



The Dawn is Near

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The present text endeavors to rationally prove the belief in Imam al-Mahdi. Although brief, the present work is undoubtedly a necessary and useful reading material for both old and young Muslim Shi'a (to keep them steadfast in their way) and non-Shi'a (to discover the truth about the Imam of Our Time).

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Foreword

Hope and fear are two forces, which keep man absorbed in his daily life. If he abandons them then he loses focus and has a feeling of worthlessness. On one hand the fear of failure keeps him away from laziness and lethargy, while on the other hand the hope of success and glory motivates him to strive for his goals. Thus, hope and fear have an amazing effect. The Holy Qur'an has proclaimed that these two forces were the very foundation of Prophetic missions:

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَ مُنذِرِينَ

“And We have not send Messengers but as warners and as givers of glad tidings”¹

The discussions concerning the belief in Mahadawiyat pertain to a future full of hope and optimism - an event that is inevitable. At that time tyranny, oppression and imperialism will be uprooted and humanity - under the leadership of a chaste and immaculate leader along with pious and virtuous soldiers - will reach the pinnacle of perfection.

The Divine voice has addressed all the eager hearts when it says:

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ

“And indeed We have mentioned in Psalms after the first reminder that surely, Our righteous servants shall inherit the earth”²

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ

“And We intend to favour those who were weakened on the earth. We will make them leaders and We will make them heirs (of the earth)”³

According to Shi'ite belief, if either of these promises of Allah has not materialized, then it is due to Divine Discretion. Hence, any time in the future it may actualize. And then in the shadow of this Divine religion and under the leadership of an impeccable leader, the Universal Islamic Government will be established.

Such glad-tidings and admonitions have become the cause of the shias moving forward - steadfastly and relentlessly, in spite of the atrocities and oppression meted out to them and which have been recorded in the pages of history. Thus, the debate and discussion regarding Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is of paramount importance. The innumerable books and writing of Shias, on this subject, in the past twelve centuries support this fact.

Since hundreds of years, the enemies of Islam have been striving to remove the belief of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) from the hearts of believers. In order to achieve their malicious aim, they have made a concerted effort. They have disgraced the believers as well as oppressed them and inflicted several types of tortures upon them. As a result, only a handful of the religious Muslims discuss this belief. They talk on this matter only superficially and move on further; in fact, they try their best from involving themselves in such (controversial) matters. Hence, it is imperative for the true believers to firstly recognize the significance of this belief and secondly make an all-out effort in spreading it among the people.

In the discussions that follow in the next few pages, we will try to elucidate the reality of this belief in the light of rational arguments so that

those who deny this belief may come to the right path and those who already believe in it may remain steadfast on it. Thus, the soldiers of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) will be armed with the rational proofs.

Notes

1. Holy Qur'an, al-Anam, 6:48.
2. Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiya, 21:105.
3. Holy Qur'an, al-Qasas, 28:4.

Chapter 1: The Chaste Leader

The life of a human being is distinct and different as compared to all other creatures. While all creatures are subservient to the laws of nature and are involuntarily passing through the evolutionary stages of their lives, man on this wide and extensive earth is capable of leading his life according to his will and intention.

Man was always been in need of a leader to hold his hand while traversing the vicissitudes of life. A leader - who will enlighten his path and protect him from deviations so that man should not slip into the abyss of misguidance.

Leadership is not a concept, which is restricted to a particular time, place, person or group. Rather it is essential in every era and at all places. In fact, it is an indispensable necessity. It is the leader, which has often elevated man to the pinnacle of perfection, while at other times the same leader has dumped him in the pit of disgrace. The leader was and always will be held responsible - both for the success and prosperity or for the humiliation and failure of the society.

The last two centuries - as compared to the earlier ones - saw a rise in various schools of thought and ideology. The purpose of every ideology was to help man achieve his goal and destination. All these schools propounded their own viewpoints and doctrines. But history is a witness to the fact that none of them could achieve their aims. Instead, they aggravated the afflictions and troubles, sorrow and sufferings of the common man.

Various schools of thoughts have tried to impress man by their outward attraction and have succeeded to a certain extent. Hordes of people were indeed attracted towards them just as a thirsty man is pulled towards a mirage. These people - bereft of a leader - accepted these flawed ideologies so that the tree of hope could once again grow in in this new soil. But they finally returned back with more dejection and frustration while their thirst had become more intense. Because they did not find anything in their teachings that would give them peace of mind and comfort their heart. Thus they became dejected with life. After numerous frustrations and stumbles, some intellectuals were finally compelled to turn towards 'religion' and 'spirituality'.

This 'return' underlined the fact that man can find the right path only in the light of decisive and firm divine laws. Since, the man made laws, do not extend beyond the realm of the mind, they rarely lead him to his goals. Rather very often they lead him to dilemmas, which defy his expectations. Thus, it becomes very clear for him that his distress will keep on piling and he will never attain salvation. In fact, Allah alone can lead man to the path of salvation, because He is our Creator, Establisher of order in the Universe and Cognizant of all human needs. He selected some of the best men and sent these chosen ones as His Prophets to mankind. These Prophets were supposed to expose the known and unknown enemies of Allah and lead men from the darkness of misguidance towards the radiance of guidance.

Prophets

They were the Messengers of Allah, who persevered against all odds for fulfilling their divine responsibilities and never sought any reward from the people. Rather they always tolerated the afflictions and oppressions inflicted upon them by their enemies, which often resulted in their martyrdom.¹

But Allah, the Almighty, did not suspend His series of Messengers due to these atrocities. He sent them to every clan and tribe, as the standard-bearers of freedom and knowledge² so that these Prophets - like clouds - may shower His Mercy on humanity and satiate them to the depth of their hearts with a spell of exhilarating life. They were sent also to remind the people of their forgotten covenant so that they may be conscious of it and abide by it.³

When the whole world was plunged into the complete darkness and history was passing through a chaotic phase; while mankind was drowned in the ocean of ignorance and oblivion, at such a time, the Omnipotent Allah sent His last Messenger in the scorching desert of Arabia - a Prophet who surpassed all the previous divine representatives. Allah raised him (S) so that His message could be known to the whole of mankind.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا

“O people! I am the messenger of Allah for all of you”⁴

This Prophet of Mercy, with the best of morals and conduct, was appointed as a prophet from the mountain of “light” and cave of Hera, so that for the last time he may raise the call for freedom of man, liberate him from all sorts of shackles and guide him towards Allah.

His appointment was to end racial and superstitious differences, eliminate ignorant centres of authority as well as erroneous modes of worship and establish the bonds of equality and brotherhood everywhere. His divine responsibility also included the reviving the faith in One Allah and to establish the commands of Allah through Holy Qur’an as well as to introduce his Ahlul Bait (a.s.). So that mankind may lead a life of happiness and never stray from the right path upto the dawn of Qiyamat.

Islam and Leadership

No divine religion other than Islam has advocated and discussed the concept of leadership. It can be said that in Islamic teachings, a great amount of emphasis has been laid on the appointment of a leader. No doubt, guidance is from Allah and the series of divine vicegerents or leaders are for guiding mankind towards Allah:

...إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَى

“And upon Us is the guidance ...”⁵

In Islam, only a virtuous and pious man can be a leader. A great amount of emphasis is laid upon the recognition of such a leader. So much so that the one who dies without recognizing his Imam or leader, then as per the saying of the Holy Prophet (S), he dies a death of ignorance.

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ إِمَامَ زَمَانِهِ مَاتَ مِيتَةَ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ.

“The one who dies without recognizing the Imam of his time, dies a death of ignorance⁶

Islam has explicitly declared that the earth will never remain devoid from the existence of an Imam or Leader. There are traditions, which state that an Imam will exist till the last moment of this world. As Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says:

لَوْ لَمْ يَبْقَ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا اثْنَانِ لَكَانَ أَحَدُهُمَا الْحُجَّةَ.

“Even if two persons were to remain on the earth then one of them will be the vicegerent of Allah.”⁷

It is the decree of Allah that all men - in every era and every place - should benefit by this bounty of leadership. The survival of this earth and its inhabitants is entirely dependent on the existence of an Imam. As Imam Baqir (a.s.) has said:

لَوْ أَنَّ الْإِمَامَ رُفِعَ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ سَاعَةً لَسَاخَتْ بِأَهْلِهَا وَمَا جَثَّ كَمَا يَمْوُجُ الْبَحْرُ بِأَهْلِهِ.

If this world were to remain devoid of an Imam even for a single moment then it will swallow its inhabitants.”⁸

Thus by now, it must have become sufficiently clear how much importance has been given to an Imam in the religion of Islam.

A cursory glance on the life of the Holy Prophet (S) reveals that he (S) had always strived during his own life, to introduce his successor to the people so that they may continue to traverse the path of guidance and bliss. Along with his constant responsibility of spreading the message of Divine Unity, he (S) would lose no opportunity in introducing his successor. He did all this so that there should not remain an iota of doubt in the minds of the people as to who are his (S) successors.

Upon his deathbed too, Holy Prophet (S) kept on reiterating the names of his (S) successors. His incessant efforts in his lifetime were only for the sake of guidance of Muslims, so that after his death they may not remain without a leader. History is a witness that the Holy Prophet (S) had introduced his successors repeatedly by his words and actions. These successors were those who would disseminate His message and confer eternity to it.

From the innumerable events in the life of the Holy Prophet (S) we relate over here only three incidences in support of our aforementioned assertion. We will demonstrate that how tirelessly Holy Prophet (S) strived to introduce Hazrat Ali (a.s.) as his immediate successor. All of his efforts were solely on the command of Allah and not a result of personal fancy, because all Muslims unanimously believe that the Holy Prophet (S) was undeniably an obedient servant of his Lord. He was not speaking anything on his own accord but it was as per the revelation of Allah.⁹ Hence his command is the command of Allah and opposing his command is similar to opposing the command of Allah. As Holy Qur'an says:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونُوا لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا.

“It does not behove a believing man or woman to have a choice in a matter which is already decided by Allah and His Apostle. And whosoever opposes Allah and His Apostle then indeed he is in manifest error.”¹⁰

It is worth noting that the issue of Hazrat Ali (a.s.)'s successorship is a matter already decided by Allah (s.w.t.) and His Apostle. Now no Muslim has any right to object in this matter or to supersede the decision of the Holy Prophet (S).

First Incident: Daawat al-Zulashirah

In the first open banquet for his tribesmen i.e. elders of Bani Hashim, the Holy Prophet (S) introduced the religion of Islam, invited them to accept the unity of Allah and to believe in his Prophethood. In this, gathering the determination and resolve of a youth astonished everyone. He alone responded to the clarion call of the Holy Prophet (S) and believed in him spontaneously. This youth was none other than Hazrat Ali (a.s.), who was the chosen successor of Holy Prophet (S).¹¹

Second Incident: Ghadeer Khumm

The previous episode was of the early days of Islam when it did not have many followers and helpers in its fold. However the second incident is of the time when the message of Islam had spread far and wide due to its refreshing teachings and also the exemplary character of Holy Prophet (S) and had attracted an enormous number of followers. On the plains of Ghadeer Khumm, in front of a mammoth crowd of around 1.25 lakh pilgrims the Holy Prophet (S) openly and unequivocally declared Hazrat Ali (a.s.) as his Divinely appointed successor.

The only difference between the first and second incidents is that the former was a gathering involving a limited number of people (only tribesmen of Bani Hashim) while the in the later a massive crowd of pilgrims heard the announcement. Before all of them Holy Prophet (S) - from a great the height and in the huge plains of Ghadeer - proclaimed that "Of whomsoever I am the master then this Ali too is his master (leader)."¹²

Hazrat Ali (a.s.) was the same man who was ever willing to sacrifice his life for Holy Prophet (S) and the cause of Islam. Muslims had already witnessed the heroic feats of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) in the battles they had fought. They all accepted the leadership of such a courageous leader with a cheerful approval.

Third Incident: Death-bed

This event relates to the final moments of the life of Holy Prophet (S) while he was on his death bed, extremely weak and frail. Even at such a delicate moment, the Holy Prophet (S) did not hesitate in emphasizing the successorship and leadership of Hazrat Ali (a.s.). He likened his Ahlul Bait (a.s.) to the Holy Qur'an and asserted that both will never separate from each other. He specified them as the (only) source of salvation,¹³

In this way, the Holy Prophet (S) clarified the issue of 'Mastership' and leadership for his people.

Not only these incidences from the life of Holy Prophet (S) testify to the successorship of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) but also many Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions can be found in its support. In one the verse, the Holy Qur'an has associated the obedience of 'Ulil Amr' with the obedience of Allah (s.w.t.) and His Apostle:

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

“Obey Allah and obey His Apostle and the Masters of Authority amongst you”¹⁴

This verse implies that it is obligatory to obey the Ulul Amr (Masters of Authority). It is unanimously agreed by all the sects of Islam that the Ulul Amr must be obeyed. The only bone of contention among the sects is who are ‘Masters of Authority’ (Ulul Amr)? According to Shi’ite belief, “Masters of Authority” are those men who are just, pious, erudite, the successors of the Holy Prophet (S) and whose words and deeds do not defy the commandments of Allah and His Prophet (S). They are preachers and defenders of Islam, exponents of Holy Qur’an and traditions, cognizant of Allah and other related sciences. The possessors of these attributes are only the twelve infallible Imams (a.s.). None of the (sunni) rulers or caliphs possessed such distinctions. These merits were seen in the pure and immaculate personalities of the twelve Imams and there are ample traditions from the Holy Prophet (S) in this regard.¹⁵

As it has been mentioned previously, since the beginning of his Prophethood till his last breath, Holy Prophet (S) repeatedly and regularly announced his successor. In mosques, in battlefields, among the companions, in Mecca, in Madina, in Hajj, in sermons, wherever he felt it necessary, Holy Prophet (S) introduced his successor and showed the people their leader. We quote over here three verses from Holy Qur’an in order to prove that leadership is a Qur’anic issue and expounded by the Holy Prophet (S) himself.

First Qur’anic Verse: Surah Maidah, 55

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُبَيِّمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

Verily your Master is Allah, His Apostle and those believers who establish prayers and pay Zakat in the state of bowing (ruku). (5:55)

The point to be noted in this verse is that ‘Mastership’ of those who pay Zakat in ‘ruku’ is mentioned along with the Mastership of Allah and His Apostle. It purports that only those persons (who pay zakat while in ruku) can be the rulers of Muslim community after the Holy Prophet (S).¹⁶

Abundant traditions are found in Shia and Sunni books, which state that this verse was revealed with reference to Hazrat Ali (a.s.), when he gave his ring to a beggar, while he himself was in ‘ruku’.¹⁷

According to this verse, after the Holy Prophet (S), it is the right of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) to guide the people.

Second Qur’anic Verse: Sura Maidah, 67

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ

النَّاسِ

“O Apostle! Convey that which has been (already) revealed to you from your Lord. If you do not, then it is as if you have not conveyed anything at all. And Allah will protect you from the people.”(5:67)

It can be inferred from this verse that whatever Allah (s.w.t.) has ordered His Messenger to convey to the people, must be really significant;

negligence on the part of Holy Prophet (S) would tantamount to not conveying anything at all from the earlier divine messages. We know for sure that the Prophethood of Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (S) is the pinnacle of Nabuwat and his Messengership is the culmination of the toils of all the earlier Messengers.

So the mystery deepens as to what was the message - which if not delivered by him (S) would nullify not only his own endeavours but also the toils of the previous prophets. Certainly, it has to be the announcement of his (S) successor — because an incompetent leader will certainly misguide and mislead the Islamic nation, thereby nullifying the struggles of the past prophets. And this would allow the deceptive and heinous reign of paganism and infidelity to prevail upon Islam.

Allamah Shaikh Abdul Husain Amini has quoted from Shia and Sunni sources, especially from 30 great Sunni scholars that this verse was revealed in praise of Hazrat Ali (a.s.). It was revealed when the Holy Prophet (S) was returning to Madina after performing his last pilgrimage (Hajjatul Wida) and many of his companions were accompanying him. When he reached the plains of Ghadeer Khumm, he received this verse. At such an occasion, at such a place and before a massive crowd, he raised Hazrat Ali (a.s.) on his hands and declared him to be his immediate successor and the leader of Muslims after him (S). It was to make them recognize their leader and realize their responsibilities towards him.

The world cannot produce again a mortal like Hazrat Ali (a.s.) who by his sheer sublimity became immortal in the annals of history. He was an epitome of all human, moral and divine attributes viz. piety, worship, bravery, leadership, erudition etc. He was a matchless and unique individual. He (a.s.) was the brother of the Holy Prophet (S), his saviour, his aide and ultimately his successor. He alone was eligible to lead Muslims after the Holy Prophet (S).

Third Qur'anic Verse: Surah Maidah, 3

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

“This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favours upon you and am pleased with Islam as your religion.” (5:3)

It is agreed by the majority of interpreters that this verse was revealed after the epoch making event of Ghadeer and confirmed the fact that religion was completed and perfected by the proclamation of Mastership and leadership of Hazrat Ali (a.s.). It means that Islam was incomplete without the announcement of Hazrat Ali's (a.s.) leadership.¹⁸

Many treatise and exhaustive books have been written by Shia authors in this connection. ‘As-Sulaim ibn Qais’, Basaaerud Darajaat, Talkheesaush Shafi, Ghaayatul Maram, Ahqaaqul-Haq, Abaqatul Anwaar, Beharul Anwaar, Al Ghadeer are but few of the books, which give convincing proofs regarding the belief in Imamate.

But it is a deplorable fact of Islamic history that soon after the demise of Holy Prophet (S), despite his repeated reminders, some corrupt individuals in their lust for power and authority disregarded his (S) admonition. They followed their whimsical desires and evil aspirations and usurped the right

of Hazrat Ali (a.s.). Leadership which was the sole prerogative of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) was snatched from him and his privileges were trampled.¹⁹ This opened the path of deviation for the Muslims.

Nevertheless, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) was forced to accept the same responsibility in its apparent form after a period of 25 years. Muslims thronged to him from all sides and compelled him to accept the leadership of the nation. He ruled the Islamic world for a brief period of five years. But the whole world witnessed the true spirit of justice and fairness of Islam in that brief reign. Everyone remained awe-struck and to this day many are amazed, by the brilliant rays of justice and truth that radiated in the brief rule of Hazrat Ali (a.s.).

Alas! There are still some people whose eyes are blinded by prejudice and they cannot perceive these brilliant rays of truth. These people are biased and have inherited prejudice from their fore fathers and ancestors who were averse to the truth. The bigots are blindly following the deviated path and as a result are deprived of guidance and truth. But they have forgotten that:

وَاللّٰهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ.

“Allah will perfect His light, though the disbelievers may be averse.”²⁰

The final words of the Holy Prophet (S) were very important and preserved by the faithful hearts. The implications of Prophetic words were the introduction of two invaluable guides (i.e. Holy Qur’an and Ahlul Bait (a.s.)), the adherence to whom will lead mankind to the right path. When hundreds of companions were looking at the Holy Prophet (S), he in his last sermon said:

“O people! I have accepted the invitation of death from Allah and I shall soon depart. But I am leaving behind two precious things amongst you i.e. the Book of Allah, the Holy Qur’an and my Ahlul Bait (a.s.) (family members). After me, if you adhere to both of them, you will never go astray. The two will not separate until they meet me at Hauz al-Kauthar.”

He (S) continued:

“O Allah! Let this earth never remain devoid of their existence so that Your religion does not tread on the path of falsehood and Your friends may not go astray. Though these Vicegerents of Allah are few in number yet they are much honoured in the eyes of Allah.”²¹

Thus it becomes clear that Holy Prophet (S) had appointed some guides and leaders besides Holy Qur’an, who were to be his successors and the exponents of Holy Qur’an, the removers of differences and the interpreters of Divine signs. The Holy Qur’an is a profound collection of multi-dimensional concepts in its entirety. Hence, it is imperative that an expert should always be there by its side. Such a person is none other than the Imam. It is only he who can explain its meanings and solve the disputes. As Holy Qur’an, itself introduces them in these words:

بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِيْ صُدُوْرِ الَّذِيْنَ اُوْتُوْا الْعِلْمَ

“Nay those are manifest signs in the hearts of those who are given knowledge.”²²

The Holy Prophet (S) himself had advocated his Ahlul Bait (a.s.) as a precious source of guidance against the perils of deviation. On another occasion, he compared his Ahlul Bait (a.s.) with the ship of salvation of H. Nuh (a.s.) for remaining safe from the waves of ruinous misguidance. He (S) said:

مَثَلُ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي فِيكُمْ مَثَلُ سَفِينَةِ نُوحٍ مَنْ رَكِبَهَا نَجَّى وَمَنْ تَخَلَّفَ عَنْهَا عَرِقَ.

‘The example of my Ahlul Bait amongst you is like the example of the ark of Nuh. The one who boards it will remain safe while the one who turns away from it will drown (in the waves of deviations and errors) ²³

In other traditions, the Holy Prophet (S) had enumerated the number and the names of his successors. In all such traditions the continuity of the path and message of Holy Prophet (S) lies in the Imamate and Wilayat (Mastership) of his (S) Ahlul Bait ²⁴ Thus, after the Holy Prophet (S), the reigns of the Islamic nation lie in the hands of the twelve Imams (a.s.) ²⁵ - a number similar to the guards (Naqeeb) of Bani Israel. Each of these Imams (a.s.) is from the Quraish and all of them are infallible. The last link in this series of Imamate or leadership is Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.).

History - written by friends and foes - is a witness to the chaste and impeccable lives of the Eleven Imams (a.s.). Each Imam, with his holy existence, had carved a niche for himself in the history of Islam. These immortal leaders, like rays of sun have instilled a fresh life in an inert humanity by their sheer wisdom and knowledge.

These sagacious personalities lifted a devastated and ravaged society to the pinnacle of prosperity and glory. They regularly imparted Islamic teachings and tenets according to the need of time and circumstances but due to some unfortunate reasons, they could not accomplish all of their plans. All such unaccomplished tasks were assigned to the last leader and were adjourned till his reappearance. A leader, who in the tenure of his Universal Government will replenish every corner of the earth with Islamic teachings and disseminate Islam in the entire world, Inshallah.

Notes

1. كَلَّمَا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَىٰ أَنفُسُهُمْ فَرِيحًا كَذَّبُوا وَفَرِيحًا يُعْتَلُونَ

Whenever a prophet said a thing which they disliked, then some they denied and some they stayed.” (Maidah, 6: 70)

2. “وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ

And in every nation We appointed a messenger who preached to worship Allah....” (Nahl: 36)

3. Saying of Hazrat Ali (a.s.): Nahjul Balagha - Subhi Saleh, pp. 43-44. فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولَهُ وَ

وَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَائَهُ لِيَسْتَأْذِنُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ وَ يُذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسَبِي نِعْمَتِهِ وَ يَحْتَجُّوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالتَّنْبِيغِ

4. Holy Qur’an, al-Aa’raaf, 7:158.

5. Holy Qur’an, Al-Lail, 92:11.

6. Ghaibat Nomani, p. 130.

7. Al-Kafi Vol. 1, p. 253, ‘Basaerud-Darajaat’, p. 488. Kamaluddin, p. 203

8. Vide ‘Ghaibat-e-Nomani’, p. 139, with minor difference in ‘Usool- e-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 253, ‘Basaerud-Darajaat, p. 448, ‘Kamaluddin’, pp. 202-203.

9. “He does not speak on his own, but what is revealed to him” (Najm, 53: 3-4).

10. Holy Qur’an, Ahzaab, 33: 36.

11. There are countless references available for this incidence, not only in Shia books but also in Sunni books. For instance, some of the famous Sunni books are: Musnad Ahmed bin Hanbal, Part I, pp. 111, 159, 333, Sharhe Nahjul Balagha by Ibn Abil Hadid, vol. 3, pp. 263,282. Kifayatut-Talib by Hafiz Ganji-e-Shafai in Chapter 51, Tafseer-e-Tabari under the verse وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ “Warn your nearest relations”, Tarikh-ul-Umam-wal-Moluk, p. 217 from different versions. Some vain and prejudiced persons have tried to dilute the importance of this matter by ignoring it deliberately. These persons did not have the forbearance to accept the glaring truth.

A contemporary author from Egypt, and a renowned litterateur, Muhammad Hasnain Haikal, a famous Sunni author has mentioned this anecdote in his biography, “The life of Muhammad”, published in 1354 A.H. on page 104, in these words: “On that day Prophet of Allah introduced Hazrat Ali (a.s.) as his immediate successor.” However a majority of the Sunnis criticized him (Haikal) for mentioning this event. Hence, in the later editions this anecdote was omitted completely. Is this justice? Justice

12. In history, the event of ‘Ghadeer’ had made such an indelible mark that it is quoted by almost all the historians. For details you can refer to ‘Al-Ghadir’ by Allamah Abdul Husain Amini, ‘Abaqaatul-Anwaar’ by Mir Hamid Husain Hindi, ‘Ahqaaqul-Haq’ by Qazi Noorullah Shustari.

13. Since Holy Prophet (S) has said this tradition hence it has been widely quoted by Sunnis and Shiite traditionalists. He said “The similitude of my Ahlul Bait amongst you is like the Ark of Noah. Whoever boards it will achieve salvation and whoever stays off it will perish. Refer ‘Al-Mustadrak’, Vol. 2, p. 343, vol. 3, p. 150. Printed at Hyderabad, ‘Fazael Al-Khamsa min sehahe sitta’, vol. 1, pp. 59, 65.

14. Holy Qur’an,an-Nisa, 4: 59.

15. For details refer ‘Muntakhabul-Athar’ by Lutfullah Safi Gul-paygaani, p. 74, Hadis No. 36, p. 101, Hadis no. 4.

16. There are many verses revealed in support of Hazrat Ali (a.s.). Allamah Sayed Hashim Bahrani has quoted 248 verses in his book ‘Ghaayatul Maram’. Similarly about 84 verses are quoted from Shia and Sunni channels in the eulogy of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) in the 3rd Volume of ‘Ahaqaaul Haq.’

17. ‘Al Ghadeer’ of Allamah Shaikh Abdul Husain Amini, vol.

18. ‘Ahqaaqul-Haq’, vol. 2, p. 399.

19. Vide Nahjul Balagha, ‘Khutba-e-Shiqshiqayya’, where Hazrat Ali (a.s.) expressed his sentiments and distressing pain of heart.

20. Holy Qur’an, As-Saff, 61: 8.

21. This tradition is recorded by many Sunni scholars from different versions. After this there does not remain any room for skeptics to maintain their stance. Shahid-e-Salis Qazi Noorullah Shustari has compiled a book on the subject by the title of ‘Ahaqaqul; Haq’, Ayatullah Uzma Aqa-e-Sayed Shahabuddin Najafi Marashi wrote footnotes on the book and added a lustre of vantage to the book. For reference of this particular tradition, refer the 9th, vol. of the book pp. 309,357, 376.

22. Holy Qur’an,al-Ankaboot, 29: 48.

23. Al - Mustadrak; 2 / 343 ; 3 / 150.

24. ‘Muntakhabul-Athar’, pp. 99-100; ‘Ghaibat-e-Noomani’, p. 81, wherein those traditions are recorded which mention the names of Imams.

25. عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ سَمُرَةَ. قَالَ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ. يَكُونُ إِثْنِي عَشَرَ أَمِيرًا فَقَالَ كَلِمَةً لَمْ أَسْمَعْهَا فَقَالَ أَبِي إِنَّهُ قَالَ كَلِمَةً مِنْ فُرَيْشٍ (Saheeh Bukhari, vol. 9, p. 81). Muslim has also recorded in his Saheeh as follows: لَا يَزَالُ الدِّينُ قَائِمًا حَتَّى تَقُومَ السَّاعَةُ أَوْ يَكُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِثْنَا عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً كُلَّهُمْ مِنْ فُرَيْشٍ. Fazaael al-Khamsah Min al-Sehaah al-Sittah, vol. 2, p. 23

Chapter 2: The Dawn of Life

Birth

In the dawn of 15th Shaban 255 A.H., a brilliant glow appeared on the horizon of the universe. Its luminescence instilled a new life in humanity and nourished the universe with elixir. Despite the evil designs of the enemies, the Promise of Allah actualized in the form of the birth of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.).

The despicable attempts of the Umayyid and Abbasid caliphs to extinguish the light of Allah once again met with failure. Indeed the birth is the most awe-inspiring and amazing event of history.

The despotic caliph of Bani Abbas had received intelligence reports that a saviour in the form of the Twelfth Imam (a.t.f.s.) will rise and fill the earth with justice and equity. Thus the apprehension of the emergence of such a reformer obsessed the minds and hearts of tyrant rulers. They contrived all sorts of devious plots to snuff out this light of Allah before its birth. In order to realize their plans they searched and explored every corner of the earth. They perpetrated unspeakable atrocities upon innocent Shias, spilled their blood, sawed their flesh and killed them ruthlessly.¹ Often the victims of such cruelties were the descendants of Holy Imams (a.s.). For the sake of keeping Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) under strict surveillance, Mutawakkil al-Abbasi issued a directive in the year 235 A.H. that Imam (a.s.) along with his family should come and stay in Samarra (the then Capital city) instead of Madina.² From then on a very close vigil was kept on Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) and his family members.

Mutamid al-Abbasi, who was successor of Mutawakkil, was as apprehensive of the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), as Firaun was scared of the birth of Musa (a.s.). This wretched caliph went a step further than his predecessors and employed some mid wives to visit the house of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and other descendants of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) to detect the birth of newborns. He was anxiously waiting the news of a newborn in their family so that he could instantly kill the infant.³

These efforts became more vigorous and intense the demise of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). At this juncture, their task became more complex since they understood that the inevitable Promise of Allah had already materialized. The reins of Mastership came in the hands of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). Thus the whole universe became subservient to him.

Shaikh Saduq (r.a), the famous Shia scholar writes in his book ‘Kamaluddin’:

“When people departed after burying Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), the Caliph and his aides started searching for the son of Imam (a.s.) more frantically and numerous houses were raided in this regard.”⁴

Another great Shia scholar, Shaikh Mufid (r.a) writes in his book ‘Al Irshad’ in the chapter of demise of Abu Muhammad Al Hasan ibn Ali (a.s.) thus:

“When Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) expired, then the caliph started searching for the son of Imam more intensely. He left no stone unturned in

this regard because the belief of the Shias concerning the advent of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) had gained prominence.”⁵

Mutazid was another despotic tyrant from the caliphs of Bani Abbas. His reign of terror lasted for a decade, from 279 A.H. to 289 A.H. When he learnt that a period of twenty years had passed since the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and despite the incessant attempts of the previous caliph to trace him, he (a.s.) was still alive; he resolved to slay the whole clan of Imam Askari (a.s.). One of the caliph’s cronies narrated thus:

“Mutazid gave two men under my charge and instructed us to take an extra horse with us. We were told to go directly to Samarrah and ride continuously without halting anywhere, not even for Namaz. After reaching Samarrah we were ordered to invade the house of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and were told that “whosoever you find there bring him to me”.⁶

Mutazid had forgotten that the power that protected Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) during the reigns of the previous caliphs can safeguard him now too, because the will of Allah cannot be thwarted by any despotic oppressor. Is it possible that the Promise of Allah may remain unfulfilled?

It is important to note that whenever Allah, the Almighty, has chosen someone, wished to confer dignity upon him and destroy falsehood through his hands, then certainly He enforced His decisions and no man or power can ever refute His decree. The story of Hazrat Musa (a.s.) lends weight to this assertion. The circumstances of his birth and his growing up in the palace of Firaun are a lesson in itself. Similarly the birth and other events of the life of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) too substantiate this reality. Hence in spite of the desperate efforts of the enemies, the Omnipotent Allah protected His Vicegerent and rendered useless the plans of His enemies.

Nevertheless, as it was mentioned earlier, at the dawn of 15th Shaban, 255 A.H., Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) saw the luminous and radiant face of his son (a.t.f.s.), who was destined to lead a very long life and fulfill the promises and glad tidings of Allah.

On the third day of his birth, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) addressed his companions in these words:

وُلِدَ لِأَبِي مُحَمَّدٍ الْحُسَيْنِ مَوْلُودٌ فَسَمَّاهُ مُحَمَّدًا فَعَرَضَهُ عَلَيَّ أَصْحَابِهِ يَوْمَ الثَّلَاثِ وَقَالَ ”هَذَا إِمَامُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِي وَخَلِيفَتِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَهُوَ الْقَائِمُ الَّذِي تَمْتَدُّ إِلَيْهِ الْعُنَاقُ بِالْإِنْتِظَارِ فَإِذَا امْتَلَأَتِ الْأَرْضُ جَوْرًا وَظُلْمًا خَرَجَ فَيَمْلَأُهَا قِسْطًا وَعَدْلًا“.

“After me he is the Master of your affairs, he is my successor, he is the same ‘Qaem (a.t.f.s.) who is awaited by all. When the earth will be fraught with injustice and oppression then he will reappear and fill the earth with justice and righteousness.”⁷

On the same occasion he addressed another group of companions as:

زَعَمَتِ الظُّلْمَةُ أَنَّهُمْ يَفْتُلُونَنِي لِيَقْطَعُوا هَذَا النَّسْلَ كَيْفَ رَأَوْا قُدْرَةَ الْقَادِرِ.

The oppressors were contemplating to kill me and sever my offspring, so that my son should not come to the existence. But they saw the infinite power of Omnipotent Allah.⁸

On the auspicious occasion of the birth of his son, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) ordered to distribute 10,000 Ratal of bread and meat⁹ among the Bani Hashim. Usman bin Saeed who was assigned this task of distribution, performed it meticulously.¹⁰

Since the initial days of birth, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) kept his son hidden from the people. Regarding this aspect, Shaikh Mufid (r.a) writes in his book “Al-Irshad”, in the chapter of demise of Abu Muhammad Al-Hasan bin Ali (a.s.) that:

“Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) declared his son as his successor, but kept him hidden because of the unfavourable circumstances of that time. The caliph was pursuing his son because the belief in Mahdi had become very common and it was well-known that he is awaited by the people. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) never brought his son in public and consequently the enemies could not recognise Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)...

Although, the birth and existence of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) remained concealed from the enemies and antagonists but the sincere and trusted Shias became aware of his existence. The source of their knowledge was Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). He himself introduced his angelic son to his followers whom he deemed fit. Some of them were informed through ‘letters’; one of them was Ahmed bin Ishaq, an ardent partisan of Imam (a.s.). He received a letter, personally written by Imam Askari (a.s.). He (a.s.) wrote:

“I have been blessed with a son, this news should not be disclosed to the people. I will personally inform this matter only to our selected friends and relatives.”¹¹

Some of the Shias were fortunate to see him (a.s.) when they went to meet Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). As Abu Amr Ahwazi relates:

أَرَانِيهِ أَبُو مُحَمَّدٍ وَقَالَ هَذَا صَاحِبُكُمْ

“He (Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)) was shown to me and I was told ‘He is your Master’.”¹²

At some other times when a group of Shias went to meet Imam Askari (a.s.) and if they were of true faith and people of forbearance, then Imam Askari (a.s.) used to present his son to them. Like Muawiyah bin Hakim, Muhammad bin Ayub and Muhammad bin Usman Amri relates thus:

“We were a group of forty men gathered in the house of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) brought his son in front of us and said: “He is your Imam and my Successor. After me obey him and do not dispute lest you all perish.”¹³

Anyhow, the Shias come to know about the birth of the twelfth radiant star on the horizon of Imamate and expressed their heartfelt joy and elation over it. Hasan bin Husain Alavi says that:

“I visited Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and offered my congratulations to him, on the occasion of the birth of his son.”¹⁴

Similarly Abdullah bin Abbas Alavi narrates as:

“In Samarrah, I met Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and congratulated him for the birth of his son.”¹⁵

Thus in such adverse circumstances Hazrat Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) led his life away from the eyes of the enemies. Only a few very devoted and genuine Shias had access to him. On 260 A.H. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) departed from this transient world and accordingly Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) ascended to the sublime office of Imamate or Leadership

Minor Occultation

After the demise of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), the sublime status of Imamate was entrusted to the last successor of Prophet Muhammad (S) i.e. Hazrat Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). Although, he would not appear among the people, yet some genuine and trustworthy Shias were having access to him. He (a.s.) would solve the problems and predicaments of Shias through these privileged ones.

These privileged Shias were men of distinction. They excelled in all the facets of life viz. faith, piety, honesty etc. They were the link between Imam (a.t.f.s.) and the masses. As the deputy of Imam (a.t.f.s.) they would convey his messages to them and in turn would exhort the people to execute their responsibilities towards him.

A probe into the lives and times of these pious personalities increases our understanding of their position and also enhances our cognizance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) because their words and traits reflect the signs of Imam (a.t.f.s.). Among these deputies, four of them were very famous and renowned.¹⁶ They were popularly known as ‘Nawwaabe-Arbaa’ (Four Special Deputies). We present a brief account of their lives, in order to acquire a better understanding of their position.

First Deputy: Usman bin Saeed Amri

He was also the deputy and trustee of Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) and Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). In that capacity, he handled an enormous amount of responsibilities pertaining to the affairs of Shias. Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) enumerated his virtues, in front of his followers as:

هَذَا أَبُو عَمْرٍوالتَّيَّةُ الْأَمِينُ، مَا قَالَهُ لَكُمْ فَعَنِّي يَقُولُهُ وَمَا آدَاهُ إِلَيْكُمْ فَعَنِّي يُودِّيهِ.

“This Abu Amr (Usman bin Saeed) is my trusted one. Whatever he tells you, it is on my behalf and whatever he conveys to you, it is on my behest”¹⁷

Until the demise of Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.), i.e. upto the year 254 A.H., he served Imam (a.s.) as his confidant. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) further adorned his position by saying:

هَذَا أَبُو عَمْرٍوالتَّيَّةُ الْأَمِينُ مِنْ ثِقَّةِ الْمَاضِي وَثِقْتِي فِي الْمَحْبِيَا وَالْمِمَاتِ فَمَا قَالَ لَكُمْ

فَعَنِّي يَقُولُهُ وَمَا آدَى إِلَيْكُمْ فَعَنِّي يُودِّيهِ.

“This Abu Amr is my confidant, as he was the confidant of my predecessor (i.e. Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.)). I trust him in the affairs of my life and death. Hence his pronouncements are by my order and his verdicts are my verdicts.”¹⁸

Due to his devotion and dedication Usman bin Saeed was retained as a deputy by Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) after the death of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). His exalted position becomes more evident by perusing the following heart-

felt condolence offered by Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), on the death of Usman bin Saeed to his son Muhammad bin Usman. He (a.s.) said:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ، تَسْلِيمًا لِأَمْرِهِ وَرِضَاءً بِقَضَائِهِ عَاشَ أَبُوكَ سَعِيدًا وَمَاتَ حَمِيدًا
فَرَحَمَهُ اللَّهُ وَالْحَمْدُ لِأَوْلِيَائِهِ وَمَوَالِيهِ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ فَلَمْ يَزَلْ مُجْتَهِدًا فِي أَمْرِهِمْ سَاعِيًا فِيمَا يُفَرِّقُهُ
إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَإِلَيْهِمْ نَصَرَ اللَّهُ وَجْهَهُ وَ أَقَالَ عَثْرَتَهُ.

“We belong to Allah and to Him shall we return. We resign ourselves to the Will of Allah and submit ourselves to His destiny. Your father led a fruitful life and met a noble death. May Allah have mercy upon him and gather him amongst His chosen friends (Peace be upon all of them). He was most persevering in his desire to gain proximity to Allah and His vicegerents. May Allah illuminate his visage.”¹⁹

Second deputy: Abu Jafer Muhammad bin Usman

He was also one of the deputies of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) in his tenure of Imamate and later Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) appointed him as his deputy. It has been said about him:

“He was so much revered and respected among the Shias that his name needs no introduction..”²⁰

Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) eulogized him and his father Usman bin Saeed, while in conversation with one of his companion in this way:

الْعَمْرَوِيُّ وَإِبْنُهُ ثِقَتَانِ فَمَا آدِيَا إِلَيْكَ فَعَنِّي يُودِيَانِ وَمَا قَالَا لَكَ فَعَنِّي يَقُولَانِ فَاسْمَعْهُمَا
وَاطْعُهُمَا فَاتَّخَمَا الثَّقَتَانِ الْمَأْمُونَانِ.

“Amri and his son both are my trusted ones. Their utterances are on my behest and their conveying is per my instructions. Thus listen to them attentively and obey them. They both are reliable and trustworthy near me.”²¹

Imam al-Zaman (a.s.) extolled his merits thus:

“I repose confidence in him and his letters are same as my letters and instructions.”²²

Third Deputy: Abul Qasim Husain bin Ruh Nawbakhti

Abu Jafar Muhammad bin Usman, the second deputy of Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) introduced him thus:

“This, Husain bin Ruh bin Abu Hajr Nawbakhti is my successor. He is a mediator between you and Imam (a.t.f.s.) and is trusted by Imam (a.t.f.s.). You all must refer to him in your affairs and rely upon him in your tasks. It was my responsibility which I have fulfilled.”²³

Shaikh Tusi (r.a) opined about him:

“Husain bin Ruh Nawbakhti was the most learned personality amongst friends and foes alike.”²⁴

Even his staunchest opponents confessed to his unmatched greatness. Shalmaghani is enumerated among those, who were a false claimant of Imam's (a.s.) deputyship. Husain bin Ruh exposed his lie and deceit on the orders of Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Consequently Shalmaghani was forced to confess that:

“It does not behove me, while in front of Allah, to speak anything about Husain bin Ruh except the whole truth although, he has perpetrated a grave crime against me. But still, this man is appointed by Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) for his works and Shias are not supposed to desert him.”²⁵

Fourth Deputy: Abul Hasan Ali bin Muhammad Seymuri

This highly venerated personality was the last special deputy of Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Husain bin Ruh introduced him as his successor and deputy of Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).

The last Epistle (Tauqee) of Imam al-Zaman (a.s.) was received through him, since he was the last special deputy. In this Epistle, Imam (a.t.f.s.) had appraised Ali bin Muhammad of his death and announced the termination of the series of special deputyship:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ - يَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّيْمُرِيِّ أَعْظَمَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَ إِخْوَانِكَ فِيكَ فَإِنَّكَ
مَيِّتٌ مَّا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ فَاجْمَعْ أَمْرَكَ وَلَا تُوصِ إِلَى أَحَدٍ فَيَقُومَ مَقَامَكَ بَعْدَ وَفَاتِكَ
فَقَدْ وَقَعَتِ الْعَيْبَةُ النَّائِمَةُ فَلَا ظُهُورَ إِلَّا بَعْدَ إِذْنِ اللَّهِ. تَعَالَى ذِكْرُهُ وَذَلِكَ بَعْدَ طُولِ الْأَمَدِ
وَقَسْوَةِ الْقُلُوبِ وَأَمْتِلَاءِ الْأَرْضِ جَوْرًا وَسَيِّئَاتِي لِشَيْعَتِي مَنْ يَدْعِي الْمَشَاهِدَةَ إِلَّا فَمَنْ ادَّعَى
الْمَشَاهِدَةَ قَبْلَ خُرُوجِ السُّفْيَانِيِّ وَالصَّيْحَةِ فَهوَ كَذَّابٌ مُفْتَرٌ وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ
الْعَظِيمِ.

“In the name of Allah, the Compassionate the Merciful. O Ali bin Muhammad Seymuri! You will die in six days. May Allah give great rewards to your brothers. Hence collect your affairs and do not appoint anyone as your successor since now the Major Occultation is about to commence. My reappearance will be by the permission of Allah (s.w.t.). A very long period will pass. Hearts will harden and the earth will be filled with tyranny and oppression. Soon some from my Shias will make a claim of meeting me. Whosoever will claim of having a voluntary approach to me, prior to the rebellion of Sufyani and the celestial voice, then he is a blatant liar and has casted an aspersion (upon me). And there is no power and might except that of Allah, the Exalted, the High.”²⁶

As the Epistle clearly depicts, the office of special deputyship was terminated and Ali bin Muhammad Seymuri was the last deputy. Also whoever claims to be a special deputy and having voluntary approach to the presence Imam (a.t.f.s.) is a vehement liar. Although in ‘Ghaibat al-Kubra’, some fortunate people have met Imam (a.t.f.s.) yet none of them made such a claim.

These four deputies of Imam (a.t.f.s.) were of such a high caliber that everyone trusted them wholeheartedly. But their mere claims were not accepted unless they displayed miracles in support of their claims.²⁷ These deputies would present the problems and difficulties of the people, questions and queries of scholars before Imam (a.t.f.s.) and Imam (a.t.f.s.) would convey the replies to them through these deputies in his Epistles.

Through these Epistles, we have answers to some of the very complex problems pertaining to beliefs and deeds. One of the issues was the

responsibilities of Shias when faced with new and intricate problems in ‘Ghaibat al-Kubra.’

In one of the Epistles addressed to Ishaq bin Yaqub, a prominent Shia, Imam (a.t.f.s.) had explained the duties of Shias in the major occultation. Since the past 12 centuries the Shias are following this code of administration as promulgated by Imam (a.t.f.s.) which has become the secret of eternity of Islam. Allah willing, we shall discuss this topic under the title “Guidance during Occultation.”

Nevertheless, these deputies acted as intermediaries between Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and his followers. Ultimately, on 15th Shaban, 329 A.H. the minor occultation ended with the conclusion of the fourth deputyship. As destined by Allah the period of major occultation commenced. It was the same dark and gloomy era that was predicted by the Holy Prophet (S) and Imams (a.s.) years before. This era of major occultation is of severe trials and tribulations, which will end by the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). He will reappear - with Allah’s permission - and implement the Divine Promises.

Major Occultation

The major occultation commenced in the year 329 A.H. In Ghaibat al-Kubra, if anyone claims to be the special deputy or intermediary of Imam (a.t.f.s.) then - as per the verdict of Imam (a.t.f.s.) - he is a blatant liar and has cast aspersions on Imam (a.t.f.s.).

Many traditions from Imams (a.s.) have compared the occultation of Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) with the sun while it is concealed behind the clouds. As the sun, though concealed behind the cloud is still an eternal source of life, so is Imam (a.t.f.s.) even while being in occultation, is the cause of existence of the whole universe.

Although many individuals have been blessed with meeting Imam (a.t.f.s.) in Ghaibat al-Kubra, yet none of them claimed to have done this voluntarily. Many books have recorded the incidents of those persons, who have met Imam (a.t.f.s.) in Ghaibat al-Kubra. One of those books is ‘Najmus Saaqib’ written by Mirza Husain Noori (r.a). This book lists some of the eminent celebrities of Islam viz. Allamah Hilli (r.a), a scholar and rationalist (Mutakallim), Muqaddas al-Ardbeli (r.a), a noted scholar, Syed ibn Ta’oos (r.a), a famous traditionalist, & Syed Bahrul Uloom (r.a), a great thinker and scholar. Many more names can be added to the list.

Each one of them has seen their beloved Imam (a.t.f.s.) with their own eyes, because their hearts were overflowing with the cognizance (maarefat) and love of Imam (a.t.f.s.). These great men strived and left no stone unturned in their quest to instill the cognizance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) in the hearts of his (a.s.) followers. The advice of Syed Ibn Ta’oos (r.a) to his son can be cited as an example. This counsel was written by him in the year 650 A.H. In this inscription, Ibn Ta’oos has hinted at many important things without the claim of meeting Imam (a.t.f.s.).

O my beloved son, if mysteries are unraveled for you, I will teach you so many things about Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), that doubts will vanish from your heart. Keep away rational proofs and evidences for surely, Imam (a.t.f.s.) is alive and is awaiting to reappear by the permission of Allah. He was not an

exception (concerning occultation) but this trait was also found in many bygone Prophets (a.s.). Be sure and believe that the cognizance of your father about Imam (a.t.f.s.) is more explicit than that of the sun.”²⁸

Apart from Shia scholars, even some laymen were blessed with the meeting of Imam (a.t.f.s.). Some of them were those who led a way-ward life but repented later and developed affection for Imam (a.t.f.s.) in their hearts. Allah with His infinite Grace blessed them by meeting Imam (a.t.f.s.). Even some Sunnis have received this privilege. One of them was Shaikh Hasan Iraqi, a Sunni by faith. He led a very reckless and wanton life in his youth and committed all sorts of sins. Suddenly one day he decided to turn into a new leaf. He left that sinful place and went to a mosque. The mosque was full of believers and a speaker was casually speaking about Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). Hasan Iraqi after hearing the speech was fascinated with Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). The fervour of his (a.s.) love encompassed the heart of Shaikh Hasan. He at once repented and expressed regret for his past misdeeds. From that very day, after every namaz, he started imploring Allah for a meeting with Imam (a.t.f.s.). Finally, his invocations were answered and he got the blessed opportunity of staying with Imam (a.t.f.s.) for seven days.

Later this very man become a renowned personality of his time. Many great scholars held him in esteem. Abdul Wahab Sharani, the famous Sunni scholar and the one who documented this incident used to remember him as “my master and my revered Hasan Iraqi.”

In ‘Ghaibat al-Kubra’ many great scholars have received Epistles from Imam (a.t.f.s.). One of them was Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Noman popularly known as Shaikh Mufid. Shaikh Mufid (r.a) held a lofty status in knowledge and piety. This Epistle (Tauqee) came to him as a reward for his incessant endeavours. A part of that Epistle is reproduced below, which was received in 410 A.H. A keen perusal of this Epistle depicts that the knowledge of Imam (a.t.f.s.) encompasses our daily lives and occurrences, which gives rise to great expectations:

فَإِنَّا يُحِيطُ عَلِمْنَا بِأَبْنَائِكُمْ وَلَا يَفُوتُ عَنَّا شَيْءٌ مِّنْ أَحْبَابِكُمْ وَمَعْرِفَتُنَا بِالذَّلِيلِ الَّذِي
أَصْبَابُكُمْ، مُذْجَنَحَ كَثِيرٍ مِّنْكُمْ إِلَى مَا كَانَ السَّلْفُ الصَّالِحُ عَنْهُ شَاسِعًا وَتَبَدُّوَالْعَهْدَ الْمَاخُودَ
مِنْهُمْ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ. إِنَّا غَيْرَ مُهْمِلِينَ لِمُرَاعَاتِكُمْ وَلَا نَاسِينَ لِدِكْرِكُمْ وَلَوْ لَا
ذَلِكَ لَنَزَلَ بِكُمْ اللَّأْوَاءُ، وَاصْطَلَمْتُمْ الْأَعْدَاءُ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ جَلَّ جَلَالُهُ.

“We are conscious of your affairs and none amongst you is hidden from us. We are also aware of your shortcomings. Most of you have committed such vices, which were shunned by your pious ancestors. These people have flouted the covenant, as if they do not have knowledge of it. Surely we are not negligent of your affairs and we are not forgetful of your remembrances. Had it been so, calamities would have descended upon you. And your enemies would have prevailed upon you, Hence remember Allah the Almighty and fear Him alone.”²⁹

As it was mentioned earlier, these invaluable pieces of writings from Imam (a.t.f.s.) in ‘Ghaibat al-Kubra’ have served like a code of

administration for his sincere and genuine followers. These epistles are documented in various authentic books.³⁰

However, in this period of Major occultation, Shias are passing through the most critical and toughest phase of their history.

Notes

1. Maqatilul-Talebeen by Abul Faraj Isfahani. In this book the author has recorded the events upto 313 A.H. and has given an account of only those martyrs who were from the progeny of Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.).
2. Isbatul Wasiyah compiled by Abul Hasan Ali Masudi, p. 435.
3. Usul-e-Kafi, Kitabul Hujjah (The chapter of New born of Abu Muhammad Al Hasan bin Ali (a.s.)).
4. Kamaluddin, vol. 1, p. 101
5. Kitabul Irshad
6. 'Ghaibat' pg 160 by Shaikh Tusi and 'Shawahedun-Nabuyyah' by Abdur Rahman Jami Hanafi.
7. 'Yanabiul-Mawaddah' by Khwaja Kallan Sulaiman Qundoozi Hanafi, p. 260.
8. Narrated by Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) on the authority of Sayed ibn Ta'oos.
9. Ratal is measuring unit and it is equal to 750 grams.
10. 'Kamaluddin' by Shaikh Saduq, vol. 2, p. 104.
11. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 108.
12. 'Al-Irshad' by Shaikh Mufid, the chapter of those who visited 12th Imam.
13. 'Kamaluddin', vol. 2, p. 109.
14. Isbatul Huda by Shaikh Hurre Aameli, vol. 2, p. 433.
15. Ibid.
16. For detailed account of Imam's deputies, the books of Narrators can be referred. Also vide Tanqihul-Maqar by Shaikh Mamaqani, vol. 1, p. 200.
17. A1 Ghaibah' by Shaikh Taifah Abi Jaafar Muhammad bin Al-Hasan Tusi, p. 215.
18. Ibid.
19. Tankihul-Maqal by Mamaqani, vol. 3, p. 149.
20. Ibid.
21. A1-Ghaibat' by Shaikh Tusi, p. 219
22. Ibid.
23. Tarikh al-Ghaibat al-Sughra' by Muhammad Sadr, p. 407
24. 'Tarikh-e-Ghaibat' by Shaikh Tusi, p. 236
25. Vide 4 Beharul-Anwar' by Allamah Majlisi, Chapter of occultation, section 21, quoted from 'Ghaibat' of Shalmaghani.
26. Ghaibat-e-Shaikh Tusi, pp. 242-243
27. 'Al-Kharaej-wal-Jaraeh' by Qutubuddin Rawandi quoted from Beharul-Anwaar, vol. 13, Chapter 21.
28. 'Kashful-Mohajjah' or 'Barnama-e-Sa'adat' by Syed ibn Tawoos, Section 75, p. 74
29. Refer to 'Beharul-Anwar' by Allamah Majlisi, vol. 52, p. 175
30. 'Kamaluddin' by Shaikh Saduq, Chapter 49, Beharul-Anwar, vol. 13, Chapter 36; 4 Al-Ethejaaj' by Shaikh Tabarsi, vol. 2.

Chapter 3: A glance at the future

The belief in Mahdaviyat has provided the shias with a dazzling “mirror”, in which they can visualize the distinct characteristics of their religion. Consequently, Shias have strived incessantly to keep this radiant light illuminated up to eternity.

In this mirror, a shia sees the fulfillment of his aspirations concerning the progress of mankind towards prominence and perfection. He visualizes multitudes of people submitting (only) to Allah and His ordinances that were promulgated for the entire humanity. He perceives the prevalence of justice and righteousness on the earth. He pictures the dominance of his religion (Islam), over all fictitious and pseudo religions of the world. A religion, which withstood the tribulations of history, remained strong and resilient and proved its genuineness.

Finally he looks at a miserable and disappointed ‘man’, who is depressed by the disgraceful failure of various schools of thoughts, due to their man-made laws. The same disheartened and dissatisfied man has (finally) surrendered himself to a saviour, a deliverer of a common law under a Divine Ordinance.

These visions relate to the advent of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) and the belief in Mahdaviyat provides a radiant aura around the future of humanity. The belief in Mahdaviyat is invigorating and positive, because awaiting a saviour leads to self - improvement and an inner awakening. Awaiting (intezaar) is a prelude to a great revolution, which will be initiated by a divine reformer with divine laws. Hence this belief comprises of two aims:

1. Purposeful Universe.

2. The necessity of establishment of the whole world as one community.

Of course, both the aims are very important and significant. Islam and all other celestial religions are unanimous in the belief of an advent of a saviour.¹ A saviour who will lead the virtuous ones to success and salvation and provide the world with tranquility and peace.

Shias have always been the torchbearers and proponents of such a belief and will continue propagating it. The reason why shias have got a prominent position concerning the belief of Mahdaviyat is due to their perseverance in clarifying and explaining the misunderstood aspects of this belief and their ceaseless efforts in highlighting the salient features of this concept - a concept which propagates the need of a leader, leadership and the establishment of a universal government.

Awaiting (intezaar) for the divine saviour has infused a zeal and willingness in the Shias. Many ancient and recent philosophers have expressed and visualized the same ideas. Like Plato, has expressed an idea of the ‘learned city’ or as recent thinkers proposed, Utopia,² Georgia,³ Eldorado⁴ and ‘the Empire of Sun.’⁵ All these ideas had a dream of a Paradise on earth.

After the renaissance, it was expected that scientific progress would fulfill all the cherished dreams of man. But despite all these scientific advancements, mankind is still dazed and confused as ever. A cursory

glance at the ideas and conclusions of so-called modern thinkers will suffice to prove the point.

1. Intellectuals and researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology of America compiled a book after a lot of research. The book was named as “The Limitations of Evolution”. An excerpt from the book is quoted below:

“Science and technology despite their multiple advantages and umpteen benefits are still considered to be the root of present complex issues. viz enormous increase in population, corruption, pollution and other dangerous effects. We are not prepared to retreat a few centuries. Yet we are still not aware how to tackle the present issues, because we do not have a clear and lucid picture about our future expectations. We are also unaware of the way to utilize the unfettered progress of science and technology, which can be a blessing or a curse in equal measures.”⁶

2. A famous French methodologist writes regarding the limitations of science in his book, “The circumstances and conditions of scientific spirit”:

“Science says that, ‘I am concerned only with tangible object i.e. How is it? and not with intangible concepts i.e. Why is it so? The problems of the common man are not of any significance to me. My principles are neither flexible nor comprehensive.’”

“Some persons are over-sensitive about poverty, problems destructions etc. Great intellectuals like Nanus, Ruman, Rolan, Andrew Burton, Pasternach, Murich, opine that the consequences of scientific progress are only destructive. Because it exterminates the essence of life and personality. It is, in fact a collection of few materialistic concepts, inventions of lifeless machines, which are meaningless to us. Hence science is a thing which by no means can be considered as constructive.”⁷

Some philosophers have suggested remedies for liberating man from these dangerous and scary circumstances.

1. Bertrand Russel a renowned British philosopher and mathematician says:

“At present there is no obstacle for the establishment of a Universal regime, from the scientific aspect. We maybe compelled to accept a Universal Government. Else either we will be forced to return to the barbaric era or we must resign to the annihilation of human race.”⁸

2. The ex-secretary of United Nations Organizations, Edward Hambler states that:

“Today millions of people are victims of cruelty and suppression or destitution and poverty. Day by day hazardous events are surrounding them. In order to tackle these problems and for maintaining universal peace, a powerful-United Nations Organizations is desperately needed.”⁹

3. The contemporary scientist and physicist, Albert Einstein states emphatically while advocating the need of communal unity that:

“The various communities of the world belonging to any colour or creed, any caste or race must lead their lives under a single banner of truth, sincerity, peace, unity and fraternity.”¹⁰

In spite of man’s successive failures in his attempts to tackle the problems of humanity, he is still engaged in the search of a solution relying

upon his knowledge and intelligence. His perseverance suggests as if he had never stumbled and faltered in his quest for salvation. It is pertinent to mention over here, that neither do we subscribe to views of the philosophers in the matter of ‘Universal Government’ nor our thoughts were influenced by them. Nor did we endeavour to revive a long forgotten belief. Rather the reality is absolutely contrary to all such baseless assumptions. We staunchly believe that this instinctive need of man (for justice and peace) which is being recently trumpeted by intellectuals was actually explained centuries ago. This belief alone can direct the man towards the path of guidance and salvation. - a salvation which can be achieved only when the leadership of a divinely appointed leader is accepted by the mind and soul.

It has been mentioned earlier that Shias have always been in the forefront of such a caravan, which aspires to achieve salvation under the patronage of a divine leader. But it does not mean that from among all the sects of Islam, only the Shias hold this belief. If only the people who make such allegations and are victims of ignorance and prejudice had been sensible and impartial and had referred to Sunni books, they would have realized the reality of this belief (of Mahdawiyat).

The quotations mentioned below corroborate the fact that Mahdaviyat is a common Islamic belief and all Muslims are unanimous about it.

A. The famous exponent of ‘Sehah al-Sitta’ and professor of Al-Azhar University, Shaikh Mansur Ali Nasif asserts that:

“It is quite popular and well-known amongst the scholars of Ahle-Sunnat that from the progeny of the Holy Prophet (S) a Mahdi will reappear and he will rule over Islamic empires. Muslims will follow him and accept him as their leader. He will establish justice and equity among the people and help the cause of Islam. Our famous traditionalists like Abu Dawood, Tirmizi, Tabrani, Ibne Majah, Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal and Hakim Neshaburi have recorded traditions pertaining to him in their books.¹¹”

B. A senior researcher and scholar of Mecca, Ahmed Zeni Dehlan notes that:

“Traditions regarding Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) are numerous and oft-quoted (Mutwatir). Among them are correct traditions, though some are weak. But excessive narration by a large number of traditionalists have given it a high degree of acceptance”¹²

It must be kept in mind that this belief enjoys a prominent place in Islam. As it was suggested earlier it is common amongst all the sects of Islam because its root lies in the Holy Qur’an. Moreover, the sayings of infallible Imams (a.s.) have made it more apparent and famous. Some of the Qur’anic verses and traditions are quoted below.

Qur’anic Verses

(a) The Holy Qur’an gives glad tidings that the earth will be ultimately ruled by the pious men:

إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ يُورِثُهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

“Verily the land is Allah’s; He causes such of His servants to inherit as He pleases and the end is for those who guard (against evil).”¹³

(b) The revival of dead earth as foretold by Holy Qur’an:

إِغْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا

“**Know that Allah gives life to the earth after its death.**”¹⁴

(c) The promise of Holy Qur’an to the believers:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي وَلَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا

“**Allah has promised to those who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth as He made rulers those before them; and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them and He most certainly - after their fear - give them security in exchange; they shall serve Me, not associating anyone with Me ...**”¹⁵

(d) At another place, it says:

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

“**They desire to extinguish the light of Allah by their mouth, but Allah will perfect His light, though the unbelievers may be averse.**”¹⁶

These were some of the glad tidings of Holy Qur’an. These verses imply that, a time will come when all false doctrines will be uprooted and overthrown; Islam will gain an upper hand and will spread from East to West. Everyone will join the mainstream. Tyranny, oppression and injustice will be annihilated and eradicated. The divine representatives will rule the earth. Thus, all the Muslims are waiting for such an auspicious and dazzling day, whose occurrence is inevitable.¹⁷

Prophetic Traditions about Mahdaviyat

In the treasures of Islamic traditions the glad tidings of a judicious and equitable government are found everywhere. Moreover, the characteristics of that ‘Divine Revolution’ are explained and also the ‘Divine Leader’ is introduced who will implement the commands of Allah. The Holy Prophet (S) said;

لَوْ لَمْ يَبْقَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا يَوْمٌ وَاحِدٌ لَطَوَّلَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ حَتَّى يَبْعَثَ فِيهِ رَجُلًا مِّنْ أُمَّتِي وَ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي يُوَاطِئُ اسْمَهُ إِسْمِي بِمَلَأِ الْأَرْضَ قِسْطًا وَ عَدْلًا كَمَا مِلَمْتُ ظُلْمًا وَجَوْرًا.

“Even if a single day were to remain for the end of this world, Allah (s.w.t.) will prolong that day to such an extent that He will raise a man from my nation, and my own progeny. His name will be same as my name and his agnomen will be same as my agnomen(i.e. Abul Qasim). He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it was fraught with tyranny and oppression.”¹⁸

This saying of the Holy Prophet (S) proclaims the advent of a judicious and equitable government and emphasizes the certainty of the Divine promise. This tradition is mentioned in Shia and Sunni books

At another place the Holy Prophet (S) addressed Hazrat Ali (a.s.) and said:

الْأَيِّمَةَ مِنْ بَعْدِي اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ أَوْهُمْ أَنْتَ يَا عَلِيُّ! وَأَخِرُهُمُ الْقَائِمُ الَّذِي يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
عَلَى يَدَيْهِ مَشَارِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَغَارِبَهَا.

“After me there will be twelve Imams. O Ali! You are the first among them, and last of them will be Al-Qaem (a.t.f.s.). Allah shall grant him victory over the east and the west”¹⁹

Imams (a.s.) have expressed the importance of this ‘Divine Promise’ in several traditions and have also introduced the last successor of the Holy Prophet (S). They themselves were desirous of his advent; they declared that the best form of worship is awaiting the reappearance of Imam Mahdi’s (a.t.f.s.) and considered his companions as the most honourable people.

Imamite traditions about Mahdaviyat

The sayings of Imams (a.s.) will add radiance and lustre to this treatise and will also clarify some wrong notions about Imams (a.s.).

When Imam Hasan (a.s.) challenged the wretched Muawiyah and his minister Amr bin Aas for a war, they bribed the commanders of Imam’s (a.s.) army and isolated him (a.s.). Hence Imam Hasan (a.s.) was forced to sign a truce with Muawiyah. But he (a.s.) dictated his own terms for the treaty. One of the clauses of that treaty was that Muawiyah will not designate anyone as his successor and will never wage a war with Imam (a.s.).

Though Imam Hasan (a.s.) signed the treaty with Muawiyah, he always remained resolute on his terms and never accepted the conditions of Muawiyah. He always exposed the transgressions of Muawiyah and thus gave a fitting reply to those who objected over the signing of the peace treaty.

While replying to the baseless objections of his shortsighted followers, he predicted the rise of twelfth Imam in these words:

أَمَا عَلِمْتُمْ أَنَّهُ مَامِنًا أَحَدٌ إِلَّا وَيَقَعُ فِي عُنُقِهِ بَيْعَةٌ لِبَطَاغِيَةِ زَمَانِهِ إِلَّا الْقَائِمُ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي رُوحَ
اللَّهِ عَيْسَى بْنُ مَرْيَمَ خَلْفَهُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يُخْفِيهِ وَلَا دَنَاءَ وَ يُعِيبُ شَحْصَهُ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ فِي عُنُقِهِ
بَيْعَةٌ إِذَا خَرَجَ ذَلِكَ التَّاسِعُ مِنْ وُلْدِ أَخِي الْحُسَيْنِ ابْنِ سَيِّدَةِ الْإِمَاءِ يُطِيلُ اللَّهُ عُمُرَهُ فِي غَيْبِهِ
ثُمَّ يُظْهِرُهُ بِقُدْرَتِهِ فِي صُورَةٍ شَابٍ دُونَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً وَذَلِكَ لِيُعْلَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ.

“Do you not know that all of us (Imams) are having the allegiance of a wicked tyrant upon our necks except our last one - Al-Qaem, behind whom Jesus will pray? Allah will conceal his birth from the people. He will remain far from the sight of people and when he will reappear then he will not have the allegiance of any ruler upon his neck. He will be the ninth descendent of my brother Husain and son of a princess. Allah will prolong his age in occultation. When he will reappear, Allah by His Omnipotence will make him look like a man of about forty years, so that all realize that Allah has power over everything.”²⁰

When Imam Sadiq (a.s.) was asked about his successor, he replied:

الْإِمَامُ مِنْ بَعْدِي مُوسَى وَالْحَلْفُ الْمُنْتَظَرُ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ عَلِيِّ ابْنِ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُوسَى

“My son Musa will be my successor. But the Imam about whose reappearance everyone is anxious will be Muhammad son of Hasan, son of Ali, son of Muhammad son of Ali son of Musa.”²¹

Also Imam Sadiq (a.s.) is quoted repeatedly as saying:

لِكُلِّ أُنَاسٍ دَوْلَةٌ يَرْقُبُونَهَا وَدَوْلَتُنَا فِي آخِرِ الدَّهْرِ يُظْهِرُ.

“For every nation there is a government to which they are connected. Our government will appear in the last era.”²²

When Imam Musa Kazim (a.s.) was questioned, whether he was AI-Qaem’, he replied:

أَنَا الْقَائِمُ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَكِنَّ الْقَائِمَ الَّذِي يُظْهِرُ الْأَرْضَ مِنَ الْعَدَاءِ اللَّهُ يَمْلَأُهَا عَدْلًا كَمَا مَلَأَتْ جَوْزًا. هُوَ الْحَامِسُ مِنْ وُلْدِي لَهُ غَيْبَةٌ يَطُولُ أَمْدُهَا حَوْفًا عَلَى نَفْسِهِ يَزِيدُ فِيهَا أَقْوَامٌ وَ يَنْبُتُ فِيهَا آخَرُونَ... طُوبَى لِشِيعَتِنَا الْمُتَمَسِّكِينَ بِحَبْلِنَا فِي غَيْبَةِ قَائِمِنَا أَوْلِيكَ مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ مِنْهُمْ قَدْ رَضُوا بِنَا أَيْمَةً وَرَضِينَا بِهِمْ شِيعَةً فَطُوبَى لَهُمْ، هُمْ وَاللَّهُ مَعَنَا فِي دَرَجَتِنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ.

“I am a ‘Qaem” with truth; but the Qaem - who will purge the earth from enemies of Allah and who will fill the earth with justice, as it was fraught with tyranny and oppression - will be my fifth descendant. Since his life will be in danger, he will remain concealed for years. During his occultation some people will turn apostate, while some will remain steadfast in their faith.” He added; “Congratulations to our Shias who cling to our ‘rope’ in the occultation of our Qaem, those who remain steadfast on our friendship and firm in their hatred of our enemies. They are from us and we are from them, they are pleased with our leadership and we are satisfied with their following. Then congratulations to them. By Allah they will be in our grades along with us on the Day of Resurrection.”²³

The eleventh Imam, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) said:

كَأَنِّي بِكُمْ وَقَدْ اخْتَلَفْتُمْ بَعْدِي بِالْخُلْفِ أَمَا إِنَّ الْمُقَرَّرَ بِالْأَيْمَةِ بَعْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ الْمُنْكَرِ لَوْلَدِي كَمَنْ أَقَرَّ بِنُبُوَّةِ جَمِيعِ أَنْبِيَاءِ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَأَنْكَرَ نُبُوَّةَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ لِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ كَمَنْ أَنْكَرَ جَمِيعَ أَنْبِيَاءِ اللَّهِ لِأَنَّ طَاعَةَ آخِرِنَا كَطَاعَةَ أَوَّلِنَا وَالْمُنْكَرِ لِآخِرِنَا كَالْمُنْكَرِ لِأَوَّلِنَا. أَمَا أَنْ لَوْلَدِي غَيْبَةٌ يَرْتَابُ فِيهَا النَّاسُ إِلَّا مَنْ عَصَمَهُ اللَّهُ.

“I can visualize that after me you are in dispute about my successor. Beware that the one who believed in all the successors (i.e. eleven Imams) and disbelieved in my son, then it will be as if he believed in all the Prophets and disbelieved in the last Prophet (S). Obedience to the last Imam is obligatory as the obedience to the first Imam. Hence if someone denied our last one then it is tantamount to the denial of our first one. Know that the occultation of my son will be so long that people will falter and waiver in their faith, except those who are protected by Allah.”²⁴

All these traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) and infallible Imams describe the characteristics and importance of this important doctrine. In Shia books the traditions regarding this belief are so enormous, that we can safely say that only the traditions concerning H. Ali (a.s.) surpass the traditions about Imam Mahdi (a.s.) These traditions are recorded in Shia and Sunni books

and their number runs into thousands.²⁵ Great scholars of Islam (from different sects) have written entire books on Imam Mahdi (a.s.) and the list of these books is very long.²⁶

The contemporary man is seeking a solution which may free him from his distress and disaster. He is in search of a shelter where he may escape from everyday problems. This shelter along with its distinct features and unique characteristic exists in the realm of Islam. In the shade of the same 'shelter', Islam has constructed the edifice for the future of humanity.

Notes

1. The prophecies of the advent of a saviour can be found in all the celestial religions. These can be found in books like 'Basharat-e-Ahdaiir and 'Daulat-e-Mahdi' by Dr. Muhammad Sadeqi and 'Mauood-e-Jehani' by Ayatullah Zanjani.
2. Utopia: It is the name given to an imaginative, social, perfect system, often compared to Paradise. Utopian concept was a product of Thomas Moore's thinking.
3. Georgia: It is the name of a learned city suggested by Burtolet Prushet, a contemporary of Thomas Moore. This name of 'Learned City' is extracted from Thomas Moore's collection of odes.
4. Eldorado: It is another 'Learned City' introduced by Voltaire, an eminent philosopher from the 'era of enlightenment' in the history of France.
5. The Empire of Sun: It is another 'Learned City', which was thought by famous Mathematician and Philosopher, Thomas Campneila.
6. Translated from the Persian book "Mahdudiyathaae-Rushd", p. 23, from the preface. Original not traced. This book was published in Iran by "The Organization for the Protection of Social, Natural and Human Environment".
7. Quoted from the book "The style and statutes of learned soul" by Zoan Maurasti, translated by Dr. Ali Muhammad Kardan, quoted from the translation, p. 18.
8. Vide 'The effect of Science upon the people'.
9. The monthly journal of Tehran. The Economist, edition no. 859, Aban No.1349, p. 6
10. Vide 'The Theory of Relativity' by Albert Einstein, p. 35.
11. Vide 'Kitab-al-Tajy, vol. 5, Chapter 7, by Shaikh Mansur Ali Nasif.
12. Refer 'Al Futuhaat-al-Islamiyah' by Ahmed Zeni Dahlan.
13. Holy Qur'an, al-Araf, 7: 128.
14. Holy Qur'an, al-Hadid, 57:17, Imam Baqir (a.s.) interprets this verse as "He revives the earth by justice after her death by injustice." (Al- Kafi).
15. Holy Qur'an, an-Nur, 24:55.
16. Holy Qur'an, as-Saff, 61: 8.
17. According to Shia and Sunni interpreters, because of clear narrations 'Master of Authority' are none but the twelve Imams, who are the successors of the Holy Prophet (S) and appointed by Allah for the guidance of the world. For details refer 'Fazael al Khamsa min Sehaah-e-Sitta'.
18. Muntakhab-al-Asar', Part 2, Chapter 1 by Luftullah Safi Gul-paygani.
19. Ibid, Part 1, Chap. 4.
20. Ibid, Part 2, Chap. 10.
21. Ibid, Part 2, Chap. 21.
22. 'Amali', p. 489, by Shaikh Saduq (r.a.).
23. Isbatul Huda, vol. 6, p. 417, by Shaikh Hurre Aameli.
24. Ibid, p. 427.
25. Such traditions are neatly categorized and recorded in 'Muntakhab-al-Asar fil Imam-e-Saani-al-Ashar' by Lutfullah Safi Gul-paygani.
26. An exhaustive list of these books may be found in the book 'Najmus Saaqib' by Mirza Husain Noori, Readers may also refer 'Kitabnama-e-Imam Mahdi (a.s.)'.

Chapter 4: Leadership in the era of occultation

It has been revealed in Torah:

“Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) selected some capable men from the Bani Israel and made them leaders of the people. Then entrusted them with the leadership of different groups of people. These men used to arbitrate among the people in small matters, but regarding intricate and problematic matters they used to consult Hazrat Moosa (a.s.)”

This system remained so successful that even two thousand years after Hazrat Musa (a.s.), F.Y Tyler was forced to include it as a part of the constitution for the administration of organizations and named it as “The law of Exception”.¹

The “delegation of authority and powers” is a part and parcel of every administrative system. A leader executes the most important of tasks and delegates ordinary works to his subordinates in the organization, so that they may execute the tasks using their intellect and experience under the guidelines suggested by their leader.

The purpose of ‘delegation of authority’ is that the leader divests some his discretionary power to his subordinates and shares a part of his responsibilities with them. It is obvious that no organization can work efficiently unless powers and responsibilities are shared or distributed among its employees. This becomes all the more necessary when the responsibilities of the leader are ever increasing. In such a complex situation, the leader assigns an entire part of his multifarious responsibilities to his subordinates.

After the Second World War the opinion of experts on ‘Organizational Administration’ underwent a sea change and the current procedures of assigning authority came into existence. Accordingly, it affected the principles of government, guardianship and other aspects of administration in present day organizations.

This fact must be borne in mind that this approach to leadership has been proved quite advantageous. Lighter burden of responsibilities; more achievement of targets; smoother coordination; greater enthusiasm to work; quicker accomplishments of tasks are some of the manifest advantages of this approach. Apart from these, there are many more benefits to it.

“The Law of Exception” envisages how a leader enhances his realm of work by making it more comprehensive and diverse. Of course, the tasks bearing similarity with that of leader should be assigned to the most eligible men so that they may guide the people, lead them towards the right path and only in exceptional cases,² where they cannot perform their responsibility, they should consult their leader. The Holy Qur’an advocates the same concept, while expounding the dissemination of religious knowledge in these words:

وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا كَافَّةً فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ
وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ.

“And it does not behove the believers that they should go forth all together; why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain (a deep)

understanding in religion, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious?”³

This Qur’anic injunction demands that some men in every region should set out for acquisition of knowledge, come back to their areas, impart the knowledge to the masses, make them aware of their religion and guide them in the problems of life. These problems may be in the matters of worship, personal and social life. They must acquire deep knowledge regarding all the aspects of life and guide the people in the best possible manner. Thus, they inform the people of their responsibilities and also warn them of the dire consequences which may befall them due to their negligence.

The Holy Prophet (S) and infallible Imams (a.s.) would send their servants and scholarly companions to remote places with the mission of propagating Islamic teachings. They were given the freedom to pronounce verdicts in matters of Ahkam. The Holy Prophet (S) had sent Mas’ab bin Umair towards Mecca and Sa’ad bin Ma’az towards Yemen. Hazrat Ali (a.s.) followed the footsteps of Holy Prophet (S). During the reign of his (a.s.) caliphate, he appointed Qusum bin Abbas as the Governor of Mecca and wrote to him,

“Sit with the people in the mornings and evenings and explain the religious laws to them.”

Similarly other Imams (a.s.) too emulated the conduct of the Holy Prophet (S). Imam Sadiq (a.s.) had directed his followers towards Abu Bashir Asadi and Muhammad bin Muslim Saqafi for answers to their religious queries. He advised to one of his companions Abaan bin Tughlab that:

“Sit in Masjid al-Nabawi and give your verdicts pertaining to religious matters.”

Imam Reza (a.s.) exhorted Ali bin Musayyab to acquire knowledge from Zakaria bin Adam Qummi, who was a deputy of Imam (a.s.).⁴ Likewise, he directed some of his companions towards Yunus bin Abdur Rahman for learning religious sciences.⁵

This was the general practice of our Imams (a.s.) although the “law of exception” is evident in some cases. Our Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) too has followed the footsteps of his (a.s.) forefathers but he added a new dimension to it. As we have mentioned earlier, that in this era of occultation, Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has handed the reigns of guidance to the honest and trusted ‘fuqaha’ (religious scholars) so that in this period of occultation the learned scholars may guide and inform the masses of their religious duties.

Once again the “law of exception” was implemented in the period of occultation with all its characteristics for the guidance of Shias. This law became the primary cause of the safety of Islam. We its help (i.e. following the fuqaha) we were able to withstand the upheavals of time. Gradually but surely, the religion evolved with the passage of time and attained its present glory. With the help of this magnificent law alone, the representatives (fuqaha) ensured that the ‘complete message’ of Islam should reach to the people and they have been successful in guiding the shias due to the blessings of Imam al-Zamana (a.t.f.s.)

Our books of jurisprudence have unequivocally stated these ‘fuqaha’ have (limited) authority and sovereignty on the people and the people should turn towards them in matters of religion. This fact is clearly pronounced by Imam al-Zaman (a.s.) in his letter (tawqee) to Ishaq bin Yaqub via Muhammad bin Usman thus:

وَأَمَّا الْحَوَادِثُ الْوَاقِعَةُ فَارْجِعُوا فِيهَا إِلَى زُورَةِ حَدِيثِنَا فَأَنَّهُمْ حُجَّتِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ.

“And regarding the occurrence of new problems and issues, you refer to the narrators of our traditions, since they are my representatives upon you as I am the representative of Allah upon them”⁶

It must be borne in mind that “Hawadise-Waqeah” implies ‘new and unique problems’, which occur in the day to day life of the people. Hence when faced with such problems it is the responsibility of the people to consult the competent jurists.

About these ‘jurists’, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) had mentioned a few qualities which distinguishes them from others. He said:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْفُقَهَاءِ صَائِبًا لِنَفْسِهِ، حَافِظًا لِدِينِهِ مُحَالِفًا عَلَى هَوَاهُ، مُطِيعًا لِأَمْرِ مَوْلَاهُ، فَلِلْعَوَامِ أَنْ يُقَلِّدُوهُ وَ ذَلِكَ لَا يَكُونُ إِلَّا بَعْضَ الْفُقَهَاءِ الشِّيْعَةِ لَا كُلَّهُمْ.

“And among the jurists (Fuqaha) those who protect their selves (from sins), guard their religion, resist their carnal desires and are obedient to their Master, it is incumbent upon the people to follow them. Such characteristics are found only in a few (shia) jurists and not all of them.”⁷

In this way Imam (a.t.f.s.) entrusted the task of guidance in the responsible hands of Shia jurists who possess the above mentioned attributes. Their task was to guide the shias and give the verdicts in newly occurring events and problems. Although the earlier Imam (a.s.) too practiced this “Law of Exception” yet its use has been more widespread in the period of major occultation. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has urged his followers to consult those scholars who are well versed in the permitted (Halal) and the prohibited (Haram) things. As he (a.s.) put it:

“If two persons dispute about a thing between themselves then they should consult him who narrates our traditions and who deliberates upon our permitted and prohibited things and knows our views and commandments. Select him for arbitration, since I have appointed such a person for this matter. If anyone rejects his verdict then it is as if he has taken the commands of Allah lightly and has refuted us. Certainly the one who refutes us has refuted Allah. Verily such a man has entered the realm of polytheism.”⁸

This tradition clearly tells us that these jurists are not mere narrators of traditions. Rather, these are individuals who contemplate and reflect upon the words of Imams (a.s.). Then in the light of Qur’anic verses, traditions of Imams (a.s.) as well as the fundamental beliefs of religion they deduce the laws of religion.

This fact should be always borne in mind that these jurists are highly regarded by our Imams (a.s.). Once Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) mentioned about

his companions Zurarah, Abu Basir, Muhammad bin Muslim, Buraid Ajli in this manner:

“Had these persons not been there, then no one would have been able to derive the religious laws. They are the protectors of religion. My father trusted them in the matter of permitted and prohibited things. They preceded others in this world in reaching us and so will they precede others in the hereafter.”⁹

Thus, as in the case of our earlier Imams (a.s.), in this era of occultation too, the responsibility of guiding the people lies in the hands of the ‘fuqaha’. These scholars guide the people and protect the religion at all cost. It is for this reason that Imam al-Zaman (a.s.) has said about them,

“They are my vicegerents upon you and I am the vicegerent of Allah upon them.”¹⁰

Imam (a.t.f.s.) has prayed for them, aided them in deriving the Islamic laws, and guided them in difficulties. Imam (a.s.) in his tawqee to Shaikh Mufid (r.a) has referred to him as ‘my steadfast brother’ and ‘responsible friend’. The concluding part of the same blessed tawqee highlights a very important point. And that is, that our Imam (a.s.) is concerned about every Shia follower. He is so much concerned about them that he remembers them constantly, wards off calamities from them and protects them from their enemies. The affection of Imam (a.t.f.s.) can be experienced in the following words:

إِنَّا غَيْرُ مُهْمِلِينَ لِمُرَعَاتِكُمْ وَلَا نَاسِيْنَ لِذِكْرِكُمْ وَلَوْ لَا ذَلِكَ لَنَزَلَ بِكُمْ اللَّأْوَاءُ وَاصْطَلَمْتُمْ
الْأَعْدَاءُ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ جَلًّا لَهُ.

“Surely we are neither negligent of your affairs, nor are we forgetful of your remembrance. Had it been so, then afflictions would have descended upon you and enemies would have suppressed you. Hence fear Allah and adopt piety.”¹¹

Notes

1. ‘Usul-e-Saazman-e-Idari Pg. 54, written by Leverbook translated by Seerun Parham. The author had committed two apparent errors: (i) Firstly about 3500 years have lapsed since the time of Hazrat Musa (a.s.) and not 2000 years, as said by the author, (ii) Secondly, this system is not so fresh (as imposed by author) as it is imagined but centuries ago, it has become cynosure of thoughts in Islamic civilization.

2. Refer ‘Al-Muqaddemah’ by Ibn Khaldun. Here ‘exception’ does not mean against law but in the context of administration, it implies the distribution of works and grades.

3. Holy Qur’an, at-Tawba, 9 :122.

4. Ali bin Musayyab relates that I implored Imam Reza (a.s.) that: “It is very cumbersome for me to attend your lectures since my home is at a remote distance.” Imam Reza (a.s.) replied: “Go to Zakaria bin Adam Qummi, he is our turtle in religious and worldly affairs.” vide Tarkihul Maqal, vol. 1, No. 4237.

5. Ibid, vol.3, p. 338

6. Vide Kamaluddin, p. 484, Beharul Anwaar, vol. 53, p. 181, Wasaelush-Shia, vol. 18, Kitabul-Qaza, p. 101.

7. See Wasaelush-Shia, vol. 18, p. 95

8. Wasaelush-Shia, vol. 18, p. 98

9. Ibid, p. 104

10. Refer ‘Najmus Saaqib’ by Mirza Husain Noori.

11. Beharul Anwaar, vol. 53, p. 175.

Chapter 5: Longevity

One of the unique characteristics of our belief in Mahadaviyat is that it is accompanied with the belief of long life of the divine saviour. Interestingly, he is more than eleven hundred years old. While when we look around us, we hardly find people living beyond hundred years. Thus, this long life of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is something that baffles the mind and is not easily acceptable to the people. They wonder at the reason behind the long life of Hazrat (a.s.).

We will delve into this sensitive matter scientifically and support our views with well researched articles and theories so that the matter becomes clear to one and all.

Life

If we understand the basic definition of “life”, then either the questions related to longevity will cease to exist or at least it will be understood easily. The science of biology is silent on this matter (of life) and has termed it as an named it as an unfathomable mystery. Till now, no concrete definition has been put forward for “life” which implies that no clear differentiation can be made between living and non-living cells of the human body.

An American professor and lecturer of George Washington University in his book ‘One, Two, Three, Infinite’ hinted towards the shortcomings of Biology and named a chapter of his book as ‘The Mystery of Life’. He acknowledged that the intellect and understanding of man is incapable to grasp the ‘reality’ of life.

The renowned surgeon and physician Dr. Alexis Carrel, Head of Organization of Rockefeller University in America, after concluding his researches brought them in the form of a book and named it, ‘Man, The Unknown’. He solemnly confessed in this book that “We possess a very superficial and incomplete knowledge regarding our existence.”

It is natural that when our knowledge concerning “life” - which is the essence of our existence - is so shallow and incomplete, then objections on ‘longevity’ should not be raised. It must be remembered that unless man derives accurate conclusion about life, it is improper to discuss longevity.

Death

So far it is not known to biologists who of the two are natural - life or death. The eminent German biologist, Professor Wiseman gives a fitting reply to this question in his book “The Cognizance of Life” in these words:

“The thing which is natural for living being is life and not death.”¹

According to the most recent biological discoveries, if the causes of ageing in a cell can be ascertained, then we may be able to overcome death. The main cause of man’s death is nothing but gradual suicide - which he invites due to his ignorance about food and eating habits as well as the harmful effects of the environment. All these steadily but surely take him towards his end.

In other words, we can never question anyone “why you are alive?” But whenever we hear about someone’s death - whether it is of a man, woman, young, old, child - we always ask keenly about the cause of his / her death. This in itself shows that death is unnatural. Thus it is death which always

needs a reason and people ask for its cause. Reason is always required to justify death irrespective of whether it was timely or untimely. It would not be wrong to say that ‘whenever death occurs it is untimely since no particular time is fixed for death.’²

Science

If years ago astronomers would have said that the moon - which is the beloved of so many poets and about whom Socrates has written so many unheard ideas - will be under the feet of man then not many would have accepted this view. But today, the conquest of moon has become an indelible part of history. Similarly the strides made in the field of Biology through constant research and experiments compel us to believe that longevity is no longer a distant dream. As Dr. Alexis Carrel states:

“We yearn for a long life and are already heading towards it. The experiments made on animals regarding the changes of environment and food, convincingly shows that the cherished goal of longevity will be soon achieved.”³

Any wise person who has witnessed the rapid progress made by man in the various fields of science will never regard the problem of longevity as insurmountable. The patriarch of philosophers, Avicenna, suggests that:

كُلَّمَا قَرَعَ سَمْعَكَ مِنَ الْغَرَائِبِ وَ لَمْ يَثْمُ دَلِيلٌ عَلَيَّ اِمْتِنَاعِهِ فَذَرَهُ فِي بُقْعَةِ الْاِمْتِكَانِ.

“If you hear something very strange and wonderful, but cannot establish any reason for its impossibility, then let it remain in the realm of possibility.”⁴

In this discussion, we will delve into the successful experiments and present the latest theories of scientists regarding longevity and thus expose the baseless objections of the skeptics.

1. The contemporary man is striving relentlessly to find the means of overcoming old age. A large part of his life is spent in laboratories, and after extensive research and investigations finally, a glimmer of hope was sighted. Professor George Hamilton, a biochemist in Michigan University says,

“A drug by the name of Leostrol has been found to possess miraculous effects on the cells of the body and doubles their life.” He concluded that: “The life of human organs and consequently man himself can be doubled through hormones”.⁵

Dr. Pechnikov, an eminent biologist of East Europe holds another view. He opines that the primary cause of death is the alterations of certain germs near the intestines. This place is the centre, where the powers of attraction and repulsion roll into action and reaction.

Dr. Pechnikov traveled extensively in the world, especially in the Balkan regions since the inhabitants of that region were mostly centenarians. He wanted to investigate the cause of their long life. He found that the Balkan people were frequently consuming milk and its products especially curd. Curd contains lactic acid which suppresses the harmful effects of the poisonous gases found near the intestine.

Thus it can be deduced that the endeavours and investigations of man concerning longevity are bearing fruit. Thus his painstaking efforts to unravel the mysteries of longevity have yielded results

The foremost outcome of these intensive investigations is the possibility of doubling the age of man. It is expected that the future may produce still better results. The conclusive inference is that longevity and scientific discoveries are not contrary to each other. Instead the recent scientific discoveries reveal that day by day man is getting closer to longevity and is mentally prepared to welcome it now, than earlier.

Causes

Researchers in the field of Biology have also conducted an in-depth study on the factors of ageing and premature deaths and have listed many causes in this connection. The three prominent factors that curtail the life of an individual are environment, work and food. It is clear that a natural environment (like mountains and rural areas) free from pollution and human excesses, nutritious food which provides all the essential ingredients to the human body and work which does not drain his physical and mental energies are most effective in prolonging man's life. A comparative study of those who are very much careful of their eating habits and those who are careless or those who work in normal conditions and those who work under stress and deadlines indicate that the average life of former outlasts the later. All this indicates the role and importance of these factors in prolonging man's life.

Calculation of man's age

As we have discussed earlier that scientific researchers have clearly proved that no limit can be set for human life - neither there is an average limit, nor an upper limit. According to science no limit can be claimed as final because any limit can be breached. A detailed analysis of the census of different countries indicates that the average age of the people varies from country to country. And it is due to different reasons viz. climatic conditions and geographical factors.

In England, in the year 1838-1854, the age of men was between 39 years (minimum) to 91 years (maximum) while that of women was between 40 and 66 years. Once again when the census was conducted in 1973, it was found that the ages of men had risen to 60 (min) to 81 (max) years, while that of women rose to 41 (min) to 85 (max) years.

Similarly in America in the earlier census of 1901 the age of men ranged between 23-48 years and that of women between 51-80 years. While in the year 1944, the average age of men increased and ranged between 50-63 years and of women 68-95 years.

The difference in average ages after a time gap indicates the improvement in public health and effective control of dangerous diseases.

In England, during the year 1838-1845, if someone would have declared that men couldn't live more than 40 years, then surely the researchers of that time would have smiled and replied (1) No average age limit should be fixed which cannot be increased or decreased (2) even if some average age

limit was stipulated, it was as per the maximum and minimum limit of that time.

Hence all fixed age limits will be proved wrong after a period of time. All such attempts to fix the age limit will become the object of mockery and ridicule. And this derision is the fate of all those who set a limit for age and forward such baseless ideas. It must be mentioned at this stage that the increase in the average age of man is in itself the best proof that human life cannot be fixed to a pre-determined value.

The incessant researches in biological science have revealed an increasing list of factors that increase the span of life. The scientists are working on 'proportionate weight of brain', which may become an effective cause of increasing man's age and scientists have reached to a conclusion that the life of man can be prolonged up to 350 years in the near future.

Hence the conclusion of all these discussions is that no limit can be stipulated for the age of man. A manifestation of an uncommon phenomenon cannot become the proof of its non-existence.

An Exception

Let us discuss longevity from another angle. Despite the significant advancement and admirable progress of human knowledge in unraveling so many natural mysteries, there is one intricate riddle that has frustrated man and has made him powerless. And that insoluble riddle is 'the exception to natural laws', which has astonished many experts in the diverse fields of knowledge and science. The progressive man, who always seeks solution to his problems in the light of general scientific laws, is sometimes confronted with such circumstances where all the laws become void and all conjectures seem absurd. As a result, intellectuals had to admit the existence of 'Exception in natural laws.'

For instance, according to the general laws (of Chemistry) under normal conditions the combination of two gases (even outside laboratory room) produces a third gas. Like water is the product of the combination of hydrogen and oxygen, which according to the said law, under the normal conditions and as per its molecular weight, should be only in the form of a gas (since hydrogen and oxygen are gases). But strangely it is found in the liquid form, while ammonia with the same molecular weight is found in the form of vapours. Hence water as per general laws should be similar to other compositions and should follow the same course. But water is an exception and even if all natural laws are accepted, this exception cannot not be rejected.⁶

Another example may be cited from the species of plants and vegetables. We all know that all the plants and vegetables bear fruits only when pollen grain of male plant comes into contact with the pollen of a female plant either directly or indirectly. This union may be established through wind, honeybees or by any other means. It is called 'pollination'. Though it is a common natural law but still there, are some plants which do not need pollination and they bear fruits by themselves. This again supports the 'laws of exception'.

At this juncture it must be emphasised that these exceptions in common laws should not become a source of rejection of scientific laws and

principles. The people who make such ‘exceptions’ as a pretext for denying scientific researchers are grossly biased and are in clear error because these exceptional incidents are after all related to the system of the Universe. They are having special laws of their own but are somehow linked with other laws of this world. Hence to accept strange exceptions of nature is not contrary to science but is a step towards scientific research, nay an indication that if delved deeply then more such instances can be discovered. Thus in our usual course of daily life, if we cannot solve the enigma of longevity, we are not supposed to refute and reject it outright as science has always left a scope for exceptional cases - especially when many precedents of longevity are found in history. We shall discuss about it in a later chapter. Hence by no means longevity can be denied.

The Reality

If we were to keep all these discussions aside and analyse the lives of people around us we will come across instances of people who have lived a considerable long life. Few years ago, an article was published in Reader’s Digest (which is published across the world) by the name of ‘Death is afraid of us’. The article was on the citizens of ‘Azerbaijan’ in Russia. These individuals had lived for 120 years to 150 years and in spite of their long lives were engaged in their routine activities. Moreover such a long age does not surprise them because it is a very common phenomenon among them. In fact it is a peculiarity of that region. Such examples reinforce our view that longevity is not contrary to science.

Apart from these living examples, we come across many individuals - both in the recent as well as the distant past - which confirms this reality. The annals of history - both world as well as religion are a witness to the lives of those people who led a very long life. Either books are devoted to the subject of longevity or at least a particular chapter was earmarked for the same.⁷

In these books one can find the biographies of personalities whose life-span was amazing. (1) Hazrat Adam (a.s.) 930 years, (2) Hazrat Shees (a.s.) 912 years, (3) Hazrat Lut (a.s.) 732 years (4) Hazrat Idrees (a.s.) 300 years, (5) Hazrat Aad (a.s.) 1200 years, (6) Hazrat Mutwashaikh (a.s.) 960 years and Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) more than 950 years. The Holy Qur’an while narrating the anecdote of Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) also mentions the period of his propagation in these word:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا

“And surely We sent Nuh towards his people then he remained among them for a thousand years, save fifty.”⁸

H. Nuh (a.s.) preached among his nation for 950 years before deluge destroyed them. That means this period of 950 years does not reflect his entire age. He lived before and after the deluge also. His age therefore was more than 950 years.

This example clearly indicates that abundant proofs are available in history which endorse longevity and prove that it is irrefutable. Thus the age of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) - either now or when he will reappear - should not be looked upon skeptically and suspiciously, nor amazement should be

expressed. After going through the aforementioned examples it becomes clear as daylight that longevity cannot be denied. Rather accepting longevity is a sign of one's intellect and understanding.

Certitude

Now let us try to analyse the issue of longevity in the light of our faith, although all rational arguments have conclusively proved that there is no impediment in accepting longevity. The mind thus does not consider it impossible. However the fountain head of all our ideologies, view-points, morals and character is Islamic traditions (ahadith). Accepting Islamic traditions on this matter raises the conviction in longevity from the level of probability to the level of certitude.

One of the important laws of creation - as expounded by Islam - is the presence of a 'Perfect Man' in the human society. A man who is an epitome of excellence and who may serve as an example for mankind and whose life is an embodiment of Islamic precepts. This 'Perfect man' is the vicegerent of Allah and successor of the Holy Prophet (S). In Islamic traditions he has been given the title of Hujjat (i.e. Proof of Allah). There are innumerable traditions which proclaim the necessity of existence of a Hujjat on the earth and his absence will become the cause of complete annihilation of this universe.⁹

It was for this reason that Holy Prophet (S) himself designated his successor so that this earth may never remain devoid of an 'Imam' or 'Hujjat'. And after the Holy Prophet (S), this task of appointing successors was undertaken by the infallible Imams (a.s.) one after the other. Finally the banner of justice and equity reached the hands of the twelfth and last Imam, Hazrat Mahdi (a.s.). He is the leader of the human race and will establish the divine religion in all its glory in the entire world. Hence it is imperative that the life of this Imam should be very long. The reason for his occultation is that people are not yet ready to accept his dominion. He will appear at the appropriate time and spread justice and equity in the world.

The sayings of our immaculate Imams (a.s.) explain the attributes of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) at length and regard the attribute of longevity as one of his peculiar characteristics. They (a.s.) have also cited the examples of those Prophets who were blessed with long lives.¹⁰

The believers in divine religions besides Islam too believe in the Omnipotence of Allah. They believe in the infinite powers of Allah and are of the view that no task is beyond the power of Allah. According to Islam, whenever He wishes to accomplish a task, He just intends about it and says 'Be' and 'It becomes', even though the task may be against the usual principles of nature. Such tasks are innumerable and people are well-aware of such 'Acts of Allah'. The miracles displayed by the Prophets belong to the category of such 'Acts' which serve as a sign of Allah's Omnipotence and prove the veracity of their claims.

When the believers in the infinite power of Allah, come across any matter involving Allah's power and which is also supported by traditions, then it is very easy for them to accept that matter. For Allah nothing is 'difficult', 'improbable' or 'complicated' and no power can hinder the implementation of His command.

The Islamic belief in miracles and the infinite powers of Allah is not against science. Instead, such exceptional phenomena themselves conform with common laws, which move on to the prescribed line of action. Similarly the belief in miracle and ‘Omnipotence’ of Allah is not in conflict with science.

Well, the purpose of all these arguments was to prove that the concept of longevity is not against science and knowledge. Moreover, the true believers should cleanse their hearts from doubts and uncertainty. Nevertheless, the belief in the long life of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) has penetrated the hearts of every Muslim, nay every individual who believes in God.

Notes

1. This book is also translated in Persian by the name of ‘Zeest Shenasi’. This excerpt is quoted from ‘Khurshide Maghrib’, original untraced.
2. Over here the concept of ‘fixed and pre-determined fate’ should not become ambiguous.
3. Dr. Alexis Carrel in chapter V of ‘Man, the unknown’.
4. Vide foreword of ‘Ash-Shifa’ by Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna).
5. Extracted from weekly journal ‘Prushek’ No. 224, Tuesday, Khordad - 48.
6. For details of such scientific problems, refer the article ‘Water Tells its Tale’, also refer ‘The Affirmation of Existence of Allah’ by Dr. Thomas David Parkis, the Professor at Allen University, U.S.A.
7. Vide the book of Abu Hatim Sajistani ‘Al-Muammarun Wal Wisaya’. Abul Hasan Masoodi’s ‘Murujuz Zahab’ and Abu Raihan Beruni’s ‘Asarul-Baqiyah’.
8. Holy Qur’an, al-Ankaboot, 29 :14.
9. Refer to ‘Usool-e-Kaafi, Kitab al-Hujjah’.
10. Vide ‘Muntakhabul Asar, Chapter 27, where at least 50 traditions are jotted from Shia and Sunni sources relating to longevity of twelfth Imam.

Chapter 6: Awaiting the Reappearance

فَجِدُّوا وَانْتَظِرُوا هُنَيْبًا لَكُمْ آيَتُهَا الْعَصَابَةُ الْمَرْحُومَةُ.

“Then strive and await. Congratulations to you! O the recipient of Allah’s mercy”

The responsibilities of the shias in the period of Major Occultation are quite onerous. We must strive to maintain the radiant glow of our faith in our hearts and be firmly focused on the future. Every shia has always been listening to the glad tidings of his future in the words of the Qur’an wherein Allah says:

إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ

“*Verily, My virtuous servant will inherit the earth.*”¹

Almost all Muslims are certain of the eventual uprising of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) - an uprising aimed at purifying the earth from tyranny and oppression. Hence it is imperative upon every Muslim to purify his own self as well as the society from all sorts of vices. This incessant awaiting should not make him lethargic; rather it should induce him for endless endeavours, which also includes the stirring of lazy and negligent people, so that all of them should move forward cohesively on a common path. As the Holy Qur’an puts it,

صَفًّا كَانَتْهُمْ بُيُوتُهُمْ مَرْصُوعًا

“*Fortified as insurmountable walls.*”²

Shias of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) should invoke Allah (s.w.t.) with utmost sincerity in unison that:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَرْغِبُ إِلَيْكَ فِي دَوْلَةٍ كَرِيمَةٍ تُعِزُّ بِهَا الْإِسْلَامَ وَاهْلَهُ وَتُذِلُّ بِهَا الْبَغْيَ وَاهْلَهُ.

“O Allah, we implore you for a gracious government. A government by which you will confer dignity upon Islam and its adherents and disgrace hypocrisy and its partisans.”³

Thus Muslims should realize their duties towards this divine reign established under the aegis of Holy Qur’an - a rule which will bring honour to Islam and the Muslims and disgrace to hypocrisy and hypocrites.

For the ardent lovers of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), his (a.s.) separation is agonizingly painful and unbearable. The real meaning of “awaiting” has to be discussed from various angles, describing its actual concepts and consequences. Thus we will clarify the concepts in the following discussion. We will enumerate the different aspects of true awaiting (Intezaar).

1. Agonizingly distressful

The condition of Shias at the moment is similar to the plight of that caravan whose chief is not visible to them and the heart bleeds due to his separation. Thus the caravan is confused and lost. As it moves ahead, groups of men people are falling by the wayside, lost in the whirlpool of deviation. A Shia trembles seeing all this because he knows that these calamities are due to the absence of their beloved leader. We are afraid of the moment, when our leader will come and seek answers from us for our indifference and carelessness.

When he (a.s.) will start his mission of reformation and will ask us “Why were you lazy and careless? Does Intezaar imply that you remain negligent and leave the entire work of reformation upon the leader? Why did you not take the initiative of protecting the faith of the people when you saw them falling into the pit of deviation? When bloodthirsty wolves were attacking the shias, why did you choose to remain silent? Is religion protected in this way? You slept a negligently on your bed and merely uttered our name by your tongue”.

A true Shia when he ponders over all this becomes agitated and restless. He cannot bear the separation from his leader even for a moment.

2. Extremely difficult

Today’s world is rife with chaos, discord, disgrace, frustrations, corruption, malpractice, arrests and other vicious evils. One of the aims of Imam (a.t.f.s.) after his reappearance will be to uproot all sorts of evils and vices. Thus his reappearance will prove to be a remedy for all such maladies and a soothing balm for all these pains. Hence we often recite in ‘Dua al-Iftetah’ and implore Allah to hasten his reappearance. Unfortunately our verbal supplications are not supported by physical actions. This in itself is a difficult examination due to which the separation from Hazrat (a.s.) becomes all the more painful.

3. Taking lessons

When will that day arrive when we will be able to distinguish between good and evil and learn the etiquettes of appreciation? History is replete with incidences of deviations when the people ignored and derided our Imams (a.s.). Similar things are being witnessed in the present era too when our Imam (a.s.) is in occultation. Above all this are events and occurrences that numb the mind and heart. All this must serve as a lesson for us that in the era of occultation or after the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) we must adopt that path which will not cause embarrassment and humiliation to us. Hence we must endeavour - under the grace and mercy of Imam (a.s.) - to spread justice and equality in every nook and corner of the world and remind the people about the forgotten virtues of brotherhood, justice and equality. In this way we will be able to enliven the earth and infuse in it a new life. This in itself is the best lesson and an aspect of awaiting for Imam (a.t.f.s.)

4. Energetic and Constructive

Awaiting the reappearance of Imam al-Zaman (a.s.) imbibes us with vigour and zeal. We cannot see our future. His reign is our only hope and support. Although our present state of affairs is depressing and bleak, yet our eyes are fixed on the bright sun of justice and equality. This feeling in itself is a fountain of life and energy. We must emulate our elders by standing up - rather than being idle - and march towards this radiant sun, not alone but taking everyone along. We must move forward in unison like the waves of the sea - with enthusiasm and fervour. Moving forward in unity by itself is a source of strength and courage. This uniform and united struggle will energize us, and also strengthen and our community. Indeed such a

movement is positive, since every step that is taken towards the illuminating sun (of guidance), will also possess some glimmer of light in itself. Finally these steps will merge with the illumination personified, i.e. Imam (a.t.f.s.).

As a result, the separation from such an Imam (a.t.f.s.) who is dearer to us than our lives does not permit us to sit idle. Instead, we should be strong as steel to enjoy the fruits of real intezaar. Such an attitude will increase our resolve and make us steadfast. Thus adversities will not divert us from our path; tough ordeals will not despair us from our radiant future. By the sheer dint of our efforts, we will prepare the grounds for the Universal Islamic Government.

5. Duties

We will quote some of the traditions over here for an in-depth understanding of our duties and responsibilities in the occultation of Imam (a.t.f.s.).

Imam Zainul Abedin (a.s.) says:

إِنَّ أَهْلَ زَمَانِ غَيْبَتِهِ الْقَائِلِينَ بِإِمَامَتِهِ وَالْمُنْتَظِرِينَ لِظُهُورِهِ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ أَهْلِ كُلِّ زَمَانٍ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى أَعْطَاهُمْ مِنَ الْعُقُولِ وَالْأَفْهَامِ وَالْمَعْرِفَةِ مَا صَارَتْ بِهِ الْعَيْبَةُ عِنْدَهُمْ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْمُشَاهِدَةِ وَجَعَلَهُمْ فِي ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانِ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ بِالسَّيْفِ أَوْلِيكَ الْمُخْلِصُونَ حَقًّا وَشَيْعَتُنَا صِدْقًا وَالِدُعَاةَ إِلَى دِينِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ سِرًّا وَجَهْرًا.

“Certainly those who believe in his (Imam Mahdi’s) Imamate and await his advent are superior to the people of all times. Allah, the Almighty, has bestowed them with such a degree of intelligence and understanding that they see the Imam (a.s.) even though he (a.s.) is in occultation. Allah considers them like those soldiers who fought with their swords in the company of the Holy Prophet (S). They are our true and devout Shias. These are those who invite others towards the religion of Allah openly and secretly.”⁴

A brief perusal of this tradition reveals the status of those who await the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.). Their position is so much exalted in front of Allah that they are compared with the warriors who fought in the company of the Holy Prophet (S). Such an intezaar will never bear a negative outcome and such a person⁵ will always remain concerned with the problems of society and never will he be disappointed from guiding others.

². Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) has complimented the Shias of Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) in these words:

طُوبَى لَشَيْعَةِ قَائِمِنَا الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ لِظُهُورِهِ فِي غَيْبَتِهِ وَالْمُطِيعِينَ لَهُ فِي ظُهُورِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ.

“Congratulations to the Shias of our Qaem, who are awaiting his reappearance and will be obedient to him after his advent. They are the friends of Allah and there will be no fear for them or any grief.”⁶

Even this tradition depicts the position of a “Muntazir” (one who is doing intezaar). This tradition envisages two distinct characteristics of such people

viz. true awaiting during occultation and complete obedience after his reappearance. Whosoever will possess these traits will be included among the friends of Allah and thus will be saved from sorrow and fear.

3. For more understanding of the greatness and nobility of the believers in Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) let us ponder over this saying of Imam Sadiq (a.s.):

مَنْ سَرَّهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ الْقَائِمِ فَيَنْتَظِرْ وَيَعْمَلْ. بِالْوَرَعِ وَ مَحَاسِنِ الْأَخْلَاقِ وَهُوَ مُنْتَظَرٌ.

“The one who desires to be a companion of our Qaem, then he must await (the reappearance) intensely and must act piously. Such a person is a true muntazir”⁷

4. If we ponder over the following tradition then the importance and significance of this matter becomes all the more evident. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says:

“Those who died while awaiting the dominion of Qaem were like those who were with Qaem. Nay, they are like those who are riding on their horses and wielding their swords along with him.”

He maintained silence for a while then again said:

“By Allah, they are like those who attained martyrdom in front of Holy Prophet (S).”⁸

Are we really awaiting our Imam (a.t.f.s.)? Are we at least yearning for him like we yearn for our dear ones when they have gone on some journey?

Awaiting the reappearance of Imam (a.s.) makes the society proactive and productive. But it also expects individuals who are conscious of their responsibilities and are willing to share the task of preparing the grounds for the reappearance of Imam (a.s.).

As regards the responsibilities of Shias in the times of occultation and for knowing more about the reign of Imam (a.s.) one must refer to those supplications which are related to Imam (a.t.f.s.), since they are the best source for getting information of such matters. Many commendable and highly beneficial invocations are found in ‘Iqbal’ of Syed Ibn Tawoos (r.a) and Mafateeh-al Jinan of Shaikh Abbas Qummi (r.a). A keen and thoughtful recitation of such supplications will apprise us of our responsibilities towards him, characteristics of his powerful dominion and conditions of this world after his reappearance.

Notes

1. Holy Qur’an, al-Anbiya, 21:105.
2. Holy Qur’an, as-Saff, 61:4.
3. Dua al-Iftetah.
4. Kamaluddin, p. 302.
5. Such word is not found in any lexicon or dictionary of English literature. But we have coined this term for the sake of our convenience and brevity of disquisition in hand.
6. Kamaluddin, chapter 33, tradition No. 54.
7. Ghaibat-e-Noomani, p. 200; Muntakhabul Asar, p. 497
8. Muntakhabul Asar, p. 498. “Certainly when our Qaem will rise, then the earth will be illuminated by the light of Allah and men will not need the light of sun anymore.” (Beharul Anwaar, vol. 52, p. 337)

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