

Imām Mahdī: The Promised Saviour

The Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation



*The Promised Mahdi
Cultural Foundation*

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**IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE BENEFICENT,
THE MERCIFUL**

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

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

(سوره انبياء / ۱۰۵)

**IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL**

“We have written in the Psalms, after the remembrance: The righteous among my worshipers shall inherit the earth.”

(The Holy Quran, Chapter 21, Verse 105)

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Foreword

All humans despise oppression and yearn for justice. It is in our nature. Therefore, one of the beliefs that all religions share is the belief in a savior which in Islam is addressed under the title of Mahdism. The holy prophet Muhammad has spoken numerous times of the appearance of a man who will bring justice and peace to the earth and put an end to oppression and immoralities. Thus all Muslims believe in the savior, although there are some differences in the details of their beliefs. The Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation has come up with this brief and independent book in order to explain this particular Islamic teaching from the Shia point of view.

In Persian, more than 4000 volumes have been published on the subject of Mahdism, but it seems that very few books have been written on the same topic in English. On the other hand, works which

have been translated into English from another language have not been very successful as it has been difficult for the non-Muslim reader to relate to them. There are some good translated works as well, but they are either incomplete in a sense or slightly too complete!

As the largest and most widely recognized Mahdic research institute in Iran, the Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation sensed the need for a simple yet dependable book in English which would be able to introduce Imam Mahdi briefly and accurately. This book is an attempt at that. It has been compiled by the International Department of the Foundation with the intention of providing information on this essential Islamic teaching so that those in search of the path of truth may learn of the Shia savior as well and be able to find the answer to any questions they may have on the subject. It has been made to be thorough as well as brief. Any suggestion or criticism is welcome and appreciated.

Seyed Asadollah Avaei
International Deputy of the Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation

Introduction

Sacred texts and the Prophets who bring them are God's gifts to mankind. Their purpose, through guidance and spiritual aid, is to help free mankind from the bonds of ignorance, superstition, confusion and lust. By sending His last Messenger, Muhammad, descendant of Abraham, and by giving him the Quran, the Lord perfected his gift to mankind and raised it to such a level of maturity that no longer was there any need for a new prophet, religion or scripture.

'This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favour on you and chosen Islam for you as a religion' (5:3)

However in order to protect the Holy Qur'an and the inheritance of the prophets, there was a need for divinely appointed, infallible

representatives. God selected twelve such persons to represent Him upon the earth, providing guidance and following the path of the prophets. The earth has never been devoid of God's representatives and it never shall be. Imām Mahdī is the twelfth of them, descended from the Prophet Muḥammad, Imām of the Shia, hidden from view by God's wisdom until a time comes when the people are ready to follow him and it is the will of God to end his occultation. He will then reappear and lead the people wisely and justly.

'That which Allah leaveth with you is better for you if ye are believers.' (11:86)

This book is an attempt to use authentic Islamic sources to introduce the Imām Mahdī to those who wish to learn more about Islamic beliefs from primary sources.

Imamate in Shi`ism

It is necessary to begin with a brief account of the concept of Imamate and its place in Islam. The topic of Imamate and its significance, including the characteristics attributed to the Imām, are major factors in setting Shi`ism apart from other Islamic sects (perhaps even other monotheistic religions). It may be asked why Imamate has gained such importance in Shi`ism as to be counted amongst the principles of Islam. Who is the Imām now? When will the need for him arise? What duties does he have? What is the difference between an Imām and a Prophet? Most fundamentally of all, what is the point of his existence?!

Literally, Imām means leader and it has no special virtue in and of itself, because any person who is followed by a nation, a society or a group can be considered an Imām, including Pharaoh, Nero and Genghis Khan.

However, the twelve Shia Imāms are a number of saintly, pure and infallible people to whom God has assigned the mission of political, social and spiritual guidance as well as protecting the inheritance of the prophets from unwanted change. These leaders are Imāms. They are guardians assigned by God and His representatives on earth;

regardless of whether or not society recognises them for what they are and follows them.

According to many scholars, out of all the doctrines centred on reason and disregarding God which emerged after the French Revolution, not one has been able to realise its ideals. Communism, which at one point dominated half of the world, having realised an enormous amount of injustice and crimes against humanity. Capitalism, at times emphasising justice and at other freedom, is currently grappling with despair without having brought happiness, freedom or peace to the citizens of the Western world. It has done nothing but brought ecological destruction upon the earth for the benefit of a specific minority. The bloodiest wars in the history of humanity have taken place during the birth and death of various isms that disregard God, because they theorise and depict their ideals based only on such factors as power and politics, ignoring man's celestial nature entirely and never turning out to be anything but an illusion.

Islam addresses every aspect of human life; managing society, explaining the principles and laws and spirituality of Islam. The Shia believe that Islamic society needs all three and the person who is in charge of them should be chosen by God and

introduced by His messenger. Why? Because if humans were capable of finding the path to salvation by themselves there would have been no need for prophets and sacred texts in the first place! The only difference between prophets and Imāms is that prophets received knowledge of God's commandments directly from Him through revelations. They were then responsible for carrying them out and spreading them far and wide, while the Imāms had to ensure that the teachings of the prophets were not distorted or forgotten. In a way you could say that an Imām's task is more difficult than a prophet's, because preserving and continuing something is always more difficult than starting it. This is precisely why the Shia regard the Imamate to be a major principle. We shall end this chapter by quoting Imām Riḍā, the eighth Shia Imām. Upon hearing that people have arguments and differences on the subject of Imamate and being asked his opinion, he said:

'Do the people even understand enough about the significance and importance of Imamate so as to be given their choice in it? Indeed Imamate is a matter too great, with heights too high and depths too deep for the people to appreciate or understand it with their own wisdom or to choose an Imām by themselves'.

Imām was the title given to Abraham after he

had already been a prophet and called friend of God for some time. It was the third honour his Lord bestowed upon him, thus crediting his name, 'I have appointed thee an Imām for mankind.' (2:124)

In his joy Abraham said, 'And of my descendants?'

'My covenant includeth not wrong-doers', his Lord replied, thus forbidding the Imamate of wrong-doers and making it a title for untainted souls only, to be chosen by Himself.

He then further favoured Abraham, by placing Imamate in his House.

'And we bestowed upon him Isaac, and Jacob as an additional gift (grandson) and each of them we made righteous.'

'And we made them Imāms to guide by our command, and we inspired in them the doing of good deeds and the establishment of prayer and the giving of alms, and they were worshippers of us (alone).'' (21:72-21:73)

Imamate was inherited by generations after Abraham, until it eventually reached Muḥammad. God said:

'Truly, nearest to Abraham are those who followed him and this prophet and those who believe and Allah is the guardian of the believers.' (3:68)

So the Imamate was his until he passed it on to his cousin `Alī as commanded by God and then they were succeeded by the chosen ones amongst their descendants. God had given them wisdom and faith and they are the sons of `Alī based on this verse: ‘And those who are given knowledge and faith will say: certainly you have tarried (been in limbo) according to the ordinance of Allah until the day of resurrection, so this is the day of resurrection, yet you did not know,’ (30:56) for there is no prophet after Muḥammad.

How do these fools select Imāms for themselves when the Imamate is God’s representative on earth, Muḥammad and `Alī’s title and Ḥasan and Husayn’s inheritance?!”¹

At this point two questions may occur to the reader. Bearing in mind this quote from Imām Riḍā, do people have no part in choosing their Imām? Is the Shia Imamate not effectively a hereditary monarchy?

Islam has given people freedom of choice in many fields, but freedom is meaningless regarding matters beyond one’s understanding. When ill, you are free to choose your own physician, but would any sensible person believe that he is also free to choose whether or not to follow the physician’s

1. *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, 1:283.

directions? Similarly, prophets are there to guide people where they cannot find their way on their own due to insufficient knowledge, namely arranging their life in such a way as to result in eternal salvation. This does not mean that people are not free to make their own social, financial, domestic, management or any other kind of decisions or that they are unknowledgeable or ignorant in those fields. Moreover, people have always been able to choose whether or not to follow and obey prophets and their locum tenens. God has never denied people freedom of choice. Nor has He ordered his prophets and their successors to force people into treading the path of salvation! He says in the Qur'an:

‘We have shown the path; some are grateful and some ungrateful,’ (76:3)

The Qur'an also says:

‘There is no compulsion in accepting the religion; the path of righteousness has been made distinct from the path of error’ (2:256)

Therefore, people can choose freely whether to: a) accept the prophets and their successors as guiding lights and follow them into eternal glory and bliss, or b) refuse to accept their guidance, instead following their own desires and fancies to some

dark and unknown end.

As for the Imamate and hereditary monarchy, there are two major differences between them. Kings who gain power through wealth and bloodshed consider rule to be theirs – an acquired ownership. They leave it to their sons based solely on the fact that their blood runs through their veins. However, in Shi`ism, Imamate is not acquired. The Imām is designated by God, because he must have inner qualities and characteristics of which none but God can be aware. Moreover, only those who have reached such a high status as to be chosen by God are worthy of the Imamate. *“God selects and assigns messengers from amongst the people and the angels.”* Those selected by God must be sinless which is why God said, *‘My covenant includeth not wrong-doers,’* in reply to Abraham’s request that his descendants should be made Imāms. It is thus made clear that Imamate cannot be hereditary. Otherwise God would not have refused His prophet’s request. What the above verse says is that a person must have the necessary requirements in order to be made an Imām and being the son of an Imām or prophet does not suffice.

Therefore, Imamate is a rank given by God only to the purest and most righteous amongst men. If the Imamate was placed in `Ali’s house it was

because they were truly superiorly infallible and virtuous.

The Imāms were possessed of unique qualities that made them pre-eminent even amongst the rest of the Prophet's descendants. God decided them to be worthy and assigned to them the task of clarifying Islam and guiding the people. If we believe the sons of Imām Husayn to be Imāms, it is because Imamate was assigned to them by God, not because the Imamate is hereditary and an Imām's son is himself an Imām.

In Islam, after the Prophet Muḥammad's passing away, there has always been an Imām chosen by God amongst the people and there always will be. There are numerous hadiths narrated from the Prophet himself, describing the Imāms, stating their number, that they are all from Quraysh tribe and from his own descendants and that The Promised Mahdī is the last of them.

There are also numerous written accounts of the Prophet's words about `Alī being the first Imām, as well as additional written accounts from `Alī himself introducing the second Imām, the second Imām introducing the third and so on and so forth.

Based on these accounts, the Imāms of Islam are twelve and their names and personal details are as follows:

	Name	Name of Father	Epithet	Year of Birth (Islamic)	Year of Death (Islamic)	Year of Birth (Gregorian)	Year of Death (Gregorian)
1	`Alī	Abū Tālib	Murtaḍā	10 BH (Before Hijrah)	40	600 AD	661 AD
2	Hasan	`Alī	Mujtabā	3 AH	50	624	670
3	Ḥusayn	`Alī	Sayyid-al-Shuhadā'	4	61	626	680
4	`Alī	Ḥusayn	Zayn al-'ābidīn	38	95	659	713
5	Muḥammad	`Alī	Bāqir	57	114	677	733
6	Ja`far	Muḥammad	Sādiq	83	148	702	765
7	Mūsā	Ja`far	Kāzim	128	183	745	799
8	`Alī	Mūsā	Ridā	148	203	766	818
9	Muḥammad	`Alī	Jawād	195	220	811	835
10	`Alī	Muḥammad	Hādī	212	254	828	868
11	Hasan	`Alī	`Askarī	232	260	846	874
12	M.u.h. a.m.m. a.d	Hasan	Mahdī	255		869	

The name of Imām Mahdī

He shares the name of his ancestor the Prophet Muḥammad.

Epithets

Titles often used instead of his real name include Mahdī, Qā'im, Muntazar, Baqiyyatullāh, Ḥujjah, Mahdī and Manṣūr, the most popular of which is Mahdī. He is called Mahdī (the guided one) because he will guide people to the right path, Qā'im (one who rises) because he will rise to implement and uphold justice, Muntazar (the awaited) because believers are waiting for his reappearance and Baqiyyatullāh (that which remains of God) because he is the last of God's representatives on earth. He is Mansūr (the aided one) because he is aided by the Lord. Ḥujjah is another of his titles and perhaps the most difficult to explain. In Arabic ḥujjah refers to a really strong reason; something that disarms the opponent in a logical discussion. It is also the thing that gives you the power to say 'I told you so!' when someone faces failure after disregarding your advice. If we call Imām Mahdī al-Ḥujjah it is because he is the living Imām of our time, but in truth all of the Imāms are ḥujjah. The same applies to the prophets and holy texts. The purpose is that when the Day

of Judgement comes, God will ask disbelievers what reason they had for not accepting his guidance. He Himself has strong reasons for having expected them to. He has sent scriptures, prophets and Imāms.

His Father

Imām Mahdī's father is the eleventh Shia Imām (Imām Ḥasan `Askarī). He was born in Medina in the year 232 AH (846 CE). He was there for 13 years at the end of which al-Mutawakkil, the tenth Abbasid Caliph, forcibly moved their family to Iraq which was the Abbasid capital at the time. Lodgings for Imām Hādī were provided in a region called `Askar in the city of Sāmerrā', so that he could be watched and contact between him and his Shia followers could be prevented. Imām Ḥasan `Askarī became Imām at the age of 23, upon the death of his father – Imām Hādī. He faced many restrictions and imprisonments, as had his father before him. He actually spent three years of his Imamate, the total of which was 6 years, in prison. At the age of 29, he was poisoned on the order of al-Mu`tamid the Abbasid caliph. He was buried next to his father in Sāmerrā'. The graves of these two wronged Imāms are shrines which attract a great number of Muslim pilgrims (mainly Shia) every year.

His Mother

His honourable mother was named Malikah. On the father's side she was the granddaughter of the Byzantine Caesar while her mother's lineage went back to Simon i.e. Saint Peter, one of the twelve apostles.

Despite living in a palace and having an aristocratic life, she was extremely faithful and chaste, almost as if she had taken after her mother's family entirely. Her life was similar to that of Mary, Jesus and Simon in that it had an aura of spirituality. She was therefore inclined to marry into a family of believers and God aided her by strange means in this wish of hers, so she ended up in Imām Hādī's household and was wed to Imām Ḥasan `Askarī. Imām Hādī changed her name to Narjis (Narcissus) and foretold her giving birth to a son who would grow up to fill the earth with the light of wisdom and justice after it had become full of cruelty and tyranny.

His Birth

He was born in Sāmerrā' on the dawn of Friday, 15th Sha`ban, in the year 255 AH (2nd August 869 CE). The birth of the Mahdī is a historical fact asserted not only by the Shia Imāms, scholars and historians, but also some Sunni scholars and historians. The names of more than a hundred such individuals are listed in numerous research books.¹

1. Refer to *Imām Mahdī and Scholars* by `Alī Davānī.

The Four Stages of His Life

Stage One: From Birth to the Age of Five

Imām Mahdī was born in secret, so there was a risk of the Shia failing to recognize him in future. Imām Ḥasan `Askarī informed a number of trustworthy followers of the birth of his son and bid them spread the news among Shia people. Aḥmad ibn Ishāq Aḥmad, who was an elder and senior Shia and a rather special disciple of the eleventh Imām, has recounted one of his visits as follows:

‘I had gone to see the Imām and ask him about his successor but before I could say anything, he himself spoke. “O Aḥmad!” he said.

“The almighty Lord has never left the earth devoid of His representatives and He shall not do so until the Day of Judgment. Because of his existence people are saved from calamities and catastrophes and because of him the rain pours and the earth gives birth to things that grow.”

“O son of God’s messenger! Who is the Imām after you?” I asked eagerly. His Holiness went inside the house and brought back with him a three year old child whose face shone like the full moon. “Were you not dear to God and to His

representatives, I would not show you my son.” he said.

“Indeed he shares the name of God’s messenger and is the one who shall fill the earth with justice, after its being filled with tyranny and evil!”

‘I asked for a sign with which to assure and secure my heart. Then the small boy, speaking in perfect Arabic said:

“I am that which remains of Allah on earth and I shall take revenge upon the enemies of God. O Aḥmad ibn Ishāq! Do not ask for signs after you have seen something with your own two eyes.”¹

Two years after this audience Imām Ḥasan `Askarī was martyred and his five year old son became the new Imām. There are earlier examples of child Imāms in Shia history. The ninth and tenth Imāms began their Imamate at the ages of seven and nine respectively. Furthermore, prophets such as Jesus and John were made prophets in childhood.

‘O John, hold fast the scripture; and we gave him wisdom in childhood.’ (19:12)

‘She (Mary) pointed to him (the baby Jesus);

1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 2:384-385.

they said, How shall we speak to an infant who is in the cradle?! He (Jesus) said: I am the worshiper of Allah. He has given me the scripture and appointed me a prophet and made me blessed wherever I may be and charged me with prayer and charity as long as I live.’ (19:29 to 19:31)

Stage Two: From the Age of Five to the Age of Seventy Four i.e. *The Minor Occultation*

Imām Mahdī was born at a point in time when both the Imāms preceding him and their Shia had to endure a great deal of persecution and restrictions from the Abbasid Caliphs. The Shia population was closely watched and it was extremely difficult for them to contact their Imāms. Shia Imāms in earlier times were in no better conditions either, and it is believed by the majority of Muslim scholars that none of the Shia Imāms died natural deaths. Imām `Alī, the first Imām, was assassinated by the sword stroke of a dissident while praying in the mosque of Kufa. Imām Ḥusayn, the third Imām, was martyred in a horrifying way by Yazīd son of Mu`āwiyah and all the other Imāms were martyred by means of poisoning, conspired to by the rulers of their time.

Considering this situation and also considering that Imām Mahdī was the last Imām and religious

leader assigned by God, his birth was kept entirely hidden by his father Imām Ḥasan and he was never present in public places and gatherings. Similar to Moses, his birth had been foretold. Muslims anticipated his appearance and uprising just as the Israelites had anticipated Moses and the Abbasids were vigilant, seeking to kill him at birth just like the Egyptian Pharaoh with regard to Moses.

On the other hand, fading spirituality along with the growth of ignorance, doubts, misgivings and distorted beliefs spawned over two centuries by those claiming the Islamic leadership after the Prophet, created conditions to make it impossible for people to prepare themselves for Imām Mahdī's reappearance and to aid him in his worldwide mission of spreading peace. Thus it was that people's lack of preparation and the danger that threatened Imām Mahdī's life resulted not only in the Muslims but the whole world being deprived of his presence among them and of direct contact with him. Thus it was that the words of the Prophet regarding the long occultation of Mahdī came true. Therefore at the age of 74, while nearing the end of his minor occultation during which his only contact with his people was through special representatives (*nurwab al-khās*), he wrote a letter to his fourth and final representative, announcing the

end of the minor occultation (*ghaybat al- khās*) and the beginning of the major occultation (*ghaybat al-`āmm*) on 15th Sha`ban 329.

‘In the name of Allah, the most beneficent, the most merciful: O `Alī ibn Muḥammad! May the Lord reward your brothers in religion magnificently for their patience in the face of grief. Truly you shall pass away within six days, so prepare yourself, but do not select anybody to replace you after your death, for the major occultation has begun and there is no appearance for me unless it is the will of the beneficent Lord. It will take so long that hearts will be hardened and the earth will become full of evil. Soon some of the Shia will claim to be special representative, but beware, for any who makes such a claim before the celestial call and the rising of the Sufiyānī is a liar and a fraud.’¹

Ever since that time Imām Mahdī has not had a special representative and has referred the Shia to jurists in general², who are nowadays known as Marāji` al-Taqlīd.

At this point a number of questions may occur to the reader. You may wonder how the Shia Imāms could have been so oppressed and

1. *Kamāl- al- Dīn*, 2:516.

2. *Kamāl- al- Dīn*, 2:484.

tormented that they could not complete their missions, every single one of them ultimately being martyred and the last of them being forced into exile if, as we believe, they were appointed by God and given enough power by Him to guide the people in the right direction. Could He not choose another land in which to present this final religion and place His last prophet and the successor Imāms so that humanity would have a better fate than this?

In the Qur'an, the almighty Lord says to Muḥammad:

'And if thy Lord had willed, he would have made the people a single nation (all of whom followed the right path) and there would be no differences between them.' (11:118)

However, it was not God's will to make humans like angels. He has given them freedom of choice and the ability to tell right from wrong. He tests and tries them to see which path they will take. It is God's tradition to a) allow people to choose for themselves and b) give them a certain amount of time in this world.

'Do people think that they will be left alone by saying, 'We are believers,' and will not be tried?' (29:2)

Although historically a number of guilty nations

have been heavily punished in this very world, this is not God's tradition and custom, but rather examples for the rest of humanity. Therefore not only the Prophet of Islam and the Shia Imāms but every prophet in history has suffered persecution and harassment at the hands of the people and the rulers of their times, so many of them were imprisoned, exiled or killed during their efforts to guide people. Studying the history of prophets and their successors among various nations reveals that other people's treatment of the messengers of God has been no better than the Arabs'/Muslims'. Interestingly, the Prophet Muḥammad often said to Imām `Alī, 'You are to me as Aaron was to Moses.'¹ He may have meant by this that just as the Israelites ignored Aaron in Moses' absence and started worshipping the calf, the Islamic nation would disobey Muḥammad's successor after his death. So we cannot know if things would have turned out better had God chosen some other place for His last messenger. Moreover it can be said that the land of Arabia was exceptionally situated in the centre of a circle surrounded by all the ancient civilizations. To its south was Yemen, to its north Rome and Phoenicia, to its east and northeast Persia and Assyria, and, to its West,

1. *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, 6, hadith number 6032, 395.

Ancient Egypt. Naturally, such a location would make a good starting point for spreading Islam throughout the world and so God chose this land for His final prophet in order to make it easier for him to spread the revelations made to him. It should also be considered that the people of Arabia were very inferior in social skills, respecting each other's rights, beliefs and traditions and so they needed guidance more than the other nations of that time such as the Persians or the Romans. Last but not least is the following verse, which indicates that there are many mysteries around the subject of prophecy of which only God is fully aware and we can understand it only partially.

'Allah knows best where to place His message.' (6:124)

Since it is God's will that one day the earth should be governed by honest and virtuous men only and Imām Mahdī is the last holy leader from the line of prophets, it makes perfect sense for God to protect him from harm until human society reaches such a spiritual level and understanding as to be ready for him.

Stage Three: From the Age of Seventy Four to the Present i.e. The Major Occultation

One of the most mysterious things about Imām Mahdī is his life during the major occultation

which began on 15th Sha’ban 329 (20th May 941 CE) and continues to this day, more than one thousand hundred years later.

Although his birth and his being alive are obvious facts based on the principle that there must always be a representative of God on earth, it is necessary to answer some of the most important questions often put to Shia.

1. Within the Muslim population, are Shia the only people who believe in Imām Mahdī?

Nearly all Muslims believe that Imām Mahdī, a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, is the saviour of humanity. However, Shia Muslims and some Sunnis believe that he has already been born whereas others believe that he has not been born yet. The following quote from the Prophet Muḥammad is in more than ten reliable Sunni Hadith books.

‘Even if there be only one day left of the life of the world, God will make that day long enough for a descendant of mine who shares my name to appear. He shall fill the earth with peace and justice, just as it has become full of oppression and tyranny.’¹

2. Is there a clear reference to the existence of Imām Mahdī in the Qur’an and the words of the

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 51:83.

Prophet?

a) Imām Mahdī is not directly mentioned in the Qur'an and there are two possible reasons for that: firstly, because the Qur'an is comprised mostly of generalities, the explanations and clarifications of which were left to the Prophet and his successors and secondly, being very specific not only makes a holy scripture extremely long¹, it also strengthens the potential motives for making changes to the text. There are, however, some verses in the Qur'an that directly necessitate the existence of a divine proof upon the earth at all times. Two such verses follow:

1. 'And the unbelievers say: 'why has no sign been sent down to him from his Lord?' you are only a warner, and there is a guide for every nation.'(13:7)

It can be concluded from this verse that the earth will never be devoid of a saint who directs people to the right path. He must either be a prophet or some other guide assigned by God.²

2. 'We have sent you with the truth, a bearer of glad tidings and warning, and there is not a nation

1. 'Were every tree that is in the earth (made into) pens and the sea (to supply it with ink), with seven more seas to increase it, the words of Allah would not come to an end.' (31:27).

2. Persian translation of *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Quran*, 11:416.

but a warner has passed among them.’

b) Ibn `Abbās has quoted the Prophet saying, ‘Know that the Almighty Lord has made me and the infallible Imāms his hujjah. There will be Imāms from the line of Ḥusayn who will act upon my words and uphold my will and my instructions. The ninth of them is our Qā’im and the Mahdī of my people (*ummah*). He is most similar to me in action and speech. He will reappear after a long occultation.’²¹

3. Why should a leader assigned by God, who the Shia believe is God’s representative on earth be in occultation, hidden from people and apparently impossible to contact? If the only reason for Imām Mahdī’s occultation is the people’s unpreparedness and fear of his being killed by tyrants, can it be imagined that there will come a time when everybody is ready and everybody needs not fear being followed or killed by any tyrant?

a) The truth is that nobody can claim to know in full what the reason of Imām Mahdī’s occultation is. Questions have been asked about it, not only during his occultation but also before it even began. Reasons such as fear for his life, society not

1. *Kamāl- al- Dīn*, 257:2.

being ready, testing the believers' faith, punishing people for their ungratefulness and for failing to support the Prophet's rightful successors, etc. are all reasonable explanations, but they cannot all be true. `Abdullāh ibn Faḍl al-Hāshimī says:

*"I heard Imām Ṣādiq the sixth Shia Imām say, 'There is an inevitable occultation for the Mahdī which will cause every sceptic to doubt.' 'But, my master, what for?' I asked. 'For a cause we are not permitted to reveal.' He replied. I asked, 'What wisdom is there behind this occultation?' to which he answered, 'The same wisdom that was behind the occultation of others before him. It will only be revealed after his reappearance, in the same way that the reasoning behind Khidr's actions was not clear to Moses until the time of their separation. O son of Faḍl! This matter is one of the secrets and mysteries known only to the Almighty. Once we acknowledge the wisdom of God, we will admit that all His acts are wise, even if we do not understand them.'"*¹

b) According to historical evidence, humanity has grown in intelligence and understanding as it has progressed through time. Even though mankind has always been caught up in oppression and injustice and prophets and their successors have often been persecuted for their endeavours

1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 2:482.

towards guiding the nations and upholding justice, nowadays we seldom see rulers claim divinity. Statesmen are not kings who believe themselves to have been divinely appointed. They are not men who think they don't need to be answerable for their unjust actions or claim the right to impose their every wish and whim upon the people under their rule. These days, most statesmen gain office in the name of democracy and the termination of the few dictatorial monarchies that remain is not far off. Religious and tribal wars which were once responsible for sending countless men to their graves and destroying entire civilizations have decreased considerably. Even though there are still injustices hidden under beautiful words such as democracy, the testimony of history regarding mankind's growing intelligence, a great part of which is undoubtedly the result of the prophets' teachings, cannot be overseen. What is more, God has promised in the Qur'an and numerous other scriptures that this progress will one day result in the victory of the righteous and the believers.

'Allah hath promised such of you as believe and do good work that he will surely make them to succeed (the present rulers) in the earth even as he caused those who were before them to succeed (others); and that he will surely establish for them their religion which he hath

approved for them, and will give them in exchange safety after their fear. They serve me. They ascribe no thing as partner unto me. Those who disbelieve henceforth, they are the miscreants.’ (24:55)

4. Why is it necessary for one such leader and guide to be alive and waiting for reappearance? What is the point of an Imām in occultation? Would it not make more sense for Imām Mahdī to be born at the right time and carry out his mission then?

As mentioned before, Islamic beliefs necessitate the presence of a prophet or Imām upon the earth at all times. Based on this belief, even if there are only two people left in the world one of them would be a hujjah. Imām Muḥammad Bāqir, the fifth Shia Imām, has said about the matter, ‘By God, since the day when Allah took Adam’s life he has left no land without a leader to guide its people. This leader is God’s hujjah over people and the earth shall never be empty of an Imām who is God’s hujjah.’¹

Moreover, such a question would be valid only if the existence of the living but unseen guide and hujjah had no effect in the world and he had no activities, whereas Imām Mahdī is both effective and active. Questions about the manner of

1. *Uṣūl- al- Kāfī*, 1:333; al-Nu`mānī: *al-Ghaybah*, hadith number 7, 193.

benefiting from Imām Mahdī's holy existence have been asked as early on as during the Prophet Muḥammad's days. Even Imām Mahdī himself was asked about it. The answers have been similar. When Jabir Ansārī asked the holy Prophet if the Shia will benefit from an Imām's existence during his occultation, the Prophet replied, 'I swear by the God who chose me as His messenger that they benefit from their Imām when he is in occultation as they benefit from the sun when it is hidden behind clouds.'¹

Imām Mahdī himself said, 'Benefiting from me during my occultation is like benefiting from the sun when it is hidden behind clouds and I balance the earth as the stars balance the skies.'²

Since this text is intended to be a concise one, we shall refrain from explaining this metaphor in detail and continue to list the effects of Imām Mahdī's existence and his activities during his occultation.

a) From the Shia point of view an Imām has a very special status. He influences and benefits the earth and its people whether he is present among them or not. Regarding the status of the Imāms, Imām `Alī said, 'They are the keeper of God's

1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 1:253.

2. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 2:485 and Shaykh Ṭūsī: *al-Ghaybah*, 176 and; 292.

secrets and the refuge of his commands. They are treasuries of knowledge and sanctuaries for books, the reference in God's law and the unyielding mountains of religion. Through them the bent back of religion will be straightened and its body will cease to tremble.¹ Certainly an Imām with such characteristics will have his effects even when he is not visibly present.

b) The Imām not being present does not mean he has no authority. Even in his occultation, he can intervene in the course of events. In the case of a destructive deviation emerging in the world of Islam, he will step in and avert it either directly or indirectly and people may or may not notice his intervention. However, these interventions have certain limits the nature of which is unknown to us.

c) Although the people do not have access to him, there are always a few honest and righteous men and women who meet him and are given certain information or instructions. They act upon what they are told and share what they have learned, often without knowing the source themselves! These occurrences which are sometimes made known, but most often remain hidden,

1. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Khuṭbah no. 2.

benefit everybody, particularly Muslim society.

5. Is it possible for a man to live so long? Is this Muslim belief not more like some kind of fairy tale which depicts a beautiful but impossible and illogical future for mankind?

It is first necessary to state that what modern science has discovered about the world and its phenomena is very little compared to what it has not yet discovered even without believing in a world beyond this one. If we do believe in other worlds then what we know for certain is nothing compared to what we do not know. When people asked the Prophet Muḥammad about the spirit, this must have been the reason for God saying:

“They ask thee concerning the spirit. Say: the spirit is by the command of my Lord, and of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little.” (17:85)

Therefore, those who are truly wise are most careful about believing or disbelieving things they come across or hear about. The great scientist Avicenna says, ‘If you hear a strange tale, do not reject it until you find evidence either of its possibility or impossibility.’¹

Imām Mahdī’s lifespan of approximately 1200

1. *Al-Ishārāt*, 4,159.

years and counting, is certainly a strange phenomenon in nature, but is this reason enough to deny it? Those who have religious beliefs, especially Jewish, Christian or Islamic ones have no problem accepting such miraculous longevity. Accounts of the lives of Noah, Idrīs (Enoch), Elijah and Khidr testify that longevity, however extreme, is perfectly possible when God so wills.

Imām Ṣādiq, the sixth Shia Imām says, ‘God lengthened he life of his servant Khidr, not to make him a prophet or give him a scripture with which to abrogate the law of previous religions. Nor was it to make him an Imām to be followed by people. It was because God intended for the Qa’im to have a long life and was aware of man’s scepticism; so he granted Khidr longevity in order to make it evident that prolonged existence is possible.’¹

Is such long life logically impossible? What do impossible things in this world consist of?

Simply put, we can divide impossible things into two major categories: those which are rationally impossible and those which are believed to be impossible, based merely on experience and observation. The Qur’an, along with the teachings of the prophets and Imāms, does not allow Shia to

1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 2357.

believe in that which is rationally impossible. Rational impossibilities include two contraries being true e.g. for one thing to be white and black at the same time or for an element to be metal and non-metal. Something like two plus two giving a number other than four is also rationally impossible and is immediately rejected by the human mind and by science. These are examples of what is eternally impossible. However, does the phenomenon of a man living for several centuries fly in the face of science? Absolutely not! It is only strange and difficult to believe because it has not been seen, the same as many other things that were thought to be impossible in the past but are everyday things now, such as humans flying, space travel, etc. Moreover, travelling beyond the borders of the solar system is impossible at the present time and with our existing technology, but it may well become possible in a few years. It is not logically or scientifically impossible and neither is longevity. The Shia believe that none of the matters mentioned by the Prophet or Imāms contradict reason. They have merely not been discovered yet by human science, which still faces countless mysteries concerning the universe and has not yet been able to figure out the connection between this world and others.

Therefore, based on the principle that a Ḥujjah always exists, the Shia believe in the Mahdī's longevity in spite of its extraordinary nature.

6. Does Imām Mahdī have any responsibilities during his occultation or is he just waiting for the time of his reappearance so he can begin his revolution?

Sometimes we talk about the effects of an Imām's existence even when he is not doing anything. That is an ideological argument. It was explained in previous chapters that the existence of a hujjah is necessary. Now, however, the question is whether Imām Mahdī actually does anything during his occultation. In answering this question it should first be made clear that the philosophy of occultation, its causes and the reasoning behind it allows us only a brief and incomplete knowledge of the subject. In other words, we have little knowledge of all the things he does, but it can be gathered from various verses of the Qur'an, historical evidence and Imām Mahdī's own words that he is not idly awaiting his special day. However, his actions often go unnoticed and there are limits to them, the details of which are known to none. Some of his activities are listed below:

1. Training a small group of true believers

According to various sources, a very small group of the best people in terms of religion is in contact with Imām Mahdī. They learn from him and are given jobs and responsibilities. Whenever one of them passes away, a new member is recruited to fill his place. Imām Mahdī's occultation does not prevent him from having a small group of people privately under his tuition and guidance. However, they are never allowed to introduce themselves as such.

2. Caring for followers

In a letter to Shaykh Mufid, Imām Mahdī has stated:

I never fail to watch over you. Nor do I ever forget or disregard you. If I did, calamities would befall you at any moment and your enemies would devour you! So remember God and practice piety.¹

3. Solving the problems of followers

Many books have been written which contain true stories of occasions when Imām Mahdī has helped solve the seemingly impossible mental, physical and financial problems of some of his followers or even non-followers, including non-Muslims. More information on this subject may be found in *Mir-e-Mehr* by Mas'ūd Pūr Sayyid

1. *Ihtijāj*, 2, 499.

Āghā'ī, *Dīdār-e-Yār* by `Alī Karamī and *Those who Love Mahdī* by Ghāzī Zāhidī. Most unfortunately, however, these books are in Persian and to date, none of them has been translated into English.

7. Is it possible to contact Imām during his occultation?

Shia scholars disagree over this question. Some believe it to be possible while others do not. We will not say it is impossible to meet him in this era, but conversely, it does not mean that anyone claiming to have seen Imām Mahdī is telling the truth.

It would be helpful to clarify the question somewhat before explaining the different views. There are three ways of having contact with Imām Mahdī: 1) a spiritual and mystical connection, 2) in the world of dreams and 3) in the flesh.

It is the latter which has caused disagreements. Those who reject the idea of meeting Imām Mahdī during his occultation rely mainly on a number of narrations and texts including Imām Mahdī's own letter in which he calls anyone who claims to have met him a liar and a fraud, saying: 'Beware! Anybody who claims to have seen me (*al-mushāhadah*) before Sufyānī has risen and the

celestial call has been heard is a liar and a fraud.”¹

If *al-mushāhadah* is interpreted as ‘to have seen’ we cannot accept any of the stories about meeting with Imām Mahdī which have been recorded in books throughout the years.

On the other hand, the majority of Shia scholars believe such occurrences possible, based on narrations from trustworthy persons. They are of the opinion that there is nothing to suggest that meeting the Imām is not possible. Based on this point of view, there are no authentic narrations that reject the idea. There is only the Imām’s letter and even that may not mean what we would imagine at first.

Numerous explanations of this letter have been proposed, the best of which is that Imām Mahdī’s use of the word *fraud* suggests that he means someone claiming not only to have met him but also to be his official representative. In fact, this letter was written with regard to the issue of his special representatives. The recipient was ‘Alī-Ibn-Muḥammad Samarī (the fourth and final representative), the Imām was telling him that the minor occultation was over and he would no longer have a representative among the people.

1. *Kamāl- al- Dīn*, 2,294.

Therefore, it is perfectly possible to see Imām Mahdī. It is only natural to come across him at some point, seeing as he lives in this world and has a perfectly solid body. However, mysteriously failing to notice him is in the interest of the occultation. Although in his letter Imām Mahdī denies the possibility of any meeting him it can be gathered from the context that he is speaking of meetings that are synonymous with representing him.

Stage Four: Reappearance

Seeing as this stage of Imām Mahdī's life has not yet come to pass, the information in this chapter is all based on accounts from the Prophet Muḥammad and the Shia Imāms, for the Shia believe that the only people whose predictions can be trusted are those who receive their information directly from God. This means, of course, prophets and their successors. What information can be extracted from the Qur'an and other unchanged scriptures is also reliable.

It is a pleasure and delight to speak of things that are going to happen after Imām Mahdī's reappearance, but it is also difficult. The 2000+ accounts recorded in Islamic Mahdism sources can only give us a general idea of the fantastic and

extraordinary events that are to take place. Obviously the infallible Imāms have mentioned only generalities when describing the future of the world, but what they have said is only a small part of what they knew, most of which they were not permitted to speak of. Moreover, they have used words and terms intelligible to most people. For instance, Imām Bāqir says, ‘After our Qā’im has risen, Allah shall place a hand on the heads of people and collect their wits and bring together their wisdom and intelligence.’¹ This is an important and strange episode in the era following the reappearance. What is this placing of God’s hand and how is it going to happen so as not to clash with man’s free will and yet bring about such a dramatic change in his thinking? In other words, in what way is this sudden leap in the history of mankind going to take place? We know for certain that this will happen because we believe in God’s wisdom and power and also the treasures of knowledge He has bestowed upon the infallible Imāms. What we do not know is how it will happen.

It is said in another quote from Imām Sajjād that:

1. *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, 1:19.

‘Knowledge is made of twenty seven letters. Everything that has been revealed and taught to people by the prophets makes up only two letters of it and no more than that has been discovered yet. When our Qā’im rises, he will bring forth the other twenty five letters and spread every letter across the world.’¹

All the discoveries of modern science, all the things that mankind has learnt of the world, using them to dominate nature and explore the universe, are hardly more than one fourteenth of all that is to be learnt.

In another quote from the Prophet Muḥammad it is said that, ‘The inhabitants of the earth and the skies will be happy with him. The sky will pour down all the rain it has to offer and the earth will answer with the green plants shooting out of its surface. The times will be so pleasant that the living will wish the dead were still among them.’² It will be an era of friendship between man and nature; the same nature that people are ruining and destroying.

The above quotes truly predict the beginning of a new age in the life of mankind. Thinking of the scientific explosion that is to come and the abilities that we will have in that time fills one with

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 52:336.

2. *Al-Tashrīf bi al-Minān*, 146.

wonder and delight.

Undoubtedly, Imām Mahdī's reappearance coincides with his revolution which is a successful attempt to seize the rule of the world and establish justice. Imām Mahdī's war against tyrants (and victory over them) will be inevitable, but the nature of his revolution is something completely different. The majority of those who rise up intending to seize the rule of a place, expand their borders or build a new civilization begin their work by killing and bloodshed and burning down older civilizations. This may have caused many to believe that the revolution of the Mahdī is something along the lines of the bloody crusades. Nonetheless the Mahdī, like his ancestor Muḥammad, wishes only to build a civilization and he will only use weapons in defence and to destroy those oppressors who are the epitome of evil. Imām Mahdī's revolution is a global issue. He is not just the Muslims' promised saviour. He is what every religion and every nation longs for. The birth of the Israelites' saviour had been announced from before and it came true with the birth of Moses; Moses promised the appearance of Jesus and that also came true; Jesus in turn told of Muḥammad and the latter foretold the appearance of Mahdī as the last saviour of the world.

He will not favour any nation above another. It has been narrated that Mahdī's followers are from many different nationalities and their pledge runs thus: '(I solemnly swear) to avoid stealing, fornication, bad language, unnecessary bloodshed, scandal, attacking homes, striking the innocent, piling up gold and silver, cheating orphans of their inheritance, drinking, wearing fine clothes, bowing before wealth, blocking passages, making passages unsafe, homosexuality and greed; to support that which is good and pure and to steer clear of that which is evil; to promote the former and prohibit the latter.'¹

Islam and other religions have, with certainty, depicted a future for world that is filled with light, justice and love. Although these predictions have pointed out a few details concerning this bright future, we must admit that nobody can speak of all that is to come with absolute conviction. Fortunately, the information which we do have is enough to give us a general idea of what is expected to happen in the fields of security, justice, efficient management, food and energy sources, scientific achievements, etc.

It has been stated by Ayatollah Khamenei,

1. *Al-Malāḥim wa al-Fitan*, 122.

current leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran that those who believe Imām Mahdī's revolution to be concurrent with the end of the history of humanity are mistaken. Imām Mahdī's reappearance is in fact the beginning of a new age. Humanity, currently struggling through brambles on narrow and winding paths as far as physical and spiritual progress goes, will at that time speed along highways free of any obstacle.

Certainly, an event that is meant to revolutionise the lives of all humans will be far from ordinary. If you ask how one may identify Imām Mahdī and make sure that he is indeed the messiah of the end of time, the answer is that every prophet including Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, displayed some sort of extraordinary miracle in order to convince people of their sincerity so that they could believe that these men were messengers of God. Moreover, news of their emergence had been passed down through generations and society was ready for them. Imām Mahdī's situation is undoubtedly very similar to that of the great prophets.

The Advantage of Knowing the Precursors to Reappearance

Before beginning to list the events that precede the reappearance, we had better explain why we

need these signs in the first place. Could Imām Mahdī's reappearance not happen all of a sudden – without preamble?! Firstly, every great social or religious event takes a great deal of prior preparation and an event such as the appearance of a global saviour cannot take place in an instant without facing any problems. God made some arrangements and preparations before the beginning of Imām Mahdī's major occultation so that the people would be ready. Moreover, the previous Imāms and the Prophet himself also foretold this phase. The reappearance needs at least as much advance planning as well as time to inform and prepare people.

Secondly, some of these signs are a kind of tribute to this huge event, similar to the signs that tended to appear before the birth of some prophets.

Thirdly, the signs of reappearance are a warning of sorts for Imām Mahdī's enemies. They will prevent many battles because many enemies of justice and freedom will lose all hope upon seeing these signs and know that they have no chance of withstanding the oncoming storm.

Fourthly, several people have to date claimed to be the Mahdī and have gathered a number of followers around them, but their claims have easily

been proved to be false. Knowing the signs of Imām Mahdī's reappearance helps people distinguish frauds and false saviours from the true Imām.

Types of Signs

The signs of reappearance are plenty and thus can be slightly misleading if not properly categorised. Sometimes reading the signs inaccurately causes some people to believe wrongly that the reappearance is either extremely close or hopelessly distant. The signs of reappearance can be classified in five ways:

1. Inevitable or Doubtful: Inevitable signs are those without which the reappearance will not occur. They include the celestial call and the rise of Sufyānī. Doubtful signs may ultimately never be seen. There may be obstacles to them or the time may simply never be right for them to happen.

2. Global or Regional: The celestial call is a global sign, meaning it will be heard by every single person on the earth in his or her own language. Regional signs are events that take place in a particular region e.g. the Middle East.

3. Earthly or Heavenly: If the earth falls in in a particular spot that is an earthly sign, whereas the

celestial call or solar and lunar eclipses in a certain period of time are heavenly signs.

4. General or Specific: Widespread oppression and immorality are general signs. The rise of the Sufyānī is a specific one.

5. Signs which are close to the appearance and signs which are not: The celestial call is extremely close and perhaps even simultaneous to the reappearance but the fall of the Abbasids is not. The latter only means that there will be no reappearance as long as the Abbasids rule. All of the inevitable signs are close to the reappearance and to each other, so that within a year of the first inevitable sign being observed the reappearance will occur.

The Signs of Imām Mahdī's Reappearance

There are thousands of ḥadīths describing the signs of reappearance, from both Sunni and Shia sources. Some say there are more than 1200 signs. In just one narration, Imām Ṣādiq names more than a hundred of them, some of which are cited below:

1. Oppression and tyranny will be widespread
2. Religion will be practically hollow and men will turn it upside down as if it were a bowl

3. Misdeeds will be done openly and the doers will not be reprimanded
4. Men will prefer men over women and women will prefer women over men
5. Offenders will lie and nobody will deny their falsehoods
6. Children will not respect their elders
7. Relatives will be estranged
8. Women will marry women
9. Neighbours will harass each other and not be prevented from doing so
10. Those who offer advice with good will are regarded with contempt
11. Sinners will gain popularity and power
12. People will trust false oaths
13. Sinners will become bold and daring and not wait for the cover of darkness
14. A believer will not be able to dissuade anyone from performing bad deeds
15. Judges will accept bribes
16. Positions will be awarded based on profit rather than worthiness
17. Hearing the truth will be difficult for people whereas hearing falsehood will be easy for them
18. God's law will be set aside and people will act on their own whims
19. People will earn their living by cheating

others

20. Prayers will be easily disregarded

21. Men will put together great wealth without having paid a penny of alms

22. People's hearts will be hard, their eyes dry and remembering God will be difficult for them

23. People will race each other in illegal trades

24. Those pursuing that which is legitimate will be scolded and those pursuing that which is illegitimate will be praised

25. Deeds abhorred by God will be done in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and nobody will try to put a stop to them

26. Humans will have sexual intercourse with each other in public the way beasts do and nobody will dare forbid them for fear of their reaction

27. Parents will often be unhappy with their children and children will have no respect for their parents

29. Human beings will care most about satisfying their stomachs and their lust¹

As you may have noticed, many of these signs have always been present in human societies to various extents, but with the startling developments made in the field of media they are becoming more and more pronounced. However,

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 52:256.

only a few of them are certain and conclusive signs of reappearance. ‘The rise of the Qā’im has five signs,’ Imām Ṣādiq has said. ‘They are the rise of the Sufyānī, the rise of the Yamānī, the celestial call, the murder of the pure soul and the ground of Baydā’ giving way.’¹ A brief explanation of each is given below in no particular order:

1. The celestial call: based on what was said before, this sign is global, specific, inevitable, heavenly, and, close to the reappearance. It declares the reappearance of Imām Mahdī and demands compliance. All nations in all parts of the world will hear it in their own tongue. It has been said that without this call there will be no reappearance.

2. The rise of the Sufyānī: Immediately before Imām Mahdī’s reappearance a descendant of Abu Sufyān will rise from the land of Levant and corrupt a great many Muslims by pretending to be a pious man. Imām Sajjād says, “The rise of the Qā’im is a certainty and so is the rise of the Sufyānī.”² He is one of the cruellest men of all time and is completely unfamiliar with the concepts of kindness and pity. He will commit unbelievable atrocities. The Sufyānī is descended from the

1. *Al-Irshād*, 2:279.

2. *Al-Irshād*, 2:347.

Umayyads, is bloodthirsty and kills men and women as if they were insects. This sign is regional, inevitable, earthly, specific and closely followed by the reappearance.

3. The ground of Baydā' (a place between Mecca and Medina) falling in: The Sufyānī will send an army to Mecca to fight Imām Mahdī, but they will be miraculously swallowed by the earth when they reach the land of Baydā'.

4. The rise of the Yamāni: The rise of a senior officer from Yemen is another event expected to occur before the reappearance. A pious and virtuous man, he will rise against all that is immoral and wicked and fight them with all his might. The details of his movements are not known to us.

5. The murder of the pure soul: The pure soul refers to a sinless person, likely a prominent follower of Imām Mahdī, who will be killed shortly before his reappearance and inside the Holy Mosque (al-Masjid al-Ḥarām).

The Requirements of Reappearance:

The question is, is it enough for us to believe in the reappearance and know all about the things

preceding it or is some sort of action required? Does being interested in utopia and the golden age of humanity bring responsibilities in its wake? This is where the topic turns to the conditions of the reappearance and preparing the ground for it. We will call these conditions the requirements of reappearance. Some of these requirements are completely out of our hands, but others need to be established by us. Four requirements can be named, two of which are pre-established. The other two address people's duties with regard to accelerating it.

a) Planning: Clearly every reform movement needs a complete and wide-ranging plan for fighting faults and deviations. It also needs a thorough code of law able to fulfil every person's social and individual needs in a just governmental system. The teachings of the Qur'an and the traditions of the infallible Imāms (i.e. Islam at its finest) will serve Imām Mahdī as the perfect plan and the best law and he will be acting upon this eternal and divine charter. Therefore the laws governing and plans supporting his global revolution are unique. It is incomparable to any other reformative movements. He will never hit a dead end. It is even said that he will introduce new

methods previously unheard of.

b) Leadership: This is a most vital component in any reform movement. The need for a powerful and competent leader is felt more strongly as the movement reaches further and aims higher. Imām Mahdī, the heir to the quintessence of all prophets, will be there as the leader of this great movement. He is the only person in touch with the supernatural world and so knows about everything in existence and all the connections between things. He is the most intelligent and knowledgeable person of his time. The Prophet Muhammad says: ‘Know that the Mahdī is the heir to all knowledge.’¹

Therefore the global government has the best possible leader.

c) Supporters: Before he can reappear and begin his revolution, Imām Mahdī needs a number of worthy and competent supporters to aid him in the aforementioned revolution and fill the positions in his global government. It is only natural for a man who is going to lead a movement to need a number of competent allies. Until there are enough of them, there will be no reappearance

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 37:208.

and no revolution, because in spite of all the divine aid and signs accompanying Imām Mahdī's initial reappearance, it is not his intention to govern the world using miracles! He will need sufficient numbers of assistants to appoint as his ministers and deputies and God knows what else. They should be honest persons who will aid him in his plans, not the kind of people who are easily corrupted by power. They have been described as having the following characteristics:

- They have recognised God as is worthy of Him
- They endeavour to obey their Imām
- They spend their nights praying and their days fasting
- Their hearts are set and hard as iron when it comes to working for their sacred cause
- They encircle their Imām in battle, protecting him with their own lives
- It is their wish to be martyred for God
- They are like lions which have left the jungles and can uproot mountains if they wish
- They do not believe that being patient is too much or that their life is too valuable to be spent for God
- They are united with each other
- They have sworn an oath to Imām Mahdī not to pile up gold or silver, or wheat and barley

More precisely, based on their merits and their competence, Imām Mahdī's supporters fall into different categories or levels. He will have 313 special followers who form the foundation of the revolution. There will be ten thousand more to aid him and gradually every believer in the world will join them.

d) General Preparedness: By studying various points in history we can see that despite the presence of an Imām, society has never made the most of it. It did not appreciate the infallible Imāms or benefit from their existence as it could. As a result, the Lord Almighty concealed his last hujjah so that he may appear at a time when people are ready for him and he can fill their hearts and minds with divine wisdom and insight. Therefore general preparedness is vital to the reappearance, for, only with it, can the movement flourish and the flaws of our world be corrected.

So the reappearance will only take place when everybody wants social justice, moral and mental health and spiritual improvement. When people become tired of prejudices and injustice, when they see with their own eyes the powerful rights violations of the poor and when they realize that a particular minority are in control of most

resources, their thirst for justice will spike.

When immorality becomes widespread and people race each other in it, taking pride in their sins, when there is so much distance between people and the humane principles devised by God that they legalise deeds that fly in the face of chastity, thereby causing families to fall apart and children to be overlooked, at that point many will long for the leader under whose rule they can have a healthy society, a stable family and emotional security. When people have access to all worldly pleasures but are still unhappy because deep down they yearn for spirituality, they will want the saviour who has been promised them.

It is only natural that humanity will want its Imām most after it has witnessed the failure of numerous human systems and governments. They will then realize that the only one who can save the world from degeneracy and ruin is God's own representative Imām Mahdī and the only program that will make a healthy and peaceful life possible for them is God's law. Therefore they will feel the need for the Imām's presence with all their being and try hard to pave the way for his reappearance.

A View of Imām Mahdī's Rule (The Post-Reappearance Era)

As was pointed out earlier, although we know for certain that Imām Mahdī's reappearance will be the beginning of a glorious age in the history of mankind, we know very little about what that age will actually be like. However, using the many ḥadiths that we have access to, we can name three major points as parts of his plans. These include culture, society and the economy.

A) Cultural Plans

In Imām Mahdī's global rule, all cultural activities will be aimed at people's intellectual and practical improvement and the elimination of ignorance in all fields. This may be done in the following ways:

1. Reviving the Scripture and the Sunnah: under the rule of God's last Ḥujjah the reviving teachings of the Qur'an will make their way into every aspect of the human life. Moreover, the Sunnah (literally; tradition) which constitutes the speech and actions of religious leaders will be introduced as the best standard to try to live up to. Imām `Alī has described the Mahdī's rule

as follows: ‘In an age when lust rules the Mahdī will rise and replace it with guidance and redemption. It will be an era when personal opinions are preferred over the Qur’an, but he will direct humanity’s attention towards it and make it the foundation for his rule.’¹

2. Spreading wisdom and ethics: The Prophet Muḥammad considered ethics to be the aim of his mission and the Qur’an describes him as a perfect example. Most unfortunately, however, moral degradation can be seen in all human societies including Muslim ones, perhaps because of the distance we have put between ourselves and religious teachings. One of Imām Mahdī’s chief concerns will be to popularise moral principles again. Imām Bāqir says, ‘Once our Qā’im has risen, God will place His hand on humanity’s head, joining their minds together and perfecting their understanding’² We can gather from this that under Imām Mahdī’s rule, which encourages ethics and spirituality, all will be ready for man’s intellectual and moral growth, because just as immorality is caused by lack of wisdom, it will be prevented by an

1. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Khuṭbah no. 138.

2. *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, 1:25.

increase in wisdom and intelligence.

3. **Scientific Advancement:** considerable scientific progress is another thing we have to look forward to. Regarding this part of Imām Mahdī's plans the Prophet Muḥammad said, 'God will enlighten the earth through him after it has become caught in darkness; He will fill it to the brim with justice after it has become full of oppression, and, He will spread knowledge in the world at a time when ignorance is dominant.'¹

B) Economic Plans

Under Imām Mahdī's rule there will be a universal, global economic program based on which humanity benefits optimally from natural resources and wealth is fairly distributed amongst all people. Again we refer to ḥadīths for more information:

1. **Benefiting from Natural Resources:** a major economic problem is the incorrect use of natural resources. The earth is not used to its full capacity and water is not used properly to revive it. During Imām Mahdī's rule, with God's blessing, rain will pour down generously and the

1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 1:487.

earth will react correspondingly. Imām ‘Ali says: ‘And when our Qā’im has risen, the sky will pour and plants will grow.’¹

All the earth and its resources will be at his service to enable the good Imām to build a healthy economy. Imām Bāqir says: ‘The earth shall be wrapped up for him (he can move from one spot to another in a moment) and all its treasures revealed to him.’ –b²

2. Fair Distribution of Wealth: It is the sign of a diseased economy when all wealth is in the hands of a particular minority. There have always been some persons or groups who have considered themselves to be special, snatched at resources and used them to their own advantage. Imām Mahdī will fight such behaviour and distribute wealth equally among the whole community.

Imām Bāqir says: ‘After his reappearance, our Qā’im will distribute wealth equally and treat people with justice.’³

The principle of equality will be put into practice at that time and everybody will receive what is their right.

1. *Al-Khiṣāl*, 626.

2. *Kamāl- al- Dīn*, 1:603.

3. *Al-Nu` māni: al- Ghaybahā*, 242.

The Prophet Muḥammad once said, ‘I give you the glad tidings of the coming of the Mahdī. He will distribute wealth correctly.’ They asked him what he meant and he answered, ‘All people will be equal in wealth.’¹ This will be the end of poverty and socio-economic classes.

Imām Bāqir says: ‘The Mahdī will treat people justly, so there will be no one left who needs another’s charity.’²

3. Development: It is the norm in human societies that classes connected to the rulers and their associates or to other influential people receive the most attention and the other classes are neglected. However, under Imām Mahdī’s rule, this will not be the case:

Imām Bāqir says: ‘There shall remain no ruined spot on the earth which is not built.’³

C) Social Plans

1. Reviving *al-Amr bi al-Ma`rūf wa al-Nahy `an al-Munkar*: this long Arabic term means roughly ‘enjoining good and forbidding evil’ and is considered to be religious duty for the Shia. Under Imām Mahdī’s rule this great duty will be

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 51:81.

2. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 52:390.

3. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 1:603.

widely practiced. This is the practice which the Qur'an has named as the quality of superior nations. Upholding it will result in God's word being obeyed and neglecting it is what causes the eradication of that which is good and the popularity of that which is evil.

The best form of it is when a leader and his agents enjoin good and forbid evil.

Imām Bāqir says: 'The Mahdī and his followers enjoin good and forbid evil.'¹

2. **Fighting Immorality:** Forbidding evil, which is a main characteristic of a divine rule, is not just done verbally. Degeneration will be checked and confronted until the society becomes entirely free of it.
3. **Upholding God's Law:** There are many of dealing with criminals. During his rule, Imām Mahdī will primarily endeavour to bring them back to the right path through educational methods and strengthening the foundations of faith in them. He will also provide all people with what they need in order to live a reasonably comfortable life. If, however, there are still some who violate the rights of other citizens and

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 51:47.

refuse to comply with the law, they will face a punishment so severe that not only will they be sure to discontinue their criminal activities, but the crime rate in the society will also decrease. To be more precise, he will uphold the Islamic law with regard to criminals. *“He will uphold God’s law.” –Prophet Muḥammad¹*

4. Judicial Justice: Justice in all fields is one of his main plans and he is the one who will fill the earth with it after it has become full of injustice. Jurisdiction is naturally one of the most important fields when it comes to upholding justice. Ironically it may also be the field in which most injustices have been done – property wrongly confiscated, blood unnecessarily shed, innocent people disgraced, etc.

The underprivileged have been most wronged in court, where the influence of the wealthy and powerful has resulted in many persons or groups losing their property or even their lives. There have been many greedy judges who, for their own benefit have returned unjust verdicts.

1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, 52:27:4.

Imām Riḍā says:

‘When he has risen the earth shall be enlightened with the light of the Lord and he shall uphold justice in such a way that no man may ever be wronged again.’¹

1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 2:372.