

The Fundamentals of Shia'ism

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Before we deal with the roots and the articles of faith in detail, we may divide our study of the Shi'a religion according to five principles:

- 1. Knowledge of God.**
- 2. Identification of His Prophet.**
- 3. How to worship.**
- 4. Doing good actions and refraining from bad ones.**
- 5. Belief in ma'ad (the Day of Judgement), and punishment and reward.**

There are two parts to religion -theoretical and practical- or, more precisely, belief or faith in God and the unseen, and daily action based on this belief. Tawhid (monotheism), Prophethood and ma'ad (the Day of Judgement) are the three basic arkan (pillars) of Islam. If anyone denies one of these arkan, he is neither a Muslim nor a believer (mu'min); if he does believe in them he will be counted among the Muslims according to God Almighty (refer to the following words which have been taken from the Quranic text: "He who believes in God, His Prophet and the Day of Judgement"), and shall be entitled to all the rights of the Muslims.

According to the holy verse the Muslim is the "one who believes in God, His Prophet and also performs good actions"; the "iman" (faith) of a Muslim refers to "belief in his heart, verbal acknowledgement and performance of fundamental acts". One may add another "rukn" (pillar) to these three, which is the obligatory acts are of five kinds: (1) salat (prayers), (2) fasting, (3) zakat (generally speaking, the Islamic system of taxation); (4) hajj and (5) jihad (striving or exerting oneself (even to the extent of fighting for Islam).

We may explain the difference between Islam and iman as a matter of degree. This difference is based on the words of God Almighty in the surah "al-Hujurat", "The Arabs say: "We have iman!" Say (to them , O Muhammad): 'You do not have iman; but say "we have accepted Islam (aslana: lit. we have submitted)", for iman has not yet entered your hearts.'" For further elucidation, He says in another verse: "Verily, the believers (mu'minin) are those who accepted faith in God and His Prophet and never after that entertained any doubt; also they performed jihad with their life and wealth in the way of God -they alone are the true believers."

"Iman" thus means the combination of testifying one's belief, and of acting in accordance with it. These are the basic beliefs of all the Muslim. The Shi'as have another "rukn" thus bringing the total to five principles. This fifth pillar is faith in the imamate.

According to the Shi'a point of view, the Imamate, like Prophethood, is divine vicegerency. Just as it is God Almighty Who chose one from amongst His servants for the rank of Prophethood or Messengership, in the same way it is God Who chooses the Imams. God Almighty Himself commanded His Prophet to announce the Imamate (spiritual leadership) of the selected person before his death.

The Prophet, according to divine command, chose a leader for mankind to protect and complete the religious code. The only difference between a Prophet and an Imam is that the Prophet receives "wahy" (revelation) from God, while the Imam, through a special blessing, receives commands from the prophet. So the prophet is the messenger of God and the Imam is the messenger of the Prophet.

The Imamate comprises twelve perfect persons, and every Imam appoints his successor by a specific indication (nass). Like all Prophets, the Imams are also infallible; there is no possibility of their committing any sin. The infallibility of the Imam is clearly proved from what God Almighty says in the holy Quran: "Verily, I make you an Imam for mankind. He (Abraham) said: "And of my offspring?" He said: "My covenant does not reach to the unjust."

Moreover, an Imam is superior to all men in all matters of knowledge and character, since the very purpose of the Imamate is that humanity may be exalted to the highest stage and may be adorned with knowledge and good actions through the imitation of the Imam. What has been said in the Holy Quran about Prophethood (that the Prophets have been sent to people as His signs, to teach them the Book and Wisdom), is equally applicable to an Imam too, because an imperfect person cannot make another person perfect. What can someone give to another, when he does not possess anything himself? A misguided man cannot guide another man.

Judged accordingly, an Imam is a little below the Prophet, but over every human being. Anyone who believes in the Imamate is called, according to the Shi'a terminology, a "mu'min" (a man of faith and trust) in the special sense. Anyone who acknowledges the four fundamentals, which are the centre of faith of all the Muslims, is called a "Muslim" and a "mu'min" in a general sense; as has been said earlier, all Islamic laws apply to him: the protection of his life, property, respect and honour is obligatory. By only refusing to acknowledge the Imamate, a person cannot be excluded from the Islamic fold. Of course, on the Day of Judgement, and in the stages of nearness to God and "karamat" (miraculous signs), the Shi'a faith will reveal its excellence over the Islam of the majority.

All Muslims are equal in the world and are brothers, but in the next world there will certainly be a difference of ranks. People will be accorded positions according to their performance and intention. The final decision is in God's hands in these matters, and it is therefore better for us

not to involve ourselves.

We have explained that that which distinguishes the Shi'a from the Sunni Muslims is their belief in the Imamate of the Twelve Imams, and it is for this reason that this sect is called "Imamiyah, because the word Shi'a applies to the Zaydiyyah, the Isma'iliyah, the Waqifiyah and the Fathiyah as well. These are sects which are counted as Muslim. But a more careful study of other sects will show that there are many which are totally excluded from Islam, but which, nevertheless, are sometimes still called Shi'a as, for instance, the Khitabiyah, who are an example of the hundred or more sects which cannot be regarded as Muslim. At the present time, however, the word of Shi'a specifically refers to the Imamiyah sect, which is the biggest body of Muslims in the world of Islam after the Sunnis.

In Islamic learning, faith in the twelve Imams is not anything new; it is referred to in all reliable and authentic books by Muslim authors. The Imams Muslim and al-Bukhari narrated traditions

concerning the twelve Imams in their Sahihis in different ways. A few of them are given here:

1. Jabir ibn Smarah says, "One day when I went to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) along with my father, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said: "The universe shall not come to an end until all the twelve caliphs have appeared.' After this the Prophet (s.a.w.) said something silently, which I could not hear. I asked my father what the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.) had said. He said: "The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) says that all of them shall be from the Quraysh.""

2. Another tradition says: "So long as there are the twelve authorities, the Muslims will continue to exist."

3. Again: "So long as there are the twelve caliphs, the grandeur and majesty of Islam shall live on.

4. God knows who these twelve caliphs are. The Holy Prophet's statement that "after me the caliphate shall remain for thirty years, then it will become the object of deceit and fraud" is well known to all Muslims both Shi'a and Sunni.

We do not want to enter into discussion and arguments concerning this topic. If anyone seeks a complete proof of the existence of the twelve Imams, he can study the thousands of volumes devoted to this subject

The Fundamental Beliefs

From the Shi'a point of view, the religion is divided into two sections: knowledge and practice. That is, matters concerning the intellect, and matters relating to the human body. Those matters which concern knowledge or wisdom, are called "Usul ad-din" (fundamentals of religion) and they are five: (1) tawhid (monotheism), (2) nubuwah (Prophethood), (3) the Imamate (Vicegerency), (4) 'adl (Justice) and (5) ma'ad (the Day of Judgement). We shall

.explain each topic separately

Tawhid (monotheism):

According to the Imamiyah faith, every sane thinking person has a moral duty to know his Creator. He should believe in His Oneness and Divinity, and should ascribe no partner to Him in His Actions. He should also believe that creation, sustenance, life and death are governed by Him alone. He is the All-pervading, and if somebody ascribes sustenance, creation, or the giving of life and death to anyone else except God, he will be considered an unbeliever (kafir), someone who ascribes partners to God in His work (mushrik) and will be excluded from the Islamic fold.

Similarly, in obedience and worship of God sincerity is necessary. That is, if somebody worships anything else other than God Almighty, or adores someone or something else, or considers worship of something other than Him as a means of nearness to Him, he also, according to the Imamiyah faith, shall be regarded as an unbeliever. Worship of anyone except God, the One without any partner, is not lawful. Obedience to anybody except God the Almighty, the Holy Prophets, and the Holy Imams is also not permissible.

Obedience to the Prophets and the Imams is indirectly obedience to God, because they are the ones who proclaim of the divine command; but to obey them with the idea that it is worship of God is unlawful and purely a satanic deceit. To seek blessings from these revered persons, to make them a means of intervention between ourselves and God, and also to offer certain prayers at their graves is lawful because this is worship of God and not worship of them. This is quite an obvious difference.

According to the holy words of God the Almighty, "in houses which God has permitted to be raised to honour, for the celebration in them of his name", it is lawful to offer prayers to God in these sacred places. This is the faith of "tawhid" of the Imamiyah sect, which is unanimously supported by all our 'ulama'. The subject of the monotheism has been divided into several types: "tawhid adh-dhat" (the Essence of the One God), "tawhid as-siffat" (the Attributes of the One God), "tawhid al-af'al" (the Actions of the One God). For the sake of brevity we will not dwell on this topic

Prophethood

Imamiyah Shi'as believe that all the Prophets were appointed by God; all of them were sent by Him and they are all His exalted servants. Hadhrat Muhammad al-Mustafa (s.a.w.) is both the "Seal of the Prophets" (the final prophet) and the Chief of all the Prophets. he was perfectly infallible, free from sin and deviation. All his life the Holy Prophet acted according to the will of

God Almighty; God enabled him to travel from Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa, from where he went bodily to al-'Arsh and al-Kursi (the throne and the footstool) and even beyond the "hujub" (the evils) and the "suradiq" (the highest point beyond the heaven of heavens); he finally came to within two bow spans or less of the presence of God. It is the firm faith of the Imamiyah Shi'as that whoever claims prophethood or revelation after Hadhrat Muhammad al-

Mustafa (s.a.w.) is an unbeliever and liable to be put to death.

The Quran which today is in the hands of the Muslims is the same text of guidance and religious commands which God the Almighty revealed as a miracle. There has been no addition to, or subtraction from, it. Muslims believe in "tahrif" (changes in the original) are wrong, because it violates the Quranic declaration: "We have revealed the Book and We are its Protector". All the 'ulam' (religious scholars) are unanimous on this point, and if there is any tradition against it, it is unauthentic; any tradition which has come down to us through imperfect chains of transmission cannot be relied upon as source of knowledge and cannot .thus be acted upon

The Imamate:

It is question of the Imamate which distinguishes the Shi'a sect from all other sects; it is the basic and fundamental difference which separates this school from other schools of thought. Other differences are not fundamental; they are "furu'i" (that is they are concerned with the details of the code of writing and action). Such differences of secondary importance are present between the views of the Imams (religious heads) of the majority community of the Muslims. For instance, a large number of the Hanafi laws do not correspond with the laws of Shafi'is. According to the Imamiyah sect, the Imamate is the rank of the Perfect Man; like prophethood it is sustained by Almighty God for the guidance of the people. The Shi'as believe that Almighty God ordered His Prophet (s.a.w.) to appoint 'Ali ibn 'Abi Talib (a.s.) as his successor, so that after the end of Prophethood the mission of spreading Islam might be continued. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) knew that this appointment would be looked at with displeasure by others. Many of them would think that it was due merely to brotherly love or undue regard for his son-in-law.

It is quite obvious that from the beginning of the Islamic era until the present age of the Muslims have in general not truly followed the Holy Prophet's guidance. The All-powerful declared in very clear words: "Oh Prophet, deliver immediately what you have been commanded to from your Lord and if you do it not, then (it will be as if) you have not delivered His message (at all)". Accordingly after his last hajj the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) gathered the people at "Ghadir al-Khum" and addressed them thus: "Am I not better than every believer present here?" Then all

of them said with one voice: "Certainly, O Prophet of God. You are superior to all of us." After this testimony of allegiance the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) said; "Whoever has accepted me as his master, then 'Ali is his master ..." Moreover, on various other occasions, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) clearly explained the reality of the Imamate, sometimes by implication and sometimes quite openly. The Prophet thus performed his duty and God's command his duty and God's command was carried out. As soon as the Holy Prophet had breathed his last breath some Muslims presumptuously tried to hide the reality of the Imamate. They misconstrued the open declaration, and through their personal interpretation began to make changes in the religious commands. The result is well known as we have seen.

However 'Ali (a.s.) and his group, which comprised high-ranking sahaba (companions) kept aloof from this selfish struggle for power and refused to offer allegiance. Amir al-Mu'minin (a.s.) remained silent for some time, out of consideration for Islamic unity, but when Mu'awiyah tried to bring the Islamic rule and authority under his subjugation and started destructive activities, Amir al-Mu'minin set himself against him; supporting a man like Mu'awiyah and tolerating his wrong policies would have been a deadly poison for Islam, and it was the foremost duty of Hadhrat 'Ali (a.s.) to protect the divine religion.

The Imamiyah believe that spiritually they are with 'Ali (a.s.) and are his followers; anyone who takes 'Ali as a friend, we too are friends of that person, and of whoever takes 'Ali (a.s.) as an enemy, we also are his enemy. This faith is based on the Holy Prophet's words: "Oh God, be a friend of the one who loves 'Ali (a.s.) and be an enemy of the one who is an enemy of 'Ali (a.s.)."

The Imamiyah Shi'as believe that Almighty God never leaves the world without a Prophet or an Imam whether this "proof of God" is apparent or hidden. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), through an explicit ordinance, made 'Ali al-Murtadha (a.s.) his successor. 'Ali (a.s.) made al-Hasan (a.s.) his successor, and Imam al-Hasan (a.s.) made his brother Imam al-Husayn (a.s.) his successor. In this way this chain continued until the eleventh Imam. The Eleventh spiritual guide Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) was succeeded by his son the twelfth Imam, the Imam of the Age, the Awaited One (a.s.), vicegerent of God. This belief is not an innovation of the Shi'as, rather it is a divine practice, which started with Adam (a.s.) and continued until the last Prophet (s.a.w.).

There are innumerable books written by eminent 'ulama' on this topic. We give below the names of some 'ulama of early centuries who have written on the topic of "wasiyah" (succession).

1). Hisham ibn al-Hakam.

- 2). Husayn ibn Sa'id.
- 3). 'Ali ibn Miskini
- 4). 'Ali ibn al-Mughirah
- 5). 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn Fadhl.
- 6). Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn Sa'id.
- 7). Ahmad ibn Muhammad Khalid al-Barqi, the author of "al-Mahasin".
- 8). The great historian 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz ibn Yahya al-Judi.

Most of these writers belong to the first and second centuries, but the number of writing from authors of the third century hijri is also large:

- 1). Yahya ibn Mustafad.
- 2.) Muhammad ibn Ahmad as-Sabuni
- 3.) 'Ali ibn Ra'ab
- 4.) Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Farukh
- 5.) The well known historian 'Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, the author of "Muruj adh-Dhahab".
- 6.) Shaykh at-Ta'ifah Muhammad ibn al-Hasan at-Tusi
- 7.) Muhammad ibn 'Ali ash-Shalmaghani
- 8.) Musa ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Amir

Books written after the fourth century can hardly be counted.

Al-Mas'udi wrote in his famous book "Ithbatu 'l-wasiyah": "Every prophet had twelve successors". The writer also gave the names of all of them, and wrote brief life-sketches of each; at the end of the work he writes in more detail about the twelve Imams. The Shi'as have been the target of attack from both Muslim and non-Muslim groups concerning the existence of the twelfth Imam. We should thus like to explain the reality of this belief in a few words. Those who object think that the Shi'as believe in a baseless and ridiculous thing. When we examine the view-point of these critics however we find that it is based on two rather naive doubts; the first being "How can a person naturally live for more than a thousand years?" and the second, "What advantage is gained from his disappearance?" or "What is the use of a hidden Imam whose existence and non-existence are both equal?" As to the first doubt, we should like to draw the reader's attention to the prophet Nuh's age. According to clear Qur'anic statements the prophet Nuh live for nine hundred and fifty years, calling the people to God among his nation; according to the opinion stated by the 'ulama' his age was at least one thousand six hundred years, and a number of other scholars have gone so far as to say that he lived to be three thousand years old. The scholars of hadith of the majority community also acknowledge the longevity of other persons besides Nuh (a.s.). The great

scholar an-Nuwi in his book "Tahdhibu 'l-Asma" writes: "Though there is a difference of opinion among the 'ulama' about the age and the Prophethood of Hadhrat Khidr (a.s.), the majority of scholars admit that Khidr is still present with us. The Sufis, moreover, unanimously declare that he is still alive, and innumerable stories about his meetings with people, and about what was said at these meetings, are quite well-known."

Shaykh Abu 'Umar ibn Salah writes in his "Fatwas": "The majority of the 'ulama' decided that Hadhrat Khidr is alive, but some of the scholars of hadith do not accept it." I seem to recall that in another work Shaykh Abu 'Umar wrote (and az-Zamakhshari also has written this in his Rabi'u 'l-abrar) that the Muslims are unanimous in their belief that four prophets (a.s.) are still alive among us. Two of them are in the sky, that is 'Isa (a.s.) and Idris (a.s.), and two are on the earth and these are Khidr and Ilyas. Hadhrat Khidr was born in the time of Ibrahim Khalilu 'llah (a.s.). Thus we have clear proof of the existence of persons who lived for hundreds of years. 'Allamah as-Sayyid al-Murtadha has written in his "Imali" about persons who have lived to a great age and ash-Shaykh as-Saduq has given an even a longer list in his "Kamal ad-Din". Even in the present age we find some people who have lived for a hundred and thirty years, and some for even longer.

Logically we may pose the question: "If someone is capable of living to an abnormal age, say a hundred and thirty, then is it possible that in extraordinary conditions a man may live to be a thousand?" At the most you can call it something super-normal. Moreover, is super-normality in the case of Prophets and the "awliyah" (those near to God) a particularly strange thing? If one turns over the pages of the old volumes of "Majallatu 'l-Muqtatif", you will find that they are full of articles written by western scholars who have scientifically proved that man can theoretically attain eternal life in this world. Some western thinkers even say: "If Ibn Muljim's sword had not struck 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), he would have lived forever. We are justified in this supposition because the Holy Imam was endowed with such qualities of excellence and healthy living." Much could be added on this topic but the scope of this book does not allow further discussion. Concerning the second objection, we might ask whether it is fitting that the Muslim nation should know every detail of divine will and intention. Is it necessary to know all the secrets of the world and of the religious commands? Before demanding such knowledge we must carefully think whether under the screen of some outwardly incomprehensible divine command there is also hidden some other secret. For example, a stone, in itself, neither benefits nor harms man. Nevertheless, we kiss the Hajarul 'Aswad (the black stone in the Ka'bah). What is the wisdom hidden behind that, we may ask. The "maghrib" prayers are offered in three rak'ahs (units); the "isha" prayers are performed in four units. The morning

prayers consist of only two units. What expediency is there in this difference of units? Rather we must realise that there are a large number of matters of which neither archangel nor prophet has any knowledge; concerning the knowledge of the last hour, God, the Almighty says: "Verily God alone has knowledge of the Hour, the Day of Judgement and when it will rain." Apart from this, there are many other things which have been kept secret from us and their justification is unknown; we may refer, for example, to "ismu 'l-'azam" (the Greatest Name), "laylatu 'l-qadr" (the time for the acceptance of Invocation). We would like to make clear by the above examples that one need not be amazed at those divine matters whose wisdom is not apparent. Rather, we should recognise that an order or action exists, and act accordingly as believing Muslims.

If something is proved by the authentic statements of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and his infallible successors, we must accept it. There is no other opinion: to enter into an argument about the nature of wisdom and man's obligation to find a reason for everything would be in vain. As far as possible we have deliberately not provided arguments and proofs in this small booklet; there are already large volumes in which these points have been discussed in detail; likewise we examine the "Qa'im Al-Muhammad", the presently existing descendant of Muhammad (s.a.w.). There are a great number of authentic traditions concerning the "qiyam" of al-Mahdi (the rising of the twelfth Imam) in books of knowledge of both sects.

Though we acknowledge the fact that God knows better the wisdom about the occultation of Imam al-Mahdi, we would nevertheless point out that a number of rational proofs have already been given in reply to some Shi'a questioners. The decisive fact to bear in mind is that in every age the existence of an Imam is necessary; the world cannot remain without a divinely appointed guide; his very existence is blessing for mankind, and his authority over us is also a blessing. The question of the wisdom hidden in this action of God's is thus invalid (a blessing cannot be rationalised) and acknowledgment of the "ghaybah" (occultation) is a necessary duty .of every obedient Muslim

Adl (Justice)'

God the Almighty is not unjust to anybody, nor does He commit any action which could be considered bad by man's primordial sense. This is what is known as, 'adl (justice). Justice is one of the attributes of Almighty God, existence of which is necessary. It is essential, like all the other attributes of Oneness. The Ash'arites differ greatly in their beliefs from the Imamiyah and the Mu'tazilah (the Imamiyah and the Mu'tazilah are both called "Adliyah") The reason for this opposition is that the Ash'arites reject "goodness and badness" as rational concepts, and affirm rather that "goodness" is that which is called "good" by religion, and "badness" that which

the code of religion calls "bad". They regard knowledge of the Creator and recognition of the prophets as being outside the scope of the intellect; they accept miracles according to the dictates of religion, and they completely discard the dictates of wisdom.

Consequently they are in perplexity.

The "Adliyah" (that is, the Imamiyah and the Mu'tazilah) maintain that Islam is in accordance with reason.

Reason considers some actions good and some actions bad, and it is reason too which considers a bad act to be impossible for God the Almighty: He is All-wise and a bad action would be contrary to the dictates of His wisdom. To chastise an obedient person is unjust, and injustice is a bad action; reason assures us that the Creator of the world could not unjustly chastise obedient Muslims as this would be a bad action.

The Imamiyah sect have paid special attention to the problem of 'adl and have included this attribute among the fundamentals of religion. (It is worthy of note here that the Ash'arites do not themselves deny justice; their faith in this respect is that whatever God the Almighty does cannot affect justice and goodness; they are of the view that wisdom is so insignificant that it cannot decide as to whether one thing is appropriate for God and another thing inappropriate.) The Imamiyah have clearly demonstrated that the best criterion for testing goodness and badness is wisdom. It is through this means that we have come to the conclusion that the All-perfect Being (God) must have all good attributes and be free from all imperfections.

On the basis of this view of goodness and badness, and faith in the justice of God, certain other beliefs have formed: the notion of "lutf" (God's all-permeating benevolence and blessing), and the belief that it is the duty of a Muslim to thank God, Who has given him everything. The notion of "jabr" and "ikhtiyar" (the coercion of man by God and the freedom of man to act as he wishes respectively) are closely connected to the ideas of goodness and badness. Absolute destiny and freewill have always been a major subject of discussion in every philosophy or religion.

The Ash'arites believed in "jabr", and the Mu'tazilah and the Imamiyah held and still hold the view that every man is free and independent: he can do everything voluntarily, and perform all his actions with his own will. Like the existence of self, the faculty of volition is also a gift from God. The Creator of the universe created people and gave them freedom of action; absolute authority is God's alone, but in his day-to-day speech and actions man is quite independent. God, the Almighty, neither forces anyone to some action, nor restrains him from doing it; the sons of Adam do as they please. It is for the same reason that the intellect demands that a crime be punished and a good act rewarded or praised. If we do not follow this basic rule,

reward and punishment, the sending of the prophets, the revelation of the Books, and the promise of Gehenna or Paradise in the hereafter becomes meaningless. There is, unfortunately, no further room for discussion within the restricted framework of this book. We would refer the reader to part I of our book "ad-Din wa 'l-Islam". In short the .Imamiyah religion believes that God is "adil" (just) and that man is independent and free to act

Ma'ad (the Day of Judgement)

Like all Muslims, the Shi'as believe that Almighty God will bring all people to life again for accountability, punishment and reward on the Day of Judgement. Ma'ad involves the appearance of every person before his Lord in exactly the same human bodily form he had while on earth. It is not necessary to know in what way the return will be effected; suffice it to say that whatever has been stated about final requital and accountability in the Book of God and the authentic traditions is a part of our faith, namely, belief in hell or paradise, comfort or pain in "al-barzakh" (i.e. purgatory), "al-mizan" (the balance), "as-sirat" (the path), "al-a'raf" ("the heights", a place situated between paradise and hell), and "kitabu 'l-a'mal" (the record of deeds) which will show all the deeds one has done in one's life. The Shi'as therefore finally believe that every one shall be entitled to receive punishment or reward according to his deeds.

Good actions shall be rewarded and bad actions shall entail punishment: God says in the glorious Qur'an: "Whoever does at atoms weight of goodness will see it on the last day, and
".whoever does and atom's weight of bad will see it on the last day