THE REACTUALIZATION OF ‘IŞMAH AL-AIMMAH CONCEPT: Analysis on the Interpretation of al-Ṭabatḥabā’î

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Abstract

‘İşmah al-a’immah issue has been a polemic among the theology community of Sunni-Shia, particularly in the internal Shia. The Shia Ismâ’iliyah and Ithnâ ‘Ashariyyah communities believe in the absolute ma’sûm character of their leaders/imam. Meanwhile, some Shia Zaidiyah communities limit the character, and the rest totally refuses it. Al-Ṭabatḥabâ’î, a Shia Ithnâ Ashariyyah ulama known to be moderate and is accepted in Sunni community, has similar opinion with his mazhab’s doctrine regarding ‘işmah al-a’immah. However, al-Ṭabatḥabâ’î tried not to dwell on a never-ending ‘işmah issue, but interpreted it contextually instead. This article reveals the ‘işmah al-a’immah concept of al-Ṭabatḥabâ’î by applying qualitative research and analytic descriptive method. According to al-Ṭabatḥabâ’î, an imam/leader must be ma’sûm before guiding people toward devotion. The ma’sûm level is achieved through knowledge, irâdah and ikhtiyar of imam in obeying Allah and staying away from immorality. Their obedience makes Allah grant them with a well-absorbed special insight (‘ilm ḥudûrî) to form a character that later becomes a self-controller from sinful acts, with which they eventually achieve the ma’sûm level. Al-Ṭabatḥabâ’î then tried to escape from further theological debate by interpreting ‘işmah as a potential which is achievable by ordinary people to protect human values.

**Keywords:** ‘īsmah al-a’immah; reactualization; al-Ṭabatābâ’î

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**Introduction**

The pros and cons of ‘īsmah (the ability to protect oneself from sins) concept in Islamic theology are not something new. The majority of ulama who agree with the urgency of ‘īsmah as the determinant factor for the success of nubuwwah (prophethood) mission is, as a matter of fact, still in a dialectic regarding its absoluteness or limitation. The controversy on it has been running on involving two huge communities in Islam i.e., Sunni and Shia. The peak was when Shia attributed ‘īsmah not only for Prophets, but also for their imams (leaders). For Shia, imam as the successor of the
Prophet PBUH who continue the mission of prophethood must have the similar characters as the Prophet. Therefore, the requirement of being imam is not only originally from Quraysh, as what was believed by the companions at the time. Other necessary requirements also include ʻismah and having the excellent expertise. (Aziz 2020, 128).

Generally, Shia believes that all imams are delegated by Allah through His Prophet PBUH. They also believe that the reason of their delegation is similar with Allah’s reason when appointing all Prophets on earth. Mudzaffar, a Shia ulama, affirms that imâmah, as well as nubuwwah, is a blessing from Allah, thus, there must be an imam in every era who replaces Prophet’s mission in guiding humans toward peace and happiness in the world and hereafter. Hence, imâmah is a continuation of nubuwwah (Marjuni and Wardi 2017, 196; al-Muzaffar 2000, 65–66). So, in implementing the law, guarding syariat, and guiding ummah (people), all imams must be maʻṣūm like the Prophets (Rajani 2021, 420). They are unable to do sinful acts, even if it is small in scale, and they cannot forget anything, particularly regarding religion and law. Even, Hishâm bin al-Hakkâm (w.179/795), a Shia theologian, stated his opinion that only imam should be maʻṣūm. Meanwhile, the Prophets, according to him, are not required to. If they do sinful acts, Allah will directly warn them through the revelation. Unlike Prophets, imam is in a different situation that they are obliged to have the character of maʻṣūm (al-Shahrastanî 1993, 185).

However, Shia Imamîyah Ithnâ Ashâriyâh and Ismâ‘iliyâh communities, representing the authorized opinion from majority of Shia, believe that imams have similarity with prophets (as) in terms of maʻṣûm and knowing the unseen (ghaib), unless the imams do not receive the revelation and prophethood (Marjuni and Wardi 2017, 195). Some verses regarded as the foundation of this opinion are Q.S. al-Ahzâb [33]:33 dan Q.S. al-Nisâ’ [5]:59. Meanwhile, Shia Zaidîyah refuses to compare imams with prophets (as). This community states that Allah only specializes noble characters for prophets (as) and that He does not give the characters to any individual, except they are considered as imams. According to Imam Aḥmad bin Sulaiman al-Zaidî, no one will reach the level of prophethood, including Alî bin Abî Ṭâlib. The level is exclusive, given by Allah to His prophets through mu‘jizat (miracle) as written in Q.S. Sabâ’ [34]:10.
Based on the above explanation, the concept of *imam’s ma’ṣūm* from sins and mistakes is not accepted by Shia Zaidiyah. They consider *imam* as a normal human who is not free from sins (Attamimi 2015, 105–106). Some parties of this community accept the *ma’ṣūm* character of *imams* by restricted it to *ahl al-Kisā’* (Prophet PBUH, Fātimah, Alî bin Abî Ṭālib, also Ḥasan and Ḥusain), and some others specialize it for the three *imams*, they are Ali bin Abî Ṭâlib, Ḥasan and Ḥusain bin Ali.

The issue on ‘*išmah al-aimmah* also captivated Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabaṭabā’î (hereinafter referred to as al-Ṭabaṭabā’î) whose ideology is *mażhab* Shia Ithnâ Ashariyyah. He is well-known to have moderate thoughts (Tamrin 2019, 5). As a contemporary Shia ulama, he is inseparable from his *mażhab* doctrine including ‘*išmah al-aimmah* doctrine. Hence, this article aims to discover the objective and moderate thoughts of al-Ṭabaṭabâ’î on the concept of ‘*išmah al-aimmah* which becomes the icon of his *mażhab*.

Based on author’s observation, the description about ‘*išmah* concept on *imams* can be found in some research studies, such as Kamaluddin Nurdin Marjuni (Marjuni n.d., 1–40), Azmil Zainal Abidin (Abidin 2014, 37–66), Nafiuddin and Syaiful Bahri (Nafiuddin & Bahri 2022, 21–40), and Amin Khosraftar and Mohsen Ehteshaminia (Khosraftar & Ehteshaminia 2016, 1594–1606). Those researchers tried to reveal the doctrine of *imams’ ma’ṣūm* in Shia theology. Meanwhile, some researchers discussing about the thoughts of al-Ṭabaṭabâ’î are Fiddian Khairudin (Khairudin 2016, 1–22), and Otta (Otta, 2018, 77–105). Both academicians attempted to view the thoughts of al-Ṭabaṭabâ’î on some objects e.g., spirits, the meaning of *iman* (faith) and its mystic dimension in the book of tafsir al-Mīzân. The mentioned studies have yet to discuss specifically about the thoughts of al-Ṭabaṭabâ’î on ‘*išmah al-aimmah* concept, thus, this article aims to discover the thinking construction of al-Ṭabaṭabâ’î on ‘*išmah al-aimmah*. The author also tried to find the different thought of him with the mainstream of theology teaching doctrine he adhered, as well as his attempts to reactualize the said concept.

**Research Method**

The author implemented library research categorized in qualitative study focusing on ‘*išmah al-a’immah*. The descriptive-analytic method is applied (Syarifah & Fahimah 2020, 289). Meanwhile, the material objects
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used here are some works of al-Ṭabaṭaba’i, such as Tafsir al-Mizân, al-‘Aqâ’id al-Islâmiyyah, and Islamic Teachings: An Overview which are considered as primary sources to see the tendency of thoughts of the said figure, as well as deepen his thought construction on the concept. Other relevant works were also used as secondary data. The analysis content was applied as the data analysis technique to comprehend the interpretation of ‘îsmah al-aimmah concept in the perspective of al-Ṭabaṭaba’i.

Results and Discussion
The Resurgence of ‘Ismah al-Aimmah Doctrine among Shia Sects

Imâmah doctrine is a pillar of Shia teaching that has caused this community to break into several groups or sects. The three big sects of Shia Imamîyah that still exist to date are Shia Zaidîyah, Ismâ’îlyah, and Ithnâ Ashariyâh. These three were diverged due to different opinions on imâm’s orders and criteria. Shia Zaidîyah acknowledged Zayd bin Ali Zainal Abîdîn bin Husayn bin Ali bin Abî Ṭâlib as the fifth imâm (Marjuni and Wardi 2017, 184). The other two (Ismâ’îlyah and Ithnâ Ashariyâh) have dissimilar perspective on the genealogy of imams after Imam Ja’far al-Ṣâdiq. In Shia Ithnâ ‘Ashariyâh’s perspective, the second son of Imam Ja’far, Mûsâ bin Ja’far, is the seventh imâm. Meanwhile, in Shia Ismâ’îlyah’s opinion, their seventh imâm is Ismâ’il bin Ja’far (the first son of Imam Ja’far) (Egyptian Islamic Affairs High Council Research Team 2015, 47).

Among the three aforementioned Shia sects, some ulamas claim Zaidîyah as the most moderate because their teachings are considered closer to Sunni’s. This community does not compare imâm with prophet, and does not call out the Companions (Sahabah) as kafir (infidel), particularly Abû Bakar As-Ṣiddîq and Umar bin Khâṭṭâb (Mas’od dan Hamat 2019, 15). However, in some studies, the moderate of Shia Zaidîyah due to its closeness to Sunni turns out invalid. Kurniawan’s study states that Ibnu Taymîyah claimed that the said community is closer to Mu’tazilah because of their similarity in teaching about tauhid and justice. Furthermore, Kurniawan emphasizes that Shia Zaidîyah may be considered more extreme than the Imamîyah Ithnâ Ashariyâh and Ismâ’îlyah sects. This is proven when Shia Zaidîyah required the skills for seizing the tyrannical ruler’s authority as one of criteria of imams. Once again, this requirement looks like the fifth teaching principal of mu’tazilah (al-uşûl al-
khamsah), namely *al-amr bi al-ma’rūf wa al-naḥy ‘an al-munkar* (Kurniawan 2020, 131–140).

The leadership position called *imāmah* is believed by Shi’a community as their teaching principal (the pillars of faith). In their perspective, *imam* occupies the position both in worldly and religious affairs (Syafi’i 2019, 44). In this matter, al-Mawardi states that *imāmah* is constructed to replace the function of prophethood in order to guard the religion and manage the world (al-Mawardi n.d., 5; Yunus 2020, 198). Muslim Shi’a community believes that Allah swt definitely has appointed an *imam* after the death of the Prophet PBUH to uphold religious culture and laws, as well as to guide the people to the right path (al-Ṭabaṭaba’î 1989, 116). Shi’a considers their *imams* as the people possessing privilege to elucidate religious teaching. They essentially come to reveal the concealed meaning of a revelation (Mooezi 2021, 6). Their speech and religious practice hold the similar position and power of those of the Prophet PBUH (Rajani 2021, 420).

The theology of *imāmah* is the most substantial part of Shi’a theology. This is because *imams* have their own virtue as the descendants of Rasulullah PBUH. Besides, the appointment of *imam* is based on two basic principles: first, *naṣṣ* and knowledge or inspiration which is directly from God; second, changing from one *imam* to another (Rijal and Palangkey, n.d., 154). The appointment of *imam* in Shi’a theology is Allah swt’s prerogative, which was conveyed through revelation and Rasulullah PBUH’s verbal statement. All sects of Shi’a-Zaidiyah, Imamiyah, Ismā’iliyah-agree that the three *imams*: Ali bin Abī Ṭālib and his two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusain, have been determined and appointed as the leader through “*naṣṣ*” of Allah and and His Prophet (Marjuni 2020, 53–54). Other than that, the three sects differ in opinion, such as the issue on *imam*’s order and criteria.

One of criteria argued by those Shi’a sects is about ‘*ʾismah* or *maʾṣūm*. Shi’a Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah and Ismā’iliyah believe that *imams* have the similar level of spiritual and perfection to all prophets (as), unless the revelation and prophethood that they do not receive (al-Ṭabaṭaba’î 1989, 117). Shi’a Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah believes that their twelve *imams* are *maʾṣūm* figures. Shi’a Ismā’iliyah also believe that their *imams* are *maʾṣūm*. This community states that, if an *imam* does something evil and immoral in the eyes of ordinary humans, Allah will not consider it as something bad or sinful. This is
because imam is in fact free from taklif alshari’at and has reached the level of maqam ma’rifat (Khairudin 2016, 327). Ma’rifat is a knowledge achieved through an inner process, relying on consciousness and ḥudūrī method (an approach which prioritizes spiritual intelligence and mental awareness) (Umar 2021, viii–ix).

The aforementioned perspective of both Shia sects on ‘ismah is dissimilar to Shia Zaidiyah. The loyalty and devotion of Shia Zaidiyah toward their imam are not dogmatic. They refuse the concept of the purity of imam from sins and mistakes, and consider imam as a human being who is able to make mistake (Attamimi 2015, 105–106). Ma’ṣūm is not related to the attitude of negligence, mistake, and forgetfulness as stated by Shia Imamiyah and Shia Ismā’iliyah. Other than syari’at matters, such as fatwa, politic, and social issues, the character of ma’ṣūm of an imam is not an obligation for other humans to follow. It means, we are not obliged to do what imam does (Marjuni 2020, 32–34). Marjuni’s study revealed that the majority of Shia Zaidiyah think that ma’ṣūm character only belongs to the so-called ahl alkisâ’, they are the Prophet PBUH, Ali, Fâthimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusain; however, the said character is not absolute. In fact, some ulamas of Shia Zaidiyah, such as Imam Muḥammad bin Ḥasan ad-Daylamic, limit the ma’ṣūm character only for three imams, namely Ali bin Abî Ṭâlib, Ḥasan and Ḥusain bin Ali (Marjuni n.d., 26-27).

Although Shia believes that imāmah is one of pillars of the five Shia teachings, the sects of Shia still differ in opinion on determining the criteria. The majority of Shia Ismā’iliyah and Ithnâ Ashariyah admit the absolute ma’ṣūm character of imams, meanwhile Shia Zaidiyah limits the character, and the rest of the sects completely refuses it.

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The Portrait of al-Ṭabaṭaba’î Biography

Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabaṭaba’î, widely known as al-‘Allāmah al-Ṭabaṭaba’î, was born in Tabriz, Iran on 29 of Dzuḥijjah 1321H/March 16, 1892 AD (al-Ṭabaṭaba’î 1997, b). Al-Ṭabaṭaba’î grew up in a family of a quite popular ulama in the city. In his intellectual journey, the focus was on three cities, Tabriz, Najaf, and Qum. In the last city, Qum, al-Ṭabaṭaba’î’s career started to reach its peak (al-Awsî 1985, 39–51). He also dealt with the terrible intellectual and political agitation. In the intellectual agitation, he once witnessed and was challenged with the conflict of Mazhab Akhbariyah (Shia term for ahl al hadis that considered ijtihad as batil/invalid and only followed akhbâr [riwaya/narration and hadith]) and ߎsâliyyah (a community that considered ijtihad as wâjib kifâyah) which was a part of jurisprudence of Shia (Rusli 2009, 150-153). Meanwhile, in the history of political agitation, there were two huge
incidents experienced by al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī at the time. First, the World War II in 1941 resulted in the emergence of the understanding of materialism and capitalism. Razzaqi claimed that this incident became the main factor of al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī’s phenomenal work *al-Mīzân*. He observed the situation and condition of Islam society at that time, particularly in a scope of institution in Qum City, which was dominated by a lavish materialistic thinking. Hence, rational and philosophical discourses were highly needed to enable *Hawzah* to elaborate the principles of intellectual and doctrinal of Islam supported by rational argument to defend Islam’s position (Razzaqi n.d., 6). Second, al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī witnessed the Iranian Revolution (also known as Islamic Revolution) in 1979 in his old age. In 1981, al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī died after devoting his entire life to the advancement of science in Qum at the age of 78 (al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī 2006, 24).

His great work *al-Mīzân fi Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* is said as the only *tafsir* book of Shia which gains huge appreciation and is accepted in Sunni community. *Al-Mīzân* is claimed to have particular characteristics, one of which is combining a corpus of Shia’s classic *tafsir* and contemporary one owned by al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī. The said contemporary corpus is seen through the influence of the *tafsir* modernization introduced by Muḥammad Abduh (al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī 1997, c). This is due to his sensitivity on the condition of Muslim at the time in challenging Western imperialist (Tamrin 2019, 5). Although some are sympathetic toward his charisma and moderate thinking, al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī was not free from criticism of ulamas. One of harsh criticisms came from Alī Aḥmad as-Salûs claiming that al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī had a hidden mission behind his moderate-like thinking. According to as-Salûs, even though al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī used a series of argument, even using *riwaya* outside the scope of Shia, in the end, it only showed his extremist side because he was really persistent to defend his *aqida* (as-Salûs 2001, 680-687). As-Salûs proved it by exploring al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī's interpretation on verses regarding *imamah*.

‘Iṣmah al-Aimmah and Leadership Criteria

Al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī defines ‘*ismah* as an aspect of knowledge which prevents or preclude someone from making mistakes or sins. In other words, ‘*ismah* is a knowledge aspect that protects someone from fumble. Bravery, kindness, and generosity are images of positive knowledge to
realize and be used to prevent doing the opposite, such as cowardice, carelessness, sluggishness, greediness, miserliness, and wastefulness (al-Ṭabaṭaba’i 1997, 79-80).

Therefore, al-Ṭabaṭaba’i classified the source of ma’sūm into two things, namely knowledge and ikhtiyār (selection). What al-Ṭabaṭaba’i means by knowledge as a primary source of ma’sūm is the useful knowledge and the impeccable wisdom which can affect positively to the owner. The knowledge will prevent the owner to fall into destruction and humiliation, and to profane himself with sins. This is exactly similar as someone who has knowledge and wisdom, as well as privilege from ahl al-taqwā wa al-dīn (al-Ṭabaṭaba’i 1997, 80). Practically, knowledge will keep one away from something that should not happen, and keep one closer to something that must happen. Allah states in Q.S. al-Jâtsîyah [45]:23,

“Have you seen [O Prophet] those who have taken their own desires as their God? and Allah has sent him astray due to knowledge...”

M. Quraish Shihab explained that ways to obtain ‘ilm (knowledge) are classified into two, namely ‘ilm kasbî and ‘ilm ladunnî. The former is the knowledge achieved from learning process, meanwhile the latter is a blessing from Allah to someone He desires and is given without learning process (Shihab 2007, 329). ‘Ilm ladunnî is also called as Presential Knowledge or ‘ilm ḥudūrî; it is a knowledge on spiritual, sins, effects or consequences of good and bad behavior, as if it is visible (Hillî 1413, 494). In ‘ilm ḥudūrî, the real and individual objects are no longer distinguished as it is one inseparable unity. Hence, ḥudūrî is a simple understanding about objectivity which directly presents inside the subject’s soul who knows, and thus, it is logically implied in the definition of the knowledge conception itself (Habib 2018, 222). It is different with ‘ilm ḥuṣūlî (knowledge by correspondence), exist within subject’s mental, which is a visual form of object’s entity. In ‘ilm ḥuṣūlî (knowledge by presence), the thing which is present in subject’s mental is the object’s existence. Some main criteria of ‘ilm ḥuṣūlî are: 1) it is existentially present within the subject; 2) it is not a conception formed from syllogism that occurred in a mental; and 3) freedom from dualism of truth and fault (al Walid 2020,170). Hence, in the perspective of Shia Ithnâ Asharîyah, the Prophets and imams have no desire to commit sins at all because they have already informed through the
knowledge about the consequences of immorality or committing sins. In this case, al-Ṭabataḥbā’i explained about ‘ilm ḥudūrī in his statement:

“‘ilm ḥudūrī is a form of knowledge from within ourselves, the essence is cued by “I”. Basically, it will never disappear whatever the condition is, whether in solitude or busyness, asleep or awake. It is not an accident (something that is essentially present, but not included in substance). The essence within ourselves is in the form of maḏḥūm of correspondence knowledge. The maḏḥūm existing in our mental, however it is described, will never be detached from the plural relation and it is identified in the external existence. This is, what we witness from ourselves and what we analogize with “I”, an identity which essentially is not composed and identified in the dimension of existence, thus, we understand through our essence (I) and exist within ourselves through external existence which is a basic identity that has an effect, and this is different part of knowledge called al-‘ilm al-ḥudūrī (al-Ṭabataḥbā’i 1995, 174).”

It seems like this is what al-Ṭabataḥbā’i means when defining ‘ismah as wujūd ‘amr fī al-insān al-maṣūm. The word ‘amr in the definition is presumably a knowledge which controls or keeps the owner away from committing sins (al-Ṭabataḥbā’i 2002, 179). Allah states in Q.S. Yāsin [36]: 82-83,

“All it takes, when He wills something to be, is simply to say to it: ‘Be!’ And it is! So, glory be to the One in Whose Hands is the authority over all things, and to Whom alone you will all be returned.”

God’s affairs (‘ilm ḥudūrī) in the above verse is named malakūt, that is another aspect of creation, with which they stand before God the Almighty, purified from time and space limitation, free from changes (al-Ṭabataḥbā’i 1997, 267). Nasaruddin Umar expresses that malakūt is the realm (alam) of angels and jinns, a realm which closeness level with the peak realm is primary compared to previous realms, but is lower than the top realms such as jabānūt realm and al-‘ayān al-thābitah. Mulkī or maqām mitsāl up to the higher realms cannot be reached by human’s physical five
senses since it is the supernatural realm. *Alam malakût* is accessible only for humans who are able to make use of the *malakût* potential they possess (Umar 2021, 106).

According to al-Ṭabaṭabā’ī, *imam* is a guide that leads people with his *malakût* potential. Hence, subconsciously, as human authority in his action and guidance, *imāmah* is not only a matter of showing the way, but also to lead them to what has been commanded by Allah swt (al-Ṭabaṭabā’ī 1997, 268; Amir-Moezzi 2021, 6). Allah swt said in Q.S. Ibrahim [14]:4,

“We have not sent a messenger except in the language of his people to clarify the message for them. Then Allah leaves whoever He wills to stray and guides whoever He wills. And He is the Almighty, All-Wise.”

Knowledge, which is meant with the ability of ‘*iṣmah* or infallibility, does not change the chosen human’s character (prophets/imams) on their *ikhtiyar*, it also does not forcefully come. Knowledge is one of principles of preference, and the power of knowledge merely requires the power of will. For example, someone knows that poison is lethal, thus, refuses to drink it. In Q.S. al-An’âm [6]: 87-88 Allah said,

“... We chose them [to be the Prophet and the messenger] and guided them to the straight path. This is Allah’s guidance with which He guides whoever He wills of His servants. Had they associated others with Him in worship, their good deeds would have been wasted.”

Allah swt also stated in Q.S. al-Mā’idah [5]:67,

“O Messenger! Convey everything revealed to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you have not delivered His message...”

Furthermore, the second source of *ma’sūm* is will and *ikhtiyār*. Some people think that Allah swt keeps human away from *maksiat* (sinful acts) not due to the individual’s choice and will, but due to conflict of causes. Allah conquers it by creating will or by sending the angel that is against the human’s will, then prevents him/her from the effect, or changes the way and turns him/her to another thing other than the initial objective.

Murtaḍā Muṭahhari emphasizes that every humans’ action is caused by tendency and impulse from within themselves, which then stimulates
them to do something (Muṭahhari 1995, 74). Meanwhile, forgetfulness, mistakes, and the like are a form or realization of one’s psychic and soul. Therefore, those potentials, when they are expressed and realized in human’s behavior, are often considered as something natural.

In al-Ṭabaṭaba’î’s perspective, a ma’sūm person leaves sinful act due to his own choice and will. He links his action with Allah swt’s protection and surveillance. He believes that one’s knowledge will affect determining his choice and will on whatever he is going to do. Al-Ṭabaṭaba’î expresses that one’s bad behavior is caused by one’s choice to do the negative action, and so does someone who chooses to behave positively. It is clearly evident that knowledge is the determinant of someone’s behavior quality (al-Ṭabaṭaba’î 1997, 167).

The above analysis shows that ma’sūm is not achieved under compulsion nor it is effortlessly obtained. Ma’sūm sources from knowledge and devoted faith, from which emerges irādah or will to obey the rules or otherwise. On one’s own ability, devotion or maksiat is realized. This describes that human has will in determining his own behavior and ikhtiyār to realize it. When human chooses to devote, he will be guided by Allah swt and blessed with specific knowledge (‘ilm ḥudūrī). He even will be given ability to explore the malakūt realm, so the will to leave sinful acts or maksiat is stronger. Let alone doing maksiat, they do not even want to think about it, thus, they are protected from negative behavior. Figure 1 presents the stages to gain ‘ismah elaborated by al-Ṭabaṭaba’î in his magnum opus, al-Mīzân.

Al-Awsî, quoted from al-Ṭabaṭaba’î, expresses that Allah swt’s main purpose to send prophets and messengers with revelation and religious sharia is to guide all ʻummah or humans to the right path, to arrange their sustainable life so they are far from disputes causing disaster, catastrophe, and fight. These will not be achieved if the Prophets are not ma’sūm. For the similar reason, there must be someone whose ma’sūm is on the same level of the Messenger of God to uphold the religion after the death of the Messenger. Therefore, Allah will surely appoint someone who has similar perfection (except the revelation and the prophethood) to replace the prophet’s position in maintaining religious culture and law as a whole, as well as guiding the ʻummah. The only purpose is to succeed the guidance.
program, so humans will have no excuses to argue Allah swt (al-Awsî 1985, 62), as written in Q.S. al-Nisâ’ [4]:165,

“All were messengers delivering good news and warnings so humanity should have no excuse before Allah after the coming of the messengers. And Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.”

In the Quran, the word imam (leader) often comes along with the word ḥidayah (guidance/direction). Among others are mentioned in Q.S. al-Anbiyā’ [21]:73,

“We also made them leaders, guiding by Our command, and inspired them to do good deeds, establish prayer, and pay alms-tax. And they were devoted to Our worship.”

also, in Q.S. al-Sajadah [32]:24,

“We raised from among them leaders, guiding by Our command, when they patiently endured and firmly believed in Our signs.”

People who get guidance from Allah swt will surely be under His protection. Otherwise, people who are reluctant in achieving Allah’s direction will be misled, as a result, they will never meet the guidance of God. People who tightly hold on to Allah will be guided to the right path. Those who have faith and belief to Allah swt will be blessed with grace and
priority, as well as be directed to the straight path (Attamimi et al. 2022, 461).

Al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī classifies people into four categories: first, person who is zalim (oppressive) throughout his/her life; second, person who is not zalim throughout his/her life; third, person who is zalim only in the beginning of his/her life, but not through the end; and fourth, person who is just in the beginning but is zalim at the end of his/her life. Of the four categories, only the second one must be within imam’s personality. Meanwhile, person, who is not ma’sūm, is not eligible for being imam (leader) that is supposed to guide others to the truth (al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī 1997, 270).

As his mażhab’s doctrine, al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī requires ‘īsmah as the criteria that must be owned by an imam. Imam must be ma’sūm (guarded) from stray and maksiat (sinful acts). Otherwise, he will not be able to guide ummah (al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī 1997, 269), as expressed in Allah’s words in the aforementioned Q.S. al-Anbiya’ [21]:73. Based on the explanation, all imams in Shia community are the chosen ones blessed with ‘īsmah. Allah swt said in Q.S. al-Ĥzâb [33]:33,

“...Allah only intends to keep the causes of evil away from you and purify you completely, O members of the Prophet’s family!”

According to al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī, the word ahl al-bayt is the special name in the Quranic term for five people, they are the Prophet PBUH, Alî, Fâtimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusain. The name is made specifically for them. Even if there is someone who is truly a close relative in general perspective, he/she is not entitled to bear that name as it is particular only for the said five people. In Shia perspective, the five people are called ahl al-kisâ’ i.e., People of the Cloak (al-Ṭabaṭaba’ī 1997, 316-323).

However, some riwaya/narrations of Shia Ithnâ Asharîyah claim that nine of twelve imams who are the descendants of Imam Ḥusain are also included in ahl al-bayt. According to this community, the people are called The Fourteen Infallibles. The speech and behavior of those ahl al-bayt, in the belief of Shia Ithnâ Asharîyah, have similar authority with the Prophet PBUH (Ṭabaṭaba’ī 1989, 114). Meanwhile, for Sunni community, ahl al-bayt does not particularly refer to the five people. ‘Ali Āḥmad al-Salûs states that ahl al-bayt includes the Prophet PBUH’s wives and the descendants. If pronoun (ḏamîr) is the issue of the verse, according to al-Salûs, no Quranic
verse does merge *jama' muannath* form with *lafaz ahl al-bayt*, either it refers to the wives or others (al-Salûs 2001, 76). The controversy on the meaning of *ahl al-bayt* is definitely inseparable from the influence of inter-*mażhab* and its relation to *imāmah* in Shia doctrine.

**The Reactualization of ‘Ismah Concept**

Humans are the most flawless creature of Allah as they are created in the best shape. The creation elements consisting of body and soul, passion/lust and reason make humans prioritize one of the two. With the reason given by Allah swt, humans obtain knowledge to actualize themselves, in accordance with God’s initial purpose when creating them, as God’s caliph on earth. That humans’ potential tends to lead them, either toward positive or negative direction. Therefore, Allah shows them religion as a guidance, so they can reach the peak of humanity. This potential is what distinguish humans with other creatures, including angels (Musbikin 2016, 383).

In the current modern era, the rapid improvement of science and technology also affects the shift of human values (dehumanization). Materialistic, individualistic, hedonistic, consumeristic behaviors have spread to every aspect of modern human life. The number of psychic disorders or mental illness causes a kind of condition called *split personality* in human’s self, which eventually results in difficulty for human to get serenity and happiness in life (Musbikin 2016, 384).

According to some Psychologists, Erich Fromm, Carl Gustav Jung, and Roll May, modern life can ruin human’s psyche. The symptoms are feeling anxious and tense in human’s soul. The more developed a society is, the more curious the people are, thus, the harder it is to find life’s serenity and happiness. If human’s needs increase, rivalry and seizure of chances and profits are greater (Musbikin 2016, 384). Furthermore, anxiety and soul’s tension felt by modern society have implications to what we call *destructivestative* i.e., an act leading to negative behavior. For example, imbalance, meaningless destruction, tension, nonsensical worry, apathetic character, and so forth are the attitudes that eventually lead to negative, clumsy, and conservative behavior toward surrounding environment (Drajat 1983, 12). Those conditions will gradually set human apart from his spiritual life.
The polemic on ‘īsmah in Islamic theology is caused by interpretation on substance and rationalization of the verses. This is closely related to the background of ideology and doctrine of schools of kalam. It seems like this never-ending controversy is no more relevant for us to not consider it as important in the current era, in which the humanity issues are more complex and in a worrying situation.

As a contemporary thinker, al-Ṭabaṭabā’i offers the reactualization idea through his interpretation in the meaning of ‘īsmah, as a solution for the happening problematic crisis of human values. For al-Ṭabaṭabā’i, ‘īsmah is not only a blessing from Allah swt, but also an accomplishment or an achievement of one’s endeavor, utilizing one’s knowledge, in determining a preference and preventing someone from the behavior that does not match with human values. Society’s trust toward the figure of a leader, for instance, is gradually eradicaded. Many leaders nowadays are failed to implement religious teachings, let alone showing exemplary to the people. As a result, they cannot guide the society. The situation is worsened by the condition of ummah these days who tend to disobey religion’s rules, that cause human values slowly disappear. The fundamental thing in a relationship of a human and his spirituality, according to al-Ṭabaṭabā’i, is religious teaching or guidance. He expresses:

“That religious teaching--fundamental belief, moral sanction, and its practice--has powerful relation with human’s soul, thus, solidifying knowledge and strong quality which in turn will create sturdy characteristic and ability. This knowledge and characteristic give distinguished identity to human’s soul which determine his way toward either happiness or destruction, as well as intimacy or distance with Allah swt. Those having straight and true belief will behave correctly, gain perfection which bring them closer to Allah and His ridha (acceptance), as well as grant them with heaven. Otherwise, if they commit sinful behavior and have false belief, his soul (spirit) will get a bad image. They have no other purpose than this worldly life and everything inside it; as a result, when they leave this world, they will live in hell and destruction. This human journey–either to heaven or hell–is not something limited
inside human’s mind. It is a fact or a reality, instead of only exist in human’s imagination.”

Even though al-Ṭabāṭabā’i’s perspective on the concept of ‘īsmah al-aimmah is inseparable from his mazḥab doctrine, his interpretation of ‘īsmah is a fundamental thing that should be paid attention to as a response on globalized dehumanization. That knowledge can influence someone to act in accordance with the humanity is what al-Ṭabāṭabā’i tried to convey. This is evident from what is stated by al-Ṭabāṭabā’i on the aforementioned ‘īsmah concept as an attempt or ikhtiyār to humanize human. Hence, ‘īsmah is not merely protected from disobedience toward God, but also protected from defiance toward the humanity. It is not only protecting oneself by being self-righteous (taqwâ), but also improving social-piety. Hence, in the current context, ‘īsmah is interpreted not only as guarding oneself from committing sins, but also from harming human values.

Conclusion

‘īsmah al-Aimmah is one of doctrines triggering controversy among the three Shia communities. Shia Imamîyah Ithnâ Ashariyah and Ismâ’iliyah agree that ‘īsmah is as one of main criteria that must be owned by their imams. Meanwhile, Shia Zaidiyah does not require the character, unless for the first three imams, namely Ali, Ḥasan and Ḥusain. Some of them even add the Prophet PBUH and Fâtimah (as) in the category.

As one of ulama with the ideology of Shia Ithnâ Ashariyah, al-Ṭabāṭabā’i has his own opinion which is not that different from his mazḥab doctrine. His thinking construction in interpreting ‘īsmah does not only adopt his mazḥab doctrine. He also reactualizes the concept using social and psychology approaches. His reactualization effort proves that there is a relation between ‘īsmah and human values. All this time, the ‘īsmah concept is only around the cycle of theological debate among ulamas. Al-Ṭabāṭabā’i, even though he must be affected by his mazḥab doctrine, tried further to observe the relevance of ‘īsmah in the context of the downturn of human values, as well as the urgency of ‘īsmah as a solution to get out of the downturn.
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