



## EMĀM-E JOM'Ā

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**EMĀM-E JOM'Ā**, leader of the congregational prayer performed at midday on Fridays. This prayer, comprising two prayer cycles (*rak'as*) preceded by a sermon (*koṭba*), normally takes the place of the regular noon prayer with four *rak'as*. Customarily the *emām-e jom'a* both delivers the sermon and leads the prayer, though his title refers only to the latter function.

The Friday prayer was first performed by the Prophet Moḥammad in September 622, when he entered Medina after his migration (*hejra*) from Mecca, at a site in the valley of Rānūnā, later marked by a mosque known as Masjed al-Jom'a (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 1256-58, tr., VII, pp. 1-4; Tahir ül-Mevlevi, pp. 41-43). Attendance at the Friday prayer was soon made mandatory by the revelation of Qur'an 62:9 ("O you who believe, when summons is made to the prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of God and lay aside selling; that is best for you, if you but knew"). The institution of the Friday prayer marked the first stage in the establishment of the Prophet's political authority at Medina. The Friday prayer has retained an important political dimension; mention of the ruler's name in the *koṭba*, together with its stamping on the coinage, came to be one of the chief tokens of sovereignty.

It was therefore natural that in Twelver Shi'ism the right to lead or convene the Friday prayer should initially have been reserved for the Imams, though Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb was the only one who exercised the political power on which it was predicated; some of the sermons found in *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sayyed Rażī's anthology of 'Alī's addresses and writings, were presumably delivered on Fridays, though the book contains no indication. The fourth Imam, 'Alī b.



Ḥosayn al-Sajjād, alluded to the leading of Friday prayer as one of the prerogatives of which he and his predecessors had been deprived (Zayn-al-ʿĀbedīn, tr., p. 189), and it is uncertain that any of the Imams after the first convened such prayers, even privately for his own followers. Traditions from the fifth and sixth Imams, Moḥammad al-Bāqer and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq, exhorting Shiʿites to perform Friday prayer may be interpreted as encouragement to participate in the prayers of the general Muslim community as a form of prudential dissimulation (*taqīya*), and it is possible that they did so themselves (Sachedina, p. 182). An anti-Shiʿite polemic from 12th-century Persia suggests that Shiʿites would attend the congregational mosque at midday on Friday but perform the Friday prayer with obvious disdain, reserving their devotional sincerity for the regular noonday prayers they would perform immediately afterwards (Qazvīnī, p. 551).

Early works of Shiʿite jurisprudence nonetheless contain provisions for performance of the Friday prayer. Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) held that attendance is incumbent if the prayer is convened by a just ruler (*solṭān ʿādel*, i.e., the Imam) or his nominated deputy (*nāʿeb kāṣṣ*); if a minimum of seven believers participate; and if it is held at least 2 *farsaks* from other prayer sites (I, p. 143). Ebn Bābawayh/Bābūya (d. 306/918) explained the two *rakʿas* as analogous to the two *rakʿas* of the prayer marking the two main festivals (*ʿīd*); according to him, a Friday prayer performed under the leadership of the Imam is a weekly festival for the believers (cited in Sachedina, p. 180).

Of particular interest to Shiʿite jurists (*foqahā*) was the question whether Friday prayer might legitimately be convened after the onset of the greater occultation (*ḡaybat-e kobrā*) in 330/941 had removed the possibility of the Imam's designating an individual to lead it. Both Ṭūsī and Shaikh Moḥammad Mofīd (d. 413/1022) regarded it as permissible, on condition that a qualified person led it and that it was not detrimental to the Shiʿite community; attendance could not, however, be regarded as mandatory (*wājeb*) but was at best recommended (*mandūb*; Sachedina, p. 185). ʿAllāma Jamāl-al-Dīn Ḥasan Ḥellī (d. 726/1325) concurred, suggesting that the general authority conferred on jurists by certain traditions of the Imams implicitly authorizes them to convene Friday prayer; he argued, too, that the koranic verse enjoining the prayer includes no condition requiring the presence of the Imam or his delegate (Sachedina, p. 187). (The latter point is also made as late as 18th century in certain Sunni polemical works which reproached Shiʿites for failing



to hold regular Friday prayer; see, e.g., Dehlavī, p. 504). Other jurists, however, mindful of the nexus between the Friday prayer and the exclusive governmental authority of the Imam, regarded holding Friday prayer during the occultation as impermissible. They included Šarīf Mortazā (d. 436/1044), Sallār Deylamī (d. 448/1056 or 463/1071), and Ebn Edrīs Ḥellī (d. 598/1201). Moḥammad b. Makkī ‘Āmelī al-Šahīd al-Awwal (d. 786/1384) appears to have been the first jurist to designate the Friday prayer as incumbent if performed in the presence of a jurist, counted as a deputy of the Imam; it is significant that he expressed this opinion in *al-Lom‘a al-demašqīya*, a treatise on jurisprudence (*feqh*) written for ‘Alī Mo‘ayyad, ruler of the Sarbadarid principality in Khorasan (763-83/1362-81; Amir Arjomand, 1984, p. 141). ‘Alī b. Zayn-al-Dīn ‘Āmelī al-Šahīd al-Tānī (d. 965/1557) expressed a similar view.

The views of these two martyrs may have been inspired partly by the desire to provide the Shi‘ite community in Syria with greater visibility and acceptance as an authentic legal school, enjoining the same rites as the Sunnis. The question of the Friday prayer had, after all, already figured in the 12th-century polemics against the Shi‘ites. They were accused of diverging from orthopraxy through their insistence on the prayer being led by the Imam or his nominee. To this the retort was given that this no more signified an abandonment of Friday prayer than did the Shafi‘ite stipulation that a minimum of forty believers be assembled for the prayer (Qazvīnī, pp. 551-52). It was, however, the rise of the Safavids to power in Persia and the concomitant propagation of Shi‘ism as the state creed that lent particular topicality and urgency to the debate over the Friday prayer. Scholars like ‘Alī Karakī (d. 940/1533), an immigrant from Jabal ‘Āmel in Syria who exercised great influence during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (930-84/1524-76), argued that under the new conditions of Shi‘ite supremacy the Friday prayer was incontestably obligatory, and arrangements were made for convening it in a number of Persian cities (Glassen, pp. 266-67). He was opposed on this and related matters by another immigrant, Ebrāhīm Qaṭīfī, as well as by later Safavid jurists, and scholarly opinion continued to vary throughout the Safavid period. Treatises proliferated on both sides of the issue (for listings, see Modarressi, pp. 145-52 and *al-Darī‘a* XV, pp. 62-82). Among those regarding Friday prayer as obligatory were Moḥammad-Bāqer Sabzavārī (d. 1090/1679), Mollā Moḥsen Fayż Kāšānī (d. 1091/1680; Sachedina, pp. 197-99), and Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī (d. 1111/1700; LXXXIX, pp. 146-47). On the other hand, one of Majlesī’s pupils, Fāzel Hendī (d. 1137/1724), who like him exercised some influence at the Safavid court, insisted that the holding of Friday prayers was still



forbidden, for, if the jurists were to lead the prayers, it would imply unauthorized revival of the special deputyship (*nīābat-e kāṣṣa*) that had ended with the death of the Imam's fourth named agent in 330/941 (Sachedina, p. 195).

It is not therefore surprising that the Friday prayer never became fully institutionalized in Safavid Persia. During the reign of Shah 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629), it is true, Bahā'-al-Dīn 'Āmelī (q.v.; d. 1032/1623) made an attempt, with royal support, to foster the performance of Friday prayer, but even he was obliged to admit that the believer had the option of performing the regular midday prayer instead (Eskandar Beg, I, p. 156). The age of Shah 'Abbās was, in any event, a time of approximation, whether conscious or not, to Ottoman institutions, and it is significant that the name of the monarch was mentioned in the *koṭba*, in imitation of a Sunni practice that had already been denounced by 'Allāma Ḥellī as a reprehensible innovation (*bed'a*) introduced by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (136-58/754-78; Lambton, p. 222). Safavid monarchs were reported occasionally to have attended Friday prayer (Amir Arjomand, 1988a, p. 199), but it is revealing that Jean Chardin, who was in Persia during the reigns of Shah 'Abbās II (1052-77/1642-66) and Shah Ṣafī II (1077-1105/1666-94), remarked on the absence of anything resembling the ceremonial royal attendance at Friday prayer he had witnessed in both Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India (II, p. 395).

It was not until the Qajar period that the *emām-e jom'a* emerged as an important religious figure in Persia, often exerting an influence beyond merely leading the Friday prayer. This development was unaffected by the sharp disagreements between followers of the Akbārī school of jurisprudence (See [AKBĀRĪYA](#)) and their Oṣūlī adversaries, who espoused *ejtehād* (independent reasoning). The Akbārīs went so far as to accuse of apostasy anyone who disputed the unconditionally obligatory nature of the prayer, maintaining that its conditionality on being led by the Imam or his nominee was the result of the *ejtehād* (q.v.; Sachedina, p. 199). The majority of Oṣūlīs continued to affirm that the presence of the Imam or his nominee was essential but held that the general authority of the jurists during the occultation included competence to convene Friday prayer (Sachedina, pp. 200-202). The practical effect of both positions was therefore the same. In any event, theoretical considerations may not have been decisive: Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥasan Najafī (d. 1266/1848), an Oṣūlī scholar resident in Iraq, accused his Persian colleagues of being motivated by love of power and



leadership (Sachedina, p. 198). In the late 18th century a parallel controversy between Akbārīs and Oṣūlīs among the Shi'ites in northern India did lead, partly for local reasons, to opposite positions on the question of the Friday prayer, with the Akbārīs strongly opposed to it and the Oṣūlīs, under the influence of their colleagues in Iraq and Persia, favoring it (Cole, pp. 127-37).

Although the Oṣūlī jurists had from the outset a frequently uneasy relationship with the Qajar monarchs, it was the shah in the Qajar period who appointed the *emām-e jom'as* of Tehran and the provincial cities; the first such appointments were made by Āgā Moḥammad Khan (1193-1212/1779-97; Algar, p. 44). Sometimes the counsel of the jurists was sought in making such appointments; it was on the advice of Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem Qomī that Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah (1212-50/1797-1834) offered the position in Tehran to Moḥammad-Bāqer Ṣaftī and then to Āqā Sayyed Moḥammad Yazdī (Algar, pp. 50-51). Especially in the provinces *emām-e jom'as* sometimes reinforced governmental authority, but more often they contested it. Mīr Moḥammad-Ḥosayn, Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's appointee in Isfahan, interceded with him on at least two occasions, once on behalf of the city after its people had lent their support to a Zand pretender to the throne and once on behalf of Ṣaftī, who had been imprisoned for excessive zeal in implementing penalties stipulated by Islamic law (Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-ṣafā'* IX, pp. 323-26; E'temād-al-Saltāna, *Montāẓam-e nāṣerī*, ed., Reẓwānī, pp. 1443-44; Algar, pp. 52, 61). Mīr Moḥammad was also among those jurists who issued rulings (*fatwās*) instructing the government to declare war on Russia in 1241/1826 (Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-ṣafā'* IX, pp. 640-43; Algar, p. 79). His successor, Mīr Moḥammad-Mahdī, participated in suppressing disorder at the beginning of Moḥammad Shah's reign in 1250/1834 but three years later himself helped to organize a revolt against the governor of Isfahan before carrying his agitation to Tehran, where he attempted to have the water supply of the Jewish quarter cut off (Algar, pp. 110, 119). During the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) Mīrzā Sayyed Moḥammad, *emām-e jom'a* of Isfahan, was in permanent conflict with the governor, Mas'ūd Mīrzā Żell-al-Solṭān, over control of the city (Żell-al-Solṭān, p. 350).

Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah's *emām-e jom'a* at Tabrīz, Mīrzā Aḥmad Mojtahed, had amical relations with the monarch, but his son and successor Ḥājī Moḥammad-Bāqer (d. 1285/1868) so completely dominated the city that "no heed was paid to the government" (Nāder Mīrzā, p. 118). Although he was briefly removed from Tabrīz by the grand vizier Amīr(-e) Kabīr (q.v.), he returned in triumph after the latter's disgrace and execution. The expulsion from Tabrīz in 1303/1886 of



the *emām-e jom'ā* Mīrzā Jawād Āqā ended in similar fashion (Ādamīyat, pp. 429-32; Algar, pp. 181, 209).

The position of the *emām-e jom'ā* in the capital was particularly sensitive, and care was taken to ensure that it was filled by men amenable to the policies of the court. Nonetheless, Mīr Moḥammad-Mahdī (not to be confused with his identically named counterpart in Isfahan), who held the post from 1236/1820 to 1263/1846, waged a bitter struggle against the Sufi proclivities of the grand vizier Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī (q.v.) and denounced him by name from the pulpit (Ḥabībābādī, *Makārem* V, p. 1703; Stuart, pp. 219-20). Mīr Moḥammad was succeeded by his nephew and son-in-law, Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem, who proved more loyal to the court, exerting himself to preserve public order first during the transition from Moḥammad Shah to Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah and then, in 1265/1849, when a mutiny of the Tehran garrison forced the temporary resignation of Amīr Kabīr. The latter nonetheless deprived him of his judicial functions and restricted him to leading Friday prayer, because of the direct links he had established with both Great Britain and Russia (Hedāyat, *Rawżat al-ṣafā'* X, p. 401; Algar, pp. 129-30; Ādamīyat, pp. 424-27). This taming proved decisive, and thereafter the *emām-e jom'as* of Tehran functioned unvaryingly as loyal adjuncts of the court. Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem was succeeded by his son Mīrzā Zayn-al-'Ābedīn, who was only eleven years old; his actual leadership of the prayer had to be deferred for some years, a symptom of the full incorporation of the post into the Qajar bureaucracy. Mīrzā Zayn-al-'Ābedīn married a daughter of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah and was seated next to the throne at celebrations of Nowrūz (Algar, pp. 130, 156; Ḥabībābādī, *Makārem* V, p. 1650). It is thus not surprising to find him among the minority of jurists who sought to dissuade Mīrzā Ḥasan Šīrāzī from opposing the tobacco monopoly in 1308/1891 (Algar, p. 211). On his death in 1321/1903 Mīrzā Zayn-al-'Ābedīn was succeeded by his son Ḥājī Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsem (named, no doubt, after his grandfather), who is credited with having disrupted the first major gathering of the Constitutional Revolution (q.v. ii), at Masjed-e Šāh in Šawwāl 1323/December 1905 (*Tārīk-e bīdārī*, ed. Sa'īdī Šīrjānī, I, pp. 321-40; Algar, p. 246). Hereditary transmission of the post, combined with unwavering loyalty to the court, robbed the *emām jom'as* of Tehran of all real influence, and consigned them to a marginality in the religious life of Persia that continued through the Pahlavi period (1925-78).

Sheikh Moḥammad Kālesī (d.1342 Š./1963), an Iraqi scholar banished to Persia in 1341/1923, attempted to convene regular Friday prayer, but the issue



remained largely dormant until after the deposition of Reżā Shah in 1320 Š./1941. It was then that Ayatollah Moḥammad-Taqī K̄vānsārī reintroduced the regular performance of Friday prayer at the Masjed-e jāme' in Qom after a long hiatus (Rāzī, I, pp. 149-50). The founder of the Fedā'īān-e Eslām (q.v.), Sayyed Mojtabā Mīrlawḥī, better known as Nawwāb Şafawī (k. 1334 Š./1956), uninterested in the erudite controversies of the past and concerned only with the educational and mobilizing potential of the Friday prayer, proposed that the Ministry of the interior (Wezārat-e keşvar) build a Friday mosque in every city in Persia; that all members of the government, from the shah to the lowliest civil servant, be compelled to attend Friday prayer; and that the *koṭba* delivered in Tehran be broadcast throughout the country (pp. 59-60). Ayatollah Sayyed Maḥmūd Ṭālaqānī (d. 1358 Š./1979), in a sermon delivered at the Hedāyat mosque in Tehran shortly before the uprising of K̄ordād 1342 Š./June 1963, declared the prayer obligatory if performed behind a just imam (*emām-e 'ādel*; 1341 Š./1962, p. 20). Imam (then Ayatollah) Sayyed Rūḥ-Allāh K̄omeynī (d. 13 K̄ordād 1368 Š./3 June 1989), in a compendium of jurisprudence prepared during his exile in Bursa, Turkey, in 1343 Š./1964, expressed regret that the political dimension of the Friday prayer had everywhere been neglected and specified that the *koṭba* should include mention of political and economic developments, "especially those leading to the colonization and exploitation of the Muslim lands" (1390/1970, I, pp. 231-34). In lectures on Islamic government delivered at Najaf in 1348 Š./1969-70 he commented further on the mobilizing function of Friday prayer (K̄omeynī, 1391/1971, pp. 180-81).

It was not, however, until the years leading up to the revolution of 1357 Š./1978 that the Friday prayer actually became a means of confronting the shah's regime. In 1351 Š./1972 Ayatollah Ḥosayn-'Alī Montazerī, banished from Qom to his native Najafābād, began to lead Friday prayer, addressing such topics as the need for an Islamic government, the official celebration of two and a half millennia of Persian monarchy, the Palestine question, and the forced participation of schoolgirls in official parades, as well as the obligatory nature of attending Friday prayer during the occultation (Īzadī, I, pp. 100-27). Imprisoned in 1354 Š./1975, Montazerī organized Friday prayer for his fellow inmates (Īzadī, p. 255). As the revolution progressed in the summer of 1357 Š./1978, antigovernment Friday prayers were held in a number of cities, including Qom and Isfahan.

In the summer following the foundation of the Islamic Republic, Ṭālaqānī



telephoned Montazerī in Qom to suggest that he approach Komeynī with a view to establishing regular Friday prayer throughout the country. Komeynī agreed but initially held that the jurists in each province should make the necessary arrangements. Ṭālaqānī was able to persuade him that, as leader (*rahbar*) and legitimate holder of authority (*walī amr*), he should himself appoint the Friday imams, for it was only thus that the prayer would be properly institutionalized. He also emphasized the necessity for speed, as the large numbers of Sunni Muslims visiting Persia in the aftermath of the revolution would certainly expect to attend such gatherings (Nahzat-e āzādī, pp. 52-53).

The first appointment was of Ṭālaqānī himself, as *emām-e jom'ā* of Tehran, on 5 Mordād 1358/27 July 1979, in time for the beginning of Ramazān. In his first *koṭba*, delivered at what was to become the permanent site of the prayer, on the campus of Tehran University, Ṭālaqānī drew an analogy between the situation of the Muslims of Persia after the Revolution and that of the Muslims in Medina after the migration of the Prophet and defined the purpose of the *koṭba* as “exposing the plots of the enemy and acquainting them [the worshippers] with the duties and responsibilities facing them in the week ahead” (Ṭālaqānī, 1358 Š./1979, pp. 8-9). He led the prayer on only five other occasions before his death in September 1979. Komeynī then appointed Montazerī, stressing the importance of the Friday prayer as “a demonstration of the political and social power of Islam” (Komeynī, 1361-71 Š./1982-92, IX, p. 197). Montazerī’s tenure lasted eighteen weeks, at the end of which he was appointed *emām-e jom'ā* of Qom and Ayatollah (then Ḥojjat-al-Eslām) Sayyed ‘Alī Kāmena’ī took his place in Tehran (Komeynī, 1361-71 Š./1982-92, XI, p. 245). On 6 Tīr 1360/27 June 1981 Kāmena’ī, while delivering the Friday sermon, was wounded by a would-be assassin; thereafter he alternated with Ḥojjat-al-Eslām ‘Alī-Akbar Rafsanjānī in leading the prayer, though occasionally prominent figures like ayatollahs Mūsawī Ardabīlī and Emāmī Kāšānī were designated provisional *emām-e jom'ā* (*emām-e jom'ā-ye mowaqqat*) for single occasions.

*Emām-e jom'ās* were also appointed in other cities, the selection sometimes made in accordance with popular request. The appointments included at least two Sunnis, Mulla Qāder Qāderī (Pāva) and Mawlawī Šahdād (Zāhedān), and one for a foreign location, Ḥojjat-al-Eslām ‘Abbās Mehrī (Kuwait; Komeynī, 1361-71 Š./1982-92, IX, p. 197). By December 1980 the number of *emām-e jom'ās* had grown to the extent that Montazerī thought it useful to convene a national gathering at the Fayzīya *madrassa* in Qom, in order to refine and coordinate



their activities (Īzadī, II, pp. 166-90). Soon thereafter councils were organized in each province, but four years elapsed before a central secretariat (Dabīr-kāna-ye markazī) of *emām-e jom'as* was established, its members appointed by Komeynī. Another result of the gathering in Qom was the decision to organize an international congress of leaders of the Friday and congregational prayers (*kongra-ye jahānī-e a'emma-ye jom'a wa jamā'at*), with the declared purposes of promoting unity between Sunnis and Shi'ites and countering perceived misrepresentations of the revolution abroad. Komeynī approved the initiative, commenting that, had the revolution yielded nothing more than the revival of the Friday prayer, that would have been enough (Īzadī, II, p. 169). Delegates from sixty countries attended the congress, held in Tehran 8-13 Dey 1361/29 December 1982-3 January 1983, followed by visits to Qom and the war front in Kūzestān. A second international congress took place in Tehran 16-24 Ordibehešt 1363/6-14 May 1984; it issued a communiqué proclaiming Komeynī leader of the world's Muslims.

On the theoretical plane the establishment and centralized organization of the Friday prayer was fully comprehensible in light of the doctrine of *welāyat-e faqīh* (governance of the jurist), in which the governing jurist was declared heir to all the governmental prerogatives of the occulted Imam. It is nonetheless significant that no formal declaration of obligatory attendance appears to have been made; rather, emphasis is on the duty to attend as a weekly renewal of allegiance (*bay'at*) to the Islamic Republic. The prayer is typically performed in a large open space, in itself signifying an expansion of religious concern beyond the devotional limits of the mosque; the front rows are reserved for government dignitaries, war veterans, and foreign guests. During the 1980s the *koṭba* was preceded by the chanting of slogans condemning enemies of the Islamic Republic, for example, the Ba'ṯhist regime in Iraq, the United States, Israel, and the Sāzmān-e mojāhedīn-e kalq, in official parlance the Monāfeqīn (Hypocrites). The Tehran *koṭba* in particular serves to promulgate and justify government policies and is both broadcast live and published in the daily press in full or in extract. During Komeynī's lifetime the *emām-e jom'as* frequently consulted with him, individually or in groups, and the authority they acquired from direct access sometimes tended to clash with that of other government organs. Komeynī therefore found it advisable, in advance of the presidential elections of 1366 Š./1987, to forbid their interference in the electoral process (1361-71 Š./1982-92, XX, p. 100). One consequence of the visibility and relative accessibility of the *emām-e jom'as* as government spokesmen was the assassination by the Mojāhedīn of four of



them, known as *čahār šahīd-e meḥrāb* (the four martyrs of the prayer niche): Ayatollah Sayyed Asad-Allāh Madanī (Tabrīz), on 20 Šahrivar 1359/11 September 1980; Ayatollah 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Dastḡayb (Shiraz), on 20 Āḍar 1360/11 December 1981 (Rabbānī, I, pp. 571-72, 578); Ayatollah Moḡammad Šadūqī (Yazd), on 11 Tīr 1361/2 July 1982; and Ayatollah 'Aṭā'-Allāh Ašrafī (Bāḡtarān, formerly Kermānšāh), on 23 Mehr 1361/15 October 1982 (Ḳomeynī, 1361-71 Š./1982-92, XVI, pp. 219-20, XVII, pp. 56-57). The varying popularity of government policies has also been reflected in attendance at Friday prayer.

See also [ḲOTBA](#).

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