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## THE REACTUALIZATION OF 'IŞMAH AL-AIMMAH CONCEPT: Analysis on the Interpretation of al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î

Suraya Attamimi & Nurhayati\*

\*Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu, Indonesia

Email: [suraya@iainpalu.ac.id](mailto:suraya@iainpalu.ac.id)

### Abstract

*'Işmah al-aimmah issue has been a polemic among the theology community of Sunni-Shia, particularly in the internal Shia. The Shia Ismâ'iliyah and Ithnâ 'Ashariyah 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î, a Shia Ithnâ Ashariyah 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î tried not to dwell on a never-ending 'işmah issue, but interpreted it contextually instead. This article reveals the 'işmah al-aimmah concept of al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î by applying qualitative research and analytic descriptive method. According to al-Ṭabaṭabâ'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-Ṭabaṭabâ'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.*

Persoalan 'iṣmah al-aimmah masih menjadi polemik antar kelompok teologi Sunni Shia terkhusus internal Shia. Kelompok Shia Ismā'īlīyah dan Ithnā Asharīyah meyakini kemaksuman mutlak para imam. Sementara sebagian Shia Zaidīyah membatasi kemaksuman tersebut, dan sebagian lain bahkan menolaknya. Al-Ṭabatābā'i, seorang ulama dari kalangan Shia Ithnā Asharīyah yang dikenal moderat dan diterima di kalangan Sunni tampak memiliki pendapat yang sama dengan doktrin mazhabnya perihal 'iṣmah al-aimmah. Meski demikian al-Ṭabatābā'i tetap berupaya tidak larut dalam perdebatan 'iṣmah yang tiada akhir bahkan menginterpretasikannya secara kontekstual. Tulisan ini bertujuan mengungkapkan konsep 'iṣmah al-aimmah al-Ṭabatābā'i dengan menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dan metode deskriptif analitis. Menurut al-Ṭabatābā'i seorang imam sebagai pembimbing umat kepada ketaatan, harus memiliki kriteria kemaksuman. Tingkat kemaksuman itu diperoleh melalui pengetahuan, irādah dan ikhtiyar para imam dalam ketaatan kepada Allah serta menghindarkan diri dari kemaksiatan. Melalui ketaatan itu, Allah menganugerahkan pengetahuan khusus ('ilm ḥudûrī) dalam diri para imam yang merasuk kuat hingga membentuk karakter dan kemudian menjadi pengendali diri dari perbuatan dosa sampai pada akhirnya mencapai tingkat kemaksuman. Ṭabatābā'i selanjutnya tampak berupaya keluar dari perdebatan teologis lebih lanjut dengan memaknai 'iṣmah sebagai potensi yang dapat dicapai manusia biasa dalam bingkai menjaga nilai-nilai kemanusiaan.

**Keywords:** 'iṣmah al-aimmah; reactualization; al-Ṭabatābā'i

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## Introduction

The pros and cons of 'iṣmah (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 'iṣmah 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 'iṣmah 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 *'ishmah* 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 *ma'sûm* 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 *ma'sûm*. 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 *ma'sûm* (al-Shahrastani 1993, 185).

However, Shia Imamîyah Ithnâ Ashariyah and Ismâ'iliyah communities, representing the authorized opinion from majority of Shia, believe that *imams* have similarity with prophets (as) in terms of *ma'sûm* 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'sûm* 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'sûm* character of *imams* by restricted it to *ahl al-Kisâ'* (Prophet PBUH, Fâtimah, Alî bin Abî Tâlib, also Hâsan and Hûsain), and some others specialize it for the three *imams*, they are Alî bin Abî Tâlib, Hâsan and Hûsain bin Alî.

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

Based on author's observation, the description about '*ishmah*' 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'sûm* 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-Mizân*. The mentioned studies have yet to discuss specifically about the thoughts of *al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î* on '*ishmah al-aimmah*' concept, thus, this article aims to discover the thinking construction of *al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î* on '*ishmah 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 '*ishmah al-aimmah*'. The descriptive-analytic method is applied (Syarifah & Fahimah 2020, 289). Meanwhile, the material objects

used here are some works of al-Ṭabaṭābā'ī, such as *Tafsir al-Mizān*, *al-'Aqā'id al-Islāmīyah*, 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 'ismah al-aimmah concept in the perspective of al-Ṭabaṭābā'ī.

## Results and Discussion

### The Resurgence of 'Ismah al-Aimmah Doctrine among Shia Sects

*Imāmah* 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 *Imamīyah* that still exist to date are Shia *Zaidīyah*, *Ismā'īliyah*, and *Ithnā Ashariyah*. These three were diverged due to different opinions on *imam's* orders and criteria. Shia *Zaidīyah* acknowledged Zayd bin Alī Zainal Abidīn bin Ḥusayn bin Alī bin Abī Ṭālib as the fifth *imam* (Marjuni and Wardi 2017, 184). The other two (*Ismā'īliyah* and *Ithnā Ashariyah*) have dissimilar perspective on the genealogy of *imams* after Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. In Shia *Ithnā 'Ashariyah's* perspective, the second son of Imam Ja'far, Mūsā bin Ja'far, is the seventh *imam*. Meanwhile, in Shia *Ismā'īliyah's* opinion, their seventh *imam* is *Ismā'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 *Zaidīyah* as the most moderate because their teachings are considered closer to *Sunni's*. This community does not compare *imam* with prophet, and does not call out the Companions (*Sahabah*) as *kafir* (infidel), particularly Abū Bakar As-Ṣiddiq and Umar bin Khaṭṭāb (Mas'od dan Hamat 2019, 15). However, in some studies, the moderate of Shia *Zaidīyah* due to its closeness to *Sunni* turns out invalid. Kurniawan's study states that Ibnu Taymīyah 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 *Zaidīyah* may be considered more extreme than the *Imamīyah Ithnā Ashariyah* and *Ismā'īliyah* sects. This is proven when Shia *Zaidīyah* 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-uṣūl al-*



*khamseh*), namely *al-amr bi al-ma'rûf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (Kurniawan 2020, 131–140).

The leadership position called *imâmah* is believed by Shia 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 *imâmah* 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 Shia 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'i 1989, 116). Shia 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 *imâmah* is the most substantial part of Shia 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 Shia theology is Allah swt's prerogative, which was conveyed through revelation and Rasulullah PBUH's verbal statement. All sects of Shia-Zaidiyah, Imamîyah, Ismâ'iliyah-agree that the three *imams*: Alî bin Abî Ṭâlib and his two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusain, have been determined and appointed as the leader through "*naṣṣ*" of Allah 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 Shia sects is about '*iṣmah* or *ma'ṣûm*. Shia Ithnâ 'Ashariyah and Ismâ'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-Ṭabaṭabâ'i 1989, 117). Shia Ithnâ 'Ashariyah believes that their twelve *imams* are *ma'ṣûm* figures. Shia Ismâ'iliyah also believe that their *imams* are *ma'ṣûm*. 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 al-shari'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 *huduri* 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'sum* is not related to the attitude of negligence, mistake, and forgetfulness as stated by Shia Imamiyah and Shia Isma'iliyah. Other than *syari'at* matters, such as *fatwa*, politic, and social issues, the character of *ma'sum* 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'sum* character only belongs to the so-called *ahl al-kisâ'*, they are the Prophet PBUH, Alî, 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-Daylamî, limit the *ma'sum* character only for three *imams*, namely Alî bin Abî Ṭâlib, Ḥasan and Ḥusain bin Ali (Marjuni n.d., 26-27).

Although Shia believes that *imamah* 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 Isma'iliyah and Ithnâ Ashariyah admit the absolute *ma'sum* character of *imams*, meanwhile Shia Zaidiyah limits the character, and the rest of the sects completely refuses it.

Table 1  
'Ismah al-Aimmah in the Perspective of Shia Sects

No	Theme	Shia Zaidiyah	Shia Isma'iliyah	Shia Ithnâ Ashariyah
1.	Imam's Order	1. Alî bin Abî Ṭâlib 2. Ḥasan bin Ali 3. Ḥusayn bin Ali 4. Ali bin	1. Alî bin Abî Ṭâlib Ḥasan bin Ali 2. Ḥusayn bin Ali 3. Ali bin Ḥusayn 4. Muḥammad bin Ali 5. Ja'far bin	1. Alî bin Abî Ṭâlib Ḥasan bin Ali 2. Ḥusayn bin Ali 3. Ali bin Husayn 4. Muḥammad bin Ali 5. Ja'far bin Muḥammad

	Ḥusayn	Muḥammad	6. Musa bin Ja'far
	5. Zayd bin Ali bin Ḥusayn bin Alī bin Abī Ṭālib	6. Ismā'il bin Ja'far al-Ṣādiq	7. Ali bin Musa 8. Muḥammad bin Ali 9. Ali bin Muḥammad 10. Ḥasan bin Ali 11. Muḥammad bin Ḥasan (al-Mahdī)
2. 'Iṣmah al-A'immah	– restricting to only three <i>imams</i> : Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusain – restricting to ahl al-Kisā: the Prophet PBUH, Ali, Fātimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusain – refusing it – <i>imam</i> 's <i>ma'ṣūm</i> is not absolute	– all <i>imams</i> are <i>ma'ṣūm</i> – the character of <i>ma'ṣūm</i> is absolute (free from big or small sins, even when they forgot it)	–the twelve <i>imams</i> are <i>ma'ṣūm</i> –the <i>ma'ṣūm</i> character of <i>imams</i> is absolute

### The Portrait of al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī Biography

Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī, widely known as al-'Allāmah al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī, was born in Tabriz, Iran on 29 of Dzulhijjah 1321H/March 16, 1892 AD (al- al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī 1997, b). Al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī 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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī's career started to reach its peak (al-Awsī 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 *akhbār* [*riwaya*/narration and hadith]) and *uṣūliyyah* (a community that considered *ijtihad* as *wājib kifāyah*) 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-Ṭabaṭabā'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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī's phenomenal work *al-Mizān*. 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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī witnessed the Iranian Revolution (also known as Islamic Revolution) in 1979 in his old age. In 1981, al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī died after devoting his entire life to the advancement of science in Qum at the age of 78 (al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī 2006, 24).

His great work *al-Mizān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* is said as the only *tafsir* book of Shia which gains huge appreciation and is accepted in Sunni community. *Al-Mizān* is claimed to have particular characteristics, one of which is combining a corpus of Shia's classic tafseer and contemporary one owned by al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī. The said contemporary corpus is seen through the influence of the *tafsir* modernization introduced by Muḥammad Abduh (al-Ṭabaṭabā'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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī was not free from criticism of *ulamas*. One of harsh criticisms came from Alī Aḥmad as-Salūs claiming that al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī had a hidden mission behind his moderate-like thinking. According to as-Salūs, even though al-Ṭabaṭabā'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-Salūs 2001, 680–687). As-Salūs proved it by exploring al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī's interpretation on verses regarding *imamah*.

### 'Iṣmah al-Aimmah and Leadership Criteria

Al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī defines 'iṣmah as an aspect of knowledge which prevents or preclude someone from making mistakes or sins. In other words, 'iṣmah 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 1997, 79–80).

Therefore, al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î classified the source of *ma'sûm* into two things, namely knowledge and *ikhtiyâr* (selection). What al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î means by knowledge as a primary source of *ma'sûm* 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-taqwâ wa al-dîn* (al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 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-Jâtsiyah [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 huḍûrî*; 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 huḍûrî*, the real and individual objects are no longer distinguished as it is one inseparable unity. Hence, *huḍûrî* 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 huṣûlî* (knowledge by correspondence), exist within subject's mental, which is a visual form of object's entity. In *'ilm huḍûrî* (knowledge by presence), the thing which is present in subject's mental is the object's existence. Some main criteria of *'ilm huḍûrî* 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 Ashariyah, 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-Ṭabaṭabā'î explained about *'ilm ḥudûrî* in his statement:

“*‘Ilm ḥudûrî* 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 *mafḥûm* of correspondence knowledge. The *mafḥûm* 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-ḥudûrî* (al-Ṭabaṭabā'î 1995, 174).”

It seems like this is what al-Ṭabaṭabā'î means when defining *'iṣmah* as *wujûd 'amr fî al-insân al-ma'sûm*. The word *'amr* in the definition is presumably a knowledge which controls or keeps the owner away from committing sins (al-Ṭabaṭabā'î 2002, 179). Allah states in Q.S. Yâsin [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 ḥudûrî*) in the above verse is named *malakût*, that is another aspect of creation, with which they stand before God the Almighty, purified from time and space limitation, free from changes (al-Ṭabaṭabā'î 1997, 267). Nasaruddin Umar expresses that *malakût* 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 *jabarût* realm and *al-a'yân al-thâbitah*. *Mulkî* or *maqâm mitsâl* 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î, *imam* is a guide that leads people with his *malakût* potential. Hence, subconsciously, as human authority in his action and guidance, *imâmah* is not only a matter of showing the way, but also to lead them to what has been commanded by Allah swt (al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 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-Mâ'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'sûm* is will and *ikhtiyâr*. 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.

Murtaḍâ Muṭahharî emphasizes that every humans' **action is caused by tendency and impulse from within themselves, which then stimulates**

them to do something (Muṭahharî 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î's perspective, a *ma'sûm* 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 1997, 167).

The above analysis shows that *ma'sûm* is not achieved under compulsion nor it is effortlessly obtained. *Ma'sûm* sources from knowledge and devoted faith, from which emerges *irâdah* 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 *ikhtiyâr* to realize it. When human chooses to devote, he will be guided by Allah swt and blessed with specific knowledge (*'ilm huḍûrî*). He even will be given ability to explore the *malakût* 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î in his magnum opus, al-Mizân.

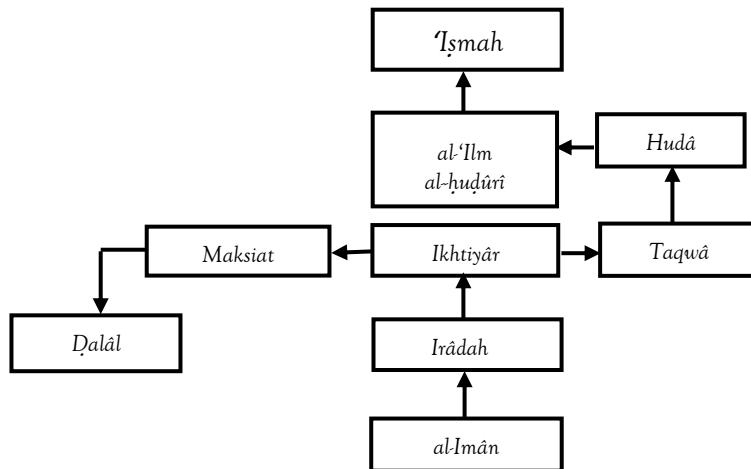
Al-Awsî, quoted from al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î, expresses that Allah swt's main purpose to send prophets and messengers with revelation and religious sharia is to guide all *ummah* or humans to the right path, to arrange their sustainable life so they are far from disputes causing disaster, catastrophe, and fight. These will not be achieved if the Prophets are not *ma'sûm*. For the similar reason, there must be someone whose *ma'sûm* 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 *ummah*. 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 QS. 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.”*

Figure 1



In the Quran, the word *imam* (leader) often comes along with the word *hidayah* (guidance/direction). Among others are mentioned in Q.S. al-Anbiyâ' [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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 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'sûm*, is not eligible for being *imam* (leader) that is supposed to guide others to the truth (al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 1997, 270).

As his *mazhab*'s doctrine, al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î requires 'iṣmah as the criteria that must be owned by an *imam*. *Imam* must be *ma'sûm* (guarded) from stray and *maksiat* (sinful acts). Otherwise, he will not be able to guide *ummah* (al-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 1997, 269), as expressed in Allah's words in the aforementioned Q.S. al-Anbiyâ' [21]:73. Based on the explanation, all *imams* in Shia community are the chosen ones blessed with 'iṣmah. Allah swt said in Q.S. al-Aḥzâb [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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î, 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-Ṭabaṭabâ'î 1997, 316-323).

However, some *riwaya*/narrations of Shia Ithnâ Ashariyah 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 Ashariyah, have similar authority with the Prophet PBUH (Ṭabaṭabâ'î 1989, 114). Meanwhile, for Sunni community, *ahl al-bayt* does not particularly refer to the five people. 'Alî Aḥmad al-Salûs states that *ahl al-bayt* includes the Prophet PBUH's wives and the descendants. If pronoun (*damîr*) 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-*mazhab* and its relation to *imâmah* 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 *destructive-substantive* 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 'ismah 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'ī offers the reactualization idea through his interpretation in the meaning of 'ismah, as a solution for the happening problematic crisis of human values. For al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī, 'ismah 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 eradicated. 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'ī, 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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī's perspective on the concept of 'iṣmah al-aimmah is inseparable from his *mazhab* doctrine, his interpretation of 'iṣmah 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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī tried to convey. This is evident from what is stated by al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī on the aforementioned 'iṣmah concept as an attempt or *ikhtiyār* to humanize human. Hence, 'iṣmah 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 (*taqwā*), but also improving social-piety. Hence, in the current context, 'iṣmah is interpreted not only as guarding oneself from committing sins, but also from harming human values.

### Conclusion

'Iṣmah al-Aimmah is one of doctrines triggering controversy among the three Shia communities. Shia Imamīyah Ithnâ Ashariyah and Ismâ'iliyah agree that 'iṣmah 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-Ṭabaṭabā'ī has his own opinion which is not that different from his *mazhab* doctrine. His thinking construction in interpreting 'iṣmah does not only adopt his *mazhab* doctrine. He also reactualizes the concept using social and psychology approaches. His reactualization effort proves that there is a relation between 'iṣmah and human values. All this time, the 'iṣmah concept is only around the cycle of theological debate among *ulamas*. Al-Ṭabaṭabā'ī, even though he must be affected by his *mazhab* doctrine, tried further to observe the relevance of 'iṣmah in the context of the downturn of human values, as well as the urgency of 'iṣmah as a solution to get out of the downturn.

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