





T H E
MAHDI

UNDERSTANDING THE AWAITED ONE

S A Y Y I D
MUNEER ALKHABBAZ

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Author: Sayyid Muneer Al-Khabbaz

Translated and Edited by: The Mainstay Foundation

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To the Master of the Time.
May God hasten his emergence.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sayyid Muneer Al-Khabbaz was born in Qatif, Saudi Arabia in 1384 AH (1964 CE). At the age of 14, Sayyid Muneer traveled to the Holy City of Najaf to begin his training within the Islamic seminary. Not long after, he migrated towards the city of Qum, Iran, when the Baathist Regime in Iraq began tightening its crackdown on the Islamic seminary.

In the year 1402 AH (1981 CE), Sayyid Muneer returned to Qatif for personal reasons and continued his studies there. One year later, he traveled to Damascus, Syria to study in the Islamic seminary there under the tutelage of His Eminence Sayyid Jamal Al-Khoei. Finally, in 1405 AH (1984 CE), he returned to the Holy City of Najaf to continue his studies. There, he studied under some of the most respected scholars of the Islamic seminary, including Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abulqasim Al-Khoei and Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Murtada Al-Boroujerdi. With the recommendation of another one of his tutors, Sayyid Habib Hussainyan, Sayyid Muneer also began to study under the tutelage of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Al-Sistani, benefitting much from his lessons in the principles of jurisprudence, as well as his extensive examination of modern sciences and their correlation with Islamic sciences.

Sayyid Muneer then moved back to Qum where he studied under Grand Ayatollah Wahid Khorasani for several years. He also studied extensively under the tutelage of Grand Ayatollah Mirza Jawad Tabrizi, who became a guide and mentor for the remainder of his life. Before his passing, Grand Ayatollah Tabrizi gave Sayyid Muneer an endorsement as a jurist capable of deducing Islamic laws from its sources.

In 1418 AH (1997 CE), Sayyid Muneer began teaching Advanced Seminars (*Bahth Kharij*) in jurisprudence. He is known by his students for his eloquence, as well as his encouragement of discussion and debate. He is an avid lecturer and an author, with multiple works published for a varied readership.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Working on this book has been an honor and a privilege. We have long listened to Sayyid Muneer Al-Khabbaz's lectures and sermons and have benefitted much from his insight. When the opportunity arose for us to work on translating one of his books – one about our beloved Twelfth Imam (a), no less – we could not let the opportunity go by. We hope that our readers benefit from the Sayyid's insights and knowledge as much as we did during the course of this project.

Before our readers begin on the journey of this book, we hope that they keep a few important points in mind.

Firstly, there are great structural differences between the original Arabic language of the book and the modern English language. Such structural differences make the task of literal translation burdensome, and create a final result that does not accurately capture the spirit and readability of the Arabic text. Because Sayyid Muneer's work could not be encapsulated in a direct or literal translation, adaptations were used freely to capture the meaning of the text without being bogged down in linguistic and structural variations.

The process of translation always begs us to find precise meanings for the passages that we translate. When we encounter the majesty of the Holy Quran, we find ourselves incapable of understanding its intricacies, let alone translating its true and deep meanings. We turned to the works of translators who have attempted to do this before. Although no translation can do justice to the Holy Quran, we found that the translation of Ali Quli Qarai to be the most proper in understanding when compared to the interpretation of the text as derived by our grand scholars. As such, we

decided to rely on Qarai's translations throughout this book, with minor adaptations that allowed us to weave the verses more properly with the rest of the work.

A second great limitation came with translating the narrations of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Holy Household (a). Their words are ever so deep and ever so powerful. We attempted to convey these passages to the reader in a tone that is understandable without deviating from the essence of the words of these immaculate personalities. We pray that we were successful in this endeavor.

Finally, we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support. As students of Islam and as translators of this text, our greatest purpose is to please God by passing along these teachings to others. By picking up this book, you have lent your crucial support to this endeavor. We hope that you will continue your support throughout the rest of this book, and we ask that you keep us in your prayers whenever you pick it up.

The Editorial and Translation Team,

The Mainstay Foundation

MEETING IMAM MAHDI

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

What remains of God's provision is better for you, should you be faithful.^[1]

Sayyid Tabatabaei wrote in his Al-Mizan that the meaning of “what remains of God’s provision” in the blessed verse is the profit that a man may earn after a commercial transaction. His evidence for this viewpoint was the context of the verse itself, which is part of Prophet Jethro’s (a) dialogue with his people. He said,

O my people! Observe fully the measure and the balance, with justice, and do not cheat the people of their goods, and do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption. What remains of God's provision is better for you, should you be faithful.^[2]

However, the more accurate interpretation is that “what remains of God’s provision” is a reference to the remaining semblance of God Almighty. It is, in fact, a reference to Imam Mahdi (a) for two reasons:

First, that the tradition narrated by Omar ibn Zaahir states that a man once asked Imam Sadiq (a) about whether the Awaited Imam (a) is greeted as Commander of the Faithful. Imam Sadiq (a) replied,

No. That is a name given by God to the Commander of the Faithful [Ali ibn Abi Talib] (a). No one was called by it before him nor does anyone claim it after him other than a disbeliever.

The man asked, “How would he be greeted?” The Imam (a) replied, “They would say, ‘Peace be upon you, O Remainder of God’s Provisions.’” He then recited the verse, “What remains of God’s provision is better for you, should you be faithful.”^[3]

Accordingly, what is meant by the remainder of God's provisions is in reference to Imam Mahdi (a), because he is the remaining semblance of God. Every Imam and prophet is a sign or semblance of God. However, in other cases a semblance may transcend into the afterlife through death, so that its time as a sign lapses. There is a semblance, however, that remains until the Day of Reckoning – that is the “remainder of God's provisions.” This phrase applies to the Awaited Imam (a).

Second, if the meaning of the “remainder of God's provisions” meant the profit earned through a gainful transaction, there would be no meaning to condition it by saying “should you be faithful.” Profit is a good that encompasses both believers and disbelievers and is not restricted to those who are faithful. However, the verse states that “what remains of God's provision is better for you” restricted specifically to the believers – “should you be faithful.” That does not apply except to the Awaited Imam (a). He is the good that is conditioned on faithfulness and virtue.

The verse speaks of the Awaited Imam (a). The fact that it came in the context of Prophet Jethro's (a) dialogue with his people does not contradict the assertion that it is encompassing of a longer time span. It is meant as a directive to the believers at all times, even if it was conveyed through Jethro (a) in his dialogue with his people.

Thus, we wish to address three points about Imam Mahdi (a).

DEALING WITH THE AWAITED IMAM

There are two perspectives for dealing with the Imam (a) – a physical one and a spiritual one.

The physical perspective deals with the Awaited Imam (a) as an absent individual whose presence is sought, or as a traveler whose return is anticipated. That is why many individuals and writers focus on the physical aspects of the occultation, such as the signs of the appearance, the Imam's (a) looks, and what his tools will be. This is the version of the physical perspective which focuses on the material aspects of the appearance. This is why there is a focus on the signs of his appearance: so that he can be distinguished when he does arrive.

The other perspective is the spiritual one which sees the Imam (a) as present and not absent. Yes, he is an individual of flesh and blood. However, *Divine Guardianship* does not simply exist in his physical body; rather it is a corpus of values, principles, and ethics. These principles are present, applicable, and effective. They are not absent. An Imam (a) is distinguished by his values, principles, and ethics, not simply by his physical body.

So long as *Divine Guardianship* rests in a set of principles and values, the Imam (a) remains present rather than absent. These principles are present and in effect. So we must deal with the Imam (a) as someone who is present, not as an individual who is absent.

This is what is described in the blessed verse, “You are the best nation [ever] brought forth for mankind: you bid what is right and forbid what is wrong.”^[4] God Almighty says, “There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong.”^[5] This is a reference to the Imam.

The Imam is teaching what is right and a forbidding of what is wrong. He is a call to that which is good. These living and evolving values are the Awaited Imam (a). We deal with these values as they are present, not as if they are absent.

This doesn't mean that we should ignore the signs of the appearance. There have been signs mentioned to us in the narrations, such as what was relayed

by Omar ibn Handhala who relayed from Imam Sadiq (a) that,

There are five signs before the emergence of al-Qa'im ^[6] (a): the Call, Al-Sufyani, the Sinkhole, the Murder of the Pure Soul (between the Corner [of the Kaaba] and the Shrine [of Abraham]), ^[7] and Al-Yamani. ^[8]

These are five signs. In the well-regarded narration of Abdullah ibn Sinan, he said that all of them are “inevitable”^[9] – meaning that all are bound to occur.

In the narration of Abu Busair, “There is not amongst the banners a banner that is more guided than that of Al-Yamani. It is a banner of guidance, as it calls to your Master (a).”^[10]

The fact that there are signs for the appearance of the Imam (a) is something that cannot be denied. These signs will take place before he emerges. The Holy Household (a) have mentioned these signs to remove all doubt from his emergence and the time of his emergence. However, we must not focus on the signs and neglect the values. The Imam (a) is defined by the values and not by the signs. Whether these signs take place or not, we must deal with the Imam (a) as a present actor.

To summarize the point: focusing on the signs of the appearance, descriptions of the Imam (a), and descriptions of his clothes and tools is taking a physical perspective toward the Imam (a). It is limiting him to a body which cannot be presently seen, while *Divine Guardianship* is in principles which are present and effective.

MEETING THE IMAM

There is no doubt that it would be a great honor and a most admirable goal to be graced by meeting Imam Mahdi (a). However, in order to understand this point well, we must answer the following three questions.

Is it possible to meet the Imam?

Some might say that meeting the Imam (a) is something that is impossible. This may be understood in what Al-Sadouq, a great scholar of Twelver heritage, narrated in his book *Kamaal Al-Deen*. He wrote that in the last month of his life, the Fourth Ambassador Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Samri, the last of the Imam's Ambassadors, received a signed letter from the Awaited Imam (a). In that signed letter, the Imam (a) wrote,

In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

O, Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Samri, may God increase the rewards of your brothers for [the tragedy of your loss] as you pass within [the next] six days.

Organize your affairs and do not appoint someone to take your position after your death. Total occultation has begun and there will be no emergence until God wills.

That will be after a lengthy duration, the hardening of hearts, and the spread of injustice throughout Earth.

Those who will claim to see [me] will come to my Shia. Surely, whoever claims to have seen [me] before the emergence of Al-Sufyani and the Call is a liar and a fabricator.

There is no power except by God, the Most High, the Most Glorious. ^[11]

From this passage, it may be understood that it is impossible to actually meet the Imam (a) – “Whoever claims to have seen [the Imam] is a liar and fabricator. There is no power except by God.”

However, this quote has a different contextual meaning, and it is possible to meet the Imam for a number of reasons.

First, the occultation of the Imam (a) is not one of seclusion. The Imam (a) is not absent and disconnected from society. He does not live in a cave, on an uninhabited island, or in any other place of seclusion. Rather, his

occultation is one of continuous connection. What is in occultation is not his person but his apparent persona. He lives amongst us. He eats and drinks as we do. He may even get married. He is amongst us, but we do not recognize his immaculate persona. That is why we read in Dua Al-Nudba,

May I be your ransom, O you who have been hidden [from our eyes] yet are never absent from our [hearts]! May I be your ransom, O you who are far [from our sight], while [your kind hand is] not far from us! May I be your ransom, O aspiration of believing men and women who yearn for you, who upon remembering you, heave a sigh [of longing to see you]!^[12]

Therefore, his occultation means an absence of his outward persona. It does not mean his physical absence, as he is amongst us and continuously connects with us. Therefore, meeting him is something which is very possible and even feasible. If the Imam (a) wishes to meet us, it is up to him to decide and is out of our hands.

Second, it is a recurrent theme within Twelver Shiism that the Imam (a) has met with numerous scholars. The frequency of these reports leads us to believe with certainty that meeting the Imam (a) is quite possible and not an absolute impossibility.^[13]

Third, the signed letter attributed to the Imam (a) is speaking of ambassadorship and not just the possibility of meeting the Imam (a).

What is categorically rejected in the letter is official ambassadorship after the fourth and final Ambassador, up until the emergence of the Imam (a). We understand this based on the context of the narration.

The referenced passage is from a signed letter of the Imam (a) directed to the Fourth Ambassador, Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Samri. It tells him of his imminent passing, that he is the last Ambassador, and that he should not appoint anyone to take his position. The letter then says that there will be people who will claim to have seen the Imam (a), an apparent reference to ambassadorship, and that those who claim ambassadorship are liars and fabricators.

An ambassador is clearly different from any ordinary citizen. An ordinary citizen may know some things about the state, but the ambassador is

naturally entrusted with confidential and sensitive information and must know the state's domestic and foreign policy. The information entrusted to an ambassador is therefore of a crucial and decisive nature.

Therefore, the Imam (a) is saying that there will be no ambassador after the Fourth Ambassador and that there will no longer be a person entrusted with this crucial and decisive information. However, an ordinary individual's meeting and receiving the blessings of the Imam (a) is much different than this ambassadorship and is not within the scope of this narration.

Still, the Imam (a) will not meet whoever wishes to see him. He chooses specific individuals for some greater private or public good. If the Imam (a) were to meet with just any individual, that would contradict the wisdom behind these meetings. Therefore, the individual chosen to meet the Imam (a) must be qualified for such a meeting and able to achieve the private or public benefit that is required.

What is the nature of meeting the Imam?

A meeting with God's representative on earth is one of great meaning and significance.

To use the terminology of Muslim philosophers, it is a meeting of "complete dissolution," not one of "association." There is a difference between the two, and we can use an example to illustrate this difference. If you stir some honey in a cup of milk, you create a mixture where both the honey and the milk can be tasted. Thus, there are two distinct existents that came to be associated within that cup. This is what the philosophers refer to as a relationship of association.

On the other hand, when iron and other elements are smelted into steel, you no longer sense the existence of the component parts. Rather, they become one material indistinguishable from its parts. This is what philosophers refer to as total dissolution.

This also takes place within our own minds. If we contemplate on the relationship between an individual and his name, we find that it is also an example of total dissolution. For example, let us assume that I was to name my next son Noah.

Initially, when someone asks me about Noah, I might not instantly link his question to my son as I am not yet used to the name. In that period, I feel that there are two distinct existents – my son and the name that is made up of the four letters N-O-A-H. However, after some time, if someone mentions the name Noah to me, I would instantly think of my son without much mental processing of the name and its letters. This is a relationship of total dissolution, as the name has completely dissolved as a distinct existent and the only remainder is my son, Noah. The relationship was at first one of association, but it transformed over time into a relationship of complete dissolution.

The same must be true of our meeting with God. It must be a meeting of complete dissolution where we no longer feel the two distinct existents.

We must come to the point where in our meeting with God we only feel His existence. Such is a relationship of total dissolution. For us to have such a meeting with God, we must always feel His presence. The Holy Quran describes this relationship when it says, “Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to God. The hand of God is above their hands.”^[14] A person must feel the hand of God touching his own hand. God Almighty also says, “Do they not know that it is God who accepts the repentance of His servants and receives the charities?”^[15] We must reach a state where we feel that God is the one that is taking our charity and accepting our deeds. In another verse, God says in reference to the animal sacrifice slaughtered during the Hajj and the meat of which is given as charity, “It is not their flesh or blood that reaches God; rather, it is your piety that reaches Him.”^[16]

Our meeting with God must be one of total dissolution, where we no longer feel our own existence but only the existence of God. This is what Imam Hussain (a) spoke of in the Supplication of Arafa,

When have You ever been absent so that You may need something to point to You? When have You ever been far-off so that traces may lead to You? Blind be the eye that cannot see You watching it. Losing is a servant's deal that does not dedicate a share to Your love.^[17]

Does the Imam wish to meet us?

The scholars of mysticism say that there is a difference between an honorary and an intimate meeting with the Imam (a). One may wish to have an honorary meeting with the Imam (a) so that he could see his honorable face and his praiseworthy virtue. As we read in the supplication, “O God! Show me the rightly guided face and the praiseworthy virtue [of Imam Mahdi (a)], enlighten my vision by looking at him, and hasten his appearance....”^[18]

However, the Imam (a) does not want this. The Imam (a) wants intimate meetings. But, how can the Imam (a) have these intimate meetings with us, if we are not at the level of having a close of a relationship with him?

The Imam (a) wants something and we want something else. We want the Imam (a) to honor us with a meeting, when we remain immersed in our sins and vices. The Imam, however, wants an intimate meeting where he can be proud of us and happy for us. This requires that we foster a relationship of total dissolution with the Imam (a). Only then will our meeting with the Imam (a) be a profound one. Otherwise, the Imam (a) may be generous enough to grant us an honorary audience, but he would rather for us to be at the level that he requires of us so that we can receive the grace of a special meeting with him.

LOVE FOR THE IMAM

We must acknowledge that our relationship with the Imam (a) is superficial and dry. We may have a relationship with our teachers that is stronger than our relationship with the Imam (a). We may have a relationship with our friends and loved ones that is stronger than our relationship with the Imam (a). We may have a relationship with our religious authorities and community leaders that is stronger than our relationship with the Imam (a). Therefore, we must go back to ourselves and make sure that we establish a loving and intimate relationship with the Imam (a). We pray for the Imam (a) but he does not want this simple movement of the tongue. He wants us to cultivate an intimate and loving relationship so that we may become ready for the greatest honor of meeting him.

There are a number of factors that can cultivate within us this loving connection with the Imam (a).

A pure heart

A heart that carries hatred for others is a far cry from being qualified to meet the Imam (a). God teaches the prayer, “Our Lord, forgive us and our brethren who were our forerunners in the faith, and do not put any rancor in our hearts toward the faithful.”^[19] A heart must be free of rancor in order to meet the Imam (a).

A person who is always smiling, who loves others, who always stretches a helping hand – that is a person that may be graced with an audience by the Imam (a) and his support. His heart is pure; a blank slate without any rancor or malice. It is narrated that Prophet Muhammad (s) said, “*The most virtuous amongst you are the best in ethics, who [are always kind], who love and are loved, and whose homes are always welcoming [of guests].*”^[20]

Purity from sin

Sins irritate and hurt the Imam (a). Al-Tabrasi narrates in his book *Al-Ihtijaj* that the Awaited Imam (a) said,

If our followers – may God guide them to His obedience – had unified their hearts in fulfillment of their oath that is upon them, the grace of meeting us would not have been delayed for them.

Happiness would have rushed to them when they see us with true and sincere knowledge of us. What keeps us away from them is nothing but what is reported to us of what we loath and dislike from them. God is our Supporter and He is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent trustee.^[21]

Giftng to the Imam

It is narrated that the Prophet (s) said, “Give each other gifts and you will come to love each other.”^[22] A gift creates love and that is true even with the Imam (a). You can pray on his behalf, fast on his behalf, perform a pilgrimage on his behalf, offer charity on his behalf, or do any other good deed with the intent of gifting its rewards to the Imam (a). This gift would be cherished by the Imam (a) and would earn us the blessing of being included within his graces and prayers – prayers that are true and answered by God. God says, “Call Me, and I will answer you!” So if the call is there, the answer will follow. Many of us say, ‘I pray but my prayers are not answered.’ If that is the case, then there was no true prayer that required an answer to follow.

You can reach this true prayer through the Awaited Imam (a), and then the answer will surely follow. God says “call me” but does not specify whether the call must be directly or through an intermediary. I can pray to God with my intermediary being the Imam (a). My communication with the Imam (a) would be through this gift – a good act whose rewards I grant to him. This gift would earn his prayers. Thus, I would have prayed to God through the Imam (a).

The Imam (a) prays for those close to him. He wrote in a letter to Sheikh Mufid, “We do not neglect in caring for you and do not overlook remembering you. If it weren’t for that, hardship would have befallen you and enemies would have overcome you.”^[23] Thus, if we grow closer to the Imam (a), he would become closer to us and pray for us.

Silent remembrance

Silent remembrance is a term used by mystics and is taken from the prayer of Imam Sajjad (a) where he pleads to God, “Make us intimate with silent remembrance, and employ us in purified works and efforts pleasing to

You.”^[24] The Imam (a) in this passage refers to complete reliance on God, where no one is asked, complained to, or sought comfort in except God. If a person achieves that, he would have reached silent remembrance and complete reliance on God. One of the factors for strengthening the relationship with the Awaited Imam (a) is to reach this level in relation to God, then to ask God for continued life, health, and prosperity with the pleasure of the Imam (a). This would be an acknowledgement of the Imam’s (a) stature and a show of true love.

Thinking of him

When you love an individual, you are constantly thinking of him. If you truly loved the Awaited Imam (a), your mind would be preoccupied with thoughts of him and his character.

One look at the Visitation of Aal Yasin reveals to us this process of thinking of the Imam (a). We read in that visitation,

Peace be upon you in the midst of your night and within the bounds of your day... Peace be upon you when you stand. Peace be upon you when you sit. Peace be upon you when you read and explain. Peace be upon you when you pray and supplicate. Peace be upon you when you bow and prostrate. Peace be upon you when you say ‘There is no God except God’ and when you say ‘God is greater [than what He is described].’ Peace be upon you when you enter the morning and the evening. Peace be upon you in the enveloping nights and in the manifesting days.^[25]

This is an image of the Imam (a) that we must imagine and contemplate upon.

Feeling his pains

There is no individual on this Earth that contemplates like the Imam (a). He sees the tragedies and adversity that have come over the Muslim nation. When he sees a believer committing a sin, he is hurt. How does he feel seeing the greatest of sins and crimes being committed? That is why our relationship with the Imam (a) must be so close that we feel pain for his pain. Dua Al-Nudba teaches us how to feel his pain.

It pains me that I should see [the rest of] creation yet not see you, and not hear from you so much as a rustle or a whisper... It pains me that I receive every answer except [news of] you [returning], and I am [merely] consoled [for your continued absence]. It pains me that I should cry for you while [most of] humanity deserts you. It pains me that you should be afflicted with such hardships rather than they [who caused you these hardships by deserting you].^[26]

These words allow us to better feel the pain that the Imam (a) feels. It is narrated that Imam Sadiq (a) said,

May God have mercy on our Shia. They were created from the leftovers of our clay. They were kneaded with the waters of loyalty to us. They mourn for our mourning and are joyous for our joy.^[27]

Feeling their pain is a type of loyalty to them. The greatest of the Imam's (a) pains is the memory of the tragedy of Karbala – a memory that he will never forget and whose grief he will never get over.

THE VALUE OF LOVE

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Is He who answers the call of the distressed when he invokes Him and removes his distress, and makes you the vicegerents of the earth...?^[28]

The blessed verse indicates that if the ‘distressed’ were to call on his Lord, he would be answered. Who is the distressed that is referred to in this verse? There are two major opinions on this issue.

The first opinion is the one proffered by the late Sayyid Tabatabaei, who concluded that the distressed is the person who is in a state of total reliance on God. He supported this conclusion with two verses of the Holy Quran, and each of these verses elaborates on the other.

The first of these verses reads, “Your Lord has said, ‘Call Me, and I will answer you!’”^[29] This verse indicates that a true prayer will always be answered. It does not, however, detail the meaning of what a true prayer is.

The other verse expounded on the meaning of true prayers saying, “Is He who answers the call of the distressed when he invokes Him and removes his distress...?”^[30] The true prayer that will always be answered is that of the distressed who has reached a level of certainty in the fact that all material means are incapable of achieving his goals. If a person is stricken with a terminal illness and is certain that no material means will be able to cure him, such an individual will reach a state of total reliance on God. Such an individual understands that the only way forward is through God. This individual would seek refuge in God.

Through this analysis, the late Sayyid Tabatabaei concludes that the distressed in the verse is the individual who reaches this level of complete

reliance on God under the circumstances of severe tribulation. This individual is promised an answer to his prayers.

The second opinion suggests that the distressed who is referred to in this verse is the Twelfth Holy Imam (a). Two major sets of evidence point to this fact.

First, the narrations of the Household of the Prophet (s) are clear in this regard. For example, we can rely on the accepted tradition narration by Muhammad ibn Muslim who relayed the explanation of Imam Baqir (a) of the verse. The Imam (a) said,

This verse was revealed in reference to Al-Qa'im (a). When he emerges, he will wear a turban, pray at the station [of Abraham at the Grand Mosque of Mecca], and beseech his Lord so that no banner of his will ever be turned down.^[31]

We can also turn to the narration of Salih ibn 'Uqba, who relayed the following from Imam Sadiq (a),

This verse was revealed in reference to Al-Qa'im (a) from the Household of Muhammad (s). By God, he is the distressed! If he prays two Rak'a at the station [of Abraham] and supplicates to God, he will be answered, all distress will be removed, and he will be made to inherit the Earth.^[32]

Second, this could be understood from the context of the verse. At the end of the verse, God states that He will “make you the vicegerents of the earth.” If we were to review the original Arabic language of the verse, we would see that it is very precise in this respect. It says that God will make you “*the* vicegerents of the earth,” not simply “*a* vicegerent” or “*among* the vicegerents of the earth.” If any of the latter two expressions were used, the verse could have been applicable to all of humanity as any person can be *a* vicegerent of the earth. In fact, every individual that makes proper use of the earth and its resources can be called a vicegerent of the earth.

As for “*the* vicegerents of the earth,” it is a much greater position. The vicegerents of the earth must be those who the entire earth and all of its resources are under their authority.

The Holy Quran used both types of expressions within its verses. In reference to Prophet Adam (a), the Quran says, “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed I am going to set *a* vicegerent on the earth...’”^[33] And in reference to Prophet David (a), we read, “O David! Indeed, We have made you *a* vicegerent on the earth.”^[34]

But when it came to the nation of the Prophet Muhammad (s), God did not say *a* vicegerent or *among* the vicegerents – He said that He will “make you *the* vicegerents of the earth.”^[35] The nation of the Prophet Muhammad (s) was promised vicegerency over the entire earth, and not simply a portion of it. Adam (a), David (a), and others may have had limited vicegerency on the earth. But the promise of the verse goes much further when it speaks to the nation of our Grand Prophet (s).

The fulfillment of this promise will happen at the time of the emergence of our Twelfth Imam (a). Therefore, the promise that comes within the same verse provides contextual evidence that the distressed that is mentioned in the verse is none other than the Twelfth Imam (a).

The ‘distressed’ is the individual who bears the responsibility of fulfilling this promise, and that is our Awaited Imam (a). As God declares in the Holy Quran: “We desire to show favor to those who were abased in the land, and to make them Imams, and to make them the inheritors [of the earth].”^[36]

Therefore, when you read this verse in supplication – “He who answers the call of the distressed when he invokes Him” – you must acknowledge that you are actually speaking about the Immaculate Imam (a). You are beseeching God by the grace of the Awaited Imam (a) to repel any tribulation or distress. As we read in Dua Al-Nudba, “Where is the distressed one who is answered whenever he calls?”^[37] With this understanding, we continue to speak with our relationship of love toward the Imam (a).

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY HOUSEHOLD

There are two differing opinions amongst Muslims. There are those who say that the love of the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) has no substantive value. The other group asserts that the love of the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) does have a fundamental value.

The Literalist View

This is the view of some Salafi scholars, and it relies on two points.

First, that love must be directed to God and not for any other creation. Any love for the Prophet (s) must thus be only based on the fact that he had called to the way of God. To clarify this, it could be said that the Prophet's (s) life had a personal aspect and prophetic aspect. His personal life would include his interactions with his wives, daughter, and son-in-law. As for the prophetic aspects of his life, it is described in the verses, "Indeed We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news, as a warner, and as a summoner to God."^[38]

The proponents of this view assert that we love the Prophet (s) for his prophetic life and work, and not for his personal life. In other words, they claim that we must love the Prophet (s) because of his role as a messenger and not as an individual.

Second, that love has no substantive value and that value lies only in an individual's deeds. In this view, they rely on the following verses of the Holy Quran. From the verse, "If you love God, then follow me; God will love you,"^[39] they conclude that emphasis is placed on following the Prophet (s) and not on love. The Holy Quran also says "Therein are men who love to keep pure, and God loves those who keep pure."^[40] From this verse they also conclude that emphasis is on work and purity, and not on love.

The proponents of this view conclude that there is no substantive value to love and that value is only in work and deeds. They assert that celebrations that show love for the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) are valueless and unnecessary.

The Objective View

The objective view is that of the Twelver Shia and other Islamic schools of thought. We assert that love does have substantive worth and value. In support of this, we provide three arguments.

First, within our Twelver Shia heritage, we do not distinguish between the Prophet's (s) personal and prophetic life. We assert that the Prophet (s) in all his actions, omissions, and character is a semblance of God. His character cannot be dissected and analyzed in this way. We assert that any prophet and divinely appointed guardian of faith cannot be said to have a private life and a public life. In support of this, we can cite multiple passages of the Holy Quran that speak of Prophets and righteous servants without making a distinction between their private and apostolic life. The Holy Quran addresses their character with expressions that connote absolute purity in all aspects and facets of life. When the Holy Quran speaks of some of the Prophets, it says,

And remember Our servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of strength and insight. Indeed We purified them [i.e. made their persons purely for God] with exclusive remembrance of the abode [of the Hereafter]. Indeed they are surely with Us among the elect of the best.^[41]

And when it speaks of Prophet Moses (a) specifically, it says, "Mention in the Book Moses. Indeed he was purified [i.e. chosen], and an apostle and prophet."^[42] This does not only mean that he was purified and chosen in his role as prophet, but in all aspects of his life.

Speaking of Prophet Joseph (a), the Holy Quran says,

She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her [too] had he not beheld the proof of his Lord. So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency. He was indeed one of Our chosen servants.^[43]

This confirms that there is no distinction between a prophet's personal and apostolic life. Every prophet is chosen because of the totality of his pure character.

In another verse, God uses a different expression and says, "And I made you [Moses] endearing, and that you might be nurtured under My

[watchful] eyes... And I nurtured you for Myself.”^[44]

God nurtures these individuals. He chooses them. He purifies them. When it comes to the Household of the Prophet (s), God says, “Indeed God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.”^[45] God says that He purified these individuals from any and all faults and errors – a thorough purification. These souls were therefore purely for God and chosen by Him.

The persons of the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) were thus purified and chosen by God. That is why the Twelver Shia school asserts that you cannot differentiate between their private and apostolic lives. The Prophet (s) is, in all aspects, is a sign of God. The same goes for our Immaculate Imams (a). That is why God says about the Prophet (s), “Nor does he speak out of [his own] desire. He is naught but revelation.”^[46]

Second, love for the Prophet (s) is an innate love and cannot be said to be valueless. The scholars of mysticism divide love into three types:

Desirous Love which revolves around lust and appetite. As God says,

The love of [worldly] allures, including women and children, accumulated piles of gold and silver, horses of mark, livestock, and farms has been made to seem decorous to mankind. Those are the wares of the life of this world, but the goodness of one's ultimate destination lies near God.

Human Love which revolves around companionship, such as love for one's family and friends.

Innate Love which is the love of perfection. Every human is born with a natural instinct to love perfection, excellence, and beauty. The Holy Quran says in describing mankind, “Indeed he is an avid lover of good.”^[47] Man is an avid lover of good because good represents a form of perfection and beauty.

So why does an individual love God? Because God is the All Perfect and mankind by innate nature loves everything that is perfect. Why would an individual love the Prophet (s) and his Household (a)? Because they are perfect human beings and mankind by innate nature loves this perfection. Therefore, an individual loves God and His Prophet (s) because his innate

nature drives him towards that love. Mankind, by innate nature, loves perfection and beauty. Therefore, the assertions of the Salafis that love for the Prophet (s) is meaningless does not pass muster under review. It is our innate nature that calls us to the love of the Prophet (s) and his Household (a), and that love therefore holds the value of its purity and innocence. That is why this innately driven love does not stop with the Shia. Any individual who comes to learn of the life and character of the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) will surely come to love them. That is why Paul Salamy, a Christian who read the biography of Imam Ali (a), declared in verse,

Truth has rung within the Christian so that, due to his excessive love, he became called an Alawite. I am the lover of virtue, inspiration, justice, and all good qualities. So if Ali (a) was not a prophet, then surely his character was prophetic.

Third, as we said before, the Salafis assert that love for the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) holds no substantive value. They claim that an individual may follow the Prophet (s) and enter Paradise without feeling any affection towards the Prophet (s).

In reality, however, love has a substantive value just as good work and deeds hold substantive value. Just as good deeds may be a means to salvation, so too is love. And we can support this by a number of Quranic verses.

God says in the Holy Quran, “Say [O Prophet (s)], ‘I do not ask you any reward for it except the love of [my] relatives.’”^[48] If love had no substantive value, God would have told the Prophet (s) to ask for obedience rather than love. The fact that God tells His Messenger (s) to ask the believers to love his Household (a) means that there is a fundamental value for love.

Again, the Quran relays these words of Prophet Abraham (a), “So make the hearts of a part of the people fond of them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks.”^[49] If love had no value, why would Abraham (a) pray for it? This supplication of Abraham (a) is evidence that love does hold substantive value in the eyes of God. Otherwise, Abraham (a) – a grand prophet who surely knows what God wants and values – would not pray for it.

In a third verse, God speaks to Moses (a) and says, “I made you endearing, and that you might be nurtured under My [watchful] eyes.”^[50] This means that love towards Moses (a) has value. Otherwise, God would not have regarded this as a blessing to His prophet.

Prophetic traditions also indicate that love has a substantive value. Al-Tha’labi narrates in his exegesis of the Holy Quran the following tradition attributed to the Prophet (s),

Whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), he has died a martyr. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), he has died while forgiven. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), he has died penitent. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), he has died a believer of full faith. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), he shall receive glad tidings of paradise from the Angel of Death, then from [the angels of judgment] Munkar and Nakeer. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), he has died while forgiven. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), God will make angels of the All Merciful be the visitors of his grave. Indeed, whoever dies on the love for the Household of Muhammad (s), two doors from paradise will open into his grave.

Indeed, whoever dies on the hatred for the Household of Muhammad (s), he will come on the Day of Judgment with an inscription on his forehead, ‘Despair of God’s mercy.’ Indeed, whoever dies on the hatred for the Household of Muhammad (s), he will die a disbeliever. Indeed, whoever dies on the hatred for the Household of Muhammad (s), he will never smell the fragrance of paradise.^[51]

The Holy Quran says, “Those who believe in [the Prophet (s)], honor him, help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him, they are the felicitous.”^[52] What does it mean that the believers should ‘honor’ the Prophet (s)? To honor someone is to express love and admiration for the

individual. And if this expression of love and admiration was not valuable, the Holy Quran would not have commanded that it be shown toward the Prophet (s). To celebrate the joyous occasions and commemorate the tragedies of the Prophet (s) and his Household (a) are all forms of honoring them. We conclude that love does have a considerable value unlike the opinion that is preferred by some Muslim scholars.

THE VALUE OF LOVE TO THE HOLY HOUSEHOLD

There is a misconception that we must address at this point. Some claim that Twelver Shia heritage teaches its followers to be emotionally charged due to feelings of oppression and persecution. One may reach this conclusion if he sees the rituals of mourning that are more pronounced than the joyous celebrations. Even in the supplications and the Visitations, there is an emphasis on oppression and sorrow. The claim is that the scholars and preachers of the Shia teach every follower of the school of thought to constantly feel that they are oppressed and persecuted.

For example, this is a supplication that the Shia recite every night in Ramadan. They say,

O God, we complain to You for the loss of our Prophet (s) – Your blessings be upon him and his Household (a) – the absence of our leader, the profusion of our enemies, our few numbers, widespread disorder, and the vicissitudes of time amongst us. So send Your blessings upon Muhammad (s) and his Household (a) and help us overcome all this with a victory that You expedite, an injury that You relieve, a triumph that You confirm, a righteous authority that You establish, a mercy that You expand over us, and wellness with which You cover us. By Your mercy, O Most Merciful!^[53]

This passage teaches the Shia to feel as though they are a group that is oppressed, persecuted, and downtrodden. This could be a very dangerous phenomenon. Social psychologists warn that if someone is conditioned to believe that they are oppressed and downtrodden, they will develop an inferiority complex which would lead to isolation and misanthropy.

Because the large majority of Shia are taught to feel oppressed and persecuted, they develop this inferiority complex. Thus, they become isolated and do not participate in the advancement of their communities. If the opportunity were to arise for them, they would seek retribution for historic injustice and allow this hatred to spill into action.

In debunking this misconception, we offer two comments.

First, it is true that Shia heritage does include these complaints to God for the ills of the world. However, complaining to God does not create an inferiority complex or foster a vengeful spirit. Instead, it teaches the individual to be patient and resilient in the face of trials and tribulations.

When an individual goes through some tough times, who should he complain to? He complains to his Lord because this inspires him to regain his energy and face adversity with renewed vigor. Complaining to God nurtures a spirit of patience, resilience, and vigor and does not nurture a spirit of hate and vengeance. And the best proof of this are the actions of Jacob (a) as relayed in the Holy Quran,

He turned away from them and said, 'Alas for Joseph!' His eyes had turned white with grief, and he choked with suppressed agony. They said, 'By God! You will go on remembering Joseph until you wreck your health or perish.' He said, 'I complain of my anguish and grief only to God. I know from God what you do not know.' [54].

Prophet Jacob (a) did not complain to God seeking retribution from his sons. Rather, he looked toward God with certainty that He will give him the patience and the resolve to face the challenges of life.

The same is true with Prophet Muhammad (s). Historical accounts tell us that the Prophet (s) went to Ta'if, east of Mecca, to call its people to God. When they heard his call, the people of the city rushed to him and attacked him. At that moment, he raised his hands to the heavens and said,

O Lord! I complain to you of my weakness and my meekness amongst these people. O Most Merciful! You are the Lord of the downtrodden! You are my Lord, so to whom do you surrender me? To a stranger that will sneer at me? Or to an enemy whom You have given power over me? Yet, if You are not enraged for my sake, I would not mind [any of this].

At that moment Archangel Gabriel came to him and said,

God has heard the words of your people to you and how they answered you. He has sent to you the angel of the mountains so that you may command him as you wish in their matter.

The angel of the mountains added,

O Muhammad (s), I have been sent by God. God has heard the words of your people to you. I am the angel of the mountains. Your Lord has sent me to you so that you may command me as you wish. If you wish I would [strike them with the adjacent mountains].

The Prophet (s) replied, “I pray that God would draw from their loins people who would worship God and not associate anything with Him.”^[55]

The Prophet’s (s) protestations to God became a cause for hope and optimism, and not a cause for vengeance and pessimism.

When we Twelver Shia complain to God of the abundance of our enemies and our few numbers, this is a source of strength not of pessimism. It is not a way to foster a vengeful spirit. Rather, it fosters a determination to move forward despite adversity.

Second, no one can ask the Shia to forget the long history of oppression and persecution that we have faced, especially under Umayyad and Abbasid reigns. It is only natural that the Twelver heritage emphasizes this sorrow. In fact, there is a verse of poetry attributed to Imam Sajjad (a) that says, “Mankind are joyous for their holidays, but our holidays are our commemorations.”^[56]

There are also traditions that instill this sorrow in our character, such as one attributed to Imam Rida (a) –

Whoever remembers our tragedies and cries for what was done to us, he will be at our level on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever remembers our tragedies, cries, and makes others to cry, he shall not cry on the day when all eyes will cry. Whoever sits in a gathering where our issue is remembered, his heart will not die on the day that all hearts will die.^[57]

Is the goal of this sorrow and grief the promotion of hatred towards the followers of other Islamic schools of thought? Is it an incitement for the Shia to react with vengeance against other Islamic sects?

That is absolutely not the case. Rather, the heritage of grief and sorrow – which extends from the time of Imam Ali (a) up until, now, in the time of

the Awaited Imam (a) – is meant to teach the Shia that they must reject tyranny, injustice, and corruption. Our Imams (a) did not mention these narrations frivolously. They did teach us to be sorrowful, remorseful, and passionate. If one were to survey all the traditions of the Twelver Shia, they would not find even one passage or any accurate narrations that incites hatred, animosity, or vengefulness towards the rest of the Muslim nation.

In fact, we read in the narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a),

I advise you to be wary of God, reverent in your faith, vigorous in God's way, truthful in speech, trustworthy with what is entrusted to you, extensive in your prostrations, and good to your neighbors. This is the message of Muhammad (s). Keep the trust of whoever entrusts you, whether he is righteous or wicked, as the Messenger of God (s) would command keeping the trust whether it was a thread or a sewn garment. Associate with their tribes, attend their funerals, attend to their ill, and safeguard their rights. Indeed, if an individual was reverent in faith and honest in speech, kept the trust, and had an upright character amongst people, they would say, "He is Jafari." That would please me and I would be gladdened by him. They would say, "these are the ethics of Jafar (a)..."^[58]

Such narrations command us to treat all Muslims as our brothers, regardless of sect or school of thought.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AWAITED IMAM

There was once an article published that spoke of our emotional connection with the Awaited Imam (a). It said that whoever reads Dua Al-Nudba – a well-known supplication amongst the Shia – would see that this supplication and its likes teach the Shia to be preoccupied with emotions and sorrow and disregard values and principles. The article said that indulgence in grief is principally a reprehensible mode of behavior. This excerpt from the supplication was exhibited as proof for the article’s claims,

Until when must I [search and] remain baffled at [not finding] you, Master, until when? [With] what words must I cry out and what must I whisper [to ask God] about you [so that He hastens your return]? It pains me that I receive every answer except [news of] you [returning], and I am [merely] consoled [for your continued absence. It pains me that I should cry for you while [most of] humanity deserts you. It pains me that you should be afflicted with such hardships rather than they [who caused you these hardships by deserting you]. Is there anyone who will help me to prolong my sobs and cries [for you]? Is there anyone overwhelmed with grief in whose grief I may share when he finds himself alone? Is there anyone whose eyes cannot bear his grief so that my eyes may come to their aid [to relieve them of some of their burden]?^[59]

Therefore, it would seem that these supplications teach the Shia that grief is given a high priority, and other values are not emphasized.

Again, this is a mistaken view.

First, we were not commanded by God to simply love the Prophet (s) and his Household (a), but to show passionate affection toward them – “I do not ask you any reward for it except the love of [my] relatives.”^[60] “Love” in this verse is translated from the Arabic *mawadda*, which connotes not only love but an active expression of that love.

All Muslim sects love the Household of the Prophet (s), but that is not enough. What the Holy Quran asks for is an active expression of that love. The recitation of supplications like Dua Al-Nudba is a form of active

expression of love for the Prophet (s) and his Family (a). It teaches us to always feel the presence of the Imam (a), knowing that he lives amongst us. It teaches us to acknowledge that he is amongst us and that he knows us and our faults and struggles. Even though he is in a state of occultation, he hears our pleas and prayers. This supplication teaches us to actively express our love for him as we are commanded in the Holy Quran.

Second, you cannot present a short passage of the supplication and use it to make a generalization about its entire content. The supplication does teach us to express our love for the Prophet (s) and his Household (a), but it also teaches about the importance of good work and uprightness. For example, one passage reads,

Help us to fulfill our obligations to Him and endeavor to obey Him and to refrain from sinning against Him... Turn toward us in Your magnanimity. Accept our effort to attain Your proximity [through this supplication]. Gaze upon us with mercy....^[61]

This is the advantage of Shia heritage over others. It emphasizes both aspects – love and deeds. It does not simply speak of deeds as if we were emotionless automatons, the sole purpose of which is to obey. Shia heritage combines actions and emotions. Actions cannot be pursued without emotion. Emotions cannot be expressed without action.

Let us be fair to the reality of the world that we live in. If we truly loved the Prophet (s) and his Household (a), we would celebrate the anniversaries of the Household (a) just as we celebrate New Year's Eve. If celebrating the anniversaries of the Household (a) is a heresy, so is celebrating New Year's Day. Frankly, no one claims that merely celebrating New Year's Eve has driven us away from the traditions of the Prophet (s) and his companions.

After all, who ever heard of the companions exchanging New Year's greetings?

FROM THE PROPHET TO THE SAVIOR

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

We did not send you but as a mercy to all the worlds. [\[62\]](#)

With this holy verse as our starting point, we will address three primary issues.

THE MUHAMMADAN TRUTH

Many of us may have heard of or read this term, but what does it really mean? In order for us to understand this term more fully, let us examine three points.

Firstly, philosophers say that everything that exists passes through two stages of existence: definite and indefinite.

For example, a fruit tree has a definite existence – it has roots, branches, and fruits. It also had a previous existence that was indefinite when it existed as a mere seed. Similarly, the human before his definite existence had existed in an indefinite form within an embryo. The human being then took on a definite form and became a body with reason and emotion.

It is true that even the Holy Quran passed through these two stages of existence. The Quran we read today is in its definite form, with its chapters and verses, and its commands and admonishments. Yet it had a prior indefinite form within the “Guarded Book.”

The Holy Quran itself declares this truth when it states, “[This is] a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One [who is] all-wise, all-aware.”^[63] It also states, “This is indeed a noble Quran in a Guarded Book. No one touches it except the pure ones.”^[64]

So everything passes through two phases of existence – an indefinite existence and a definite existence. The Quran expressed this as well, stating, “There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure.”^[65] In another verse, it states, “Indeed We have created everything in a measure”^[66] – meaning that everything is given a boundary when it is brought into the world of material existence.

Everything within this world, from its smallest atoms to the greatest of galaxies – planets, stars, and all – existed once in an indefinite form before it took its definite form. They passed through the two stages. The universe was once existent in an indefinite, cursory form which the philosophers call “*Al-Faid Al-Aqdas*.” It then transformed into a definite form of existence, with the Earth, sky, sun, moon, man, animals, plants, and inanimate objects

– what the philosophers call “*Al-Faid Al-Muqaddas*.” This definite existence will once again assume its indefinite form on the Day of Judgment. God says, “The day We shall roll up the heaven, like rolling of the scrolls [meant] for writings.”^[67]

Secondly, in our Islamic heritage we find mentions of something called “the World of Lights.” It refers to the fact that God created Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Holy Household (a) from light before creating the universe. It is related that Imam Baqir (a) said,

Did you not know that Muhammad (s) and Ali (a), God’s blessings be upon them, were a single [ray of] light before the hands of God before the making of creation by two thousand years?^[68]

We also read in *Al-Ziyara Al-Jami’a*, “God created you as lights and made you circulate His throne.”^[69] In the visitation of Imam Hussain (a) we say, “I bear witness that you were a light in the lofty loins and the purified wombs.”^[70]

This world of light is what we were describing as *Al-Fayd Al-Aqdas* and as the indefinite existence. The indefinite existence of the universe is the light of Muhammad (s) and his Household (a). God first created the luminous material that is called the light of Muhammad (s) and his Household (a) – which is also called the indefinite existence and *Al-Fayd Al-Aqdas*. He then poured out all existence from it, and thus existence transformed through this luminous material into definite existence. This is the Muhammadan Truth.

Al-Muhaqiq Al-Asfahani, a professor of our teacher Imam Khomeini (may they both rest in peace), says the following verse about the Prophet(s), “Greatness has manifested from the heavens; from the World of Names, the greatest of names.”

So we know that the Muhammadan Truth is the indefinite existence. And as indefinite existence is mercy – all existence being mercy – God the Almighty says “He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.”^[71] Therefore, the Muhammadan Truth is the universal mercy. This is one of the meanings of the verse “We did not send you but as a mercy to all the worlds.”^[72]

What is the connection between Prophet Muhammad (s) and the worlds? What is his connection with the worlds of the heavens, earth, jinn, angels, plants, inanimate objects, and animals? Is the Prophet (s) not a man created on earth and sent to human society? So what is his relation to the worlds?

The answer is clear in light of the concept that we have explained – the Muhammadan Truth. The Prophet (s) is a light created before the universe. He is the indefinite existence and *Al-Fayd Al-Aqdas* created before the universe. From him, the universe was brought into existence and was sustained. That is why the Prophet (s) is “a mercy to all the worlds.”^[73]

Thirdly, the scholars of monasticism maintain that every truth has a means of sustenance. To illustrate the point, think of a lamp. The lamp is a truth, but it must be sustained by an electrical source for it to be luminescent. Thus, every truth needs a form of sustenance.

God says, “The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp – the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star.” This is all truth. Its sustenance is “lit from a blessed olive tree.” This tree is the sustenance. “Neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon light. God guides to His Light whomever He wishes.”^[74]

The Messenger of God (s) is the sustenance to all truth. He is the blessed tree. Prophet Muhammad (s) is the mercy that encompasses all of creation. Prophet Muhammad (s) is an existence and *Al-Fayd Al-Aqdas* that preceded this universe and was the medium of its making. This is the truth, but who really feels the sustenance of this truth? Who really feels the sweetness of the Muhammadan Truth? Those who feel it are select people who are the “good-doers.” The holy verse reads, “Indeed God’s mercy is close to the good-doers.”^[75] God also says, “My mercy embraces all things. Soon I shall appoint it for those who are Godwary.”^[76]

There is a well-known tradition that is noteworthy. It is narrated that the Prophet (s) said, “The first amongst us is Muhammad. The intermediate amongst us is Muhammad. The last amongst us is Muhammad.”^[77] Some may think that the Prophet (s) is speaking simply of names. In fact, the tradition is setting out the stages of the Muhammadan Truth. The Muhammadan Truth is a light that passes through three stages. The

beginning stage of this luminescence was the one that ascended to the heavens, the Chosen Prophet (s) who was the one to plant the seeds of faith. The intermediate stage is Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) who encompassed knowledge in its expanse and at whose hands the foundation of the school of thought were laid. The end stage is the one who is to establish the ideal state and apply complete justice. He is the one whose hands will reap the efforts of the prophets and the sacrifices of the vicegerents. The Almighty has said, “We desired to show favor to those who were abased in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs.”^[78] Therefore, the last is the one who will reap the desired fruit.

We realize that the Awaited Imam (a) is the extension of his grandfather, the Prophet (s). So as the Prophet (s) was a mercy to all the realms, so is the Awaited Imam (a) a mercy to all the realms. And as the Prophet (s) was a piece of mercy, the Awaited Imam (a) is a piece of mercy.

REFLECTIONS OF MUHAMMADAN MERCY

The Awaited Imam (a) reflects the mercy of his grandfather the Prophet (s) in three ways.

Merciful Character

The character of the Prophet (s) was one of mercy. As the Holy Quran tells us, “It is by God’s mercy that you [O Prophet (s)] are gentle to them; had you been harsh and hardhearted, they would have surely scattered from around you.”^[79] The character of the Prophet (s) was one of humility, affection, and love. That is why the Holy Quran describes him by saying, “Indeed, you possess a great character.”^[80] This same image of a great and magnanimous leader is replicated in the Awaited Imam (a).

Some may think of the Imam (a) as an unsociable and violent man. This could not be further from the truth, as the Imam (a) is just like his grandfather the Prophet (s). The Imam (a) will have the Prophet’s (s) smile and will exhibit the same humble, tranquil, and serene character. In a narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a), he says, “[The Awaited Imam (a)] would be amongst people as his grandfather [the Prophet (s)].”^[81] In another narration, Imam Sadiq (a) commented on the following verse,

O you who have faith! Should any of you desert his religion, God will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, who will be humble towards the faithful, stern towards the faithless, waging jihad in the way of God, not fearing the blame of any blamer.^[82]

The Imam (a) said, “[The verse] was revealed in respect to Al-Qa’im (a) and his companions.”^[83]

Fraternal Community

If one were to review the books of orientalist, they would quickly conclude that these authors made every effort to criticize and deride the Prophet (s). The one thing that none of them could disparage was the Prophet’s (s) ability to change the community in Medina into a fraternal community in a short period of a time. This was no easy task. The community of Medina – a city of persistently contending and belligerent tribes – was transformed by

the Prophet (s) into a community of fraternity, love, and loyalty. The Holy Quran praised this community in saying,

[The spoils are also] for the poor Emigrants [i.e. the Muhajiroon] who have been expelled from their homes and [wrested of] their possessions, who seek grace from God and [His] pleasure and help God and His Apostle. It is they who are the truthful. [They are as well] for those who were settled in the land [i.e. the Ansar] and [abided] in faith before them, who love those who migrate toward them, and do not find in their chests any privation for that which is given to them, but prefer [the Emigrants] to themselves, though poverty be their own lot. And those who are saved from their own greed—it is they who are the felicitous. [84].

The Holy Quran paints a beautiful picture in these verses. The Ansar had lovingly embraced their Muhajiroon brothers, caring for the poor and affording them work opportunities within their newly shared city. Would this ever happen in this day and age? For one community to embrace another and provide it with free shelter and work opportunities – and not do it out of guilt or shame, but out of love and bonhomie – is simply remarkable.

Imam Mahdi (a) will create a fraternal community as did the Prophet (s). Such a community is built on two principles – love and social solidarity.

We all long to live in such a community. We pray to God to make us of the aides and supporters of our Awaited Imam (a) and to hasten his reappearance. However, Imam Mahdi (a) expects us to take the initiative and prepare ourselves to live as a fraternal community. We cannot be his aides and supporters until we become a loving and caring fraternal community. We will not see that day until we, in spite of our differences, create a community that is characterized by social solidarity. It is when we reach that state that we become qualified to be his aides and supporters.

In one narration a man came to Imam Sadiq (a) and informed him that there are many Shia in his hometown. The Imam (a) asked the man, “Do the wealthy amongst them act kindly toward their poor? Does the well-doer forgive the ill-doer? Do they sympathize with one another?” The man

acknowledged that this was not the case. The Imam (a) said, “Then these are not Shia. The Shia are the ones that do [as I’ve described].”^[85] In another narration, the Imam (a) asks, “Can one of you come to his brother and put his hand in his brother’s [wallet] and take what he needs without being asked?”^[86]

The aides and supporters of the Awaited Imam (a) are the ones that always interact with others on the basis of love and social solidarity. We will not be of his supporters unless we rid ourselves of disputes and enmity to become a fraternal community. God says, “Indeed God does not change a people’s lot, unless they change what is in their souls.”^[87] He also says, “You will never attain piety until you spend out of what you hold dear.”^[88]

General Mercy

One of the Muhammadan qualities that manifest in the Awaited Imam (a) is the general scope of mercy.

The Prophet (s) was merciful with both the obedient and the disobedient. Imam Mahdi (a) is the same as his grandfather; his mercy with the disobedient is no less than his mercy for the obedient believers. It is narrated that Imam Ali (a) said,

Muhammad (s) was patient in the way of God such that he left no excuse for his people for distrusting him, expelling him from his home, and pelting him with stones, and for Abu Lahab to heave the innards of camels and sheep on him. God then instructed Jabeel, the Angel of the Mountains, to sunder the mountains and take care of the case of Muhammad (s). He came to [the Prophet (s)] and said, ‘I have been commanded to obey your commands so that if you ordered me to [strike them with the adjacent mountains], I would doom them so.’ [The Prophet (s)] said, ‘Rather, I have been sent as a mercy. My Lord, guide my people, for they do not know.’^[89]

The Prophet (s) was merciful with the disbelievers. And Imam Mahdi (a) will exhibit the same traits as his grandfather. And this is recorded in the books of all Islamic sects. In *Musnad Ahmad*, there is a narration by Saeed Al-Khidri stating that the Prophet (s) once said,

I give you glad tidings of the Mahdi (a). He will be brought forth within my nation while men are in dispute and earthquakes [are wreaking havoc]. Surely, he will fill the earth with equity and justice after it is filled with inequity and injustice. The dweller of the heavens and the dweller of the earth will be pleased with him. He will allocate wealth correctly.

A man asked him, “What do you mean by ‘correctly’?” The Prophet (s) said, “In equity amongst people. He will fill the hearts of the nation of Muhammad (s) with sufficiency and they will be encompassed by his justice.”^[90]

In another narration, the Prophet (s) said, “My nation will flourish during his time in a way they have never experienced, both the righteous amongst them and the corrupt.”^[91]

Imam Mahdi (a) is a glad tiding. He is mercy. He is ethics. He is compassion and empathy for the disobedient and the corrupt as well as the obedient and the believing.

A STATE OF MERCY

There is a misconception that is proposed by some individuals. They claim is that the Shia believe in the Mahdi (a) as an individual who is different from the one that the rest of the Muslims adopt. They claim that the Shia narrations give an image of the Mahdi (a) as a violent dictator that will brutally persecute the nation of the Prophet (s). They claim that Shia narrations speak of a state that is established on violence, persecution, and brutality. There are numerous problems with this claim.

First, this description of the Mahdi (a) contradicts the spirit of mercy that is characteristic of Islam. God said in the Holy Quran, “We did not send you [O Prophet Muhammad (s)] but as a mercy to all the worlds.”^[92] The Shia belief in the Mahdi (a) is in complete contradiction under the facets of this claim because it is based on brutality and violence.

Second, is it truly possible that humanity wait all this time for the Imam to be finally surprised to find a state based on brutality, persecution, and violence which would be their bane? In other words, the hope of humanity would not be achieved. Humanity would only face disappointment and desolation.

The claim is that the Shia believe in the Mahdi (a) as an individual who will use brutality to institute his state, while others believe in a savior who comes with mercy and love. The proponents of these claims use a number of narrations as evidence that are found in the Shia books of narration.

The first narration is relayed in the book of *Bihar Al-Anwar*, where Imam Baqir (a) is reported to have said,

If people only knew what Al-Qa'im (a) would do! Once he emerges, most people would wish that they did not see him due to how many people he would kill. Surely, he will not start with anyone other than Quraysh. He will not take anything from it but the sword and he will not give it anything but the sword. This will be until many would say, 'This man is not from the Progeny of Muhammad (s)! If he were from the Progeny of Muhammad (s), he would have had mercy.'^[93]

The second narration is also from *Bihar Al-Anwar* and narrated from Imam Sadiq (a), where the Imam (a) is reported to say,

Ali [ibn Abi Talib] (a) said, 'I was authorized to kill the fleeing [enemy] and to finish off the wounded. Yet I refrained from engaging in this for the sake of my companions, so that if they were wounded they would not be finished off. Al-Qa'im (a) has the authority to kill the fleeing [enemy] and to finish off the wounded.'^[94]

The third narration is attributed to the Commander of the Faithful (a), saying,

May my father be sacrificed for the son of the best of maids! He will make them taste humiliation and pour them a bitter drink. He will not give them anything but the sword in a time of chaos.^[95]

What is our stance regarding these narrations?

First, most of these narrations are weak in their *Sanad*, or chain of attribution to the original source. The *Sanad* of some include Muhammad ibn Ali Al-Kufi who was also known as Abu Samina. Al-Najashi, one of the great scholars on the history of narrators, says in his regard,

Muhammad ibn Ali was nicknamed Abu Samina. He is very weak; a man of corrupt creed and cannot be relied upon in any way. He traveled to Qum after becoming known as a fabricator in Kufa.^[96]

Among the individuals in the *Sanad* of some of these narrations is also Muhammad ibn Ali Al-Hamadani, who is unknown.^[97] There is also Al-Hassan ibn Ali ibn Abi Hamza Al-Bataini, who is known by our scholars to be weak.^[98] Some narrations are relayed by Al-Hassan ibn Harun, the fabric merchant, and he is also unknown.^[99] Other narrations also include Abu Al-Jaroud who was the leader of the Jaroudi Zaydi group. He is known by our scholars to be weak in narration.^[100]

Therefore, these narrations are plagued by their weak *Sanad*, which means that they cannot be used to draw any viable conclusion about the state that Imam Mahdi (a) will usher upon his emergence.

Second, these narrations are contradicted by a number of other narrations that illustrate the grandeur of the Imam's (a) state of mercy and compassion. In one narration attributed to Imam Ali (a), the Imam (a) gives glad tidings of Imam Mahdi's (a) emergence and says that he will take an oath from his followers not to deride a Muslim, kill a pilgrim, transgress against a woman, demolish a home, or strike anyone except by due right.^[101] This is the way that the Imam (a) deals with even his worst enemies.

In another narration, Imam Ali (a) says,

He [i.e. Imam Mahdi (a)] will march with twelve thousand at the least or fifteen thousand at the most. They would chant, 'Die! Die!' until they come to meet Al-Sufyani. [Imam Mahdi (a)] would say, 'bring forth my cousin so I can talk to him.' [Al-Sufyani] would come forth and talk to [the Imam (a)] and then he would submit to [the Imam (a)] and pledge allegiance to him. Then, when Al-Sufyani returns back to his camp, a dog would shame him so he would return to [the Imam (a)] and ask him to rescind [his pledge], and [the Imam (a)] would allow him to rescind. Then [the Imam (a)] would fight Al-Sufyani's army.^[102]

The Imam (a) begins with a conversation with his enemy in an attempt to make peace, which shows that he is a man of mercy and not a man of war and violence.

There is also a narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) in *Bihar Al-Anwar* that asserts that Imam Mahdi (a) will call forth the greatest rabbis, priests, and scholars of Judaism and Christianity. He will debate them based on the Torah and the Bible, ask them for their interpretation, and show them the fabrications that befell their books.^[103]

Third, there are some authenticated narrations in this regard that do refer to a relentless battle between Imam Mahdi (a) and his opponents. Yet these narrations are ambiguous as to the methods and ends of these battles. There are other narrations that do tell us who the target of these battles is and that his engagement in war is only a tool for self-defense.

The West, with its Christian and Jewish populations, will believe in Imam Mahdi (a) and will not fight him. Those who will fight him will be a

specific group of Muslims who hold hatred for the Progeny of the Prophet (s). The majority of the population of the earth will voluntarily submit to him because he will come with the tools of knowledge and understanding, as well as kindness and compassion. It is only those Muslims who hold hatred for the Progeny of the Prophet (s) who will fight against him. It is relayed in the books of narration that Imam Baqir (a) said,

[Imam Mahdi (a)] will march to Kufa where he will be met by sixteen thousand fully armed deserters. They would be reciters of the Quran and scholars of faith. Their foreheads would be blistered [due to long prostration in prayer] and their clothes would be rolled [as if they are ready to commence work]. They would be overtaken by hypocrisy and they would say, 'O son of Fatima (a)! Go back, for we do not need you.' ^[104]

Other narrations say,

The Mahdi (a) will approach the deviant party and advise them. He would give them three days and they would only increase in their tyranny and disbelief. The Mahdi (a) would thus order that they be killed. ^[105]

We can see that the state that will be established by Imam Mahdi (a) is one of kindness and compassion, and not one that would compel people into religion by force. Rather, it will spread religion through education and learning. This is the path of Imam Mahdi (a), as it was the path of his forefathers. The Prophet (s) was a man of dialogue, always preferring diplomacy over war. Imam Ali (a) was the same way, and so was Imam Hussain (a), who would stand on the battlefield and face the enemy camp in order to advise them on what is in their own best interest. Imam Hussain (a) would say, “I cry for those who will enter hell for [killing me].” ^[106]

Imam Hussain (a) did not leave Medina towards Mecca and then towards Kufa in order to kill or be killed. His mission was reform, but his enemies were adamant on killing him. He would say, “By God, they will not leave me until they take [my heart] out of my body.” ^[107]

A NECESSARY REALITY

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Alif, Lam, Mim. This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godwary, who believe in the Unseen, maintain the prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them.

[\[108\]](#).

The blessed verse reminds us of the necessity to believe in the ‘unseen’ – a term referring to everything that is not observed by mankind or empirically experienced through the senses. For example, you can sense the shape and movement of an individual through your sense of vision. You cannot see that individual’s soul. Rather, you infer that it exists based on the fact that the individual is alive. The soul is a thing of the unseen realm, as we cannot empirically observe it.

There are two relevant narrations that help us understand this verse better. In one narration, Imam Sadiq (a) explained that it refers to “whoever acknowledges the truth of the emergence of Al-Qa’im (a).”[\[109\]](#)

In another narration, Imam Sadiq (a) said,

The Godwary are the followers of Ali (a). The Unseen is the Absent Proof [i.e. Imam Mahdi (a) during his occultation]. The evidence of this [meaning] is the word of God: They say, ‘Why has not some sign been sent down to him from his Lord?’ Say, ‘[The knowledge of] the Unseen belongs only to God. So wait. I too am waiting along with you.’[\[110\]](#).

It is as if the Imam (a) is trying to distinguish between two types of the Unseen. The first type is the Unseen that cannot and will never become an

empirically observable reality. This is actually a reference to God, as he can never be seen or observed empirically.

The other type of the Unseen can become an empirically observable reality at some point in time. This is a reference to the Awaited Imam (a), as the verse reads, “[The knowledge of] the Unseen belongs only to God. So wait. I too am waiting along with you.” Imam Sadiq (a) used the verse in the narration as proof that there is a type of the Unseen that must be awaited before it can be observed by the senses. The Awaited Imam (a) is one example of this general concept.

Based on this understanding of the verse, let us discuss the following points.

AN ALLEGATION

There have been a number of articles that have been published, proclaiming that the Shia conception of Imam Mahdi (a) is a myth. This assertion is made with the support of two conclusory allegations.

First, they claim that the Shia psyche created the idea of an Awaited Imam (a) in response to a history of failings and disappointment. The idea was a means to latch on to hope and a spur of mankind's inclination to survive despite adversity.

Second, they claim that Shia scholars realized that the project of the Household of the Prophet (s) was a failure due to their inability to reach political power. Even those who reached a position of authority, such as Ali ibn Abi Talib (a), could not hold on to it for long. The allegation is that the Imams (a) were not able to reach political authority or even wide social influence, and so the Shia scholars had to invent the idea of Imam Mahdi (a) in order to create hope for their followers. The claim is that Shia scholars purposely created the idea of the Awaited Imam (a) to comfort their followers that there will be a day when they finally reach their goals.

However, these allegations are clearly erroneous.

AN OBJECTIVE AND NECESSARY REALITY

The idea of a messianic savior and belief in the Awaited Imam Mahdi (a) is not a mere creation of mankind's primal instincts.

First, if the idea of an awaited savior is merely an instinctive reaction to oppression, then it should have been first and primarily propagated by the followers of Judaism. Historically, the Jewish people faced continuous persecution and genocide. Still, they were not the first or only religious group to adopt the idea of a messianic figure. The idea was known to societies even before Judaic beliefs emerged historically. Islam also confirmed the idea. Even though the Shia were the only Muslim sect that faced systematic and continued persecution, they were not alone in holding fast to the principle. In fact, all Muslim denominations believe in the idea of the Mahdi (a) as a savior that will emerge at the end of times, with some disagreements over the details.

The idea and promise of the Mahdi (a) is not merely instinctive, as all Muslim sects endorse the belief. Even the Muslim denominations who lived in relative ease, prosperity, and security affirmed belief in the Mahdi (a). That is why Muhammad ibn Al-Muntasir Al-Kitani, Director of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (an affiliate of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), wrote, "The crux is that the narrations regarding the Awaited Mahdi (a) are *Mutawatira* [i.e. conveyed through various channels by numerous narrators, indicating the narrations' veracity]." ^[111]

Historically, there have been numerous Muslim scholars across denominational lines ^[112] who have asserted that the issue of the Mahdi (a) is a given and that the narrations in this regard are so varied and numerous that they are unlikely to be in error. In fact, there have only been a few individuals who have diverted from this mainstream opinion, such as Ibn Khaldun in the 14th century and Ahmad Ameen Al-Masri in the 20th century, as well as a number of Salifi thought leaders. Otherwise, the idea is widely accepted by scholars and narrations across all Muslim denominations.

Second, if the idea of the Mahdi (a) is merely instinctive and brought about by the human psyche under the pressures of failure and persecution, the same must be true of all knowledge of the Unseen. In fact, some Marxists

have alleged this exact point. They claim that the Prophet Muhammad (s) was a brilliant figure who was able to convince his followers of an unseen system of reward and punishment to encourage moral conduct and discourage immoral conduct. Thus, they claim that all matters of the Unseen are mere propaganda tools without any basis in reality.

Those who claim that the idea of the Mahdi (a) is created by the instinct and unconscious of the Shia or as a propaganda tool by Shia scholars fall into the same line of thinking as these Marxists. If this could be said about the idea of the Mahdi (a) just because it is part of the Unseen, why not apply the same argument to the existence of God or the Day of Judgment? Accepting the line of thinking proposed in these allegations will doubtlessly lead us to reject God and His system of reward and punishment as mere propaganda – just as the Marxists did. Thus, because acceptance of this line of thinking leads to such untenable results, the allegation itself must be false.

Third, in mathematics, the calculation of possibilities is regarded as the best means of supporting a hypothesis. Rather, one cannot prove anything except through a calculation of possibilities, or in other words, through the corroboration of different pieces of evidence regarding a specific issue. This would then result in a higher probability in a specific matter. To illustrate the point, let us take two examples.

In the first example, let us assume that I want to prove that the person in front of me actually exists. The only way I can do that is through calculating the possibilities. For one, I can see the individual and that gives me a 30% chance that the individual exists. I can hear the individual's voice, which adds another 30% to the probability of his or her existence. This makes the probability of the individual's existence 60%. Finally, if I touch the individual that gives adds another 30% to the probability that the individual exists. The probability adds up to 90%. This is how different pieces of evidence add up and corroborate one another to prove even the simplest of facts.

As a second example, let us assume that we received news of a bombing in Baghdad. How do we prove it as a fact? Firstly, the news is widely circulated, which may give us a 30% probability that it is in fact true. Then

we hear of it on the radio, and see pictures of it on the television. The more evidence we receive, the higher the probability rises until it reaches 100%. Thus, evidence for a certain proposition corroborates to a level where it gives certainty that the proposition is true.

HISTORICAL REALITY

Through this method of cumulative probabilities, we can prove propositions about historical reality. Some Salafis on TV and say that certain historical events must be rejected because they are not supported by a *Sahih*^[113] narration. However, even a layman can easily see that this is not a scientific justification. We do not need these twisted methods to prove historical reality, such as relying on whether a narration is *Sahih*. This is in fact a fruitless path toward the study of history. If this was truly how we judge history, then nothing in regards to the history of the Holy Prophet (s) can be proven. Instead, you have a mathematical method that is accepted scientifically – the calculation of probabilities. You must gather the historical evidence until it gives a higher level of probability that a specific event did or did not occur.

Today, we hear of the opinions of Al-Shafe'i – a second century AH Sunni Muslim scholar – when we do not in fact know whether he existed or not. However, we can prove that he existed through the calculation of probabilities. We do not prove it through a determination of whether a narration is *Sahih* or not. Instead, we say that genealogists agree that he existed, we know of his written works, we know of his students, and other pieces of evidence all accumulate to give us certainty that Al-Shafe'i did in fact exist.

Accordingly, we come to the issue of Imam Mahdi's (a). How do we prove it through the method of probabilities? We can do that by looking at the distinct pieces of evidence that support the fact that he is a living individual. These pieces of evidence can be summarized as follows:

An Imam for Every Era

There is much evidence to prove that there must be an Imam for every era and that there must always be a link between the earth and the heavens. This includes the holy verse, “You [O Prophet] are only a warner, and there is a guide for every people.”^[114] This means that in every era and for every generation, there must be a guide. So who is the guide in our time?

God also says, “The day We shall summon every group of people along with their Imam...”^[115] The meaning of the word “Imam” here must be a

reference to the real meaning of the word, which is a divinely appointed leader. Accordingly, for every group of people at every time and era, there must be a divinely appointed Imam.

As for narrations and traditions, there are numerous sources we can look to. Take for example the tradition of the *Thaqalayn*, which was recoded with slight difference in many of the books of narration and by all Muslim denominations. In *Musnad Ahmad*, the author recoded that the Holy Prophet (s) said,

I leave amongst you two weighty things, one of which is greater than the other: the Book of God, which is a bond extending between the heavens and the earth, and my Household and Progeny (a). The two will never separate until they reach me at the Pond [of Paradise].^[116]

Thus, this narration tells us that so long as the Quran exists, there must be a person from the Progeny of the Prophet (s) to protect and uphold it. So who is this individual who will uphold and protect the Quran during our time?

The same goes for the narration recounted in the same book, “Whoever dies without [acknowledging his] Imam dies the death of the Age of Ignorance.”^[117] Thus, every era must have such an Imam.

Al-Nisabouri also records the following prophetic narration,

The stars are a harbor for the denizens of the heavens, so that if they fade they will meet that which they were promised. So am I a harbor to my companions as long as I live, if I pass they will meet that which they were promised. And so is my Household a harbor for my nation, if they were to perish it will meet that which it was promised.^[118]

This same notion was conveyed in the narration of Imam Baqir (a), “If the Imam were removed from the Earth, it would thrash its denizens like the sea thrashes its denizens.”^[119] This is a clear indication that there is an Imam that is always a link between the earth and the heavens. This does not apply to anyone but the Awaited Imam (a). What other Muslim can say that he is the one meant by these narrations? Who can say that he is the one that upholds and protects the Quran?

This cannot apply to anyone but Imam Mahdi (a). That is why we read in Dua Al-Nudba, “Where is the lifeline linking the [denizens of] the earth to [God] on high?”^[120]

Twelve Imams

It is narrated in *Sahih Muslim* that the Holy Prophet (s) said, “The religion will continue to be established until the determined hour [of Judgment Day] or you are led by twelve successors, all of whom are from Quraysh.”^[121] The meaning of “successors” here does not mean anyone who will accede to power by force and arms, but true successors. Moreover, this narration indicated that these twelve successors will remain until the Day of Judgement. So who does this apply to?

Ibn Katheer also wrote in his exegesis after relaying this narration, “Apparently, this includes the Mahdi who was promised in the narrations that mention him and tell us that his name is the same as the Holy Prophet’s (s).” This is further proof that will add the accumulating probabilities for the existence of Imam Mahdi (a).

The Old and New Testaments

Glad tidings of the Mahdi (a) came even before the birth of Islam, as he is mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. He was mentioned in books of scholars of world religions, such as *Al-Maseeh Al-Dajjal* by Dr. Saeed Ayoub, *Al-Baraheen Al-Sabatiyya* by Al-Qadi Al-Sabati, and *Anees Al-Islam* by Sheikh Muhammad Fakhrulislam – the latter two being reverts from Christianity. These glad tidings came in the Book of Isiah and the Book of Revelation. They also came in the Gospel of John under the Greek name *Pericytyos*, which can be translated to “the praised one” or “Muhammad.”

So these glad tidings of Imam Mahdi (a) came before the birth of Islam. Al-Qadi Al-Sabati, a convert from Christianity and a Hanafi Muslim, wrote,

This description does not apply to any theory except for that of the Imamiyya [i.e. Twelver Shia Muslims], in regards to the existence of Muhammad ibn Al-Hassan [(a)] as the twelfth [Imam].

So this again is additional corroborative evidence.

Third Century AH

If we return to the historical records of the time of birth of Imam Mahdi (a) in 255 AH, his occultation in 260 AH, and up to the end of the minor occultation in 329 AH, we will find that the Imam (a) had four different Ambassadors during that period – Othman ibn Saeed, Muhammad ibn Othman, Al-Hussain ibn Rooh, and Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Samri. If we review the writings of notable scholars of that period of all Muslim denominations, we find that none of them denied his birth or occultation. If the birth of Imam Mahdi (a) was a fabrication, then that would have been an opportune time to disparage and deride the Shia as believers in an apparent myth. But no one said that at the time. No scholar of the time denied that Imam Mahdi (a) was born and had gone into occultation.

As for Shia scholars of the time – like Al-Kulayni, Ali ibn Babaweih Al-Qummi, and Ibn Qawlaweih – we see that they recorded that sightings of the Imam (a) were so numerous that they reached the threshold of *Tawator*. During the sixty nine years of the minor occultation, he had written and signed a number of letters, all of which bore the same handwriting. During that time, there were four different Ambassadors – the first two being a father and a son, while the third and fourth were unlinked to the first two or to each other. If the Imam (a) was not in fact present, how could these four individuals fabricate letters in the same exact handwriting over a period of sixty nine years?

During that period, our scholars received these letters and accepted them without hesitation. We do not have any record of our early scholars scrutinizing the narrations of these signed letters. Were the narrators that passed along these letters so obviously untrustworthy that there was no need to address them? Or were they so trustworthy that there was no need to address their strength? Or was there something particular to these letters and the indications surrounding them that gave credence to the fact that they were actually written and signed by the Awaited Imam (a)? If we go back and review the chains of narrators for these signed letters, we would find that some narrators were not specifically mentioned by our scholars as trustworthy or weak – like Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yaqoub. Thus the first two possibilities cannot be the case. Therefore the third possibility – that the

actual letters contained evidence of Imam Mahdi's (a) authorship – must be the case.

This is more evidence to corroborate the Imam's (a) existence.

Textual Evidence

It is strange to see some who claim to be Shia say that there is no reliable textual evidence of Imam Mahdi's (a) birth. In fact, there are numerous *Sahih* narrations that point to this fact in some of the most venerated books of Shia heritage, such as *Al-Kafi* and *Man La Yahdaruh Al-Faqih*.

For example, in a narration attributed to Imam Kadhim (a), he said,

Say in Sajdat Al-Shukr,^[122] 'O God, I witness to You and ask Your angels, prophets, messengers, and all creation to witness that You, O God, are my Lord, that Islam is my religion, that Muhammad (s) is my prophet, and that Ali, Al-Hassan, Al-Hussain, Ali ibn Al-Hussain, Muhammad ibn Ali, Jaafar ibn Muhammad, Moussa ibn Jaafar, Ali ibn Moussa, Muhammad ibn Ali, Ali ibn Muhammad, Al-Hassan ibn Ali, and the Hujja the son of Al-Hassan ibn Ali are my leaders. I vow allegiance to them and forswear their enemies.'^[123]

Imam Mahdi (a) was mentioned by Imam Kadhim (a) and listed alongside the other Imams even before he was born.

Genealogists' Concurrence

In regards to any historical issue, we must go back to the experts in the field and take their opinions into account – much like we would do with issues of medicine or engineering. If we are asking about the family history of the Hashimites, we need to go back to the genealogists who are experts in the field. There are at least seventeen non-Twelvever genealogists that expressly testified to the birth of a child named Muhammad to Imam Hassan Al-Askari (a). This includes:

- Sahl ibn Abdullah Al-Bukhari, a 4th century AH scholar, in his book *Sir Al-Silsila Al-Alawiyya*,^[124]
- Al-Sayyid Al-Amri, a 5th century AH scholar, in his book *Al-Mujdi fi Ansaab Al-Talibiyyin*,^[125]

- Al-Fakhr Al-Razi, a 7th century AH scholar, in his book *Al-Shajara Al-Mubarakah fi Ansaab Al-Talibiyya*,^[126]
- Al-Marouzi Al-Azwarqani, a 7th century AH scholar in his book *Al-Fakhri fi Ansaab Al-Talibiyyin*,
- Ibn Inba, a 9th century AH scholar in his book *Umdat Al-Talib fi Ansaab Aal Abi Talib*,^[127]
- The Zaydi Genealogist Muhammad Al-Hussaini Al-Yamani Al-Sanaani, an 11th century AH scholar, in his book *Rawdat Al-Albaab fi Maarifat Al-Ansaab*,
- Muhammad Ameen Al-Swaidi, a 13th century AH scholar, in his book *Sabaek Al-Thahab fi Maarifat Qabael Al-Arab*,^[128] and
- The contemporary genealogist Muhammad Weis Al-Haydari Al-Souri in his book *Al-Durar Al-Bahiyya fi Ansaab Al-Haydaria wa Al-Ouaysiya*.

Historians' Agreement

A number of historians of all Muslim denominations have recorded his birth and occultation in their historical accounts. This includes:

- Ibn Al-Atheer, a 7th century AH scholar, in his book *Al-Kamil fi Al-Tareekh*,^[129]
- Ibn Khalkaan, a 7th century AH scholar, in his book *Wafiyyat Al-Aayan*,^[130]
- Al-Thahabi, an 8th century AH scholar in three of his books,^[131]
- Ibn Al-Wardi, an 8th century AH scholar in his book *Tareekh ibn Al-Wardi*,^[132] and
- Ahmad ibn Hajr Al-Haytami, a 10th century AH scholar in his book *Al-Sawaeq Al-Muhriqa*.^[133]

After looking at all this, any reasonable and objective individual that calculates the possibilities derived from the corroboration of all this evidence would rightfully conclude in certainty of the existence of the Twelfth Holy Imam (a).

THE PROMISED DAY

If we put aside the evidence and textual support that we put forward above, there still remains the intellectual proof in support of the promised day of salvation and justice.

The Philosophical Dimension

The mind often wonders, ‘what is the meaning of life?’ The Holy Quran answers, “He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct. And He is the Almighty, the All-forgiving.”^[134] Life was created so that the community of man may strive to achieve excellence. It is through the triumph of justice over oppression and of virtue over vice that such excellence can be attained. If this is the goal of humanity, then there must be a day when it will be achieved. Otherwise, creation would be meaningless. However, this cannot be the case, as God the All-wise is far above acting frivolously.

Because this is the overarching purpose of creation, God has given mankind the means to usher in this triumph of justice and virtue – “Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice.”^[135] God has given us honored prophets, holy scriptures, and Immaculate Leaders as means of guidance as we strive towards that goal. One day, by God’s grace, we will achieve that goal and fulfill God’s promise that “Certainly We wrote in the Psalms after the Torah: Indeed Our righteous servants shall inherit the earth.”^[136] This is enough intellectual proof that the promised day of justice will dawn upon the earth.

The Social Dimension

History has its trajectory. It does not progress randomly, but based on social and historical patterns. This includes the survival of the fittest, that economic injustice begets social and economic ruin, and that fear and hunger drive revolution. If we return to history, we find that Prophet Noah (a) led a revolution against fear and hunger, as his followers were predominantly the oppressed and the destitute. The same was true for Prophet Jethro (a). In fact, we see that a similar pattern is recurrent for most prophets and reformers. This is not a purely religious phenomenon – Albert

Einstein, Bertrand Russel, and George Bernard Shaw all reached a similar conclusion.^[137]

There must be a global revolution against fear and hunger. In other words, the nations of the world will realize that the current economic and civic structures are unable to provide the necessary economic and personal security. When the world comes to that realization, there will be an global revolution that will set the stage for the Awaited Mahdi (a).

This is an intellectual issue arising out of an understanding of the nature of society and its tendency to revolt against fear and anger. This is the same type of revolution that was supported by our Holy Prophet (s), the Commander of the Faithful Ali (a), and Imam Hussain (a).

Imam Hussain (a) did not revolt for the sake of power or status. He led a revolution in order to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil. His revolution was against the oppressors who used fear and hunger to reign over the population. The Umayyad clan had used the nation's wealth for their selfish purposes and pleasures. As such, Imam Hussain (a) rose in revolt against this tyranny.

WHO IS WAITING?

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

They say, 'Why has not some sign been sent down to him from his Lord?' Say, '[The knowledge of] the Unseen belongs only to God. So wait. I too am waiting along with you.' ^[138]

The verse speaks of a stance between the Holy Prophet (s) and the disbelievers. The disbelievers asked the Holy Prophet (s) for a miracle other than the Holy Quran. They said that the Holy Quran was not enough of a miracle for them to believe. They would say, “Why has not some sign been sent down to him from his Lord?”

In response, the Holy Prophet (s) told them that there is another miracle that supports his message. The Holy Quran tells Prophet Muhammad (s) to say, “[The knowledge of] the Unseen belongs only to God.” In other words, there is another miracle that is still in the realm of the Unseen. “[The knowledge of] the Unseen belongs only to God. So wait. I too am waiting along with you.” They must wait before the miracle becomes apparent to them.

So what is this second miracle that matches the Holy Quran? The Holy Quran is a miracle that provides unequivocal support of Prophet Muhammad’s (s) message. What is this second miracle that provides similar unequivocal support?

A narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) specified the nature of this second miracle. He said in reference to the cited verse, “The miracle is the Unseen. The Unseen is the *Hujja*.” ^[139] For Islam to one day emerge as the sole religion on earth would clearly be miraculous. Therefore, just as the Holy Quran was a miracle supporting the message of Prophet Muhammad (s), the same will be true of the emergence of our Twelfth Holy Imam (a) – who

will fill the earth with justice and equity after it is filled with oppression and transgression.

WHEN IS THE APPEARANCE?

First, we must ask an important question. Do circumstances and historical events play a role in determining when our beloved Imam (a) will emerge out of occultation? Or is it a set date that will not be affected by human actions?

First View

There are some who say that the appearance of the Twelfth Imam (a) is like the Day of Judgment – it has a set time and will not occur a moment sooner or later. The proponents of this view use a number of texts to support their view. The first is a verse in reference to Moses (a), who was told to remind his people of three set hours – “Certainly We sent Moses with Our signs: ‘Bring your people out from darkness into light and remind them of God’s [holy] days.’”^[140] In reference to this verse, Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said, “God’s [holy] days are three: the day of [emergence of the Awaited Imam (a) from occultation], the day of death, and the Day of Judgment.”^[141] Thus, these three days have a set and definite time.

They also rely on the narration attributed to Imam Ali (a), in which he relays that the Holy Prophet (s) said, “The Mahdi (a) is one of us, the [Holy] Household (a). God will reform his matter in a [single] night.” In a similar narration, the Holy Prophet (s) says, “God will reform him in a [single] night.”^[142] The narration is also relayed in *Musnad Ahmad*.^[143]

It is strange to find some who use this narration to claim that the Mahdi would be a wretched man who God would reform in a single night – as if the role of being a divinely appointed Imam does not require the individual to be of an Immaculate nature. A narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) explains the true meaning of prophetic tradition. The Imam (a) said,

Be more aspiring to what you have not wished for than for what you have wished for. Moses (a), the son of Amram, set out to bring a firebrand for his family, but returned to them a messenger and prophet.

God, the Most Blessed and High, reformed the matter of his servant in a [single] night. And so God, the Most Blessed and High, will do unto Al-Qa’im, the Twelfth of the Imams (a). He

will reform for him his matter in a [single] night as he reformed the matter of his prophet Moses (a). He will deliver him from distress and occultation to the light of relief and emergence.^[144]

That is, God will assemble the Imam's (a) companions and supporters in Mecca in a single night that will be a Friday eve. In one narration, "Our Al-Qa'im (a) will emerge on a Friday."^[145] This is in regards to the initial stage of the emergence which will be on Friday in the Grand Mosque of Mecca between the cornerstone of the Kaaba and the Shrine of Abraham (a). However, our narrations also tell us that the Imam (a) will announce his emergence on the 10th of Muharram which will be on a Saturday.^[146]

In another narration, Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said, "Al-Qa'im (a) will not emerge except in an odd year."^[147]

It may be deduced from these narrations that the Awaited Imam (a) will emerge on a set date that cannot be changed and that is not affected by circumstances and historical events.

Second View

The second view is that circumstances do play a role in determining the day that the Twelfth Imam (a) will emerge out of occultation. Although the narrations do indicate that he will emerge on a specific day, they also describe a number of circumstances that will precede his emergence. The proponents of this view posit that the date of emergence may be advanced or delayed in accordance with the will of God and the actions and decisions of mankind.

It is much like death, which many people believe is a predetermined date that cannot be changed. In reality, an individual's lifespan is also made contingent, by God's will, on choices and circumstances. For example, a person may advance his own death by suicide, or may delay his death by righteous deeds. That is why Imam Kadhim (a) is reported to have said,

An individual may honor his family while his death is three years away, and God will make it thirty year away. An individual may sever his family ties while his death is thirty years away, and God will make it three year away.^[148]

Death is contingent on circumstances and choices. The same is true with the emergence of the Awaited Imam (a) – it is contingent on certain circumstances and human choices, and may be advanced or delayed as a result. This view can be supported by two sets of evidence.

First, the narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) in which he says,

Surely, God, the Most Blessed and High, has appointed the time of this matter in the 70th [year after Hijra]. When Hussain (a) was killed, God's wrath intensified and he delayed it until the 140th [year after Hijra]. We told you of this and you spread the word and lifted the veil of secrecy. Since then God has not given us a date and 'God effaces and confirms whatever He wishes and with Him is the Mother Book.'^[149]

The time of his emergence is contingent on a number of circumstances and antecedent events.

Second, many supplications have concurred in their prayers for the hastening of the emergence. For example, in one supplication we read, “O God, hasten his emergence, support him with victory, aid his supporters, and desert his deserters.”^[150] If the Awaited Imam's (a) emergence is set for a specific time that cannot be advanced, then what would be the meaning of praying for the hastening of his emergence?

These supplications are proof that the time of emergence is subject to change. If a number of specific circumstances and requisites were met, the Imam (a) would emerge from his occultation. That is why we pray with these supplications, as the prayers of the believers could be a cause for advancing the time of his emergence.

Some may also claim that since the emergence of the Imam (a) is inevitable, we cannot say that it is contingent on circumstances and antecedent events. However, just because something is inevitable does not mean that its timing cannot be, by God's will, contingent on mankind's choices. God knows exactly when these events would take place and He chose to make them requisites and contingencies for certain events to take place. So, for example, the revelation of the Holy Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (s) was contingent on a number of human choices, such as his birth to two

noble parents by their own choice. The same goes for the lifespan and death of each individual, as discussed above.

Circumstances Preceding the Emergence

The ideological and spiritual circumstances preceding the emergence are the most important in this regard.

Humanity will try all political and economic systems and realize that they all fail in meeting its necessities, leaving mankind to suffer in fear and hunger. At that point, the time will be ripe for the emergence of the Awaited Imam (a). There are a number of narrations that indicate this. Take, for example, the narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) where he says,

Our state is the final state. There will be no household that will lead a state except that it shall accede to it before us so that none can say, once they see our model, 'if we were to rule, we would rule like them.' And that is the word of God, 'And the outcome will be in favor of the Godwary.' ^[151]

The emergence of the Imam (a) also requires a base that will support and defend him. This has not yet occurred. Once there is a base of supporters who are ready to devote themselves to his mission, another important condition for his emergence will be fulfilled. In one narration, Imam Sajjad (a) is reported to have said,

Surely, the people of the era of his [i.e. Imam Mahdi (a)] occultation who believe in his Immaculate Leadership and who wait his appearance are better than the people of any other era. That is because God, the Most Blessed and High, gave them the intellect, comprehension, and knowledge that allowed them to see occultation at the level of presence. He made them at that era at the status of those who struggled alongside the Messenger of God (s) with their swords. Those are the real devotees, our true Shia, and the callers unto God's religion in public and in privacy. ^[152]

There is a group of select individuals whom God will prepare for his emergence and will make them the cornerstones of his state. This is another important condition that will precede the emergence of the Imam (a).

WHY AT THE END OF TIME?

The state of Imam Mahdi (a) will come at the end of time, and it will be the last state for humanity. Here, let us raise a question; ‘Why did God not create this state at the beginning of time? Why did God not provide the means for our Holy Prophet (s) to establish this state?’

Our scholars say that God is wise and kind. He is kind towards all his creatures, especially towards mankind. And because mankind needs a just system, God has given us prophets and scriptures that would allow us to establish this just system. And if left to its own devices, mankind would not be able to establish this just state across cultures and ethnicities. The means of establishing this just state must be given to us by God, who is omniscient, omnipotent, and magnanimous.

Thus God, due to his wisdom and kindness, must have given us the just system that we require.

Our scholars have used this to prove the necessity of divine appointment of prophets and vicegerents, the revelation of scriptures, and the ultimate fulfillment of a truly just system. But if God’s kindness is proof that He will ensure the establishment of a just system on earth, why was it not established at the time of the Holy Prophet (s)? What is the wisdom of delaying this joyous day until the end of time?

In answering these questions, we need to understand three points.

Earthly Limits

Muslim philosophers say that material existence is a source of limitation, while transcendence is a source of excellence. Thus, something that exists as a physical object is limited, especially by the two major constraints of time and space.

Mankind cannot free itself from the limitations of time and space. A human being cannot experience firsthand the events that occur in a different geographic location than where he is in fact. You can’t be in two places at once. Similarly, an individual cannot experience the events of a different time period firsthand. Matter is constrained by time and space, and since mankind is made of matter it is also limited by these constraints. On the

other hand, beings that are not made of matter, such as the angels, are not limited by these constraints.

With this in mind we ask, ‘What is the difference between the existence of our souls before the creation of our bodies and after the creation of our bodies?’

Our souls were existent in a higher realm before our bodies were created in this one. We were transcendent beings, not limited by time and space. We were thus able to see the dominion of God, and we would glorify Him for the sight of His dominion. God says in the Holy Book, “Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude.”^[153] Every soul lived in transcendence and witnessed God’s dominion before it was tied to a body. However, once the connection between body and soul is made, the soul becomes bound by time and space much like the body.

Cultural Accumulation

Because of our limitations, mankind needs to take generations and eras accumulating its knowledge and developing its culture. Take this example. A child at an early age cannot learn the complex materials taught at universities. Even if the child had an excellent memory and committed everything he was taught to heart, he would not be able to use and utilize this knowledge. In the same way, a medical student cannot learn seven years’ worth of material in one day. That is because the senses and the mind have their limitations.

These limitations mean that an individual cannot learn a new concept without a base of knowledge that accumulates over time. Thus, a freshman in college will not be able to excel at a doctorate’s course because he lacks the requisite proficiency that would accumulate through years spent in an educational institution. Some people may learn at a different pace than others, but that does not contradict the fact that everyone needs a solid foundation of knowledge accumulated through the years. Thus, because of mankind’s limitation, there must be a process of accumulation that occurs through years, generations, and eras of human experience.

Human Needs

So we go back to the original question. ‘Why did God not provide the means for our Holy Prophet (s) to establish state that will envelop the entire world in justice and mercy?’ We can even go a step further and ask, ‘Why did it take thousands of years of human history before Prophet Muhammad (s), the Seal of the Prophets, was born and given his message?’

The answer lies in humanity’s limitations and its need for generations of accumulated knowledge and developed insight. If the message of the Prophet Muhammad (s) was delivered at the time of Adam (a), humanity at that early stage would not have been able to understand and adopt its teachings. It would have been a failed message. The message of Islam required mankind to develop to a stage that allowed it to be receptive of the divine revelation.

Much like God delayed the message of the Prophet Muhammad (s) for thousands of years, the same wisdom applies to the appearance of Imam Mahdi (a). The system that Imam Mahdi (a) will establish requires humanity to be at a highly developed level of knowledge and culture. Since mankind has yet to reach the level of sophistication that would allow it to accept Imam Mahdi (a) and the state he will establish, God has delayed the appearance until mankind develops adequately. If this system and state was established at the time of the Holy Prophet (s) or even today, mankind would reject it and would not be able to benefit from it.

We need only look to Imam Ali (a) to see a perfect example of this concept. “O Kumail! There is much knowledge here!” the Imam (a) would say as he points to his chest. “If only I come by those who can carry it.”^[154] He would complain that there is no one that truly understands him, as he was far beyond his own time. He would stand at the river and say, “If I wished I would have created for you light and fire out of water.”^[155] He would say this long before people understood the concept of electricity and hydropower.

We see that the Holy Quran ran into the same issue. People would read its verses but would not understand that they were statements of fact yet to be discovered and scientifically proven. For example, the Holy Quran says, “You see the mountains, which you assume to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds.”^[156] No one at the time could comprehend the concept,

but now we can easily point to plate tectonics or other phenomena as proof. The Holy Quran says, “We have built the heaven with might, and indeed it is We who are its expanders.”^[157] It is only recently that mankind has made the empirical observations that support the fact that the universe is expanding.

Even when we come to psychology, we find that the Holy Quran and the noble traditions have given us key insights that were not fully developed through the scientific tradition until recently. For example, the understanding of the unconscious mind has only been recently developed by psychologists. On the other hand, the Holy Quran mentioned it explicitly in the verse, “[God] indeed knows the secret and what is still more hidden.”^[158] Imam Ali (a) further expounded on the idea when he said, “Whenever a person conceals a thing in his heart, it manifests itself through unintentional words from his tongue and in the expressions of his face.”^[159] The Holy Quran, the Prophet Muhammad (s), and the Holy Household (a) understood and expounded on some of the most novel discoveries and theories of modern science.

It could be said that the state of Imam Mahdi (a) was delayed until the end of times because mankind needs time to reach a level of sophistication that would allow it to accept the state of justice and mercy. Mankind has yet to reach this level. If this promised day were to come at a time when people have not yet reached the requisite level of sophistication, they would reject it and not benefit from it. The limitations and needs of mankind are the cause for the delay in the promised day of peace, justice, and mercy.

WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

We have seen that the appearance of Imam Mahdi (a) is contingent on a number of factors and circumstances. Can we as individuals and as a community play a role in bringing about the required circumstances? Can we play a role in hastening his blessed appearance? Can our actions advance the cause of setting the groundwork for his emergence? What is our role during the time of his occultation?

We are told by our Holy Prophet (s) and Immaculate Imams (a) that our role is to “wait.” The Holy Prophet (s) said, “The best deed for my nation is to await relief from God.”^[160] What does it mean to “wait”? There are two major theories in this regard.

Dormant Waiting

Some Shia have suggested that we must be dormant while we wait for our Twelfth Holy Imam (a). They said that we should forgo any reform and the earth must continue to fester with oppression and transgression so that the stage could be set for the Imam’s (a) ultimate revolution. Because our narrations tell us that the Imam (a) will reappear at a time when the earth is full of oppression and transgression, some have suggested that attempting to stop oppression would delay the Imam’s (a) emergence.

This theory is not without its support. For example, they have relied on narrations such as the one in which Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Every banner raised before the appearance of Al-Qa’im (a), its leader is a leviathan worshipped beside God.”^[161] In another narration, Imam Sadiq (a) said,

Doomed are the... hasty.... [Remain] in your homes, for the dust will settle on whoever riles it. They will never target you with a ploy except that God will [foil their ploys] with a distraction, [but will not do so for] anyone who set out against them.^[162]

Proactive Waiting

The Holy Prophet (s) said, “The best deed for my nation is to await relief from God.”^[163] Waiting has three different purposes in this context: theological, administrative, and ethical.

Theological Purpose. Waiting for the Imam (a) means that you believe that God can give such a long life to an individual and preserve him for a day when he could achieve a grand mission. This belief is in itself a great deed for which the individual will be greatly rewarded. At the end of time, people will lose this faith. As Imam Sadiq (a) said in one narration,

By God, your Imam will disappear for years during your age, so that you will be tested. And you will be thrashed just as the waves of the sea thrash against sailing ships. None will be saved except those who God has taken an oath from [and they have fulfilled that oath]. ^[164]

So believing in the occultation is of great value, as more and more people at the end of times will not believe in it.

Administrative Purpose. We want to set the groundwork for the Imam's (a) appearance. But we cannot be hasty or put a specific time frame on the appearance. There are many narrations that condemn the *Waqqatun* – i.e. the people who put a specific date on the appearance of the Imam (a). “The *Waqqatun* are liars. We are a Household that does not give a specific time [for this matter]. God has determined to disprove the times given by the *Waqqatun*.” There is strong condemnation for anyone who would set a specific time for the appearance because if the oppressors would know what its actual time is, they would work to undermine it. Accordingly, waiting has an administrative purpose, which is to deny the oppressors the opportunity to undermine and work against the appearance.

Ethical Purpose. Waiting allows for the earth to be adequately prepared through the process of enjoining good and forbidding evil. There is much textual evidence in support of this. God says, “There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong.”^[165] This is not intended for any one era or another. Rather, it is applicable at all times and in all eras. It has been reported in some narrations that the Holy Prophet (s) condemned the people of the end of time because they became deviant and did not enjoin good and forbid evil. People at that time would even enjoin evil and forbid good.^[166] If waiting meant that we should not enjoin good and forbid evil, then the Holy Prophet

(s) would not have condemned the people of the end of time for shirking on this obligation.

The narrations used by those who hold the first view do not simply refer to any and every banner raised during the time of the occultation. Rather, the context tells us that they refer only to the banners that do not uphold religious teachings in regards to life and property and who would be, as the narration phrases it, “a leviathan worshipped beside God.” As for a person who calls unto the path of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Holy Household (a) – that is a banner of guidance that is not condemned in the meaning of these traditions. It is narrated that Imam Sadiq (a) said,

If someone comes to you on our behalf, take care to know for what purpose you are setting out. And do not say, ‘Zayd had set out’ [as an excuse]. Surely, Zayd was a scholar and was most honest. He did not call you to himself, but towards seeking the pleasure of the Family of Muhammad (s)....^[167]

This is evidence that the condemned banners are the ones that call towards themselves and do not enjoin good and forbid evil.

In addition, narrations have indicated that the people of the time of occultation who enjoin good and forbid evil are given a higher status than the people of any other time.^[168] That is why our role lies in enjoining good and forbidding evil. Each one of us can do this in accordance to his status and circumstances. You cannot say, ‘That is the job of scholars and preachers.’ Rather, every individual is responsible to enjoin good and forbid evil. As God says, “Go on working: God will see your conduct, and His Apostle and the faithful [as well].”^[169] In another verse, He says,

O you who have faith! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel will be people and stones, over which are [assigned] severe and mighty angels, who do not disobey whatever God commands them and carry out what they are commanded.^[170]

Our role is to call unto the faith with sincerity. Everyone who works sincerely and for the pleasure of God, he is said to be waiting for his Imam

(a) and setting the groundwork for his appearance. It is narrated that Imam Sajjad (a) said, “Awaiting relief is [itself] a great relief.”^[171]

Let everyone enjoin good and forbid evil – each according to his capacity. This is the call of the prophets and the vicegerents. This was the call of Imam Hussain (a), who wrote when he set out towards Iraq,

I have not set out due to discontent, nor out of arrogance. I did not rise as a corruptor, nor as an oppressor. Rather, I wish to call for reform in the nation of my grandfather. I wish to call for what is good, and to forbid what is evil.^[172]

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

And if We defer their punishment until a certain Umma, they will surely say, 'What holds it back?' Look! On the day it overtakes them it shall not be turned away from them, and they will be besieged by what they used to deride.^[173]

The blessed verse indicates that there is a punishment promised to the deviant among the nation of the Holy Prophet (s). However, that punishment did not befall the Muslim nation during the life time of Prophet Muhammad (s) because of the decree that God made, “But God will not punish them while you are in their midst.”^[174] The punishment was delayed until a specific promised date. But what is this date set for the punishment of the deviant? Scholars of exegesis have debated the exact meaning of this day of punishment, though they agree that it is a worldly punishment and not a promise for the hereafter.

The noble traditions have elaborated on the idea of this promised punishment. In one narration, Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have explained this verse – “The punishment is the appearance of Al-Qa'im (a). The certain *Umma* is his companions who are the same in number as the warriors of [the Battle of] Badr.”^[175] The punishment is a psychological one which comes with the establishment of the faith throughout the earth. It also has a physical aspect which comes through some of the signs of the reappearance, like the great sinkhole.

There is a question that is often posed about the time of the reappearance. People say, ‘We read a lot about that time, but we do not see any mention of the role of women. Do women not play a role in these events?’

This question can also be taken a step further. We can ask, ‘What has the role of women been throughout Muslim history and heritage? Why does Islam give priority to men over women in some religious rulings, so that a woman gets half of a man’s share in inheritance for example? Is Islam a patriarchal religion?’

To answer these questions, let us clarify two points.

THE CORRECT READING OF TEXTS

If we read the texts of our faith – the Holy Quran and the noble traditions – we find that there is a distinction between how they address men and women. For example, the Holy Quran says, “And men have a degree above them [i.e. women].”^[176] The Holy Quran also says, “And if there are not two men, then a man and two women – from those whom you approve as witnesses – so that if one of the two defaults the other will remind her.”^[177]

In another verse, it says, “For the male shall be the like of the share of two females.”^[178] But what is the correct reading of such passages?

Modernist Readings

Some Islamists have adopted a modernist reading of the text, relying in their views on differences between faith, heritage, and history.

First, they point out the distinction between the faith and scholarly heritage. Faith is the religion as revealed to and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (s). On the other hand, jurisprudence and the scholarly heritage that we have inherited over generations are based on scholars’ understanding of the text. They are, therefore, the products of fallible men and may not be an accurate reflection of the faith. An individual’s disagreement with parts of this heritage does not constitute a rejection of the faith because the two are not one and the same.

The best proof of this concept lies in the fact that scholars disagree amongst themselves on the interpretation of evidence and have sometimes taken stances that fly in the face of a thousand years of settled jurisprudence. The late Imam Khomeini, for example, ruled that playing chess is permissible so long as it is not considered a tool for gambling – an opinion that contradicts the settled jurisprudential tradition amongst Twelver Shia. The martyred Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr also ruled that borrowing money with a rate of interest equal to the rate of inflation is permissible, another ruling that contradicts settled religious heritage.

Scholars disagree amongst themselves and are willing to proffer opinions that contradict centuries of religious heritage. That is enough proof to show that the religious heritage and the faith itself are not one and the same. So a

person that disagrees with this heritage does not reject the faith. A person may differ with a religious opinion, the product of the fallible human mind, and that does not constitute a transgression against the commands of God.

Second, they posit that the Holy Quran that we have amongst us is not the actual revelation sent to the Prophet Muhammad (s). Rather, they argue, revelation was a set of abstract concepts and manifestations that were bestowed onto the Holy Prophet (s), and he was the one to translate these abstract ideas into the Arabic language. The revelation itself was divine and infinite, but when the Holy Prophet (s) translated it into words it became a human product. Such a text cannot be separated from its historical context and must be understood within it.

For example, the Treaty of *Hudaybuyyah* is a man-made product – a document agreed upon by the Holy Prophet (s) and the disbelievers of Mecca. We cannot understand the document without understanding the circumstances that led up to its creation. Because it is a human phenomenon, it has to be understood within its historical context. The same goes for the Muslim defeat at the Battle of *Uhud*, or any other historical event.

All human speech is an entirely human phenomenon. Every human phenomenon must be read within its context. Thus, Quranic verses must also be read within their context. So when we read the verse that says “then a man and two women – from those whom you approve as witnesses,”^[179] we must interpret it in accordance to the historical context. At that time, women were relegated to being housewives and thus did not possess the requisite refinement and culture. However, today the matter is completely different and women now serve as professors, parliamentarians, ministers, and heads of state. We can say that this specific verse is addressing mankind in that stage of its development and does not apply absolutely to all eras.

And take, for example, the blessed verse, “God has allowed trade and forbidden usury.”^[180] This was a rule given at a time when inflation did not pose a problem to the world’s economic system. However, given the impact that inflation plays in the world today, the followers of the modernist approach suggest that usury is no longer forbidden. In summary, the modernist approach suggests that Quranic verses should be understood in

their historical context and should not be understood as absolute rules and living teachings that apply to all eras.

Discussion of the Modernist Approach

First, if the revelation had been given to the Holy Prophet (s) as a set of abstractions and then he was the one to formulate the verses, the modernist approach may in fact be appropriate. However, that is not the case.

Revelation was given to the Prophet Muhammad (s) both as abstract ideas and as specific verses in the Arabic language. In other words, it was not the Holy Prophet (s) who formulated the verses, as they were revealed in the form that we read today. The Holy Quran itself professes this in the verse,

This is indeed [a Book] sent down by the Lord of all the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart (so that you may be one of the warners), in a clear Arabic language.^[181]

The Holy Quran also says,

Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it. Indeed it is up to Us to put it together and to recite it. And when We have recited it, follow its recitation. Then, its exposition [also] lies with Us.^[182]

In another verse, God addresses the Holy Prophet (s) and says “Do not hasten with the Quran before its revelation is completed for you.”^[183] These verses are a clear indication that the Holy Quran was revealed not just in abstractions, but as structured verses in the Arabic language.

The Quran is a divine product and not a human product, and so this aspect of the modernist argument does not hold.

Second, if we concede that the Holy Quran was revealed as a set of abstractions and that the Holy Prophet (s) was the one who translated it into Arabic and formulated its verses, we must then ask, ‘How do we go about finding out what the true religion is? How can we understand it? Is it limited to the elite who can understand it? Who are those elite? Is it the intellectuals? Or linguists? Or jurists? How can we understand the true teachings of the religion by studying the words of the Holy Prophet (s)?’

If we ask any rational individual about how to best understand any text, the answer would be that we need to go to the relevant speech community and

understand its customs for the usage of language. For example, if we have questions about a work of English literature, we should ask speakers of the English language about the plain meaning of the text. The same goes for any language. So if we are seeking to understand the language of the Holy Quran, we must go back to speakers of the Arabic language and seek to understand its custom in terms of language and literature.

This is especially true since the Holy Quran was not revealed to the elite. Its address was not limited to linguists or jurists. Rather, it addressed all people in a “clear Arabic language.”^[184]

So we ask, ‘How can we understand Arabic custom in terms of language and literature?’ Arabic language and its nuances cannot be understood easily and without effort. It is built on principles and rules that apply sometimes generally and sometimes only in particular instances. The general principles include, for example, the rules on qualified and unqualified phrases, general and particular phrases, and the morphology of nouns and verbs. There are also some rules that apply to particular words.

Thus, in order to understand the text of the Holy Quran, we have to go back to the experts who know these general and particular principles. Not every individual can understand its meaning alone.

In attempting to understand the Holy Quran, we go back to jurists and scholars. This is not to say that their understanding is divine and beyond critique. Rather, they are the reference point because they are the subject matter experts in this field. Much like we turn to a doctor in medical issues or to an attorney in legal issues, we should also look towards religious scholars when it comes to issues of understanding the faith.

Third, the commands of the Holy Quran can be generally separated into administrative and legal. We can understand the difference by looking at each verse within its context and understanding the circumstances of its revelation.

The administrative commands in the Holy Quran came to solve specific issues. For example, the Holy Quran says, “O you who have faith! When you converse privately with the Apostle, offer a charity before your private talk.”^[185] This is not a legal standard or principle. It was meant to address a particular problem at the time. The Muslims were overstepping their bounds

with the Holy Prophet (s). God wanted to limit the problem, so He revealed this verse. Verses such as this cannot be separated from their historical context and the circumstances of their revelation.

As another example take the verse, “O Prophet! Urge on the faithful to fight.”^[186] This is an administrative command limited to its specific circumstances and is not a legal principle that applies to all eras.

The same distinction can be found in the noble traditions of the Holy Prophet (s) and his Household (a). For example, Imam Sadiq (a) was once asked about whether the meat of the animal sacrifices can be taken out of the Valley of Mina and offered as charity in nearby cities. The Imam (a) answered,

We used to say that it should not be taken out due to the need of the people [of Mina]. But today, the people [performing the Hajj and offering the sacrifice] are much more, so there is no harm in taking it out [of Mina].^[187]

In other words, the instructions that the meat of the animal sacrifices should not be taken out of Mina was administrative and only to solve a particular problem.

Imam Ali (a) was also asked once why he did not dye his grey hair since the Holy Prophet (s) had done so and instructed others to do the same. The Imam (a) replied, “Surely, he had said that at a time when the religion was confined to a few, but now that its expanse has widened and it is firmly settled, every individual is free in his choice.”^[188] In other words, the command of the Holy Prophet (s) was administrative, and so people were free to choose once the particular circumstances had changed.

As such, administrative commands are limited in their scope to the circumstances and do not apply more generally.

The other types of commands in the Holy Quran can be described as legal. These commands cannot be restricted to their historical circumstances, but applied more generally. We cannot say that a command is no longer applicable because it was revealed when women were housewives and now they are heads of state. Similarly, we cannot say that the command

prohibiting usury is no longer applicable because it was revealed when inflation was not a significant issue and times have changed since then.

Legal commands are absolute, and therefore apply to all times and eras. Restricting any such command to one era and not another would need some evidence to rebut the presumption of general relevance and applicability. And because we believe that they are absolute, we cannot presume that they apply only to a specific time period and require evidence to support their relevance and applicability more generally.

For example, assume that an endowment was set aside a thousand years ago to support the poor and destitute. Can anyone claim that the endowment was set for that time period and to support the poor of that time only? The endowment was set at that time, but so long as the principle exists and there are poor in this world that could be supported, the endowment will continue on in perpetuity.

An endowment will be respected in a reasonable society and will not be restricted to one specific generation simply because circumstances change over time. The endowment should be respected because of the generally relevant and applicable nature of the endower's language. Unless there is evidence to limit the applicability of such language, it should be allowed to take its plain meaning which applies absolutely.

The same applies for the Arabic language. So long as a command comes in absolute terms, there needs to be evidence to show that it is fact limited in some way.

The same is true for the Quranic passages in regards to women or any other issue. So long as they are absolute in their language and no evidence exists to limit their scope, they should be understood to apply generally to all times and eras.

That is why it is reported that Imam Baqir (a) said,

If a verse comes down addressing a people, and then if those people were to perish the verse perishes with them, then there would not remain anything of the Quran. Rather, the Quran applies from its beginning to its end so long as the heavens and the earth remain intact. ^[189]

Another tradition reads,

What [Prophet] Muhammad permitted shall be permissible forever until the Day of Judgment. What he forbade shall be forbidden forever until the Day of Judgment. It will never be otherwise or replaced by another.^[190]

It is amusing to see some of these modernists apply their ideas selectively. If they like a verse, they give it general applicability. If they do not like it, they restrict it to a certain time and place.

For example, they say that these verses are absolute: “Indeed God enjoins justice and kindness, and generosity towards relatives”^[191]; “You will never attain piety until you spend out of what you hold dear”^[192]; “The faithful are indeed brothers”^[193]; “A believer may not kill another believer, unless it is by mistake.”^[194]

On the other hand, they claim that these verses are limited: “For the male shall be the like of the share of two females”^[195]; and “God has allowed trade and forbidden usury.”^[196]

So we maintain that the correct reading must be one that adheres to the absolute nature of the verses’ applicability, unless some evidence is provided to the contrary. Each command in the Holy Quran is considered legal and applicable to all eras and generations unless there is specific evidence that shows it to be administrative and limited to the specific time period. This can be understood from some of the Holy Quran’s verses – for example, “We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things and as guidance, mercy and good news for the Muslims.”^[197] As for the referenced disagreement of the scholars in some issues, it is not based on the theories preferred by the modernists but is due to their differing understandings of the text.

Jurisprudential Readings

The jurisprudential reading, adopted by the Islamic Seminary, is built on two premises:

First, there is no general rule that favors men over women. Rather, the general rule is that religious teachings and divine commands apply equally

to both genders. That can be understood from the general content of the verses and the specific verses that state this general rule – for example, “The wives have rights similar to the obligations upon them, in accordance with honorable norms.”^[198]

This general rule is applicable unless supplanted by more specific evidence in a particular instance. The rules that distinguish between men and women (for example, in matters of being witnesses or in the inheritance) are simply exceptions, and are not the general rule. Again, the general rule is equality between the genders because of the absolute nature of the verses and because of verses that state the rule outright – that women “have rights similar to the obligations upon them, in accordance with honorable norms.”^[199]

It has been mentioned in the books of principles of jurisprudence that are taught in the Islamic seminaries that the objectives of legislation may either be real or constructive. For example, the prohibition of alcohol has a real objective; that is, the elimination of intoxication and addiction in a society. On the other hand, the punishment for slander of a believer is based on a constructive objective; that is the societal good of protecting the believers’ honor and reputation.

Or, for example, a woman must wait for three menstrual periods before she can remarry after a divorce. On the other hand, a widow must wait for four months and ten days. Why? It may be for the constructive objective of safeguarding the sanctity of marriage. If the husband dies, then out of respect for the existing marriage, the waiting period is extended. The protection of the sanctity of marriage is not a real and direct objective, but a constructive social objective.

So in summary, not all religious laws are the result of real and direct objectives since some may be the result of constructive social objectives.

Second, preference in religious rulings does not indicate actual superiority. For example, the martyr who dies on the field of battle is given a high status and is not washed or shrouded before burial, where as a believer dying in his home does not get the same preference. This preference, however, does not mean that the martyr is actually superior.

For example, Hamza the Master of Martyrs and the uncle of the Holy Prophet (s) died in battle and was not washed or shrouded before burial. However, Prophet Muhammad (s) himself died in his home and was washed and shrouded before burial. Does this mean that Hamza was better than Prophet Muhammad (s)? The religious rule did give preference to Hamza in one respect, but it does not signify an actual preference or superiority.

For example, a woman who went through her menstrual cycle in the Holy Month of Ramadan must make up for her missed fast and not her missed prayers. Does that mean that fasting is better than prayer? The distinction in the ruling does not actually mean that fasting is superior to prayers.

Another example, when it comes to the estate of a deceased man who has no children, the mother inherits a third while the father inherits a sixth. Does that mean that the mother is superior to the father? What about the other rules that give some preference to the father? Again, these rules do establish a difference in their application, but they do not indicate actual preference or superiority.

All this simply means that religious rules may be the result of constructive social goals, and do not reflect actual preference or superiority. A group of individuals may each be at a different status in the eyes of God, but the religious rules may show preferences that do not necessarily reflect that.

So in conclusion, the fact that men are given preference in some religious rulings – i.e. that a man gets double the share of a woman in inheritance or that a man's testimony is equal to the testimony of two women – does not indicate an actual preference. God says,

O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you.^[200]

He also said, “Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should they be faithful, We shall revive them with a good life.”^[201]

WOMEN'S ROLE IN IMAM MAHDI'S MOVEMENT

Do women play a role in Imam Mahdi's (a) movement, either at the time of reappearance or before that? We affirm that they play a significant and heroic role in the blessed movement.

Textual Evidence

There are a number of narrations in which our Imams (a) mention the role of women in the movement of Imam Mahdi (a). For example, it is reported that Imam Sadiq (a) said, "By God, three hundred and thirteen individuals, amongst them fifty women, will come and gather in Mecca without a predetermined appointment."^[202] So there will be fifty women who are of the closest companions of the Imam (a), as these 313 individuals will be his closest advisors, the pillars of his government, his most loyal companions, and his most trusted supporters. This elite group of individuals will include 50 women.

Furthermore, the texts are mostly phrased in absolute terms and do not address men in particular. For example God says, "There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong."^[203] In another verse God also says, "The faithful, men and women, are guardians of one another: they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong."^[204] This basically means that women are guardians over their husbands, much like men are guardians over their wives. For example, if a woman sees her husband neglecting his prayers or listening to music, she has the authority to bid him do right and forbid him from wrong.

So what has been narrated from the Holy Prophet (s) – "The best deed for my nation is to await relief from God."^[205] – is not a specific instruction for men only. The women who are sincere and excel in the fields of medicine, education, or any other profession are awaiting relief from God.

Historical Evidence

The history of Islam was not crafted solely by men. Women played a large role in the development of Islamic history and heritage. Just as the companions such as Abu Thar, Salman, Miqdad, and Ammar played a critical role in Muslim history, there were women who played a similar role.

For example, Lady Khadija (a) provided vital moral and financial support for the Holy Prophet (s) in his mission to deliver the divine message.

Or Lady Fatima (a) in her stance and struggle, when she lent her time, effort, and her life to defend the nation's right to a rightly guided successor to the Holy Prophet (s).

Or Lady Zaynab (a) and her critical role in propagating the message of Imam Hussain's (a) movement.

Or Lady Hakima, the daughter of Imam Jawad (a), who was a religious scholar and an intermediary between the Imams (a) and their Shia.

These great women did not take their role due to exigent or exceptional circumstances. They are foundational roles that showed Muslim women how to be part of the making of history. They inspire Muslim women to rise with vigor and determination to fulfill such vital roles.

A COSMIC CIVILIZATION

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Know that God revives the earth after its death. We have certainly made the signs clear for you, so that you may exercise your reason. ^[206]

What does it mean that God will revive the earth after its death? There are two narrations that address this issue directly. It is reported that Imam Baqir (a) said, “God will revive [the earth] with Al-Qa’im (a) after its death. Its death is the disbelief of its denizens...”^[207] It is also reported that Imam Sadiq (a) said in reference to the verse, “God will revive it through the justice of Al-Qa’im (a) after it dies by the oppression of the chiefs of deviation.”^[208]

Now, if we momentarily put these narration aside, how can we be sure that the verse actually refers to the Twelfth Imam? There are two major sources of support for this interpretation.

First, we must look at the preceding verse,

Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for God’s remembrance and toward the truth which has come down [to them], and to be not like those who were given the Book before? Time took its toll on them.... ^[209]

The expression “time took its toll on them” is an indication that the Jews and Christians went through a period of waiting. Moses (a) had left them and they awaited his return. They awaited the birth of Jesus (a) after Moses (a). The verse then continues, “Their hearts were hardened, and many of them are transgressors.”

The verse thus indicates that the nation of the Holy Prophet (s) will go through a period much like that of the People of the Book. It will go through a prolonged period of waiting. It must take heed not to fall into the same errors as earlier nations. “Time took its toll on them and so their hearts were hardened, and many of them are transgressors.”

The expression “time took its toll” in the preceding verse is an indication that the revival of the earth after its death is something that will happen after a prolonged period of waiting. This does not apply to any theory other than what we explained above – i.e. that Imam Mahdi (a) is the instrument with which God will revive the earth.

Second, the verse says, “Know that God revives the earth after its death.” What does it mean that He will revive the earth? Which earth? The verse did not say that God may revive a piece of the earth after it dies. Rather, it refers to the earth as a whole. So what is the day in which God will revive the entire earth?

The indication is that before the appearance of Imam Mahdi (a), the earth will suffer a physical and spiritual death. It will be struck with disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and floods alongside the disastrous consequences of global warming. It will be revived after this death by a new global civilization. That is the day that the Holy Prophet (s) foretold of when he said,

If there is naught left in this world but a single day, God will prolong that day until a man of my Progeny (a) emerges and fills the earth with justice just as it was filled with injustice and transgression.^[210]

This same meaning is reiterated in many other narrations. In elaborating on the verse, “The earth will glow with the light of its lord,” it is reported that Imam Sadiq (a) said, “The lord of the earth is its Imam.” The Imam (a) was asked what would happen once the Imam emerges out of occultation. He replied, “People will no longer need sunlight and moonlight, and will suffice themselves with his light.”^[211]

This narration tells us that, since the Awaited Imam (a) is a manifestation of God’s glory and omnipotence, and once he leads the earth it will glow by his light. The fact that the verse comes within the context of the Holy

Quran's elaboration on the events preceding Judgment does not refute this explanation. The establishment of Imam Mahdi's (a) state, which will allow the earth to glow with his light, is a precedent event to Judgment.

These verses indicate that the earth will be revived through a new civilization that will be established on earth after his appearance. Speaking of this civilization will focus on three points.

CIVILIZATION AS A GOAL

The purpose of mankind's existence on earth is to establish a cosmic civilization. The goal is not simply a global civilization, as that would not have much value in relation to the rest of the universe. Establishing a cosmic civilization would mean human control over the universe's infinitely expansive space, in all its atoms, galaxies, energy sources, and treasures. The goal is a cosmic civilization, and this view can be supported by intellectual and textual proofs.

Intellectual Proof

There is no debating the fact that the universe is teeming with energies and undiscovered mysteries. In fact, scientists assert that there are a great many things that we still do not know about our own planet. There are millions of planets out there that we can study further. There are many mysteries swimming through space that mankind is yet to discover.

So we ask, 'Why did God create all these stars and galaxies? Did God create all this without a purpose?' If we say that there is no purpose behind the creation of the stars and galaxies, then we are claiming that God created it all frivolously. Frivolity is vice, and God the All Wise would never engage in a vice. The Holy Quran explicitly states,

We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them for play. Had We desired to take up some diversion We would have taken it up with Ourselves, were We to do [so].^[212]

In another verse, God says,

We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them for play. We did not create them except with consummate wisdom; but most of them do not know.^[213]

All creation has a purpose. But what is that purpose?

The purpose for creation of the universe is to be at the disposal of mankind. Mankind is the only creature that has the potential to discover and develop the universe and its treasures. God says,

Certainly We have honored the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good

things, and preferred them with a complete preference over many of those We have created.^[214]

The reason for the creation of the universe is so mankind can invest it in its entirety. This is what we mean by a cosmic civilization. Otherwise, the creation of the universe would be frivolous. This is what the verses of the Holy Quran emphasize. God says,

O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority [from God].^[215]

The verse indicates that whenever mankind possesses authority, they will come to control the universe. In another verse, God says, “Indeed We presented the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to undertake it and were apprehensive of it; but man undertook it.”^[216]

Some narrations say that the Trust in the verse is allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a).^[217] It could also mean dominion over the universe in light of allegiance to Imam Ali (a), as this dominion is something that no creature is able to attain but humankind. In some verse, God mentions the earth specifically. For example, the Holy Quran says, “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed I am going to set a vicegerent on the earth.’”^[218] But this reference to the earth simply indicates the capital of the vicegerency and does not limit its dominion. So the dominion of the vicegerency is the entire universe. This dominion cannot be established without a civilization that can come to control the entire expanse of outer space.

Textual Proof

First, the verses indicate that the entire universe is deeply interconnected. We can easily imagine how disruptive it would be if you take the sun or the moon out of existence because of their direct influence on our world. The same is true across the universe, as each object effects and is effected by other objects far and wide. We read in the Holy Quran, “Neither it behooves the sun to overtake the moon, nor may the night outrun the day, and each swims in an orbit.”^[219] We also read,

Do you not see that God has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth and He has showered upon you His blessings, the outward, and the inward?
[\[220\]](#).

What does it mean that God has disposed the universe for us? It means that that the stars that are four hundred or more light years away are also at our disposal. They affect us whether we like it or not. We are affected by every star, planet, and object out there.

God also says: “He disposed the sun and the moon for you, constant [in their courses], and He disposed the night and the day”;[\[221\]](#) “the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] disposed by His command”;[\[222\]](#) and “He has disposed for [your benefit] whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth; all is from Him.”[\[223\]](#)

The universe is one family. The sun affects all living things on Earth. Mankind has been attempting to understand celestial bodies and their effects on the earth. Thousands of years ago, humans began to develop theories on astronomy as a means of deciphering the movements of stars and other celestial objects. We are now better able to understand our relationship to the vast expanse of outer-space through scientific programs like the Hubble telescope and the Apollo space missions.

Second, it is important for us to attempt to understand our relation to the rest of the universe. Just as we are asked to pray and fast, we are also asked to study and understand the universe.

God says,

Have you not regarded that God is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the birds spreading their wings. Each knows his prayer and glorification, and God knows best what they do.[\[224\]](#).

In another verse God says, “Whatever there is in the heavens and in the earth glorifies God, the Sovereign, the All-holy, the All-mighty, the All-wise.”[\[225\]](#) He also says, “There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification.”[\[226\]](#)

These verses not only indicate God's omnipotence and sustenance of the entire universe through the glorifications of all beings, but also that mankind needs to work to understand these glorifications. God says, "But you do not understand their glorification" – meaning that you must work to understand their glorifications.

We cannot understand these glorifications unless we understand our relation to them. We cannot do that until we establish the cosmic civilization. Once we establish that civilization, we will discover the secrets of the universe, understand our relation to all creation, and begin to comprehend these glorifications. That is why God says in the Holy Quran,

Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say], 'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire.'^[227]

Thus, mankind's purpose on earth is to establish the cosmic civilization and discover the secrets of the universe.

IMAM MAHDI AND GLOBAL CIVILIZATION

The civilization that will be ushered by Imam Mahdi (a) is the cosmic civilization that mankind is meant to establish. This can be seen in the discussion of two matters.

Technology

The state of Imam Mahdi (a) is not one of swords and spades. His movement will not take mankind back in history. Rather, his state will be the most technologically advanced in human history. It will also be the most spiritually advanced, as establishing the cosmic civilization and discovering the secrets of the universe will lead mankind to better understand its Creator.

We believe that the day of Imam Mahdi's (a) emergence is the day that God will fulfill his promise to mankind. God says, "And We desired to show favor to those who were abased in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs."^[228] God promised that one day those who are abased in the earth will be made to inherit it. God also made a promise specifically to the pious – "The earth indeed belongs to God, and He gives its inheritance to whomever He wishes of His servants, and the outcome will be in favor of the Godwary."^[229]

God will bless his servants with the day of the emergence of Imam Mahdi (a), as that will be the day of civil and spiritual perfection. This is understood from the verses, which speak of this day as a promise of great favor and blessings. God says, "God has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth."^[230]

God also says to the Holy Prophet (s), "We did not send you but as a mercy to all creation."^[231] God could have said that the Holy Prophet (s) is a mercy to mankind, but instead said to "all creation." This includes beasts, plants, and inanimate objects. How could this be?

This absolute mercy has not yet taken full effect. The scholars of mysticism say that mercy is the actualization of perfection. If something becomes perfect in some way, it has received mercy. For example, a seed that is sown

and grows to become a tree has received mercy. If it is sown but withers before becoming a tree, it was denied mercy. So when the verse says “we did not send you but as a mercy to all creation,” it means that there will be a day when all creation will receive mercy in this way. It speaks of a day when all creation will reach perfection. That is the day when the cosmic civilization at the hands of Imam Mahdi (a), who is the extension of his grandfather the Holy Prophet (s).

There are also a number of narrations that support this understanding.

- Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said, “Knowledge is of 27 parts. Everything that the messengers have delivered constitutes two parts. Until today, people only know these two parts. Once Al-Qa’im (a) emerges, he will take the 25 remaining pieces and spread them amongst people so that they know all 27 pieces.”^[232]
- It is also narrated that Imam Mahdi (a) will be able to extract unknown knowledge and treasures in the land of Egypt.^[233]
- Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said, “If Al-Qa’im (a) of us emerges, God will enhance the hearing and sight of our followers so that they will have no need for mail. He will speak and they will hear, and they will see him while he is [far away].”^[234]
- The verse also says, “If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority [from God].”^[235] Authority over the heavens will be achieved under his blessings and auspices.

And this is not restricted only to the narrations from Shia sources. Other schools of thought have also recorded similar narrations.

- Ibn Abbas narrates, “As for the Mahdi (a), he will fill the earth with justice and equity just as it was filled with injustice and inequity. Cattle and beasts will be at peace and the earth will pour out its innards... like pillars of gold and silvers.”^[236]
- It is reported that the Holy Prophet (s) said, “There will be at the end of times a Caliph that will distribute wealth without account.”^[237]
- In another narration, the Holy Prophet (s) says, “I give you glad tidings of the Mahdi (a). He will be brought forth within my nation while men are in dispute and earthquakes [are wreaking havoc]. Surely, he will fill

the earth with equity and justice after it is filled with inequity and injustice. The dweller of the heavens and the dweller of the earth will be pleased with him. God will fill the hearts of the nation of Muhammad (s) with sufficiency so that no one will need another.”^[238]

All these narrations speak of a cosmic civilization where mankind will discover the secrets of the universe. They do not speak of a primitive society reliant on swords and spades. The day of Imam Mahdi’s (a) appearance will be the establishment of the cosmic civilization. His state will be the capital of a cosmic civilization and not an earthly civilization.

The Cosmic Civilization

For the cosmic civilization to be realized, two prerequisites must first be attained.

First, mankind must discover the hidden secrets of the universe. There is no civilization without science and no scientific advancement without new discoveries. In our day and age, science has reached the level that allows us to genetically modify a human embryo through an understanding of genomes – though the field remains largely theoretical. But it is through understanding of the secrets of genetics that we gain control over such scientific techniques.

In the same way, it is the discovery of the secrets of the universe that will allow us to establish a cosmic civilization. There are a number of verses that can be understood to convey this meaning.

In one verse we read, “He taught Adam the Names, all of them.”^[239] Why was Adam (a) made a vicegerent on the earth in lieu of the angels? It is because Adam (a) was granted the secret of these Names. This is based on the interpretation that the Names are a reference to the secrets of the world.

In another verse, this knowledge was referred to as authority. God says,

O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority [from God].^[240]

In the Holy Quran, Solomon (a) asks God for a kingdom – “He said, ‘My Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a kingdom that will not befit anyone except me. Indeed You are the All-munificent.’” What was this kingdom? It is a

civilization that he ruled over through his knowledge. God says, “So We disposed the wind for him, blowing softly wherever he intended by his command.”^[241] Solomon (a) was given knowledge of the secrets of the wind.

In yet another verse, this dominion was referred to as the “knowledge of the Book.” Solomon (a) told his courtiers, “O [members of the] elite! Which of you will bring me [the throne of the Queen of Sheba] before they come to me in submission?” Solomon (a) was in Jerusalem and the throne was in modern day Yemen. One of the Jinn said to Solomon (a), “I will bring it to you before you rise from your place. I have the power to do it and am trustworthy.” But this was not fast enough. “The one who had knowledge of the Book said, ‘I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.’”^[242]

Asif ibn Barkhiya was able to bring the throne of the Queen of Sheba from Yemen to Jerusalem in an instant. Science has yet to discover a way to transport an item made of gold over such a long distance in an instant. But this will be achieved on the promised day. Asif had “knowledge of the Book” and he was able to undertake the task. He knew only some of the secrets of the universe. So what about the one who has complete knowledge of the Book?

The Holy Quran says, “God suffices as a witness between me and you, and he who possesses the knowledge of the Book.”^[243] God also says, “We have not omitted anything from the Book.”^[244] In explaining this verse the Holy Prophet (s) said, “That is my brother Ali ibn Abi Talib (a).”^[245] The Awaited Imam (a), who has complete knowledge of the Book and will establish the cosmic civilization, takes his knowledge from Imam Ali (a). The same is true for all of our Imams (a). As the Holy Prophet (s) said, “I am the city of knowledge and Ali (a) is its gate.”^[246]

Second, a science is not perfected until it is taken out of the realm of theory and into the realm of practice and empirical reality. Medicine, for example, is not perfected unless it is taken out of the realm of theory and used to cure a disease. There will be a day when all human knowledge will be perfected through and brought into the realm of practice. That day is the day when the Master of our Time (a) will bring with him the fountains of knowledge.

One may ask, ‘When the Awaited Imam (a) emerges will he replace human civilization or complement it?’ In reality, his movement will be a continuation of human progress and scientific advancement, and he will not supplant human civilization.

Take this as an example. An individual may study medicine for a number of years. After a formal education in medicine, he is yet to become a physician. He must take what he learned out of the realm of theory and into the realm of practice. He must undergo several years of residency as a trainee under supervision of an experienced physician. After completion of residency an individual finally becomes a medical professional. It is through practical application of knowledge that he was able to inch closer toward excellence and become a respected member of the profession.

The same could be applied to Imam Mahdi’s (a) movement. If he were to supplant human civilization, his new civilization would be doomed to fail because it uproots the process of human development through practice and experience. Mankind went through thousands of year of this practical development and was able to accumulate a wealth of knowledge and experience. Our Awaited Imam (a) will come to direct and guide the continuation of this development and not supplant it. Only then will mankind continue to grow towards perfection.

This concept can be seen in some of our narrations. It is reported that Imam Sajjad (a) said

The people of the time of his occultation who believe in his Immaculate Leadership and who await his appearance are better than the people of any other time. God gave them the intellect and understanding that allowed them to perceive occultation at the level of presence.^[247]

In another narration, Imam Baqir (a) is reported to have said that when the Awaited Imam (a) emerges “he will place his hands on the heads of people. Through that he will marshal their intellects and cultivate their wisdom.”^[248]

IMAM MAHDI, SCIENCE, AND WORSHIP

Western civilization has promoted a wall of separation between faith and science. Imam Mahdi's (a) cosmic civilization will be one of harmony between faith, science, and technology.

One could legitimately object to the premises argued above. After all, isn't worship the purpose behind the creation of humankind? God says, "I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me."^[249] So the purpose behind creation is worship and not the establishment of a cosmic civilization.

The two opinions are not in fact contradictory. Civilization and worship are one and the same. Worship does not mean simply praying and fasting, but gaining proximity to God. Praying and fasting are a form of worship because they are a means of gaining proximity to God. But the same is true of science. Discovery of the hidden secrets of the universe leads to a better understanding of God and is thus also a means to gaining proximity to God. Knowledge is incomplete without worship and worship is incomplete without knowledge. God says "As for those who strive towards Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways."^[250] He also says, "And worship your Lord until certainty comes to you."^[251] Attaining a level of certainty requires both knowledge and worship. That is why the two will be in harmony in the state of Imam Mahdi (a). On one hand, the cosmic civilization will unveil the secrets of the universe. On the other hand, the Islamic civilization will create an atmosphere of constant remembrance of God. The blessed civilization will usher the golden age of science and worship.

Those who combine both knowledge and worship are the closest in proximity to God. The mystics call such individuals people of insight. God says, "Say, 'this is my way. I summon to God with insight – I and he who follows me.'"^[252] Insight is the union of both knowledge and worship. So what of a person who is of 'astute insight?' Imam Sadiq (a) said, "Our uncle Abbas ibn Ali (a) was of astute insight and firm faith. He strived alongside [Imam Hussain (a)], distinguished himself, and passed as a martyr."^[253]

THE MASTER OF TIME

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Certainly We have brought them a Book, which We have elaborated with knowledge, as a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith. Do they not consider [the consequences of] its fulfillment? The day when its fulfillment comes, those who had forgotten it before will say, 'Our Lord's apostles had certainly brought the truth.' ^[254]

All Muslims await a day when this promise will be fulfilled through the complete interpretation of the Holy Quran. The promise has not yet been fulfilled and we are waiting for the day when the Holy Book will be explained in its entirety. But this day will come and everyone will believe in the message of the Holy Quran – “The day when its fulfillment comes, those who had forgotten it before will say, ‘Our Lord’s apostles had certainly brought the truth.’”

So when is this promised day?

Most Quranic scholars have not addressed this question. Still, there is a narration from Imam Sadiq (a) that we can use to better understand this promise. The Imam (a) said in reference to the verse, “That is the day of Al-Qa’im (a) and the Day of Resurrection.”^[255] This tells us that there will be two phases to the complete interpretation of the Holy Quran. First, there will be a complete interpretation of worldly concepts with the appearance of our Awaited Imam (a). Second, there will be a complete interpretation of other-worldly concepts on the Day of Resurrection.

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Our understanding of the Quran can be placed in three categories.

Plain Meaning

The Holy Quran is an Arabic text. If it is recited to an Arabic speaker, its plain meaning will be understood. Because it is a text that uses language to communicate meaning, anyone who is proficient in the language will be able to understand the plain meanings of its texts. That is why every Muslim is instructed to contemplate on the Holy Quran – “Do they not contemplate the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts?”^[256] God also says, “Do they not contemplate the Quran? Had it been from [someone] other than God, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it.”^[257]

There can be no contemplation of the Holy Quran without an understanding of its text. The plain meaning of the text can be understood by going back to the experts in the Arabic language and its literary tools.

For example, God says, “God has allowed trade and forbidden usury.”^[258] The plain meaning of the Arabic text is understood to apply to all times and all societies because it speaks in absolute terms. An understanding of the plain meaning of the text comes with proficiency in the Arabic language and its nuances.

Exegesis

Exegesis is of a higher level of understanding the text than simply by its plain meaning. Exegetes attempt to discern the exact meaning intended by God in a verse. This is doubtlessly a difficult endeavor. We can understand the plain meaning of a text, but it is a different thing altogether to discern with certainty the author’s precise intention.

The Holy Prophet (s) said, “Whoever interprets the Quran with his [subjective] opinion should prepare for his seat in hellfire.”^[259] So the process of exegesis is not a simple task and it is not up to anyone to discern the true meanings of the scripture. Only through reference back to the Holy Prophet (s) and Immaculate Imams (a) can we begin to understand the text in this way.

For example, God says, “What remains of God’s provision is better for you, should you be faithful.”^[260] If we rely only on our intellects, we cannot discern the meaning of this text. What is meant by God’s provision? But once we turn back to the narrations, we find a clear explanation. Imam Baqir (a) is reported to have said,

When [the Awaited Imam (a)] emerges, he will lean his back on the Kaaba and three hundred and thirteen men will gather around him. The first thing he will utter is the verse, ‘What remains of God’s provision is better for you, should you be faithful.’ He will then say, ‘I am the remainder of God’s provision on his earth and his vicegerent and proof over you.’ No one will greet him by anything but, ‘Peace be upon you, O Remainder of God’s Provision.’^[261]

Interpretation

Interpretation is a higher level process than exegesis. It entails the understanding of a text based on its foundational principles. Does the Quran have such foundational principles that we can go back to? As we discussed in a prior chapter, the Quran went through two stages; an indefinite existence and a definite existence. God says, “[This is] a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated.”^[262]

So the Holy Quran first passed through a stage where it was made definitive but still did not exist in its elaborated form. It was then transformed into its definite, elaborate form. The indefinite form was that of the Mother Book – “And it is sublime and wise with Us in the Mother Book.”^[263] In another verse it is described as the Preserved Tablet – “Indeed it is a glorious Quran, in a preserved tablet.”^[264] In yet another verse it is referred to as a Guarded Book – “This is indeed a noble Quran, in a guarded Book.”^[265] These are all descriptions of the indefinite existence of the Quran before it was elaborated during the process of revelation.

In its indefinite form, the Quran was a collection of principles and teachings without the specific details on things like inheritance or the heavens. In the process of revelation, it was elaborated and transformed into chapters and verses. God says, “We have sent the Quran in [discrete] parts so that you

may recite it for the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal.”^[266]

The process of interpretation requires us to take any verse that is unclear or ambiguous back to its foundational principles – those found in what is called the Preserved Tablet, the Guarded Book, and the Mother Book. The process of interpretation is even more difficult than exegesis. It can only be attained by a few select individuals who have witnessed the indefinite existence of the Holy Quran in the Preserved Tablet.

This is understood from a number of verses from the Holy Quran. God says, “Then We made those whom We chose from Our servants heirs to the Book.”^[267] This means that only God’s chosen servants have the ability to interpret the Holy Book. In another verse we read, “No one knows its interpretation except God and those firmly grounded in knowledge.”^[268] In another verse God says, “Indeed, it [i.e. the Book] is [present as] manifest signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge.”^[269]

So who are these individuals who “have been given knowledge,” are “firmly grounded in knowledge,” and are the “heirs to the Book”? There is another verse that elaborates on this concept. God says, “This is indeed a noble Quran, in a Guarded Book – no one touches it except the pure ones.”^[270] So only the pure ones can touch the Guarded Book. Of course, “touch” here does not refer to physical contact. God says, “Remember Our servant Job when he called out to his Lord, ‘The devil has touched me with hardship and torment.’”^[271] “Touch” in these verses does not mean physical contact, but to reach or realize. No one can reach the meanings of the Guarded Book but the pure ones. So who are the pure ones?

Again, we go back to the verses of the Holy Quran for an elaboration. God says, “Indeed God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.”^[272] The individuals who are able to interpret the Holy Quran are none other than the Holy Household (a) of our Prophet Muhammad (s).

These individuals have been purified practically and intellectually. Practically, they are purified because they are immaculate in nature, never committing a sin or a wrong of any kind. Intellectually, they are purified

because their knowledge is granted from the heavens without a need for the earthly processes of learning and experimentation. Because of this practical and intellectual purification, they are qualified to interpret the Holy Quran.

If we do not go back to the Holy Household (a) for the interpretation of the Holy Quran, there will be many verses which we will not be able to understand. For example, God says, “Had We sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled [and] go to pieces with the fear of God.”^[273] Does this mean that a mountain will crumble if the Holy Quran is revealed to it? We need the knowledge of the Holy Household (a) to interpret this verse.

God also says, “Have they not seen how We visit the land diminishing it at its edges?”^[274] How is the earth being diminished? Do any scientists claim that the earth is being diminished in any way? Erosion may take away some of the edges of land into sea or other bodies of water, but is that what is meant by diminishing? We cannot interpret this verse without referring back to the Holy Household (a).

And what does this holy verse mean, “We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things and as guidance”?^[275] Many things are not explained within the Holy Quran, so what is meant by “a clarification of all things”?

These are the types of verses that cannot be understood without the guidance of the Holy Household (a). They are the importance of that with which the Holy Prophet (s) entrusted to us when he said,

I leave amongst you two things that, if you hold fast to, you will not go astray after me. They are the Book of God and my Household and Progeny (a). The Compassion and All-Aware has entrusted to me that they will not separate until they reach me at the Pond [of Paradise].^[276]

The last of Prophet Muhammad’s (s) Progeny and Household (a) is the Awaited Imam Mahdi (a). That is why Imam Baqir (a) is reported to have said, “The Mahdi (a) was given the name of *Mahdi* [i.e. the Guided] because he will guide to a hidden matter.”^[277]

GOD'S WILL

There is not a thing in the universe except that it bows to the will of God.

To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the Earth. Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He wishes. His seat embraces the heavens and the earth. ^[278]

God's will can mean one of three things. First, God's will is the act of creation. "All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it 'Be,' and it is."^[279] Some of our narrations say that "His will is His action."^[280] Second, his will can be a withholding of blessings. God says,

Whomever God desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam, and whomever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and straitened as if he were climbing to a height. ^[281]

Accordingly, God's will is to grant and to withhold blessings.

Third, God's will can signify the accumulation of causes. God says,

And when We desire to destroy a town We command its affluent ones [to obey God]. But they commit transgression in it, and so the word becomes due against it, and We destroy it utterly. ^[282]

In this verse, His will is that whenever the causes for destruction of a people come to fruition that destruction will take place.

IMAM MAHDI'S AGE

Here we must ask a question. What is the philosophy behind Imam Mahdi's (a) long age? We do not ask about the occultation in general, but about the length of his age specifically. In other words, was the Imam born in that era and continued to live on normally in accordance with the laws of nature? Or was there divine will and planning throughout all these years?

Imam Mahdi's (a) long age and survival throughout the ages was not arbitrary or natural. It is according to a divine plan and under divine care

and will. God willed that the causes accumulate in a way that prolonged his life for so long.

So what is the purpose behind his long age?

Proof through Observation

First, there is a difference in the law between the testimony of a witness who has observed a matter and hearsay evidence. In some instances, you may find a direct witness to a certain crime. At other instances, you may have someone who heard of things outside the court and presents what he heard as evidence. The latter sort of testimony is inadmissible hearsay evidence.

Even on the Day of Judgment we see mankind trying to use this rule in his favor. A person is presented with the sins he committed during his life, but he would try to evade culpability – “But man is the most disputatious of creatures.”^[283] “The day [will come] when every soul will come pleading for itself.”^[284] Despite being presented with a book of deeds and the angels acting as witnesses, mankind will continue to dispute. So what will quiet mankind in the court of Judgment?

On the Day of Judgment, God will present testimony based on direct observation to prove any sin or wrong committed by man. The Holy Quran speaks of the Day of Judgment and says, “Today We shall seal their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness concerning what they used to earn.”^[285] God also says, “They will say to their skins, ‘Why did you bear witness against us?’ They will say, ‘We were given speech by God, who gave speech to all things.’”^[286] Therefore, it is this testimony that is based on direct observation that holds weight in a court of judgment.

Second, for every era God has appointed a witness who will observe the actions and deeds of the people. For example, Jesus the son of Mary says in the Holy Quran, “I was a witness to them so long as I was among them. But when You had taken me away, You Yourself were watchful over them.”^[287] In regards to the Holy Prophet (s) the Quran says, “We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people, and that the Apostle may be a witness to you.”^[288] During his lifetime, the Holy Prophet (s) was

a direct witness to his nation's actions. After he passed away, he remains a witness through his knowledge.

In every era, there is a leader appointed to bear witness on mankind. The Holy Quran says, "The day We shall summon every group of people along with their imam."^[289] The imam is the leader who will testify to the deeds and actions of his group.

So for every generation and every era, there is a leader who will testify to the actions of mankind through his direct experience. That is why Imam Mahdi (a) was born over a thousand years ago and continues to live on to be the direct witness to our actions.

In one narration, Imam Sadiq (a) elaborates on the following verse, "We sent it down on a blessed night, and We have been warning [mankind]. Every definitive matter is resolved on it."^[290] The Imam (a) said,

That is the Night of Power during which dictates are recorded of the pilgrims of Hajj and what occurs in the year of obedience, disobedience, death, or life. God will speak what he wills during the night and day and then He gives it to the Master of the Earth.

When a companion asked who the Master of the Earth is, the Imam (a) said, "he is your companion"^[291] – meaning Imam Mahdi (a). This knowledge was granted to the Holy Prophet (s), then to his Purified Household (a), all the way to the Master of our Time (a).

This is what is meant by the supplication which we read in the middle of the month Shaaban

O God, [we ask you] by this night and the one born on it.... [They are] the sword of God who will not grow dull, His light who will not fade, and the men of wisdom who does not frolic. [They are] the focal point of time, the trustees of the present, the masters of the matter [of vicegerency], and the ones who upon whom is revealed what is revealed on the Night of Power.^[292]

Spiritual Perfection

The late Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a renowned thinker and author of the book *Bahth Hawl Al-Mahdi*, proposed a theory in regards to our

Twelfth Imam's (a) age that has become controversial. He said that God had allowed for the Imam (a) to live so long and observe so much of history and civilization so that he can grow and develop the competence required for the momentous mission with which he is tasked. This theory is controversial because of our beliefs in the topic of Immaculate Leadership. Was Imam Mahdi (a) not an Immaculate Imam when he was born? Did he not hold the skills and competence to be the Immaculate Guardian of the Faith, even at that early age? Surely, the Imam (a) does not need to live so long and observe society for eras in order to be competent to fulfill the job of Immaculate Leadership. So what exactly did the late Sayyid al-Sadr mean?

It is very likely that what Sayyid al-Sadr meant was not the Imam's (a) actual competence, but the perspective of people towards him. This is what can be understood from a number of other statements that he makes. That is why he said that the Imam (a) is acquiring increased qualifications as time passes on – not in reality, but in the outlooks of those who do not believe in his Immaculate Leadership.

We can also understand his statement as a reference to a type of spiritual development. Scholars say that there is a balance between blessings and trials; the harder an individual is tried, the more he is blessed. The trials that our Immaculate Imams (a) face are a balance to the great blessings they have been given. The same is true with our Twelfth Holy Imam (a). He is being tried with this long age as a balance to the great blessings he will be granted once he emerges.

Let us explain a number of points.

First, when we go back to the history of the prophets we find that they all went through periods of trial and tribulation. God says of Abraham (a), “When his Lord tested Abraham with certain words and he fulfilled them, He said, ‘I am making you the Imam of mankind.’”^[293] In regards to the prophets of the Children of Israel God says, “When they had been patient and had conviction in Our signs, We appointed amongst them Imams to guide [the people] by Our command.”^[294] In other words, they were given the position of Imam after their patience in the face of trials.

Of Joseph (a) the Quran says, “When he came of age, We gave him judgement and [sacred] knowledge.”^[295] The Quran also treats Moses (a) similarly. These trials played a part in their attainment of the highest levels of certitude. It is when they reached the greatest level of certitude that God granted them the position of Imam. “When his Lord tested Abraham with certain words and he fulfilled them, He said, ‘I am making you the Imam of mankind.’”^[296]

Do Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Purified Household (a) go through a similar process? Do they also progress towards the greatest level of perfection of certitude?

As an answer to these questions, let us explain the following. Our Imams are born with the competence – the ability and readiness – to carry out their roles as Immaculate Leaders. They do not need to experience, observe, or learn in any way before they take up that position. However, they also progress in their knowledge and spirituality.

In the twenty sixth volume of *Bihar Al-Anwar*, there is a narration that has reached us in numerous ways and through multiple routes of narrators. In this indisputable narration Imam Sadiq (a) says, “Surely, we are given greater [knowledge] every day and night. If that was not the case, [the knowledge that] we have would run out.”^[297]

Imam Sadiq (a) was once asked whether this increase in knowledge was in matters of *Halal* and *Haram*. He said, “As for *Halal* and *Haram*, God has revealed them fully to his Prophet (s). The Imam is not increased in [knowledge of them. Rather it is] in all matters other than *Halal* and *Haram*.” When a companion asked him if the Imams (a) were given any knowledge which was not given to the Holy Prophet (s), he replied,

No. Rather whenever a command comes from God an angel brings it to the Messenger of God (s). The angel would say, ‘O Muhammad, your Lord commands you with such and such.’ [The Holy Prophet (s) would reply], ‘Take it to Ali (a).’ The angel would go to Ali (a) who would say, ‘Take it to Hassan (a).’ [Hassan (a) would say], ‘Take it to Hussain (a).’ It would continue like this going from one to another until it reaches us.

When the companion pushed again asking if the Imams (a) were given any knowledge that was not first given to the Holy Prophet (s), the Imam (a) replied, “Woe to you! How could it be that an Imam would know something that was not first known by the Messenger of God (s) and the Imam before him?”^[298]

Since birth and at every moment of his life, an Imam is the best of people in terms of both knowledge and action. Otherwise, he would not be an Imam. At the same time, the Imam also progresses further in knowledge as time passes. It is not the knowledge of religious teachings or empirical sciences that progresses. Rather, it is the knowledge of God and His attributes. With each passing moment and at all times, the Imams are growing more and more knowing and understanding of God. At all times, the Imams continue to be the most knowledgeable and most perfect human beings. Otherwise, if there was at any time anyone who is better than them they would not be Imams.

At the same time, the Holy Prophet (s) and the Imams (a) continue to grow in spiritual stature. God says, “Whatever We relate to you of the accounts of the apostles are those by which We strengthen your heart.”^[299] In another verse God says, “The faithless say, ‘Why has not the Quran been sent down to him all at once?’ So it was, that We may strengthen your heart with it.”^[300] So we must ask, what does it mean that God will strengthen the Holy Prophet’s (s) heart?

Surely, it does not mean that the Holy Prophet (s) will move from doubt to certainty or from hesitation to confidence. Nor does it mean that he had a vague understanding of a concept and it was clarified further.

The strengthening of the heart is a progress in spiritual stature, such that he transcends higher and higher at every moment. The same is true with the Immaculate Imams (a).

For example, Imam Ali’s (a) perseverance for twenty-five years despite wrong and oppression is a trial by which he progressed spiritually and for which he will reap the greatest rewards in the hereafter.

Similarly, Imam Hassan’s (a) perseverance in the face of vicious attacks is a trial that allowed for greater spiritual progression. Imam Hussain’s (a)

stance and the tragic massacre he endured was also a trial and a means of spiritual progression.

Second, the spiritual progression they experience is not a prerequisite to their Immaculate Leadership. They are Imams since their birth, as many narrations have emphasized.^[301] As we read in *Al-Ziyara Al-Jami'a*, “God created you in the form of light then kept you closely attached with His Throne.”^[302] These individuals that were created in the form of light before all other creation, how could they be in need of spiritual progression?

This spiritual progression is neither a prerequisite to their position as Imams or a qualification for their leadership role. So what is the meaning of this spiritual progression?

The purpose for creating this system whereby the Immaculate Leaders can progress spiritually is simply to favor them over all other creation and prepare their unmatched rewards in the hereafter. They are stricken with trials and tragedies so that they may persevere and earn the highest of status in this world and the next.

For example, we have many narrations stating that God rewarded Imam Hussain (a) for his great sacrifice by making the Immaculate Imams from his progeny, rendering the dust of his grave a panacea for all ailments, and answering the prayers of his visitors.^[303] This should be taken in perspective along with the fact that many of our scholars say that Imam Hassan (a) is of a higher status than Imam Hussain (a). After all, Imam Hussain (a) lived under the leadership of his brother for ten years after the passing of their father. However, because of the weight of the tragedy that Imam Hussain (a) endured, he was granted these high honors. He is the father of the Imams. In his shrine prayers are answered. By the dust of his graves diseases are cured.

It is highly likely that the late Sayyid al-Sadr meant that Imam Mahdi (a) has been given this long age as a trial and a means by which he can earn the highest status and the greatest rewards. As a reward for his perseverance, he will be granted blessings in this world which no other prophet, messenger, or Imam was granted before him.

Our Imam (a) is persevering through three types of pain in particular. He is persevering through the pain of occultation, as he cannot teach and call to

the faith as he would like. He is persevering through the pain of all the crimes he sees being committed around the world as he remains in his occultation. He is persevering through the pain of seeing his followers wrong one another and sin, and he is hurt for them.

These pains are a trial for the Imam (a). This trial is not frivolous, but there must be a reason and wisdom behind it. It is possible that he has been granted this long life so that he can endure this pain. As a reward for his perseverance, he will be granted a great status in the hereafter in addition to the great status he will be granted in this world. His reward is that he will emerge and fill the earth with justice and equity just as it has been filled with injustice and inequity. He will be the one to fulfill the promises of the prophets and the messengers.

The long life that has been granted to our Twelfth Imam (a) is not so he can be fit for the role of leadership or better equipped to lead the world. Rather, it is a trial for which he will be rewarded greatly in this world and the next.

Preserving the Faith

God says in His Holy Book, “Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice.”^[304] The purpose of the divine message is the maintenance of justice and equity. In turn, justice and equity are in need of the teachings of the divine message.

So just as God has given us the divine message, He has also willed to protect the message through the succession of prophets and Imams. Every Imam’s role during his time is to safeguard the teachings of Islam. This is done in three ways:

Safeguarding the text. God says, “Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it.”^[305] It is the role of the Imam to protect the Quran from any distortion or fabrication.

Safeguarding the teachings. The teachings of the faith are safeguarded through the continuous study of the text, as well as teaching and education for the masses. Our seminaries have taken on this task under the watchful eyes of the Imam (a).

Practical protection. Every religious group has its adherents to give practical protection to the faith through their practice. God says,

Indeed God has bought from the faithful their souls and their possessions for paradise to be theirs: they fight in the way of God, kill, and are killed. A promise binding upon Him in the Torah and the Evangel and the Quran. And who is truer to his promise than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him, and that is the great success. ^[306]

Who are these faithful whom God has bought?

[The faithful are] penitent, devout, celebrators of God's praise, wayfarers, who bow [and] prostrate [in prayer], bid what is right and forbid what is wrong, and keep God's bounds—and give good news to the faithful. ^[307]

These are the individuals who have taken on the responsibility of practically protecting the faith and its adherents.

The religious scripture, the Holy Quran, is protected from all distortion by our Twelfth Holy Imam (a). The religion of Islam is also safeguarded through our jurists and the process of learning and teaching that continues in the seminaries under the watchful eye of the Imam (a). Finally, every community of believers practically protects the faith through their practice and adherence and with the support of our Imam (a). God says, “He has written faith into their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him.”^[308] The spirit with which God has supported the believers is the Master of Our Time Imam Mahdi (a).

He protects the faith in its text, its teachings, and its practice. This has been the mission of our Immaculate Imams. It was the mission of Imam Ali (a) after the passing of the Holy Prophet (s). It was the mission of Imam Hassan (a) after the martyrdom of Imam Ali (a). It was also the mission of Imam Hussain (a) that drove him towards Karbala. He spoke of his mission and said,

I have not set out due to discontent, nor out of arrogance, nor as a corruptor; nor as an oppressor. Rather, I wish to call for

reform in the nation of my grandfather. I wish to call for what is good, and to forbid what is evil. [\[309\]](#)

OCCULTATION AND HOPE

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

They desire to put out the light of God with their mouths, but God will perfect His light though the faithless should be averse.

[\[310\]](#).

What is the light that the faithless wished to extinguish but which God perfected despite their attempts?

A companion once asked Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a) about the verse. The Imam (a) replied,

They desire to put out the allegiance of the Commander of the Faithful (a) with their mouths... and God will complete the Imamah. [God] says, 'So have faith in God and His Apostle and the light, which We have sent down.' [\[311\]](#). *The light is the Imam.*

The companion then asked about the next verse, "It is He who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the true religion."[\[312\]](#) The Imam replied, "It is He who commanded His messenger to call for allegiance for his successor, and this allegiance is the true religion."

The companion asked about the continuation of the verse, "It is He who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the true religion that He may make it prevail over all religions."[\[313\]](#) The Imam (a) replied,

He will make it prevail over all religions at with the emergence of Al-Qa'im (a). God says, 'God will perfect His light,' which is allegiance to Al-Qa'im (a), 'though the faithless should be averse' to giving allegiance to Ali (a). [\[314\]](#).

God says, “So have faith in God and His Apostle and the light, which We have sent down.”^[315] Having faith in this ‘light’ is different than having faith in God and His Messenger (s). It is the light of Imammah which God will perfect with the Imam Mahdi (a). There is a supplication by the name of Dua Al-Ahad – the Supplication of the Covenant – which Imam Sadiq (a) tells us,

Whoever supplicates to God with this covenant for forty days will be of the companions of our Al-Qa’im (a). If he were to pass away before [the emergence], God will bring him out of his grave and give him for every word a thousand rewards and erase a thousand sins.

The supplication begins, “O God, Lord of the Great Light and Lord of the Great Throne....” What is the Great Light? It is our Twelfth Holy Imam (a). In another verse of the supplication we read, “O God, I beseech You by Your Noble Name and by the Light of Your Luminous Face.”^[316] It is the light of the Master of our Time (a).

THE LUMINOUS PERSONA

The luminous persona of an Imam or prophet is integral to the issue of miracles. They are individuals of light as described in the Holy Quran. “Is someone whose chest God has opened to Islam so that he follows a light from His Lord...?”^[317] God also says,

Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?^[318]

So what does this luminous personality have to do with the ability to perform miracles? The ability to perform miracles relies on two factors.

Knowledge

The Immaculate prophet or Imam is not a mere vessel for the miracle. Some may say that, for example, the body of Jesus (a) was a vessel through which God cured the leper and revived the dead. Jesus (a) thus did not have much to do with the miracle. This view is mistaken.

The Holy Quran is clear in that the miracles are a product of the individual performing them, and not that they are mere conduits for the miracle. Of course, all human actions are contingent on the will of God. When I walk, the action is my own despite the fact that God is the one who gave me the ability to do so. The same applies to a miracle. It is the action of an Immaculate individual, albeit it is contingent on the will and empowerment of God. God says in the Holy Quran,

And [Jesus the son of Mary will be] an apostle to the Children of Israel [and he will declare], 'I have certainly brought you a sign from your Lord: I will create for you the form of a bird out of clay, then I will breathe into it, and it will become a bird by God's leave. I heal the blind and the leper and I revive the dead by God's leave.'^[319]

Thus the individual who is performing the miracle is not a simple vessel that has no other role in the miracle. Rather, it is an action, like any other, in its contingency on the will and empowerment of God.

The Immaculate individual is thus the actor who is undertaking the task of performing the miracle. As we said, the performance of a miracle relies on two factors. The first is knowledge of secrets and true causes. After all, a miracle is an effect and like all effects it must have a cause. Muslim philosophers also say that this cause must be of the same type as the effect. For example, when we see an apple tree we know it was caused by the planting of an apple seed and not an orange seed. The same applies to miracles; a physical miracle must have a physical cause.

God alluded to this in the verse, "There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure."^[320] Everything in this material world is sent down in a known measure in accordance to the system of cause and effect. God also says, "Celebrate the Name of your Lord, the Most Exalted, who created and proportioned, and who determined and guided."^[321] Everything is apportioned and determined, which includes having a cause. If the thing is material, then its cause is also material. Because the curing of the blind and the leper and the reviving of the dead are material actions, they must have a material cause.

The crux of the matter is that things have true causes and apparent causes. Mankind usually does not fathom the true causes of events but only their apparent causes. The Immaculate individual, on the other hand, knows the secrets of the universe and understands the true causes of events. As such, they can use this knowledge to perform things that are miraculous to the ordinary individual.

Divine Will

Some may say that if knowledge was the only factor affecting miracles, such events would lose their miraculous nature over time as mankind advanced further in science and discovery. Miracles would become relative. Reviving the dead may be a miracle during the time of Jesus (a), but science may one day advance enough to discover the secret of life and revive the dead through technology. The miracle at that point would lose its miraculous nature. What then differentiates a miracle from scientific endeavors?

A miracle requires another factor, which is divine will. Due to the fact that Immaculate individuals are in such proximity to God, the divine will is a factor supporting their miracles. That is the meaning of the narration attributed to Imam Baqir (a), “We do, by His permission, whatever we wish. However, we do not wish anything except what He wishes. Thus, if we will something, so too does God will it.”^[322] Or take, for example, the narration of the Holy Prophet (s) in regards to his daughter Lady Fatima (a), “Surely, *God* is angered for the anger of Fatima (a) and is pleased by her contentment.”^[323] In other words, her will is a reflection of the will of God.

The role of this divine will in the performance of miracles is that it substitutes for the normal system of causes. This is part of what our scholars refer to as *Wilaya Takwiniyya*, or Cosmological Authority, by which God’s closest servants have authority over creation. For example, science may one day advance enough in its understanding of the human genome that doctors can change the genetic makeup of a fetus to cure diseases or change physical attributes. While this would be highly beneficial, it would not be a miracle. Such advancement would rely on the normal course of cause and effect. Scientists must continue to study the topic and conduct experiments before coming to a reliable result.

The Immaculate individual, on the other hand, may substitute divine will for this gradual progression. A miracle reaches a result quickly without the need for experimentation and scientific processes. God says, “All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it ‘Be,’ and it is.”^[324] The will of the Immaculate prophet or Imam is a reflection of the will of God, and can thus be manifested instantaneously.

This is the difference between empirical sciences and the Cosmological Authority of God’s closest servants. This is clearly outlined in the Holy Quran, such as in the verse,

Whoever is wary of God, He shall make for him a way out [of the adversities of the world and the Hereafter] and provide for him from whence he does not count upon. And whoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him.^[325]

In another verse the Quran says “God has ordained: ‘I shall surely prevail, I and My apostles.’”^[326] God also says, “Indeed We shall help Our apostles and those who have faith in the life of the world and on the day when the witnesses rise up.”^[327] God’s aid comes in the form of His divine will. We see that Cosmological Authority and the ability to undertake miracles are based on two factors: divine knowledge and divine will.

THE OCCULTATION

There are a number of questions that can be asked about the occultation of our Twelfth Holy Imam (a).

A Miracle?

Is the occultation of Imam Mahdi (a) a miraculous phenomenon? Or is it a natural phenomenon? We know that his existence is in complete reliance on God’s will and sustenance. God says, “He has written faith into their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him.”^[328] But is his occultation completely miraculous such that he does not need to rely on natural causes for his survival? Is he liable to illness and danger? Or is he completely and miraculously protected from all harm?

The occultation of the Imam (a) is a natural phenomenon. As we discussed in earlier chapters, the Imam’s (a) occultation is not in his person but in his

apparent persona. He lives amongst us. He eats and drinks as we do. He may become ill and be cured. He is amongst us, but we do not recognize his immaculate persona. As one of his Ambassadors is reported to have said, “By God, the master of this matter comes in the season [of Hajj] every year. He sees people and knows them, yet they see him and do not know him.”^[329]

A Divine Plan?

If the occultation is a natural phenomenon, is it due to manmade causes or is it the culmination of a divine plan?

There are two phases to our Imam’s (a) occultation. The minor occultation took place over the span of sixty-nine years (260-329 AH / 873-940 CE). The minor occultation was the result of human choices. When the authorities of the time attacked his home and were intent on killing him, he disappeared in order to evade their oppressive grasp. However, he continued to communicate with his followers through his four Ambassadors.

At the passing of the fourth Ambassador, the major occultation began. This was not just the result of human actions, but the culmination of a divine plan guided by divine will. The Imam (a) could have continued to communicate to the world through a succession of ambassadors. He instead began the major occultation where he did not communicate through any ambassador. This was not a personal choice, but the culmination of a divine plan and the operation of divine will.

The Imam (a) wrote to his fourth and last ambassador,

O, Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Samri, may God increase the rewards of your brothers for the tragedy of your loss as you [will] pass within six days. Organize your affairs and do not appoint someone to take your position after your death. The complete occultation has begun and there will be no emergence until God wills. That will be after a lengthy duration, the hardening of hearts, and the spread of injustice throughout the earth.^[330]

Thus, it is the culmination of a divine plan.

A Role?

Does the Imam (a) play a role during his occultation? Is he like a prisoner that is simply waiting for his release? Or does he play a role which we are unaware of?

The Imam (a) plays a critical role during the occultation as he prepares the world for his emergence. We discussed in a previous chapter the role of the Muslim nation during the occultation. We said that the concept of ‘awaiting his appearance’ means that we must prepare the world for that day. He is also engaged in the process of preparing the earth for that day.

A MANIFESTATION OF COMPASSION

Theologians say that God is compassionate with his creations. This means that He would doubtlessly bring mankind closer to His service and away from sin. Because guidance is a form of compassion, God would surely select the best of individuals to lead mankind as prophets and Imams. Some people may ask, ‘Why does God not allow the Imam (a) to live amongst us openly, in the same way that Noah (a) lived amongst his people for a thousand years? People would come to know him and believe in his message. If God can protect him while he is in occultation, God can also protect him if he lives openly amongst us. So what is the point behind the occultation?’

A Disputation

The argument presented above can be taken to its next logical conclusion. Namely, if God can make an individual to live for thousands of years while protecting him from the dangers and treachery of deviant forces and oppressive regimes, why did He not do so for our Holy Prophet Muhammad (s)?

God’s wisdom has dictated that religion should spread and take hold within humanity through natural means and not through a supernatural imposition on mankind. Faith is a spiritual state which cannot be reached except through personal conviction and choice. If a belief system was imposed on an individual, he would not fully believe in it.

Divine wisdom has dictated that religion should not spread through supernatural means. Instead, it should come through a process of conflict between good and evil and between right and wrong. Only then would

people be able to see both side and choose faith over evil and oppression by their own conviction. Otherwise, people would not come to fully believe in a creed that was imposed on them. God says in the Holy Quran, “Had your Lord wished, all those who are on earth would have believed. Would you then force people until they become faithful?”^[331] In another verse God says, “There is no compulsion in religion: rectitude has become distinct from error.”^[332]

God’s wisdom dictated that the Imam (a) should be hidden from the people during a time of occultation. If the Imam (a) were allowed to live openly amongst us without aging and with absolute protection from all harm, that would advance his cause through miraculous means and not through the natural causes explained above. If God were to support the Imam (a) in this way, people would not react with his movement and would not come to true faith. There needed to be a struggle just like the struggle of any other prophet or Imam. God says,

Do you suppose that you will enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of [what befell] those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, ‘When will God’s help [come]?’^[333]

God Almighty also says, “So that he who perishes might perish by a manifest proof, and he who lives may live on by a manifest proof.”^[334]

Divine Wisdom

There is wisdom behind the occultation which our Twelfth Imam (a) hinted to. He said in a signed letter,

As for the reason behind the occultation, God says ‘O you who have faith! Do not ask about things, which, if they are disclosed to you, will upset you.’^[335] *Surely, each of my forefathers had carried on his shoulders an oath to the tyrant of his time. I will emerge whenever I emerge without an oath to any tyrant on my shoulders.*^[336]

His role is different than the roles of his forefathers. The Imams (a) before him were tasked with the duty of clarifying the teachings of the faith and

educating the believers as a means of preparing for both the occultation and the emergence. It was their role to endure having to swear their oaths to the tyrants under duress and coercion. As for the Twelfth Imam (a) whose role is to establish a government of justice and equity, he could not be hindered with such an oath.

In other words, the role of the first eleven Imams (a) was to prepare for the state of justice and equity that Imam Mahdi (a) would establish.

As for our Awaited Imam (a), his role is to establish the state of justice and equity and to abolish injustice and inequity. He cannot be hindered by an oath to a tyrant or oppressor.

Practical Benefits

Some may say that the occultation is an ill and misfortune that has struck the nation without any apparent benefits. The occultation allowed for competing factions that have clashed throughout history. During the occultation many people have turned away from faith. So it is a misfortune and not an overall good.

Again, this argument can be applied to the period of time between Jesus (a) and our Holy Prophet (s). In that period, people split into warring factions and many turned away from faith. In fact, this can be said about any period of time between successive prophets.

The occultation is a test for us. It is a trial by which the perseverant and firm in faith are distinguished from others. A companion once asked Imam Baqir (a) when the day of relief – the day of Imam Mahdi’s (a) emergence – would be. The Imam (s) is reported to have replied, “Woe! Woe! The relief will not be until you are winnowed, then winnowed, then winnowed again until God Almighty removes the tainted and retains the pure.”^[337]

It is also reported that Imam Askari (a) said,

Surely, my son is [the Awaited One (a)] after me. He will bear the traditions of the prophets in long life and occultation. Hearts will harden due to his prolonged period. No one will remain steadfast in his belief in [the occultation] except those whom God has written faith in their hearts and supported them with a spirit from Him.^[338]

The occultation is a trial for us and a test of our faith and perseverance. This outlook is not one of despair or pessimism. Rather, it inspires hope as we look forward toward the state of justice and equity and are proactive in preparing for it.

HOPE AND DESPAIR

Pessimism and despair have become widespread social ills. They grow out of a number of reasons. Many people grow up and live in a generally pessimistic environment. A person growing up within a pessimistic family will likely take on the dangerous tradition of pessimism. And when many youth are asked about their approach to life, they say that it is trial and error. They try to experience things and decide afterwards whether it was a good or bad experience. The approach itself is dangerous as it leads to the accumulation of bad experiences and ultimately to pessimism.

An individual should always be proactive and thoughtful in approaching life. He should plan and seek advice whenever he embarks on any important life decision. It is narrated that the Holy Prophet (s) once said, “I advise you to, should you undertake any matter, to reflect on its outcome. If it be good, continue forward. If it be ill, do not undertake it.”^[339]

So how can we solve the problem of pessimism?

First, a spiritual environment goes a long way in solving the problem. The environment of the mosque, where prayers, supplications, and worships are regularly established, fosters hope and a sense of community. God says, “Behold! The hearts find rest in God’s remembrance!”^[340]

Second, choosing the right friends and companions is a key to leading a successful life. A successful friend with the right attitude will help the individual be more hopeful and ultimately reach success.

Third, we need to ensure that our general culture is one of hope and optimism. In our gatherings and at our mosques, our attitude as a community needs to be positive in order for us to foster a positive and proactive youth. Such an attitude will allow each individual within the community to continue to persevere despite hardship and adversity. This is what we learn from the stances of our Immaculate Imams (a), especially the stance of Imam Hussain (a) in Karbala. The tragedy of Karbala is a stance

for the principles and values by which we live and continue to persevere towards a brighter future.

THE BANNER OF HUSSAIN

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

The word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice. Nothing can change His words, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing. ^[341]

‘Word’ is used in the Holy Quran to indicate two different meanings. In some instances, it is used to indicate a truthful statement. For example, God says in one verse, “Your Lord’s word has become due upon them.”^[342] This verse is itself a reference to a promise God made to Satan in another verse – “I will surely fill hell with you and all those who follow you.”^[343]

‘Word’ could also refer to existence as a reflection of God’s attributes. So for example, the existence of the Holy Prophet (s) is a reflection of God’s divine attributes, and thus the Holy Prophet (s) may be referred to as a ‘Word.’ That is why God says in the Holy Quran,

O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, distinguished in the world and the Hereafter and one of those brought near [to God]. ^[344]

The Holy Quran described Jesus as a ‘Word’ because he was a reflection of God’s divine attributes. “Indeed the case of Jesus with God is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was.”^[345] God also says, “If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the words of my Lord are finished, though We replenish it with another like it.”^[346] The words referred to in this verse are the instances of existence that reflect the divine attributes of God. The Holy Quran also says, “Then Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned to

him clemently. Indeed He is the All-clement, the All-merciful.”^[347] Our noble traditions mention that the ‘Words’ which Adam received were the lights circling around the Throne. He asked about these lights and he was told that these are the lights of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Immaculate Household (a).^[348] We also read in our supplications, “God created you as lights and made you to encircle His throne.”^[349]

As for the verse we began this chapter with – “The word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice”^[350] – ‘word’ in this context holds the second meaning we described. The reasoning for this lies in the verse itself. God describes the word as one of justice, and justice is a description of an outside existence more than mere words and speech. The word described in the verse is an existence that reflects the divine attributes of God. However, what specific existence is referred to in this verse?

In one tradition Imam Sadiq (a) describes this verse as a reference to the Twelfth Awaited Imam (a). The verse was inscribed on the forehead of the Imam (a) when he was born and he will be the fulfillment of this promise. Thus, there was luminous existence that began with the Holy Prophet (s) and which will be completed and fulfilled by Imam Mahdi (a). Of course, this Word of God has different aspects in which it is fulfilled. From a theoretical and legislative standpoint, this Word was fulfilled during the time of the Holy Prophet (s). God says, “Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.”^[351] But fulfillment on a practical level “in truth and justice” has not yet taken place. So when is the day that this practical fulfillment will occur?

That is the fulfillment of the divine promise that will come with the emergence of our Awaited Imam (a). The Holy Prophet (s) describes that day and says,

If there was naught left in the world but one day, God would extend that day until a man of my progeny emerges to fill the earth with justice and equity after it has been filled with injustice and inequity.^[352]

That is why we read in the supplication in the month of Shaban,

O God for the sake of this night and for the sake of the one who was born tonight, Your proof and [this night's] promise that You have joined with increased favor. Thus Your word has been fulfilled with truth and justice; surely there is no changing Your word. ^[353]

We also read in the supplication following the visitation of Aal Yaseen,

O God, send you blessings upon Muhammad, Your proof in Your earth, Your vicegerent over Your land, the caller unto Your path, the administrator of Your justice, the insurgent by Your command, the master of the believers and the perdition of the disbelievers, the eliminator of darkness and the illuminator of right, the speaker of wisdom and truth, and Your fulfilled word on Your earth. ^[354]

The blessed verse – “The word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice” – refers to the emergence of the Awaited Imam (a) who will fulfill Islam’s complete application “in truth and justice” on the Earth. God says in continuation of the verse, “Nothing can change His words, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.” ^[355]

This word began with the Holy Prophet (s) and will be fulfilled by the Awaited Imam (a). It is narrated that Imam Ali (a) once asked the Holy Prophet (s), “Is the Mahdi one of us [the Holy Household] or of another?” The Holy Prophet (s) replied, “He is of us. God will conclude with us just as He began with us.” ^[356] In another narration, Imam Ali (a) told his companion Kumail ibn Ziyad, “O Kumail, there is no knowledge except that I begin and there is no secret except that Al-Qa’im (a) will seal.” ^[357]

This luminous existence of the Holy Household is one and indivisible. A comparison between any two of our Immaculate Imams (a) will yield nothing but similarity in purpose, thought, and action. In this chapter, we will discuss specifically the similarities between Imam Hussain (a) and our Awaited Imam (a).

THE PURPOSE

To analyze any phenomenon, whether natural or social, one must go back to its root causes. When studying natural phenomena, we look at physical cause and effect. When studying social phenomena, we look more towards purpose and motivations.

So for example, if we were to study the phenomena of floods and hurricanes we would have to look at the natural causes of such catastrophes, including global warming and climate change.

When it comes to social phenomena, we need to look at purpose and motivation. For example, why do millions of individuals walk towards the tomb of Imam Hussain (a) during the season of *Arbaeen*? The cause of this is clear for anyone who would look with an analytical and objective view. The purpose of these crowds walking towards Imam Hussain (a) is to revive the memory of the Household of the Holy Prophet (s). In one narration Imam Sadiq (a) asked his companion Fudail, “Do you gather and narrate?” Fudail replied in the affirmative. The Imam (a) said,

I love those gatherings. Revive our matter, O Fudail – may God have mercy on those who revive our matter. O Fudail, whoever remembers us and sheds [a tear the size of a] fly’s wing, God will forgive his sins even if they were more than the spume of the sea. ^[358]

It is also narrated that Imam Rida (a) said,

Whoever remembers our tragedy and cries for what befell us shall be with us on our level on the Day of Judgment. Whoever reminds [others] of our tragedy, crying and making others cry, his eyes will not cry on the day when all eyes cry. Whoever attends a gathering where our memory is revived, his heart will not die on the day when all hearts die. ^[359]

Revolution is a social phenomenon which must be analyzed in depth. Revolutions are of two types, proactive and reactive. A reactive revolution occurs as a result of accumulating pressures that lead to an explosive social environment. For example, Marxist thought emphasizes that when class

struggle reaches a tipping point, the proletariat will revolt against the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of proactive revolutions – ones that are not the result of emotion and groupthink, but of carefully planning and clear goals.

Imam Hussain's revolution was a proactive movement following a conscious and well-studied plan. This can be seen in two key aspects of the movement.

First, Imam Hussain (a) did not impose a revolution on his followers but allowed them their free choice throughout. He was not like the Umayyad general Tariq ibn Ziyad who during his conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, "O my warriors, whither would you flee? Behind you is the sea, before you, the enemy. By God, you have left now only the hope of your resolve and your patience."^[360] The Umayyad army's movement at that time was reactionary, based on nothing but necessity and a need for food and shelter.

On the other hand, Imam Hussain (a) told his companions,

I don't know of any companions better than my companions, nor a family more pure and rooted than my own. May God reward you on my behalf. I see that the day the enemy will transgress against us is tomorrow. I give you leave to take off in the night, there is no blame or fault on you if you leave. The night has shrouded you, so ride into the night. Let each one of you take a member of my household [as a guardian] and disperse in the lands and cities. May God reward you all. These people ask for me, not for you... and if they get to me they will be too preoccupied to go after anyone else.^[361]

Imam Hussain (a) wanted his companions to participate in the revolution out of their own choice and resolve. The revolution must stem from their conviction and aspiration, as well as their faith in the plan laid down by the Holy Household.

Second, the motivation for the revolution was not simply a refusal to pledge allegiance to Yazid. That is an important part of it, as Imam Hussain (a) had declared,

Governor! We are the household of the Prophet (s), the core of the message, and the harbor of Angels. By us, God has introduced His message, and to us He will return it. Yazid is a deviant, a miscreant, a drunkard, and a murderer. He has publically professed his deviance and impiety. Someone like me will never give homage to the likes of him.^[362]

But that is not the sole and driving reason for revolution. Neither were the letters of the Kufans who declared, “The fruits have ripened. The pastures have greened. The rivers have swollen. [The time has come and you will find] armies mustered at your command.”^[363] If that were the case, then his revolution would have been reactionary and a result of public sentiment rather than the conscious and well-studied plan we know it to be.

Of course, the Imam’s (a) actions were influenced by the circumstances of his time. But the driving purpose behind his revolution and his every action is his divinely given role as the guardian of Islam. As he wrote to his half-brother Muhammad ibn Al-Hanafiyya,

I do not set out due to discontent, nor out of arrogance. I do not rise as a corruptor, nor as an oppressor. Rather, I wish to call for reform in the nation of my grandfather. I wish to call for what is good, and to forbid what is evil.^[364]

Imam Hussain’s (a) revolution was not simply a military movement – otherwise it would have clearly been a defeat. Rather, his movement was a spiritual one aiming to awaken the Muslim nation from its deep slumber and veer it off the course of deviance that it had taken. Through his revolution he was able to achieve this noble goal. A single look at history will show that the massacre at Karbala became a cause of numerous revolutions that shook the Umayyad throne – the Repenters’ Revolt, the rebellion of Medina, the Revolt of Mukhtar, the Revolt of Zayd, and numerous others.

The same is true of the revolution of our Awaited Imam (a) – it is above all a spiritual revolution. The Holy Prophet (s) said,

If there was naught left in the world but one day, God would extend that day until a man of my progeny emerges to fill the

earth with justice and equity after it has been filled with injustice and inequity.^[365]

Imam Mahdi (a) is not described as filling the earth with soldiers or arms. Rather, his purpose is to fill the earth with justice and equity. It is the same purpose as that of his forefather Imam Hussain (a) who set out to call for reform in the nation of his grandfather the Holy Prophet (s). They are movements to call for what is good and to forbid what is evil.

THE GOAL

The goals of the two revolutions are one. It is the same goal as all other prophets and messengers. God says in the Holy Quran, “Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice.”^[366] Mankind is meant to establish justice on earth. This relies on two main factors.

First, the economic factor which is addressed in the Holy Quran. “Do not give the feeble-minded your property, which God has assigned you to manage.”^[367] This verse means that wealth is sustenance for you and your communities and is a primary pillar in the establishment of civilization.

Second, the legal factor which sets the framework for the establishment of justice. There must be a framework for enforcement of just laws and a just allocation of wealth.

The goal of the divine messages is to establish a just and prosperous civilization. That was the goal of Imam Hussain (a) as he set out from Medina. That is also the goal of our Twelfth Imam (a).

In one narration, Imam Rida (a) is reported to have said,

If you were to cry for anything then cry for Hussain ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (a). He was slaughtered along with eighteen men of his family unlike anyone else on earth. The seven heavens and the earth cried for his murder. Four thousand angels came down to earth to support him but were not given permission, so they remain dusty and unkempt until the emergence of Al-Qa'im (a).

Their rallying cry will be, 'Revenge for Hussain (a).' ^[368]

Reprisal for Imam Hussain (a) is not a personal vendetta, or vengeful or bloody retribution. Imam Hussain (a) did not revolt for a personal, tribal, or sectarian purpose. Rather, the reprisal of Imam Hussain (a) is the reprisal of God. The texts have repeatedly said this, including in the visitation of Imam Hussain (a) when we read, “Peace be upon you O reprisal of God and the son of His reprisal.”^[369] Imam Hussain (a) led a movement to call for what is right and forbid what is wrong – a Quranic mission as outlined by the verse, “There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good,

bidding what is right, and forbidding what is wrong.”^[370] This is the divine mission for which reprisal is sought. It is not a personal, tribal, or sectarian vendetta. It is a continuation of his movement for which he expended himself and all that he held dear.

THE BASE

The revolutions of Imam Hussain (a) and Imam Mahdi (a) are the same when it comes to their support as well. Each revolution requires a class of individuals to believe in the revolution and its purpose and to pursue its goals with conviction. This group of individuals is the backbone of the revolution. God refers to such individuals when speaking of His Prophets,

How many a Prophet there has been with whom a multitude of godly men fought. They did not falter for what befell them in the way of God, neither did they weaken, nor did they abase themselves; and God loves the steadfast.^[371]

God also says,

Do you suppose that you will enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of [what befell] those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, 'When will God's help [come]?' Behold! God's help is indeed near!^[372]

The Quran also spoke of the elite group of individuals that were alongside our Holy Prophet (s), like Imam Ali (a), Miqdad, Ammar, and Abu Thar. It says “Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves.”^[373] For every movement there is a base of supporters who follow through with conviction and are resolute on their path.

As for the base that supported Imam Hussain (a), he himself said of them, “I don't know of any companions better than my companions, nor a family more pure and rooted than my own.”^[374] As for the group of individuals that will form the basis of support for Imam Mahdi (a), it is narrated that the Holy Prophet (s) once said, “O God, allow me to meet my brethren!” His companions were puzzled and asked, “Are we not your brethren?” The Holy Prophet (s) replied,

No. You are my companions. My brethren are a people at the end of times who believed me without seeing me. God has

taught me their names and the names of their fathers before He will extract them from the loins of their fathers and the wombs of their mothers. Each of them is most protective of his faith... and will be like one clasping a burning ember. They are the lanterns of the night. God will save them of every dark and murky sedition. [\[375\]](#).

This is the base that Imam Sajjad (a) described in another narration saying,

Surely, the people of the era of his [i.e. Imam Mahdi (a)] occultation who believe in his Immaculate Leadership and who wait his appearance are better than the people of any other era. That is because God, the Most Blessed and High, gave them the intellect, comprehension, and knowledge that allowed them to see occultation at the level of presence. He made them at that era at the status of those who struggled at war alongside the Messenger of God (s). Those are the real devotees, our true Shia, and the callers unto God's religion in public and in privacy. [\[376\]](#).

These are clearly the individuals described in the verse,

Among the faithful are men who fulfill what they have pledged to God: there are some among them who have fulfilled their pledge, and some of them who still wait, and they have not changed in the least. [\[377\]](#).

Those who have fulfilled their pledge are the companions of Badr and Karbala. Those who still wait are the companions of Imam Mahdi (a).

Let us think about the statement, "Those who fulfilled their pledge." Each individual expends his power and effort in pursuit of some goal. Many do it in pursuit of a worldly goal without thinking of reciting the Quran or the supplications. These people will be the most regretful when we they pass to the next world. The Commander of the Faithful (a) attempted to remind the people of this truth when he stood in one market and said,

O slaves of this world and servants of its people! If you are engaged in trade during the day, asleep in your beds at night,

and are heedless of the hereafter throughout, when will you prepare your provisions of think of the resurrection?^[378]

There are others who expend their energies and efforts in truth, both in words and in action. They are the application of the blessed verse, “Among the faithful are men who fulfill what they have pledged to God: there are some among them who have fulfilled their pledge, and some of them who still wait.” They were perseverant in their path of truth, “they have not changed in the least.”^[379]

How can we truly be of the true believers who are waiting for the emergence of our Awaited Imam (a)? Waiting involves preparing the earth for his emergence through enjoining good and forbidding evil. Waiting is not simply speech or by attending lectures and reading books. We cannot simply do these things and say we are waiting while we are consumed with our worldly lives. We must actively work towards preparing the world for his emergence. We must support charitable organizations and religious institutions that serve individuals and build towards our Awaited Imam’s (a) emergence.

And amongst the instances of preparing the world for his emergence is through reviving the day of *Ashura*. The night of *Ashura* is not simply for weeping and commemoration. It is a night of worship and seeking closeness to God. We must extend the night with worship much like Imam Hussain (a) during his last hours.

GUIDANCE

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse. ^[380]

The verse contains a divine promise that the religion of Islam will one day prevail over the entire earth. This promise has yet to be fulfilled. Since God will never renege on a promise, this promised day will surely come in the future. This will be the day of the reemergence of our Awaited Imam (a). It is reported that Imam Sadiq (a) once said when asked about this verse, “By God, its interpretation has not yet been revealed and will not be revealed until the reemergence of Al-Qa’im (a).”^[381]

When reading this verse, one wonders what is meant by “guidance and the religion of truth.” Is guidance not the same as the religion of truth? Why does God make a distinction between the two?

The religion of truth is the set of beliefs that are adopted by the believers. Guidance, on the other hand, is the connection between this set of beliefs and willpower. An individual might adopt the set of beliefs that comprise the true religion, but there may be a disparity between these beliefs and his will and conviction. Many times, we believe in certain principles yet still act against them.

For example, an individual that engages in theft does so knowing that it is a reprehensible crime. He knows that theft is bad and would be outraged if something of his was stolen. His actions and willpower are at odds with his beliefs. He may have the true religion but lacks that link between adopting a creed and applying it. This link is what is meant by ‘guidance.’ Guidance is

the link between our held beliefs and our willpower to act in accordance with those beliefs.

STAGES OF GUIDANCE

Guidance can be classified into two types – creational and spiritual. Every creature received the first type of guidance. God says in the Holy Quran, “Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.”^[382] Every creature is guided towards its goal and purpose. A seed is guided towards becoming a tree. A beast is guided to find food and protect itself from predators. The sun and moon are guided on their orbits. “Neither it behooves the sun to overtake the moon, nor may the night outrun the day, and each swims in an orbit.”^[383] Each is guided on its own path. That is what we mean by creational guidance.

Spiritual guidance, which is exclusive to mankind, can also be categorized into two types. The first is the guidance that every individual deserves at birth. This is called mankind’s innate nature. God says, “Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.”^[384] God also says, “So set your heart as a person of pure faith on this religion, the original nature endowed by God according to which He originated mankind.”^[385] Every individual deserves at birth to be guided toward his Lord. This is a general type of guidance for all of mankind and without it humanity would have no purpose. God Almighty says, “O man! You are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him.”^[386]

The other type of spiritual guidance is a preferential one with which God endows on some of the believers. This type of spiritual guidance can be divided into three types.

Opening the Heart

The Holy Quran refers to this type of guidance and says,

Is someone whose breast God has opened to Islam so that he follows a light from His Lord...? So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of God.^[387]

Opening refers to the softening of the heart, as opposed to its hardening. God says, God has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture [composed] of similar motifs, whereat shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and hearts

relax at God's remembrance. That is God's guidance, by which He guides whomever He wishes. [388]

If a person wants to test himself to see whether he attained this level or not, let him simply be mindful of himself when reading a supplication. If he enjoys reading the supplication and derives meaning and lessons from it, his heart is open and receptive to God's guidance. However, if he finds himself unreactive to the supplication, then his heart is hard and unwelcoming to God's guidance. God says, "Then your hearts hardened after that; so they are like stones, or even harder. For there are some stones from which streams gush forth..." [389]

Rectitude

God Almighty says, "We chose them and guided them to a straight path." [390]

When we read the Holy Quran, we sometimes see that the verses seem to be conflicting when taken at face value. God says, "As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways, and God is indeed with the virtuous." [391] This verse explicitly states that there are "ways" to which God will guide, and not just one way.

But we also read in another verse, "Say, 'This is my way. I summon to God with insight – I and he who follows me.'" [392] In another verse "Whoever defies the Apostle, after the guidance has become manifest to him, and follows a way other than that of the faithful, We shall abandon him to his devices." [393] These verses also seem to state that there is only one "way" to which God will guide.

So how do we reconcile between these verses?

This is a point that mystics address as follows. An individual may think at the outset that there are multiple paths to God. As he journeys on this road, however, he begins to discover that the path to God is one. For example, an individual who looks at the Abrahamic faiths may at first glance think that they are three different creeds. In reality, however, they are one.

The creed of Prophet Abraham (a) was that of submission to God – "When his Lord said to him, 'Submit,' he said, 'I submit to the Lord of all the worlds.'" [394] Abraham also said, "Our Lord, make us submissive to You,

and [raise] from our progeny a nation submissive to You.”^[395] Judaism and Christianity also share this common creed of submission before God. The Holy Quran says, “Should anyone follow a creed other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him.”^[396] In another verse we read, “Indeed, with God creed is Islam.”^[397]

This “Islam” is the shared creed of the Abrahamic religions. The name of our religion – Islam – is derived from the Arabic root that is ‘to submit.’ So the Abrahamic faiths share this creed. The difference between them lies in their prescribed laws. God says,

He has prescribed for you the creed which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [also] revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, ‘Maintain the creed, and do not be divided in it.’^[398]

In another verse God says, “For each [community] among you We had appointed a code [of law] and a path.”^[399] The difference is not in creed but in the code of law which prescribes practical rules and the rituals of worship.

If a person looks at a single religion at face value, he may also think that there are multiple paths within a single religion. Prayer is a path, fasting is another, and paying alms is a third. But in reality this is only one path towards seeking proximity to God. God says in the Holy Quran, “Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation – those who are reverent in their prayers.”^[400] Reverence – or *Khushu’* – is a single concept and attitude towards worship. It cuts across prayers, fasting, and all other rituals. So the many acts of worship are in fact a single path of reverence in the service of God. The Holy Prophet (s) once saw a man fiddling with his beard during prayer and said, “[.]”^[401] So reverence is a state of mind and heart which must be present during all worship.

Certitude

If a person continues on the path of guidance, he will reach a status where he can see the reality of his actions in this world. This is the level of certitude that will allow him to see reality in its entirety, including what most do not see and recognize.

We read in one of the whispered prayers of Imam Sajjad (a), “My God, conceal my sins with the clouds of your mercy and send over my faults the rainclouds of your clemency.”^[402] Why does the Imam (a) use this figurative language? It is because he has reached a level of certitude that allows him to see sin as a piece of hellfire. His certainty allows him to feel that fire. He asks for rainclouds that would put out the flame of sin.

The third stage of spiritual guidance is this level of certainty that allows an individual to see reality.

God says “Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude.”^[403] In another verse God says “Indeed, were you to know with certain knowledge, you would have surely seen hell [in this very life].”^[404] In other words, if you believed with certainty you would see the truth of your actions. You would see hellfire manifested in any sin – in lying, in backbiting, and in any wrongdoing. God says in another verse “Rather, their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning. Indeed, they will be alienated from their Lord on that day.”^[405] Sins have sullied our hearts such that we cannot see the reality of our actions.

The Holy Quran says, “We made them Imams, guiding by Our command.”^[406] Every Imam appointed by God and given the command to guide can lead you through these three stages of guidance. Every individual is able to access this guidance through the Imams. Some individuals may only be able to attain the first level of an open heart. Others may reach the level of rectitude.

There are some who are able to follow the guidance of the Imams and reach the level of certitude. These include Kumail ibn Ziyad who was guided by Imam Ali (a) to the level of certitude that allowed him to see the reality of this world.

The Imam is the conduit of God’s guidance. God is the ultimate source of all guidance and blessings, but He has chosen to appoint conduits of his guidance and blessings such as our Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) and the Immaculate Imams (a) from his Purified Household.

GOD'S GUIDANCE

The Holy Quran attributes guidance to God, but also attributes “leading astray” to Him. The Holy Quran says “Whomever God guides is rightly guided, and whomever He leads astray—it is they who are the losers.”^[407] Another verse states “Whomever God leads astray, has no guide.”^[408] Yet another verse states

Whomever God desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam, and whomever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and straitened as if he were climbing to a height.^[409]

If it is God who leads astray, what fault do we have if we sin and why should we be punished? How can we ascribe ‘leading astray’ to God in the first place?

There are two answers to these questions.

First, what is meant by guidance is the opening the heart as described above. ‘Leading astray’ is the withholding of this blessing once an individual becomes stubbornly attached to sin and wrongdoing. God says “So when they swerved [from the right path], God made their hearts swerve.”^[410] In another verse He says “Indeed God does not change a people’s lot unless they change what is in themselves.”^[411] The meaning of “leading astray” is withholding the blessing of guidance and not an act of misguidance.

Second, philosophers say that every action or thing has an abstraction. This abstraction itself is a form of creation. So who creates this abstraction? God says “Is there any creator other than God?”^[412]

If I want to do a good deed like prayer, I imagine the abstract thought of praying. This abstraction is a creation of God. The same goes for a misdeed – a person first imagines it abstractly and that abstraction is a creation of God. Accordingly, God is the creator of these abstractions whether good or bad – guidance or misguidance.

Philosophers also say that every act of creation requires both a creator and a contingency. If I were to write a poem, for example, the contingencies must

be ready if the poem is to be created. There needs to be a pen and paper to take my poem and manifest it in reality.

The same could be applied to guidance and leading astray. God is the source and creator, but the contingency is the will of the individual. If the individual is willing to receive guidance, he will be guided by God. However, if the individual only wishes to stray from the path, then God will create the abstractions of misguidance in his mind. That is why the Holy Quran says, “So when they swerved [from the right path], God made their hearts swerve.”^[413] God also says,

Whoever desires this transitory life, We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whomever We desire. Then We appoint hell for him, to enter it, blameful and spurned. Whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with an endeavor worthy of it, should he be faithful, the endeavor of such will be well-appreciated. To these and to those – to all We extend the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined.^[414]

This is the reason behind the attribution of ‘leading astray’ to God. The granting of the blessing of guidance or withholding that blessing is ultimately contingent on each individual’s will and choices, there is no issue with God ultimately punishing those who chose to sin and continue in their wrongdoings.

THE MAHDI AND GUIDANCE

Why the Title 'al-Mahdi'?

Why is the name 'al-Mahdi' – or the Guided One – given to our Twelfth Imam (a) particularly when all of our Imams (a) were guided? This is a question that can be asked about all of our Imams. Why was our Sixth Imam (a) named 'al-Sadiq' – the Truthful – when all of our Imams (a) were obviously truthful? Why is Imam Hussain (a) given the honorific title 'al-Shaheed' – the Martyr – when all of the Imams (a) were martyrs? Let us discuss the honorable names given to our Imams (a) by each other. We will leave out from the discussion titles historically given to the Imams (a) by others – such as 'al-Askari,' or the prisoner of the barracks, which was given to our Eleventh Imam (a).

Each Imam is given a title that denotes the most important role that he would play – as known by God before the time of creation. Each of our Imams (a) played a different role during his lifetime based on his particular circumstances. Accordingly, each Imam (a) was given an honorific title that best suited his role during those circumstances.

For example, Imam Hussain (a) played an important role during a time when the Muslim nation was overtaken by deviance and lethargy. There needed to be a movement that would wake the nation from its slumber and remind it of its purpose and potential. Thus, Imam Hussain (a) needed to undertake that movement during the time of Yazid. His movement eventually led to his tragic martyrdom along with his closest kin and companions. Because his circumstances compelled him to play this role, he was given the title of 'al-Shaheed' – the Martyr.

During the time of Imam Sadiq (a), many schools of thought began to appear, each claiming that they have the true understanding of the faith. There were individuals who claimed scholarship in jurisprudence and began to issue rulings. There were different philosophies beginning to spread in regards to theology. These schools of thought were not based on divine knowledge, but on reason, deduction, and opinion. They were liable to make mistakes – and many in fact did. The only school of thought not liable

to err was that of our Imam (a). For his role in spreading the true teachings of our faith he was given the honorific title ‘al-Sadiq’ – the Truthful.

Imam Sadiq (a) would declare to his students,

My speech is the speech of my father [Imam Baqir (a)]. The speech of my father is the speech of my grandfather [Imam Sajjad (a)]. The speech of my grandfather is the speech of Hussain (a). The speech of Hussain (a) is the speech of Hassan (a). The speech of Hassan (a) is the speech of the Commander of the Faithful (a). The speech of the Commander of the Faithful (a) is the speech of the Messenger of God (s). The speech of the Messenger of God (s) is the word of God. ^[415]

In other words, the school of thought of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a) is not based on deduction and reasoning, and therefore it could be liable to error. Rather, it is based on knowledge inherited through the generations directly from the Holy Prophet (s), who had been entrusted with this knowledge by God.

So why was our Twelfth Imam (a) given the name ‘al-Mahdi’ – the Guided one?

Although all of his forefathers were engaged in guidance, his role is to bring guidance to the entire world. It is narrated that Imam Baqir (a) said, “The Mahdi (a) is called the Guided One because he Guides to a hidden matter.”^[416] There is something that people do not know and to which they will be guided at his reemergence – namely, the interpretation of the Holy Quran and the stature of the Household of the Prophet (s).

Evident Truth

In one narration, Imam Sadiq (a) described to a close companion the era of the occultation. The Imam (a) described the length of that period and the many deviant paths that will rise during that time. When the companion heard all this, he began to cry. The Imam (a) asked him “Why do you cry?” The companion answered that he could not hold his tears when he heard about the spread of turmoil and deviance.

Upon hearing this, the Imam (a) pointed to a window through which sunlight entered the room. He asked “Is this [sun] apparent?” The

companion replied in the affirmative. The Imam (a) then declared “Our matter is more evident than this sun.”^[417]

At the reemergence of our Twelfth Imam (a), the truth will be as clear as the sun. Through this evident truth, the Imam (a) will fill the earth with justice and equity after it was filled with injustice and inequity.

INTELLECT AND PATIENCE

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

God has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors, and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me.^[418]

This verse promises the believers that they will be made ‘successors’ to the earth and that their religion will be established across the land. This promise has yet to be fulfilled. However, God’s promise must surely be fulfilled. So when is the promised day? It is none other than the day of our Awaited Imam (a). Per Imam Sadiq (a) “[This verse] was revealed with respect to Al-Qa’im (a) and his companions.”^[419]

There are a number of other similar verses in the Holy Quran, each with an explanation in the blessed traditions. For example, God says,

They say, ‘When will this victory be, if you are truthful?’ Say, ‘On the day of victory their [newly found] faith will not avail the faithless, nor will they be granted any respite.’ So turn away from them, and wait. They too are waiting.^[420]

It is reported that Imam Sadiq (a) said with respect to this verse “The day of victory is the day in which the land will be open before Al-Qa’im (a).”^[421]

In another verse God says,

Do they not consider that the angels may come to them, or your Lord may come, or some of your Lord’s signs may come? The

day when some of your Lord's signs do come, faith shall not benefit any soul that had not believed beforehand and had not earned some goodness in its faith. Say, 'Wait! We too are waiting!'^[422]

According to a narration of Imam Sadiq (a), he said “The signs are the Imams and the awaited sign is Al-Qa'im (a).”^[423]

AN INTELLECTUAL VICTORY

Many may think that the era of the reemergence of Imam Mahdi (a) is an era of military triumph. God promises that the religion of Islam will be established on every corner of the earth and made to prevail over all other religions. Many people jump to the conclusion that this is a promise of military victory and that the religion will be spread by force. However, this explanation is incompatible with our understanding of this promised day.

For example, God says in the Holy Quran “It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse.”^[424] Some conclude that this is a reference to an armed struggle since the religion will be made to prevail despite the aversion of some. In other words, they will not be convinced of the faith but will be compelled to accept it. The common conclusion is that the verse is referring to a military triumph.

This, however, is incompatible with the religion of Islam. No sound conclusion is pushed by brute force unless the idea itself is weak and unable to prove its own validity. But since Islam is the religion of truth, it does not need to rely on force in order to spread. Islam is the complete religion – “Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.”^[425] It is the religion of mankind’s innate nature – “So set your heart as a person of pure faith on this religion, the original nature endowed by God according to which He originated mankind.”^[426] There is no need for Islam to be spread by force, since it is the complete religion and coincides with mankind’s innate nature.

The Incompatibility of Faith and Compulsion

Religion in general cannot be spread by the sword.

First, faith and conviction are not things that can be forced upon an individual. It is a matter very personal to each individual. Its place is within the heart and the mind, and thus cannot be imposed by force. Rituals like prayer and Hajj only give an appearance of faith. True faith is a conviction of the heart and runs much deeper than the appearance of devotion.

Hearts and minds cannot be controlled by brute force. They are the only truly free place on earth. An individual's thoughts, emotions, and convictions cannot be controlled. That is why the commander of the faithful is reported to have said,

If I were to strike a believers face with this sword of mine so that he may hate me, he would not. If I were to grant the world and all its riches to a hypocrite so that he may love me, he would not. ^[427]

It is impossible to control the heart of an individual. Therefore, it is impossible to spread conviction in the faith through force.

When the Commander of the Faithful (a) was martyred, Muawiya began dealing with the followers of Imam Ali (a) one by one. He murdered some, bought off others, and ensured that the rest would live a life of constant hunger and terror. Historians say that Muawiya attempted to buy off Al-Aswad Al-Du'ali, a companion of Imam Ali (a). Muawiya's first gift was a jar of honey mixed with saffron – a delicacy of the time. Al-Aswad's young daughter walked in and took a bite of the sweet mix. Her father quickly informed her,

My daughter, spit it out for it is surely poison. This is a confection that Muawiya has sent to us to tempt us away from the Commander of the Faithful (a) and deter us from the love of the Household [of the Prophet (s)].

The girl quickly spit the honey out and said, “May God curse him! He wishes to tempt us away from the Purified Master (a) by a dish of honeyed saffron! Woe to whoever sent this and whoever eats it!” ^[428]

Second, God says, “There is no compulsion in religion: rectitude has become distinct from error.” ^[429] In other words, there is no need for compulsion because the truth has been made clear. A strong and truthful ideal does not need to be supported by force, but will rather win people over due to its righteous nature. A creed that is supported by reason and proof does not need to be forced onto the people. They will come to accept it out of their own conviction once they come to see the full picture. That is the meaning of the verse, “To God belongs the conclusive argument.” ^[430]

Third, an attempt to enforce religion would actually cause a counter reaction. Scholars say that a wise individual would never do anything that would contradict his goal or objective. That would go against the idea of wisdom. God is the All-wise. He gave us religion so that we can reach a level of belief and conviction in the faith, and so that we can react with it and act based on its teachings. However, imposition of a religion by force goes against the purpose of having mankind follow it out of faith and conviction.

God says, “Indeed the prayer restrains from indecent and wrongful conduct.”^[431] He also says, “O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be Godwariness.”^[432] Godwariness will only come through prayer and fasting if these actions are undertaken out of conviction. An individual who is forced to pray or fast will not attain the same result.

So imposition of religion by force contradicts its purpose and objective. If mankind is meant to act according to the faith’s teachings out of personal conviction and volition, it cannot be imposed by force. That would contradict the purpose.

The imposition of certain rules onto society is not necessarily wrong. For example, if someone wanted to live within society but did not want to live a primitive life – refusing to send his children to school or seeking medical treatment for a highly contagious disease – rational society would have no problem imposing rules, regulations, and fines on such an individual. In fact, no government would be viable if its rules and regulations were not backed by the force of law. Thus, there is nothing inherently wrong about the imposition of moral or religious rules through the force of law. However, because religion is intended to be a matter of conviction, it cannot be imposed by force.

Those Averse to the Religion

Furthermore, the blessed verses do not indicate that the religion of Islam will be imposed by force. God says, “It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse.”^[433] The fact that there is

a faction that is averse to the religion of truth does not mean that the faith will be forcefully imposed on them.

Scholars say that there are two forces internal to each individual; the power of the intellect and the power of the heart. The role of the intellect is to take in and process information. The role of the heart is to believe or disbelieve, doubt, love, hate, and to be joyous or sad. When the intellect and the heart are in agreement, true piety is reached, but they do not necessarily always align.

For example, would any of us be able to spend a night alone in a dark room with a dead corpse? Our intellects tell us that a corpse is devoid of life and unable to do us any harm, but our hearts will not allow us to rest easy. Even the bravest and most rational individual will not be able to continue with the task simply because the power of our hearts does not follow the power of our reason and intellect.

In the case of religion, the heart may sometimes be in agreement with the intellect and sometimes in disagreement. Arguments and proofs may deliver certainty to an individual's intellect, but his heart may disagree and choose another path. That is why the Quran asserts "They impugned [God's signs], wrongfully and out of arrogance, though they were convinced within themselves [of their veracity]."^[434] What is meant by 'selves' here are the intellects, as they realized the truth of God's signs but their hearts could not come to believe. Mankind may sometimes come to believe that an idea is true although in their hearts they may be averse to it. That is the meaning of the verse "It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse."^[435]

The verses of the Holy Quran do not indicate that the religion of Islam will prevail by force. Rather, it will prevail through its intellectual strength. Still, there will be some individuals who will see the clear proof in support of God's true religion, but will nonetheless remain averse to it.

THE IMAM AND THE OPPOSITION

Some may also ask, ‘How will the Imam (a) deal with opposition to his state? Will any opposition have the freedom to speak out against the Imam (a) and his ideals? Will the freedom of speech and the press be guaranteed?’

This question can be answered in two points.

Opposition is Unfathomable

It is unimaginable that there would be a rational opposition to the Imam (a). Why?

Muslim scholars submit that injustice is not an innate and natural tendency of mankind. Rather, it is an occasional and unnatural phenomenon. Mankind is by innate nature virtuous and just. Each individual recognizes justice as a virtue and wants to be treated fairly and equitably. And by their nature people will treat others justly because they would like to be treated in the same way.

It is narrated that one of our Imams (a) said to his companions, “Indeed, only one who fears loss will be hasty. Surely, only the weak need to act unjustly.”^[436] A person who fears that he might lose an opportunity will be hasty and will make rash mistakes. And only a weak individual will act unjustly. A person who is strong in his morals and firm in his principles will act justly and will find no need to cheat or mistreat others. Thus, injustice often arises out of an inferiority complex.

If a person lives in a state where all his rights are protected and the means of an honorable and comfortable life are guaranteed will never find the need to act unjustly. He will not think of opposing the state. If a person is living an honorable and comfortable life, what need does he have to act unjustly or to revolt against the state?

The government of Imam Mahdi (a) will usher justice and prosperity for the entire world. So what need is there for opposition or revolution? The Holy Prophet (s) said that the Imam (a) will “fill the earth with justice and equity.”^[437] Justice and equity means that all society will be protected and treated fairly. Each individual will be protected and treated fairly. The general philosophy and culture will be that of justice and equity.

When Imam Mahdi (a) fills the earth with justice and equity, he will usher in an age of a general understanding, philosophy, and culture of justice and equity. Through that, every individual will act justly and treat everyone else fairly.

Opposition to such a state is unfathomable. No rational individual will oppose justice and equity.

Enmity and Aggression

Even if we assume, for argument's sake, that there will be a rational and excused opposition to the Imam (a), then his treatment of this opposition will be the same as how the Holy Prophet (s) and the Commander of the Faithful (a) treated the opposition during their lifetimes. A narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) said, "He [the Awaited Imam (a)] would be amongst people as his grandfather [the Prophet (s)]."^[438] During the time of the Holy Prophet (s), intellectual freedoms were not restricted. The Holy Prophet (s) took care that no opposition could turn into a full-fledged sedition.

There are a number of noble goals behind the treatment that the Holy Prophet (s) afforded to his opposition. Unity of the Muslim nation, for example, is one noble goal espoused by the Holy Quran – "Do not dispute, or you will lose heart and your power will be gone."^[439] Another is the preservation of the innate nature of mankind which fosters a spirit of collaboration and bonhomie – "Cooperate in piety and Godwariness."^[440] Every opposition which bears only enmity and aggression in the face of these noble goals should be dealt with. Differences in viewpoint and opinion, on the other hand, are allowed.

This was part of what the Commander of the Faithful (a) spoke about in his letter to Malik Al-Ashtar. The Imam (a) taught Malik how a Muslim government should be at all times. Imam Mahdi's (a) state, of course, will not act any differently than how Imam Ali (a) taught his companions to be. And amongst the greatest points of that letter was the Imam's (a) instructions on how a governor should deal with citizens, whether they share his religion or not.

Imam Ali (a) wrote in the letter

Accustom your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them. Do not stand over them like a greedy beast who feels it is enough to devour them. Know that they are of two kinds, either your brother in faith or your equal in creation.^[441]

This is the character of Imam Ali's (a) state. It stands in complete opposition to the Umayyad state which was founded on discrimination based on faith, language, ethnicity, and tribal lineage.

As for the Purified Household of our Holy Prophet (s), they always honored people of other faiths. God says, "Certainly We have honored the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things."^[442]

Even in the saga of Imam Hussain (a), we find that one of the Imam's companions had a leaning toward the third caliph Othman. Some of our narrations say that it was Zuhair ibn Al-Qayn.^[443] Imam Hussain (a) treated him with kindness and honored him until he became a lover of the Holy Household (a) and was martyred alongside the Imam (a). The Imam (a) was merciful even to his enemies up to the last moment. He would say, "I cry for these people who will enter hellfire because of [their transgression against me]."^[444] Yet they persisted on their wretched path and committed a great massacre against the household of the Holy Prophet (s).

THE MARJAEYA

In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

But why should not there a group from each of their sections go forth to become learned in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware?^[445]

The blessed verse urges us to actively pursue learning about our faith and its teachings. There is no emphasis in the verse on what part of religion we should learn, but is encompassing of both the principles of creed and the minutia or religious rulings.

A *Sahih* hadith attributed to Imam Sadiq (a) explains this verse further. A companion asked the Imam (a) what people are to do if something were to happen to any of the Imams. Imam Sadiq (a) recited the above verse and said, “People are excused so long as they are in pursuit [of knowledge]. Those who await them are also excused until their comrades return to them.”

CREED

Our honorable scholars tell us that knowledge is of two types. There are issues that are in and of themselves obligatory and each individual must seek to understand them and believe in them. There are other issues that are not so and are rather dependent on arguments and proofs. An individual should believe in them once proof is presented in support of each idea.

This categorization is true whether we are looking through a religious lens or a rational lens. Religiously, a person should believe in anything supported by conclusive proof that would lead to certainty. This includes anything that is supported by a hadith that is *Mutawatir*,^[446] or if it is a necessity of the faith or the school of thought. This includes, for example, belief in the Quran as the word of God or in prayer as a religious obligation. As for anything that is not supported by such conclusive proof, a rational religious proof could lead us to believe in it and accept it.

The same categorization applies if we look at the issue through a purely rational lens. We can say that we must necessarily believe in things that are prerequisites or results of thankfulness. The rational obligation to be thankful is something that is discussed in details by Muslim philosophers. Presuming that thankfulness is a rational obligation for our purposes here, we can say that anything that is a prerequisite or a result of that should also be studied in depth. We can also say that anything that is a primary rational concepts – another subject that is discussed in detail within Muslim seminaries.

For example, there is a rational obligation for us to believe in the pillars of our faith. If I realize that I exist, I rationally conclude that my existence is a blessing and a gift. Thus, there is a source of this blessing and I must seek to know this source and be thankful and grateful to it. When I come to know the grantor of this blessing, I will know that He is a being that is all-encompassing of every perfection, including justice, wisdom, and compassion. It is irrational to think that the giver of all virtues is lacking in any of them. The natural result coming from a just, wise, and compassionate Creator is that He will send messengers and prophets and appoint Imams. It also follows that there will be a day when each individual

will be judged for his actions on this world and that is the Day of Resurrection.

These are the pillars of our creed that we are rationally obliged to believe in. There are several other doctrines that follow from this system of beliefs – for example that the messengers and the Imams know the details of the faith and are of an Immaculate nature. These are conclusions reached through rational processes and are the foundation of our faith.

The second category includes things that we are not rationally obliged to understand and believe in. Some of these are issues that we may not be able to rationally prove or disprove without the use of religious texts. These include the details of purgatory and judgment, the punishment of the grave, the meaning of the ‘straight path,’ and similar issues. There is no rational obligation for us to believe in all these detailed matters. However, if a religious proof is present in support of these details then a Muslim should believe out of submission to God, His Messenger (s), and the Immaculate Imams (a).

RELIGIOUS STANDARDS

An individual is considered to be Muslim if he believes in the Muslim creed – that there is no deity but God and that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) is His messenger. In some situations, an individual rejects a major tenet of Islam, like prayer or pilgrimage, while he knows and acknowledges that he in fact is impugning the Prophet (s). That individual is also considered to be outside the realm of Islam since he is effectively rejecting the Muslim creed by rejecting God’s messenger. However, if a person does not intend to impugn the Prophet (s) but is simply misinformed, he is not considered to have rejected the Muslim creed even if he rejects a major tenet of the faith.

The standard when it comes to Shia Islam – as understood from the narrations – is the belief in the Immaculate Imam. In the *Sahih* narration relayed by Zurara, Imam Sadiq (a) said

The apex of every matter, its pinnacle, its key, the gate to all things, and the satisfaction of the All-Merciful [all lie in] obedience to the Imam after knowing him. Indeed God says ‘Whoever obeys the Apostle certainly obeys God; and as for those who turn their backs [on you]; We have not sent you to keep watch over them.’^[447] Surely if a man were to spend his nights in prayer and his days in fasting, give his entire wealth to charity, and perform the pilgrimage his entire life, yet he does not know allegiance to God’s vicegerent, so that he performs all his deeds by the guidance [of the Imam], he would not be deserving of any reward from God nor would he be of the faithful.^[448]

The standard in Shia Islam is to know the Immaculate Imam that is appointed by God and to take guidance from him. We can seek guidance from and knowledge of the Imam in one of two ways:

Inconclusive Methods

One way to seek guidance from and knowledge of the Imam is through inconclusive methods such as stand-alone narration. For example we have numerous narrations indicating that the Holy Prophet (s) had authority over legislation. In one narration Imam Sadiq (a) says, “God forbade wine and

the Messenger of God (s) forbade all intoxicating drinks as God allowed him to do so.”^[449] Another such narration is one relayed by multiple companions of Imam Baqir (a) and Imam Sadiq (a) where the Imams would say, “God obligated prayer and the alms of trade profits and the Messenger of God (s) imposed [the alms] on nine [types of accumulated wealth].”^[450]

These narrations tell us that the Holy Prophet (s) had the authority to legislate by virtue of his divinely inspired and immaculate nature. But does this same privilege extend to the members of his Holy Household?

This issue is disputed amongst our grand scholars. The methods of attempting to find an answer are all inconclusive. For example, we have narrations from our Immaculate Imams (a) that state, “Whatever authority was given to the Messenger of God (s) has also been given to us.”^[451] But such narrations are an area of study and reflection for our scholars. Grand Ayatollah Tabrizi had some reflections in regards to the chain of narrators of these traditions. He also mentioned that the narrations that speak of *Al-Jami’a* – the document containing all legislation down to the “reparations for a scratch” which was dictated by the Holy Prophet (s) and written by Imam Ali (a) – indicate that legislation was complete at the time of the Holy Prophet (s) and that the Immaculate Imams’ (a) role is to deliver these teachings to the people. This is not because they lack the authority to legislate, but because the process of legislation was completed during the time of the Holy Prophet (s).

The bottom line is that this issue is contested amongst our scholars and the evidence that support either interpretation is inconclusive.

Conclusive Methods

Another way to seek guidance from and knowledge of the Imam is through conclusive methods and evidence. This generally includes three types of evidence.

First, the unanimity of scholarly opinions. In this, we go back to the scholars of the earliest stages of Islam, specifically those who had direct contact with the companions who lived alongside the Holy Prophet (s) and the Immaculate Imams (a), up until the time of the minor occultation. These are the scholars who interacted directly with the Immaculate Imams (a) or their companions, and are best able to inform us of the Imams’ guidance

and opinion. So if we find that these scholars unanimously agree that the Holy Prophet (s) and the Imams (a) are Immaculate individuals, perfect in every way, without any fault or sin, then this necessarily and conclusively reflects the teachings of our Imams.

To clarify this, let us address a number of points.

First, this proposition is not based on any theological premises. Nor is it based on strict logical deduction. Rather, we rely in support of this proposition on the theory of probabilities. This is incidentally is the same basis for considering *Tawatur* to be conclusive evidence – more on that below.

A calculation of probabilities dictates that when evidence accumulates in support of or against any proposition, its truth or falsity is significantly more probable. Evidence may even reach a point to be considered rationally conclusive and a basis for certainty in the proposition's truth or falsity.

So for example, if the scholars of that early era of Muslim history all agreed that prayer behind a person born out of wedlock is invalid, then their agreement on other topics is considered ample evidence for a number of reasons.

- The ruling in question goes against the general principle derived from other narrations, stating that one can pray behind anyone whose faith is trusted.
- The scholars in question are of such caliber and piety that it is inconceivable for them to have given such an opinion without proper evidence. Furthermore, it is highly improbable that they all were not aware that this rule goes against the general principle described above.
- It is also highly improbable that their basis for this ruling was a narration from the Holy Prophet (s) or an Immaculate Imam (a). Otherwise, they would have included such a narration in the books of tradition that they compiled and in which they included many traditions of varying strength and veracity. However, there must be some basis for this opinion; else, this great number of scholars could not possibly be in unanimous agreement without any supporting evidence. Their opinion must be based on some other

form of conclusive evidence that they received from the Imams (a) or their companions. Thus, we cannot say let us look at the evidence they considered in support of this conclusion and weigh it for ourselves. Such conclusive evidence is derived directly from the interactions and the environment of the time, which in turn were indicative of the sayings, actions, and confirmations of the Imams (a).

Second, there is no difference in the applicability of this line of reasoning between jurisprudential and theological issues. The nature of the evidence is one and the reasoning is the same. There is also no difference in whether this line of reasoning is applied to material or immaterial propositions, except for the fact that the evidence is usually stronger when it comes to material propositions.

Third, if there is an individual who contradicts the unanimous opinion of the others in reliance on evidence that was passed down and is known to us, then we can simply test his evidence and come to a conclusion on whether his opinion will legitimately discredit the unanimity of that era's scholars as a means of knowing the Immaculate Imams' (a) teachings and opinion. The fact that Al-Shaykh Al-Sadouq holds an opinion contrary to the rest of the scholars when it comes to the matter of the Holy Prophet's (s) immaculate nature does not break the remaining unanimity of the majority of the other scholars. This can be explained by the following evidence:

- It is debatable whether Al-Sadouq actually contradicted the unanimity of the scholars, as his writing is up to interpretation.
- We know the individual contradicting the unanimous opinion of the scholars and the evidence upon which he relied. Thus, we can go back to the evidence and judge whether his opinion was reasonable or erroneous. In this case, we find that his reasoning was erroneous and that his opinion does not break the unanimity of Shia scholars of the time.

We will not go into the detailed evidence, but will suffice to mention the following. The Holy Quran states, "Certainly, the faithful have attained salvation – those who are humble in their prayers."^[452] In another verse the Quran says, "Woe to those who pray but are heedless of their prayers."^[453] Is

it possible that the Holy Prophet (s) is an example of the second verse rather than the first? It is unconceivable. The fact that a scholar may disagree on this issue does not breach unanimity or the conclusive nature of scholarly opinion in this regard.

Second, the unequivocal declarations of scholars. When we review the texts of that early period of Muslim history, we find that our scholars discuss a number of issues with the presumption that they are accepted truth without mentioning a single dissention. The reasoning in support of this proposition is the same as the support for the unanimity of scholars discussed above.

As an example of this type of proposition, we find that our scholars have unequivocally declared that an Immaculate Imam (a) acquires knowledge both by learning from his predecessor Imam (a) as well as by inspiration. When we read the verses of the Holy Quran, we see that God ascribes this second type of knowledge to individuals like Al-Khidr – “[There] they found one of Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Ourselves, and taught him a knowledge from Our own.”^[454] Surely Al-Khidr is not better than the immaculate Imams (a). Therefore, we find that the scholars of Shia Islam have unequivocally declared and adopted the view that our Imams (a) acquire some of their knowledge by divine inspiration.

Third, the concept of general *Tawatur*. A hadith is *Mutawatir* if it is conveyed through various channels by numerous narrators, indicating the narrations’ indisputable veracity. At times, a narration may not reach the threshold of *Tawatur* but could still be considered conclusive evidence due to a number of corroborative factors. For example, some narrations, when taken together with historical accounts, give us a degree of certainty of the narration’s content. Numerous narrations from our Imams (a) state that they were all martyred – “None of us shall pass except by murder or poison”;^[455] “None of us shall pass except by poison or murder”;^[456] and “By God, none of us shall pass except as a murdered martyr.”^[457]

These narrations from distinct books and through distinct chains of narrators are further corroborated by historical fact, along with other similar narrations and the content of some our supplications and visitations. All this leads us to conclude confidently that such narrations must be true.

Some may say that this is simply a historical issue and does not relate to theology and creed. But in fact the issue here is much more than just a historical discussion. The title of ‘martyr’ is a sacred status and an honor bestowed by God upon select individuals. The discussion centers on whether the Imams (a) had been given this honor and status or not, and therefore has a clear theological dimension.

Thus, there are a number of conclusive methods that allow us to learn of the teachings and guidance of our Immaculate Imams (a). Some individuals may doubt the teachings and rulings derived by our grand scholars through these conclusive methods, but that is normally due to the individual’s own fallacies or because of a lack of religious learning and understanding. An individual should not knowingly reject any of our religious guidance that is deduced through these conclusive methods. Otherwise, he would be rejecting Shia Islam outright because he is rejecting what we conclusively know to be the word and teachings of the Imam.

PROGRESSION IN RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Any body of knowledge or course of study has its settled facts and its unsettled theories. The study of religion is much the same. For example, the issue of resurrection is a definite fact that cannot be rejected – God says,

Say, ‘To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth?’ Say, ‘To God. He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself. He will surely gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt.’^[458]

Can issues seen as unsettled theories become at some point definitive facts? Yes, that can and does take place. We mentioned in a previous chapter the importance of accumulated knowledge to human advancement. In any field, the accumulation of experimentation, study, and scientific discourse leads humanity to conclusions about reality. We see that propositions which were at some point simply scientific theories are later proven to be fact. The same is true in medicine, engineering, and other areas of study. It is also true when it comes to religion and theology.

For example, the Holy Quran was seen as a book of guidance for over a century, and it is indeed a book of profound guidance – “This is the Book, there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godway.”^[459] However, in recent times, the Holy Quran is seen to have within it valuable nuggets of scientific fact which were not discovered before. For example, God says, “I swear by the places where the stars set! And indeed it is a great oath, should you know.”^[460]

God does not swear by the stars but by their location. This may have been seen as an inconsequential difference a thousand years ago, but our modern understanding of the universe reveals the gravity of the statement. We now know that starlight takes years to reach our planet – thousands of years in many instances. The distance between our planet and these stars is difficult to calculate and often disputed. In the meantime, we know that the universe is expanding and that the stars are moving. Thus, knowing the exact location of any star is itself marvelous. An oath by the locations of the stars is a great oath indeed!

So our accumulation of knowledge and years of study allow us to better understand reality. This can also be seen when discussing matters of theology. For example, a thousand years ago our scholars were not necessarily in unanimous agreement that our Immaculate Imams (a) are of a higher status than many of the Prophets. However, as we have continued to study our religious texts, including our narrations, supplications, and visitations, we found that they constantly place the Imams (a) at a status that is only second to our Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). So with the development of our understanding of our faith and our religious texts, we are able to say definitively that the Holy Prophet's Immaculate Household is of a higher and more elevated status than the prophets – save the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). When we look at the many texts in this regards, we conclude that this issue is an integral and definitive part of our creed.

THE JURISTS DURING OCCULTATION

After all this discussion on how we come to know the teachings and guidance of our Imams (a), let us discuss the role of our grand jurists during the time of the occultation.

Our grand jurists – and especially our Religious Authorities, the *Marjaeya* – play three major roles by virtue of their status and knowledge: they deduce religious laws and teachings from their sources; they act as judges in disputes amongst the believer; and they have some degree of authority over the believers, with some scholars limit this authority to a narrow scope while others take a much more expansive view.

All in all, the mission of our grand jurists is to protect the faith. This all important mission is achieved in three ways; by safeguarding the text, by safeguarding the teachings, and by practically applying the faith as a means of ensuring that it remains alive.

Safeguarding the Text. The jurist is responsible in overseeing the intellectual currents within Muslim society. He must aim to preserve the general principles and definitive truths. At the same time, he must engage in intellectual discourse when it comes to theories and unsettled issues. That is why in one narration the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said

For every successor [to political power] over my nation there is an equal amongst my Progeny. He would disclaim against the fabrication of the fanatics, the pretension of the saboteurs, and the misinterpretations of the ignorant.^[461]

Safeguarding the Teachings. The goal behind the establishment of the seminaries is to protect the teachings of the faith. They protect the faith by constantly studying and teaching its principles and substance. If it were not for these seminaries, religious knowledge would have been stagnant and would surely have been eviscerated. God says,

But why should not there a group from each of their sections go forth to become learned in religion, and to warn their people when they return to them, so that they may beware?^[462]

Practical Protection. Our grand scholars practically protect the faith by applying it themselves and teaching others its correct application. Through correct practice by the faith's adherents, Islam is protected and remains a living world religion.

God says in the Holy Quran "Yet all pride belongs to God and His Apostle and the faithful." This verse tells us that God wants us to maintain the pride of Islam and the believer. This pride can only be protected by the Religious Authority – the *Marjaeya* – which safeguards the faith in the ways listed above. The *Marjaeya* maintains the religion and gives the school of thought its stature and prominence. The *Marjaeya* continues to carry on the call of Imam Hussain (a) who declared as he set out on his journey,

The imposter – a son of an imposter – has [given us a choice] between death and disgrace. Surely, we will never bend to disgrace. God refuses that for us, and so do his Messenger (s) and the believers. ^[463]

Praise to God, Lord of the Realms.

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- [1] The Holy Quran, 11:86.
- [2] The Holy Quran, 11:85, 86.
- [3] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 1:411-12.
- [4] The Holy Quran, 3:110.
- [5] The Holy Quran, 3:104.
- [6] Al-Qa'im (a) is one of the well-known names given to the Twelfth Imam in Shia Islam. –Eds.
- [7] See: Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 331.
- [8] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 8:310.
- [9] It is narrated that Abdullah ibn Sinan relayed from Imam Sadiq (a) that, “The Call is inevitable. Al-Yamani is inevitable. The Murder of the Pure Soul is inevitable. A hand that appears from the sky is inevitable.” He also said, “And a cry in the month of Ramadan that wakes whoever is asleep, scares whoever is awake, and compel a lady to leave her home [i.e. to investigate].” Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 262.
- [10] Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 264.
- [11] Al-Sadouq, *Kamaal Al-Deen*, 516. See also: Al-Tusi, *Al-Ghayba*, 395.
- [12] Arastu, *Al-Nudba*, 94.
- [13] See: Al-Nuri, *Jannat Al-Ma'wa*.
- [14] The Holy Quran, 48:10.
- [15] The Holy Quran, 9:104.
- [16] The Holy Quran, 22:37.
- [17] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, 95:226.
- [18] Al-Kaf'ami, *Al-Misbaah*, 551.
- [19] The Holy Quran, 59:10.
- [20] Al-Tabrasi, *Al-Ihtijaj*, 2:325.
- [21] Ibid.
- [22] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 5:144.
- [23] Al-Tabrasi, *Al-Ihtijaj*, 2:323.
- [24] Abtahi, *Al-Sahifa Al-Sajjadiyya*, 419.
- [25] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, 53:171.
- [26] Arastu, *Al-Nudba*, 93-96.
- [27] Al-Ha'eri, *Shajarat Tuba*, 3:1.
- [28] The Holy Quran, 27:62.
- [29] The Holy Quran, 40:60.
- [30] The Holy Quran, 27:62.
- [31] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, 51:59.

- [32] Ibid, 51:48.
- [33] The Holy Quran, 2:30. Emphasis added.
- [34] The Holy Quran, 38:26. Emphasis added.
- [35] The Holy Quran, 27:62. Emphasis added.
- [36] The Holy Quran, 28:5.
- [37] Arastu, *Al-Nudba*, 87.
- [38] The Holy Quran, 33:45, 46.
- [39] The Holy Quran, 3:31.
- [40] The Holy Quran, 9:108.
- [41] The Holy Quran, 38:45-47.
- [42] The Holy Quran, 19:51.
- [43] The Holy Quran, 12:24.
- [44] The Holy Quran, 20:39, 41.
- [45] The Holy Quran, 33:33.
- [46] The Holy Quran, 43:3, 4.
- [47] The Holy Quran, 100:8.
- [48] The Holy Quran, 42:23.
- [49] The Holy Quran, 14:37.
- [50] The Holy Quran, 20:39.
- [51] Al-Tha'labi, *Tafseer Al-Tha'labi*, 8:314.
- [52] The Holy Quran, 7:157.
- [53] Al-Tousi, *Misbaah Al-Mutahajjid*, 366.
- [54] The Holy Quran, 12:84-86.
- [55] Ibn Katheer, *Al-Bidaya wa Al-Nihaya*, 3:166-68.
- [56] Ibn Shahrashoub, *Manaqib Aal Abi Talib*, 3:295.
- [57] Al-Sadouq, *Al-Amaali*, 131.
- [58] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 2:636.
- [59] Arastu, *Al-Nudba*, 95-98.
- [60] The Holy Quran, 42:23.
- [61] Arastu, *Al-Nudba*, 105, 106.
- [62] The Holy Quran, 21:107.
- [63] The Holy Quran, 56:77-79.
- [64] The Holy Quran, 11:1.
- [65] The Holy Quran, 15:21.
- [66] The Holy Quran, 54:49.
- [67] The Holy Quran, 21:104.

- [68] Al-Sadouq, *Ilal Al-Sharaei*, 1:174.
- [69] Al-Mashhadi, *Al-Mazaar*, 529.
- [70] Al-Tousi, *Misbaah Al-Mutahajjid*, 721.
- [71] The Holy Quran, 20:50.
- [72] The Holy Quran, 21:107.
- [73] Ibid.
- [74] The Holy Quran, 24:35.
- [75] The Holy Quran, 7:56.
- [76] The Holy Quran, 7:156.
- [77] Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 88.
- [78] The Holy Quran, 28:5.
- [79] The Holy Quran, 3:159.
- [80] The Holy Quran, 68:4.
- [81] Muhammad ibn Muslim also narrates that he once asked Imam Baqir (a) and how he would be after he emerges from his occultation. The Imam (a) replied, "He would be like the Messenger of God (s) until Islam prevails." When Muhammad ibn Muslim asked the Imam (a) about how the Imam Mahdi (a) would exhibit the traits of the Prophet (s), he replied, "[The Prophet (s) had] nullified what had been during the Age of Ignorance and met people with justice. The same is with Al-Qa'im (a) once he emerges; he will nullify what is practiced by people in the intermittent period and meet people with justice." Al-Tousi, *Tahtheeb Al-Ahkaam*, 6:154.
- [82] The Holy Quran, 5:54.
- [83] Al-Qummi, *Tafseer Al-Qummi*, 1:170.
- [84] The Holy Quran, 59:8, 9.
- [85] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 2:173.
- [86] Ibid, 2:174.
- [87] The Holy Quran, 13:11.
- [88] The Holy Quran, 3:92.
- [89] Al-Tabrasi, *Al-Ihtijaaj*, 1:315.
- [90] Al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, 3:37.
- [91] Al-Hindi, *Kanz Al-Ommaal*, 14:274.
- [92] The Holy Quran, 21:107.
- [93] Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 238.
- [94] Ibid, 237.
- [95] Ibid, 234.
- [96] Al-Najashi, *Rijal Al-Najashi*, 332.
- [97] Al-Tousi, *Al-Fahrist*, 337.
- [98] Al-Najashi, *Rijal Al-Najashi*, 36.
- [99] Al-Namazi, *Mustadrakat Ilm Rijaal Al-Hadeeth*, 3:67.

- [100] Al-Najashi, *Rijal Al-Najashi*, 170.
- [101] Al-Maqdisi, *'Aqd Al-Durar*, 90-99.
- [102] Al-Muruzi, *Al-Fitan*, 217.
- [103] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, 53:9.
- [104] Al-Tabari, *Dala 'el Al-Imama*, 455.
- [105] Al-Hilli, *Mukhtasar Al-Basaer*, 190.
- [106] Hassan, *Binoor Fatima Ihtadayt*, 201.
- [107] Al-Mufeed, *Al-Irshad*, 2:76.
- [108] The Holy Quran, 2:1-3.
- [109] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 340.
- [110] Ibid; citing: The Holy Quran, 10:20.
- [111] Al-Kitani, "The Fatwa of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference," *Intidhar Magazine*, No 11, 26.
- [112] A short list of such scholars includes Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar Al-Haythami, Ibn Al-Qayyim, Al-Shawkani, and Al-Soyouti, to name a few.
- [113] A narration is referred to as *Sahih* if all the individuals in its chain of narrators are trustworthy believers. –Eds.
- [114] The Holy Quran, 13:7.
- [115] The Holy Quran, 17:71.
- [116] Al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, 3:14, 17, 26, 59. See also: Al-Nisaei, *Fadael Al-Sahaba*, 15; Al-Nisaei, *Sunan Al-Nisaei*, 5:45, 130; Al-Nisabouri, *Al-Mustadrak*, 3:109, 147; Al-Tabarani, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat*, 3:374.
- [117] Al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, 4:96.
- [118] Al-Nisabouri, *Al-Mustadrak*, 2:448, 3:497.
- [119] Al-Sadouq, *Kamaal Al-Deen*, 203.
- [120] Arastu, *Al-Nudbah*, 85.
- [121] Al-Nisabouri, *Sahih Muslim*, 6:4.
- [122] *Sajdat Al-Shukr* – the prostration of thankfulness – is a highly recommended act of worship where a believer prostrates before God, praises Him, and thanks Him. –Eds.
- [123] Al-Sadouq, *Man La Yahdaruh Al-Faqih*, 1:329.
- [124] "Ali Al-Naqi (a), the son of Muhammad Al-Taqi (a), begot Jaafar, who is called by the Imamiyya [i.e. Twelver Shia] 'Jaafar the Liar.' He was given that moniker because he attempted to usurp the legacy of his brother Al-Hassan [Al-Askari] (a) rather than [allow it to pass on to Imam Al-Askari's (a) son, the Awaited *Hujja* [Imam Mahdi] (a). There is no qualm about his lineage." See page 40.
- [125] "And Abu Muhammad [Imam Al-Askari] (a) passed away while his son through Narjis (a) was known to his closest companions and the trusted in his family. We will mention the story of his birth and the accounts we have heard in its regards. The believers – nay, all people – were tested through his occultation. However, Jaafar ibn Ali lusted after his brother's wealth and status and denied that he had a son...." See page 130.

[126] “As for the Imam Al-Hassan Al-Askari (a), he had two sons and two daughters. As for his two sons, they are the Master of the Time, may God hasten his honored relief, and the other is Moussa who passed away during his father’s lifetime.” See page 78.

[127] “Imam Abu Muhammad Al-Hassan Al-Askari (a), who was of a great status in piety and knowledge. He is the father of Imam Muhammad Al-Mahdi (a), the twelfth of the Imams to the Imamiyya [i.e. Twelver Shia], and the Awaited [Imam] to them....” See page 199.

[128] “Muhammad Al-Mahdi (a), whose age was five years when his father passed away. He was of a brawny build, handsome face and hair, aquiline nose, and wide forehead.” See page 346.

[129] In the accounts of the year 260 AH, Ibn Al-Atheer wrote, “And in that year Abu Muhammad Al-Alawi Al-Askari [(a)] passed away, and he was one of the twelve imams for the Imamiyya. He is also the father of Muhammad [(a)], whom they believe to be the Awaited One.” See 7:274.

[130] “Abu Al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Al-Hassan Al-Askari ibn Ali Al-Hadi ibn Muhammad Al-Jawad, who were mentioned earlier. The twelfth of the twelve imams per the beliefs of the Imamiyya, and is known as the *Hujja*... His birth was on Friday in the mid of the month of Shaaban in the year 255.” See 4:176.

[131] See his books: *Al-Ibar*, 125; *Tareekh Dowal Al-Islam*, 113; and *Siyar Aalam Al-Nubala*, 13:19. In *Al-Ibar*, he said, “And in that year [i.e. 256 AH], was the birth of Muhammad ibn Al-Hassan ibn Ali Al-Hadi ibn Muhammad Al-Jawad ibn Ali Al-Rida ibn Moussa Al-Kadhim ibn Jaafar Al-Sadiq Al-Alawi Al-Hussaini. [His agnomen was] Abu Al-Qasim, and is given by the *Rafida* the names: the Succeeding *Hujja*, the Mahdi, the Awaited One, and the Master of the Time. He is the last of the twelve [Imams].”

[132] He mentioned the year of Imam Mahdi’s (a) birth as 255 AH.

[133] “[Al-Askari (a)] did not leave any descendants other than his son Abu Al-Qasim Muhammad Al-Hujja, whose age at the passing of his father was five years – although God had given him great wisdom even at that age. He is also named the Righteous and the Awaited.” See page 207.

[134] The Holy Quran, 67:2.

[135] The Holy Quran, 57:25.

[136] The Holy Quran, 21:105.

[137] See: *Intidhar Magazine*, No 14, 63.

[138] The Holy Quran, 10:20.

[139] Al-Sadouq, *Kamaal Al-Deen*, 18.

[140] The Holy Quran, 14:5.

[141] Al-Qummi, *Tafseer Al-Qummi*, 1:367.

[142] Al-Sadouq, *Kamaal Al-Deen*, 152.

[143] Al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, 1:84.

[144] Al-Sadouq, *Kamaal Al-Deen*, 151.

[145] Al-Sadouq, *Al-Khisal*, 392.

[146] It is reported that Imam Sadiq (a) said, “The name of Al-Qa’im (a) will be called on the eve of the twenty third. He will rise on the day of *Ashura*, the day when Hussain ibn Ali (a) was killed. It is as if I see him on that Saturday, the tenth of Muharram, standing between the cornerstone [of the Kaaba] and the Shrine [of Abraham (a)] and Gabriel is to his right calling ‘[Come and pay] allegiance to God.’ His Shia will come to him from the corners of the earth, as it will be bent for

them [to travel through] until they pay him allegiance. God will fill the earth with justice through him just as it was filled with oppression and transgression.” Al-Mufid, *Al-Irshad*, 2:379.

- [147] Al-Tousi, *Al-Ghayba*, 453.
- [148] Al-Rawandi, *Al-Da'awat*, 125.
- [149] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 1:368. Citing: The Holy Quran, 13:39.
- [150] Al-Tousi, *Misbah Al-Mutahajjid*, 414.
- [151] Al-Tousi, *Al-Ghayba*, 472. Citing: The Holy Quran, 7:128.
- [152] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 320.
- [153] The Holy Quran, 6:75.
- [154] Al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balagha*, 4:36.
- [155] Al-Reyshahri, *Mawsu'at Al-Imam Ali*, 302.
- [156] The Holy Quran, 27:88.
- [157] The Holy Quran, 51:47.
- [158] The Holy Quran, 20:7.
- [159] Al-Radi, *Nahj al-Balagha*, 4:7.
- [160] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 644.
- [161] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 8:295.
- [162] Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 203.
- [163] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 644.
- [164] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 1:338.
- [165] The Holy Quran, 3:104.
- [166] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 5:59.
- [167] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 8:264.
- [168] See, for example: Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 320.
- [169] The Holy Quran, 9:105.
- [170] The Holy Quran, 66:6.
- [171] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 320.
- [172] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar Al-Anwar*, 44:329.
- [173] The Holy Quran, 11:8.
- [174] The Holy Quran, 8:33.
- [175] Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 248.
- [176] The Holy Quran, 2:228.
- [177] The Holy Quran, 2:282.
- [178] The Holy Quran, 4:11.
- [179] The Holy Quran, 2:282.
- [180] The Holy Quran, 2:275.
- [181] The Holy Quran, 26:192-95.

- [182] The Holy Quran, 75:16-19.
- [183] The Holy Quran, 20:114.
- [184] The Holy Quran, 26:195.
- [185] The Holy Quran, 58:12.
- [186] The Holy Quran, 8:65.
- [187] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 4:500.
- [188] Al-Radi, *Nahj Al-Balagha*, 4:5.
- [189] Al-Ayashi, *Tafseer Al-Ayashi*, 1:10.
- [190] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 1:58.
- [191] The Holy Quran, 16:90.
- [192] The Holy Quran, 3:92.
- [193] The Holy Quran, 49:10.
- [194] The Holy Quran, 4:92.
- [195] The Holy Quran, 4:11.
- [196] The Holy Quran, 2:275.
- [197] The Holy Quran, 16:89.
- [198] The Holy Quran, 2:228.
- [199] Ibid.
- [200] The Holy Quran, 49:13.
- [201] The Holy Quran, 16:97.
- [202] Al-Ayashi, *Tafseer Al-Ayashi*, 1:65.
- [203] The Holy Quran, 3:104.
- [204] The Holy Quran, 9:71.
- [205] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 644.
- [206] The Holy Quran, 57:17.
- [207] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 668.
- [208] Al-Nu'mani, *Al-Ghayba*, 32.
- [209] The Holy Quran, 57:16.
- [210] Al-Tousi, *Al-Ghayba*, 180.
- [211] Al-Qummi, *Tafseer Al-Qummi*, 2:253.
- [212] The Holy Quran, 21:16, 17.
- [213] The Holy Quran, 44:38, 39.
- [214] The Holy Quran, 17:70.
- [215] The Holy Quran, 55:33.
- [216] The Holy Quran, 33:72.
- [217] See, for example: Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 1:413.

- [218] The Holy Quran, 2:30.
- [219] The Holy Quran, 36:40.
- [220] The Holy Quran, 31:20.
- [221] The Holy Quran, 14:33.
- [222] The Holy Quran, 7:53.
- [223] The Holy Quran, 45:13.
- [224] The Holy Quran, 24:41.
- [225] The Holy Quran, 62:1.
- [226] The Holy Quran, 17:44.
- [227] The Holy Quran, 3:191.
- [228] The Holy Quran, 28:5.
- [229] The Holy Quran, 7:128.
- [230] The Holy Quran, 24:55.
- [231] The Holy Quran, 21:107.
- [232] Al-Rawandi, *Al-Kharaej wa Al-Jaraeh*, 2:841.
- [233] Al-Kourani, *Asr Al-Dhuhur*, 328.
- [234] Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi*, 8:241.
- [235] The Holy Quran, 55:33.
- [236] Al-Nisabouri, *Al-Mustadrak*, 4:514.
- [237] Al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, 3:5.
- [238] Al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, 3:52.
- [239] The Holy Quran, 2:31.
- [240] The Holy Quran, 55:33.
- [241] The Holy Quran, 38:35-36.
- [242] The Holy Quran, 27:38-40.
- [243] The Holy Quran, 13:43.
- [244] The Holy Quran, 6:38.
- [245] Al-Sadouq, *Al-Amali*, 659.
- [246] Al-Sadouq, *Oyoon Akhbar Al-Rida*, 2:210.
- [247] Al-Sadouq, *Kamal Al-Deen*, 320.
- [248] Ibid, 675.
- [249] The Holy Quran, 51:56.
- [250] The Holy Quran, 29:69.
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