



BARĀ'A

BARĀ'A, an Imami theological term denoting dissociation from the enemies of the imams. During the conflict between 'Alī and Mo'āwīa, formulas of dissociation were used by both parties, and this practice was continued by both Omayyads and 'Alids throughout the Omayyad period. At this stage the 'Alids only dissociated from those who had fought 'Alī while he was in power. With the emergence (during the first half of the 2nd/8th century) of an Imami doctrine of the imamate based on allegiance (*walāya*) to the imams and enmity (*'adāwa*) toward their enemies, *barā'a* was broadened to include both the usurpers who had deprived 'Alī of his God-given rights and those who had supported these usurpers. It thus applied to the majority of the *ṣaḥāba*, and in particular to the first three caliphs.

As a religious duty, *barā'a* is either subsumed within *walāya* or is regarded as a necessary complement to it (as in 'Alī al-Rezā's letter to al-Ma'mūn, in Ebn Bābawayh, *Oyūn aḵbār al-Rezā*, Najaf, 1390/1970, II, pp. 123, 124-25). The duty of dissociating from four male and four female idols is mentioned in two creeds of Ebn Bābawayh, the *Resālat al-e'teqādāt* (tr. A. A. A. Fyzee, *A Shī'ite Creed*, London, 1942, p. 109) and the *Hedāya* (Tehran, 1377/1957-58, pp. 8f.). The reference to the idols is probably an instance of *taqīya*, those who are in fact meant being Abū Bakr, 'Omar, 'Oṭmān, and Mo'āwīa, 'Ā'eša, Ḥaḥṣa, Hend, and Omm Ḥakam (Mo'āwīa's sister) (cf. Majlesī, *Behār al-anwār* XVIII/2, p. 434). In contrast, dissociation from an imam is considered a heinous crime, and it is a moot point whether the believer may resort to it so as to save his life.

In the period preceding the Greater Occultation (see *ḡayba*), dissociation was



implemented by a public declaration of the imam or by a message sent privately to the person concerned. The message might be oral or written; the former was preferred by the earlier imams, and the latter by those imams who spent much of their lives in prison, as well as by the *safirs*. The *safirs* showed a predilection for formal documents which were distributed among the community. With the start of the Greater Occultation the right to pronounce *barā'a* devolved naturally on the scholars and lawyers.

In times of danger, *barā'a* could often be pronounced only within a circle of trusted friends; at other times it could not be pronounced at all and had to be kept in the heart, in which case it is referred to as “that which is concealed” (*al-moẓmar*) (Ebn Bābawayh, *Creed*, p. 116).

Barā'a is often accompanied by imprecations which are uttered during supererogatory prayers (*qonūt*), on the occasion of the Ġadīr Kōmm festival, or when standing over the grave of an enemy. Where the believer enjoys freedom of action (*ektiār*), dissociation also takes the form of social ostracism: The believer must not give the adversaries alms tax or help them in any other way; he may not allow them to perform the pilgrimage on his behalf; he may neither pray behind them nor accept their testimony as valid (Ebn Bābawayh, *Hedāya*, p. 9).

While *barā'a* was directed primarily against non-Imami enemies of the imams, it was also used against other categories of opponents. These included Imamis who did not toe the official line on certain doctrinal or theological issues (e.g., Zorāra b. A'yan and Yūnos b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān); deviant members of an imam's family (e.g., 'Abd-Allāh, the son of Ja'far al-Ṣādeq); erstwhile Imamis who abandoned the Emāmīya as a result of disagreements over the identity of the imam; and extremist Shi'ites (*ḡolāt*), regardless of whether these had at some point belonged to the Emāmīya (Kohlberg, pp. 158-67). At the same time the imams (as well as Imami scholars) were keenly aware of the danger of *barā'a*'s being abused through application to all who deviated from rigidly held principles (a habit of which the Kharijites were accused). Hence traditions in which the believers are exhorted to define faith in as broad a manner as possible, so as to accommodate within its bounds Imamis guilty of various sins or lapses. In one case at least, a tradition of this kind is entitled *al-nahy 'an al-barā'a* “prohibiting dissociation” (*Ketāb Ja'far al-Ḥāẓramī*, ms. Tehran University no. 962, fol. 41b).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text. See also Koleyī, *ʿOsūl al-kāfi*, Tehran, 1375-77/1955-57, II, pp. 22-23, 42-45, 124-27, 221, 405.

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E. Kohlberg, "Barā'a in Shī'i Doctrine," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7, 1986, pp. 139-75.