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Examining the Nature and Definition of Imamate in the Views of Khajeh Nasir and Ibn Arabi

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Abstract

A fundamental step in researching the intersection of Islamic mysticism (Irfan) and theology (Kalam), and in bridging these two disciplines regarding the concept of Imamate, is to ascertain if a shared understanding of Imamate's essence exists between them. Only if there's a common conceptualization of Imamate can we effectively explore its various aspects across both fields. The central question of this research is whether the core concept and characteristics of Shi'a Imamate are present within Ibn Arabi's mystical framework. It's important to clarify that this study does not aim to examine the specific linguistic term "Imamate" in mysticism; rather, it seeks to identify the meaning and reality of Imamate, even if it is not explicitly expressed through that particular word in mystical discourse. This article, using an analytical-comparative approach, examines how Khajeh Nasir considers a Perfect Definition (hadd tamm) that it includes the qualifier "by inherent right" (bi'l-aṣālah). He posits that a prerequisite for this definition is divine

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appointment. Therefore, this can be considered the core characteristic of the Shi'a definition of Imamate. While Ibn Arabi's terminology differs from that of Shi'a theology (kalam), the qualifier "by inherent right" (*bi'l-aṣālah)* can be found in his writings with the same Shi'a meaning. Furthermore, he acknowledges individuals "appointed by God" after the Prophet, which serves as another expression of this very qualifier "by inherent right"(*bi'l-aṣālah)*.

Keywords

Nature of Imamate, Khajeh Nasir, Ibn Arabi, By Inherent Right (*bi'l-aṣālah*), Divinely Appointed.

Introduction

The term Imamate (امامـت) holds both a literal and a technical meaning within Shi'a thought. The words "Imam" (امـام) and "Imamate" originate from the root " Ummam" (امـم). Its primary and initial meaning is " intention" or " purpose" (al-Azhari, n.d., Vol. 15, p. 455; Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH, Vol. 12, p. 22). Beyond mere intention, it also signifies "turning one's attention towards a specific goal" (Zabidi, n.d., Vol. 16, p. 26; Isfahani, 1416 AH, p. 87). Regarding the literal meaning of Imam, it has been defined as:« إنسانا كأن يقتدى بقوله أو فعله، أو كتابا، أو غير ذلك محقّا كـان أو مـبطلا» ("A person whose words or actions are followed, or a book, or anything else, whether they are in the right or in the wrong") (Isfahani, 1416 AH, p. 87). An Imam is defined as a human being whose words, actions, writings, or any other matter are followed, regardless of whether that individual is on the path of truth or falsehood. *Majma' al-Bahrain*, in its interpretation of the term "Imam" in verse 124 of verse Al-Baqarah, states: «يـأتم بـك النـاس فيتبعونـك و يأخـذون عنـك» (Turayhi, 1362, Vol. 6, p. 10). It states: " People follow you and take [teachings or information] from you".

The technical meaning of Imamate in theology, beyond its conceptual definition, encompasses specific characteristics. This differs significantly from how the concept of Imamate is understood by Sunni scholars compared to its technical meaning in Shi'a discourse. This divergence in understanding has a profound impact on their respective theological and jurisprudential discussions.

Ibn Arabi, a renowned mystic, significantly influenced later Sufi thinkers. His religious affiliation is not definitively clear; some consider him Ash'ari, while others believe he was Shi'a. However, it can be confidently stated that he was influential among subsequent Shi'a mystics. In mystical thought, terms such as Imam, Wali (guardian), caliph (Khalifa), Qutb, and Perfect Human (*Insan Kamil*)

are used. Ibn Arabi assigns various and technical meanings to each of these, which in some instances, only share a linguistic commonality with the Shi'a perspective. In other cases, however, they do align with the Shi'a concept of Imamate in certain respects. Therefore, an examination of the meaning and concept of these terms in Ibn Arabi's view, and articulating their points of convergence and divergence with the Shi'a perspective, will help lay a principled foundation for research into Imamate studies within mysticism.

Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi is another renowned theologian, not far removed in time from Ibn Arabi. Furthermore, Khajeh Nasir was an authority in various sciences, including theology (kalam), philosophy, and mysticism (irfan). He possessed a thorough understanding and mastery of Shi'a theology. Through his critiques of theological works from other sects, he aimed to refine beliefs, establish an unassailable rational theology, and respond to existing doubts and ambiguities. His familiarity with mysticism (Irfan) was also significant, to the extent that he authored the book *Awsaf al-Ashraf* (Descriptions of the Noble) on the subject. Therefore, it can be asserted that he was well-acquainted with mystical discussions and their terminology in his time.

Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi is a prominent scholarly authority in Shi'a thought regarding the issue of Imamate. His works are characterized by their precision and conciseness, making it easy to identify the key points and essential features of the Shi'a concept of Imamate. This allows his work to serve as a benchmark for critically assessing similar concepts. Furthermore, the concept of Imamate proposed by Khajeh Tusi differs from earlier interpretations, such as those from the Baghdad school during the Imams' presence, as well as later interpretations from the Isfahan school. While these differences aren't drastic, they are significant. Therefore, Ibn Arabi's mystical terminology will be evaluated against the views of Khajeh Nasir.

in the Shi'a view, Imamate is considered one of the Principles of Religion (Usul al-Din). Unlike other Islamic sects, Shi'ites have chosen five such principles for their religion, and Imamate is one of them. This principle causes the main distinction and difference between Shi'ism and all other Islamic sects. This is because other Islamic sects consider Imamate to be among the Branches of Religion (Furu' al-Din), relating to practical rulings and secondary matters. (Taftazani, 1409 AH, Vol. 5, p. 232).

By clarifying the indicators of Imamate in Khajeh Nasir's view and conducting a thorough case study and complete survey of related terms in mystical thought, we can readily determine the presence or absence of the Shi'a concept of Imamate within mysticism. This will also pave the way for comparative research in mysticism and theology concerning Imamate studies. This is crucial because, assuming a conceptual commonality in terminology, we can then proceed to discuss Imamate. If it's proven that Ibn Arabi accepts the characteristics of the Imam as defined in Shi'a terminology and employs them in his expressions and vocabulary, then a discussion about identifying the specific instance of the Imam and his attributes becomes possible.

Various works have been written in this field. Most research is one-dimensional, and mysticism (Irfan) has not been explored comparatively with theological (Kalam) perspectives. While some studies have focused on the concept of Wilayah (guardianship) in mysticism[1], However, it has not been compared with Shi'a Imamate. Among the comparative works written is the thesis, "A Comparison of Walayah (Guardianship) in Mysticism and Shi'a Theology (Kalam)

1 **Kamali Baniani, Mohammad Reza and others.** (2007). "An Examination of the Mystical Theory of Wilayah from the Perspective of Several Mystics." *Journal of Religions and Mysticism*.

(with an Emphasis on Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* and the Works of Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi)"This work discusses both theological [1]. and mystical *Guardianship*; however, it does not delve into the topic precisely, and Ibn Arabi's works are examined through the lens of Shi'a commentators, at times with justifications. Additionally, that discussion only covers *walayah* (guardianship), and other synonymous terms haven't been examined. In contrast, this article reviews all of Ibn Arabi's books without focusing on any specific term from his works. Furthermore, Ibn Arabi's own viewpoint is presented, not that of his commentators, who are often Shi'a and accept the theory of Imamate. Also, in a scientific-promotional article titled, "The Comparative Position of the Theory of Imamate in Theological Approaches and an Examination of Philosophical and Mystical Foundations," the mystical foundations of this issue have been explored.

In this article, to understand Ibn Arabi's views, we will refer to his original texts and not examine the perspectives of his commentators. This approach allows for a precise exploration of the concept of Imamate. Furthermore, we aim to identify the characteristics of the concept of Imamate from Khajeh's (Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's) viewpoint within Ibn Arabi's works, and we will not independently address Ibn Arabi's specific terms such as *wali* (guardian), caliph (*khalifa*), and others.

Imamate from Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's Perspective

After discussing Monotheism (Tawhid), Divine Justice (Adl), and Prophethood (Nubuwwah), Shi'a theologians address the issue of Imamate. Therefore, it can be said that Imamate is contingent upon these preceding principles (Tusi, 1405 AH, p. 425). However, Modarres

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Razavi, in his comprehensive research on the works of Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, attributes this treatise to him (Modarres Razavi, 1370, p. 545). *Mu'jam Tabaqat al-Mutakallimin* also considers it a work by Khajeh Nasir (The Scientific Committee at Imam Sadiq Institute, undated, Vol. 2, p. 414). Although the points Khajeh Nasir discusses in this treatise are scattered throughout his other works, its logical structure and use of logical terminology make it valuable for examining the definition, essence, characteristics, and requirements of Imamate.

Definitions are generally categorized into two main types: perfect definition (*hadd*) and descriptive definition (*rasm*) (Helli, 1371, p. 221). Consequently, various forms of definition are considered. Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, in addition to presenting different definitions, believes that one can also define Imamate by explaining its "why" (causation) and "how" (quality) (Tusi, 1405 AH, p. 426). While he doesn't define Imamate in some of his works, such as *Tajrid al-I'tiqad (The Purification of Theology)*, he defines it in three different ways in other works, which warrant examination.

The first definition of Imamate is as follows:« الإمامة رئاسة عامة دينية، مشتملة على ترغيب)عموم الناس في حفظ مصالحهم الدينية و الدنيوية، و زجرهم عمّا يضرهم بحسبها» "Imamate is a general religious leadership, encompassing the encouragement of all people to preserve their religious and worldly interests, and deterring them from what harms them accordingly.") (Tusi, 1413 AH, p. 83). In this definition, in addition to the general religious leadership that's stated in most books, the characteristic of encouraging people to preserve their religious and worldly interests is also articulated.

The second definition by Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi is:« «رئيس قاهر، آمر بالمعروف، ناه عن المنكر، مبيّن لما خفي على الأمّة من غوامض الشرع، منفّذ لأحكامه؛ ليكونوا إلى الصلاح أقرب و من الفساد أبعد، و يأمنوا من وقوع الفتن)» A conquering leader (or one who enforces his authority), who enjoins

what is good and forbids what is evil, clarifies what is obscure in the Sharia (Islamic law) for the community, and implements its rulings, so that they may be closer to righteousness and further from corruption, and be secure from the occurrence of discord.") (Fazel Meqdad, 1420 AH, p. 156). Fazel Meqdad considers "leader to be the proximate genus and the rest of the definition as the differentia, each part of which prevents other things from entering the definition (Fazel Meqdad, 1420 AH, p. 156). In these two definitions, in addition to the genus and differentia, there's a greater focus on the purpose (غاية) of Imamate.

The third definition that Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi provides, and which aligns more closely with the definitions from Sharif Morteza (Tusi, 1405 AH, Vol. 2, p. 264) and Himsi (1412 AH, Vol. 2, p. 235), is as follows:« هـو الانسـان الّـذي لـه الرئاسـة العامّـة فـي الـدين و الـدنيا بالأصـالة فـي دار التكليـف» ("He is the human being who possesses general leadership in religious and worldly affairs, by inherent right (or by divine appointment), in the abode of obligation" (Tusi, 1405 AH, p. 426). He considers this definition to be more comprehensive ("the most perfect") than the others. One of the reasons for its comprehensiveness is that more causes are mentioned within the definition. This is because a Perfect Definition (*hadd*) must include all causes (equal and distinct), and the four causes, either individually or collectively, can be expressed as the differentia (*fasl*) (Tusi, 1361, p. 434). Given this, it can be stated that general leadership (رئاسـه عامـه) is the genus. The phrases "in religious and worldly affairs" (فی الـدين و الـدنيا) act as the differentia based on the formal cause. "By inherent right" (bi al-asalah) serves as the differentia based on the efficient cause. And "in the abode of obligation" (فـی دار التكليـف) functions as the differentia based on the material cause. In this specific definition, the differentia based on the final cause (purpose) has not been explicitly stated. However, considering Khajeh Nasir's second definition, the differentia based on the final cause can also be derived.

In cases where an object shares some essential commonalities and essential distinctions, a Perfect Definition (hadd) is used. This is because a *Perfect Definition* expresses both the common essential attributes (the genus) and the distinguishing essential attributes (the differentia) (Helli, 1371, p. 221). However, it's important to note that definition by *Perfect Definition* applies to species, whether true or relative, because a differentia exists in these instances.

Based on these three points, we can conclude that Imamate is a relative species (*naw' izafi*), not a true species (*naw' haqīqī*). These three points are:

1. Imamate is agreed upon by all Islamic sects.
2. In logic, the four causes of an object can serve as the origin of its differentia (Tusi, 1361, p. 434).
3. From the perspective of theologians, the disagreements among Islamic sects stem from differing beliefs on whether God is obligated to appoint an Imam or if the responsibility lies with the people, and if it is obligatory for God, in what manner. (Tusi, 1413 AH, p. 83) In essence, it can be said that this disagreement lies in the efficient cause of Imamate.

Given that various sects differ on the agent or cause that brings the Imam into existence, it can be argued that this disagreement, in a way, extends to the very definition and true essence of Imamate. Consequently, we can conclude that Imamate is a relative species, not a true species. The consensus among all Muslims lies in its essential attributes (genus and differentia based on the formal, material, and final causes), while their disagreement is centered on a single aspect: the differentia based on the efficient cause. Due to the fact that many definitions only mention the genus and differentia based on the formal cause (Taftazani, 1409 AH, Vol. 5, p.

234; Iji, 1325 AH, Vol. 8, p. 345), we can say that the subject of discussion regarding Imamate is consistent. All theologians have been aware of these differing viewpoints concerning the efficient cause, but only some have incorporated this distinction into the definition, which is why they included the qualifier "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah). In fact, it is this very qualifier that changes the definition of Imam from that of a relative species (naw' izafi) to a true species (naw' haqīqī). All definitions share common ground in the differentia based on the formal, material, and final causes. The origin of the disagreement between the Shi'a and Sunni viewpoints lies in their acceptance or rejection of this qualifier. Therefore, this article will focus on it.

The Meaning of " by inherent right " in Theology (Kalam)

The term " by inherent right " (بالأصالة), as a theological concept, was perhaps first used by Sayyid Morteza in his definition of Imamate, where he contrasted it with " by deputyship " (Bi al-Niyabah) (Sharif Morteza, 1405 AH, Vol. 2, 264). Its primary meaning is that the individual is originally an Imam in their own right, not merely a successor or representative of another. Various viewpoints have offered different interpretations of its meaning, which we will now examine.

" by inherent right " (بالأصالة) is used to distinguish and exclude the leadership of deputies and governors appointed by the Imam (Bahrani, 1406 AH, p. 174; Fazel Meqdad, 1405 AH, p. 326). In this explanation, the qualifier " by inherent right " is contrasted with the Imam's deputies. In reality, this isn't a precise explanation of the qualifier itself; it merely states its opposition to " by deputyship " (Bi al-Niyabah).

This qualifier signifies general leadership and is synonymous with it, serving to distinguish the position of Imamate from other subordinate roles like judgeship and provincial governance (A Group of Writers, 1381, p. 51). Upon reviewing this perspective, it must be noted that Khajeh Nasir's definition includes both "general leadership" and "by inherent right" (بالأصالة). If these two phrases held the same meaning, one would be redundant and superfluous in the definition, which contradicts his logical principles. For this reason, this interpretation is not acceptable.

It's possible to omit this qualifier and substitute it with "by deputyship from the Prophet." (Helli, 1409 AH, Vol. 1, p. 45) Some even consider the Imam to be acting by deputyship from the Prophet, believing that only Prophets possess "by inherent right" (بالأصالة). (Majlisi, 1404 AH, Vol. 2, p. 290).

In evaluating this perspective, it should be noted that some early Shi'a scholars, despite acknowledging that the infallible Imams are the successors and deputies of the Prophet, still consider the Imam to possess authority "by inherent right" (بالأصالة). In response to this viewpoint, they state: «ذلك لانهم عليهم السلام و إن كانوا نوّابه، إلّا أنّه عليه الصلاة و السلام ليس في دار التكليف، فلا يبطل بذلك الحد» "That is because, even though they are his deputies, he is not in the abode of obligation (or accountability), so the definition is not invalidated by that.") ((Himsi, 1412 AH, Vol. 2, p. 236). Even though, in one sense, the Imam is a deputy, the definition of Imam remains correct because the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his family) is no longer alive in this world of obligation. He reconciles the qualifier "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah) in the definition with the Imam's deputyship from the Messenger, believing that this characteristic of the Imam doesn't necessitate considering him solely as acting "by deputyship" (Bi al-Niyabah).

In this definition, "by inherent right" (بالأصالة) means that God originally chose him. In contrast, when people choose a general leader for themselves, it's called "by deputyship" (Bi al-Niyabah). Consequently, one of the characteristics of an Imam is being divinely selected, and this qualifier has an entailment or conditional relationship with divine appointment. Several reasons can be presented in support of this view, including:

A: According to Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah) can be considered the differentia based on the efficient cause. The well-known differentia ("in religious and worldly affairs" - فی الدین و الدنیا), which is agreed upon by all, is based on the formal cause. Consequently, this qualifier refers to the agent who determines the Imam. Based on an exhaustive disjunction, the agent determining the Imam is either God, the individual themselves, or the people. The second possibility (the individual themselves) is false, because anyone, even without the necessary qualifications, could claim to be the Imam. The third condition (the people) is also invalid according to Sayyid Morteza's definition. Therefore, the desired conclusion (being divinely chosen) is established. With this analysis, it can be said that this qualifier indicates divine appointment.

B: The primary and original meaning of this is that the Imam is an Imam by virtue of himself, and not appointed by anyone else. Analyzing this point raises the question: Does the Imam possess the quality that makes him an Imam inherently as part of his human essence, or is it an accidental attribute? If it were inherent (essential), then the

Imam's essence would be the same as other humans; all are rational animals. Consequently, all humans would have to be Imams. Due to this problematic implication, the first possibility is false. If Imamate is due to an accidental attribute, it must have a cause, and someone must create this attribute in him, as every accidental attribute has a cause. This cause is either the essence of the thing itself, God, or something else. The possibility of the essence itself is false for two reasons: First, a thing cannot give what it lacks, and second, all humans would then have to be Imams. If the second possibility (God as the cause) is accepted, the desired conclusion (divine appointment) is established.

For the "something else" category in the third possibility, two scenarios are conceivable: either infallible Prophets or fallible, non-infallible individuals (the common people). If the fallible individuals were to be the cause of granting Imamate, they would lack the very thing (Imamate) they are supposedly bestowing, and thus, they cannot grant it. In the case of infallible Prophets, it must be said that their actions are not based on human desires but rather on divine revelation. «وَ ما يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوى. إِنْ هُوَ إِلاَّ وَحْيٌ يُوحى»[1] ("Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed.") (Najm, 3-4) In reality, even in this scenario, it is God who bestows Imamate upon an individual and appoints him. This appointment and the individual's inherent right (*bi al-asalah*) to Imamate are declared through the Prophet (Himsi, 1412 AH, Vol. 2, p. 296).

1 "Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed."

Consequently, with this analysis, the term *bi al-asalah* implicitly indicates divine appointment. Perhaps it is because of this analysis and implicit indication that Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi states after his definition: «إذ لا مانع للمصطلح أن يضع ألفاظا بإزاء ما يريد إلّا أنّه ينبغي أن يكون مطردا في المواضع المستعملة في المعنى المراد»("Indeed, there is nothing to prevent a scholar (or coiner of terms) from assigning terms to whatever they intend, except that it is incumbent upon them that these terms be consistently applied in the contexts where the intended meaning is used.") (Tusi, 1405 AH, p. 426).

C: Himsi, a Shi'a theologian who predates Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, explains "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah) and its difference from general leadership, stating: «بيانه أنّه لو نصّ الله تعالى على شخص بالقضاء مثلا او جباية الصدقات بالأصالة لا أن يجعله نائبا عن غيره في ذلك لما كان إماما»(" Its explanation is that if Allah Almighty had explicitly designated a person for, for example, **judiciary** or **collecting zakat (charity)** *originally* – not as a *deputy* for someone else in these matters – that person would **not** be considered an **Imam**.") (Himsi, 1412 AH, Vol. 2, p. 236). To support the idea that one could have a judge "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah), he uses the phrase "God's explicit appointment" (نص الله). It seems for him, the concepts of being original (أصل) and divinely appointed (منصوص) are intertwined and accepted as a fundamental premise.

D: After providing the aforementioned definition in his *Risalat al-Imamah* (Treatise on Imamate), Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi states: «الامام الّذي حدّدناه إذا كان منصوبا ممكّنا» ("The Imam whom we have defined, if he is divinely appointed (منصوبا) and empowered (ممكّنا)...") (Tusi, 1405 AH,

p. 426). Regarding the meaning of ممکّـن, it has been explained as being established (Tarihi, 1362, Vol. 6, p. 317) and gaining power and authority (Mostafavi, 1368, Vol. 11, p. 150). Given that if Imamate merely entailed the characteristic of general leadership, then a leader is only truly a leader when they possess power and dominance; someone without power is not addressed as a leader. In that case, either the condition "if he is divinely appointed (إذا کـان منصـوبا)" would be superfluous, or the meaning of "leader" would be different. Both scenarios—a meaningless condition or a change in meaning without supporting evidence—are unlikely for Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. Furthermore, Sunni Muslims accept the Imam as a general leader in both religious and worldly affairs, yet they do not accept this condition and consider it outside the definition. Therefore, it must be said that this condition pertains to the qualifier "by inherent right (bi al-asalah)." Perhaps this is why he uses the phrase "whom we have defined (حـددناه)." This condition belongs to *this* definition, and the difference between this definition and others lies in the phrase "by inherent right." Hence, divine appointment can be understood as "by inherent right."

E: Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi believes that the explicit designation (nass) and proclamation of an Imam don't mean God appoints someone as a leader; rather, they serve to make him known to the people (Tusi, 1363, p. 115). From another perspective, the "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah) aspect is unknown to people; it's a characteristic they can't normally discern. Therefore, God must announce it to them. In fact, explicit designation (*nass*) is the means by

which people become aware that an individual is an Imam by inherent right. Thus, there's an entailing relationship between being divinely appointed and this qualifier.

Considering the aforementioned reasons, it can be concluded that the qualifier "by inherent right (bi al-asalah)" in the definition implicitly or conditionally indicates divine appointment. Consequently, an individual who believes in an Imam "by inherent right" or in the existence of a divinely appointed individual aligns with the Shi'a definition of Imamate and can be considered Shi'a. In essence, including this qualifier in the definition implicitly highlights the point of divergence between Shi'a and Sunni interpretations, and this difference in a single defining element leads to disagreements in specific instances or manifestations of Imamate.

Characteristics of Imamate Being " By Inherent Right " (Bi al-Asalah)

Given Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's perspective and the nature of " By Inherent Right "(Bi al-Asalah) as a differentia, its distinguishing features from other viewpoints can be expressed as follows:

The selection of the Imam is not the responsibility of the common people (mukallafin).

The Imam possesses characteristics that only God is aware of, and for this reason, the selection of the Imam is God's responsibility.

The Shi'a theory of Imamate is distinguished from other sects that consider its selection the responsibility of the common people.

When the determination of the Imam is not the responsibility of the common people, it is not considered an act or deed of the common people. Hence, it will not be among jurisprudential matters or practical rulings.

Just as the appointment and selection of Prophets are God's responsibility and are discussed under the principles of religion (Usul al-Din), Imamate, being God's selection, is also addressed within the principles of religion. However, it should be noted that prophethood and Imamate differ in their logical genus, and general leadership is not discussed in the definition of prophethood. Therefore, they will be two distinct and different things.

It could perhaps be argued that, given this qualifier expressed by Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, the definition of Imamate is a true (perfect) definition. In this definition, the essential attributes of the Imam as they exist externally are articulated. This means that in proving the external existence of the Imam, the concepts of divine appointment (manṣūṣ) and obligatoriness upon God (wājib ʻalayhi Allāh) are introduced. Analyzing these two conditions leads us to the conclusion that the Imam must be infallible (ma'sum) (Tusi, 1405 AH, p. 427). Therefore, a characteristic is stated as a differentia in the definition that, in some way, refers to divine designation and the necessity of his selection by God.

Ibn Arabi's Perspective

Ibn Arabi lived slightly before Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, during the Abbasid rule. Numerous terms like wali (guardian), Imam (leader), caliph (khalifa), and qutb are found in Ibn Arabi's works, and in many instances, he assigns them specific characteristics. Therefore, to grasp the overall concept, we can't just pick one term and discuss it. Instead, we're looking for a concept in his writings that Shi'a scholars use in their definition of Imamate. If we can establish that a shared concept exists, then that can serve as the starting point for interdisciplinary discussion, allowing us to explore subsequent steps based on that commonality.

The most crucial point in describing Imamate from Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's perspective is the differentia "by inherent right (bi al-asalah)." This differentia is the hallmark of Shi'a Imamate's identity. This qualifier distinguishes the Shi'a definition and viewpoint from that of the Sunni Muslims, to the extent that none of the scholars from various Sunni sects accept it; only Shi'a scholars use it. As discussed, it implicitly refers to divine appointment. Therefore, we must examine instances where Ibn Arabi believes an individual is divinely appointed.

A: Use of the Term by inherent right "Bi al-Asalah"

Upon examining Ibn Arabi's works, we find that this qualifier, " by inherent right " (Bi al-Asalah), is indeed used in his expressions. When discussing the *Qutb*, he states: "Among them [may God be pleased with them] are the Poles, and they are those who encompass spiritual states (*ahwal*) and stations (*maqamat*) by inherent right or by deputyship" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 6). In this statement, he believes that some Poles, who combine spiritual states and stations, are sometimes chosen by God and sometimes by others. He uses the term by inherent right ("Bi al-Asalah") and also mentions " by deputyship " (Bi al-Niyabah) alongside it. The juxtaposition of these two terms echoes Sayyid Morteza's view, who considers Imamate to be "by inherent right, not by deputyship" (Sharif Morteza, 1405 AH, Vol. 2, p. 264). Notably, the term " by inherent right " holds no place in Sunni theological discourse regarding the Imam or ruler; it's exclusively used by the Shi'a.

Given that Ibn Arabi accepts the concept of a "Qutb by inherent right and believes that some Poles are divinely appointed, it can be argued that, based on this text, people and those bound by religious duties (mukallafin) have no role in appointing the Qutb, at

least in certain instances. These instances share common ground with the Shi'a understanding of Imamate. One might object that " by inherent right " in Ibn Arabi's expression is not the same as the theological term used by Shi'a scholars. To address this, one would need to examine the meanings of "originality" (asalah) and "deputyship" (niyabah) in his works and then make a judgment accordingly.

The Meaning of "Asalah" (Originality) and "Niyabah" (Deputyship) in Ibn Arabi's View

Ibn Arabi uses the term " by inherent right " (bi al-asalah) in another context. Regarding " the Remnant of God " (Baqiyat Allah), he states:

> إنما سماه بقية لأنه بالأصالة خلق لك ما في الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعاً فكنت مطلق التصريف في ذلك تأخذ ما تريد و تترك ما تريد ثم في ثاني حال حجر عليك بعض ما كان أطلق فيه تصرفك و أبقى لك من ذلك ما شاء أن يبقيه لك فذلك بقية الله و إنما جعلها خيرا لك لأنه علم من بعض عباده أن نفوسهم تعمي عن هذه البقية بما يعطيهم الأصل فيتصرفون بحكم الأصل فقال لهم البقية. (ابن عربی، بی‌تا، ج۴، ص.۱۱۴)

> "He (God) only named it (the remnant) as such because originally (bi al-asalah) He created for you all that is on Earth, so you had absolute disposal over it, taking what you wished and leaving what you wished. Then, in a second stage, He restricted some of what was permitted for your disposal and left for you what He willed to leave. That is Baqiyat Allah (the Remnant of God). He only made it good for you because He knew that some of His servants' souls would be blinded to this remnant by what the origin (the unrestricted initial state) gave them, causing them to act by the rule of the origin. So He said to them, 'The Remnant.'" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 114)

He considers the creation of the world for humankind to be "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah). Therefore, humans are free to act in the world as they wish. However, God established " the Remnant of God "

(Baqiyat Allah) for humankind because He knew that some servants, due to the "original" (unrestricted) state God granted them, would fail to perceive this " the Remnant of God." Thus, they must manage affairs according to the very principle that is " the Remnant of God." Ultimately, he places this "remnant" alongside the creation of the world for humans, considering both to be fundamental principles.

the Remnant of God (Baqiyat Allah) is by God's decree, and God has established him by inherent right (bi al-asalah).

For humans to manage affairs, they must act according to the decree of the Remnant of God, and he holds sovereignty over the people.

Some humans lack the ability to perceive this divine blessing and this fundamental principle, remaining blind to it.

The fact that the Remnant of God is chosen by God and that all people must obey him indicates that " by inherent right " in Ibn Arabi's discourse carries the same theological meaning as understood by the Shi'a.

Ibn Arabi also uses the qualifier " by deputyship " (Bi al-Niyabah) in two senses. Its general meaning is that sometimes God and humans can become deputies for each other. Humans become God's vicegerents on Earth, and God, in some instances, becomes the deputy for humans (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 671). The Perfect Human (Insan al-Kamil) becomes God's vicegerent on Earth and acts as the deputy of the Divine Truth in all actions. Their disposition over various matters is due to this deputyship, whereas other beings do not become God's deputies (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 3, pp. 280-286). This meaning, however, cannot be considered the same as the established theological meaning. The other meaning of " by deputyship " is precisely what Sayyid Morteza intended in his theological discourse, and we'll delve into that in detail.

Special Meaning of Deputyship (Niyabah)

Ibn Arabi explains the special meaning of "by deputyship" (Bi al-Niyabah) in one of his statements. He says: An Imam and Caliph is either manifest, meaning he takes control of affairs with the sword and overwhelming power, or he is hidden and, for some expediency, does not accept apparent power. In this case, he has a deputy who assumes power. This caliph can rule with justice or with tyranny and oppression (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 137). An Imam "by deputyship" (Bi al-Niyabah) is a caliph who rules on behalf of the Imam "by inherent right". He believes that the selection of the Imam is God's responsibility, and if an Imam does not assume governance, he himself chooses a caliph for the people. The caliph and Imam are not chosen by the people. However, he also states that the "Ahl al-Hall wa al-'Aqd" (people of loosening and binding, i.e., those who appoint and depose rulers) are among the factors that compel the Imam and Caliph to accept apparent rule (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 138). In reality, this council does not determine the Imam; rather, it compels him to accept apparent power and governance, having no true role in determining the Imam.

In summary, this perspective suggests that an Imam "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah) and divinely appointed sometimes accepts apparent rule and sometimes does not. In the latter case, the Imam remains inwardly (Bāṭinī) and selects a deputy for outward governance. In essence, whether the Imam governs or not doesn't contradict their "by inherent right" status; rather, it impacts whether their leadership is manifest (outward) or hidden (inward).

B: Successors Chosen by God

Given that Ibn Arabi's view on the Perfect Human, Caliph, Qutb, and Imam is not precisely identical to the Shi'a perspective—sharing

common applications in some instances and differing in others—the examples used should not be the terms themselves. Instead, it must be demonstrated that Ibn Arabi, like the Shi'a, believes in God's appointment after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family). In reality, unlike other Sunni theologians who believe that the selection of a successor after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) is the people's responsibility and that God has not appointed anyone on Earth after him, Ibn Arabi believes in divine selection and appointment. The Shi'a concept of Imamate can thus be found in his expressions.

Upon examining Ibn Arabi's statements, instances explicitly mentioning God's appointment after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) can be found. Among them is the following:

Ibn Arabi believes that God chooses and places other individuals on Earth besides prophets. He states, "The Pole appointed by the Divine Truth has precedence in ruling over those whose Imamate is known inwardly among people" (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 3, p. 138).

From this statement, two points can be inferred: First, there exists an individual who is appointed by God. The phrase "appointed by the Divine Truth" (المنصوب من جهه الحق) is essentially another expression for Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's term "by inherent right".

In Ibn Arabi's terminology, the Qutb (Pole) refers to the heirs of divine messengers and prophets (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 4, p. 760). Therefore, we can conclude that he believes in divine appointment after the Great Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), though he expresses it using a term other than "Imam."

Another point derived from his statement is the precedence in

ruling. In Ibn Arabi's view, the individual divinely appointed has superiority over others, and his decree is binding over all other judgments of his time. Given that Ibn Arabi previously divided the Qutb into those "by inherent right" and "by deputyship" (Bi al-Niyabah) (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 6), we can infer that the divinely appointed Qutb is another expression for the same concept of "by inherent right." This Qutb holds precedence over the Qutb "by deputyship" and any Qutb who is the inward Imam of the people; these individuals will be subordinate to him.

2-Ibn Arabi distinguishes between a "Caliph from God" (*Khalifah 'an Allah*) and a "Caliph from the Messenger" (*Khalifah 'an al-Rasul*). In his view, the Caliphate has different ranks. After the Prophet of God, some become his Caliphs, while others are Caliphs of God. Outwardly, both issue the same rulings; however, the Caliph of the Messenger rules based on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and traditions received from the Prophet, whereas the Caliph of God receives the same ruling directly from God (Ibn Arabi, 1370 AH, p. 163). Based on this, after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family), there are individuals who receive rulings directly from God, even if these rulings do not outwardly differ from the established Islamic legal rulings. He concludes by stating, "He (God) did not explicitly appoint anyone as His Caliph, nor did He designate anyone" (Ibn Arabi, 1370 AH, p. 163). It should be noted that Ibn Arabi's true intent here is that the Shi'a Imams and true Caliphs are not "Caliphs from the Messenger." If the Imams were appointed by the Prophet and were his Caliphs, then the qualifier "by inherent right" (*bi al-asalah*) would not be valid, and they would instead be "by deputyship from the Prophet" (*niyabah 'an al-Nabi*), thus falling outside the definition of an Imam who possesses inherent authority.

If there is an explicit designation (nass) for the Imam, it points

to divine appointment and being divinely chosen, not to the Prophet of Islam appointing a successor or caliph for himself. This is why Ibn Arabi explicitly states that the Prophet did not choose a caliph for himself, as he knew that God had already chosen a caliph after him, and that person would be a caliph "by inherent right" (bi al-asalah). In reality, the status of the Imams is that of God's vicegerents (Khalifatullah); they don't attain the position of caliphate through imitation or independent reasoning from the Prophet's texts. They are directly chosen by God and receive rulings from Him.

Addressing the Misconception of Wujudiyya's Influence on the Appointed Imam

A common misconception arises from Ibn Arabi's doctrine of Unity of Existence (vahdat al-vujud), where no reality exists apart from God, and all beings are merely manifestations and aspects of Him (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 183). Given this perspective, and interpretations that attribute Ash'ari determinism to him, it's sometimes concluded that his terms and phrases indicating the appointment and selection of an Imam are merely a consequence of this worldview. In essence, according to Ibn Arabi, nothing exists but God. Therefore, if he uses phrases like "He places them" (يجعلهم) or "the appointed one" (المنصوب), one should not infer that this aligns with the Shi'a viewpoint. Instead, it's argued that in Unity of Existence (Vahdat al-Vujud), only God performs any action, and the reason he doesn't grant people a role in choosing the caliph is due to the dominance of the Unity of Existence (Vahdat al-vujud) theory in his perspective.

In response to this misconception, it's important to note two things. First, Ibn Arabi does not accept determinism (jabr) in the sense of the Ash'aris (Ibn Arabi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 624); in some instances, he upholds free will. Second, while phrases like "He places them" (يجعلهم) might align

with the concept of *Unity of Existence (vahdat al-vujud)*, the term "the appointed one" (المنصـوب) explicitly states divine appointment and the exclusion of popular choice.

A third response to this misconception, based on Ibn Arabi's own statements, is that he believed that during his time, the caliphs were successors to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), not successors to God (Ibn Arabi, 1370 AH, p. 162). Furthermore, he believed that after the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), there was an individual who would accept the "Caliphate from God" (خلافـه عـن الله) directly from God (Ibn Arabi, 1370 AH, p. 163), and that Islamic governance was not *solely* administered by the people's choice. Based on this, it must be said that in Ibn Arabi's view, God did choose a Caliph after the Prophet. However, the question of "Who is this divinely chosen Caliph?" is a separate issue concerning the identification of the specific individual, which is beyond the scope of this article, as it focuses only on the concept of Imamate.

Given Ibn Arabi's classification, it's evident that while he sometimes acknowledges popular choice, he also firmly believes in divine selection. This suggests that the concept of unity of existence (Vahdat al-vujud) plays a very minor role, if any, in this theological view. Instead, Ibn Arabi's perspective seems rooted in the realities of society and the tangible world. Therefore, considering the distinction between a "Caliph from God" and a "Caliph from the Messenger," terms like "He places them" (يجعلهـم) can be interpreted as referring to the Caliph of God and His divine selection and appointment.

Conclusion

Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi offers various definitions of Imamate, some of which align with other existing definitions. However, there's a particular definition that primarily highlights the distinction of

Imamate in the Shi'a perspective compared to other Islamic sects. This definition includes three characteristics based on the four causes. Two of these characteristics are consistent with other definitions, and in some cases, with Sunni definitions. The third characteristic, however, is the qualifier " by inherent right " (bi al-asalah). As discussed with the provided reasons, this refers to the efficient cause, which Sunni Muslims do not accept or even use. The implication of this qualifier is that the Imam must be divinely appointed. Given that this definition is specific to the Shi'a and Sunni scholars have not articulated this qualifier, it serves as the criterion for defining Imamate in this article.

Ibn Arabi's terminology on this topic is varied, using different terms that sometimes align with Shi'a Imamate and at other times diverge. Given that the qualifier " by inherent right " (bi al-asalah) or divine appointment of the Imam is specific to the Shi'a perspective, we explored its usage in Ibn Arabi's works. By examining its meaning, we can see that in certain instances, he uses this qualifier with the same specific theological meaning as the Shi'a. He also adheres to its implication of divine appointment, believing that there is an individual "appointed by God by inherent right." Since this article doesn't delve into specific examples of the Imam but focuses solely on the concept of Imamate, we can conclude that Ibn Arabi accepts the core characteristic of the Shi'a concept of Imamate. In various contexts, he differentiates it from an Imam who acts "by deputyship." While he might not use the exact term "Imam" in the Shi'a-specific sense, he nonetheless believes in its conceptual characteristics and accepts that God continues to appoint individuals after the Prophet.

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