IMAMATE AND THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVING-KINDNESS

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INTRODUCTION

In the theology of *ʿAdliyyah*, the principle of loving-kindness (*luṭf*) is the most important maxim after the maxim of the intelligibility of good and evil (*ḥusn wa qubḥ ʿaqlī*). From their point of view, many doctrinal teachings such as the necessity of religious duties, the necessity of prophethood, the necessity of the infallibility of His messengers, promise (*waʿd*) and threat (*waʿīd*) are based on this maxim. Shiʿah theologians also prove the necessity of Imamate through 'this maxim'. Accordingly, it is incumbent on God to select some individuals as the Imams to reveal to humankind the way of goodness and felicity via them.

Scholars of the science of principles of jurisprudence (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*) also, in order to validate consensus (*ijmāʿ*), cling to this principle. Ayatollah al-Tustarī (d. 1822), one of the great scholars in *ilm al-uṣūl* argues that it "requires that the opinion of the Imam of the age can be discovered from the consensus of the scholars." He adds that according to the principle of *luṭf*, appointing an Imam who is characterized by knowledge and infallibility is incumbent upon God.[1] The jurists also refer to this principle in the discussions of 'promotion of good and prevention of evil' (*al-amr bi-ʾl-maʿrūf wa ʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar*).[2] The great jurists, like al-Ṭūsī, ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī, Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn, al-Shahīd al-Awwal, and al-Shahīd al-Thānī, believe that the principle of *luṭf* can prove the rational necessity of the promotion of good and prevention of evil.[3]

As a matter of fact, the principle of *luṭf* has been one of the most significant and influential principles in Islamic theology. The Muʿtazilites are also supporters of this principle whereby most of them consider the act of *luṭf* obligatory upon God. The Ashʿarites, on the other hand, deny it and basically do not consider any act as an obligation upon Him and, consequently, do not consider *luṭf* incumbent on God. Imāmī scholars generally accept the necessity of *luṭf* upon God and the necessity of the existence of an Infallible Imam in every age and time.

This principle appears to be one of the first theological issues to be considered by *ʿAdliyyah* theologians. Abdu al-Karim al-Shahrastānī (d. 1152), when expressing the general opinions of the Muʿtazilites, refers to the principle of *luṭf*. They believe that 'the religious practice' (*taklīf*) is a requirement of divine *luṭf*.[4] Moreover, al-Ṭūsī cites the book of *al-Alṭāf* as one of the works of Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 795), one of the great followers of the Sixth and Seventh Imams, in this field.[5] Al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān (d. 873) , one of the followers of the Tenth

Imam, also had a book on the subject.[6] Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā also recorded the arguments between Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 916) and his son, Abū Hāshim (d. 933), in his *al-Dhakhīrah*.[7]

This paper firstly aims to look at the general views of the two schools of Shiʿah and Ahl al-Sunnah on imamate. Secondly, it addresses the definition and the classification of *luṭf*. Thirdly, it will examine the views on *luṭf* and imamate. Lastly, it will discuss the Muʿtazilites' critiques of imamate being a *luṭf*.

THE GENERAL VIEW OF THE TWO SCHOOLS OF SHIʿAH AND AHL AL-SUNNAH ON IMAMATE

Prophet Muhammad passed away at the beginning of the eleventh year AH.[8] This was after 23 years of tremendous endeavors in propagating the religion of Islam and shaping a utopian society. All Muslims believe that with his departure, revelation and prophecy came to an end, and no prophet will come thereafter; nevertheless, the duties of the Prophet[9] (other than the responsibility of conveying the revelation) certainly did not end. Thus, after his demise, it was essential for a well-informed and pious person to perform these duties as a caliph, the successor of the Prophet, Imam, or leader of the Muslims. This belief is accepted by all Muslims, although there is disagreement between Shiʿahs and Sunnis about some of the attributes of the Prophet's successor, and the way to identify him. The next section touches upon the views of ahl al-Sunnah.

IN THE SCHOOL OF AHL AL-SUNNAH

Sunni scholars understand the caliphate to be a social position in which there are no specific requirements other than competence and expertise for specific purposes. However, they present different views regarding the characteristics that a caliph must possess, some of which are now briefly discussed.

Abu Bakr al-Baqillānī (d. 1013) maintains that the caliph should possess the following conditions: 1. He must be Qurashī; 2. He must be familiar with Islamic legislation on the level of a judge; 3. He must be capable of managing the affairs of Muslims and possess thorough knowledge of war tactics and border protection. He adds that the caliph cannot be removed from his position even if he usurps property of the people or fails to enforce God's limits. Moreover, the Ummah should advise him and refrain from following his unjust commands.[10]

Qāḍī ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1335), one of the great Ashʿarite scholars believes that the Imam, from the point of view of the majority of Ahl al-Sunnah, should have these characteristic: 1. He must be a *mujtahid* in religious beliefs and religious practices in order to be able to answer the religious questions of the people; 2. He must be a wise strategist to be able to lead the community; 3. He must be brave in order to maintain the unity of Islam and Muslims. Some theologians, he adds, do not consider these attributes necessary for the Imam. They argue that since all these qualities may not be found in one person, they cannot be considered as essential characteristics of the Imam. As a result, considering such features for the Imam is useless. In their opinion, the Imam should be just, wise, mature and free.[11]

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IN THE SCHOOL OF SHIʿAH

While the scholars of Ahl Sunnah consider the caliphate to be a social position, the Shiʿah theologians understands it as a divine position that is determined by God in which on many circumstances and matters the Imam has the same responsibilities as the Prophet.

Infallibility and superiority (*afḍaliyyah*) are among the most important qualities that Imami theologians have considered necessary for the Imam. Naturally, the requirement of these two features is that the Imam has attributes such as knowledge, courage, tactfulness and also other attributes that are necessary for leadership. On the other hand, since infallibility is an inner feature and a God-given talent, and no one other than God is aware of it, the Imam must be chosen by God. Abū ʿAbd Allah Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Nuʿmān, known as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) maintains that, in the eyes of Imamiyyah, the Prophets' successors are infallible like their predecessors. Nevertheless, he points out that the Muʿtazilites do not accept this doctrine and claim that it is acceptable for the Imam to commit major sins.[12]

Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā[13] (d. 1044), one of the greatest Shiaʾh scholars, holds that the Imam must possesses these qualities: 1. He must be free from committing reprehensible acts and sins; 2. He must be chosen by God or a miracle should confirm his Imamate; 3. He must be the bravest person in his time; 4. He must be the most knowledgeable individual on the rules of *sharīʿah*, politics and tact; 5. There should not be more than one Imam at any time.[14] *Tajrīd al-Iʿtiqād of* Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) provides only three characteristics of an Imam – infallibility, superiority, and selection by God.[15] Nevertheless, his *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* provides eight qualities for Imams – infallibility; full awareness of the requirements of the Imamate, such as knowledge of *sharīʿah* and politics; braveness; superiority over others in possessing perfect qualities (*sifāt al-kamāl*), such as courage and generosity. Regarding superiority he argues that it is not desirable to prioritize inferior personalities over superior ones; 6. Purity from any abhorrent defect, whether physical or psychological; 7. Being the closest one to God; 8. Being able to perform miracles; 8. Being unique in any age and time.[16]

To summarize, Muslim theologians are at one over the fact that after the demise of the Prophet, it was essential for a pious and well-informed individual to perform the duties of the Prophet as Caliph, Imam, or the successor. However, there is a disagreement in the school of Shiʿah and Sunnis about some of the qualities of the successor, and the way to determine him. In this regard, it appears that the question of the electiveness or selectiveness of the Imam is one of the most controversial issues between these two schools of thought. It seems that there were two views after the demise of the Prophet:

1. The Prophet, by the command of God, has chosen a distinguished person who is qualified to lead the Islamic Ummah and has introduced him to the people as his successor;
2. The Prophet did not declare anything about the issue of leadership after himself. It means that it is the responsibility of the people to choose the successor for themselves.[17]

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However, in order to evaluate these two views and arrive at a reasonable conclusion, we can view this matter from three perspectives:

1. What were the interests of the Muslim society at the end of the Prophet's life? Was it necessary for the successor of the Prophet to be chosen by God or elected by the Muslim community?
2. Are the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition consistent with selectiveness or electiveness?
3. Let us suppose we cannot find the answer to the first and second questions. What is the verdict of human intellect? Is it compatible with selectiveness or electiveness?

The first and second perspectives are beyond the scope of this article, so this paper confines itself to examine only the third perspective. The Shi'ah theologians maintain that one of the intellectual proofs for the necessity of appointing some individuals for the position of an Imam via God is the principle of *lutf*. According to them, it is incumbent upon God to appoint successors for the Prophet. Before discussing the Imami argument, it is worth noting to referring back to the definition of *lutf* and its classifications.

DEFINITION OF *LUTF*

According to distinguished philologists, the term *lutf* denotes compassion, closeness (*qurb*), smallness (*ṣighar*), and delicacy (*laṭāfah*).[18] Al-Raghib al-Iṣfahānī argues that performing deep-laid actions, or something that is incomprehensible to the senses is called *laṭīf*. If God is *laṭīf*, as the Qur'an says, "Would He who has created not know? And He is the All-Attentive (*laṭīf*), the All-Aware" (67:14), because He is aware of the details of things or He is kind to his servants. It means that He tries to guide them.[19]

Before examining principle of *lutf* from theologians' perspective, let us briefly summarize this principle. The purpose of human creation is to attain the desired perfection, which is achievable in light of worship and devotion to God. Whenever man's guidance depends on some arrangements, God will make those provisions; otherwise, human creation will have no purpose. Therefore, He sent the divine individuals for the guidance of mankind, and provided them with miracles. He has also made the promise (*wa'd*) and threat (*wa'īd*) to encourage men to obey and warn them of their sins.[20] These arrangements are *lutf* from God.

In order to determine whether the principle of *lutf* supports the necessity of Imamate, it is appropriate to review its definitions from the perspective of *'Adliyyah* theologians. *Lutf* in the eyes of Shi'ah theologians, is what motivates a person to move toward obedience and away from evil. For instance, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) holds that *lutf* is what can lead man to approach obedience and turn away from sin. Consequently, it cannot rob him of authority to the extent that it compels him to obey or to cease to commit sins.[21] Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā also refers to the same definition and holds that *lutf* leads us towards religious obligations.[22] The Mu'tazilite Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1024) holds that *lutf* is something by

which man adopts the obligatory act and avoids the evil act, or it brings him closer to performing the obligatory act or leaving the evil one.[23]

Having mentioned the definitions of *lutf* from the perspective of *'Adliyyah*, it is important to point out that this view has classified *lutf* into two categories that are discussed in the next section of this paper.

CLASSIFICATION OF *LUṬF*

Lutf, in terms of the impact and benefit of human beings, is of two types: *lutf al-muḥaṣṣil* (providing loving-kindness) and *lutf al-muqarrib* (approaching loving-kindness). God created man to guide and bring him to the ideal perfection. Obviously, man requires divine guidance in order to attain such a goal. In other words, he needs to rely on the prerequisites provided by God. These preliminary steps are of two kinds.

1. *Lutf al-muḥaṣṣil* constitutes the steps that, without taking them, human beings would not be able to attain the desired perfection. To put it differently, without these essential elements, he cannot achieve his final destination through reason and contemplation. Man, for example, knows that God created him and entrusted him with specific religious duties, leading him towards perfection. Despite his intellect and reflection, he never grasps these religious tasks. In this regard, God has the responsibility of revealing the religious duties to the people. Explaining religious duties to man is therefore *lutf al-muhaṣṣil* (providing loving-kindness).[24]

2. *Lutf al-muqarrib* are those preliminary steps that God takes to encourage man to achieve perfection in human beings in a way that, without these steps, most people would not be interested in reaching perfection. For example, man knows that performing religious practices and abandoning His prohibitions will lead him towards perfection. On the other hand, God knows that many people are keen to worship Him provided that He would grant them Paradise. Likewise, most people will refrain from sin if they know that the sinner will be punished in Hell. Therefore, the creation of heaven and Hell is *lutf*, because many people perform their religious practices and abstain from sin in the shadow of the existence of Heaven and fear of Hell. So, promise (*wa'd*) and threat (*wa'īd*) are *lutf* as they can lead the majority towards obedience and this is named *lutf al-muqarrib*.[25]

As you can see, there are two similarities between *lutf al-muhassil* and *lutf al-muqarrib*: 1. Both invite man towards His obedience;[26] 2. Both are not in conflict with the free will of man, and in other words, cannot compel him to obey God and refrain from sin.[27]

IMAMATE AND *LUṬF*

After being acquainted with the definition and classification of the principle of *lutf*, it is appropriate to address the arguments of those who believe it is incumbent on God to select a successor for the Prophet. From the past, Imami scholars have argued for the necessity of selecting the Imam based on the principle of *lutf*. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī claims that Imamate is *lutf* and *lutf* is incumbent on Him.[28] Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī presents the same argument and states

that the existence of Imam is *luṭf*. Therefore, God in order to fulfil His aim, should appoint the Imam.[29] The argument of these two scholars reveals that Imamate is one of the instances of God's *luṭf*, and since *luṭf* is an obligation on God, Imamate is also obligatory.

To further clarify this perspective, we portray their claim in the form of a categorical syllogism (*qiyās al-iqtirānī*). Each categorical syllogism comprises a minor (*sughrā*) and a major (*kubrā*) premise. The categorical syllogism will be as follows:

> Minor premise: Appointment of the Imam by Allah is a *luṭf*.
> Major premise: Intellect dictates the necessity of the act of *luṭf* upon God.
> Conclusion: The intellect dictates that the selection of the Imam is incumbent upon God.

Let's ponder more over the first premise, i.e., the selection of Imam by Allah is a *luṭf*. In this regard, Sayyid al-Murtaḍā asks us to consider two societies, one of which has a capable leader. The leader prevents oppression and destruction and promotes justice and virtues. In contrast, the other society is deprived of such leader. He concludes that the first society will certainly be in a more privileged position than the second one, in terms of developing virtues and values. Al-Murtaḍā maintains that the existence of such a leader in the first society is nothing but *luṭf*.

He adds that *luṭf* is a blessing from Allah that paves the way for obedience to the religious laws and avoiding disobedience and committing sins. Undoubtedly, the appointment of the Imam by God, who introduces the religious laws and seeks the establishment of justice and guidance of society through encouragement (*wa'dah*) or punishment (*wa'īd*), is considered a clear instance of *luṭf*.

Therefore, the existence of the Imam is a *luṭf* bestowed upon the people, since it motivates them to perform their rational duties and avoid evil. The requirement of divine wisdom is not to deprive the society of an Imam. Al-Murtaḍā adds that this is a matter of which is rational and self-evident, and if someone denies it, one cannot have a scientific discussion with such a person.[30]

Let's reflect on the major premise, i.e., *luṭf* is incumbent upon Allah. It depends on a few points: 1. God did not create man and the world in vain, but rather His act was purposeful; 2. His goal is to guide man and bring him towards perfection; 3. Man can reach perfection only through worship and avoiding sin; 4. Without divine guidance, man cannot find the path to perfection but needs a divine teacher.

In light of these four points, it can be concluded that if God deprives the society of His divine teachers, man will not be able to find the path to perfection which he was supposed to achieve; as a result, His creation would be in vain. It is evident that God does not do things in vain. Therefore, reflecting upon these two premises implies the necessity of selection of the Imam by God; otherwise, the creation of man without the existence of Imam is in vain.

In summary, Imami scholars are at one over the necessity of choosing the Imam by God in light of the principle of *luṭf*, however, the Mu'tazilites have criticized this argument. Although, they, as we said earlier, acknowledge the argument of *luṭf*, they do not regard the necessity of the selection of the Imam by God as an instance of *luṭf*. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1024), one of the great scholars of Mu'tazilites had presented many challenges in detail in his *al-Mughnī*. Nevertheless, Sayyid al-Murtaḍā in *al-Shāfī fī 'l-Imāmiyyah* made an effort

to examine them. Other Imami theologians have also endeavored to assess the critiques of the Mu'tazilites. This article, in its scope, reviews and outlines some of these drawbacks.[31]

MU'TAZILITES' CRITIQUES OF IMAMATE BEING A *LUṬF*

1. If Imamate is considered a *luṭf*, it must be universal, and this *luṭf* must encompass all the people, including the Imam himself. In other words, all human beings, including the Imam himself, should benefit from such a blessing. This statement implies that every Imam should also benefit from the *luṭf* of another Imam, which will lead to an endless regression (*tasalsul*).[32]

In reply, it can be said that the subject of *luṭf* is not all the individuals (*mukallafūn*), but individuals in whom there is a ground for corruption and deviation. Putting differently, the people prone to sin or injustice need divine teachers, as a *luṭf* from Allah for guidance. We know that such a ground does not exist in the Imam due to his infallibility. Therefore, the Imam is out of the rule of *luṭf*, and consequently, the imam does not need the *luṭf* of another Imam.[33]

Moreover, as we said earlier *luṭf al-muḥaṣṣil* involves taking the steps that, without them, man cannot achieve his final destination through reason. Man, for example, knows he has some religious duties which leads him towards perfection. Despite his intellect, he never grasps these religious tasks. In this regard, God has the responsibility of revealing the religious duties to the people. Explaining religious duties to man is therefore *luṭf al-muḥaṣṣil*. Since Imam himself, through the unseen world, is aware of religious duties, he does not need the *luṭf* of another Imam to acquaint him with his duties. Therefore, the Imam is out of the rule of *luṭf al-muḥaṣṣil*, and consequently, the Imam does not need the *luṭf* of another Imam.

2. The Mu'tazilites present another argument. They state that if we accept the assumption that Imamate is *luṭf*, this argument does not imply that it is incumbent on God to select some individuals as the Imams. That is, suppose we accept that the existence of the Imam is *luṭf*, how do we know that this selection is the duty of God? Perhaps it can be said that if the people also elect the Imam, divine *luṭf* will be achieved.[34]

In response, if we agree that Imamate is a requirement of God's wisdom and *luṭf*, the Shi'ah scholars prove that it is incumbent upon God. From the Imami point of view, the selection of the Imam is a direct act of God, and He must appoint the Imam. The reason is that one of the most important qualities of the Imam is infallibility, and infallibility is the power that God grants to specific individuals. To put it another way, God chooses the person who has already been gifted this infallibility from Himself. Therefore, since the people are not aware of the existence of this power among individuals, they cannot play a role in electing the Imam.

3. Mu'tazilite scholars present another argument that the selection of the Imam by God is not an instance of *luṭf*. They claim that, suppose the presence of the Imam, in the society, is *luṭf*, due to the fact that he has an enormous influence on the tendency of people towards obedience and away from sin. In that case, it is necessary that God appoints an Imam in every city. Taking this stance implies the plurality of the existence of Imams in one era and

time. However, the consensus of Muslims indicates that the Imam, at any time and era, is not more than one.[35]

In reply, the existence of infallible Imams in every city is not denied by *‘aql*, and God, from the rational point of view, can select an Imam for each region. Nevertheless, the narration and consensus indicate the unity of the Imam in each era and time. Yet, we can resolve the Mu‘tazilte argument from another angle. It means that the Imam can appoint qualified individuals as governors and leaders of different regions. The Imam, as a result, can lead the Islamic Ummah in two ways, one directly (by himself) and the other through his selected people. This is the method that has been used in the time of the divine prophets and wise people. This solution responds to the Mu‘tazili critique.[36]

4. Mu‘tazili scholars present another objection to the Imam being a *lutf*. They say, if we accept that the existence of Imam is *lutf*, such a blessing is evident when the Imam is present in the political arena. With the help of his companions, he can fulfil the duties that God has placed on him. By forming a government, he will be able to spread justice and eliminate the grounds for oppression in society. The present Imam can send his companions and representatives to different cities to encourage people to obey God and avoid sin. Nevertheless, as history testifies, many Shi‘ah Imams did not enjoy the freedom of action due to the power of the rulers of the time. Some of them have been imprisoned for a long time due to the oppression of the rulers, and consequently have not been able to participate in society. Mu‘tazilites conclude that the existence of the incapable or imprisoned Imam cannot be considered as an instance of *lutf*.

In answer to this question, it must be said that the realization of *lutf* depends on three stages.

I. *Lutf* which is the act of God. God chooses a person among the people and appoints him as the Imam.
II. *Lutf* which is the act of the Imam. The Imam accepts the position of Imamate and is ready to fulfil it.
III. *Lutf* which is the act of the people. The people follow their Imam. They are obedient to and supportive of their Imam in the commands and prohibitions.

There is no doubt that the first and second stages have been completed. That is, God has chosen a person as the Imam, and he is also fully prepared to guide and lead the people. If the Imam has not been able to perform divinely specified obligations, it is because the third stage has not been fulfilled. That is, if the people helped him, he could have fulfilled the duties that God has placed on him. By forming a government, he could spread justice and eliminate the grounds for oppression in the society. Therefore, the lack of *lutf* is due to the shortcomings of the people.[37]

Moreover, Imam's duty is man's guidance, and it can occur (at least) in two ways: 1. Formation of a government; 2. Educating and training individuals. If the first way was not possible for the Imams, they used the second method to lead the community. For example, the Fifth and Sixth Imams trained many students by forming classes. The compilations of narrations transmitted on the authority of the Imams are a clear example of guiding people. So, if the Imams could not lead people by forming a government, they would lead them

via the second way, and even the Imams who were in prison would guide the people by appointing representatives (*wukalāʾ*).

To summarize, the task of guiding mankind is not limited to the establishment of a government, for the Prophet guided Meccans for thirteen years without forming a government.

5. This reply raises a further question: God knew that people would not be loyal to the Imam, so what was the benefit of selecting such an Imam? How can an Imam who is incapable of performing his duties be a manifestation of God's *luṭf*? In other words, it is true that the reason for the futility of the existence of Imam, in this case, is the lack of people's loyalty, but God foreknew that they would be disloyal. As a result, selection of the Imam by Him is pointless. It is obvious that the All-Wise God is free from any vain act. Therefore, the existence of the Imam is not an instance of *luṭf*, let alone, the need to select an Imam by God. Thus, the Imam's existence is not *luṭf*. Therefore, it is not incumbent upon God to select him. However, this is contrary to believing in Imamate according to which the Imam's existence is necessary at all times.[38]

In reply, basically, one of the wise effects of the existence of divine leaders, including the Prophet and the Imams, is to put an end to arguments against God by His servants on the Day of Judgement. It means that not all people may be faithful to the divine leaders and they disobey them, however, this does not imply that their election is useless and nullified, since if God did not send the divine teachers, some people might have thus asked, "Our Lord! Why did You not send us an apostle so that we might have followed Your signs."[39]

Therefore, God had a purpose in selecting the Imams, and that is the guidance of man. If the people followed them, they would have been guided, and there would be no further possibility of arguing in the Hereafter, or proffering excuses by saying, for example, 'Since you did not send the Imams, I did not know the right way adopt in my life. Accordingly, the existence of the Imam, whether the people are loyal to him or not, is an instance of *luṭf*.

6. The fourth critique, i.e., the incapable Imam cannot be regarded as an instance for *luṭf*, concerning the Twelfth Imam, is raised more seriously by Muʿtazilites. They claim that the Imamiyyah believe in the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Furthermore, the reason for the occultation is the lack of loyalty of the people to him. The people not only did not help him but also tried to kill him. On the other hand, Muʿtazilites add that the Imam's existence as being *luṭf* is subject to his presence and accessibility. How can the people have access to the absent Imam? How does the Imam in the veil of occultation fulfil the duties divinely entrusted to him. How can an inaccessible Imam spread justice and stand against oppression?

Moreover, it is true that the reason for the occultation of the Imam is the lack of the people's loyalty, however, God foreknows that they will be disloyal, and as a result, the selection of the Imam by Him is pointless. It is obvious that the All-Wise God is free from any vain act. Therefore, the existence of the unknown Imam is not an instance of *luṭf*, let alone its being incumbent upon God to select the Imam. Therefore, believing in the Imam's occultation is incompatible with the Imamate's *luṭf*; it requires that God's selection of an inaccessible Imam is not obligatory. This is contrary to the Imamate belief that the existence of the Imam is obligatory at all times.[40]

Therefore, in the age of occultation, the existence of Imam cannot be considered as an instance of *luṭf.*

In reply, it is worth noting that this criticism is one of the most famous doubts about the Shiʿah view on Imamate. According to the Shiʿah perspective, there is no contradiction between believing in the necessity of Imamate at any time and the permissibility of his occultation. Early Shiʿah theologians attempted to address this concern, which will be touched upon below.

The Quran mentions two types of saints – The outwardly manifest saint, who is known by people; and the saint who is hidden from view, unknown to people, even though he lives among them and is aware of their daily lives. Chapter 18 mentions both types of holy men: one was Moses, the son of ʿImrān, and the other was his travelling companion, al-Khiḍr. Moses did not know who this saint of God was, and it was only through God's revelation that he gained knowledge of his companion's true identity and came to benefit from his actions, as it is said, "[There] they found one of Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Ourselves, and taught him a knowledge from Our own. Moses said to him, 'May I follow you for the purpose that you teach me some of the probity you have been taught?'[41]

The Qur'an then describes the helpful and beneficial acts of this saint, making it clear that although the people were unaware of his identity, they nevertheless benefited from his holiness and influence. The Twelfth Imam resembles Moses' companion, unknown, and yet a source of benefit to society. Thus, the Imam's occultation does not entail any separation from the community; rather, he is explained in a hadith related from an infallible as being "... like the sun hidden behind a cloud, unseen by the eyes, but nonetheless bestowing light and heat upon the earth. Furthermore, throughout history, a large group of pious and pure-hearted people have come to the Imam and benefited from him. In this way, others also benefit from the blessings of the existence of the Twelfth Imam."[42]

Furthermore, the conventional method among human beings has been (and currently is) that the leader entrusts part of the work to his representatives. It is true that various reasons have caused the occultation of the Imam of our time, and human beings are deprived of direct access to him due to occultation, but fortunately, the way to benefit from the representatives of that Imam, who are just and pious jurists, is not closed to the followers of that Imam. The great jurists and high-ranking mujtahids have been the representatives of that Imam in religious and governmental affairs, and the administration of the Islamic society has been entrusted to them in the time of occultation.[43]

In light of what has been said it can be concluded that the existence of an Imam, as al-Ḥillī states,[44] even under the veil of occultation, is *luṭf.*

CONCLUSION

Principle of *luṭf,* in the eyes of the *ʿAdliyyah,* is the most important maxim after the maxim of the intelligibility of good and evil. In their view, many religious teachings such as the necessity of religious practices, the necessity of prophecy, the necessity of the infallibility of His messengers, promise (*waʿd*) and threat (*waʿīd*) are based on this maxim.

Muʿtazilites are supporters of this principle, whereby most of them consider the act of *luṭf* obligatory upon God. Ashʿarites, on the other hand, deny it and basically do not consider any act as an obligation upon Him and, consequently, do not consider *luṭf* incumbent on God. Imami scholars generally accept the necessity of the act of *luṭf* upon God and prove the necessity of Imamate in every age and time through 'this principle'.

In the definition of *luṭf*, it can be said that it is what may lead an individual toward obedience and away from evil. Shiʿah theologians demonstrate the necessity of the existence of an Infallible Imam through the principle of *luṭf*. They portray their claim in the form of a categorical syllogism. They state, 1. appointment of the Imam by Allah is a *luṭf*; 2. The intellect reveals that the act of *luṭf* is incumbent upon God. They conclude that the selection of the Imam is incumbent upon God in the eyes of *ʿaql*.

Although the Imami scholars are at one over the necessity of choosing the Imam by God in light of the principle of *luṭf*, Muʿtazilites have criticized this argument. They concede the principle of *luṭf*; nevertheless, do not regard the necessity of the selection of the Imam by God as an instance of *luṭf*.

Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, one of the great Muʿtazilite scholars, had presented many challenges in detail in his *al-Mughnī*. The most critical one is that if we accept that the existence of the Imam is *luṭf*, such a blessing is apparent when the Imam is active in public life. Nevertheless, many Shiʿah Imams did not enjoy the freedom of action due to restrictions imposed in them by the rulers. Some of them have been jailed and consequently have not been able to engage in political life. Muʿtazilites conclude that the existence of an incapable or an imprisoned Imam cannot be regarded as an instance of *luṭf*.

In reply, it has been mentioned that *luṭf* can be realized in three stages: 1. The act of God, i.e., He selects a person; 2. The act of Imam, i.e., he embraces the position of Imamate; 3. The act of the people, i.e., the people who follow their Imam.

The first and second stages have been accomplished. If the Imam has not been able to perform the duties that God has placed on him, it is because the third stage has not been fulfilled. Thus, if people supported him, he would be able to fulfil the duties that God had entrusted to him.

Moreover, the Imam's duty is man's guidance, and it can occur (at least) in two ways: 1. Establishment of a government; 2. Training individuals. If the first way was not possible for the Imams, they used the second method to lead the community. For example, the Fifth and Sixth Imams trained many students by forming classes.

To summarize, the task of guiding mankind does not depend on the establishment of a government, as the Prophet guided Meccans for thirteen years without establishing a government. Therefore, from the Imami perspective, the existence of the Imam is *luṭf*.

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NOTES

1. al-Tustarī (n.d.), p. 114; for further details, see al-Narāqī (1996), pp. 683-5.

2. al-Miqdād (2001), p. 229; al-Shahīd al-Thānī (n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 409-410.

3. Kharrāzī, (1995), pp. 32- 40.

4. al-Shahrastānī (1991), vol. 1, p. 57.

5. al-Ṭūsī, M. (2000), p. 494.

6. al-Najāshī (1986), p. 308.

7. al-Murtaḍā (1991), pp. 187-9.

8. 11/632.

9. Such as explaining the meaning of the Quran and resolving its complexities, explaining the religious practices, the avoidance of divisiveness, responding the religious and theological questions, training capable individuals, establishing justice, equality and security, protection of frontiers and Islamic lands; Sobhani (2001), pp. 109-110.

10. al-Baqillānī (1994), pp. 471-3.

11. al-Ījī (n. d.), vol. 8, pp. 350-351. For further details, see al-Ghazālī (1989), p. 149; al-Shahrastānī (2004), p. 276; al-Āmidī (1993), p. 324; al-Taftāzānī (1989), vol. 5, p. 244; idem (1987), p. 100; Subḥānī (1990), vol. 2, pp. 518-521.

12. al-Mufīd (1993), p. 65.

13. He is known as ʿAlam al Hudā and al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā. He was also one of the students of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd.

14. al-Murtaḍā (1991), pp. 429-30.

15. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1996), pp. 184-8.

16. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1985), 429-31. For further details, see al-Ḥalabī (1984), pp. 170-2; al-Ḥimṣī al-Rāzī (1992), vol. 2, pp. 278-9; al-Baḥrānī (1986), pp. 177-82; Miqdād, Jamāl al-Dīn (1985), pp. 332-37; al-Ḥillī (1982), pp. 164-8.

17. Subḥānī (1990), vol. 2, p. 548.

18. al-Fayyūmī (1993), vol. 2, p. 553; al-Ṣāḥib (1994), vol. 9, p. 177; Ibn Fāris (1983), vol. 5, p. 250.

19. al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (1992), p. 740.

20. Subḥānī (1990), vol. 2, p. 53.

21. al-Mufid (1993), p. 35.

22. al-Murtaḍā (1991), p. 186.

23. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (2002), p. 351.

24. Subḥānī (1990), vol. 2, pp. 47-8; Ibrāhīm ibn Nawbakht (1993), p. 55. For other definitions, see Rabbānī (2019), p. 97.

25. al-Murtaḍā (1991), p. 185.

26. Loc. cit.

27. al-Baḥrānī (1986), p. 118; al-Mufīd (1993), p. 35.

28. al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad (1994), p. 98.

29. al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn (1996), p. 181.

30. al-Murtaḍā (1991), pp. 409-410. See also, al-Baḥrānī (1986), p. 175; al-Ḥimṣī al-Rāzī (1992), vol. 2, p. 240; al-Miqdād (1985), p. 328.

31. This paper does not discuss the critiques of the Ashʿarites who do not believe in the principle of *luṭf*. For their objections, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1991), pp. 481-482; al-Ṭūsī (1985), p. 342; Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1962), p. 354; al-Ṭūsī (1996), p. 111.

32. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1962), vol. 1, p. 25.

33. al-Murtaḍā (1991), p. 414; al-Ḥimṣī al-Rāzī (1992), vol. 2, p. 245; al-Murtaḍā (1990), vol. 1, p. 53.

34. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1962), vol. 1, p. 26.

35. Ibid, 25.

36. al-Murtaḍā (1991), pp. 412-3; al-Ḥimṣī al-Rāzī, (1992), vol. 2, pp. 250-251.

37. al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn (1996), p. 183.

38. al-Ḥimṣī al-Rāzī (1992), vol. 2, p. 252.

39. The Qurʾan 20:134.

40. al-Ḥimṣī al-Rāzī (1992), vol. 2, p. 252.

41. *The Qurʾan.* 18:65-66.

42. Ṣubḥānī (1990), pp. 116-117.

43. Ibid., p. 117.

44. al-Tusi, Naṣīr al-Dīn (1996), p. 182. For further details on the benefits of the *luṭf* of the Imam, see ibid., p. 183.