet of Allah*. 2007. 102.

actions contradicted the Qurʾānic principles. The Qurʾān outlines the lifestyle and moral handbook for believers. Numerous times throughout the Qurʾān, God warns His creations not to sin. If the Prophet sinned, he would not comply with the Qurʾān. Furthermore, if the Prophet was corruptible, then the Qurʾān could also be corruptible. The Prophet had to continue to hold the trust of the people of Mecca, or they would stop following him and call him a hypocrite who did not follow his own teachings. If the Prophet did make an error then this would put his every action into question. This would be detrimental to the Prophet's message and the foundation of Islam. From a rational viewpoint, the Prophet was free from sin to ensure the longevity of God's message and the Qurʾān.

Most theologians follow the rational argument for the Prophet's infallibility. Prominent early Shīʿah scholars, including Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.1022). Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.1044), Al-Ṭūsī (d.1274), and Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d.1280) agree that the Prophet's infallibility was a blessing bestowed upon him by God. In his text, *Tanzih al-Anbiyaʾ* (*Exonerating the Prophets*), al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, argues that while the Prophet was unable to commit sins, he still possessed free will.[78] Al-Ṭūsī elaborates, for the Prophet to be trusted and the purpose of his prophecy fulfilled, he must be infallible.[79] The Prophet also could choose his actions and shape his destiny. On top of this, Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1640) argues that the Prophet was infallible because he possessed divine knowledge that steered him away from ever sinning, and such deviant temptations innately repulsed him.[80] In other words, he believed there was a direct connection between knowledge and infallibility. The Prophet's intellect was superior to his base

[78] al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzih al-anbiyaʾ (Exonerating the Prophets)*.
[79] Nasir-al-Din Abu Jaʿfar Moḥammad Ṭusi. *Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*, Maqsad 4, Mas'ala 1.
[80] Zahra Tavakoli. "Mulla Sadra on the Relation between Knowledge and Infallibility." *Biannual Scientific Journal SADRĀ'I WISDOM*, 9, 1, 2020, 21-34. doi: 10.30473/pms.2018.41660.1629

temptations which drove him from committing vice. Similarly, Ṭabāṭabāʾī argued that the Prophet knew the divine nature of sins and this profound knowledge was sufficient in overcoming his desires in this world.[81] He states that God presented the Prophet with a unique type of knowledge that revealed the disturbing nature of sin. The nature of the Prophet's infallibility was such that his knowledge of the unseen steered him away from even the thought, let alone the action, of committing a sin. Metaphorically, infallibility can be described as a gift given from God to the Prophet. God chose the Prophet, and the Prophet accepted the gift of infallibility.

In *Doctrines of Shīʿah Islam*, contemporary Shīʿah scholar Ja'far Sobhani supports the idea that the Prophet's level of infallibility does not negate free will. The Prophet enjoyed being in a state of obedience toward God. Similar to previously mentioned scholars, Sobhani argues that the Prophet possessed divine knowledge that drew him away from sin, but he still had the ability to commit sin.[82] The presence of the Prophet's personality and figure is so attuned with the commandments and knowledge of God that he is drawn away from every act that would take him away from perfection. Additionally, the Prophet never even thought of committing an act of transgression because he did not see sin or vice as anything attractive.[83] He was appalled by it. This sets the Prophet apart from mankind, which is readily attracted to imperfections. For example, when the Prophet witnessed acts of transgression while living in Mecca, even before he received divine revelation, he was repulsed when he saw the Meccans drinking wine and gambling in public.[84] This internal repulsion of what the Prophet felt drove him to seek

[81] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shi'ite Islam*, 39.
[82] Ja'far Sobhani. *Doctrines of Shīʿah Islam.* 2001. 71.
[83] Ibid., 73.
[84] Ja'far Sobhani. *The Message: The Holy Prophet of Allah.* 2007. 187.

the sanctity of Cave Hira, in which he sat in meditation for a third of the night as a way to cleanse himself from what he witnessed by his surrounding community. The Prophet was repulsed by sin even before his prophethood, and after his prophethood, he was touched with divine light that deepened his knowledge of vice. Thus, the Prophet's perfection was established.

One rational argument against the Prophet's infallibility is the question of the infallibility of the human being. If the Prophet is a human being, and he is infallible, then why are all human beings not infallible? If the prophets are infallible, then why do they have the ability and we do not? Why is the rest of humanity held to account for its sins? As a counterargument, the key point is that there is no contradiction between the infallibility and free will of the Prophet. The Prophet had the power to sin even if he never acted on this. For example, a father has the ability to slap his son but does not act on this power.

In addition to rational proofs, evidence for the Prophet's infallibility is also textually based in the Qurʾān. Indeed, most Islamic scholars universally agree that the Prophet was infallible in receiving and conveying revelation. However, there is a debate in which areas the Prophet possesses infallibility. According to the Qurʾān and sunnah, infallibility or *ʿiṣmah* operates in these four following domains: 1) judging disputes, 2) religious principles, 3) the domain of social principles and responsibilities, and 4) daily matters.[85] While most scholars agree that the Prophet was infallible in terms of his immunity from disbelief, polytheism, and making mistakes related to divine revelation, there are differing interpretations on which matters the Prophet was infallible.

[85] Ja'far Sobhani. *Doctrines of Shīʿah Islam.* 2001. 71.

One verse that is commonly recited to prove the Prophet's infallibility is the 17th verse of Chapter 18, "The Cave" (*Sūrah Al-Kahf)*: "Whomever Allah guides is rightly guided, and whomever He leads astray, you will never find for him any guardian or guide."[86]According to Ṭabāṭabāʾī, this verse, specifically "whoever Allah guides is rightly guided," guarantees that the Prophet is the perfect guide for the believers to follow precisely because the Prophet is guided by God, the All-Perfect.[87] Additionally, the second half of this verse, "whomever He leads astray, you will never find for him any guardian or guide," reveals that the Prophet is incapable of leading anyone astray. If he committed any vice then he would not be a guide for his followers. Since committing any act of sin is a type of misguidance, then the Prophet would not be able to commit any sin without misleading his followers.

According to these Qurʾānic verses, the Prophet must be infallible in social regards as well because the Islamic community followed his example and learned from watching his actions what is permitted and prohibited, or *ḥalāl* or *ḥaram*. As established above, the Prophet was the perfect guide for his community, which in the early days of Islam, sought guidance from him for social matters in addition to religious ones. Furthermore, the Qurʾān states in verses 3-4 in Chapter Fifty-Three, "The Star" (*Surah Najm*), "Nor does he speak out of [his own] desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed [to him]."[88] In other words, all words of the Prophet were revelation and not his own whims. Thus, the Prophet must have been infallible in social matters.

In *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an,* contemporary Shīʿah scholar, Sayyid Muḥammad Rizvi illustrates the necessity of the Prophet's status of infallibility as

[86] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 18:17]
[87] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī. *Tafsīr al-Mizan.*
[88] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 53:3-4]

dictated throughout the Qurʾān.[89] The 64th verse of Chapter Four, "The Women" (*Sūrah an-Nisa*) speaks to the prophetic role on this earth, and the necessity of the prophets' followers to take their word as obedience. "We did not send any apostle but to be obeyed by Allah's leave. Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to Allah for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded for forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allah all-clement, all-merciful."[90] As Rizvi points out, the divine social order is outlined here.[91] The purpose of the followers is to obey their prophet, not decide based on every action or command whether or not they should follow their prophet. In this regard, the Prophet's message is meant to be followed in absolute. It is not up to the adherents of the Prophet's message to decide to follow some commandments and not others. This authority that is bestowed upon the Prophet speaks to the Prophet's character. If his followers obey him in absolute obedience, then the Prophet cannot lead them astray by making such mistakes. Ultimately, if God is commanding His servants to follow and obey His Messenger in every regard, then God would not tell His people to follow wrongdoing, which would defile His own perfection.

The obedience of the Prophet's followers in verse 64 of *Sūrah an-Nisa* can be read in conjunction with verse 59 of the same chapter: "O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle, if you have faith in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more favorable in outcome."[92] Here, obedience to the Prophet is ordered by God. In this verse, God is using the imperative form to tell the

[89] Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi. *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*. Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania. 2014. 7.
[90] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 4:64]
[91] Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*, 8.
[92] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 4:59]

believers to obey the Prophet or suffer the consequences during the Day of Retribution. Obedience to God and obedience to the Prophet are of paramount importance, and they are linked together in such a way to highlight the imperativeness of following the Prophet as a divine commandment.

In further verses in the same chapter, *Sūrah an-Nisa*, an explicit comparison is made between obeying the Prophet and obeying God Himself; "Whoever obeys the Apostle certainly obeys Allah."[93] When verses 59 and 80 of *Sūrah an-Nisa* are analyzed together, this creates a deeper understanding of the Prophet's station. If one is to follow the Prophet like they follow God, then the Prophet should not be capable of leading the people astray, let alone make one sin or mistake. The infallibility of the Prophet also makes the decisions and lives of the believers easier. Following the Prophet is the right path in every affair, and disobeying the Prophet is the incorrect path in every matter. In this analysis of the Prophet's inability to sin, the religion of Islam and the actions of the believers are purified instantly as long as they adhere to the Prophet's actions or commandments. If the Prophet must be obeyed unconditionally, then the Prophet must be perfect in all regards.

To be obedient to God is to be obedient to the Prophet. In several verses of the Qurʾān, God commands those who sin not to be obeyed. For example, in verse 24 of Chapter 76, "The Man" (*Sūrah al-Insan*), God commands, "So submit patiently to the judgment of your Lord, and do not obey any sinner or ingrate among them."[94] In the previous verses discussed, God tells the believers to obey the Prophet. Now, God is telling the believers not to obey the sinners. The logical argument at hand is conspicuous.

[93] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 4:80]
[94] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 76:24]

The Qurʾān can not contradict itself, and these verses have not been abrogated. Thus, God states to obey the Prophet as he is not conditioned to sin.

One counterargument for the Prophet's infallibility at social levels is the example of what would commonly be perceived as mistakes committed by other prophets. This can be illustrated through the examples of the prophets as dictated in the Qurʾān. In Chapter Two, *Sūrah Baqarah*, verse 35, God sent Adam and his wife Eve to go live in paradise, and he warned Adam not to eat from the tree; "Don't eat from this tree, it is an injustice to yourself."[95] Prophet Adam ate from the tree anyway. Nevertheless, Adam was still in paradise in which there was no *sharia* or legal code.[96] The distinction, Adam has not been sent down yet, and since he was still in paradise this protected his *ismah*. Another prophetic example in the Qurʾān is when Prophet Moses punched a man with no intention to kill him, but Moses killed the man anyway. Again, this lowers the level of the infallibility of Moses as compared to the final messenger who was not capable of committing such mistakes. There are no recorded, authentic instances of the Prophet committing mistakes such as these throughout his life. Therefore, there must be different levels of infallibility, so the level of the Prophet cannot be compared to the level of the infallibility of Prophet Adam or Prophet Moses.

3) The Reliability of *Hadīth* Literature

In order to delve into the numerous *aḥadīth* related to infallibility, it is important to give a brief overview of the study of *ḥadīth* reliability. Many Western and even contemporary Muslim scholars argue that *ḥadīth* literature is unreliable because it was transmitted through oral tradition and often not recorded until generations later. This

[95] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 2:35]
[96] Rizvi, *The Infallibility of the Prophets in the Qur'an*, 2014.

paper acknowledges that the compilations of *ḥadīth* that we have today are not authentic in their entirety. For example, in the preface of *Kitāb Al-Kāfī*, one of the four main Shīʿah books of *ḥadīth*, al-Kulaynī remarks on the nature of his compilation. Not everything is guaranteed to be accurate.[97] Quite the contrary, the authenticity of the narration is left to the determination of the scholar and the consensus of the collective. However, this does not mean that every *ḥadīth* in *al-Kāfī* should be discarded or trusted in its entirety. Neither should every *ḥadīth* be taken in its literary context. As in many aspects of Islamic studies, studying *ḥadīth* and its authenticity requires advanced knowledge, the use of the Quran and the intellect, and the application of reason to determine which *ḥadīth to what degree* can be considered authentic or reliable.

In traditional Islamic circles of learning, there is an entire discipline devoted to this subject: the verification of *ḥadīth* (*ilm al dirāyat*). *Ilm al dirāyat* refers to the verification of *ḥadīth*. The root letters in *dirāyat* are (د ر ى), denoting understanding, knowing, or comprehending.[98] This can be done in many ways, and in the Shīʿah tradition *dirāyat* focuses on the chain of narration and comprehension of *ḥadīth*. While there is not a single definition of *ilm al dirāyat* that all scholars agree on, Shīʿah scholars tend to agree that *ilm al dirāyat* as a discipline is concerned with issues that contribute to a more reliable chain of transmission, a more accurate understanding, and a more precise evaluation of the *ḥadīth* at hand. It is clear that *ilm al dirāyat* makes evaluating the reliability of the *ḥadīth* a more streamlined process. Additionally, *ilm al dirāyat* has contributed to the canonization of *ḥadīth* literature as a whole.

It is imperative to understand how *ilm al dirāyat* worked historically, and how its

[97] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī.*
[98] "Dirāyat."*Lughatuna Dictionary*. https://www.livingarabic.com/

deficiencies can be improved. This methodology can allow contemporary scholars to work towards improving *ilm al dirāyat* for multidisciplinary scholarship. In fact, *ilm al dirāyat* can be strengthened by approaching *ḥadīth* studies at an angle of Sunnī-Shīʿah rapprochement, a precedent left behind by Ayatollah Sayyid Hossein Borujerdi, the leading source of emulation (*marja*) of Iran from 1947 until his death in 1961. His approach is imperative for understanding to contemplate *ḥadīth* on controversial topics, such as the infallible nature of the Imāms.

One initiative that Borujerdi took was rewriting Shīʿah *ḥadīth* literature for a Sunnī majority audience.[99] Borujerdi believed that the 17th-century work titled *Wasāʾil al-Shiʿah* — translated roughly as *Shīʿah Rituals*— by the reputable traditional Shīʿah scholar Al-Hurr al-ʿĀmilī was incomplete. This was surprising due to the extensive nature of *Wasāʾil al-Shiʿah*, which encompassed the four main Shīʿah *ḥadīth* texts — *Kitab al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh* by al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq*, Al-Istibṣār.* and *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* by Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī — in addition to other major Shīʿah sources. While *Wasāʾil al-Shiʿah* covered Shīʿah rituals and their significance, according to Borujerdi, it was insufficient because these *aḥadīth* were not compared with their Sunnī counterparts.[100] Instead of returning to al-ʿĀmilī's work, Borujerdi based many of his beliefs and scholarly work on the early Shīʿah scholar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan, known widely as Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067). This figure inspired Borujerdi to rewrite the four main Shīʿah *ḥadīth* texts into one collective 31 volume work titled, *Jami' Ḥadīth al-Shi'a*. Borujerdi focused on *ḥadīth* mainly from the sixth Shīʿah Imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, but he rewrote

[99] Ahmad Kazemi-Moussavi. "The Socio-religious Roles of Ayatollah Borujerdi," 2021.
[100] Ibid.

them for a particular Sunnī audience in mind. Borujerdi's goal was to make Shīʿah *ḥadīth* more palatable while also including Sunnī circumstances more visibly, and ensuring the reliability of every *ḥadīth*.

What separated Borujerdi from other renowned scholars of *ḥadīth* studies is that he sought to redefine the realm of Shīʿah *ḥadīth* literature by analyzing transmission patterns.[101] In order to rank the reliability of narrations, Borujerdi emphasized the "list of authorities who have transmitted a report of a statement" (*isnād*).[102] Borujerdi undertook an extensive investigation to discover the identity of each narrator and informant. In his compilation of *Jami' ḥadīth al-Shi'a*, he would compare the *isnād* of the two reporters and look for similarities and differences.[103] Next, Borujerdi would pay particular attention to the number of sources of the tradition. The higher the number of unique individuals, the higher the credibility of the *ḥadīth*. After this step, Borujerdi would determine which city each source was from. The greater the number of informants and the diversity of where the informants were from, the greater the reliability of the *ḥadīth*. Using these strings of evidence together, Borujerdi still could not make an informed decision without first applying his reasoning. He would then determine the weakness or strength of the narrator and whether the narrator possessed any extremist views or other causes for concern that would affect the validity of the *ḥadīth*.[104] This approach considered more elements of the *ḥadīth* and incorporated Sunnī *ḥadīth* as well. Thus, Borujerdi's work was beneficial for both Sunnī and Shīʿah scholars alike and allowed for scholarly dialogue between the two branches.

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[101] Seyfeddin Kara. "Use of Transmission Patterns in Contemporary Shiʿi Isnād Analysis," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 144–64. doi:10.1353/isl.2016.0013.
[102] T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Isnād," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 26, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/topic/isnād.
[103] Kara, "Use of Transmission Patterns in Contemporary Shiʿi Isnād Analysis," 155.
[104] Ibid.

Additionally, it is important to analyze why Muslims do not have a clear index or text of both Sunnī and Shīʿah *ḥadīth* along with a discussion of its chain of transmission and reliability of narrators. Unfortunately, there is no such clear code of *ḥadīth* by Muslim authors written in English to benefit the billion Muslims and Islamic scholars worldwide. Finally, the most relevant research question to this thesis: how can the restructuring of *ilm al dirāyat* be a means of understanding the role of the Imāms as divine leaders not only between the Islamic branches but all of humanity. The next section of this thesis will use Borujerdi's principles to analyze both Sunnī and Shīʿah *ḥadīth* literature in order to understand the dialogue between the juxtaposed views on the nature of Imāmate. Instead of looking at Sunnī and Shīʿah *ḥadīth* concerning the Imāms in opposition to each other, this thesis will approach Sunnī and Shīʿah *ḥadīth* in conjunction.

Moreover, a large portion of *ilm al dirāyat* deals with the fourfold division of *ḥadīth*. This categorization provides the appropriate terms for attributing the level of reliability of each narration. According to the Shīʿah jurisprudence system, these four principles of *ḥadīth* and their definition are thoroughly explained by Ja'far Sobhani in *Narrators and Narrations: A Beginner's Guide to Rijal and Dirayah*. The principles of *ḥadīth* are as follows:

1) The authentic [or sound] (*al-ṣaḥīḥ*): Its narration is connected to an Infallible through a just Imāmi.[105]
2) The good [or fair] (*al-ḥasan*): Its narration is connected to an Infallible through a praised Imāmi that has not been specified as being just.[106]

[105] Ja'far Sobhani. *Narrators and Narrations: A Beginner's Guide to Rijal and Dirayah*. Trans. Zaid Alsalami. 2019. 139.
[106] Ibid.

3) The reliable (*al-muwaththaq*): Its narration is connected to an Infallible through a reliable non-Imāmi, whether they are a Shīʿah… or a Sunnī.[107]
4) The weak (*al-ḍa'īf*): It does not have any of the conditions of the first three.[108]

This flow of division of *ḥadīth* is in regard to the Shīʿah school of thought. Each category of reliability depends on its connection to an infallible, i.e., the prophets or the Imāms.

On a parallel plane, the Sunnī school of thought does not break the division of *ḥadīth* into four categories but three: *al-ṣaḥīḥ, al-ḥasan*, and *al-ḍa'īf*. The Sunnī school of thought also had slightly different interpretations of each of the three categories of *ḥadīth*, presented as follows:

1) The authentic (*al-ṣaḥīḥ)*: What is connected to the just and accurate without irregularities (*shudhūdh)* or faults (*'illah*).[109]
2) The good (*al-ḥasan*): Its extractor (*mukhrij*) is known and its narrators are famous, being accepted by most scholars and used by the majority of jurists.[110]
3) The weak (*al-ḍa'īf*): It does not have the quality of an authentic… book, and its weakness is of different levels.[111]

Both the Shīʿah and Sunnī principles of *ḥadīth* will be useful for analyzing the *ḥadīth* on the infallibility of the Imāms as followed. Each narration can be labeled in terms of its reliability according to both Shīʿah and Sunnī standards of *ḥadīth* studies. This is imperative for the study at hand because many scholars disprove *ḥadīth* based on supposed unreliability. Thus, this thesis will undergo a rigorous analysis of which level of reliability each *ḥadīth* falls under. This categorization will elucidate the *ḥadīth* on

[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid..
[109] Ibid., 140.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

infallibility and how the *ḥadīth* should be considered in relation to the station of the Imāms.

A final point on *ḥadīth* studies, it is important to note that in Shīʿah jurisprudence some primary tools of analyzing for Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* studies include the intellect (*ʻaql*), deductive reasoning (*ijtihād*), and consensus of the majority of qualified scholars (*ijmāʿ*).[112] Furthermore, the four Shīʿah or three Sunnī principles of *ḥadīth* are not implemented in isolation from other tools of analysis. In Shīʿism, these three tools — *ʻaql, ijtihād,* and *ijmāʿ* — are used to further analyze *ḥadīth*. However, the use of the *ʻaql*, *ijtihād*, and *ijmāʿ* are not found in Shīʿism alone. Firstly, the intellect, *ʻaql*, is a tool of rationality and the use of God-given faculties of reason, i.e., common sense. Secondly, while *ijtihād* is more significant to Shīʿah jurisprudence, it still plays a significant role in Sunnīsm. For instance, *ijtihād* can help in determining which level of *al-ḍaʻīf* the *ḥadīth* falls under. Many Sunnī scholars implement *ijtihād* today in matters that are undisclosed in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* literature. Thirdly, the concept of following the principle set by a qualified group of scholars, *ijmāʿ*, is a fundamental aspect of the principle of *ḥadīth, al-ḥasan*, as perceivable by the Sunnī definition noted above. Therefore, the next section of the thesis will implement the principles of *ḥadīth* according to both Shīʿah and Sunnī standards as well as the primary tools embedded in Shīʿah jurisprudence today. Together, these elements will help clarify the reliability and authentic meaning of the *ḥadīth* concerning the infallible nature of the Shīʿah Imāms.

[112] Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shīʿah Islam*, 176.

4) Early Shīʿah *Ḥadīth* On Infallibility

This section will analyze narrations from the authors of the four main books on Shīʿah *ḥadīth* to discuss how the early Shīʿah community viewed the infallible nature of the Imāms. It will go in-depth to assure the authenticity and reliability of these narrations set by Borujerdi's precedence and the principles of *ḥadīth* outlined in the previous section. Additionally, these narrations will be cross-referenced in other early Shīʿah texts to further guarantee their reliability and authenticity. To guarantee the soundness of the argument at hand, this paper will cross-reference *ḥadīth* in any Sunnī sources. Thus, this section will draw from various early Shīʿah and Sunnī sources. Ultimately, this section argues that the infallibility of the Shīʿah Imāms is founded in the early Shīʿah community.

Firstly, this section will be devoted to the similarities and differences between the Prophet and the Imāms in terms of infallibility. It is important to emphasize that the Prophet was at the peak of perfection. While the Shīʿah Imāms are held to a high station, this station is not higher than or equal to the Prophet in any regard. Ja'far Sobhani aptly describes the status of the Prophet and the Imāms in relation to God as well as the status of the Prophet in comparison to the Imāms.

> *Allama Majlisi says: 'Ghuluw in regard to the Prophet and the [Imāms]... applies if we name them God, or that in our prayers and our worship we see them as partners with God, or that we see creation or our daily sustenance as being from them, or that we believe that God has incarnated Himself (hulul) in them, or that we say that they know the secrets of the unseen without [needing] inspiration from God, or that we think of the Imāms as [having the same rank as the] Prophet, or that we presume that knowledge and recognition of the Imāms renders us beyond the need for any kind of worship and absolves us of all religious responsibilities.*[113]

[113] Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shīʿah Islam,* 71.

The Arabic word "*ghuluw*" refers to exaggeration. This excerpt is imperative to understand the exact relationship between God, his Prophet, and the Imāms. In no regard are the Prophet or the Imāms a reincarnation of God himself. This is an exaggeration that is detrimental to core beliefs. Neither the Prophet nor the Imāms are leaders of the religion without divine guidance and inspiration that is God-given. The Imāms do not have any special station or power on their own, except what has been given to them by God, through the teachings of the Prophet. Even further, as lofty as the position of the Imāms is, they are not on equal footing with the Holy Prophet. While the Prophet acts as a link towards reaching God, the Imāms act as another link in the chain towards reaching the Prophet and through him to God. Furthermore, while the Prophet was bestowed with revelation and the Holy Qurʾān, the Imāms were not. Thus, the Prophet remains as the seal of prophethood, and the role of the Imāms becomes a source of the continuation of that same prophetic light and blessings. Lastly, following in the Imāms' footsteps does not absolve the believer from other religious obligations. Therefore, the role of the Imāms is not to continue the line of prophethood or take a Godly position, but the Imāms were sent by God as guides for humanity to follow the Prophet's message.

As a final note about the status of the Imāms in comparison to God and the Prophet, Sobhani further clarifies the aspect of the "*ghuluw*" or those who exaggerate the position of the Imāms. In response to the exaggeration of Imāms' position he says:

> *Imām ʿAlī and his pure progeny always sought to distance themselves from the exaggerators, and even cursed them. Here we shall relate one sound ḥadīth in which Imām Ṣādiq gives his followers the instruction: 'Warn your youth about the exaggerators, lest they ruin their religious beliefs, for truly the exaggerators are the worst of God's creatures; they try and belittle the majesty of God while claiming lordship for the slaves of God.'*[114]

[114] Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shīʿah Islam,* 176

While many scholars attack the Shīʿah branch for idolizing the status of the Imāms, it is clear that these stereotypes are hearsay. This act of exaggerating the Imāms to a prophetic or Godly position is greatly discouraged by Shīʿah scholars. The one who exaggerates the status of the Imām is one that is led away from the true reality of the religion. Thus, while the Imāms occupy a very lofty and venerated status, they remain far beneath the throne of God as well as beneath the Prophet. This citation on the negative aspects of exaggeration will be vital for analyzing the reliability and authenticity of *ḥadīth* concerning the infallible status of the Imāms as follows.

The early Shīʿah community believed in the infallible and supernatural nature of the 12 Imāms. Namely, three prominent, early Shīʿah scholars of *ḥadīth* addressed this issue: 1) Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 940), author of *al-Kāfī*, translated as *The Sufficient*, 2) Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 991), known more commonly as Ibn Bābawayh or al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, author of *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*, translated as *For the Who is Not With the Presence of a Jurist*, and 3) Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, known widely as Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), author of *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām,* known as *The Refinement of the Laws*, and *Al-Istibṣār,* known as *The Book of Insight.* Each text covers different subjects. Firstly, *al-Kāfī* includes *ḥadīth* divided into three broad categories: core beliefs (*uṣūl)*, Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and or mannerisms based on ethics and morality (*akhlaq)*. Secondly, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh* focuses on Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Thirdly, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* only includes narrations focused on the laws of the *sharia* or Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Fourthly, *Al-Istibṣār* includes the same matters as *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* in a condensed form. Together, these four texts are known as *Kutub al-Arbaʿah*, "The Four Books on Shīʿah

*Ḥadīth*," because they are the best known and most cited works in Shīʿah circles. Unlike the six books of Sunnī *ḥadīth*, which Sunnīs perceived to be completely authentic in their entirety, the four Shīʿah books are taken as valuable, but not under the assumption that all of their contents are fully authentic. Shīʿah *ḥadīth* literature begins with these four texts but also expands well beyond the scope of these texts. Each scholar was a prolific writer with many works to his name. This thesis will also be lacking without mentioning the ideas in *Kitāb Al-Irshād* by al-Mufīd (d. 1022), a renowned teacher of al-Ṣadūq and al-Ṭūsī.

Al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣaduq, and al-Ṭūsī, argued that the early Shīʿah community believed that the Imāms possessed knowledge of the unseen and presented the superior nature of the Imāms. Some of these early texts of *ḥadīth* are currently translated into English while the rest remain in the original Arabic form, and they reflect the early Shīʿah view of the nature and supreme powers of the 12 Imāms.

Kulaynī spent 20 years collecting and compiling a total 16,199 *ḥadīth* in eight volumes in what became known as *Al-Kāfī*. This length of time was dedicated to the special attention Kulaynī took to verifying and organizing the narrations. Kulaynī was a contemporary of the 12th Imam al-Mahdī, and he compiled his texts during the Minor Occultation of the Imam. This adds credibility to Kulaynī's *isnāds*, as he names the whole chain of narrators up to the Imam.[115] Moreover, Kulaynī implemented a common practice of grouping the *ḥadīth* in a chapter according to a ranking based on its authenticity and clarity of meaning.[116] Thus, the earlier the number the *ḥadīth* is in the chapter, the more

[115] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī.* Vol. 1. 16.
[116] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī.* Vol. 1. 16.

reliable it is. This thesis uses *ḥadīth* from the beginning of the chapter because they are very specific, clear, and answer many common issues at stake.

The first volume of *Al-Kāfī* will be used in this analysis because it includes three discussions central to the topics at hand: 1) "Intelligence and Knowledge," 2) "Allah, the Creator and the Guardian of all things," and 3) "People to who Allah has given the authority and means to be the guardian over His creatures."[117] Kulaynī explores the issue of infallibility as it relates to the core beliefs of Shīʿism as well as the divine authority guaranteed to the Imāms. For example, in Volume One, "Chapter 15: The Unique Ahadith that sums up the Virtue and Qualifications of the Imam (a.s.)," discusses the nature and unique status of the Shīʿah Imāms.

> *Abu Muhammad al-Qasim ibn al-'Ala', may Allah grant him blessings, in a marfu' manner (rafa'abu), has narrated from 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muslim the following:*
>
> *The Imam is clean of sins, free of faults, possesses special knowledge and is distinguished in forbearance. The Imam maintains law and order in religion. He is the might of the Muslims to enrages the hypocrites, and futile to unbelievers. The Imam is the peerless person of his time, no-one can reach even near his rank in virtue and no scholar is comparable to him. No one can become A number of our people has narrated from alternative for him, nor is there anyone similar to him or just like him. His is exclusive in all virtues of which none is acquired or is sought after, in fact, his virtues are all from bestowed up on him by the source of all virtue, the Generous One.*[118]

This narration raises many important issues. Primarily, it is important to note that this is the first *ḥadīth* in this chapter, so there are no contrary points to the claims made above. Kulaynī was not aware of any other *ḥadīth* that would contradict what is already stated. In this *ḥadīth*, 'Abd al-'Aziz had approached Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā to clarify the different opinions held on the issues of Imamate and the people's controversies over the issues.[119]

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[117] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī.* Vol. 1. 6.
[118] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī.* Vol. 1. P 296, H 523, Ch. 15, h 1
[119] Ibid.

This labels the *ḥadīth* as *ṣaḥīḥ* because it is traced to an Imām and there are no irregularities (*shudhūdh)* or faults (*'illah*). This excerpt is only a part of the Imām's answer to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, but it is the most directly related to this thesis. The language of this *ḥadīth* is clear and simple. The Imāms are clean of sin. There is no scholar comparable to the Imāms. The Imāms possess unique knowledge and virtues from God that lead the Imāms not to commit sins or mistakes. This *ḥadīth* clarifies that this was the overall opinion of the Imāms during the lifetime of al-Mahdī and those Imāms prior to him.

Another important narration is the second *ḥadīth* cited in this section, thus revealing its authenticity without irregularities or faults like in the first example. Thus, the Sunnī would perceive this narration as authentic according to their own criteria. This *ḥadīth* lists all the qualities of the Imāms, and then it ends with the importance of infallibility.

> *H 524, Ch. 15, h 2 Muhammad ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Isa from al-Hasan ibn Mahbub from Ishaq ibn Ghalib from abu 'Abdallah (a.s.) who has described the condition of the Imāms (a.s.) and their attributes in one of his sermons.*
>
> *The Imam is the outstanding amicable person, the most trusted guide and the guardian who can make hopes come true. Allah has chosen him with such distinctions. He choose him as such in the realm when all things were in the form of particles in the instance that He made him a particle and in the realm in which all things were designed as He had designed him well-protected as a shadow, before He made the organisms, on the right side of His throne, gifted with wisdom in the unseen knowledge with Him. He chose him in His knowledge and granted him outstanding nobility for his purity. He is a heir of Adam, the best one among the descendants, the chosen one of the family of Abraham, a descendent of Ismael and of the most preferred ones in the family of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.). He has always been looked after by the watchful eyes of Allah Who would provide him security and guard him with His shield, well protected against the evil nets of Satan and his armies. He is well defended against the approaching dark nights and the false accusations of the evil doers. All wickedness is kept away from him and he kept safe against all forms of defects and flaws. He is veiled against all the*

> *scourge and infallible in the case of sins. He is kept safe and sound against all indecencies. He is well known for his forbearance and virtuousness in the early days of his life and great knowledge, chastity and excellence are ascribed to him towards the end of his life.*[120]

In this *ḥadīth*, Isḥāq ibn Ghālib was listening to the sermon from Imām ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn and he narrates to others what the Imām mentioned in his sermon. This lends further authenticity to the *ḥadīth* from the Shīʿah perspective. This excerpt from the entire *ḥadīth* is an apt description of the Imām, and the underlined section above builds up to the infallible nature of the Imām. The Imām is protected against all types of evil and flaws. The imagery in this narration is profound. It is as if there is a veil between the Imām and the rest of the world, and this veil acts as a sealed boundary. All evil is projected off the Imām. The safety of the Imām's virtue enables him to uphold his station as the ultimate guide of religious and spiritual authority. This belief of the Imām was upheld during his lifetime.

Towards the end of Volume One, there is a chapter titled, "The Imāms are Similar to those before them and the Dislikeability of Calling them Prophets." As discussed in the beginning of this section, the title of this chapter reveals how the Imāms separated themselves from the Prophet. In this narration, the subject of infallibility and exact status of the Imāms is also questioned and elaborated upon.

> *H 707, Ch. 53, h 6 Muhammad ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad ibn Muhammad from al-Barqi from abu Talib from Sadir who has said that he asked abu 'Abdallah (a.s.) the following.*
>
> *A certain group of people believe that you are gods. They read to us from the Quran about it. And it is He Who in heaven is God and in earth is God." (43:84). The Imam (a.s.) said, "O Sadir, my hearing, my sight, my skin, my flesh, my blood and my hair are (all) disdain such people, and Allah also disdains them. They do not follow my religion and the religion of my forefathers. I swear by Allah, Allah will not place me with them on the Day of Resurrection. The only thing from Allah*

[120] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*. P 300, H 524, Ch. 15, h 2

> *to them will be His anger." The narrator has said that he said, "Among us there is a group of people who believe that you are messenger and read to from the Holy Quran. "O Messengers, eat of the good things and do righteousness; surely I know the things you do (23:51). The Imam (a.s.) said, "O Sadir, my hearing, my sight, my skin, my flesh, my blood and my hair are (all) disdain such people, and Allah and His Messenger also disdains them. They do not follow my religion and the religion of my forefathers. Allah will not place me with them on the Day of Judgment. The only thing from Allah towards them will be His anger." The narrator has said that he then asked, "What are you then?" the Imam (a.s.) said, "We are the treasuries of the knowledge of Allah. We are the translators of the commands of Allah. We are infallible people. Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High, has commanded people to obey us and prohibited them to disobey us. We are the complete Divine authority over all that is below the heavens and above the earth.*[121]

In this excerpt of *ḥadīth* which is number six of this chapter, Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq himself explains to Sadir al-Ṣayrafī the exact nature of the Imāms. Imām al-Ṣādiq repeatedly expresses extreme disdain towards Sadir's statement that the Imāms are God or prophets. After Imām al-Ṣādiq rebukes Sadir, he tells his companion the true nature of the Imāms: infallible people who possess divine authority granted by God. In all, these three narrations from *Al-Kāfī* prove how often the Imāms repeated that they were not God or prophets, but rather representatives on earth chosen by God. In each narration, the Imām's position is coupled with his infallible nature. This shows the nature of the Imām as it was perceived by the early Shīʿah community and scholars who followed the precedent of the Imām himself.

The aforementioned *aḥadīth* in *Al-Kāfī* are also prevalent in many texts by al-Ṣadūq. In one of his many renowned texts, *Dhakhirat al-Ibad*, al-Ṣadūq discusses *why* the Imāms must be infallible. Thus, al-Ṣadūq provides rational thinking to justify the infallible nature of the Imāms. The relevant *ḥadīth* is translated from the Arabic below:

> *Ibn Umaryr, asked Hisham ibn al-Hakam, "Is the Imam infallible?" Al-Hakam answered. "Yes, for these reasons: All sins are rooted in greed, jealousy, wrath,*

[121] Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*. P 390, H 707, Ch. 53, h 6

> *and lust. How can the Imam be greedy of the world when the whoel world is under his command? How can the Imam be jealous while all creatures are below him? How can the Imam be wrathful when his wrath is for the sake of Allah? How can the Imam be lustful when he sees beautiful faces and blessings in heaven through contemplation and intuition?* [122]

An exposition of the figure Al-Ḥakam was presented earlier under the literature review section of the thesis, and his reliability as a renowned transmitter of *ḥadīth* proves the reliability of this excerpt. This *ḥadīth* highlights an important aspect of infallibility and clarifies the station of the Imāms. It is not the case that the Imāms are unable to sin, but their faith and knowledge of God is so strong that sins become impossible for them to commit. If the Imāms have seen the blessings of the heavens, then this insight saves them from committing sins. In other words, the knowledge of the Imāms prevents them from even thinking about a sin. This perspective of the perfection of the Imāms was prevalent in the early Shīʿah community and was widely held by the followers of the Imāms.

There are many similar narrations that state that the Imāms are infallible beings. For example, as discussed in the handbook of Shīʿah beliefs, known as *Theological Instructions*, al-Ṣadūq traces this next *ḥadīth* to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib from the Prophet himself: "They are the Imāms after you and they have been purified from sin."[123] On a deeper level, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq also explains how the Imāms viewed the nature of sin in their day-to-day lives. The relationship between sin and the Imām is presented through rational arguments. How can someone who is so repulsed by the idea of sin, be able to commit sin?

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[122] Husayn Ansariyan. *Ahl al-Bayt, The Celestial Beings on the Earth.* Ansariyan Publications. 2007. 68.; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. *Dhakhirat al-Ibad.*

[123] Miṣbāḥ Yazdī and Mirza Mohammad Abbas Reza, *Theological Instruction*s (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), pp.151-2

Again, al-Ṣadūq cites more *ḥadīth* centered around the Imāms and their relationship with infallibility in another of his works titled *Uyūn ʾAkhbār ar-Riḍā,* which is translated into English as *The Springs of the Narrations of al-Rida.* In this work, al-Ṣadūq focuses on the sayings, traditions, and life of the eighth Shīʿah Imām, ʿAlī al-Riḍā. As each *ḥadīth* is traced back to al-Riḍā, this text highlights the original Imāmi position on infallibility. In one such narration that al-Ṣadūq traces back to al-Riḍā, he states, "I, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and the nine of the sons of Husayn are purified from uncleanness and are infallible."[124] The Imāms also represent the height of impeccable piety. Al-Riḍā himself, even before the birth of the remaining Imāms after him, declared to his students and followers that the chain of 12 Imāms is cleansed from sins. This narration cannot simply be dismissed, and it must be repeatedly highlighted that the infallible nature of the Imāms was the belief of the Shīʿah community during the lifetime of the Imāms. Why should the belief system of the early Shīʿah community who lived in the proximity of the Imāms be disregarded?

Lastly, al-Ṣadūq again pinpoints the infallibility of the Imāms in another of his texts, *Al-Khiṣāl* — translated variously as *The Traits* or *The Characteristics* and even as *A Numeric Classification of Traditions on Characteristics*— and it focuses on morals, ethics, and core religious beliefs. The infallibility of the Imāms transcends every philosophical and theological discussion. In this *ḥadīth,* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq discusses the station of the Prophets and the Imāms; "The Prophets and their successors have no sin, for they are infallible and purified."[125] Even the Imām himself propagated the idea that he was an infallible being. Across various texts, al-Ṣadūq insists that this is the true nature of

[124] al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. *Uyūn ʾAkhbār ar-Riḍā*. 64/1, T 30.
[125] al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. *Al-Khiṣāl*. 608/2, Hadith 9.

the Imāms. The Imāms must be purified. The repetition of this ideology shows its relevance to the early Shīʿah community. The belief in the infallible nature of the Imāms was common and widespread. During the lifetimes of the Imāms, the Imāms were respected as indispensable proofs (*hujaj*), and the Imāms were viewed as infallible by the Shīʿah.[126] The doctrines concerning the infallibility of the Imāms are further expanded upon in another of al-Ṣadūq's texts, *Al-Iʿtiqādāt* or *The Beliefs*.[127] The translation of this critical text is known as *A Shīʿite Creed*, which was translated by Asaf Ali Asghar Fyze in 1982. This text serves as a handbook for core Shīʿah tenets of faith. Chapter 36 is titled "The Belief Concerning Infallibility:"

> *Our belief concerning the prophets, apostles, Imams, and angels is that they are infallible; purified from all defilement, and that they do not commit any sin, whether it be minor or major. They do not disobey Allah in what He has commanded them; they act in accordance with His behests. He who denies infallibility to them in any matter appertaining to their status is ignorant of them, and such a one is an unbeliever. Our belief concerning them is that they are infallible and possess the attributes of perfection, completeness, and knowledge, from the beginning to the end of their careers. Defects cannot be attributed to them, nor disobedience, nor ignorance, in any of their actions.*[128]

In this chapter on the infallible nature of the Imāms, al-Ṣadūq likens the infallible nature of the prophets to the Imāms. Al-Ṣadūq uses the word defilement or the Arabic word "*danas*," to signal how unclean and polluting sins are to the soul. Additionally, al-Ṣadūq differentiates between minor and major sins, *saghira* and *kabira*. By doing so, al-Ṣadūq emphasizes that the Imām is purified from *all* sins. This adds credence to the perfection of the Imām's status. Overall, al-Ṣadūq uses simple language to state the Shīʿah doctrine of Imāmi infallibility.

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[126] George Warner. *The Words of the Imams: Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and the Development of Twelver Shīʿī Hadith Literature*. Bloomsbury Publishing. 2021. 4.
[127] al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. *al-Iʿtiqādāt.* 304–7.
[128] Al-Ṣadūq. *A Shīʿite Creed: A Translation of I'tiqādātu 'l-Imāmīyah (The Beliefs of the Imāmiyyah)* Trans. Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee. (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1982) 87.

Likewise, al-Ṭūsī dictates *ḥadīth* that are aligned with al-Ṣadūq's ideology. *Al-ʾAmālī* is a collection of *ḥadīth* that were dictated by al-Ṭūsī himself to a circle of students he taught in Najaf. It contains various topics and one such important discussion centers around the virtues of the Imāms and the role of Imamate. al-Ṭūsī narrates from the second Shīʿah Imām, Ḥasan, "We, *Ahl al-Bayt*, are those whom Allah has honored by Islam, chosen from among all creatures, removed any uncleanness, and purified a thorough purification. Uncleanness is the same as doubt. We never have any doubt about Allah and His religion. He has also purified us from infirmity or error."[129] The language is very resemblant to *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*. This is due to the fact that the *ḥadīth* Ḥasan narrates is aligned with the verses of the Qurʾān.

In *Kitāb Al-Irshād*, translated as the *Book of Guidance into the Lives of the 12 Imams*, al-Mufīd provides a detailed biography of the lives, virtues, legacies, and deaths of the 12 Shīʿah Imāms. In the 1981 translation of this text, Nasr adds a preface to the text and makes a valid point that many primary Shīʿah sources remain untranslated, leading to an erosion of understanding and a mislabeling of Shīʿah beliefs. The translator, I.K.A. Howard, writes the introduction of the text on the life of al-Mufīd. In the introduction, I.K.A. Howard states al-Mufīd's view on the nature of Imamate and the Imāms' station. In all, al-Mufīd provides a logical description of the validity of infallibility:

> *The Imamis…. believed that men could not function properly without leadership, and that in order for man to fulfill his religious duties and worship God it was necessary for him to have this leadership. At first God has provided this leadership through prophets who presented His revealed guidance to the world. These prophets, in order that the truth of God's message be substantiated were protected from error…. The prophet was in a sense an Imam. The last of the prophets was Muhammad and after Muhammad God provided a series of Imams,*

[129] al-Ṭūsī. *Al-ʾAmālī*. 561

> *who were protected from sin, to act as the custodians of faith for the world. The Imams were God's testimony to the world which guaranteed the world's continued existence. Without the Imams the world would cease to exist. The Imams were designated by God and this designation was made public by their predecessor.*[130]

As noted by al-Mufīd, the Shīʿah community believed that Imāms were free of sin. This idea is universal across all the early Shīʿah scholars.

These additional works as well as secondary books of Shīʿah *ḥadīth* such as *Biḥār al-ʾAnwār* by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699) will also be analyzed as it is critical to the complete understanding of early Shīʿah beliefs. This text by al-Majlisī is an example of a *ḥadīth* collection that was compiled then reorganized or reevaluated from previously existing *ḥadīth* collections. In *Biḥār al-ʾAnwār*, Al-Majlisī authentically traces an authentic *ḥadīth* back to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. In this narration, ʿAlī himself describes the line of 12 Imāms as the infallible successors of the Prophet appointed by God. ʿAlī says, "They are purified Imams, infallible household of noble offspring, and guided vicegerents."[131] Husayn Ansariyan adds commentary to this *ḥadīth*, and Ansariyan states that the Imāms are the manifestation of God's attributes.[132] He continues, even Sunnī scholars agree that the Imams possess the knowledge, understanding, and piety of the prophets.

Thus far, this section has cited the validity of the Imāms' infallibility from a Shīʿah perspective from al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣadūq, al-Ṭūsī, al-Mufīd, all the way to al-Majlisī. In the discussion of commonly cited *ḥadīth* on the infallibility of the Imāms, it would do this thesis an injustice to leave out a detailed analysis of what is known as *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn*. In following the earlier discussion concerning *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr* and its

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[130] al-Mufīd. *Kitāb Al-Irshād: The Book of Guidance Into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*, trans. I.K.A. Howard (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1981). xxii.
[131] Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-ʾAnwār,* 174/25, H. 39
[132] Ansariyan, *Ahl al-Bayt, The Celestial Beings on the Earth,* 61.

interpretation of establishing purity of the Prophet's household, this verse is strengthened by the renowned *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn*. The narration takes its name after the Arabic word "*thaqalayn,"* which translates literally as "two weighty things." Thus, *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn* is the narration of Two Weighty Things.

Similar to Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr, *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn* has been narrated by enough narrators with varied chains of transmissions that it is deemed *mutawātir* as well as *al-ṣaḥīḥ* according to Sunnī and Shīʿah scholars. This *ḥadīth* is cited profusely across Islamic faith traditions and is authentic according to practically every Islamic school of thought. From the Shīʿah perspective, 82 *ḥadīth* on *thaqalayn* are narrated. These are noted in *al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī,[133] *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Niʿma* by al-Ṣadūq, *Al-ʾAmālī* (al-Mufīd), *Al-ʾAmālī* (al-Ṭūsī), *Uyūn ʾAkhbār ar-Riḍā*, and *Baṣaʾir al-Darajāt*, among numerous other sources.[134] From the Sunnī perspective, this has been narrated from *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal,*[135] *al-Mustadrak,*[136] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī,*[137] *Sunan al-Nasā'ī,*[138] *al-Mu'jam al-kabir,*[139] *Du'afa' al-kabir,*[140] and *al-Mu'jam al-awsat,*[141] among other sources including *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.[142]

These Sunnī and Shīʿah scholars have narrated from the Prophet the tradition as follows: I am leaving behind two weighty things (*Thaqalayn*): the Book of Allah, and my Ahl al–Bayt (Household). If you hold fast to them, you will not be deviated; the two will

[133] al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol.1 p.294
[134] Al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Tūbilī al-Baḥrānī. *Ghāyat al-marām wa ḥujjat al-khiṣām*, vol.2 p.304-320
[135] Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*, vol.4 p.371
[136] Niyshaburi, *al-Mustadrak*, vol.3 p.110
[137] Al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, vol.5 p.328
[138] Al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-kubra,* hadith:8148
[139] Al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'jam al-kabir*, vol.5 p.166
[140] 'Aqili, *Du'afa' al-kabir*, vol.4 p.362
[141] 'Aqili, *Du'afa' al-kabir,* vol.4 p.362
[142] Al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Tūbilī al-Baḥrānī. *Ghāyat al-marām wa ḥujjat al-khiṣām*, vol.2 p.304-320

never separate until they return to me at the pond (of Kawthar). [143] This *ḥadīth* consists of two components that are one and the same: 1) the Qurʾān, and 2) the *Ahl al-Bayt*. The Qurʾān and *Ahl al-Bayt* are inseparable until the end of time. If one does not believe in both, then one will be led astray. Both Sunnī and Shīʿah alike agree with the statement that the Qurʾān and *Ahl al-Bayt* carry the same weight. There is also an emphasis on the fact that the Qurʾān and *Ahl al-Bayt* will never separate from each other.

Additionally, the alignment of the Qurʾān and *Ahl al-Bayt* has led many Shīʿah scholars to deduce that since the Qurʾān is perfection and free of sin, then the *Ahl al-Bayt* must be perfect and free of sin as well. According to Shīʿah scholars, this *ḥadīth* in itself is enough proof of the infallibility of the Imāms. The Shīʿah present a rational argument: if the *Ahl al-Bayt* were to err from the path of truth, then the Qurʾān would not represent the divine truth and the reality of the universe. Thus, for the status of the Qurʾān to be upheld, the *Ahl al-Bayt* must stand for the path of truth. The Imāms can only achieve this by following the Qurʾān in the most perfect of manners. In other words, the Imāms cannot stray from the message of the Qurʾān without tarnishing the image of Islam. Preserving the sanctity of the Qurʾān and the religion of Islam is why God gave the Imāms the insight necessary to be turned away from committing acts of vice.

Remarkably, since *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn* is sourced so profusely, the narration itself has sparked many calls for the coming together of different Islamic branches. *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn* binds both Sunnī and Shīʿah scholars together. In terms of rapprochement efforts, *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn* has enabled many dialogues between scholars, and discussion on the *ḥadīth* even led to the development of the renowned text by Sayyid Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din al-Musawi al-'Amili, titled *Al-Murājaʿāt* — published in its original Arabic

[143] *Bihar al-Anwar* 118/23, H. 36

language in 1936, and translated into more than ten languages including into English as *The Right Path* or *A Shi'i–Sunni Dialogue*. *Ḥadīth Thaqalayn* represents one of many intersectionalities between the Shīʿah and Sunnī branches.

5) The Infallibility Factor on Shīʿah Authority

This chapter will address the question, how has the Shīʿah belief in the infallibility of the Imāms impacted Shīʿah theology over the past 1,400 years? The 12 Imāms occupy both political and spiritual authority that has manifested into many unique developments today.

The infallible position of the Imāms manifests itself in two ways: the Imāms occupy 1) political, charismatic authority (*wilāyah*), and 2) devotional attachment or nearness to the charismatic authority (*walāyah*). The role of *wilāyah* and *walāyah* are distinctive to Shīʿism. On the one hand, *wilāyah* may be defined as political, moreover *charismatic*, authority. On the other hand, *walāyah* may be defined as devotional attachment or nearness *to* the charismatic authority, the figure of the infallible Imām. These two features: *wilāyah*, divine authority, and political guardianship, and *walāyah*, devotional attachment and nearness, are inseparable and are not opposed to each other. *wilāyah* cannot exist without *walāyah* and vice versa; it is this intertwining of the divine authority of the Imāms and devotional attachment to the Imāms that creates the purest of communities, charisma itself. The Shīʿah must have *wilāyah* and *walāyah*, obedience and love, in order to be a true follower in every sense of the term. Furthermore, *wilāyah* can be understood by many, exoteric (*zahir*), while *walāyah* is only understood by a few, esoteric (*batin*). Again, this mixture of the exoteric and esoteric is what creates such a charismatic community of followers.

As Maria Massi Dakake, professor of Islamic studies at George Mason University, describes, Shīʿah Islam represents the epitome of a "Charismatic Community."[144] The intersectionality of the ultimate political and devotional worship creates a mesmerizing appearance, and it is the awe and fascination that becomes known as the exemplary community, otherwise known as the charismatic community.[145] The Shīʿah theological belief in the infallibility of the 12 Imāms supports this original coinage, "the Charismatic Community." Isolating the figure of the Imām itself is in fact the utmost example of charisma. As represented in Shīʿah theology, the Imām is the perfect exemplar of the human being.[146] Their personalities are human perfection, and God instills this divine light inside the heart of every appointed Imām.[147] Indeed, the 12 Imāms in Twelver Shīʿah theology are hand-picked by God Himself, speaking to the unique nature of the Imām's authority and charisma. It not only speaks to the character of the Imām but also to the person who follows the Imām, as humankind is meant to be guided by the one selected by God to lead mankind in every avenue of life.[148] The belief and adherence to Imāmate is therefore a lifestyle geared towards seeking nothing but perfection here on this earth and in the next world.

In *Shi'ite Islam*, Ṭabāṭabāʾī also discusses the role of *wilāyah* in Shīʿah theology and how it plays a contemporary role in Shīʿah communities globally today. He cites that the term *wilāyah* is repeated several times in the Qurʾān in reference to the Imāms, most notable in verse 55 of Chapter Five, "The Table" (*Sūrah al Ma'idah*), known as the Verse of *wilāyah*;[149] "Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain

[144] Maria Massi Dakake. *The Charismatic Community*. SUNY Press. 2007. 1.
[145] Ibid., 8.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., 10.
[149] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shi'ite Islam*, 10.

the prayer and give the zakāt while bowing down."[150] From this verse, it is apparent that the political authority (*wilāyah*) of the Imāms is present in the Qurʾān. It is necessary to contextualize this verse in order to understand the circumstances of revelation.

Numerous commentators on the Qurʾān, both Shīʿah and Sunnī, agree that this verse was revealed in context to a narration concerning the first Shīʿah Imām, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, giving a ring to a beggar during the course of his daily prayer.[151] In this verse, the word "*waliyyukumu*" is translated as "your guardian." Historically, the word "*wali*" has also been used in reference to mean "ruler" or "guardian" — the one who possesses authority over others. The root letters of the word "*wali*" — (و ل ي) — agree with this definition. The lexicon of "*wali*" can be extrapolated to understand the meaning of *wilāyah*. Furthermore, "the Ruler" or الوالي, is one of the 99 names of God. Thus, the meaning of *wali* automatically takes on a religious connotation to it. If God is the *Wāli* — the ultimate religious authority, and He appoints a *wali* on earth to serve in His name, then this *wali* would also possess a divinely ordained religious authority over the people. Thus, the infallibility of the Prophet and the Imams takes root in their status as a *wali* on the earth, which is expressly rewarded as a result of their infallibility.

In the Verse of *wilāyah*, God Himself emphasizes His authority. In addition, God also links the Prophet's and ʿAlī's leadership to His own authority. As noted in *Tafsīr al-Mizan*, "When wilãyah – a special proximity – is affected in spiritual/immaterial affairs, it follows that waliyy has a right and an authority over the mawlã which others do not have (except through him)."[152] In this regard, God, the Prophet, and ʿAlī represent a chain of superior authority over others. With this being the case, if God's *wilāyah* is

[150] Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 5:55]
[151] Mahdī Pooya. *Pooya Tafsīr*.
[152] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Tafsīr al Mizan*. Chapter 5, Verses 55-56. Page 11.

universal to all, then the *wilāyah* of the Prophet and ʿAlī must also take an exalted form . Whereas God possesses the ultimate authority, the Prophet and ʿAlī possess authority in God's name. The *tafsīr* agrees with the meaning of the word, and this adds credibility to the interpretation and role of the *wali*.

According to Shīʿah interpretations of this verse, *wilāyah* extends the authority given to the Prophet by God to the 12 Imāms. In this context, *wilāyah* refers to the Imām's esoteric power in which the Imām can teach mankind the "Divine Mysteries and provide for them the key to attaining sanctity."[153] These divine figures help the ordinary Shīʿah to know God, find themselves, and understand the reality of all things. With this logic as the driving force behind the history of Shīʿism, the 12 Imāms are both the righteous religious *and* spiritual authorities, *wilāyah* and *walāyah*. Tabataba'i also explains how *wilāyah* is transferred through the family of the Prophet, not because of relation to the Prophet but because they were chosen by God. Both *wilāyah* and *walāyah* are needed in order to retain one's faith.

The Shīʿah express devotional transcendental love (*mawaddah*) for the Prophet's family. This love is given due to the lofty station of these individuals, which goes hand-in-hand with their infallibility. *Mawaddah* is a level beyond *mahabbah*, or simply love, and is a form of *walāyah*. *Mawaddah* — the noun form: مَوَدَّة and its root letters ( و د د ) — denote love, infatuation, friendship, affection, and good relations between people. In this case there exists *mawaddah* between the Imāms and their followers, the Shīʿah. *Mawaddah* is a love based on the ties of friendship and close bonds. While the word, or rather the characteristic mode of expression, *mawaddah*, is written six times in the Holy Qurʾān, verse 23 in Chapter 42, *Sūrah as-Shura*, is commonly referred to as the *Āyāt*

[153] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shīʿite Islam*, 39.

*al-Mawaddah;*[154] "That is the good news Allah gives to His servants who have faith and do righteous deeds! Say, 'I do not ask you any reward for it except love of [my] relatives.' Whoever performs a good deed, We shall enhance for him its goodness. Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-appreciative."[155] Ultimately, *mawaddah* is more than the love of friendship. *Mawaddah* is even more than the love of the Prophet and his family, and the one who possesses true *mawaddah* undergoes an intensive self-transformational process that trickles into every aspect of one's life. A true believer has *mawaddah* for everything, not just God and His Prophets. This is evident in the explanation of one of the 99 names of God, *Al-Wadud*, the Most Loving, sharing the same root as *mawaddah* — ( و د د ).[156] The one who loves God, the Holy Prophet and his family, expresses it through one's actions, thoughts, beliefs, personality, and etiquette. Thus, the transformational and devotional love of *mawaddah* is a station which the believers have the capacity to strive towards on the path of seeking salvation.

In summary, the Imāms occupy the role of *wilāyah* in the sense of political authority and *walāyah* as a devotional attachment. It is the combination of these factors — religious authority and devotional love — that creates the charismatic figure of the Imāms that the Shīʿah community today, after more than 1400 years, still follow. Amidst all of this, the infallibility of the Imams serves as a building block for their other roles. The leadership and precedence the Imāms have left behind are meant to guide the Shīʿah community forward. The dual role of leadership and devotion require that the Imāms are

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[154] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 5:85], [29:25], [30:21], [42:23] [60:1], [60:7]

[155] *Holy Qur'an: Phrase by Phrase English Translation*. Trans. ʿAlī Quli Qarai. [Qurʾān 42:23]

[156] An explanation for God's name: *Al Wadud* is the One who loves whoever turns to Him in repentance from his or her sins. The One who loved His prophets and messengers, His allies and friends, and expresses it through His forgiveness. He is Full of Love towards the believers. He praises them and is benevolent towards them. He gives them signs of His love for them and causes others to love them as well.

worthy of this following as dictated by God. Due to the sources in the Qurʾān, *tafsīr*, and historical usage of the word *wali*, the Shīʿah claim to be following the religious authority as designated by God Himself. *walāyah* is transformed into *mawaddah*, and this *mawaddah* causes the renewal of the soul in deference to respecting the authority of the Imāms as well as allowing this love to transform every aspect of life into piety. Ultimately, due to the Shīʿah belief in the infallibility of the Imāms as well as their religious and devotional authority, the Imāms occupy the highest theological station after the Prophet in Islam. It is this precise station of the Imāms that the Shīʿah believe in that transforms the hearts of those who follow them. Thus, it is clear that the infallibility of the Imāms has influenced Shīʿah theology in the way it is practiced today, especially with regard to the role of Imamate.

6) Shīʿah Identity Through Imāmi Rituals & the Imāms as Role Models for Humanity

This chapter will acknowledge the degree to which the infallible figure of the Imāms has influenced the practices, rituals, and identity of the contemporary Shīʿah community. While the Shīʿah community is often persecuted for regarding the Shīʿah Imāms in this high regard, how exactly do Imamate and the Imām's infallible nature influence Shīʿah communities in the West? The Imāms and their characteristics of infallibility have deeply entrenched Shīʿah principles of theology, ethics, jurisprudence, and politics, and this has affected the Shīʿah community to a great extent. Again, this highlights the preliminary discussion: how did the early Shīʿah community perceive the Imāms' status as compared to today? How has this affected the core identity of today's Shīʿah community?

Secondly, this chapter will discuss how the Prophet is often described as the perfect figure by non-Muslim scholars due to his friendly nature and timeless legacy. The morality and ethical nature that the Prophet possessed are remembered and remarked upon in today's society. Similarly, the Imāms are regarded in this light. According to Shīʿah belief, how did the Imāms live up to their lofty station? Is this level of spiritual and ethical purity attainable? How does taking the Imāms as role models influence the lives of people today?

The infallible nature of the Imāms is alive through the recitation and remembrance of particular supplications by the Shīʿah community today. One imperative ritual in Shīʿism is the emphasis on supplication (*duʿāʾ*).[157] The means of supplication have deeply influenced many aspects of Shīʿism from theology, community, and ethics, to individual spirituality. Both historically and presently, the Shīʿah community engages in the recitation of an array of supplications as a means of seeking closeness to God. Additionally, these supplications have a very special role. They focus on the personalities of the Imāms as role models for the rest of humanity. Shīʿah communities today strive to reach a station of proximity to God by recalling the lives and legacies of the Imāms through the recitation of the Imāms' supplications.

In *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality*, Nasr defines the unique role of *duʿāʾ* in the theological and personal practices of the Shīʿah, especially in opposition to Sunnīsm.[158] Many such narrations classify the Imāms as guides to the sacred truth that they were privy to. For instance, traditional Shīʿah centers or mosques often hold weekly "Duʿāʾ Kumayl" circles, in which the supplication is recited, followed by a lecture or

[157] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shi'ite Islam,* 140-149.
[158] Syyed Hossein Nasr. *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality.* 1988. 244

discussion. "Duʿāʾ Kumayl" was narrated from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to his companion Kumayl ibn Zīyād and is traditionally recited every Thursday evening in Shīʿah communities in order to ask God for the remission of their transgressions and to provide for their sustenance. In this verse, the Imām is asking God to purify his heart and cleanse him from his sins; "how many ugly things You have concealed!"[159] Although the Shīʿah believe the Imāms are sinless, the Imāms asked God to relieve their sins as a model for their followers to follow. Just as the Prophet asked God to remove his sins, the Imāms followed this precedent as a reminder of God's mercy. The Shīʿah repeat this specific language as a means to ask for forgiveness from God. The mystical elements of Shīʿism are also apparent. For example, the Shīʿah spend time looking inwards at themselves as a way of looking for God. Furthermore, the constant recitation of *duʿāʾ* is an act of self-purification and a means for seeking closeness to God. This spiritual endeavor is possible through the supplications and guidance of the Prophet and his family.

In "Munājāt Al-Shaʿbāniyya," another supplication by ʿAlī, there is a similar refrain; "You have concealed my sins in my worldly life, but I need Your concealment more urgently in the Next Life. You have not disclosed my sins before any of Your righteous servants."[160] The similarity between these two *duʿāʾ* is striking. It serves to emphasize the real mercy of God through the practice of *duʿāʾ* and the repetition of the mystical elements that the Shīʿah constantly emphasize through these supplications. Thus, the guidance of the Imāms enables their followers to reflect on their own spiritual journey and seek nearness to God.

[159] "Duʿāʾ Kumayl." https://duas.org/dua-kumayl.html
[160] "Munājāt Al-Shaʿbāniyya" https://www.duas.org/invocation.htm

Additionally, the recitation of "Duʿāʾ Kumayl" as a weekly event represents the social aspect of supplication. While supplication helps the individual seek closeness to God, it also brings the community together. Shīʿism emphasizes that each believer is part of the community. Supplication provides a toolkit for fully understanding the words of God. The Shīʿah understand God through the lens of how the Imāms understood Him, and the Shīʿah model their words to God after the Imāms' words.

Moreover, the ritual of *duʿāʾ* is a shortcut for the believer to develop a devotional attachment to God. In "Duʿāʾ Arafah," again there exists the narrative of asking for forgiveness and self-purification.[161] On the 9th of Dhu al Hijjah, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī exited his tent and asked God for forgiveness in what became known as the "Duʿāʾ Arafah:" "If I pray to You, You will respond to me. If I beg You, You will give me. If I obey You, You will thank me. If I thank You, You will give me more."[162] The Shīʿah recite this *duʿāʾ* every year on the Day of Arafah in order to follow in the footsteps of Ḥusayn and seek his divine intercession. This allows the Shīʿah to strengthen their attachment to the Imām in hope of modeling their own actions after him.

As noted, supplication is a core part of Shīʿism. The role of supplication is special to Shīʿism because of its extreme value, generally not found in Sunnīsm.[163] There is a specific supplication for everything and anything a believer could need. For example, a major *duʿāʾ* collection by the fourth Shīʿah Imām ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Psalms of Islam (Sahifa Sajjadiyya)*, shows the believer how to speak to their Creator, i.e. the words to ask for God's protection, the words to praise God, etc.[164] In *Psalms of Islam*, the introduction

[161] Nasr, *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality,* 246.
[162] "Duʿāʾ Arafah." https://duas.org/mobile/dua-arafah-imam-husain.html
[163] Ibid., 244.
[164] Ibid., 246.

by William Chittick discusses the role of supplication and its importance in Islamic practice and ritual.

> *In the Islamic context, supplication appears as one of the primary frameworks within which the soul can be molded in accordance with the Divine Will and through which all thoughts and concepts centered upon the ego can be discarded. The overwhelming emphasis in the Saheefa upon doing the will of Allah - 'Thy will be done', as Christians pray - illustrates clearly a Allah-centeredness which negates all personal ambitions and individual desires opposed in any way to the divine Will, a Will which is given concrete form by the Shari'a and the sunna. For Muslims then as today, obeying Allah depended upon imitating those who had already been shaped by Allah's mercy and guidance, beginning with the Prophet, and followed by the great Companions. For the Shias, the words and acts of the Imāms play such a basic role in this respect that they so sometimes seem - at least to non-Shias - to push the sunnah of the Prophet into the background.*[165]

Again, the words of the Imāms in the form of *duʿāʾ* are perceived as a means of heightened spirituality for the Shīʿah. While some incorrigibly perceive this as a means to glorify the Imāms to a status higher than the Prophet, this is incorrect. Recall the citation by Sobhani in which he discusses how the Imām condemned those who elevated his station to the point of exaggeration.

This plethora of *duʿāʾ* literature is simply not present in Sunnīsm. Furthermore, since the Imāms are viewed as the beloved by God, the Shīʿah strive to follow their example to reach this same level of worship. The way and the words that the Imāms used to worship God are used by the Shīʿah in the hope of obtaining this same closeness with the one and only Creator.[166] Therefore, the constant recitation of and emphasis on dua has become part of Shīʿah identity.

Many of these duas praise the Imāms' station and exalt their divine status. This is portrayed in one such supplication known as "Al-Zīyārah al-Jāmiʿa al-Kabīra," as

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[165] *Psalms of Islam (Sahifa Sajjadiyya)*. Trans. William C. Chittick. Ansariyan Publications: Qum. 17-18.
[166] Nasr, *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality,* 250.

narrated by the tenth Shīʿah Imām, al-Hādī, to one of his followers. The Imām dictated this supplication to his companion Mūsā ibn ʿAbd Allāh Nakhaʿī when he asked the Imām how he could pay his respect and salutations upon the visitations of each of the Imāms. This underlines that even during the Imāms' lifetimes, they taught their followers to send peace and blessings upon the Imāms as a means of obtaining spirituality. Thus, "Al-Zīyārah al-Jāmiʿa al-Kabīra" is often recited as a spiritual and physical visitation of the Imāms. This supplication is special because it is narrated from the first-person point of view, so every individual who recites the Zīyārah is speaking to God him or herself. These few lines in particular pinpoint the lofty station of the Imāms:

> *And I testify that you are the rightly-guided Imāms, guides to the right path, preserved from sin, honored by and near to God. God Fearing, truthful and chosen by God, obedient to him, upholders of His commandment acting in accordance with his will… He selected you with His knowledge, approved you for His knowledge of the Unseen. Preferred you to confide in you His secrets…*[167]

By reciting this supplication, the Shīʿah attempt to honor God by honoring the best of His servants. By doing so, the Imāms act as stepping stones for the Shīʿah to guide them closer to their ultimate destination, God. This is one example in which the Shīʿah take advantage of the unique station of the Imāms as a means to obtain closeness to God. If the Imāms are believed to be infallible beings, perfect in all regards, then the Shīʿah follow in their footsteps as closely as possible to perhaps reach a higher station in the next world. This ideology has become entrenched in Shīʿah communities. As seen in the 21st century, Shīʿah communities are Imām-centric. The birth and death anniversaries of each Imām are commemorated in traditional Shīʿah centers as a means of honoring their legacy and seeking to learn from their lifetimes.

[167] "Al-Zīyārah al-Jāmiʿa al-Kabīra." https://www.duas.org/mobile/ziyarat-jamia-kabira.html

The Shīʿah recite supplications that enable them to feel a connection with and deep love for the 12 Imāms. In turn, the recitation of the supplications of the Imāms are used to seek closeness to God. The Imāms take on the role of intercessors, and Shīʿah communities continue to ask God for guidance through the Imāms. Each supplication does not live in a vacuum, but these supplications play a role in molding Shīʿah theology and practice itself on a communal and individual level.

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter will highlight any remaining questions that this paper could not cover due to any limitations at hand. Given the current literature, future scholars in Islamic studies can shed more light on the issue of infallibility by providing detailed biographies of each of the lives of the 12 Imāms from an academic perspective. While there is a plethora of devotional literature on the lives, contributions, and tragic deaths of the Imāms, there remains a deep gap in hagiographical literature on the Imāms in the academic world. Thus, many theological aspects of the Imāms are taken for granted and not portrayed to a wider secular audience. As of now, many Islamic scholars that study in the West do not shed light on the divine nature of the Imāms because they believe certain aspects of the Imāms belong solely to worshipers and speakers in places of worship. However, this is not the case. Islamic studies should include the study of Imāmate and the lives of the Imāms to understand the position of the Imāms in the Islamic world, as well as the impact of Imāmate on contemporary communities.

One example of a well-done academic work on the life of the fifth Shīʿah Imām, Muḥammad al-Baqir, is Arzina Lalani's *Early Shīʿah Thought: The Contribution of the Imām Muḥammad al-Baqir.*[168] Lalani approaches the hagiography of Imām Baqir from a holistic perspective. She distances herself from the text and proclaims, "This study seeks to examine… al-Baqir's contribution not only from the Shīʿah angle but also from the general Islamic point of view."[169] She is not concerned if something is true or not or if events did or did not happen according to different narrations, but what does the narration

[168] Arzina Lalani. *Early Shīʿah Thought: The Contribution of the Imām Muhammad al-Baqir* (London: I.B Tauris and Co Ltd, 2004).
[169] Ibid., 28.

mean and who believes it and why. Lalani concerns herself with the effect a belief has on tradition or faith. Throughout each section of the text, it is difficult to determine that Lalani herself is a practicing Ismaili Shīʿah Muslim. Her contribution to the field of Islamic studies is essential, and the structure and content of her text lend themselves well to an academic audience.

Another example of an academic text highlighting the Imāms is *The Prophet's Heir* by Professor Hassan Abbas in which he presents a holistic biography on the life of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[170] The approachability of the text sets it apart from other non-academic biographies of ʿAlī. In the field of Islamic academia in which talking about the status of the Shīʿah Imāms is often labeled as polemical, Abbas takes a straightforward approach by focusing on the spiritual endeavors of ʿAlī and drawing upon a multiplicity of sources. For example, when analyzing the circumstances surrounding the death of ʿAlī's wife, Fāṭimah al-Zahrāʾ, Abbas discusses both perspectives; "The Shīʿah and Sunnī have very different accounts, and it is important to understand both - as the two sides largely stick to their facts."[171] Abbas acknowledges both versions of history and the fact that Shīʿah and Sunnīs will not agree with each other but must accept that the other branch holds a different view. Although a believing Shīʿah Muslim himself, Abbas presents the reality of early Islamic events with accuracy. This adds to the credibility of his narrative. Abbas is not speaking to a Shīʿah audience but asking for the ears of the entire Islamic and academic community. In short, there must be more publications on the lives and contributions that the Imāms made to Islam, and these texts will become vital resources for Islamic academia in English. The addition of more of these texts will

[170] Hassan Abbas. *The Prophet's Heir: The Life of ʿAlī Ibn Abi Talib. Yale University Press*. 2021.
[171] Ibid., 97.

ultimately contribute to the evaluation and appreciation of traditional Shīʿism within the larger framework of Islamic studies.

In summary, the infallibility of the 12 Shīʿah Imāms is founded in early Shīʿah literature, has shaped Shīʿah theology, and has become a significant part of Shīʿah identity today. According to Shīʿah beliefs, the Imāms were incapable of sinning because of their divine status. This belief stemmed from the early Shīʿah community and, amidst debates by leading Western scholars, continues today. The critical literature review section of this thesis showed the two main perspectives on infallibility and outlined each scholar's arguments for viewing the Imāms as pious scholars or as divinely blessed, infallible role models for eternity. The theological methodology implemented in this thesis showed how the status of the Imāms was embedded in the Qurʾān through *Āyāt Al-Taṭhīr*. In addition, the Prophet's level of infallibility was analyzed through the lens of the Qurʾān. The Prophet's infallibility was then connected to the infallibility of the Imāms.

This thesis highlighted the necessity of defining key terminology in *ḥadīth* studies as a means to add reliability and authority to Shīʿah *ḥadīth* literature as a whole. These factors of reliability were also used to interpret the authenticity of Shīʿah narratives surrounding the infallible nature of the Imāms. Ultimately, this critical and literary analysis performed on the Shīʿah *ḥadīth* reveals that the infallibility of the Imāms was deeply entrenched in early Shīʿah literature. The role of the Imāms has affected Shīʿah theology since its inception, and the Imāms occupy both a spiritual and political role in Shīʿah communities. The lives of the Imāms are commemorated and used as guides in the lives of the Shīʿah today.

Index of the 14 Shīʿah Infallible Figures

This index will provide brief excerpts of each of the 14 Shīʿah infallible figures according to Twelver Shīʿism.

1) Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh
    a) **Titles**: (*al-Mustafa),* The Prophet of God *(Rasul Allah)*
    b) **Birth**: 17th Rabi' al-Awwal, Year of the Elephant/570 CE in Mecca
    c) **Death**: 28th Safar, 11 AH/632 CE
2) Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad
    a) **Titles**: *(al-Zahrāʾ)*, The Pure One (*al-Batūl)*
    b) **Birth**: 20 Jumada al-Thani, 5BH or 8BH
    c) **Death**: 13 Jumada al-Awwal, 11AH or 3 Jumada al-Thani, 11AH/632 CE
3) Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib
    a) **Titles**: Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-Muʾminīn*)
    b) **Birth**: 13th Rajab, 23 BH/595 CE
    c) **Death**: 21st Ramadan, 40 AH/661 CE
4) Imām Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī
    a) **Titles**: The Chosen (*al-Mujtaba)*
    b) **Birth**: 15th Ramadan, 3 AH/624 CE
    c) **Death**: 7th Safar, 50 AH/670 CE
5) Imām Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī
    a) **Titles**: The Master of Martyrs (*Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ*)
    b) **Birth**: 3rd Shaban, 3 AH/626 CE
    c) **Death**: 10th Muharram, 61 AH/680 CE

6) Imām ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn

    a) **Titles**: Ornament of the Worshippers (*Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn*); Master of the Prostrators (*Sayyid al-Sājidīn*)

    b) **Birth**: 5th Shaban, 38 AH/659 CE

    c) **Death**: 25th Muharram, 95 AH/713 CE

7) Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir

    a) **Titles**: Splitter of Knowledge (*al-Bāqir*)

    b) **Birth**: 1st Rajab, 57 AH/676 CE

    c) **Death**: 7th Dhul-Hijjah, 114 AH/733 CE

8) Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq

    a) **Titles**: (*al-Ṣādiq*)

    b) **Birth**: 17th Rabi' al-Awwal, 83 AH/702 CE

    c) **Death**: 25th Shawwal, 148 AH/765 CE

9) Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim

    a) **Titles**: The Restrained (*al-Kāẓim*)

    b) **Birth**: 7th Safar, 128 AH/745 CE

    c) **Death**: 25th Rajab, 183 AH/7991 CE

10) Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā

    a) **Titles**: The Pleasing One (*al-Riḍā*)

    b) **Birth**: 11th Dhul-Qa'dah, 148 AH/765 CE

    c) **Death**: 17th Safar, 203 AH/818 CE

11) Imām Muḥammad al-Jawād

    a) **Titles**: The Generous (*al-Jawād*); The Pious (*al-Taqī*)

b) **Birth**: 10th Rajab, 195 AH/811 CE

c) **Death**: 29th Dhu al-Qidah, 220 AH/835 CE

12) Imām ʿAlī al-Hādī

a) **Titles**: The Guide (*al-Hādī*); The Pure (*al-Naqī*)

b) **Birth**: 15th Dhu al-Hijjah AH/827 CE

c) **Death**: 3rd Rajab, 254 AH/868 CE

13) Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī,

a) **Titles**: (*al-ʿAskarī*)

b) **Birth**: 8th Rabi' al-Thani, 232 AH/846 CE

c) **Death**: 8th, Rabi' al-Awwal, 260 AH/874 CE

14) Imām Muḥammad al-Mahdī

a) **Titles**: (*al-Mahdī*)

b) **Birth**: 15th Sha'ban, 255 AH/869 CE

c) **Death**: In Occultation since 329 AH

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Muḥammad ibn Jarir Ṭabarī. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī.*

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī. *Tafsīr al-Mizan*.

Tirmidhī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. *Al-ʾAmālī*

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. *Al-Istibṣār.*

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām.*

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