

CANDLE *of* HOPE



Ayatullah Sayed Ali Redha Shirazi

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Candle
of
Hope



LATE AYATOLLAH SAYED MOHAMMAD REDHA AL SHIRAZI

Chapter 1

The Author in Brief

Indeed, if every once in a while in history an exceptional human being comes to existence, the late Ayatollah Sayed Mohammad Redha Al-Shirazi was one of them. He was exceptional in every aspect—in his angelic manners, his saint-like behavior, his deep knowledge, his wealth of information, his loyalty to scholarship, his unrelenting faith in God, his burning love for Ahlul-Bayt (peace be upon them), his unmatched level of piety, his profound ability to influence and guide people, his immense level of sincerity and devotion, his fantastic balance between tenderness and firmness, his delicate degree of sensitivity to never hurt others in any way, his fine fatherly figure to his children, his perfect approach in protecting his family, his kind and gentle smile, his utmost respect to everyone around him, his complete obedience and unconditional humbleness towards his parents, his insistence on taking advantage of every second, his abandonment of the materialistic world, his marvelous preparation for the Hereafter, his empathetic tears for Ahlul-Bayt (peace be upon them) and the oppressed, his concern for the youth, and hundreds of other virtues and outstanding qualities that he possessed. Simply put, he was an embodiment of Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them.

Ayatollah Sayed Mohammad Redha Al-Shirazi, may Allah shower his soul with mercy, was born in the holy city of Karbala in the year 1379 A.H., about half a century ago. He comes from a family known for its scholarship and devotion to Islam. His father is the late Grand Ayatollah Sayed Mohammad Al-Shirazi, and his grandfather is the late Grand Ayatollah Mirza Mahdi Al-Shirazi, may Allah shower their souls with mercy. He spent his early childhood close to the shrine of Imam Al-

Hussain, peace be upon him in Karbala. Then, along with his father, he immigrated to Kuwait as a result of the persecution they were subjected to by the Baathist regime. After spending several years in Kuwait, where he studied well and prepared himself for a new level of scholarship, he migrated to Iran.

In Iran he studied under a number of prominent Grand Scholars. After years of academic diligence, he achieved the status of Ijtihad—which is the highest level of scholarship at the Islamic Seminary. He authored a number of profound books which revealed the depth of his knowledge and true scholarship. He also gave upper-level lessons in Islamic Law (Fiqh), Jurisprudence (Usool), Qur’anic Commentary (Tafseer), and Principles of Belief (Aqa’ed). Around the time of dawn on the 26th of Jamadi I, 1429 (June 1, 2008) and in obscure circumstances, he departed this world to meet his Lord. His departure struck a great and irreplaceable loss around the world. Millions mourned his loss around the world. He had the honor of being buried in the holy shrine of his grandfather Imam Al-Hussain, peace be upon him.

An important role he assumed in his life was to give weekly speeches to a number of his students. Many of these speeches were recorded and later broadcast on global satellite channels. These amazing speeches had a huge impact on millions of people worldwide. Many were touched by his words. His words penetrated the hearts because they came out from his heart. Millions have been guided through his remarkable speeches.

Amongst the topics that he focused on is our master and leader, Imam AlMahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance. He gave a number of speeches throughout his life which addressed many angles pertaining to Imam Al-Mahdi. We deemed it beneficial to gather some of these lectures, which were delivered in Arabic, and translate them into English. We have presented here the translation of five of his lectures on Imam Al-Mahdi.

The first lecture is entitled “Significance of Believing in Imam Al-Mahdi.” In the first part of this captivating lecture, Ayatollah Sayed Mohammad Redha AlShirazi goes through three factors which demonstrate the great importance of believing in the awaited savior Imam Al-Mahdi. In the second part, he shares several ways by which we can show our

concern for Imam Al-Mahdi. Then he concludes by giving us a glimpse of the blessings that lie in believing in the Imam.

The second lecture is entitled “The Savior: Hope for Humanity.” In the first part of this captivating lecture, the author goes through the three stages of Mahdawiyya—the concept of believing in the savior. The first stage is shared by all divine religions, while the second stage is held by Muslims, and the third stage is re-served to the Shia only. In the second part, he addresses the benefits of being blessed by the awaited savior Imam Al-Mahdi.

The third lecture is entitled “Imam Al-Mahdi’s Occultation.” In the first part of this captivating lecture, the author illustrates how the hidden awaited savior represents one of the dimensions of God. Then he gives an account of several prophets of God who also had an occultation (absence) sometime in their lives. In the second part, he makes a few observations regarding the occultation of the awaited savior Imam Al-Mahdi. He explains although the Imam is hidden, nonetheless he carries out important roles in this world.

The fourth lecture is entitled “The Role of Imam Al-Mahdi.” In the first part of this captivating lecture, the author offers a theological perspective on the different roles at play in this world. Then he focuses on the role of the awaited savior Imam Al-Mahdi. In the second part, he shares practical steps one can take to become closer to Imam Al-Mahdi and how to benefit from his existence. These steps consist of realizing one’s weaknesses, recognizing the greatness of the Imam, and developing one’s spiritual capacity by thoroughly purifying one’s self.

The fifth lecture is entitled “The Era of Reappearance.” In the first part of this captivating lecture, the author gives us a glimpse of the Era of Reappearance—the utopian era humanity is awaiting. He addresses the religious, economic and scientific states that will take place in Imam Al-Mahdi’s government. In the second part, he expresses the importance of preparing for the Imam’s reappearance, coupled with several examples he draws from Islamic narrations.

We ask the Almighty God to elevate his status and multiply his deeds, and may Allah gather him with Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, and Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them. Note:

The expression (swt) is an abbreviation of the Arabic phrase “subhanahu wa ta’ala,” which means “the Glorified and Exalted.” It is used after mentioning God.

Chapter 2

Note

The expression (saw) is an abbreviation of the Arabic phrase “salla-allahu alayi wa aleh,” which means “may the peace of God be upon him and his family.” It is used after mentioning the holy Prophet Muhammad.

The expression (as) is an abbreviation of the Arabic phrase “alayhi assalam,” which means “peace be upon him.” It is used after mentioning the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt and the prophets of God.

The expression (af) is an abbreviation of the Arabic phrase “ajjala-allahu farajah,” which means “may Allah hasten his re-appearance.” It is used after mentioning Imam Al-Mahdi.

Chapter 3

Significance of Believing in Imam Al-Mahdi

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate,
the Merciful

All praise is due to the Allah (swt) the Lord of the universe, and may His blessings be upon Prophet Mohammad and his immaculate progeny of Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them. And may their enemies be cursed till the Day of Judgment. Our discussion about the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi (af) revolves around two main points:

First point:

Factors that demonstrate the importance of the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

Second Point:

Ways by which we show our concern for Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

Factors that demonstrate the importance of the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi

As for the first point of discussion, there is a set of factors which compels us to believe in Imam Al-Mahdi (af) and treat this belief with utmost importance. We will mention three factors here:

First factor: The belief in Imam Al-Mahdi is a critical religious obligation

The belief in Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance, represents the last link or ring in the chain of faith. The last link in any chain can be of two types. In the first type, this last link or ring retains its own independent value, and its value is equivalent to the value of other links in the chain. Thus, there is no difference between the first, middle and last links. In the context of Islamic law, this type is called a “non-linked obligation.” In other words, it’s an obligation that has several parts, but the parts do not depend on each other.

Let’s give an example so we can see what is meant by a non-linked obligation. Money that one borrows or takes as a loan is considered to be of this type. Once the due date comes to pay back the money you owe to someone, there exists a religious obligation which calls on you to pay your debt. Let’s say you owe someone ten Dinars. In essence, this obligation that you must fulfill boils down to ten obligations, and each one of these ten obligations has its own independent obedience (that’s if you pay it) and its own independent disobedience (that’s if you don’t actually pay it). So each Dinar has its own obligation on you to be paid. Hence, if you pay back nine Dinars (out of ten), in essence you have fulfilled nine obligations, and there remains the last Dinar, or the last obligation that you have to fulfill. If you refuse to pay the last Dinar, the previous nine Dinars which you paid will not be affected, since those obligations were fulfilled. Therefore, if you were to be punished for not paying this last Dinar, you wouldn’t be punished for not paying the entire debt, since you have paid most of it. You would simply be punished for not paying this last Dinar. This is the first type.

In the second type, all the links or rings in the chain depend on the last link or ring. This causes the value of the entire chain to depend on the last link. In the context of Islamic law, this second type is called a “linked obligation.” If the last part of the obligation is not fulfilled, the entire obligation will be considered invalid or nullified. An example is Salat (daily prayers). If we were to assume that prayer is composed of twenty parts (recitation, bowing, prostration, etc...), all the parts depend on the last part of prayer, which is Tasleem. If this last part is valid, the entire prayer will be valid. If not, the entire

prayer would be considered invalid. This is because prayer is a “linked obligation,” so all of its parts depend on the last part.

Having understood the difference between these two types of obligations, the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance, is of the second type (linked obligation) with respect to the Islamic belief system. Just as someone’s faith is invalid if he believes in all the messengers and prophets of God but denies the seal of all prophets, Prophet Muhammad (saw), the one who believes in all prophets and Imams but denies Imam Al-Mahdi (af), his faith would be deemed invalid. Rejecting the seal of successors, Imam Al-Mahdi (af), is just like rejecting the seal of Prophets, Prophet Muhammad (af). The belief in the last successor is equivalent to the belief in all prophets and Imams, peace be upon them all, and the rejection of the last successor is equivalent to the rejection of all prophets and Imams.

Now it becomes evident why the first factor is so important, since this first factor compels us to believe in the Imam and reveals to us how critical it is to treat this belief with utmost importance.

Second factor: Believing in Imam Al-Mahdi is a way of thanking Allah

The belief in Imam Al-Mahdi (af) represents a type of “thanking the giver/sustainer.” In the science of Aqaed, it has been established that thanking the giver is an obligation our intellect mandates. (There are certain beliefs that come from the Holy Qur’an and the tradition of Ahlul-Bayt. Some beliefs, however, come from our intellect and power of reasoning. An example is the existence of God, that God is one, and that He is just. The main proof for these is the intellect. Amongst the beliefs that come from the intellect is thanking the giver. Our mind or intellect dictates to us that we must thank the one who gives us a blessing. Of course, thanking also comes in various forms. The thanks that our intellect obligates on us must be appropriate to the giver. For example, thanking one’s boss is done differently than thanking one’s friend, spouse, or child. Thanking a child is done by giving the child a toy, while thanking others is different.)

The giver/sustainer is two:

The First

The one gives us our existence, and that's Allah (swt). (When we look around us, we realize we are overwhelmed with blessings and bounties from the second we come to this life till the last moment. Every breath we take is a blessing, and every cell in our body is a blessing, let alone the many other blessings we humans enjoy. Once our intellect or mind sees all these blessings, it takes us to the conclusion that there is a being giving us all these blessings. That being is Allah (swt), and thus He being must be thanked.)

The Second

Those through which we get our existence, and they are the Prophet (saw) and the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt (as), including the last of them, Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance. In previous lectures, we have mentioned that the Holy Qur'an emphasizes there are two actors: a direct actor, and an indirect actor. As for the direct actor, it is Allah (swt), Who Has created everything in the universe, and He is the one who gives existence to everything. The fruits that come to existence are created by Allah (swt), the direct actor, but at the same time Allah (swt) states in the Holy Qur'an:?

And causes water to pour down from the sky, thereby producing fruits as sustenance for you.

In this verse, Allah (swt) states that through rain fruits are produced. The rain here is an indirect actor. Thus, the existence of fruits comes from Allah (swt), but through the rain, and so the giver in this world is two: the one who gives our existence (Allah) and those through which we get our existence (Ahlul-Bayt).

In Ziyara Al-Jami'a, do we not address the Imams, peace be upon them, by saying "the patrons of blessings?" Indeed Ahlul-Bayt (as) are the custodians of all blessings we have. Allah (swt) is the one who blesses us, but He does so through them, just as He creates fruits through rain. In the book of Al-Kafi, is there not a holy narration which states "If it weren't for us (Ahlul-Bayt), Allah would not have been worshipped." In the book of Al-Ihtijaj, do we not find a letter written by Imam Al-

Mahdi (af) which says “We are the [direct] creation of Allah, and all other creations [have been created] through us.”

Every moment that we live is a blessing of Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance. It is through Ahlul-Bayt (as) that the trees grow. It is by them that the fruits are produced, and by them the rivers flow. Allah (swt) has bestowed upon us His inherent and apparent blessings through Ahlul-Bayt (as). Therefore, treating the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi (af) with utmost importance is a way of “thanking the giver.”

It has been reported that a group of scholars once gathered to discuss what stance they should take against the dangers that were facing Islam and Muslims. This incident took place in Iraq some forty years ago. One of the scholars present suggested that their obligation is to enjoin the good, forbid the evil, and show resistance to the corrupt laws that were being legislated. However, one of those present objected to this suggestion by claiming that such a move would expose them to danger, and they might be arrested and persecuted by the government.

Upon hearing this objection, the first scholar replied by saying, “Governments assume responsibility to take full care of their soldiers for a long period of time. In return, the soldiers defend their country in times of trouble. It is unacceptable for any soldier to run away from battle during such dangerous times. In fact, running away is considered treason (or betrayal). As for us, we’ve spent all of our lives being blessed by Imam Al-Mahdi, for his mere existence is a blessing to us all. How can we now not defend him and defend the religion of his grandfather the holy Prophet peace be upon him?! Isn’t such shortcoming considered betraying him, while we, the soldiers of the Imam, have supposedly prepared ourselves for such a day?”

Indeed, the second factor which drives us to treat the subject of Imam AlMahdi (af) with utmost importance is because such concern for our Imam is a way of “thanking the giver.”

Third factor: Showing concern for Imam Al-Mahdi brings us blessings and success

Being concerned about the subject of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) draws us many blessings, and it prepares us for all types of

success. We must know that success is a very important issue in our lives. There are some people who lead a successful life, while others are deprived from achieving success. Allah, the Almighty and Glorified, makes some actions and beings blessed, while other actions and beings do not experience such blessing. How can one achieve such blessing and success? What is the way?

We generally believe that divine factors have a tremendous impact on the success of a human being's life and how blessed he or she is. Simply by examining the lives of our scholars, we can witness how true this is. These scholars would not have achieved the status they did if it weren't for some of the divine factors that surrounded them. As an example, Al-Sayed Abol-Hasan Al-Isfahani (may Allah shower his soul with mercy) invoked and sincerely asked Imam Ali (as) to assist him in a specific case. Then he saw Imam Ali (as) in his dream giving him the key to the holy city of Najaf, (after which he found the solution to his dilemma).

Another example is Shaikh Abdul Kareem Al-Haeri (may Allah shower his soul with mercy), who established the religious seminary in the holy city of Qom. He invoked Imam Hussain (as), and that may be the reason why he was so successful in his academic standing and his many achievements. As for Shaykh Al-Sadouq (may Allah shower his soul with mercy), he made significant contributions to the religion of Islam, and it has been narrated that he was born by the prayer of Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance.

As for Allama Al-Majlisi (may Allah shower his soul with mercy), who had the honor of propagating for the religion of Islam and reviving the religion of the holy Prophet (saw), a scholar narrates a story related to his birth. He says:

I was travelling from the holy city of Karbala to Isfahan when, during my journey, I had a dream about the father of Allama Al-Majlisi. He was carrying a child in his arms, and he handed the child to the holy Prophet. He asked the Prophet to pray for him so he would serve the religion of Islam and propagate it. The holy Prophet took him and prayed for him, then he handed the child to Imam Ali. Imam Ali also prayed for him and handed him to all the Imams, one by one, until the child was taken by Imam Al-Mahdi. Then Imam Al-Mahdi

handed me the child and told me to pray for him too. When I arrived Isfahan, I headed to the house of Allama Al-Majlisi's father, and once I got there, he came with an infant in his arms and he said that the infant was born on that day. Then he handed him to me and asked me to pray for him to become a servant to the religion of Islam. It was then that I remembered the dream I had, and when I relayed this dream to Allama Al-Majlisi's father, he became very joyful."

Ways by Which We Show Our Concern for Imam Al-Mahdi

We will address two points here:

First point: Serving Imam Al-Mahdi educationally

There are numerous ways one can show concern for Imam Al-Mahdi (af) through education. One way is to read informative books and articles about the personality of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). As the religious decree states, “the one who dies without knowing the Imam of his time shall die the death of Jahiliyya.” Seeking intimate knowledge and being familiar with religious figures has a great value in the eyes of God. In this regard, the holy verse in the Qur’an which states, “And I have not created the Jin nor the humans but to worship me,” has been explained to mean that Allah (swt) has created all of creation simply to be known. Furthermore, one must encourage his/her family members to exert more effort in knowing Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance, and that can be done in part by being familiar with events and stories about Imam Al-Mahdi (af) and relaying these accounts to one’s family members. Another way is to establish specialized libraries which offer a pool of resources about knowing Imam Al-Mahdi (as). Once Sayed Mohammad Kadhem AlQazwini, may Allah shower his soul with mercy, was asked, “What is the benefit of the encyclopedia you are compiling on Imam Al-Sadiq?” To that he replied, “It is satisfactory for me that this encyclopedia is kept in libraries so that people know there is an encyclopedia on Imam Al-Sadiq which reaches 60 volumes (for example).”

When a youth visits a library to realize that it has for instance 1,500 books on Imam Al-Mahdi (af), this by itself will have some sort of influence on him, (since this youth will realize how important the Imam is, and consequently he will be encouraged to know more about him. The more he comes to know about him, the closer he will be to the path of Ahlul-Bayt and Islam). Therefore, let us dedicate a section in every library, and in fact a room in every house, to all the books and audio media that relate to Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance.

Second Point: Reviving the message of Imam Al-Mahdi

There are also numerous ways to revive the message of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Amongst the various ways is to make the effort to recite and interact with the supplications that are related to Imam Al-Mahdi (af). An excellent supplication to start with is Du'a Nudba, and one may conduct a Du'a session at his/her house. Then one can encourage others to do the same. Gradually, these small efforts will evolve into a widespread, healthy social trend, by the will of God. Other ways of reviving our Imam in our life is to do anything that reminds us of him, such as giving our sons his name and giving our daughters the name of his mother Narjis or his aunt Hakeema. By reviving the name of Imam Al-Mahdi (af), the name of all other Imams will be revived. Moreover, the city of Samarra can be revived, just as the great Mujaddid Al-Shirazi, may Allah shower his soul with mercy, did so when he decided to migrate to Samarra and settle there. He was able to revive the city after it was neglected for a long time.

A scholar once reported that after the collapse of the corrupt Baathist regime in Iraq (year 2003), so many donations were sent to his institution which was dedicated to revive the city of Samarra and the shrine of the holy Imams. His institution received donations much more than he had expected. Indeed, the followers of Ahlul-Bayt are prepared to offer their lives for their religion, let alone offering their wealth.

Amongst the interesting and wonderful projects that a faithful young man, who carries the soul of serving Imam Al-Mahdi (af), embarked on was to encourage local storeowners to sell their products half the price in the name of Imam AlMahdi (af). Then he would compensate them for the other half so they would not lose money. As a result, so many people rushed to these stores, while remembering Imam Al-Mahdi (af) and sending their praise to the holy Prophet (saw) and his immaculate progeny of Ahlul-Bayt. This faithful young man says that his idea was conducted on a single Friday, but he noticed that during the following Friday one of the store owners continued to sell his products half the price, in honor of Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

The blessings that lie in the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi

The belief in Imam Al-Mahdi (af), in addition to its own inherent value, delivers success and many blessings to the lives of all those who show concern for it. In this regard, it has been reported that Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi and Sayed Bahrul-Uloom, may Allah shower their souls with mercy, were very close friends. They both studied under Al-Waheed Al-Bahbahani, may Allah shower his soul with mercy. Sayed Bahrul-Uloom, since he didn't fully understand everything taught in class, would daily ask Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi to tutor him and repeat to him what Waheed Al-Bahbahani had taught in class. Then they separated from each other since Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi migrated to Iran while Sayed Bahrul-Uloom stayed in Iraq.

After a while, Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi was quite surprised to hear that his friend, Sayed Bahrul-Uloom, achieved a very high status in scholarship and knowledge. When Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi returned to Iraq and visited him, he posed to Sayed Bahrul-Uloom a scientific question, and he was dazzled to see how deep his knowledge was and how critical his analysis was. Upon his amazement, he told Sayed Bahrul-Uloom, "indeed you are an ocean of knowledge."

Then Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi requested from him to disclose to him the secret of his baffling progress in achieving such high level of scholarship. Initially, he refused to tell him, but once Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Qummi kept insisting on him, he said, "How can I not reach such a level when Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance, took me into his arms and held me against his holy chest."

Another example is Shaykh Murtadha Al-Ansari, may Allah shower his soul with mercy, who enjoys such a distinguished and scholarly status in our seminaries today. It has been reported that he once visited the shrine of Imam Ali (as) along with his student Al-Ashtiani. When they entered the shrine, they came across a man who possessed some special types of knowledge. The man told Shaykh Al-Ansari, "You have seen Imam Al-Mahdi twice." Upon hearing this, Shaykh Al-Ansari quickly left

the shrine so his secret relationship with Imam Al-Mahdi (af) wouldn't be revealed any further.

Having and showing such concern for the Imams, and especially Imam AlMahdi (af) since he is the Imam of our time, allows for one to reap so many blessings and types of success—not only blessings for us, but for our actions and progeny in this life and in the Hereafter.

We ask Allah (swt) to guide us to that.

And may the blessings of Allah (swt) be upon Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his purified family of Ahlul-Bayt.

Chapter 4

The Savior: Hope for Humanity

All praise is due to the Allah (swt) the Lord of the universe, and may His blessings be upon Prophet Mohammad and his immaculate progeny of Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them. And may their enemies be cursed till the Day of Judgment. The Almighty Allah states in the Holy Qur'an:

And We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the inheritors. We are at the doorsteps of welcoming the anniversary of our master's birth—the inheritor of prophets, the seal of successors, the one who will honor the believers, abase the infidels, and the proof of God Imam Al-Mahdi. May Allah hasten his reappearance and make us all amongst his companions and supporters. In speaking about Imam Al-Mahdi (af), it is important to address briefly the concept or idea of the savior (Mahdawiyya in Arabic). What does Mahdawiyya mean and what does it refer to? There are three successive meanings to Mahdawiyya: First meaning: Mahdawiyya in its broad sense. At this first level of Mahdawiyya, one believes that there definitely will come a savior or global reformer at the end of times in order to fill the earth with justice and equity just as it had been filled with injustice and oppression. Now at this level, one is not concerned with the identity of the savior, who he is, and what characteristics he will have.

What's important is that there is a savior. This is the broader meaning of Mahdawiyya. What's interesting is that this first meaning of Mahdawiyya (the idea of a savior) is accepted by all divine religions. It is a matter of agreement amongst all divine faiths. Judaism accepts the concept of the savior. Christianity

believes in the savior. Zoroastrians (who are also known as Magians, and the Qur'an refers to them as "Majooos") also believe in the savior. Of course, Islam believes in the savior as well. All these religions embrace and endorse the belief in the savior.

If someone rejects this meaning of Mahdawiyya by refuting the idea of the savior, then he has opposed all divine religions. Such a person cannot claim to be a Christian, a Jew, a Zoroastrian, or a Muslim. In fact such a person is more deviant than a Jew or a Christian from this perspective—the perspective of denying the savior—because these religions believe in the savior. Thus, the one who rejects the concept of the savior has gone against all these religions.

Jews believe in a savior whom they know was "Elijah." According to their beliefs, he will come to restore justice. Christians believe that during the end of times, when injustice and oppression have escalated, when there is global turmoil, there will come a savior who will roll up the carpet of injustice and spread the carpet of justice. Christians know the savior to be the Messiah (and they believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah). Zoroastrians believe that Zoroaster is the savior, and he will come to save all of humanity.

Second meaning: Mahdawiyya in a more specific sense

At this second level, one believes that there is a savior, but the savior certainly comes from the nation of Prophet Muhammad (saw). He comes from the tribe of Quraysh, his name is Al-Mahdi, and he will appear to save the world by spreading justice. Is the belief at this second level confined to the Shia only? Do the Shia only believe in the Mahdi? All Muslims, unanimously, believe in the Mahdi at this second level. Only those who are extremely ignorant or extremely stubborn reject the Mahdi. The belief in the Mahdi is an essential part of Islam, and no scholar or Muslim can reject this belief. No Muslim with the least Islamic background or with the least amount of faith can reject the belief in the Mahdi.

In order to realize how important the belief in the Mahdi is, let us take a glance at the Holy Qur'an. How many verses are there in the Qur'an which address the Hajj (Holy pilgrimage to Mecca), which is considered amongst the most important rituals, and that the one who denies this ritual is considered to

be an unbeliever? In the Holy Qur'an, there are 12 verses which speak about the Hajj. How many verses would you guess there are about fasting, which is amongst the most significant obligations we have in our religion? There are only 14 verses about fasting. As for Khums, there is only a single verse in the Holy Qur'an, and as for Zakat, there are only 36 verses.

What do you think about Salat, or prayers? Salat is probably the most daily obligation we have, and as one hadeeth states, "Prayer is the pillar of faith." Another hadeeth states, "If prayer is accepted, all other deeds will be accepted, and if it rejected, all other deeds will be rejected." In the Qur'an, there are only 78 verses about prayer.

However, if you observe the holy Qur'an, there are more verses about the awaited Mahdi than there are verses about Hajj, Salat, Zakat, or Khums. There are 100 verses about the Mahdi. My respected uncle has gathered these verses in a book he compiled entitled "Al-Mahdi fil Qur'an." In this book, he does not rely on Shia sources only, but he has included Sunni sources as well.

Having said that, can anyone deny the Mahdi and reject the belief in him? It is impossible for one not to believe in the Mahdi, except someone who is utterly ignorant or stubborn, or one who really doesn't believe in the Holy Qur'an, since there are 100 verses about the Mahdi.

Once we have realized how many verses there are about the Mahdi, let's see how many narrations and hadeeths there are about the Mahdi in Muslim books. A single authentic narration can serve to establish an Islamic law which extends for thousands of years and is applied to millions of people. In other words, a single hadeeth narrated from the Prophet (saw) or the Imams (a) has the authority of generating or being the source of a law which applies to every individual throughout history. (Imagine if there are hundreds of narrations which address a specific law or issue—how important such a law will be). There are over 3,000 narrations about the Mahdi in Muslim books. Can any person, then, have the excuse of rejecting the belief in the Mahdi?

This is the second level of Mahdawiyya, and at this level, one believes the Mahdi comes from the nation of the Prophet (saw), from the tribe of Quraysh, and he will be the world's savior.

Third meaning: Mahdawiyya in its correct and very specific sense

At this third and last level of Mahdawiyya, one believes that the savior, the Mahdi, is from the nation of the Prophet (saw), from Quraysh, from the line of Imam Ali (as) and Lady Fatima (as), from the descendants of Imam Hussain (as), and he is the son of Imam Hassan Al-Askari (as). His name is the name of the Prophet, and he was born on the night of the 15th of Shaaban, year 255 A.H. (roughly 1,175 years ago). He is alive till this very day, and he will reappear to fill the earth with justice and equity.

This constitutes the third level of Mahdawiyya. At the first level, one believes in a savior, and all religions accept this belief. At the second level, one believes that the savior is from the nation of Prophet Muhammad (saw), and he belongs to the tribe of Quraysh. All Muslims accept this belief. At the third level, one believes that the savior is Imam Al-Mahdi (af). He is from the line of Imam Ali (as) and Lady Fatima (as), through Imam Al-Hussain (as), and he is the son of Imam Hassan Al-Askari (as). All Shia, who are on the straight path, accept this third level. There is a plethora of evidence which prove this third level; however, they require separate series of lectures to discuss in detail. One may refer to the books "AlMahdi fil Qur'an," "Al-Mahdi fil Sunna," or "Ilahiyyat" for more details.

Let us now shift to another important topic:

Has anyone seen Imam Al-Mahdi?

In Iraq, it was commonly held amongst faithful individuals that whoever makes the effort to go to Al-Sahla Mosque for 40 consecutive nights, one could achieve the honor of seeing Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Of course, during those days transportation wasn't as easy as it is today. It was a very difficult task to go to Al-Sahla mosque for 40 consecutive nights. Often times, the weather would be either extremely hot or very cold, or there was social unrest. Yet, faithful individuals would make such an effort, simply to get a glance of the Imam.

Benefits of Seeing the Imam

First of all, seeing the Imam in itself is indeed a great honor. Secondly, the care Imam Al-Mahdi (af) shows for someone, no matter how it is shown, is a key to many blessings in one's life. (Having the honor of seeing the Imam is an indicator of the Imam's care and concern for such a person). Blessings and being blessed is an important issue. As the holy verse states,?

“And he has made blessed wherever I may be.”

(This verse is referring to Prophet Jesus (as), who was blessed by Allah (swt), and the blessings of God would surround him wherever he would go).

There are some individuals who are simply not blessed. There is no blessing in their time, in their activities, and in their life. Some people live to the age of 80 or more, but they die without having achieved anything in their life. What did such a person do during all these years? Allah (swt) addresses us by saying, “Did we not give a life long enough?” What did such a person do with his or her life? Such people depart this life without leaving a trace or positive effect. They simply eat, drink, and go about their daily routine of gathering wealth. They have no noble goal in this life. But is this what we were created for? Is this what a believer and faithful individual created for? Simply to live? Imam Ali (as) beautifully addresses such a life which is void of any blessing:

“I was not created simply to keep on thinking about my food, like an animal tied down to a post and thinks of nothing but its fodder.”

In fact, some people are even lower than the animals, because animals at least carry out the role for which they were created. The animals even glorify Allah (do Tasbeeh). They carry out their role, just as all things in this world, such as the trees, carry out their specific role. But some people live without carrying out their expected roles. They waste their entire life. They are simply stripped of God's blessings. There is no blessing in their life. There are entire families which are void of God's blessing (Baraka). They lead lives which are not blessed. As the holy Qur'an teaches us, the blessing comes from Allah (swt).

On the other hand, some individuals are extremely blessed by Allah (swt). Their lives are full of achievements. Take Allama Al-Hilli as an example. It has been reported that he authored over 1,000 books! This is truly somewhat like a miracle. Try authoring a single book and you'll see how difficult it is. Many of Allama Al-Hilli's books are very deep and highly beneficial, and it has been close to 800 years that his books are studied in seminaries.

Another example is the author of "Jawaherul Kalam." This scholar was truly a blessed man. His encyclopedia (which exceeds 40 volumes) in Fiqh which is called "Jawaherul Kalam" is an everlasting contribution that he made. All those people who have built mosques, established Islamic centers, published books of guidance, and did anything charitable are indeed blessed and have blessed lives. Therefore, simply having our Imam care for us is indeed a great blessing, and similarly, seeing him is a great blessing -a blessing that leads to great success. "And He has made me blessed wherever I may be."

Many have achieved the great honor of seeing the Imam, and therefore, they have been bestowed with many blessings by the Imam. Here I shall relate a story that occurred with Sayed Al-Shahrudi. I have heard this story directly from his son, and I have also seen it mentioned in a book.

Before mentioning the story, there is an important note to mention here. Islamic seminaries have played a very important role. It is through these seminaries that our religion has been protected and taught to us. How do people come to know of their religion and practice it? How are they guided? It is through religious scholars and speakers that they come to know their faith. It is no wonder that the ink of a scholar is better than the blood of a martyr. It is also no wonder that the sleep of a scholar is better than the worship of one who is ignorant. The faith we have, and the belief system we are blessed with, has been preserved for us by scholars and Maraje'. In order for seminary students to study diligently and focus on their studies, they are given a monthly wage so they don't have to spend any time making a living. Therefore, having the seminary give a monthly wage to students striving to become scholars is a way to continue religion and preserve it.

Here's the story:

At the end of every month, students in the seminary would come to Sayed AlShahroudi to collect their monthly wage. So one month, Sayed Al-Shahroudi's son approaches him to inform him that they have no money to give the students the following day. His son, very concerned and worried, tells him, "Tomorrow is the day we have to distribute the student's wages but we have absolutely nothing to give them tomorrow. Moreover, we are indebted to many people." Sayed Al-Sharoudi, very calmly and with full faith, replied to his son, "This has nothing to do with me. I am not responsible. This seminary belongs to Imam Al-Mahdi, and he can take care of it if he wishes. Don't be in such a hurry to lose your faith and fall in despair."

When the night set in, after Sayed Al-Shahroudi had dinner and was about to sleep, someone knocked on the door. It was an old man. He wanted to see Sayed Al-Sharhoudi, but he was told that he went to sleep. The old man kept on insisting to see him, but he was told again that he had gone to sleep. When he continued to insist that it was very urgent that he sees him, Sayed Al-Shahroudi overheard him and ordered him to come in. The old man came in and offered Sayed Al-Shahroudi 14,000 Dinars (this is about 40 or 50 years ago, and this was a very large sum of money back then). Once he took the money and the old man left, Sayed Al-Shahroudi looked at his son and others who were present there and said,

"You with weak faith, did I not tell you that we have a master who looks out for us?" (He was referring to Imam Al-Mahdi (af)). His son says that they had no clue who this old man was, or what led to this incident.

Indeed, the Imam is our guardian who looks out for us, cares for us, and assists us whether we realize it or not. If it weren't for his protection and support for us the followers of Ahlul-Bayt, our enemies would have long uprooted us. Despite the difficult circumstances our scholars experience and the challenges that the Shia face, the path of Ahlul-Bayt continues to advance day after day. The Shia school of thought is becoming greater and greater. There has not been a sect in history which has been persecuted and oppressed more than the Shia. In a single night, sixty from the descendants of Imam Ali (as) and Lady Fatima (as) would be murdered. Twenty of them were youth, twenty of them middle-aged, and twenty very old.

Yet, we see that although the Shia have been persecuted throughout the centuries, they are spreading more and advancing further in most parts of the globe. Let us attempt to reap more of the Imam's blessings.

Let us dedicate this week (week of the Imam's birth) for our dear Imam. Let us encourage one another to do that which purifies our souls and brings us closer to Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance. By the will of Allah, these good deeds will come in handy on the Day of Judgment, when "no wealth or sons will avail, except him who will come to Allah with a sound heart (free of evil)."

May the peace and blessings of the Almighty God be upon His beloved messenger Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his pure progeny of Ahlul-Bayt peace be upon them.

Chapter 5

Imam Al-Mahdi's Occultation

All praise is due to Allah (swt), the Lord of the universe, and may His peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad and his immaculate progeny of AhlulBayt, peace be upon them. And may their enemies be cursed till the Day of Judgment.

Allah, the Almighty, states in the holy Qur'an:

This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who guard (against evil).

Those who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them.

In a few days, we will be celebrating the ninth day of Rabi' Al-Awwal, as it will coincide with the day our Imam, our master, and the seal of successors assumed the responsibility of Imamate. On such a day, Imam Al-Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance, was crowned with the crown of Imamate and final successorship.

On this important occasion, we shall discuss an important aspect of Imam AlMahdi's (af) life. This important aspect concerns the occultation, or absence, of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). However, before we address this topic, it is imperative to mention an introduction to this topic.

Introduction

Scholars have assigned the Names of Allah (swt) to different categories, based on what ideas they analyze and what subjects they discuss. Some of these categories are general and some are specific. Amongst the specific categories that scholars have assigned to the names of Allah (swt) is a category that looks at two dimensions of Allah (swt): the apparent dimension and the inherent dimension. Let's look at these two different dimensions.

First Dimension

The first dimension is apparent, evident, and manifest. An example of this first dimension of God is the word "light." As we address Allah (swt) in Du'a Kumayl, we say "Oh one who is light and pure." Light is one of the names of Allah (swt). In the Holy Qur'an, this description or attribute of God has been mentioned:?

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.

This attribute of God refers to God's apparent nature. It indicates His apparent dimension. Just as light is something apparent, has a strong presence, and fills the atmosphere, Allah (swt) is also apparent. Another attribute or beautiful name of God also refers to His apparent dimension. This attribute is "the apparent." (In Arabic, it is Al-Thaher). God, indeed, is apparent. Allah, the Almighty, says in the Holy Qur'an:?

He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent: and He has full knowledge of all things.

In Du'a Jawshan Al-Kabeer, which we recite during the holy month of Ramadhan especially on the Nights of Power, we come across this name or attribute of God: "Oh one who is apparent."

God is evident everywhere and in everything. If one cannot see God (not with the eyes, but with the heart), this shows that such a person is truly blind at heart.

Such a person has a blind mind and has no sagacity at all. Imam Hussain (as) beautifully describes such people in Du'a of Arafa:?

Blind is the eye which does not see that you are watchful over it.

Truly the one who denies God is blind. Allah (swt) is present in everything. He is apparent. This is the first dimension or aspect of God and the first type of God's names.

Second Dimension

The second dimension deals with God's inherent nature. This is a very deep point that some might find to be strange. While God is apparent, at the same time He is also inherent. He is more evident than everything, and he is more inherent or concealed than everything as well. Some of God's names or attributes refer to this inherent dimension. As the verse mentioned above states, "He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent." And in Du'a Jawshan Al-Kabeer, at the same time that we address Allah (swt) by saying "Oh one who is apparent," we also address Him "Oh one who is inherent."

These two names of God, Apparent and Inherent, are two opposite descriptions of God, and that is truly amazing. While God is apparent, indeed He is also inherent. In terms of His strong presence and how clear it is that He exists, He is more apparent and evident than anything we can imagine. At the same time, in certain ways He is more inherent than everything we can imagine (since we cannot physically see Him or fully comprehend His essence, for His essence is infinite and unlimited, and our comprehension is limited).

One of the names of God that refers to His inherent aspect is "The Absent." This name has been mentioned in some of Ahlul-Bayt's narrations. In Behar AlAnwar, there is a hadeeth narrated from Imam Ali (as) which refers to God by this name. In this hadeeth, Imam Ali (as) quotes the Prophet (saw) saying, "Oh one who is Absent without being missed." Indeed, Allah (swt) is in a sense absent, away and hidden, but we do not lose Him, nor is He missed. He is present and apparent in everything.

Here is the important point. Just as God has names or attributes which refer to His apparent and inherent dimensions, similarly, God has representatives who are a manifestation of His apparent aspect and inherent aspect. There are prophets and Imams who represent God's apparent dimension, and there are

prophets and Imams who represent God's inherent dimension. Some prophets represent the attribute "light," which is apparent, and some other prophets represent the attribute "absent," which is inherent.

Amongst those who represent God's inherent dimension in this era we are living in is our master and awaited savior Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Allah (swt) is "The Absent," and Imam Al-Mahdi (af) is also absent. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah (swt) says, "Those who believe in the Unseen." What is the unseen God is talking about? The unseen is a very broad and comprehensive notion. This notion of the unseen applies to Imam Al-Mahdi (af), as he is absent and the belief in him is one type of the belief in the unseen.

To substantiate the point that the belief in the unseen includes the belief in Imam Al-Mahdi (af), there is a hadeeth narrated by scholars which says:?

The unseen is the absent representative of God."

Allah (swt) is The Absent, and the awaited savior, who is the representative of God, is also absent and part of the unseen. Thus, Imam Al-Mahdi (af) is the one who represents the inherent dimension of God.

There is a question that might arise here: Is Imam Al-Mahdi (af) the only absent being and the sole person who represents God's inherent aspect? The reason why we want to address this question is that because some people object and find it quite peculiar that an Imam, who is a divinely appointed leader, can be absent. How can an Imam who is supposedly the leader of a nation be absent? If someone is an Imam he must present and seen by everyone. It is objectionable that he is an Imam and at the same time in occultation.

To address this question more thoroughly, it is important to find out whether Imam Al-Mahdi (af) is the only one who is absent. The concept of the unseen is not confined to the Imam. A quick glance at history reveals to us there are others who share the Imam in this respect. History shows that there have been prophets and representatives of God who were apparent and present in their society (they represented God's apparent aspect), and there were also some prophets and representatives of God who were absent and unseen (they represented God's inherent aspect).

Let's give a few examples here:

First example: Prophet Yunus (Jonah)

Yunus was a prophet of God, as the Holy Qur'an states:?

And Yunus was most surely of the messengers.

However, although he was apparent and present in his society, at a certain stage of his life he was absent. When Prophet Yunus (as) left his society to head towards the sea and thereafter was swallowed by the whale, he became absent. He was disconnected from the people of his society. Here's the important question: When Yunus (as) became absent did he lose his status of being a prophet? Was he no longer considered a prophet? Did his absence disqualify him from being a prophet?

There is a verse in the Holy Qur'an (which we recite in Salat Al-Ghufayla) that states: ? ?

And Yunus, when he went away in anger, so he thought that We had no power over him, so he called out in the depth of darkness: There is no god but You, glory be to You; surely I am of those who make themselves to suffer loss.

While Yunus (as) was in three layers of darkness (darkness of the night, darkness of the deep sea, and the darkness of being inside the whale) and was completely disconnected from his people and the outside world, nonetheless he remained a prophet of God. His status of being a prophet remained unchanged whatsoever. This example is taken from the Holy Qur'an, and no one can object to the Word of God.

Second Example: Prophet Musa (Moses)

Prophet Musa, peace be upon him, left his people for a while. He was absent from them. A holy verse in the Holy Qur'an which we recite in the Salat of ThulHijja says: ?

And We appointed for Musa thirty nights and completed them with ten (more), so the appointed time of his Lord was complete forty nights.

Prophet Musa (as) was disconnected from his people for forty nights. However, although he disappeared for a while, he remained nonetheless a prophet of God. His absence was in no way contradictory to his status of being a prophet.

Third Example: Prophet Isa (Jesus)

Is Jesus the Messiah, peace be upon him, alive or did he die? Is it that he died but will return to this world, or is he still living his life? The Holy Qur'an sheds light on this question by clearly asserting that Jesus (as) never died and is still alive, and no one has the right to doubt the truth of the Holy Qur'an.

It has been reported that once Al-Hajjaj professed in a gathering that there is a verse in the Qur'an which has left him puzzled and confused. He couldn't figure out the meaning of the verse. The verse is about Prophet Isa (as):?

And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death.

Al-Hajjaj had the impression that the verse is saying all People of the Book, including the Jews, will believe in Jesus (as) before they die. Every Jew will believe in Jesus (as) before he or she dies. Al-Hajjaj was puzzled because he said this not the case. There are many Jews who die without believing in Jesus (as). In fact, most of them die without having believed in him. So what is the meaning of the verse?

There was a man present in the gathering called "Shar." Shahr told Al-Hajjaj that he had misunderstood the verse, as the verse was saying something else. He explained to Al-Hajjaj that the pronoun "his" in the verse (before "his" death) doesn't belong to the People of the Book. The pronoun belongs to Jesus (as). Hence, the meaning of the verse becomes, "And there is amongst the People of the Book who will believe in Jesus before the death of Jesus." Before Jesus dies, all People of the Book, including the Jews, will believe in him. It's not that they will believe in him before they die (as Al-Hajjaj thought), but before he dies.

This will occur when Jesus (as) will descend from the heavens and pray behind the waited savior Imam Al-Mahdi (af). At that time, all People of the Book will believe in Jesus (as) as well as Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

When Hajjaj heard the explanation of the verse, he surprisingly asked Shahr where he had learned this explanation. Shahr told him he learned it from Muhammad son of Ali son of Hussain son of Ali son of Abu Talib—who is Imam AlBaqer, peace be upon him. Hajjaj told him he had indeed taken this

explanation from a pure spring—a clear spring which has no obscurities.

So far from these three examples, it has become clear that Prophet Yunus (as) had an absence, Prophet Musa (as) had an absence, and Prophet Isa (as), according to this holy verse, has had an absence close to 2,000 years now.

Fourth Example:

KhidhrAl-Khidhr is either a prophet of God or a very pious servant of God. There is disagreement amongst scholars whether he was one of the prophets of God or a pious representative of God. He is currently living in this worldly life. This belief is not confined to the Shia only. It is shared by other Muslim schools of thought as well. He is physically present in this world. He has not left this world for the Afterlife yet.

There are Islamic narrations to the effect that Al-Khidhr is present wherever he is mentioned. Where ever there is a gathering in which his name is mentioned, he attends. Even some narrations state that if you mention him, greet him (give your Salam to him). Address him by saying “Peace be upon you oh Khidhr.”

Fifth Example: Ilyas (Elias)

As the Holy Qur’an states, Ilyas (as) was a messenger of God:?

And Ilyas was most surely of the messengers. Ilyas (as) is alive till this very day.

Ilyas (as) and Khidhr (as) perform the holy pilgrimage (Hajj) every year. Some narrations indicate that Al-Khidhr joins the pilgrims in Arafah and other places during the Hajj, and prays to God to answer the prayers of the believers.

An important conclusion we can draw from these examples is that the phenomenon or course of being in occultation was quite common amongst the prophets and representatives of God. This phenomenon is not restricted to Imam AlMahdi (af). Hence, there is nothing puzzling or strange about an Imam being absent. Just as all these prophets of God had some form of absence in their lives, yet they remained prophets of God, Imam Al-Mahdi (af) is also hidden from us but he is nonetheless our Imam and the representative of God. The status of

being a prophet is not affected by an absence, and so is the status of being an Imam; it is not affect by an absence or occultation.Let's move on to the second point.

Let's discuss some general observations regarding the Ghayba, or occultation.

First Observation

The Imam's absence or occultation is a one-way relationship. It is not a mutual one. Hence, while the Imam is hidden from us, we are not hidden from him. We cannot see him, but he sees us and witnesses all of our actions.

Second Observation

The absence of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) is not a complete absence. It is relative. While most people do not see him since he is hidden from them, there are some who actually achieve the honor of seeing him. There are some individuals known as Abdal who are able to see him, as well as very faithful and pious individuals who have thoroughly purified their inner souls. They are also qualified to see him. Thus, the Imam's occultation is relative. It is not absolute. Many individuals have seen the Imam in the Minor Occultation and Major Occultation.

Third Observation

Although the Imam is hidden, he carries out a very important role. His absence does not bar him from assuming his role during the events that take place in this world, in social matters, and in our daily affairs.

Let's look at the oppressed followers of Ahlul-Bayt. These faithful followers have been persecuted and harassed by many despotic regimes throughout history. The oppressors have tried to uproot the Shia and the path of Ahlul-Bayt. They did everything in their capacity to annihilate them. If anyone examines history I don't think he or she will come across a sect more oppressed and persecuted by so many different governments than the Shia sect. Yet, despite the cruel way they have been treated, you find that the Shia have spread to all parts of the globe. The presence of Ahlul-Bayt is felt everywhere.

A friend informed me that the flag of Imam Hussain (as) flutters on the Himalayas Mountains. The flag of Imam Hassan (as) has reached as far as the North Pole. My friend says he has seen the flag of Imam Hussain (as) on the Himalays with his own eyes. Religious centers commemorating the teachings of Imam Hussain (as) and Ahlul-Bayt have spread everywhere. They have reached far, remote, and distant areas. Indeed, the call of Imam Hussain (as) has filled the world.

But let's ask ourselves how were the Shia protected throughout history, generation after generation? If it weren't for the role of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) in protecting the Shia, they would not have survived. The flag of Imam Hussain (as) wouldn't have fluttered till this day.

In reminding us of his crucial role, Imam Al-Mahdi (af) states in a letter he wrote to Shaykh Al-Mufeed:

"If we had neglected you (the Shia) and forgotten you, your life would have been miserable and your enemies would have uprooted you."

Our enemies would have annihilated us. There would not have been a single follower of Ahlul-Bayt on the face of the planet if it weren't for his role in protecting us.

There are many instances of the Imam protecting the Shia throughout history. It is imperative that every household keeps

a few books about the Imam. We must all read these books and encourage our children to do so as well. Our hearts and minds must be enlightened with the light of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). We must be familiar with him.

Here I will relate to you an incident narrated by the one of the students of the famous scholar Mirza Mahdi Al-Isfahani. He was a great scholar, and in the past I have shared with you how he was honored to meet Imam Al-Mahdi (af). He lived in the holy city of Mashhad, and till this day some of his students are still living there. Mirza Mahdi narrates this incident from his teacher Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Na'ini.

Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Na'ini needs no introduction, as he is quite famous. He was the teacher of great scholars. He also has a very well known religious ruling (fatwa) in which he states how recommended it is to commemorate the tragedy of Imam Hus-sain (as). Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Na'ini states that once the infidels besieged a Muslim country. The country was quite weak compared to the enemy. (Of course, when the infidels conquer a country, they have no mercy on the people at all. They couldn't care less about them. They do not become satisfied until they force us to convert. They do not become pleased till they force us into their own religion, even though they may pretend to be otherwise, trying to give a good image of themselves.

The infidels came and spread corruption in the country. They corrupted the youth, caused turmoil, and advanced in their destruction. Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Na'ini, extremely disturbed by what was happening, started to invoke the Prophet, the Imams, and especially Imam Al-Mahdi (peace be upon them all) so they assist in dispelling the enemies. One day, as he was praying to Imam Al-Mahdi (af), he had a vision of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) standing by a very high wall. Suddenly, he sees the wall about to collapse. Imam Al-Mahdi (af) draws his attention and tells him to look at the wall which was about to collapse. Then the Imam explained to him that the wall represented the Muslim country which had been invaded and almost destroyed by the infidels. The Imam tells him since the country is a Shia country and most of its citizens are the followers of Ahlul-Bayt, he would not allow the wall to collapse. Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Na'ini

states the wall was bent, about to collapse, but it actually did not.

That's exactly what happened. That Muslim country which follows Ahlul-Bayt was attacked by the enemies, but it was saved by the blessings of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Hence, in this third observation, we realize that there is no contradiction between the status of being an Imam and being absent, since the Imam carries out important roles (specific roles and general roles) during his absence.

We ask Allah (swt) to not deny the Imam's blessings, mercy, compassion, and care. And may the peace and blessings of the Almighty Allah be upon his beloved messenger and his progeny of Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them all.

Chapter 6

The Role of Imam Al-Mahdi

All praise is due to the Allah (swt) the Lord of the universe, and may His blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad and his immaculate progeny of Ahlul-Bayt, peace be upon them. And may their enemies be cursed till the Day of Judgment.

An important topic that has been discussed for centuries in the past and continues to raise questions is the role of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) during his occultation (or absence). This important topic, while it has a theoretic aspect, it also has practical applications. It is not only a topic which we discuss theoretically. It has a practical approach which impacts our every day life. It has an effect on us from the minute we open our eyes in the morning till the moment we close them at night. Hence, we will address this topic from two angles. The first angle deals with Imam AlMahdi's (af) role during his absence, and this is a theoretical discussion. The second angle sheds light on how we can benefit from Imam Al-Mahdi (af) during his absence, and this is a practical discussion.

First Angle: The Role of Imam Al-Mahdi

To understand more clearly the role of Imam Al-Mahdi (af), let's look at three important points.

First Point

The Holy Qur'an demonstrates there are roles and functions for certain things in the natural, physical world. It also establishes roles for certain individuals. According to the Qur'an, certain things have a role, and certain beings also have a role. Let's give two examples here:

First example:

Who is the healer and curer? Of course it is Allah (swt). The Holy Qur'an says:?

And when I become ill, it is He (Allah) Who cures me. The healer is God without a doubt. Recently, Al-Sayyed Al-Imami shared with me an interesting account. I have also heard this account in the past from one of the brothers. He says there is a well known doctor who sees patients regularly. Once he writes the patient a prescription, he jots down the name of the patient on a piece of paper. When he was asked why he kept a record of his patients' names, he replied, "I believe that the one who cures and heals is Allah, not the medicine or I. We are just apparent factors. The real factor is God. Therefore, I record the names of the patients so I can pray for them one by one when I pray at night."

Look at the faithful spirit this physician has. This physician used to be in the city of Isfahan. He used to pray for his patients at night so God would cure them. Indeed, as the Qur'an says, "And when I become ill, it is He Who cures me."

However, while the Qur'an states God is the one who cures, it also establishes that there are certain things in this world which cure and heal. One of these things is honey. As the Qur'an states:?

There comes forth from within it (the bee) a drink varying in colors, in which there is healing for people.

Allah (swt) has placed the power of healing in this liquid which comes forth from the belly of the bee. (Honey has always

been used for treatment purposes, and it has tremendous healing effects). In this example, we demonstrated that certain things have a role in this world. One of the roles of honey is to cure.

Second Example:

There are roles for certain individuals or beings in this world. Who is the one who takes our souls when we die? The Holy Qur'an clearly answers:

It is Allah Who takes the souls (of people) at death.

At the same time, the Qur'an establishes that the Angel of Death takes our souls:

Say: The Angel of Death, who is given charge of you, shall duly take your souls.

The Qur'an affirms that God takes our souls, and the Angel of Death also takes our souls. (There is no contradiction here, because when the Qur'an says God takes our souls, it is because God is the king of the universe and our creator. He is in charge of everything. No one can die without His will. At the same time, when the Qur'an says the Angel of Death takes our souls, it is because God has appointed him for this specific task. Thus, in essence, they both take our souls: God orders the Angel of Death, and he directly executes God's order).

Second Point

The existence of roles for specific beings in this universe is in no way contrary to the Oneness of God in terms of actions. This is because these players who have different roles are not independent. God is independent in His actions. These beings rely solely on Allah (swt), and all the power they have is given to them by Allah (swt). Hence, there is no contradiction between these two players: God and these other beings. God is independent, and He draws power from His own essence, while these other beings are dependent and draw their power from God.

Third Point

In our natural and physical world, two players or roles do not go against each other (just like the previous point) if the relationship between the two is linear—that is if the order of one of them comes before the other. Yes, there will be an

inconsistency if the relationship between the two is such that they are both independent and they come at the same order. They would be contradicting each other because no two causes can have the same effect. But if the order of one of them comes before the other, there is no problem at all.

Once we have observed these three points, we believe that Imam Al-Mahdi (af) represents the final link in the chain of players or roles in this natural and physical world. Allah (swt) has appointed certain players and roles in this world, and our obligation is to turn to these players to benefit from their effects. There could be a chain of several players, but the final player is Imam Al-Mahdi (af). The will of our Imam is what brings forth the final effect.

There is a well known hadeeth that most of you have read. This hadeeth has been narrated by the three Muhammads—Muhammad Ibn Yaaqub Al-Kulayni, Muhammad Ibn Hassan Al-Tousi, and Muhammad Ibn Ali Al-Sadouq. They have narrated it in the books of Kafi, Tahtheeb Al-Ahkam, and Man La Yahtharahul Faqih, respectively. This hadith is also mentioned in Mafatih Al-Jinaan. It states:

“The will of the Lord in His matters descends to you (Ahlul-Bayt) and is issued from your homes.

“Currently, the will of God in this universe originates from the home of Imam Al-Mahdi (af), or wherever he may be. This is one of the roles of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) in this world, and this does not go against having other players, roles, or factors at play. As we have discussed in the third point, if numerous players have a linear relationship amongst each other and their order is not the same, there is no problem if they all exist at the same time.

To give an example illustrating this point, take these sentences, “My pen wrote. My fingers wrote. My hands wrote. I myself wrote.” Is there a discrepancy amongst these sentences? Are they contradicting each other? There is absolutely no contradiction here because the real writer is you or your soul, but simply it is through these limbs and organs. All these players or “writers” here have a linear relationship amongst each other, since their order is different. The one which comes at the first order is your soul, and then the other

“writers” come. The Qur’an also refers to the “hands” writing in this verse:

Then woe to them from what their hands wrote.

Similarly, while there are various roles at play in this universe, the final player, or the final “soul” is the will of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). In this first angle, which is theoretical, we examined the role of Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

Second Angle: How Can We Benefit from Imam Al-Mahdi

This is a very important topic. How can we benefit from this man whom Allah (swt) Has empowered? How can we benefit from the one who has been given the keys of the universe by God? To shed some light on answering these questions, let's look at four important points here.

First Point

The first step towards benefitting from Imam Al-Mahdi (af) is to realize how weak, helpless, incapable and poor we really are. Some people do not feel this way at all. This feeling is quite detrimental to one's success in this life and in the Hereafter. Imagine if someone is afflicted with an illness like cancer, but he does not feel it at all. This disease is existent and present, but this person simply does not realize it. Will such a person take the necessary steps to treat himself? Will he make any effort to see a doctor? Since he does not feel or realize his illness, he would not do anything. Scholars of ethics and morals state that one's greatest enemy is the feeling of sufficiency. If one believes that his manners are good and sufficient, he will not make the effort to improve them. If one believes his knowledge is sufficient, he will not make the effort to learn more. This feeling is indeed a great enemy.

If one feels that he has no shortcomings at all, that there is no problem in his life at all, such person will not advance. Such person will not fully benefit from Imam Al-Mahdi. Usually, people have such feelings in turbulent and dangerous times, in times of trouble. For instance, if one loses his way in the midst of the de-sert, then he will have this feeling of weakness and danger. If one has a loved one who is suffering from an illness, especially if the loved one is a child, then it is at that time when he feels helpless and in danger. If the child is under intensive care, and his/her condition deteriorates to a life or death condition, then the parent will experience such a feeling. Some brothers who have recently visited Karbala state they almost saw death on their way there. Some of them were on the brink of dying from thirst, especially on those dreadful

mountains. During such times they experienced feelings of danger, helplessness and weakness.

Such feelings seldom come across us, but the true, special believers in God always experience such feelings. Most people sleep very well all night, because there is nothing which worries them. But if they stumble across a serious problem, God forbid, they cannot sleep well. As soon as they fall asleep they wake up. Their state of anxiety awakens them. The true believers in God always feel this way.

We only understand this following verse when we are suffering from a problem:

Who answers the distressed one, when he calls upon Him, and removes the evil?

But the true believers always understand the meaning of this verse, as they always feel distressed and weak. Hence, they really do not sleep so comfortably, acting as if everything in the world is perfectly fine.

It's good to note here an interesting account relayed by Shaykh Ibrahim, may Allah shower his soul with mercy. He says two men were once together. One of them slept, while the other could not. After a while, when he woke up, he saw his friend still awake. He asked him why he wouldn't sleep, so he told him he could not. After a while, once again he wakes up and still finds his friend awake. On the third time, his friend asked him to tell him why he couldn't sleep. He friend then removed the veils and allowed him to see that everything around them was glorifying Allah (swt). He told him, "How can I sleep when everything around me is awake?"

The first step, indeed, towards exposing ourselves to the mercy of the Imam and benefitting from him is to experience feelings of need, weakness, and shortcoming. If we don't have such feelings but rather feel sufficient all the time, we will deprive ourselves from such mercy and benefit. Therefore, it is imperative that we train ourselves to experience such a state at all times.

Second Point

The second step towards benefitting from the Imam, in brief, is to realize that the Imam has all the power, all the wealth, and all the blessings—all of which have been given to him by

Allah (swt). The Imam is not an ordinary being. With a single glance the Imam can change our condition. Allah (swt) has embodied His divine will in Ahlul-Bayt, as we mentioned, and the one who represents Ahlul-Bayt now is Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

Third Point

Once we have taken these two previous steps into consideration, we must develop ourselves such that we become qualified and capable of benefitting more from the Imam. Every human being has a certain capacity, but it is within our power to develop this capacity. A polluted, impure heart does not have the capacity. An impure soul does not have the capacity. A sinful eye, a sinful ear or a sinful tongue does not have the capacity. We must thoroughly cleanse ourselves by purifying our body and soul from all sins. That's the least thing we can do. Although trying to prevent ourselves from sinning is an extremely arduous task, but it is still possible. At least one can try to abstain from sinning with one's eyes, ears, mind and tongue.

If we examine the lives of some people who lived in the past we realize how cautious they were in all their actions. They paid so much attention to everything they did, even if they are minor things. They would think twice before uttering a word. A scholar once shared with me a captivating account of a scholar who lived in the past. We all threaten our kids to punish them and discipline them sometimes. When our kids fool around or do something wrong, we usually threaten them by telling them we will punish them. We promise them punishment if they do something wrong. However, this scholar was so pious and cautious to the extent that when he wanted to threaten his kids he wouldn't say "If you do this I will punish you." Instead, he would warn his kids by saying, "If you do this, suppose that I will punish you." He wanted to make sure that everything he would say is true to the extent that he would address them in this manner. He did not want to say or promise something which he probably would not do. Maybe he would not punish them. Hence, he would tell them to suppose that if he they were to disobey him he would punish them. Although some scholars believe that if one promises punishment, it is not mandatory for this promise to be fulfilled. But if one promises

something else other than punishment then it is an obligation to fulfill the promise. Yet, since this scholar was so cautious and pious, he wanted to make sure that he said nothing but the truth.

There are such people who are so pious. They try to never look at something which is haram, or prohibited. They never give an unlawful look. They never hear anything unlawful. They simply try not to sin. The point here is that one must purify his soul and body to the fullest extent possible. This is an important step towards benefitting from Imam Al-Mahdi (af). If a radio has a defect (such as if one of its wires or circuits are not working), the radio simply would not work. It will not have the capability of receiving radio waves. Similarly, if a heart has defects, it will not have the capacity to benefitfully from Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

Fourth Point

One must insist and insist on asking Allah (swt) and Ahlul-Bayt for their mercy. One must beg them. One must plead to them. This way, their full mercy will encompass us. Allah (swt) wants His true servants to beg Him and insist on Him. The more we insist on them for their assistance and mercy, the more they will care for us. These are four important points which, if observed, take us closer to our Imam, may Allah hasten his reappearance.

It is imperative upon us to resort to Ahlul-Bayt in our individual, familial, social, worldly, and religious problems, for the solution is in their hands. If one wants to benefit from the warmth of the sun, is it possible without exposing himself under the sun? It is not possible. That is because Allah (swt) has placed the warmth in the sun, and if one desires to benefit from its warmth, he must expose himself to it. He cannot simply sit in his room and expect the warmth of the sun to reach him. Similarly, Allah (swt) has given all the power and blessings to Imam Al-Mahdi (af). One can do whatever he wishes, but unless he turns towards Imam Al-Mahdi (af) and seeks his mercy, he will not benefit or advance. He will lose. Hence, we must all strive to seek his assistance and mercy, and we must plead to him at all times.

Let me share with you a story here which illustrates how turning our attention to Ahlul-Bayt can solve huge dilemmas in one's life. There was a scholar in the holy city of Mashhad whose name was Sayed Mohammad Baqer Al-Damghani. He used to suffer from tuberculosis, which is a very serious illness, especially during those days when it really had no treatment. He was very distressed from this illness which persisted for many years. He tried to seek treatment by visiting numerous doctors, but to no avail. Sometimes, problems occur in our lives which really have no solution. And it seems as if God will not solve such problems except if we turn to Ahlul-Bayt. They are the only resort. The doctors told him there was no hope. The loss of hope is truly devastating. Some people completely collapse when they are in despair. They cannot even get out of bed.

One day, when he greatly suffered because he discharged a lot of blood from his lungs, he went to see his teacher Mirza Mahdi Al-Isfahani. Mirza Mahdi lived in Mashhad, and he once had an incident with Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Many great blessings in Iran are due to him. Al-Damghani comes to him to complain from the sufferings he was going through. He explained to him how weak he had grown and how hopeless he had become. Mirza Mahdi, in an act of impacting him, kneels and tells him, "Are you not a Sayed? Why don't you resort to your great grandfathers? Are you not one of the Shia and followers of Imam Al-Mahdi? Why don't you resort to him for the solution of your problem? Don't you know that the Imams represent God and His beautiful names? Don't you read in Du'a Kumayl that the name of God is medicine, and His remembrance is a cure? Are you not a Muslim Sayed? Now go to Imam Al-Mahdi and beg him to solve your problem."

He was very touched by these words which choked him with tears. People who suffer from an illness, their hearts usually become tender. They become more gentle and fragile. In general, the heart becomes softer during difficult times. Heavily crying, he gets up to leave. He contemplates how he should approach Imam AlMahdi (af) and where should he go now. He decides to head to the shrine of Imam Al-Redha (as). He headed to the shrine and entered the "Old Courtyard." However, he realized that the environment at the shrine was

not normal. He had a vision. He didn't see any people who would normally be there to visit the shrine. It was quite unusual.

Then he noticed a small group walking with each other, and in front of them there was a man walking. He felt or had a revelation that the man was Imam Al-Mahdi (af). He realized that the group, along with the Imam, were leaving, getting further and further away. He still hadn't received the solution to his problem yet, so he thought of calling the Imam so he would be noticed. As soon as the thought of calling the Imam crossed his mind, the man turned and looked at him with the corner of his eyes. Just one, single look. Not a single word was spoken. As soon as the man looked at him, he started to sweat profusely. It was as if the whole incident took a second, then he realized that the shrine returned back to its normal state. The group disappeared. Then he focused on himself and realized that his illness had disappeared. There was no trace of it.

Then he returned home in a very normal condition. One of his friends says he saw him live for many years after this incident. He completely changed from the time of that incident, and he enjoyed an excellent state of health. This story goes back to about 60 years ago.

There is another story which demonstrates how effective it is to have full faith in Imam Al-Mahdi (af) and seek his assistance. Al-Qummi was an extremely pious scholar. He was so truthful to the extent that when he was asked about the time, he used to say, "Suppose it is 9:15," for example. He did this because he figured his clock wasn't always accurate, so he did not want to say something which was inaccurate or not true. This is how pious and cautious he was.

The piety of this great scholar saved the religion of some people. A scholar narrates that due to certain circumstances, he had somewhat lost faith in his religion and he started to doubt it. However, when he came to know three scholars, one of whom was Al-Qummi, he returned to the right path and saved his faith. The great faith and piety of these scholars saved him.

Al-Qummi truly believed that the greatest factor which supported his existence was Imam Al-Mahdi (af). He believed he lived because of the blessings of the Imam. During the reign of

the first Pahlavi, Al-Qummi came to Tehran to resist the corrupt regime. Consequently, he was put under house arrest. He was not allowed to return back where he came from. He did not know anyone in Tehran, and he was disconnected from society. He also had no money. Pahlavi sent a representative to visit Al-Qummi. When he saw him, he offered him a blank check and told him, "Pahlavi says write any amount you wish and take the money." Although Al-Qummi's financial situation was desperate, he refused to take the check. Since he was pious, he did not want to accept any money from the government. He was asked how was he going to live without any money and without anyone supporting him. He beautifully replied by saying, "I don't think Imam Al-Mahdi forgets his herd.

"Look at the word he uses to describe himself. Although he was a Grand Scholar, who is one of Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) soldiers, he doesn't say that he's a soldier of the Imam. In humbleness, he says he is simply part of the Imam's herd.

Those who were around him, whose faith was weak, chuckled upon hearing this from him. They laughed and mocked him. However, they were unaware of that power which lies behind everything—Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Now there was a chief officer in the city of Ray who greatly admired Al-Qummi. He was touched by his personality and charisma. This officer goes to several businessmen in Tehran and tells them that Al-Qummi is currently in Tehran, but his financial condition is not so well. He is under house arrest and completely disconnected from society. He told them if they contributed, he would be willing to take the risk and deliver the money to him. They give him a sum of money, so he takes it and heads to Al-Qummi to hand it to him. In order to hide the money, he places it in his sock. The officer was quite fearful on his way to see Al-Qummi because there were guards at the door who would inspect those seeking to meet him. If the guards would discover the hidden money, he would face severe charges during those times, not ruling out execution. At the door, he comes up with an excuse to see Al-Qummi, and he is allowed in. Once he goes in, he takes out the money and offers it to him. When Al-Qummi was given the money, he said he knew Imam AlMahdi (af) would not forget him.

Indeed, Imam Al-Mahdi (af) does not forget us. However, this holy verse also teaches us that there's a mutual relationship between us and the Imam:

Therefore remember Me, I will remember you.

How many times a day do we remember Imam Al-Mahdi (af)? When we do the Qunut in our prayers, do we mention him? Do we regularly recite this Du'a: "Oh Allah, be a protector, a guardian, and a supporter for Imam Al-Mahdi..." When we commence our classes and scholarly sessions, do we start by invoking Imam Al-Mahdi (af) and seeking his help?

Some people are blessed with a heart which always hosts the Imam. They constantly think of him. I have seen some students when they want to write an article, start doing their homework, take notes in class, or begin a research paper, the first thing they write is "O Imam Al-Mahdi, help me." They begin their studies with the name of Allah (swt) and Imam Al-Mahdi (af). They seek the assistance of Allah (swt) by invoking Him.

The state of turning to God and His righteous servants is a very important state. We must strive to develop this state in ourselves. If we remember Allah (swt), He will remember us. There is a very good book which I advise the brothers to read. It is entitled "Mikyal Al-Makarem, fi Fawa'ed Al-Du'a Lil Imam Al-Qa'em." This book speaks about the importance of praying for Imam Al-Mahdi (af). One must never forget the Imam.

We must always pray for him, so he prays for us. We ask the Almighty Allah to bring us closer to our Imam, and may He never deprive us from the Imam's mercy and blessings. And may the peace and blessings of Allah (swt) be upon his beloved messenger Prophet Muhammad (saw), and his immaculate progeny of Ahlul-Bayt.

Chapter 7

The Era of Reappearance

All praise is due to Allah (swt), the Lord of the universe, and may His peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad and his immaculate progeny of AhlulBayt, peace be upon them all. And may their enemies be cursed till the Day of Judgment.

Tonight, or tomorrow night, coincides with the night of 15 Shaaban. On such a night, the seal of all successors was born. Tonight is probably the best night after Laylatul-Qadr, the night of Destiny. Many narrations from Ahlul-Bayt (peace be upon them) hint that the best act one can perform on the night of 15 Shaaban is to visit the shrine of Imam Hussain (as). According to one hadeeth, “if one likes to greet the soul of 124,000 prophets, one should visit the shrine of Imam Hussain (as)” on such a night. Of course, there are countless spiritual benefits to greeting the soul of 124,000 prophets.

There are two topics I will be addressing:

First: A glimpse of the era of reappearance.

Second: Preparing for the reappearance.

A Glimpse of the Era of Reappearance

Many verses and hadeeths reveal to us a glimpse of the era of Imam Al Mahdi’s reappearance, may Allah hasten his reappearance. We can look at the global government of Imam Al-Mahdi (af) in three states:

- 1) Religious State
- 2) Economic State
- 3) Scientific State

Religious State

As for the religious state of the Imam's government, there will be religious unity. Allah (swt) states in the Holy Qur'an:

He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might cause it to prevail over all religions, though the polytheists may be averse.

This holy verse states that the religion of Islam will dominate and prevail over all other religions. Let us ask ourselves when did this happen in history? In the past, this type of prevalence and domination has not occurred. This will occur in the era of reappearance when Imam Al-Mahdi (af) will establish his government. Not only will there be religious unity, but there are some hadeeths to the effect that there will be unity in creed as well. There will be unity at the intellectual level, and the ideological state of all people will be unified.

Let us go through some narrations which illustrate to us the religious unity that will set in during the era of reappearance.

First hadeeth:

Imam Ali (as) narrates that religion will spread during Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) time "to the extent that there will not remain a village but it will declare that there is not god but Allah (swt) and that Muhammad (saw) is His messenger, day and night."

This hadeeth suggests that not only will Islam dominate major cities, but it will reach even the small villages. It is at that time that Allah (swt) will allow His religion to prevail, and there will be no religion other than Islam.

Second hadeeth:

Imam Al-Baqer (as) narrates, "...there shall remain no one except he believes in Muhammad."

Third hadeeth:

Imam Al-Sadiq (as) narrates: "When our Qaem will rise, the religion of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, will spread where the day and night spread, until there shall be no polytheism on the face of the earth."

Fourth hadeeth:

This hadeeth not only refers to religious unity, but it includes ideological unity as well.

Imam Ali (as) narrates that after Imam Al-Mahdi (af) will reappear, "Allah will unify their stance."

Imam Hussain (as) narrates, "what you are waiting for (the reappearance of Imam Al-Mahdi (af)) will not occur until you will disavow each other; you will witness against each other that you are infidels, and you will curse one another. Then our Qaem will rise and dismiss all of that."

These two narrations convey to us that during Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) reappearance there will be ideological unity in addition to religious unity. Religious and ideological unities are very important and critical to every society. Amongst the most important factors in every society are these two unities, for without them no social unity can be achieved. With religious and ideological unity comes social unity. In our societies there are many similarities we share, such as color, race, geography, and language, but without religious/ideological unity, there will not be much stability in society as history proves. Ever since humankind was created, we have been living just like what the angels predicted when they asked God as soon as He created Adam (as):

And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth a vicegerent (khalifa), they said: What! Will You place in it one who will make mischief in it and shed blood, and we celebrate Your praise and extol Your holiness? He said: Surely I know what you do not know.

Historically societies have clashed with one another, and human beings have killed each other. As long as religious/ideological unity is absent, human corruption and killing will continue. People claim that coexistence is possible, but till now this has been theoretical only. Practically, humans have not achieved coexistence yet. From time to time, attractive and nice slogans claiming coexistence surface here and there, but the differences that lead to clash shall remain. Wars, political turmoil, social clashes, and economic instability will continue. When Imam AlMahdi (af) reappears to establish his just government, he will eliminate those differences that lead to clashes and fighting; he will deliver peace and tranquility to all parts of the globe.

One may wonder how Imam Al-Mahdi (af) will achieve such solid unity. In brief, there are three important factors that

contribute to religious/ideological unity and eliminate differences.

First Factor: Clarity of Truth

The majority of people do not hold to the truth because they simply don't see it. They are ignorant of the true and straight path. As the saying in Arabic goes, people are enemies of what they do not know. When the truth is presented to them in a crisp and clear way, they will embrace it. My late father used to give an example depicting how people will accept the truth. Back in the old days, before electricity, people used oil lamps or candles as sources of light. In this age of electricity, would anyone go back to these old methods? Of course not, unless one is stubborn and not willing to make use of modern advancements. Just as using electricity is better than using a candle, holding on to the path of truth is far better than clinging to other devious ways. When most people see the truth in its original, genuine and clear way, they will all accept it except those who are stubborn. Most Christians today have not seen the truth, but when Imam Al-Mahdi (af) will reappear most of them will accept the truth upon seeing it.

There's a narration which might refer to this first factor:

Imam Al-Baqer (as), in explaining the verse in the Holy Qur'an which says, "until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth," says, "Allah means by that the reappearance of the Qaem. The Qaem is the truth from Allah, and all of humankind will see the truth."

Thus, if people simply see the crisp clarity of the truth they will accept it. That is one factor that will lead to religious and ideological unity.

Second Factor: Failure of Past Experiences

The second factor that will unite all people in accepting the Islam Imam AlMahdi (af) will bring is the fact that every system and every group in history will have proved its failure. As one hadeeth points out, the Imam will reappear once all groups of people have ruled each other, so that when he rules no group will have the excuse of saying that if they were to be given the chance to rule they would have ruled justly as well:

As we see today, people always have hope in a new system. People tend to have hope in every idea and system that has not been in the spotlight. Once these systems emerge and the time comes for their implementation, they utterly fail. Millions of people had their hopes in communism, but what happened? Communism only brought destruction to millions of people and resulted finally in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The same applies to capitalism. Many today have their hopes in this system, but it has already proven its failure, and it will further prove its utter failure in the future. United States Secretary of Agriculture once admitted that 10% of Americans suffer from hunger. The United States is the richest nation in the world, and throughout history, probably no country ever existed which had the resources and power that the U.S. enjoys. Isn't this an example of capitalism's failure, that over 36 million people live hungry in the richest nation of the world? Day after day, capitalism will continue to prove its failure more and more.

According to statistics generated from research, almost every single second someone attempts suicide. Millions of people around the globe attempt suicide because they have no hope—no hope in the systems and governments people have created. Being aware of these experiences and failures, when Imam Al-Mahdi (af) will establish his government, everyone will have hope and join one unified frontline. This is the second factor which will bring religious and ideological unity.

Third Factor: Greater mental/intellectual capacity

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Baqer (as), "When our Qaem will rise, he will put his hand on the head of people, and by doing so their intellect will be completed and their dreams will be realized (or their morality will be completed)." During the era of reappearance, our mental and intellectual capacity will be much greater, by the blessings of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). Therefore, people will accept and understand the truth much quicker. As soon as they see the truth, they will embrace it. This is the third factor that will lead to religious and ideological unity.

Economic State

Today, an important subject that is of high interest to everyone around the globe is economic comfort. It is a goal sought by most people. Today, only a minority of people enjoy economic comfort, while for most it is a dream. During the era of Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) government, economic comfort will become a reality and reach every single person, to the extent that there will not remain a single needy or poor person. One hadeeth portrays to us an image of that pervasive state of economic comfort:

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Sadiq (as), "When our Qaem rises, the earth will shine with the light of its Lord. Any one of you will then search for someone who needs your financial help and charity, but will not find a single person to accept that. People will become rich by that which Allah has bestowed upon them from His favors."

Another hadeeth states that economic comfort will be so widespread that one "will not find anyone willing to take charity." One may wonder how such global economic comfort will be achieved. Will it be accomplished through miracles and divine intervention? Of course, divine blessings will be there, but the Imam will also take advantage of natural means to achieve this goal. The Holy Qur'an makes reference to this important point in Sura 5, verse 66:

And if they had observed the Torah and the Injeel (Gospel) and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have been nourished from above them and from beneath their feet.

In other words, if the People of the Book had followed their divine books and abided by God's laws, they would have had happiness from every aspect of their life. Allah (swt) does bless such obedient people in divine ways, but they can achieve happiness and comfort simply by following the path of God. Similarly, during Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) time, the just laws of God and Islam will be implemented, and that is how economic comfort will be achieved.

For example, one hadeeth narrated from Imam Al-Baqer (as) states:

“No ruin will remain on earth but will be reconstructed.”

This represents an Islamic law that will be implemented during that era. This Islamic law states that “the earth belongs to Allah and whoever constructs/builds it.” If this law is implemented today, most of the world’s lands will be developed. Most ruins will be transformed to constructed lands. However, unfortunately, today’s governments fiercely prohibit people from building undeveloped lands. What’s ironic is that the governments themselves don’t care to revive dead lands by constructing them, nor do they allow their citizens to do so. They simply apply strict regulations which prohibit people from doing so. But imagine if a government today announces that people are free to develop non-developed lands (of course with some provision to prevent chaos and injustice), wouldn’t most lands around the world be developed by the people? Allah (swt) has created the earth for everyone. Another hadeeth in Behar Al-Anwar states:

It has been narrated from Imam Ali (as), describing the state during the era of reappearance, “...to the extent that a woman will walk from Iraq to Cham (Damascus), and every step she takes will be on vegetation.”

This will happen once most lands will be developed. There’s another Islamic law which states that “whoever is the first to take possession (of something natural not belonging to anyone) before others, he is more rightful to it than others.” For example, all the jungles, seas, lakes, oil, minerals and natural resources are for all people. Whoever makes the effort to take possession of these things has the right to do so, but within a certain limit so as not to cause chaos and do injustice to others. But today, global governments prohibit their citizens from laying a finger on such resources. During Imam Al-Mahdi’s (as) era, all Islamic laws will be implemented. During that era, according to one hadeeth, Allah (swt) will order the treasures and minerals of the earth to emerge. If a government today gives the freedom to its citizens to take from the treasures and minerals of this earth, wouldn’t most of that country’s lands be developed and constructed? This will be implemented during the Imam’s time. Thus, the economic comfort that will ensue during that time will be a product of divine blessings and

natural factors which come from the implementation of Islamic law.

Scientific State

The scientific breakthroughs and advancements that will take place during Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) era will not have precedence. The world will witness an advancement which history has never seen the like of. This scientific progress will not be limited to the religious sphere, since it will dominate every sector in society. This is simply because the messengers of God weren't sent only to bring religious reform to our societies. They were also sent to bring reform to our worldly affairs as well. A narration, in offering us a glimpse of the scientific advancements that will take place, says:

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Sadiq (as), "Knowledge can be summa-rized into twenty-seven parts. All the knowledge that the messengers of God have brought is two parts...

"Most knowledge people have come from the prophets of God. As for Prophet Adam (as), the holy Qur'an states:

"And He taught Adam the names of all things.

"Prophet Idris (as) taught people how to be literate. Literacy is a building block and probably the most important element to every society and civilization. Without literacy, knowledge could not have been compiled and passed down to one generation after the other. Civilization as we know it today would not have made it without literacy and writing. Prophet David (as) was endowed with the gift and art of molding iron to any shape he desired, such as making shields.

Allah (swt) states in Sura 21 verse 80:

"And We taught him the art of making coats (of mail) for you, that they might protect you from each other's violence; will you then be grateful?"

Hence, the knowledge the messengers of God dispatched to all people was not limited to religious matters. It included all aspects of our daily life. The narration mentioned above which speaks about knowledge being twenty-seven parts continues to say:

"...people have been exposed to those two parts of knowledge only till this very day. Once our Qaem rises, he will bring the remaining twenty-five parts and disseminate them to the people. Then he will add those two parts (which the

messengers had previously brought) and give people a total of twenty-seven parts.”

So when the Imam rises, complete knowledge will be achieved by humanity with the blessings of Allah (swt). Another hadeeth also describes to us the knowledge and wisdom everyone will enjoy during Imam Al-Mahdi’s (af) era:

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Baqer (as), “During his time you shall be granted wisdom, such that a woman will judge at her home according to the book of Allah, the Almighty, and the sunna (tradition, way) of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family.”

These were brief glimpses, given to us by our narrations, of some of the characteristics of Imam Al-Mahdi’s (af) era—the religious, economic, and scientific states that will govern his time.

Preparing for the Reappearance

Here's the second discussion I would like to briefly share with you here. There are many hadeeths which indicate there are many people waiting and preparing for the reappearance of Imam Al-Mahdi (af). These narrations clearly state that certain groups will prepare for him the ground before he comes. This is truly a great honor for them to be amongst his supporters and those who prepare for him. Let's go through some of the narrations which address this issue.

This following narration states that amongst those who will prepare for the Imam is Al-Yamani and his followers.

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Sadiq (as) that he said, "The most guiding flag is the flag of Al-Yamani."

This hadeeth hints that there are other groups or flags of guidance, but the most guiding one is the group of Al-Yamani. Contrary to what many think, not every group will be a misguided and evil one. There will be groups of guidance, but the best one will be Al-Yamani's. The same hadeeth continues to say:

"His flag is a flag of guidance because he will invite you to the path of Imam Al-Mahdi (af).

"The hadeeth, in praising Al-Yamani, continues:

"When Al-Yamani emerges, join him, for his flag is a flag of guidance."

According to some narrations, the emergence of Al-Yamani is amongst the definite signs of Imam Al-Mahdi's (af) reappearance. He will emerge from Yemen. Now is his emergence by way of divine intervention and sudden? Or will there be factors which will naturally lead to such an emergence? It is possible that there will be some righteous people like Al-Yamani who are preparing for the Imam's return on this earth. Hence, the emergence of such movements can be quite natural. Another hadeeth states how successful Al-Yamani will be:

"Through him Allah will cast away darkness with his light, and through him Allah will show the truth after it was concealed."

In addition to Al-Yamani, there will be another group which will emerge from Khorasan. A hadeeth narrated from Imam Al-Baqer (as) states:

“The groups carrying the black flags will emerge from Khorasan and head towards Kufa. When Imam Al-Mahdi appears, they will pledge him allegiance.”

After pledging allegiance to the Imam, they will probably join his army. Another hadeeth which speaks about the group from Khorasan states:

“At the forefront will be a man called Shu’aib son of Saleh, or Saleh son of Shu’aib...he will prepare for Imam Al-Mahdi’s rule.” We can infer from these narrations that Imam Al-Mahdi’s (af) victory will not come as a result of divine intervention only. Certainly, God will support him through divine factors; however, the Imam will also achieve victory in a natural way, and that is through these faithful groups which will emerge from different parts of the world. Imam Al-Mahdi’s (af) victory will be similar to Prophet Muhammad’s (saw) victory. Although God supported the Prophet in divine ways and that is how he achieved victory, there were also natural factors which took him to victory. There were some sincere Muslim companions who supported him.

Here are a few other narrations which speak about different groups who will emerge to support Imam Al-Mahdi (af):

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Baqer (as) that he said: “There will be a group who will emerge from the East...their mission will be to hand over [the power to Imam Al-Mahdi (af)]. Their casualties will be martyrs.”

It has been narrated from Imam Al-Sadiq (as) that he said, “He (Imam AlMahdi) has a treasure in Taliqan. The treasure is not of gold or silver. It is of righteous men whose hearts are as strong as iron. They do not have the slightest doubt in Allah. They are tougher than stone. If they charge at the mountains they can remove them. Throughout the night, they are consumed in worshipping Allah. During the day, they are courageous warriors. Their hearts resemble a luminous lamp.

Their slogan is ‘We shall avenge the [killing] of Imam Husain.’ Through them God will support the rightful Imam (Imam Al-Mahdi).”

Another hadeeth comments:

“At that time all people will hope for the coming of Imam Al-Mahdi and search for him.”

All these narrations clearly point out that there will be many groups awaiting Imam Al-Mahdi’s (af) appearance. They will achieve the great honor of preparing for him and serving him once he appears. Not only will these groups be waiting for Imam Al-Mahdi’s (af) movement. Prophet Muhammad (saw) also looked to this movement. All righteous people throughout history have been waiting for it. And humanity at large is also looking forward to this movement.

As a story which occurred with a man called Erbali demonstrates, if we support Imam Al-Mahdi (af) he will also support us. We must strive to be amongst the supporters of our Imam. Supporting the Imam is not reserved to warfare. For example, we can start supporting him now by authoring a book on him. People have abandoned the Imam in this world. Only a few turn to him and focus their attention on him. One of the brothers says he searched many web pages on the internet and realized that there were only a few sites dedicated to Imam Al-Mahdi (af), compared with the millions of web pages out there. He says even these few sites about the Imam that he saw are not enough. Most of them are very brief.

There is no real presence for the Imam in satellite channels. How many times is the Imam mentioned in all of these chaotic programs? This is one way the Imam has been neglected. How many times is the Imam mentioned in global newspapers, magazines and newsletters? We must support the Imam any way we can. If it is in our capacity to collect some audio lectures about the Imam and distribute them in our society, we must do so to support our Imam. I was told that someone was getting married in Tehran, so in the cards of invitation to his marriage ceremony he enclosed a religious CD. This is one creative way of guiding others and calling them to the path of Allah (swt). If we can write well, we must write about the Imam. We must do anything in our capacity to serve him, for if we support him, he shall support us as well. Allah, the Almighty, states in the Holy Qur’an:

Surely Allah will help those who help His cause; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.

We ask Allah (swt) to grant us success in serving our Imam, and may His peace and blessings be upon His beloved Prophet and his pure family of Ahlul-Bay, peace be upon them all.

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*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)