

The Criteria for Extremism (*Ghuluww*) in the thought of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq

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ABSTRACT

A major topic of theological debate in Iran today, owing to the influence of some Western thinkers, is the desacralisation of the world and of religion. One of the main areas on which proponents of desacralisation have focused is the status of the Imam. Some authors have claimed that Shīʿī scholars from the early centuries, including Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, did not recognise any superhuman attributes for the Imams and that they and other classical scholars reduced the Imamate of the Prophet's Household to that of "pious scholars" (*ulamā' abrār*). Some also assert that those figures who opposed this view were accused of being extremists (*ghulāt*) and expelled from the Shīʿī mainstream.

This article will endeavour to examine the description that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq presents of the *ghulāt* in his writings in order to identify the boundaries of Shīʿī extremism in his thought, and show, contrary to the claims of these authors, that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, while believing in the possibility of the Prophet experiencing a lapse in his prayers (*sahw al-nabī*), nevertheless affirmed superhuman qualities for both him and his Household and held them as a matter of religious belief.

KEYWORDS: Imam, *ghuluww*, extremism, *taqṣīr*, shortcoming,

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'ulamā' abrār, theory of the Twelve Imams as pious scholars.

Introduction

Within Islamic theology, the issue of the Imamate represents the dividing line between Shī'ism and Sunnism. Believing or not believing that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was the immediate successor to the Prophet of Islam and that this line of succession continued amongst his children, is the fundamental difference between Shī'ī and Sunnī Islam. Within Shī'ī Islam, the Imamate is also the axis around which sects and offshoots have historically formed, as it was usually due to disagreements about succession to the Imamate that led to splits within the faith. Looking through the catalogue of various Shī'ī sects, such as the Zaydiyya, Ismā'īliyya, Faḥḥiyya, and Kaysāniyya, one sees that all of these came into being as a result of debates about the rightful successor to the previous Imam.

Another issue of theological debates within Shī'ism was the position of the Imams and the station of the Ahl al-Bayt, which also gave rise to different sects. The *ghulāt* (extremist) sect is one such sect. The *ghulāt* were cursed and repudiated by the Infallible Imams, and the Imams explicitly and roundly criticised their doctrinal and practical stances. This, in turn, led Shī'ī scholars and jurists to become deeply concerned with the issue of *ghuluww* and to pay considerable attention to it, in both theory and practice, and to attempt to delineate the precise boundaries between Twelver Shī'ism and *ghuluww*.

However, efforts by scholars to provide a precise demarcation of *ghuluww* and the explicit condemnation of the *ghulāt* as having gone astray by the Imams led to the formation of extreme positions in relation to this issue. On the one hand, some scholars were so averse to *ghuluww* that they went to the opposite extreme of *taqṣīr* (shortcoming) with regards to the rights of the Prophet's Household. This meant that they saw no distinction between the Imams and the Prophet and ordinary human beings, and denied that the Imams possessed any superhuman

status or knowledge. On the other hand, there were those who sought to elevate the status of the Infallibles and, as a result, fell into heresy and disbelief by ascribing the qualities of divinity or creatorship to them. Meanwhile, moderate scholars followed the divine ordinance found in the verse, “We have made you a middle nation”³ and avoided both of these extremes, neither diminishing the status of the Imams by falling into *taqṣīr*, nor by assigning divinity to them. In this way, they respected the rights of both the Creator and His creatures.

One of the reasons why the discussion of *ghuluww* has again become relevant today in Islamic theological discourse is the penetration of Western ideas into Islamic nations and societies. Christian theology emerged in response to the internal contradictions and deviations⁴ that emerged within Christianity. However, some Muslim authors borrowed ideas from Christian theology and, in doing so, introduced the same theological contradictions into Islamic theology.⁵ Desacralisation is an integral part of human society and secular man in the contemporary era. Modern man sees everything as terrestrial and does not recognise anything as being sacred. This is to the extent that modern man even desacralises religion and God. The only thing treated as sacred is the human being and their absolute freedom, which neither religion nor God has the right to circumscribe. This idea is so deeply rooted in the

³ Q 2:143.

⁴ For example, the corruption of the text of the Bible, doctrines such as the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, Original Sin, and God being “three persons in one”.

⁵ For example, theories such as religious experience, religious language, hermeneutics, and fideism were developed in response to challenges faced by Christian theology, and some Muslim writers adopted these theories to solve problems they perceived in Islamic thought. The Bible – in both its Old and New Testaments – faces serious questions of authenticity, and no one can claim that these texts are divine revelation or the direct word of God. Discussions about religious language and hermeneutics arose in Christianity in response to the problems of these texts. Today, some Muslim authors use the same theories and ideas in relation to the Qur’an, while the Qur’an is the direct word of God and the eternal miracle of the Prophet.

minds of some Muslim authors that they have, following the Western model, also sought to desacralise Islam and religion. Some openly reject God and religion, while some outwardly accept religion while in reality undermining it.

One of the key issues onto which such authors have sought to turn the lens of desacralisation is that of the status of the Imams. They try to deny any divine or sacred status for the Imams by making the position of the Imams purely terrestrial. The most they are prepared to affirm about the status of the Imams is that they were “pious scholars,”⁶ meaning that they did not possess any special qualities such as divinely granted knowledge (*‘ilm ladunnī*), infallibility (*‘iṣma*), divine appointment, or acting as an intermediary for the outpouring of divine grace from the Creator to His creation.

On the contrary, they were merely scholars who were learned in the teachings of the religion and who practiced its ordinances. Aside from this, they had no special qualities to separate them from other people. Hossein Modarressi in his *Crisis and Consolidation* and Mohsen Kadivar in his articles and lectures have argued that the mainstream understanding of Shī‘ī scholars from the first half of the 3rd/9th century until the middle of the 5th/11th century was that the Imams possessed no superhuman qualities, meaning first-rate Shī‘ī scholars of these early centuries did not believe that the Imams were appointed by God, nor that they had any special knowledge or infallibility. Instead, these authors argue that these doctrines about the Imams were considered a form of extremism (*ghuluww*) by the leading scholars of these centuries, and that this only changed in subsequent centuries.

In this regard, Hossein Modarressi writes that: “The scholars of Qum began to declare anyone who attributed any sign of super-humanity to the Prophet or the Imams as an extremist and to expel such people from their town,”⁷ and: “The scholars of Qum, who were the highest

⁶ *‘Ulamā’ abrār*, see Kadivar, 1385; Modarressi, 1389, pp. 73, 87.

⁷ Modarressi, 83.

authority of religious knowledge in this period, remained firmly anti-Mufawwiḍa until the end of the fourth/tenth century, opposing and rejecting any idea that attributed any supernatural quality to the Prophet and the Imams” (ibid., 94). He also cites the opinion of Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī, saying: “Unlike what the extremists suggested, the Imams were merely prominent pious scholars of the *sharīʿa*. They did not possess the knowledge of the unseen ...”⁸

In this regard, Kadivar also writes: “The scholars of Qum rejected the attribution of superhuman characteristics to the Imams and asserted that the Imams were ordinary human beings. For the space of two centuries, these scholars were recognised as the official representatives of the Shīʿī community. According to al-Māmaqānī’s investigations, beliefs about the Imams which they considered to be manifestations of extremism (*ghuluww*) are today essential components of the Shīʿī school of thought;”⁹ “The fact that they labelled those who denied the possibility of the prophets and Imams experiencing lapses of concentration in their prayers (*sahw*) as extremists shows that they saw [the Prophet and Imams] as ordinary human beings.

The scholars of Qum without any doubt denied any superhuman attributes for the Imams. At the same time, there is not the slightest doubt that they were strict adherents of the teachings of the Imams in all matters of religion;”¹⁰ “During these two centuries, the dominant theology (from the second half of the third/ninth century until the end of the fourth/tenth) and the theology they propounded (in the early fifth/eleventh century) in the Shīʿī community was that the Imams were human beings with human qualities. They did not consider divinely endowed knowledge, infallibility, or explicit divine appointment (as opposed to the appointment of the Prophet or previous Imam) to be necessary qualities for the Imams. In fact, such doctrines were

⁸ Ibid., 227.

⁹ Kadivar, 1385.

¹⁰ Ibid.

considered to be signs of extremism and were repudiated by Shīʿī scholars.”¹¹

These authors cite a number of Shīʿī scholars, in addition to a selection of traditions and verses from the Qurʾan, to show that the Imams did not enjoy any superhuman powers or status, for example: “I have no control over any benefit for myself nor [over] any harm except what God may wish. Had I known the Unseen, I would have acquired much good, and no ill would have befallen me. I am only a warner and a bearer of good news to a people who have faith.”¹² They say that this verse negates any knowledge of the unseen or any divinely granted knowledge.

They also cite some traditions and statements of scholars from the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries to argue that the Imams did not enjoy any special status beyond that of ordinary people. One of the main figures cited by these authors in support of their views is Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and his teacher Ibn al-Walīd.¹³ In his *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq transmits a tradition that appears to allow for the Prophet to experience lapses of concentration in prayer (*sahw*). After quoting the ḥadīth, he quotes his teacher Ibn al-Walīd saying that “the first step of *ghuluww* is to deny that the Prophet could experience lapses in prayer (*sahw al-nabī*).”

Therefore, according to Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and his teacher, if anyone claimed that the Prophet could not make mistakes in prayer, then that person was deemed an extremist. These authors cite this tradition and al-Ṣadūq’s explanation of it as evidence for the fact that is possible for the Prophet to forget something or experience a lapse of concentration, which also entails the negation of any special status or superhuman abilities belonging to the Imams or even the Prophet. In other words, according to these authors, the three Imamological doctrines of divine

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Q 7:188.

¹³ Kadivar, 1385; Modarressi, 1389.

appointment, divine knowledge, and infallibility were, in fact, traits of Shī'ī extremists in an earlier period and these extremists have somehow insinuated these beliefs into mainstream Shī'ī teaching.¹⁴ However, according to the “moderate” understanding of Shī'ism that these authors propose, the Imams themselves did not lay claim to these three qualities.

In this article, having cited Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's views on the extremists and looking at his explanation of this, we will show that even though Shaykh al-Ṣadūq believed in the possibility of the Prophet experiencing lapses of concentration in prayer, he also believed in the Imams' infallibility, that they were the reason for the creation of the cosmos, and that they had divinely endowed knowledge, which entails him believing that they enjoyed a station above that of ordinary human beings.

The attributes of Shī'ī extremists (*ghulāt*) in the discourse of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq

In his written works, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq identifies a number of features of Shī'ī extremists. A cursory examination of his discussion of these extremists reveals that the *ghulāt* were not a single group with a unified set of beliefs, but theirs were actually a spectrum of beliefs that included both extreme and moderate doctrines. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq quotes his teacher Ibn al-Walīd saying: “Our teacher Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Walīd believed that the first step of *ghuluww* is to deny that the Prophet could experience lapses in prayer.”¹⁵

However, when we consider that he considers the first, and hence least, step in extremism to be to deny that the Prophet could experience lapses of concentration in prayer, this actually shows that there is a spectrum of belief within *ghuluww*, and the least extreme level of belief within that spectrum is denying these lapses of concentration for the

¹⁴ Modarressi, 59, 70, 80, 100; Kadivar, 1385.

¹⁵ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 1, p. 360.

Prophet. This is something al-Şadūq also calls attention to in his *Kamāl al-dīn*.¹⁶

Therefore, the doctrines that al-Şadūq attributes to Shī‘ī extremists does not mean that someone needed to hold all of these at the same time in order to be considered an extremist. On the contrary, the presence of any one of these beliefs was enough for him to be accused of *ghuluww*.

It is necessary to mention that, in order to be aware of the doctrines of the *ghulāt*, in addition to the account given by al-Şadūq, we can also look at the appearance of the narrations he quotes from them in his works. After all, if he quotes narrations from them, especially in his *Man lā yaḥduruh al-faqīh*, this shows that their opinion is in accordance with the text of the tradition.

1. Believing in the divine lordship (*rubūbiyya*) of the Prophet’s Household

Perhaps the most extreme group of *ghulāt* was those who ascribed divine lordship (*rubūbiyya*) to the Imams. Because they had seen the Infallibles perform miracles, they wrongly believed that if someone performed a miracle, this made them a deity in their own right. There were a group of *ghulāt* who believed this in the time of the Commander of the Faithful, who were put to death by him.¹⁷

Shaykh al-Şadūq says: “The *ghulāt*, may God curse them, say that if ‘Alī was not God, he would not have punished them [who professed his divinity] with fire. The response to these individuals is that if ‘Alī was God, he would not have needed to dig fire pits and load them with fuel in order to punish them. The Commander of the Faithful only meted out this punishment to them because they asserted his divine lordship (*rubūbiyya*).”¹⁸

It is clear that ‘Alī punished this group because they claimed he was

¹⁶ Şadūq, 1395, v. 1, p. 82.

¹⁷ Ibn Ḥayyūn, 1385, v. 1, pp. 48-9.

¹⁸ Şadūq, 1378, v. 3, p. 150.

God and would not desist from making this claim. The fact that this group of *ghulāt* have gone beyond the pale of Islam is self-evident, and it is for this reason that the Commander of the Faithful put them to death.

In his *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, al-Ṣadūq transmits a lengthy narration in which the opponents of the Prophet’s Household fabricate extremist narrations and attribute them to the Shī‘a in order to convince the opponents of the Shī‘a to deem them disbelievers: “Then he said: ‘O Ibn Abī Maḥmūd! Our enemies fabricate three types of tradition with regard to our merits: first, extremism (*ghuluww*); second, falling short with regards to our due; and third, proclaiming the misdeeds of our adversaries and condemning them. When people hear the extremist reports, they declare the Shī‘a to be disbelievers and say: “The Shī‘a believe that their Imams are lords beside God.””¹⁹

This tradition shows that believing that the Prophet’s Household are deities is an example of *ghuluww* and that the enemies of the Shī‘a fabricated extremist traditions to this effect so that they could present the Shī‘a as disbelievers and claim they believed in the lordship of the Prophet’s Household.

Another tradition which shows that one of the groups of the *ghulāt* are those who believe in the lordship of the Prophet’s Household is found in al-Ṣadūq’s *Khiṣāl*.²⁰ According to this tradition, Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “Beware of going to extremes with regards to us. About us, say: ‘They are God’s devoted servants’; beyond that, say whatever you please about us.”²¹

This tradition also shows that asserting the lordship of the Prophet’s Household is a doctrine of the *ghulāt*. On the other hand, it also explains the true merits of the Prophet’s Household: in short, those attributes which are exclusive to God must be negated from them, but

¹⁹ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 1, p. 304.

²⁰ See: v. 2, p. 614.

²¹ Ṣadūq, 1414, p. 101.

everything else is acceptable beyond that. Therefore, every quality or feat that implies the Imams are lords besides God must be denied, but, at the same time, miracles and superhuman abilities, such as divinely endowed knowledge, infallibility, divine appointment, and their being the purpose for which God created the cosmos, can be affirmed for them.

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq rejects *ghuluww* with the following statement: “Our belief with regard to the *ghulāt* and the *mufawwiḍa* (delegationists) is that they disbelieve in God, and that they are worse than the Jews, the Christians, the Magians, the Qadariyya, the Ḥarūriyya,²² and all of the other innovators in religion.”²³

Insofar as, after rejecting *ghuluww*, he adduces a verse concerning the beliefs of the Christians with regards to the godhood and lordship of Jesus Christ, it seems clear that the meaning of *ghuluww* that he rejects here is believing in the lordship of the Prophet’s Household.

2. Believing in divine delegation (*tafwīd*)

In some passages of his writings, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq connects the *mufawwiḍa* (delegationists) with the *ghulāt* (extremists), in a way that seems to suggest he believes them to fall within the same category and that the *mufawwiḍa* are a group within the *ghulāt*.

They say: “The mark of the *mufawwiḍa* and the *ghulāt* and the like thereof is that they accuse the scholars of Qom of falling short (*taqṣīr*) [with regards to the Imams].”²⁴ In this passage, al-Ṣadūq identifies those who accuse the scholars of Qom of falling short as the *ghulāt* and *mufawwiḍa*. *Ghuluww* and *taqṣīr* represent two opposite extremes of the spectrum of belief about the Imams.

The contrast between the two is patent, and it is clear why al-Ṣadūq labels those who accuse the scholars of Qom of *taqṣīr* as *ghulāt*.

²² One of the branches of the Khawārij.

²³ Ibid., 97.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

However, it is not correct to label them as *mufawwiḍa*, because there is less of a connection between *tafwīḍ* and *taqṣīr*. *Tafwīḍ* (delegationism) means that God has entrusted creation to the Imams. However, this belief is not the opposite of *taqṣīr*, unless we consider the *ghulāt* and the *mufawwiḍa* to be one and the same, in which case al-Ṣadūq mentions them side-by-side as two names for the same tendency. This might be the case, because on a number of occasions, al-Ṣadūq explains the doctrines of the *ghulāt* while also referring to them as *mufawwiḍa*.²⁵

If this is the case, then the idea that God delegated some of His functions to the Prophet and Imams is also *ghuluww*, and the *mufawwiḍa* are part of the *ghulāt*. It is also clear that what is meant by the *mufawwiḍa* here is not the Mu‘tazilīs, as they believed that in order for there to be free will, and therefore punishments and rewards for human behaviour, this necessitated the denial of the unity of divine acts (*tawḥīd al-aḥḍāṯ*) and the “delegation” of the power to create actions to human beings, which is why they were also called “delegationists” (*mufawwiḍa*). However, *tafwīḍ* within the context of Shī‘ism means the delegation of certain divine acts to the Prophet’s Household.

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates the following tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq in refutation of the *mufawwiḍa*:

It is narrated from Zurāra: “I said to Imam al-Ṣādiq: ‘One of the children of ‘Abdullāh b. Saba’ professes a belief in delegation (*tafwīḍ*).’ He said: ‘What is *tafwīḍ*?’ I said: ‘They say that God created the Prophet and ‘Alī, then He delegated the affairs of creation to them; they create, they distribute provision, they give life, and they cause death.’ The Imam said: ‘The enemy of God lies! If you see him, recite the verse of *Sūrat al-Ra‘d* to him ...’ So I went to him and I told him what Imam al-Ṣādiq had said. It was as if he’d been struck dumb or turned to stone!”²⁶

After quoting this tradition, al-Ṣadūq writes: “God delegated the matter

²⁵ See Ṣadūq, 1362, v. 2, p. 529; idem, 1385, v. 1, p. 227; idem, 1378, p. 203.

²⁶ Ṣadūq, 1414, p. 100.

of His religion to the Prophet when he said: ‘Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatever he forbids to you, abstain from it.’ This was also delegated to the Imams.”

Looking at the tradition and al-Ṣadūq’s remarks following it, it is clear that believing in the delegation of things such as creation, life and death, and provision to the Imams is also one of the doctrines of the *ghulāt*. He goes on to say that God has entrusted matters of His religion to the Prophet and Imams. However, by saying this, he has still asserted for them a superhuman status that goes beyond the position of mere “pious scholars”.

3. The belief in the immortality of the Prophet’s Household

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates a report to the effect that believing that the Prophet’s Household have not been killed but continue to live is also a teaching of the *ghulāt*. In his *Khiṣāl*, after narrating a tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq, he writes:

The eleven Imams who followed the Prophet were all slain; some were slain by the sword, like the Commander of the Faithful and Imam al-Ḥusayn, while the rest were slain by poison. This is what truly happened to them and not as the *ghulāt* and *mufawwiḍa* claim - may God curse them - that they were not really killed, but that it was only made to seem that way to the people.²⁷

Therefore, according to Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, another doctrine of the *ghulāt* is the belief that the Prophet’s Household were not slain. This group of the *ghulāt* believed that the martyrdom of the Imams occurred in a manner similar to the ascent of Jesus, about whom God says in *Sūrat al-Nisā’*: “and for their saying, ‘We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the apostle of God’ though they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them” (Q 4:157).

Therefore, just as Jesus Christ was not actually crucified and it only seemed that way to ordinary people, this group of the *ghulāt* likewise

²⁷ Ṣadūq, 1362, v. 2, p. 528.

believe that the Imams were never slain, but rather ordinary people and the Shī‘a were merely made to believe that this was the case, when in reality the Imams lived on.

Concerning this belief, Ṣadūq says elsewhere: “Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-‘Askarī was killed by [the ‘Abbāsīd caliph] al-Mu‘tamīd with poison; we believe that this is what actually happened and not merely how it was made to appear to people, which is what those who go beyond the bounds concerning the Prophet’s Household have professed.”²⁸

Based on the explanation he gave in his *Khiṣāl*, it is clear that by “those who go beyond the bounds concerning the Prophet’s Household,” he intended to refer to the *ghulāt*.

In *Kamāl al-dīn*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq also refers to the belief in the fact that members of Prophet’s Household did not die as being a key doctrine of the *ghulāt*: “Some claimed that the Imams were not killed but were like Jesus, where it was made to appear to people [that he had died]; but this is not correct and the fate of the Imams is not like that of Jesus. This belief - that they were not killed but that it was only made to appear so to the people - is only proclaimed by a group of the *ghulāt*.”²⁹

This expression simultaneously denies that the Imams were not martyred but still living and ascribes this doctrine to the *ghulāt*. This, in turn, shows that the *ghulāt* did not possess a single, coherent belief system, but rather a spectrum of beliefs about the Imams, and that just one group of *ghulāt* actually held this particular belief.

In *Ilal al-sharā‘i‘*, there is also a tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq that attributes the belief that Imam al-Ḥusayn was still alive to the *ghulāt*: “Whoever believes that Ḥusayn was not killed has denied the Prophet, Imam ‘Alī, and all of the Imams who came after him ... may God curse the *ghulāt* and the *mufawwiḍa* ... Those sinners think little of God, and have disbelieved in and associated partners with Him and gone astray in order to avoid performing their religious duties or delivering their

²⁸ Ṣadūq, 1414, p. 99.

²⁹ Ṣadūq, 1395, v. 1, p. 82.

dues.”³⁰

This tradition also shows that some of the *ghulāt* believed that the Imams still lived, particularly Imam al-Ḥusayn. The rest of the tradition shows that another feature of the *ghulāt* was their failure to perform their religious duties or observe the outward rites of the religion - a topic that we will return to.

4. The Prophet experiencing lapses in prayer (*sahw al-nabī*)

One of the issues that is discussed in relation to prophethood and imamate is the infallibility (*iṣma*) of the prophets and Imams.

Sunnī Muslims only discuss infallibility in relation to the prophets, while Shī‘a Muslims believe that the same rule applies to both prophets and Imams with regards to infallibility.

There are three levels of infallibility for prophets: infallibility with regard to committing sins, infallibility in receiving and conveying revelation from God, and infallibility from committing errors or experiencing lapses. There is disagreement amongst theologians about the extent of prophetic infallibility.

The Imāmī Shī‘a say that the Prophet and the Imams are completely infallible with regards to sins.³¹ On the other hand, Sunnī theologians disagree about this. All Sunnī and Shī‘ī theologians agree that the prophets are infallible with regards to transmitting the revelation.³²

However, some Sunnī scholars believe that the Prophet was capable of making mistakes or experiencing lapses of concentration.³³

Some Shī‘ī scholars also admit the possibility of the Prophet experiencing a lapse of concentration and, by extension, that of the

³⁰ Ṣadūq, 1385, v. 1, p. 227.

³¹ Sobhani, 1412, v. 3, p. 166.

³² Ibid., v. 3, p. 183.

³³ Ibid., 3, p. 200.

Imams doing so as well.³⁴ However, the majority of Shī'ī scholars³⁵ have said that it is impossible for the Prophet or Imams to experience lapses in concentration as the evidence for the infallibility of the prophets and Imams also covers cases of errors and slips in both matters of religion and everyday life.³⁶

Therefore, the majority of authoritative Shī'ī scholars, just as they say the Prophet is infallible in receiving and conveying divine revelation, also believe that he is protected from lapses, errors, and forgetfulness in everyday affairs.

The term “lapse of the Prophet” (*sahw al-nabī*), while linguistically including both lapses of concentration and errors in receiving and conveying the revelation, as a technical term amongst theologians only applies to lapses and errors in acts of worship and every day or personal matters. Therefore, the evidence presented by those who propound the doctrine of *sahw al-nabī* does not pertain to the Prophet receiving and conveying divine revelation. On the contrary, these pieces of evidence only pertain to acts of worship and every day or personal activities.

Therefore, believing in *sahw al-nabī* does not entail the negation of infallibility when it comes to revelation. *Sahw al-nabī* means that the Prophet and Imams, in everyday and personal matters, like other people, can experience lapses of concentration, make mistakes, or forget. Therefore, they can also experience doubt (*shakk*) when performing acts of worship and forget everyday things, and they are not protected from error when it comes to applying what they know in the real world.

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq follows his teacher Ibn al-Walīd in asserting the doctrine of *sahw al-nabī*, and one of the beliefs he identifies as the earliest steps into *ghuluww* is the denial of *sahw al-nabī*. In his *Man lā yahḍuruh al-faqīh*, al-Ṣadūq transmits a narration from Imam al-Ṣādiq

³⁴ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 1, p. 360; Sobhani, 1412, v. 3, p. 204 citing al-Ṭabrisī, 1372, v. 7, p. 317.

³⁵ Sobhani, 1412, v. 3, pp. 200-1.

³⁶ Ibid., v. 3, pp. 192-7.

which assumes that the Prophet was vulnerable to lapses:

Sa'īd al-A'raj says: "I heard Imam al-Ṣādiq say: 'God caused His Messenger to sleep from the beginning of the time for morning prayers until the sun had risen.' Then the Prophet awoke and performed the two units of prayer that were for before *fajr* prayers - the supererogatory prayers for morning prayers - and then performed his morning prayers. God caused His Prophet to make a mistake ... God did this to His Prophet as a mercy to this nation, so that if a Muslim slept through morning prayers or experienced a lapse of concentration in their prayer, they would say that this had even happened to the Prophet."³⁷

Al-Ṣadūq narrates the same tradition in *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* to demonstrate that the Prophet experienced lapses of concentration.

Abū l-Ṣalt says: "I told Imam al-Riḍā: 'There are people in Kufa who believe that the Prophet did not experience lapses in his prayer.' He responded: 'They lie, may God curse them! Only God does not experience lapses.'"³⁸

Here, al-Ṣadūq quotes his teacher Ibn al-Walīd again.

These two narrations from Imam al-Ṣādiq and Imam al-Riḍā convey not only the possibility but the actual occurrence of lapses in concentration for the Prophet in his prayer. Some scholars have questioned the strength of the chain of narrators for these traditions.³⁹

Other scholars have also raised questions about the validity of the meaning of these traditions, arguing that admitting that prophets could experience slips in their prayers would necessarily entail their experiencing slips in conveying the revelation from God to mankind. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq⁴⁰ and Shaykh al-Ṭabrisī⁴¹ respond to this objection

³⁷ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 1, pp. 358–60.

³⁸ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 2, p. 203.

³⁹ Sobhani, 1412, v. 3, p. 205; Shaykh Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d., 26-44.

⁴⁰ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 1, p. 360.

⁴¹ Ṭabrisī, 1372.

by saying that if such a slip occurred through Satan's interference or the forgetfulness of the Prophet, then this could impair the Prophet's infallibility.

However, if this slip occurred because God caused it, then this does not present any problems for the Prophet's infallibility, as this slip was caused by God in order to make the lives of His servants easier, so that they would remember that the Prophet was a mere servant of God and not God Himself.

On the other hand, when it comes to receiving and conveying the revelation, God would not allow the Prophet to err. However, this response has not been universally accepted by Shī'ī scholars, many of whom do not admit that such a distinction can be made between the two categories.⁴² In any case, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and his teacher Ibn al-Walīd, and the scholars of Qom in general, believed in *sahw al-nabī* and believed that anyone who denied it was one of the *ghulāt*.

Believing that the Prophet could experience slips in prayer was a key component of the doctrine of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, his teacher Ibn al-Walīd, and the scholars of Qom in general. However, it should be noted that, contrary to the interpretation that some contemporary authors have developed of the stance of these scholars, belief in *sahw al-nabī* does not in any sense imply a denial of the special status of the Prophet and Imams or of their superhuman status. It is possible that someone could believe in *sahw al-nabī* while still maintaining that the Prophet and Imams enjoy a special status above that of ordinary human beings that endowed them with God-given knowledge, infallibility, divine appointment, and the ability to perform miracles and supernatural feats. It must be said that while believing in *sahw al-nabī* might involve negating one superhuman quality from the Prophet and Imams, it does not entail the negation of all superhuman qualities from them.

A general survey of the traditions that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq has narrated about the status of the Imams and an examination of his summary of

⁴² Sobhani, 1412, pp. 205-6.

Imāmī doctrine, the *I'tiqādāt*, shows that he believed in the Imams having a God-given status that is incompatible with the view advanced by some contemporary authors of them being mere “pious scholars” (*‘ulamā’ abrār*), as we shall see when we look at some of the stations and ranks that al-Ṣadūq assigns to the Prophet and Imams.

5. Foregoing prayers and acts of worship

This and the following section can be seen as detailing the practical doctrines of the *ghulāt*, as antinomianism and claiming knowledge of alchemy are not beliefs that are unique to the *ghulāt*. For example, the Murji’a did not consider action to be a requirement of faith (*īmān*), nor did they see sinning or the failure to perform religious duties as an impairment thereof. Therefore, they did not even consider one who committed major sins to be a sinner (*fāsiq*).⁴³ By contrast, the previous doctrines outlined were more-or-less unique to the *ghulāt*.

Another feature that marked out the *ghulāt* as a group according to Shaykh al-Ṣadūq was their lack of concern with and abandonment of acts of worship and other religious and monetary obligations. In his *I'tiqādāt*, he wrote: “One of the marks of the Ḥallājiyya sect of the *ghulāt* is their claim to be concerned entirely with worship, while also believing in forsaking prayer and all other religious duties.”⁴⁴

Therefore, foregoing religious duties was considered to be one of the most important features of the *ghulāt*. The passage from *Ilal al-sharā’i’* quoted earlier (v. 1, p. 227) also explicitly calls attention to their lack of concern for religious laws and customs.

However, the mere fact that someone foregoes religious obligations does not necessarily mean that they are an extremist in their beliefs, as a believer could also shirk his duties without necessarily adopting any doctrines associated with the *ghulāt*. It seems that the meaning of showing a lack of concern for religious obligations here is not merely

⁴³ Sobhani, n.d., v. 9, p. 73.

⁴⁴ Ṣadūq, 1414, p. 101.

failing to perform religious duties, but rather a lack of belief in religious duties as duties. What seems to confirm this hypothesis is Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's remark, "while also believing in forsaking prayer and all other religious duties" which shows that they did not only forsake religious duties, they believed that it was right to do so.

6. Claiming knowledge of alchemy

In his *I'tiqādāt*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says that the *ghulāt* claimed to have knowledge of alchemy: "Another of their marks is their claim to have knowledge of alchemy, even though they know nothing about it, aside from spreading sin, corruption, doubts, and accusations amongst Muslims."⁴⁵ It seems that claims of knowing alchemy had little to do with their actual extremist beliefs. However, some of the *ghulāt* did claim that God had become incarnate within them⁴⁶ and that they could perform miracles and work magic as evidence that they were vessels of the Divine. Hence, perhaps alchemy was one such magical or miraculous act that they would perform to support their claims.

The superhuman status and attributes of the Prophet and the Imams according to Shaykh al-Ṣadūq

When we speak about "superhuman status and attributes" we mean those qualities with which God has singled out the Prophet's Household above the rest of mankind and which no other human being could acquire no matter how hard they strived.

No human being is superior to another, except by virtue of their piety and good deeds. Ordinary people can, through their own striving and good works, attain spiritual ranks, gain proximity to God, and be admitted to "those brought near" (*al-muqarrabūn*). However, being able to attain these spiritual ranks is, first of all, open to everyone who walks the path of divine servanthood and, second, something that a

⁴⁵ Ṣadūq, 1414, p. 101.

⁴⁶ See al-Shahrastānī, 1364, v. 1, p. 123.

person reaches through their own efforts.

By contrast, when we speak about superhuman status, we are referring to something which, first of all, is not open to everyone, but is only granted to the Prophet's Household and some of the prophets; second, something that cannot be obtained through a person's deeds or practice. On the contrary, it is God, through His infinite knowledge, who chooses upon whom to bestow these spiritual ranks;⁴⁷ third, these stations were given to the Prophet's Household from the moment of their creation.

Those theologians and authors who deny superhuman attributes to the Prophet's Household are mostly referring to three particular attributes: being appointed by God, having God-given knowledge, and being infallible. These three attributes clearly fall within the realm of superhuman characteristics because, firstly, they are not open to everyone; second, they cannot be obtained but must be granted; and thirdly, they were given to the Prophet's Household from the moment of their creation.⁴⁸

While Shaykh al-Ṣadūq believed that the Prophet could experience lapses in his prayer, he also believed that the Prophet's Household were infallible and did not err or experience lapses other than those willed by God and affirmed other attributes for them that fall into the category of superhuman qualities that could not be possessed by ordinary people.

1. The superiority of the Imams over the highest angels

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq quotes the Prophet saying: "I am superior to the angels

⁴⁷ As we read in *Ziyārat al-Jāmi'a*: "He chose you on account of His knowledge, approved of you for His knowledge of the unseen, selected you to keep His secret, decided on you by means of His omnipotence, equipped you with His guidance, distinguished you with His clear proofs, chose you for His light, supported you with His Holy Spirit, and accepted you as vicegerents upon His earth, and decisive authorities over His creatures ... God protected you against slips, and secured you against sedition, and removed from you all uncleanness, and purified you with a thorough purifying."

⁴⁸ Ibn Abī Jūmhūr, 1405, v. 3, p. 121.

Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, and to all of God's nearest angels and the bearers of the Throne; I am the best of all creatures; I am the best descendant of Adam."⁴⁹

According to this tradition, the Prophet of Islam - and by extension the Imams who are his successors - is superior to all of the angels, even the angels near-most to God like Gabriel and Michael. In *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*, God describes the angels as follows: "Rather they are honoured servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command."⁵⁰

According to God, the angels are beings of pure obedience to His commands. Therefore, based on this verse and the aforementioned tradition it is possible to deduce that they are infallible beings. Angels are protected from error and never do anything to contravene God's commandments. Now, if the Prophet is superior to all the angels, even the angels nearest to God, then it follows logically that he likewise never disobeys God's commands and is protected from sinning or falling into error. The tradition narrated in the *'Awālī* also confirms that this infallibility is not something an ordinary person can acquire through their efforts, as the Prophet says: "When Adam was between water and clay, I was already a prophet."

2. The Prophet is the best of all creatures

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq writes: "It is obligatory for us to believe that there is no creature superior to Muḥammad or his Household; they are the most beloved of creatures to God and the most noble of them. When God took a pledge from the prophets and made them witnesses over themselves, the first person to respond to God's call was Muḥammad, and God made him His Prophet to the other prophets in the realm of pre-existence (*'ālam al-dharr*)."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ṣadūq, 1414, 90.

⁵⁰ Q 21:26-7.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 93.

3. The angels bowed down to Adam because of the existence of the light of the Prophet's Household in his loins

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says in his *I'tiqādāt*: "When God created Adam, He commanded the angels to bow down to him. This command to prostrate must be because of something superior to the angels. The prostration of the angels for God is an act of worship and obedience, while their prostration to Adam was out of respect and reverence. It was because of the Prophet and his Household that existed in Adam's loins. And He did not tell the angels to bow to anyone unless they were superior to them. Therefore, the prostration of the angels to God is out of worship and servitude, while to Adam it was out of respect, because the Prophet and the Imams - God's blessings be upon them - were in his loins."⁵²

4. The spiritual level of each of the prophets was determined by the extent of their knowledge of the Prophet's Household

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq writes: "Everything that God gave to each of His prophets was commiserate with the extent of their knowledge of our Prophet and the speed with which they had recognised his station [in the world of pre-existence]."⁵³

5. The creation of the cosmos was for the sake of the Prophet's Household

One of the merits that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq transmits about the Prophet's Household was that the entire world was made for their sake. According to him, the heavens and the earth, Adam and Eve, and all of the angels were made for them. This doctrine is irreconcilable with the idea that

⁵² Ibid., 90.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 93.

the Prophet's Household were ordinary human beings no different from anyone else: "God created all of His creations for the sake of the Prophet and his Household. Were it not for them, God would not have created the heavens or the earth, or heaven and hell, or Adam and Eve, or the angels, or anything else."⁵⁴

6. The commands of the Imams are equivalent to the commands of God

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says: "Our belief about them is that they have truly come from God and their speech is God's speech; their commands are God's commands; obedience to them is obedience to God; to disobey them is to disobey God; and they do not say anything that is not from God or His revelation."⁵⁵

7. The Imams are protected from error and sinning

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says in his *I'tiqādāt*: "They are protected from slips and errors."⁵⁶

In *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*⁵⁷ he quotes a lengthy tradition from Imam al-Riḍā concerning the status of the Imams, which affirms many of the attributes and ranks of the Imams, one of which is their infallibility. In addition to affirming their infallibility, this tradition also affirms their possession of exclusively God-given knowledge.

In his *I'tiqādāt* he gives the following explanation of the doctrine of infallibility:

Our belief concerning the prophets, messengers, Imams, and angels is that they are protected from all blemishes and do not commit any sins, whether great or small. They do not disobey God's command and whatever God bids them to do, they do. Someone who denies

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁷ Ṣadūq, 1378, v. 1, p. 221.

any aspect of their infallibility does not know them.⁵⁸

8. Delegation of the affairs of the religion to the Prophet's Household

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says that one of the marks of the *ghulāt* and the *mufawwiḍa* is the belief that God has delegated affairs to the Imams. However, he explained that the kind of delegation that the *ghulāt* believe in is the delegation of the power to create and sustain the cosmos to them. At the same time, he asserts that God has, in fact, delegated the affairs of the religion to the Prophet and Imams. This can be found in the tradition of Zurāra, which we discussed earlier.⁵⁹

9. God-given knowledge (*‘ilm ladunnī*)

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq says the following about the knowledge of the Prophet's Household: "Our belief concerning them is that they are the recipients of God's secret knowledge, the translators of His revelation, and the pillars of His divine unity."⁶⁰

10. Other attributes

In his *I'tiqādāt*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq affirms countless other attributes and ranks for the Prophet's Household, some of which are:

Those endowed with authority; witnesses over mankind; the way that leads to God; the guarantors of safety for the inhabitants of the earth; like Noah's ark; the Qur'an is with them and they are with the Qur'an; they are the intermediaries through which rain is sent down; they are the cause for which calamities are averted and prayers are answered.⁶¹ As is plain to see, these attributes are superhuman in quality and Shaykh

⁵⁸ Ṣadūq, 1414, p. 96.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

⁶¹ Ibid., 94, 121.

al-Ṣadūq shows no hesitation in applying them to the Imams.

Conclusions

Some authors argue that the majority of Shī'ī scholars and religious authorities from the 3rd/9th to 5th/11th centuries denied that the Imams had any superhuman attributes and that those who ascribed such attributes to the Imams were condemned as extremists, or *ghulāt*. One of the main figures they ascribe this outlook to is Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, because Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and his teacher Ibn al-Walīd ascribed to the notion that the Prophet could experience lapses in his prayers and that to deny this was *ghuluww*.

However, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, in both his own words and the traditions that he transmitted, clearly expresses a belief that the Imams enjoyed a special God-given status that was above anything an ordinary human being could attain. The attributes he mentions the Prophet's Household as having - which we have briefly outlined already - clearly show that he thought the status of the Imams was extremely high and hardly compatible with the view that they were mere "pious scholars" as these modern authors assert.

Therefore, to sum up: first of all, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and his teacher Ibn al-Walīd subscribed to the view that the Prophet could experience lapses in prayer (*sahw al-nabī*); second, looking at the attributes that al-Ṣadūq assigned to the Prophet's Household, it is clear that he did not hold the view that they were merely "pious scholars" but, on the contrary, that they were superhuman in their qualities.

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