

## **12- IMAM MAHDI (AS): THE IMAM OF TIME**

This chapter reviews the life of Imam Mahdi (AS) and provides an overview of, and answers to, common questions about his minor and major occultations.

## 12-1-Before Imamat

### 12-1-1-Birth

Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan (may God hasten his reappearance) also known as “Mahdi”, was born on the dawn of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha’ban, in the year 256 Hijri, in Samarra. He is known by various titles that reflect his elevated status, that he is alive, and that he is the Imam of our time. He is known as “Mahdi” or “Guided One”, “Saahib al-Zaman” or “Master of the Age”, “Muntazar” or “Awaited One”, “Hojjat Allah” or “Proof of God”, “Baqeeyat Allah” or “Whom God has left on earth (as His last proof)”, and “Qa’em” or “One who stands up (against injustice)”.

Imam Mahdi was the only child of Imam Askari (AS). His mother, Narjis Khatoon, was a Roman princess and the granddaughter of the Roman emperor. When living at the palace, she saw a miraculous dream in which Prophet Jesus and some of his apostles were preparing for the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Imam Ali (AS), and some of the children of Imam Ali. When Prophet Muhammad arrived, he addressed Prophet Jesus and proposed the marriage of Imam Askari to Narjis Khatoon. Prophet Jesus then asked his apostle, Saint Peter, who was also Narjis Khatoon’s forefather, to accept the proposal. Saint Peter happily accepted. Prophet Muhammad then recited the marriage contract for Narjis Khatoon and Imam Askari. After this dream, Narjis Khatoon saw other miraculous dreams and, as a result, converted to Islam. After a while, she received instructions in her dream to secretly follow the Roman troops, who were being deployed for war against the Muslims. She followed the instructions, was arrested by Muslim troops, and brought to Baghdad to be sold as a slave. Imam Hadi, aware of this incident through his divine knowledge, sent someone from Samarra to Baghdad with detailed instructions to purchase and transfer Narjis Khatoon to Samarra. Imam Hadi then married her to Imam Askari and gave her the good news of becoming the mother of a son who would fill the earth with justice after it would have become filled with oppression.

One of Imam Askari's main concerns during his Imamate was to protect the life of his only child, Imam Mahdi, who would inherit the Imamate after him as the last Shia Imam. Imam Askari kept Imam Mahdi's birth a secret, even from his close family members. By God's miracle, Imam Mahdi's mother, Narjis Khatoon, did not show any signs of an expecting mother, similar to the miracle of Prophet Moses' mother, who had also not shown any signs of an expecting mother because God had wanted to save her son from the Pharaoh. On the night of Imam Mahdi's birth, Imam Askari asked his aunt, Hakimeh, Imam Hadi's sister, to stay at his home and help with Narjis Khatoon's delivery. Hakimeh was shocked, because she had not known that Narjis Khatoon was expecting. Hours later, at dawn, Imam Mahdi was born in secret and opened his eyes to this world.

### **12-1-2-Preparation for the Occultation**

After Imam Mahdi's birth, Imam Askari continued keeping his son's existence a secret. The Imam's intention was to protect his son's life from enemies, particularly the Abbasid government. However, Imam Askari needed to inform or provide hints to his Shias, especially the Shia scholars and representatives, about the birth of his son. After the birth of Imam Mahdi, Imam Askari asked Uthman ibn Saeed al-Amri, his top representative in Samarra, to donate a large amount of bread and meat to the needy and to sacrifice some sheep. The Imam also informed his representative in Qom, in Iran, about the birth of Imam Mahdi in a letter. This news brought great happiness to the Shias of Qom. While being confined in Samarra, the Capital of the Abbasids, Imam Askari only showed Imam Mahdi to certain trusted companions. On one special occasion, around 40 of the trusted Shia scholars and representatives had gathered in Imam Askari's house in Samarra. The Imam used this opportunity to show them his young son, Imam Mahdi, and introduced him as their next Imam.

There was an excessive amount of pressure on Imam Askari during his short Imamate of about six years. The Imam's activities in Samarra, the Abbasid Capital, were closely monitored by the government and his

interactions with his representatives and the people were significantly limited. The Imam was pressured for two main reasons. First, Imam Askari was the leader of the Shias, who did not accept the legitimacy of the Abbasid government. The Shias had grown to be large in numbers and were widespread in the Abbasid territory. The undeniable influence of the Shias and their leader, Imam Askari, could not be ignored by any of the Abbasid caliphs. Second, the Abbasids had received the news of the Prophet's prophecy about the last Shia Imam, Imam Mahdi, who would establish justice on earth. They feared Imam Mahdi would endanger their government and thus sought to eliminate him.

Imam Askari's circumstances were an opportunity for him to train the Shias for his son's minor occultation, during which the Shias would not have direct access to their Imam, and would need to communicate with him through writing. This is why the majority of the Imam's communications with his Shia followers and representatives were through exchanging letters. Imam Askari was the first Shia Imam who primarily communicated with the Shias by letters, rather than meeting them in person. The Imam respected and highly regarded the Shia scholars, because they would guide the people to the true teachings of the Prophet and the Imams. Through this, the Imam prepared the Shias for the upcoming time during which they would have to refer to Shia scholars for their religious affairs. The Imam also expanded the network organization of his representatives that acted as a system of managing the affairs of the Shia community. He organized it to be managed without his direct involvement.

### **12-1-3-Martyrdom of Imam Askari<sup>149</sup>**

Due to the Abbasid government's enmity for Imam Askari, the Imam was imprisoned multiple times during his short Imamate. Eventually, Mu'tamid, the Abbasid Caliph, ordered the Imam's poisoning due to his concern about Imam Askari's influence on the government. Mu'tamid wanted to eliminate the Imam before the Imam could have

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<sup>149</sup> 8 Rabi' al-Awwal, 260 AH (Imam's age:3)

any offspring to inherit the Imamatus. Although Mu'tamid had secretly poisoned the Imam, he was afraid that his plot would be revealed. When the Imam was on his deathbed, Mu'tamid isolated the Imam from his followers and the outside world. He ordered his trusted close ones to stay in the Imam's house, and continuously report the Imam's condition to him. They closely monitored the Imam's condition for several days, until the Imam's martyrdom at the young age of 27. Imam Askari had the shortest duration of Imamatus compared to the other Shia Imams, lasting for less than six years. Historical records show Imam Mahdi's presence by his father's deathbed before his martyrdom. Miraculously, Imam Mahdi's presence was not observed by the government agents monitoring the Imam.

When Mu'tamid was informed of the Imam's martyrdom, he sent his agents to search the Imam's house for any trace of a possible heir. He also sent some female agents to inspect the women in the Imam's house, and to inquire if any of them were expecting. There was suspicion about one female worker in the Imam's house who seemed like she might be expecting. Mu'tamid asked his trusted servant to keep her isolated to validate the suspicion. She was kept isolated for about two years, but did not show any sign of carrying a child.

When the Imam's close companions and family members were about to pray over his body, the Imam's brother, Ja'far, stepped forward to lead the prayer. At this time, Imam Mahdi, less than four years old, approached Ja'far, pulled on his cloak, and told him, "O' Uncle, step back as I am more deserving than you to lead the prayers over my father." Ja'far, who had not expected to be stopped by a child, was shocked and moved back unintentionally. Imam Mahdi then led the prayer over his father's body, and disappeared quickly after. Imam Mahdi's presence proved his existence to his family members and Imam Askari's close companions. Later, a large funeral procession was held for Imam Askari by the Abbasid government in Samarra to portray to the public that the government was innocent regarding the Imam's martyrdom.

## 12-2-The Minor Occultation

### 12-2-1-Beginning of Imammat

Imam Mahdi became an Imam after the martyrdom of his father when he was just three years and seven months old. His Imammat was not challenged by the Shias because of his young age. The Shias had already validated and believed in the Imammat of Imam Javad (AS) and Imam Hadi (AS) at their young ages of seven. Thus, age was not a barrier for the Shias to accept the Imammat of a young boy.

Imam Askari's brother, Ja'far, continued in his ignorance, even after witnessing Imam Mahdi's prayer over Imam Askari's body. Ja'far lacked the divine knowledge of the Shia Imams and had a corrupt character. Ja'far proceeded to introduce himself as the next Shia Imam, but he failed to prove his Imammat and to convince the Shias. He instead became known among the Shias as "Ja'far, the liar". After Imam Askari's burial, Ja'far came to Mu'tamid's minister and asked the Abbasid's approval for himself as the next Shia Imam. His request was faced with an insulting and harsh reaction from the minister who responded to him, "The Abbasid Caliph has used his entire power to change the belief of the Shias of your father (Imam Hadi) and brother (Imam Askari), but has failed. If you are an Imam of the Shias, you would not need the Caliph's approval; and if you are not an Imam of the Shias, you will never reach it."

Ja'far continued his efforts to announce himself as the next Shia Imam and successor to Imam Askari. A group of people once came to Samarra to deliver the Islamic dues from the Shias of Qom and North-Western Iran. Upon their arrival in Samarra, they were informed about the martyrdom of Imam Askari. They were referred to Ja'far as Imam Askari's successor. Upon meeting Ja'far, they asked him to reveal the names and the amounts of the Islamic dues that they had brought to Samarra for delivery. Ja'far responded harshly by saying, "You expect me to know the knowledge of the unseen (which only belongs to God)" to which they responded, "Imam Askari would inform us of the names

and the amounts in the packages in our previous deliveries to him. If you are an Imam, you should also know the names and the amounts in the packages like Imam Askari.” They emphasized that they were entrusted by the Shias to deliver the packages safely to Imam Askari, and if he could not prove that he is an Imam, they would return the packages back to their owners. Ja’far was disappointed about losing the packages. He tried to forcefully seize them with the Caliph’s power, but he failed to gain the Caliph’s support. When these individuals could not find the Shia Imam to deliver their packages to, they decided to return them to their owners. When they left Samarra, someone approached them, called them by their names, and asked them to follow him to meet their Imam. They followed him and met Imam Mahdi, who informed them about the names and the amounts in the packages. They happily delivered the packages to the Imam and asked him their questions. The Imam told them not to bring any more deliveries to Samarra and to submit them to his representative in Baghdad.

Imam Mahdi’s Imamate began with the minor occultation, which lasted about 69 years. During this long period, four Shia scholars were the points of contact between the Imam and the Shias. These four scholars were referred to as the special deputies of Imam Mahdi, and were appointed by the Imam for this special role. The Shias would pass their letters with questions or requests to the special deputy of the Imam and would receive the Imam’s responses back through him. This method of communication was not a new method for the Shias. They had experienced it in the past during the Imamate of the previous Shia Imams, especially during the Imamate of Imam Askari, whose main method of communication had been through letters. Imam Mahdi would respond to the letters with the same handwriting as Imam Askari, which was familiar for the Shias. His intention was to remove any doubts about his presence, and to strengthen the Shias’ hearts about the authenticity of their communications. The Shias would find Imam Mahdi’s letters in accordance with the letters of Imam Askari, both in style and content. By the Imam’s will, these special deputies had some particular capabilities, such as informing the Shias of the unseen future

to prove their connections to the Imam. The minor occultation was a period for the Shias to be trained for Imam Mahdi's major occultation, during which they would not have access to their Imam, even through exchanging letters.

### **12-2-2-The First Special Deputy**

Imam Mahdi's first special deputy was Uthman ibn Saeed al-Amri, a companion of Imam Hadi since Uthman ibn Saeed al-Amri was eleven years old. He was Imam Hadi's loyal and deeply trusted companion. During Imam Hadi's life in Samarra, the Abbasid Capital, he was under intense surveillance by the Abbasid government. The Imam could not always manage the hidden network organization of his representatives, so he had appointed Uthman ibn Saeed to secretly manage the affairs of this organization from Samarra during the last 10 years of the Imam's life. Uthman ibn Saeed's role continued during the Imamate of Imam Askari. He was Imam Askari's top representative in Samarra, and managed the other representatives in the Imam's network organization. He was often the point of contact for the Imam's representatives who wanted to transfer the collected Islamic dues, and the letters to and from the Imam. His cover job was as an oil salesman. He would often hide the dues and letters to the Imam inside the oil containers, and would transfer them to the Imam's house. Imam Askari had announced Uthman ibn Saeed as his trusted representative to the Shias on various occasions. When Imam Askari was martyred, Uthman ibn Saeed managed his burial. His high status in the eyes of Imam Hadi and Imam Askari was well known among the Shias, so they readily accepted his selection as Imam Mahdi's special deputy.

Uthman ibn Saeed took control of the hidden network organization of representatives among the Shia communities across the Islamic territory. By this time, the Shia communities had spread widely across the Islamic territory. They were present in Iraq, Iran, Hijaz, Yemen, and Egypt. Uthman ibn Saeed began his role as the Imam's special deputy in Samarra immediately after Imam Askari's martyrdom. Historical records suggest that, while Imam Mahdi had just begun his Imamate with



the minor occultation, his hidden primary residence was still in Samarra. After a while, with the Imam's approval, Uthman ibn Saeed permanently moved from Samarra to Baghdad and continued his activities from there. Mu'tamid, the Abbasid Caliph, moved the Capital of the Abbasids from Samarra to Baghdad, too, and Samarra lost its significance.

There are limited historical records about the activities of Uthman ibn Saeed as the Imam's special deputy. This could be attributed to the excessive pressure from the government on the Shias and their representatives. Uthman ibn Saeed continued his activities undercover, and used his career as an oil seller to conceal his role. In addition, since Imam Askari's martyrdom, the government was looking for any trace of his successor, Imam Mahdi. Thus, Uthman ibn Saeed advised the Shias not to mention the name of Imam Mahdi, as this could incite the government into increasing surveillance of the Shias and their hidden network of representatives.

### **12-2-3-The Second Special Deputy**

Uthman ibn Saeed's role as Imam Mahdi's deputy lasted until his death<sup>150</sup>. This short period is estimated by some to be around five years. Prior to his death, Uthman ibn Saeed informed the Shias about the appointment of his son, Muhammad, by Imam Mahdi as the next special deputy. Imam Askari had foretold the appointment of Muhammad ibn Uthman as Imam Mahdi's representative when a group of Shias from Yemen had visited Imam Askari in Samarra. The Imam had introduced Uthman ibn Saeed as his deputy and told them, "His son will also be my son's deputy." Imam Mahdi also gave Muhammad ibn Uthman a letter as proof of his appointment. In the letter, the Imam expressed his condolences to Muhammad ibn Uthman for his father's demise, and expressed his high regards for his father. The Imam then appointed Muhammad ibn Uthman as his father's successor and the next special deputy.

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<sup>150</sup> 265 AH

From Baghdad, Muhammad ibn Uthman continued his father's policy of leading the network organization of the representatives. He guided the Shias about Imam Mahdi's occultation, explained that it occurred by God's decree, and reminded them of the many narrations from the previous Shia Imams about the occultation of the last Imam. At the same time, he would portray to the Abbasids that Imam Askari had left no successor to the Imamate. He did this in order to convince the Abbasids that the Shias were without an Imam, and were no longer a threat to the government. Ever since the establishment of the Abbasid government, the Shia Imams and their followers had not accepted its legitimacy. Muhammad ibn Uthman's policy was to distract the Abbasids from putting pressure on the Shias and their hidden network of the representatives. Like his father, he banned the Shias from revealing Imam Mahdi's name, as this could have posed a threat from the Abbasids to the Shia communities and their activities.

Imam Mahdi also guided and helped his Shias to overcome their challenges. In one incident, Mu'tazid, the Abbasid Caliph, received a list with the names of the representatives in the hidden network organization of the Shias. He ordered undercover agents to deliver money to each of the representatives, pretending to pay the Islamic dues. His intention was to confirm the representatives' affiliation with the network organization and to arrest them. To protect the representatives, Imam Mahdi issued a letter with instructions for them. In this letter, he stated that they should not receive any Islamic dues, and should pretend that they were unaware of such a role. The Imam's message was passed to the representatives and saved them from the conspiracy of the Abbasid Caliph. The agents approached the representatives and even insisted on delivering the Islamic dues, but were faced with denial of such a role, thereby failing in their scheme.

Muhammad ibn Uthman was a scholar of religion. He had authored multiple books on Islamic laws. He had received his knowledge from Imam Askari, Imam Mahdi, and his father. He passed his books onto the next special deputy before his death. Despite his knowledge, he

would not engage himself in religious debates about Shia theology and beliefs. His intention was to keep his main role as the special deputy of the Imam hidden from the government.

Muhammad ibn Uthman's role as a special deputy lasted for about 40 years, the longest period among the other special deputies of Imam Mahdi. The majority of the communications between the Shias and Imam Mahdi occurred during Muhammad ibn Uthman's tenure. Various narrations and supplications from Imam Mahdi were narrated by Muhammad ibn Uthman to the Shias, supplications such as the famous, "Dua Iftitah", which is recommended to be recited every night during the month of Ramazan, and "Dua Samat", which is recommended to be recited in the closing hours before sunset on Fridays. Muhammad ibn Uthman also told the Shias that Imam Mahdi participates in Hajj every year, and that the Imam sees the people and knows them, while the people see the Imam and do not recognize him.

#### **12-2-4-The Third Special Deputy**

Before his death<sup>151</sup>, Muhammad ibn Uthman introduced Hossein ibn Rouh al-Nawbakhti, one of his trusted assistants and representatives, as the next special deputy. He told the Shia elders and followers that he was entrusted with the mission from Imam Mahdi to make this announcement. Muhammad ibn Uthman, who had been informed by Imam Mahdi about his approaching death, would refer the Shias to deliver their Islamic dues to Hossein ibn Rouh as much as two years prior to his death. His intention was to familiarize the Shias with the Imam's next special deputy.

The role of Hossein ibn Rouh as the Imam's special deputy lasted for about 21 years, until his death. He was socially popular among the Muslims of various theological backgrounds. Despite his social status, due to the conspiracies against him, he was imprisoned by the Abbasids for about five years<sup>152</sup>. As the special deputy, Hossein ibn Rouh took

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<sup>151</sup> 305 AH

<sup>152</sup> 312 AH

control of the network organization of the representatives, and managed it from Baghdad. He tried his best to guide the Shias, and strictly confronted any deviation in the Shias' beliefs. During one incident, when Hossein ibn Rouh was in the Abbasid prison, one of his representatives deviated and spread false beliefs among the Shias. While in prison, Hossein ibn Rouh informed the Shia elders and his other representatives about these false beliefs and asked them to distance themselves from the corrupt representative. He also informed them about a letter from Imam Mahdi, in which the Imam had falsified and denounced the beliefs of that representative. Hossein ibn Rouh's efforts as the special deputy of Imam Mahdi proved to be effective in guiding the Shias.

As the special deputy, Hossein ibn Rouh was a point of contact between the Imam and the Shias. The Shias would seek guidance and make their requests from the Imam in writing. Once, one of the Shia scholars of Qom gave a letter to Hossein ibn Rouh to pass to the Imam. In this letter, he asked for the Imam's prayer to be blessed with a child, as he did not have any children. The Imam responded in a letter that he had prayed to God for him, and soon he would be blessed with two sons. As a result of the Imam's prayer, God blessed the scholar with two sons, whom he named Muhammad and Hossein, and both of them became Shia scholars. Muhammad became a noble scholar, known by the name "Shaykh al-Saduq" or "Ibn Babuwayh". He authored notable books, such as 'Man La Yahzuruhu al-Faqih', which is among the top four books of the Shia Hadith collection, and 'Oyoun Akhbar al-Reza', a comprehensive book about the life of Imam Reza (AS). He was always proud of coming to this world as a result of his Imam's prayer.

### **12-2-5-The Fourth Special Deputy**

Prior to his death<sup>153</sup>, Hossein ibn Rouh informed the Shias about appointing Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samuri, one of his trusted assistants and representatives, as the next special deputy by the Imam. Ali ibn

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<sup>153</sup> Sha'ban, 326 AH

Muhammad had a very short period of service, lasting only three years as the fourth and final special deputy. He took control of the network organization of the representatives and managed it from Baghdad.

Prior to his death, Ali ibn Muhammad showed the Shias a letter that he had received from Imam Mahdi. This letter was the last communication between Imam Mahdi and the Shias during the minor occultation. In this letter, the Imam told Ali ibn Muhammad to prepare for his approaching death in six days. The Imam told him not to appoint anyone as the next special deputy, since the major occultation was going to begin soon. The Imam continued that his reappearance would only be by God's decree, which would occur after a long time, when hearts would harden and the earth would fill with injustice. The Imam mentioned two signs for the time of his reappearance: the uprising of Sufyani (an evil person from the descendants of Abu-Sufyan, Muawiyah's father, who would rule the Syrian region) and a loud cry in the sky. The Imam then told the Shias that anyone who claimed to have any direct connection to him before the occurrence of these two signs is a liar.

As the Imam had foretold, Ali ibn Muhammad died after six days, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha'ban, in the year 329 Hijri. When Ali ibn Muhammad was on his deathbed, the Shias asked him about whom they should refer to as the next deputy of Imam Mahdi. He responded that he did not have any instructions from the Imam to appoint anyone after himself. Even at his last moments, he was asked again about whom the Shias should refer to as the next special deputy. He responded that God has a plan, referring to the major occultation, which will prevail. These were his last words before his death. With his death, the minor occultation ended, lasting about 69 years.

## **12-3-The Major Occultation**

### **12-3-1-The Major Occultation**

With the end of the minor occultation, the major occultation of Imam

Mahdi began, and it continues until today. During the major occultation, the Imam is living behind covers and the Shias cannot directly access him or communicate with him. The Imam reaches out to the people, particularly the Shia scholars and the followers, directly or indirectly to guide them on their affairs and problems. There are many such stories which have been narrated throughout history since the Imam's occultation. It is mentioned that the Imam is like the sun behind the clouds, which means that, though we cannot see the Imam directly, we are still receiving the blessings of his presence. The Imam will be in the major occultation until a time that is only known by God. Upon God's Will, Imam Mahdi will reappear to fill the earth with justice and bring forth the peak of humanity and prosperity on earth. Prophet Jesus will also come after the reappearance of Imam Mahdi, and will follow the Imam in establishing justice on the earth.

## **12-4-Common Questions and Answers about Imam Mahdi**

### **12-4-1-Are the Shias the only people who believe in a savior?**

No. The concept of a savior, referring to the one who will come to save the people from oppression and injustice, is common amongst various theologies, though they differ about who the savior is. The savior in Zoroastrianism is known as "Sosyant", in Hinduism as "Kalki", in Buddhism as "Maitreya", in Judaism as "Moshiach", and in Christianity as "Messiah". The savior in Islam is known as "Mahdi", and all the Muslims, regardless of their sects, believe in him. There are frequent narrations from the Prophet about the Mahdi in 'Kutub al-Sittah', the primary books of narrations in the Sunni sect of Islam. Also, various books have been authored throughout history by non-Shia Islamic scholars about the Mahdi. All of the Muslims believe in the Mahdi, who is from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and has the same name as him. The Shia Muslims believe in the Mahdi as their 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, who was born in the year 256 Hijri in Samarra, and is still alive.

### **12-4-2-Is the Mahdi a concept made-up by the Shia scholars?**

Due to the importance of this concept, there are thousands of narrations from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and each of the Shia Imams about Imam Mahdi, his occultation, and his reappearance. The belief in Imam Mahdi has been an essential part of Shia theology since the time of the Prophet. There are many historical records and narrations to validate his Imamate and occultation. The Shia scholars had spread the narrations about Imam Mahdi even before his birth. Some of them also authored specific books about Imam Mahdi and his occultation. The names of about 30 such books, written before the birth of Imam Mahdi, are available in history. For example, Fazl ibn Shazan, a great scholar in Khorasan who passed away during the Imamate of Imam Askari, wrote multiple books about Imam Mahdi and his occultation.

The belief in the Mahdi is not just specific to the Shia Muslims; all the Muslims believe in the Mahdi, who is from the Prophet's descendants. There are various narrations from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about the Mahdi, which have been recorded in top narration books of the Sunni sect of Islam. The Sunni scholars have also authored various books about the Mahdi throughout history. Many non-Shia Muslims have tried to misuse the concept of the Mahdi to their own benefit throughout history. They would not have tried to misuse this concept if it was not important and well-known to the Muslims. For example, Mansur, the second Abbasid Caliph, named his son Muhammad and called him by the title of Mahdi. Mahdi then replaced his father as the third Abbasid Caliph. Other examples of famous people who falsely claimed to be the Mahdi in our contemporary time are Muhammad Ahmad in Sudan, Ali Muhammad Bab in Iran, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in India, and Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Qahtani in Saudi Arabia.

### **12-4-3-How can Imam Mahdi live such a long life?**

Although Imam Mahdi's long life of about 1,200 years is much more than the average life expectancy of a human being, it is not impossible based on current scientific theories and various current theological

beliefs. Scientists are actively researching elongating the life of human cells and protecting them from disease, aging, and other deteriorating factors. Some scientists believe that science has the potential to increase human life up to several hundreds of years. The natural world is full of wonders, where plant and animal species have been alive for thousands of years.

The mysterious stories of people with long lives of several hundreds of years have been mentioned in various cultures and religions. For example, the longevity of several people has been explicitly mentioned in the Torah, such as Prophet Adam's age of 930 years and Prophet Adam's son, Seth's age of 912 years. Some pre-Islamic Prophets are believed to still be living today, such as Prophet Elijah (Ilyas), who was raised to the sky according to the Old Testament. Muslims of various sects believe that the pre-Islamic Prophets Elijah, Enoch (Idris), Khizr, and Jesus (Isa) never died and are still alive.

The Holy Quran explicitly mentions a few examples of noble characters who were blessed with exceptionally long lives. For example, the prophethood of Prophet Noah amongst his people lasted for 950 years, and is mentioned in the Quran [29:14]: "And certainly We sent Noah to his people, so he remained among them a thousand years save fifty years". We thus deduce that Prophet Noah lived for more than 950 years. Prophet Jesus is another example of a prophet who did not die per the Quran [4:157,158]: "And for their saying, "We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the Messenger of God. In fact, they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them as if they did. Indeed, those who differ about him are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it, except the following of assumptions. Certainly, they did not kill him. Rather, God raised him up to Himself. God is Mighty and Wise." We thus deduce that Prophet Jesus has been living now for over 2,000 years.

Another Quranic piece of evidence is the story of Prophet Ezra (Uzair), where God took his life away for 100 years and then made him alive again, as mentioned in the following verse [2:259]: "(Or have you heard)



of the one who, on passing through an empty and ruined town, said, 'How will God bring it to life?' God caused him to die and brought him back to life after a hundred years and then asked him, 'How long have you been here?' He replied, 'One day or part of a day'. The Lord said, 'No, you have been here for one hundred years. Look at your food and drink. They have not yet decayed.'" According to this verse of the Quran, God not only elongated Prophet Ezra's life for 100 years, but He also miraculously preserved his food and drink, which would have naturally decayed in a day or two.

The companions of the cave are another Quranic story in which a few believers took shelter in a cave and slept there for 309 years, as mentioned in the following verse of the Quran [18:25] "And they stayed in their cave for three hundred years, adding nine." During these long years, they were sleeping, and their body was functioning without any need for water or food.

The Shias believe that the long life of Imam Mahdi is a miracle of God, and nothing is impossible for The Creator. God can elongate the life of His chosen savior and prevent him from aging. According to the narrations from the Shia Imams, when Imam Mahdi will reappear, he will look like a 40-year-old or younger.

#### **12-4-4-How do the Shias interpret Islamic belief during the occultation?**

The Shias refer to their scholars to interpret Islamic beliefs during the occultation. The Shias follow the Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the essential part of their belief. They also follow the 12 Shia Imams from the progeny of the Prophet, who continued the message of the Holy Prophet. There are no differences or contradictions between the teachings and the traditions of the Prophet and the 12 Shia Imams. Thus, the Shias are blessed to have divine guidance and teachings from the generations of 12 Imams who lived among the Muslims for about 250 years after the demise of the Prophet. There are countless narrations from the Shia Imams about every aspect of the Islamic teachings and laws. The history of these 12

holy individuals is full of wisdom for any person's life, with lessons for overcoming any challenges. The Shia theology is unique among the other Muslim sects in having access to the precious historical resources from the Prophet and the 12 Imams. As a result, the Shias are proud of having a doctrine in every aspect of the Islamic sciences.

The massive collection of the narrations and historical records from the Prophet and the 12 Shia Imams have survived through history. They are used by Shia scholars in seminaries to defend the Islamic principles and to respond to any new questions regarding Islamic laws. The Shia Imams would always encourage their followers to refer to the trusted Shia scholars for their Islamic affairs. The efforts of the Shia Imams in training scholars, spreading their knowledge, and establishing a network organization of their representatives among the Shia communities were all towards preparing the Shias for their future. This policy was also approved and prescribed by Imam Mahdi. In one of his letters during the minor occultation, Imam Mahdi explicitly referred his Shia followers to the scholars by writing, "In the events that happen, refer to the narrators of our traditions (scholars), because they are my proof upon you, and I am God's proof upon them." Thus, the Shias refer to their scholars to acquire their Islamic knowledge and interpretations during the occultation.

**IMAM MAHDI (AS):**  
**Pray abundantly for my reappearance,**  
**as your relief will be within it.**