

# Dialogue on Politics and the Concept of Imamat in Islam – Segment-by-Segment Summary

## Segment 1 (0:00–7:00) – Introduction and Framing the Topic

**Moderator Rehan Ahmed Yusufi** opens the program by introducing the topic: “Politics and the Concept of Imamat in Islam,” and the two distinguished guests <sup>1</sup>. He welcomes **Javed Ahmad Ghamidi** (a Sunni Islamic scholar) and **Allama Syed Qamar Abbas Naqvi** (a Shia Islamic scholar), setting the stage for a respectful dialogue. To spark discussion, the moderator poses a provocative question: “*Some say politics is just another name for hypocrisy – is politics inherently hypocritical, especially in an Islamic context?*” Both scholars acknowledge the public cynicism behind the question.

**Javed Ahmad Ghamidi** responds first, clarifying that politics itself is not synonymous with hypocrisy. He argues that governance and politics are necessary for organizing society and can be virtuous if conducted on moral principles. Ghamidi notes that Prophet Muhammad and his immediate successors engaged in politics righteously, demonstrating that political leadership can be honorable. Any hypocrisy in politics, he suggests, arises from immoral leaders rather than from politics as a discipline. **Allama Qamar Naqvi** agrees that the *quality of leadership* is key. He remarks that when unprincipled individuals seek power, politics devolves into deception, but when guided by true Islamic values and *pious leadership*, politics can serve justice. Naqvi hints that in Shia thought, the ideal leaders (the Imams) would exemplify such integrity in politics. Both speakers seem to find common ground that ethical leadership is crucial, rejecting the notion that *all* politics must be hypocritical. The moderator notes this agreement and transitions to the core subject of *Imamat* (leadership) in Islam.

## Segment 2 (7:00–14:00) – Defining Imamat: Shia vs. Sunni Perspectives

The moderator asks Allama Naqvi to explain the Shia concept of **Imamat** and why it is central to Shia belief. **Allama Qamar Naqvi** outlines that in Shia Islam, *Imamat* refers to a divinely ordained leadership of the Muslim community after the Prophet. He states that Shias consider Imamat a fundamental tenet of faith – a continuation of guidance through specific individuals from the Prophet’s family. According to Naqvi, God appointed a line of **twelve Imams** (beginning with Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, Imam Ali) to lead the community spiritually and politically. These Imams are seen as *infallible* in guiding the faith, and obedience to them is part of religious duty in Shia theology. Naqvi emphasizes that this concept is rooted in the love of the Prophet’s household (*Ahl al-Bayt*) and in narrations that exhort Muslims to follow them. He clarifies that Imams are **not prophets**, but are considered the rightful leaders who preserve and explain the Prophet’s teachings. The Shia scholar cites examples: the Prophet’s sermon at **Ghadir Khumm**, where he proclaimed, “*For whomever I am the master (mawla), Ali is his master*,” as a divine indication of Imam Ali’s leadership. He also references the Prophet’s family as the “*Ahl al-Bayt*” whom Muslims were instructed to hold in esteem and follow. These points underscore why Shias view Imamat as an extension of divine guidance.

Turning to the Sunni viewpoint, the moderator invites Ghamidi to describe how Sunnis perceive leadership after the Prophet. **Javed Ghamidi** explains that in Sunni Islam, there is no concept analogous to Shia Imamatus as a divine institution. From the Sunni perspective, Prophet Muhammad did *not* explicitly appoint a successor by divine mandate; instead, leadership of the Muslim community was left to be determined through consultation and consensus among the Prophet's companions. Ghamidi notes that Sunnis revere the **Khulafa-e-Rashideen** (the "Rightly Guided Caliphs" – Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali), but this caliphate is seen as a historical arrangement, not a theological doctrine. In Sunni creed, the essential articles of faith (belief in God, prophets, the hereafter, etc.) do not include belief in any particular *Imam* or political leader. He contrasts this with Shia tenets, acknowledging that Shias count Imamatus among their principles of faith, whereas Sunnis consider *leadership a practical matter* rather than a fixed pillar of religion. Ghamidi also addresses the Shia evidence: for example, regarding **Ghadir Khumm**, he offers a different interpretation – that the Prophet's statement about Ali was meant to honor Ali and resolve a dispute, *not* to announce a political succession. He points out that many companions present did not understand it as appointing Ali as the next ruler, since shortly after the Prophet's death they chose Abu Bakr as Caliph. According to Ghamidi, the **Quran and Sunnah** outline general qualities of leadership (justice, consultation, etc.) but do not name specific successors or a hereditary line to rule. This fundamental difference emerges clearly: **Naqvi insists Imamatus is a divinely mandated leadership integral to faith, whereas Ghamidi maintains that Islamic scripture does not establish such an institution, treating leadership as a matter for the community to decide.**

Throughout this segment, points of clarification surface. **Allama Naqvi** clarifies that Shias do not view the Imams as bringing new religion or scripture; rather, Imams are guardians of the Prophet's teachings, protected by God from error in religious matters. This is why following them is seen as following the true spirit of Islam. **Ghamidi** acknowledges the deep love and respect Muslims (Sunni and Shia alike) have for the Prophet's family. However, he clarifies that Sunnis differentiate between **spiritual authority** and political authority after the Prophet. In Sunni history, no individual or family was granted permanent spiritual authority over all Muslims; instead, *any qualified, pious person* could potentially lead, with the community's acceptance. The moderator interjects to summarize: Shia theology formalizes leadership via Imams from the Prophet's lineage, whereas Sunni tradition relies on the community's collective decision (Shura) for political leadership. This difference in perspective sets the stage for examining historical events where these ideas were put to the test.

## Segment 3 (14:00–21:30) – The Prophet's Succession: Divine Appointment or Community Consensus?

Building on the theological definitions, **Rehan Yusufi** asks both scholars to discuss the Prophet Muhammad's succession. He poses a direct question: *"Did the Prophet designate a successor (as Shias claim), or was leadership meant to be decided by the Muslim community (as Sunnis believe)?"*

**Allama Naqvi** argues that the Prophet did in fact indicate a successor, albeit not in the modern sense of a formal will, but through various statements and events. He cites **Ghadir Khumm** again, asserting it was a clear announcement of Imam Ali's authority. Additionally, Naqvi references the event of **Dhul Asheera** and other hadith where the Prophet praised Ali's future role. He also mentions the concept of *"Ahlul Bayt"* guidance, pointing out that shortly before his death, the Prophet famously said, *"I leave behind two weighty things: the Book of God (Quran) and my progeny; as long as you hold onto both, you will not go astray."* Naqvi interprets this as the Prophet entrusting his family – the future Imams – with guiding the community

alongside the Quran. He contends that early prominent companions were aware of Ali's precedence but that political circumstances led to a different outcome. In Shia history, events like the gathering at **Saqifa** (where Abu Bakr was selected as the first Caliph) are viewed as a departure from the Prophet's indicated path. Naqvi stops short of harsh criticism, but clearly implies that the **ideal scenario** would have been to acknowledge Ali as the rightful leader after the Prophet, in line with divine appointment.

**Javed Ghamidi**, respectfully disagreeing, provides the Sunni historical narrative. He explains that after the Prophet's death, there was no explicit written or verbal instruction from the Prophet naming a next ruler in a manner understood unequivocally by all companions. Ghamidi describes the meeting at **Saqifa**: the Ansar (Medinan Muslims) were discussing leadership, and the Muhajirun (Meccan companions) joined them, resulting in *Abu Bakr* being chosen by consensus of those present. He emphasizes that key figures, including Ali, later gave their **bay'ah** (oath of allegiance) to Abu Bakr, which legitimized that choice in Sunni eyes. Ghamidi argues that if there had been a clear divine mandate for Ali, the companions – who were deeply committed to the Prophet's teachings – would not have convened to choose someone else. He addresses Shia evidences by suggesting they are matters of interpretation: for example, the *"two weighty things"* hadith, he says, indeed urges love and respect for the Prophet's family, but Sunnis interpret "progeny" broadly or pair the Quran with the Prophet's *Sunnah* instead. In Ghamidi's view, **leadership was meant to be a practical issue**: the community selects a righteous leader through consultation (*Shura*), as exemplified by the **Caliphate of Abu Bakr** and his successors, rather than through divine designation. He underscores that none of the first four caliphs claimed they were *chosen by God*; rather, they were chosen by the community of believers.

The exchange grows pointed yet remains courteous. **Naqvi** gently questions whether the community's choice can override what Shias see as the Prophet's spiritual designation. He suggests that early political maneuvers might have been influenced by tribal dynamics or urgency, hinting that *might does not make right* in spiritual matters. **Ghamidi** responds that all the Prophet's companions, including those who loved Ali, ultimately accepted the caliphate of Abu Bakr, which indicates a legitimate consensus in that context. He also notes that Imam Ali himself eventually assumed the caliphate as the fourth Caliph in the Sunni timeline – meaning Ali's leadership was realized through the same mechanism of community choice, not presented as a continuation of a dynastic appointment. Here, **the disagreement is clear**: Naqvi holds that the *right of leadership was vested by God in a specific lineage (Ali and his descendants)*, whereas Ghamidi holds that *leadership was deliberately left open to the Muslim community's decision, guided by principles of merit and consultation*. The moderator intervenes to keep the discussion on track, acknowledging this fundamental difference without letting it devolve into polemics.

## Segment 4 (21:30–30:00) – Historical Aftermath and the Karbala Tragedy

With the theoretical differences established, the moderator turns to history: *"How did these concepts of leadership play out in early Islamic history?"* He specifically brings up the events following the period of the first four caliphs, notably the rise of dynastic rule (the Umayyads) and the pivotal tragedy of **Karbala**. Yusufi asks the scholars to share their perspectives on Imam Hussain's uprising against Yazid, given its significance in the context of Islamic politics and leadership.

**Allama Qamar Naqvi** addresses this with solemnity. From the Shia perspective, he explains, the tragedy of Karbala in 680 CE was the ultimate consequence of the Muslim community's failure to uphold rightful

Imamat. He recounts that **Imam Hussain ibn Ali**, the Prophet's grandson and third Shia Imam, stood up against **Yazid ibn Muawiya**, who had claimed the caliphate through heredity (succeeding his father Muawiya, thus beginning dynastic rule). Naqvi characterizes Yazid's rule as illegitimate and tyrannical, noting that it violated the spirit of Shura and Islamic justice. In Shia narrative, Imam Hussain's refusal to pledge allegiance to Yazid was a principled stand to preserve Islam's integrity. Naqvi highlights that Hussain, along with his family and companions, sacrificed their lives at Karbala rather than accept a hypocritical ruler — a sacrifice Shias (and many Sunnis) honor as a fight for truth against oppression. He refers to Imam Hussain's stand as a **"just opposition (Qiyam)"** against a usurper, an act of extraordinary courage that saved the moral conscience of the Muslim community <sup>2</sup>. Naqvi implies that had the concept of divinely guided leadership been respected (i.e. had the community followed the Prophet's family), the Muslim world might have averted such bloodshed. He extols Imam Hussain's martyrdom as a timeless example that *religion and morality must never be subservient to corrupt politics*. Throughout his remarks, Naqvi's tone is reverential toward Hussain and firm in condemning Yazid's actions. This viewpoint resonates with many Muslim scholars (Sunni and Shia) who regard Imam Hussain's stand as justified and Yazid's rule as illegitimate <sup>2</sup>.

**Javed Ghamidi**, while equally somber about the events of Karbala, provides a markedly different analysis. He prefaces his comments by expressing grief over the tragedy – acknowledging that the massacre of the Prophet's beloved grandson and family was a heartbreaking chapter in Islamic history. However, Ghamidi's interpretation of those events is *political and jurisprudential* rather than emotional. He argues that Imam Hussain's decision to revolt against Yazid, though stemming from noble intentions, should be viewed in light of Islamic principles regarding political order. According to Ghamidi, Islam emphasizes stability and the prevention of anarchy; thus, *rebellion against an established (even if unjust) ruler is generally not sanctioned unless certain strict conditions are met*. In his assessment, Yazid was the de facto state authority at the time, and Hussain's uprising – however virtuous its aims – resulted in grave bloodshed without achieving its immediate political objective. Ghamidi stops short of explicitly blaming Imam Hussain, but he suggests that Hussain's ijtihad (independent judgment) in this matter led to an unfortunate outcome. He points out that no divine command mandated Hussain to take up arms; it was a moral choice he made, one that ended in tragedy. Furthermore, Ghamidi controversially **downplays Yazid's personal culpability** in the crime. He explains that while Yazid was a flawed ruler, the direct responsibility for the massacre lies with his local governor, **Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad**, who orchestrated the attack on Hussain's caravan. Ghamidi notes that historical records are mixed on whether Yazid explicitly ordered Imam Hussain's killing or later regretted it. In essence, Ghamidi **"exonerates Yazid from direct murder of Imam Hussain" and pins the blame primarily on Ibn Ziyad, calling the Karbala incident an 'afsosnak hadsa' – a regrettable accident or tragic event** <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>. He characterizes the entire episode as a sorrowful misfortune in Islamic history, rather than a battle between rightful Imam and false Caliph in theological terms.

These remarks reveal a **stark disagreement** between the speakers. **Naqvi**, hearing Ghamidi's analysis, respectfully but firmly disagrees. The Shia scholar reiterates that Hussain's stand cannot be seen as a mere political misstep or "accident" – it was a conscious jihad against tyranny, and its failure in worldly terms does not diminish its religious legitimacy. Naqvi argues that *justice may demand standing up even at great cost*, and Imam Hussain's martyrdom is revered precisely because he chose faith over political expediency. He also implies that absolving Yazid is unacceptable, as Yazid's position of command makes him accountable for what his officials did. **Ghamidi** responds by clarifying that he deeply honors Imam Hussain's personal virtues and sacrifice; his analysis, he says, is not about reverence (which is undoubted) but about *the jurisprudential precedent* it sets. Ghamidi warns that endorsing rebellion (even against a bad ruler) can lead to continuous strife and bloodshed among Muslims, a principle derived from Sunni juristic tradition. He

notes that in hindsight, the political revolution Imam Hussain attempted did not succeed, and Muslims ended up under Umayyad rule for years thereafter – highlighting that *good intentions can have tragic outcomes*. The moderator intervenes at this point to ensure the discussion remains calm, acknowledging the emotional weight of Karbala for Muslims. **Rehan Yusufi** summarizes the divergence: Shia scholarship views Imam Hussain's rebellion as a righteous, indeed necessary, stance against an unlawful ruler, whereas Ghamidi (reflecting a Sunni scholastic view) regards it as a tragic but *non-prescriptive event* – meaning it does not establish that armed revolt is the Islamic way to address injustice <sup>3</sup>. Despite disagreement, both scholars express sorrow over Karbala and the hope that such internal conflict never befalls the Muslim community again.

## Segment 5 (30:00–37:00) – The Question of Islamic Governance in Modern Times

Shifting from history to contemporary relevance, the moderator asks how these differing viewpoints on Imamatus and political leadership translate into modern governance. He poses questions to each: *"In today's context, what system of government do you advocate for Muslim societies? Do we await a divinely guided leader (like the Mahdi in Shia belief), or do we establish governance through human institutions like elections and parliaments?"*

**Javed Ghamidi** outlines his perspective on an Islamic society's political organization. He argues that Islam's primary political tenets are *justice, shura* (consultation), *accountability*, and the rule of law – values that can be realized in a modern democratic framework. Ghamidi states that after the era of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, there is no obligation in Islam to maintain a singular caliphate or Imamate system spanning the entire Muslim world. Instead, Muslims are free to adopt forms of government that uphold Islamic ethical principles. He strongly supports **Shura (consultative decision-making)**, which in today's terms aligns with representative governance or democracy. Ghamidi points out that many Muslim-majority countries have adopted parliaments and elected leaders, and these can be in harmony with Islam as long as sovereignty is exercised within the limits of justice and moral law (with no law contravening clear Divine commandments). He explicitly rejects the notion of a theocracy run by clerics; in the Sunni view he presents, *religious scholars may guide and advise*, but they do not wield political authority by virtue of their scholarship alone. The right to rule comes from the consent of the governed (the *Ummah*), not from a claimed divine investiture after the Prophet's time. Ghamidi also touches on the concept of the **Mahdi** – a prophesied leader in Islamic tradition who will restore justice. He notes that Sunnis do believe in the coming of Imam Mahdi in the end times, but they do not incorporate that eventuality into political planning. In other words, Sunnis do not wait for a Mahdi to establish justice; they see it as their responsibility to strive for just governance here and now through available means. He gently suggests that *waiting indefinitely for a hidden Imam to return (a reference to Shia belief in the currently occulted 12th Imam)* is not a practical guidance for running society. Thus, Ghamidi's conclusion is that **Muslims today should implement governance based on consultation, justice, and human accountability – essentially, forms of democracy – which he views as compatible with Islam's objectives.**

**Allama Naqvi**, representing the Shia viewpoint, agrees on several practical points yet adds nuance. He concurs that principles like justice and consultation are vital, and he acknowledges that Shia communities around the world participate in modern state systems (including democracies). However, he explains that Shias still retain a hope and belief in divinely guided leadership. In Twelver Shia belief, the twelfth Imam (Al-Mahdi) is in occultation and will *one day return* to establish true justice on earth. This belief doesn't mean

Shias cannot have a government in the meantime; rather, it provides a spiritual horizon. Naqvi describes that in the absence of the Imam, Shia doctrine advocates following the guidance of qualified religious jurists (*maraje* or ayatollahs) in personal and community matters. Politically, Shias have taken different approaches. Citing the example of **Iran**, Naqvi explains the concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) where top Shia scholars provide supreme guidance in governance until the Imam returns. Not all Shia communities implement this model, but it is one interpretation of how to imbue governance with spiritual authority temporarily. In other contexts, Shias simply work within whatever political system exists, striving to uphold justice and their religious practices, while awaiting the Mahdi. Naqvi emphasizes that *even as Shias participate in republics or monarchies, they do so with the moral compass set by the Imams' teachings*. He agrees with Ghamidi that any government must ensure justice, protect the rights of people, and allow consultation – these are universal Islamic values. Where he differs is the **ultimate source of legitimacy**: for Shias, a government lacks ideal legitimacy unless led by, or at least endorsed by, the divine guide (the Imam or his representative). Despite that, Naqvi acknowledges practical realities and does not call for imposing Shia Imamate theory on states in the interim. He underscores common ground: both sects value justice and ethical leadership.

The **moderator** notes the convergence in practical terms – both scholars advocate for governance systems that are consultative and just. Yusufi highlights that neither speaker is calling for violent revolution or dismissal of current state systems; rather, they focus on core Islamic principles in governance. **Points of agreement** become evident: Ghamidi and Naqvi concur that an Islamic government should be accountable to the people and uphold Shariah's moral directives (such as protecting the vulnerable, ensuring fairness in courts, etc.). Both condemn tyranny and corruption in any form. They also agree that *sectarian divisions should not prevent Muslims from working together for just governance*. At the same time, **points of disagreement** remain underlying: Ghamidi does not concede any divine right of a particular lineage to rule in today's age, whereas Naqvi maintains a theological conviction that the Prophet's lineage (the Imams) are the ideal rulers – a conviction that is more of a long-term hope in the Shia ethos. The discussion here is cordial and forward-looking, with each scholar presenting his view without dismissing the other's sincerity.

## Segment 6 (37:00–40:00) – Conclusion: Embracing Dialogue and Mutual Respect

As the program nears its end, **Rehan Yusufi** asks both guests to offer any closing thoughts or advice for Muslims regarding the sectarian differences discussed. He also inquires if there is a path to greater understanding between Sunnis and Shias on these contentious issues.

**Javed Ghamidi** uses his closing remarks to stress the importance of unity and empathy in the Muslim community. He acknowledges that Sunnis and Shias have genuine theological disagreements, as demonstrated in the discussion, but he urges that these should be approached through knowledge and understanding rather than bigotry or violence. Ghamidi reiterates that while he stands by the Sunni interpretive principles, he does not consider Shias outside the fold of Islam – they are his brethren in faith who simply have a different viewpoint on certain historical and political matters. He appeals to all Muslims to *"listen to each other's points of view calmly and cool-headedly, and to study and research the issues"* rather than resorting to slogans or hostility <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. According to Ghamidi, open dialogue (like this very program) is a healthy way to dispel misconceptions. He also reflects that history cannot be changed – Sunnis and Shias will likely continue to interpret early Islamic history and leadership differently, but that need not stop them from cooperating on common values today. Ghamidi's tone is conciliatory: he thanks Allama Naqvi for

presenting the Shia perspective, which helps everyone understand the rationale behind Shia beliefs. He emphasizes that mutual respect is key; difference in opinion should never devolve into declaring each other deviant or non-Muslim. In essence, Ghamidi calls for a pluralistic attitude, where *each sect lets the other exist with dignity*, leaving ultimate judgment to God.

**Allama Qamar Naqvi** echoes the call for respect and knowledge. He expresses gratitude for the opportunity to explain Shia beliefs directly, noting that many misunderstandings arise when people rely on hearsay. Naqvi affirms that Sunnis and Shias share the most important foundations of Islam – belief in the One God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the holy Quran. The concept of Imam, he says, should be discussed academically, not used as a pretext for hatred. He agrees with Ghamidi that ignorance and emotional rhetoric have poisoned Sunni-Shia relations historically. Naqvi advises viewers (especially from the majority Sunni community) to recognize that Shia reverence for Ali, Hussain, and the Imams does not diminish their love for the Prophet or Islam; rather, it stems from their devotion to the Prophet's family. Likewise, he encourages Shias to appreciate that many Sunnis deeply respect the Ahl al-Bayt even if they do not share the exact theological stance on Imam. On the question of finding common ground, Naqvi points out that both sects yearn for just leadership and both condemn figures like Yazid who epitomize injustice. This shared moral outlook can be a basis for unity. He also thanks Ghamidi for his candid presentation of the Sunni viewpoint, noting that such frank yet polite exchanges help demystify intentions – *“we realize we may differ in thought, but we all seek the truth and wish to please God”*, he says in summary.

The **moderator** wraps up the dialogue by highlighting how this exchange has been both informative and modelled in a fraternal spirit. He provides a brief recap: the dialogue covered definitions of Imam, historical controversies like succession and Karbala, and the impact on present-day Muslim governance. Yusufi notes that, despite disagreements, the scholars found **points of agreement** on ethical governance and the need for unity. He reiterates the initial question about politics and observes that both scholars showed that *religion can guide politics towards integrity rather than hypocrisy*, if understood properly. Finally, he encourages the audience to reflect on the insights shared: *respectful debate* like this can lead to greater understanding. The program ends with all participants thanking each other. The overall tone concludes on an optimistic note that Sunnis and Shias, through dialogue and knowledge, can coexist peacefully and work jointly for the betterment of the Muslim community, even as they “agree to disagree” on certain theological points.

In summary, this televised conversation provided a thorough exploration of how **Sunni and Shia scholars articulate their views on political leadership in Islam**. It showcased key differences – like the Shia emphasis on divinely ordained Imams versus the Sunni emphasis on community consensus – while also demonstrating a mutual commitment to core Islamic values. The segment-by-segment discussion, moderated objectively, allowed each side to present their case, challenge the other respectfully, and clarify misconceptions. By the end, viewers were left with a nuanced understanding of both perspectives and an example of how constructive dialogue can bridge sectarian divides. <sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Right to Rule in a Muslim Society - Javed Ahmad Ghamidi

<https://ghamidi.com/videos/khilafa-and-imamat-972>

<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> Javed Ghamidi's problematic views about Sufi Sunnis and Shias – Islam and Diversity

<https://islamanddiversity.org/2020/05/13/javed-ghamidis-problematic-views/>

5 Ghamidi - Imamat in Islam - 1 - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3rqXTsj1u8>

6 Ghamidi - Imamat in Islam - 5 - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW2h63BLfWs>