

In the name of God,  
the most Beneficent, the  
most Merciful



This book is dedicated to those who  
believe that a Bright Future lies ahead for  
humankind in this world.



# **The Promised Mahdi**

**(In the view of Shi'a)**

*Ḥamīd Sa'ādat*

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## The Promised Mahdi in the view of Shi'a

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## **Foreword**

The belief in the Promised Saviour is a common significant principle among all Abrahamic religions and other schools of thought optimistic about the end of the world. It is addressed in Islam under the doctrine of Mahdism. According to many authentic Hadiths, Prophet Muhammad has spoken numerous times of the appearance of a man from his progeny, namely al-Mahdi, who will bring overwhelming and thorough justice and peace to the earth and put an end to all oppressions and immoralities. So, despite some differences in details, all Muslim groups and sects believe in the Promised Mahdi and his appearance one day at the End of the Time. In the meantime, it can be said that the brightest Islamic view on Mahdism has emerged among the Twelver Shi'a such that there is a crystal clear distinguished difference between the views of Shi'ism and other Islamic sects in this regard. According to the Shi'ite teachings, the twelfth Imam of Shi'a is the very Promised

Mahdi, who is alive now but in occultation by the will of the Almighty Allah.

As the largest and most widely recognized Mahdic research institute in Iran, the “Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation” sensed the need for the compilation of a simple yet trustworthy book in English that could introduce Imam Mahdi in a brief and concise way. There are some other good translated works in this area, but most of them are either incomplete in a sense or too detailed! So, in the present book, we attempt to provide information on this essential Islamic teaching so that those in search of the “Path of Truth” get acquainted with the Twelver Shi'as' view on the Promised Saviour (Imam al-Mahdi) and find appropriate answers to their possible questions on the subject. Any suggestion or criticism is warmly welcome and appreciated.

*The Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation*

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## Introduction

Humans have never been free from the dream of “living better” and they have always stared anxiously at a better and more organized future. From long ago, the doctrine of forming a free society without any sort of oppression and discrimination, in which high spiritual and human standards would prevail, has had a very remarkable position and importance in the human mind such that all individuals have always been seeking throughout the history for an ideal (utopian) society and consequently, a person who will be able to form this utopia.

Though “Messianism”<sup>1</sup> and the types of inclination of different religions’ followers towards this idea are different and not at the same level, it can be said that after believing in God, no other unanimous belief has been so widespread throughout the world. That is because this great and joyous glad tiding, in addition to the fact that it is the desire of all people globally, is found in the holy books of all religions and sects. Most religions talk about

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1. To believe in the coming of the Promised Saviour at the End of the Time.

a universal peacemaker who will appear at the “End of the Time” and put an end to all sorts of crime and sedition. Furthermore, he will establish the foundation of a one-world government based on justice and real freedom. Hence, Messianism is inter-connected with the idea of “Utopianism” in the mind and thought of the followers of various religions and sects.

It can be clearly stated that “Saviourism” is a comprehensive and universal goal and thought; so, in addition to the Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism), other religions like Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism also believe in the ultimate triumph of *Truth* over *Falsity*, and the bright future of the world, and have given glad tidings of its actualization. Islam, like other Abrahamic religions, has an optimistic outlook toward the future of mankind and promises an era when mankind, with the best individual and social conditions, will take the path of both material and spiritual perfection rapidly, through the good news of the advent of a *Great Man* from the descendants

of Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad.

### **Imam Mahdi's position in Shi 'a<sup>1</sup> teachings**

“Imamate”, in the view of *Twelver Shi 'a*<sup>2</sup>, is considered as the continuity of divine Messengerhood and Prophethood in the sense that, although divine revelation is not revealed to the “Imam”<sup>3</sup>, some duties of the Prophets such as the interpretation of religion and the guidance of people are among his responsibilities, because the Muslims, to know their duties towards God, always need an infallible honest leader who knows the right path and guides them towards God. Otherwise, everyone will interpret the religion based on his or her personal interests and preferences, and thereby, will go astray.

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1. The word “Shi 'a” lexically means “follower” and terminologically refers to those Muslims who believe in the immediate Caliphate and Imamate of Imam Ali, and also that the Prophet's successor is determined by God and not by what the people vote on.

2. Since Shia 's are divided into some sects, it is important to pay attention to the various usage of the term “Shi 'a” in each case. Currently, Shi 'as or followers of Imam Ali are divided into three main groups: *Zaydiyyah*, *Isma'ilyah*, and *Ja 'fari* Shias. In the modern day, Shi 'as are referred to as Ja 'fari or *Twelver Shi 'as*, and two other sects are known as Zaydis and Isma 'ilis respectively. So, the Shi 'ite opinions presented in this book are limited exclusively to *Twelver Shi 'a* viewpoints.

3. Shi 'a believes in the Twelve Imams (from Imam Ali to Imam Mahdi), who are the true successors of the Prophet Muhammad.

What is certain is that fulfilling this important mission will only be handled by a few specific individuals chosen by God. So, an Imam is a man who has been designated by the order of God and introduced to Muslims through the Prophet or the previous Imams. Therefore, in the view of Shi'a, Imamate is a fundamental issue, and the Imam has various characteristics and responsibilities, including explaining and interpreting the religion and guiding the people.

Shi'a believes that Imam Ali and the eleven men from his lineage up to the last of them, who is Imam Mahdi, are the Imams and leaders of Muslims appointed to the position of Imamate by the order of God, and their names are mentioned in some Hadiths narrated by Prophet Muhammad. These Imams in chronological order are as follows: *Ali bin Abī Ṭālib*, *Ḥasan bin Ali*, *Ḥusayn bin Ali*, *Ali bin al-Ḥusayn*, *Muhammad bin Ali*, *Ja'far bin Muhammad*, *Mūsa bin Ja'far*, *Ali bin Mūsa*, *Muhammad bin Ali*, *Ali bin Muhammad*, *Ḥasan bin Ali*, and *Muhammad bin al-Ḥasan al-Mahdi*.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, this group of Muslims is called “Twelver Shi'a”

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1. See: *Shi'a*, by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāi, translated by Sayyid Ḥusayn Naṣr.

because they believe that the real successors of the Prophet are only these twelve mentioned individuals. They also believe that the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam is the promised Mahdi, who is alive, is currently living in this world, and will appear and rise up one day at the End of the Time, ultimately.

Taking what said into consideration, two basic factors, i.e. to be the issue of Imamate (and thus, Mahdism) among the basic tenets of Twelver Shi'as, and also to believe in the twelfth Imam (the promised Mahdi) as the living Imam, have caused the teaching of “Mahdism” achieve a magnificent rank among the Twelver Shi'as, in such a way that the reflection of Mahdism has been very extensive in the events and developments of the Shi'ite society throughout the history, and has played a key role in the life of its followers. The history of Shi'a proves that Mahdism and awaiting the advent of the promised Mahdi have always been an important part of the identity of Shi'ism. Furthermore, during the near twelve centuries since the disappearance of Imam Mahdi, the scientific and practical works of Shi'a scholars have continued to promote this truth and explain the related topics and issues.

# Chapter 1

## To take a brief cognizance of Imam Mahdi

Cognition means correct and true knowledge to a person or something. Accordingly, taking cognizance of Imam Mahdi refers to acquiring proper knowledge to the Imam's prominent personality and sublime status, as well as acquainting yourself with his lifestyle, goals, and plans. This knowledge will be the paving-the-ground understanding for a deep vision of religiosity and choosing the right and desirable attitude in life. Hence, in some authentic Hadiths, "cognition of the Imam" is specially ordered. In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad says:

*"If someone dies while not recognizing the Imam of his/her age, his/her death is like the Death of Ignorance."*<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that getting familiar with the physical traits

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1. *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni`mah*, by Sheikh al-Şadūq, vol. 2, p. 410

of Imam Mahdi will be the first step to recognizing him.

### **An initial introduction**

The Twelver Shi'a is of the view that the universal Promised Saviour is a man from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad; he is the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam of the Shi'a, who will appear at the End of the Time and fill the world with justice and equity. The birthday of the promised Mahdi occurred on the daybreak of Friday, Sha 'bān 15<sup>th</sup>, 255 A.H. (August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 869 A.D.) in Samarra (a town in northern Iraq). His name is Muhammad and his cognomen is Abu al-Qāsim. His famous titles are *al-Mahdi* (the guided one who guides people), *al-Qāim* (the Upriser), *al-Muntaẓar* (the awaited one), *Baqiyyat Allah* (the last remained proofs of God), *al-Hujjah* (a proof from God), *al-Khalaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (the righteous offspring), *Ṣāhib al-Amr* (the Master of Imamate and Authority), and *Ṣāhib al-Zamān* (the master of the current time), of which the most famous one is “al-Mahdi”. Each of these epithets indicates a characteristic or dignity of the Imam.

The Imam is called “al-Mahdi” because he is the man guided by God and guides other people by the permission and help of God. He is called “al-Qāim” because he will



rise for the truth. He is called “al-Muntaẓar” because everyone is waiting for him to appear. He is called “Baqiyyat Allah” because he is the last proof and the last divine reserve of God. He is called “al-Ḥujjah” because he is God’s proof over creation. He is called “Ṣāhib al-Amr” because his specific responsibility is to establish the universal divine government on the Earth. Finally, “Ṣāhib al-Zamān” means that he is the only ruler and master of his time.

### **Imam Mahdi in the Quran and Ḥadiths**

To believe in the promised Mahdi is one of the most important Islamic beliefs, commonly accepted by all Islamic sects despite the multitude and variety of Islamic denominations and some ideological differences. Hence, despite a few disagreements in some details related to the personality of Imam Mahdi, the way of his appearance and the formation of his government between Shi'a and Sunni<sup>1</sup>, the Sunnis also consider the belief in the promised

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1. Literally, “Ahl al-Sunnah” means those who agree and share in a good and acceptable manner with each other, and terminologically, it refers to the majority of Muslims who do not believe in the existence of an explicit Islamic text or statement concerning the appointing of the Caliph and successor following the Prophet Muhammad; and they believe in the selection of the Caliph as a responsibility and choice made by the Muslims.

Mahdi as one of their Islamic beliefs and have accepted it. This acceptability originates from the genuine sources of Islam, the most important of which are the Quran and the Hadiths narrated from Prophet Muhammad and the infallible Imams. In this section, we will get a glimpse of these two basic sources:

### **a) Imam Mahdi in the Quran**

On the whole, for explanation of Mahdism in the Quran, two sets of verses can be adduced:

1) Verses containing a kind of promised salvation for mankind in the future, of which “Mahdism” is considered the most prominent exemplification. In fact, the fulfillment of this Quranic promise is based on the words of God’s Messenger and many Hadiths that bring the glad tidings of the establishment of justice and equity by the hands of the Promised Saviour at the End of the Time.

2) Verses that by themselves do not have a clear signification of the salvation and the promised saviour; however, in numerous Hadiths, they have been construed as referring to Mahdism or the Mahdi. This group outnumbers the first group of verses.

Although the name of the saviour is not directly

mentioned in the Quran, some Quranic verses bring the glad tidings of the formation of a just global government and domination of righteous and downtrodden people. Shi'ite and some Sunnite commentators, through the esoteric interpretation or reconciliation of the Quranic verses and the related Hadiths ascribe them to Imam Mahdi and his uprising.

An example: The glad tidings of righteous people's domination

God says in the Quran:

*“And certainly We wrote in the Book [of Psalms] after the reminder that My righteous servants shall inherit the Land.”<sup>1</sup>*

This verse clearly states the rule of righteous people on the Earth as one of their worldly rewards and promises its fulfillment as a unique event that will happen only during the era of promised saviour's advent. There are also numerous Hadiths asserting that the fulfillment of this divine promise will be at the time of the appearance of Imam Mahdi. This means that all unrighteous governments are contrary to the direction of the system of creation and the laws governing the world. Now, we mention a few

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1. *The Quran*, 21:105

points regarding the interpretation of this verse:

### 1. Keywords

To explain and clarify the words used in the above-mentioned verse, we can say:

- “Zabūr” or “Psalms of David” in the Old Testament is a collection of whispered prayers, devotions, and admonitions of Prophet David.

- The word (الذِّكْرُ) (remembrance of God) originally means something that is a reminder, but in this verse, due to the quoting alongside “Psalms”, it has been interpreted to Torah (the divine book of Prophet Moses).

- In this verse, “Earth” refers to the entire globe, not a specific land or territory.

- “Inheritance” means something that is transferred to someone without a transaction. In some verses of the Quran, this word refers to the domination of a righteous group of people over the wicked and unrighteous ones and taking possession of their property and resources.<sup>1</sup>

- Due to the addition of the word “servants” next to the word “God” i.e. (عِبَادِي) (My servants), here the word “servants” shows that these people are faithful and theist,

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1. *The Quran*, 7:137

and by the word (الصَّالِحُونَ) (the righteous people), all the merits such as good deeds, piety, knowledge, awareness, strength, strategy, and social order and understanding come to mind.

When God's faithful servants provide these merits within themselves, God will also help them to overcome the arrogant rulers. So, "being oppressed" is not the only reason for the victory over enemies and ruling on the Earth; rather, "the existence of faith and the acquisition of merits" are also necessary, and the oppressed people all over the world will not reach a ruling on the Earth unless they observe these two principles.

## 2. Glad tidings of the domination of righteous people in the *Psalms of David*

As the Quran reiterates, the promise of the righteous people's ruling over the entire world is mentioned in the form of various wordings in the Psalms:

- Psalms, 37:9&10, "... *For evildoers shall be cut off; however, those who wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the Earth. In just a little while, there will no wicked anymore; he will not be there though you look carefully at his place.*"

- Psalms, 37:11, “... *But the meek shall inherit the whole Land and delight themselves in abundant peace.*”

- Psalms, 37:22, “*Those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the whole Land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off.*”

- Psalms, 37:29, “*The righteous shall inherit the whole Land and dwell upon there forever.*”

- Psalms, 37:1, “*The Lord knows the days of the righteous and their inheritance will be eternal.*”

In the above phrases, the term “the righteous” mentioned in the Quran is seen with the same meaning in the Psalms as well. Additionally, other terms like “the trustworthy”, “those who rely upon God”, “the blessed”, and “the humble” have been mentioned in other sentences. These interpretations indicate the generality and extent of ruling of the righteous people and in full agreement with the Hadiths of the uprising of Imam Mahdi.

It is essential to pay due attention to the point that the Quran, as the *Constitution of Islam*, mainly deals with general principles of beliefs and a selection of rules and ethics, and other regulations and details of practical, jurisprudential, and civil rules are vested in the custom and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, the Prophet was on the mission to explain and interpret the

Quranic verses. Beyond that, God orders in several verses that Muslims should obey the Prophet's commands and the infallible Imams.

### **b) Imam Mahdi in Ḥadiths**

Due to the fact that, from the very outset of Islam, Mahdism has always been one of the most authentic Islamic topics, which has been continuously receiving the attention from the side of Muslims, the Prophet and the Infallible Imams of Shi'a always tried to explain its various dimensions in such a way that this cultural effort has provided a huge collection of Mahdist teachings. Therefore, it can be said that *Mahdism* is one of the Islamic topics with the largest number of related narrations such that just the abundant narrations from the Prophet and the Imams of Shi'a suffice to prove the validity and rightfulness of believing in Imam Mahdi as the Prophet has clearly and explicitly introduced the Promised Mahdi in these Hadiths by name and title and with some details, and talked about the events before and during the Imam's appearance and its merits and blessings.

## **Narrative common grounds between Shi'a and Sunni on the subject of Mahdism**

The popularity of Mahdism and the abundance of related narrations were so huge that even years before the birth of Imam Mahdi, numerous independent scientific works and books had been written about his birth, occultation, advent, and signs of appearance. On the issue of Mahdism, some researchers collected around two thousand narrations from both Shi'ite and Sunnite narrative books, showing their many commonalities on the subject of Mahdism. Some of these shared aspects include: Imam Mahdi's lineage, facial features, resemblance to the Prophet Muhammad, having the same patronymic and namesake with the Prophet, being from the descendants of Imam Ali and honorable Lady Fāṭima al-Zahrā<sup>1</sup>, physical features, the certainty of the appearance, the place of his appearance, his companions, conditions of the pre-appearance era, the signs of the appearance, the characteristics of his government, the effects and blessings of the appearance, Prophet Jesus and Imam Mahdi, and the global government of Imam Mahdi.

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1. Lady *Faṭima al-Zahrā* is the only surviving child of the Prophet of Islam, the wife of Imam Ali, and the mother of Imam al-Ḥasan and Imam al-Ḥusayn. It is said that she was martyred in Medina at the age of 18.



Here, for brevity, we will suffice to mention only a few instances:

**a) The certainty of Imam Mahdi’s advent and arising**

The first accepted issue in the narrations of Shi'a and Sunni is the certainty of Imam Mahdi’s appearance and uprising. It is one of the common beliefs between these two groups in a way that there are many authentic narrations in both Shi'a and Sunni narrative sources in this regard. For example, there is a narration from the Prophet Muhammad to have said:

*“If there remains only one day for the world to come to an end, God will prolong this day till a man from my progeny raises. His name is the same as mine.”<sup>1</sup>*

**b) Mahdi is from the Household of the Prophet Muhammad**

The promised Mahdi is from the family and the progeny of the Messenger of God- the Prophet Muhammad, and there are numerous Hadiths revealing this fact. It can be said that this issue has been emphasized in most of

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1. *Al-Irshād*, by Sheikh al-Mufīd, vol. 2, p. 340; *Sunan*, by al-Tirmidhī, Hadith no. 2332; *Al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*, by Ṭabarānī, vol. 10, p. 135; *Al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḡhir*, by al-Siyūṭī, vol. 2, p. 438

the Hadiths related to Mahdism and reflected in various phrases and wordings; the reason behind such an emphasis was probably the predictions that the false claimants would claim that the promised Mahdi belongs to them. So, from the very beginning, the Prophet had asserted that Imam Mahdi is from his progeny among the children of Lady Fāṭima. For instance, narrated from Umm-e Salamah, the Prophet said:

*“Narrated Umm-e Salamah, she said: “I heard the Messenger of God saying: The Mahdi is from my lineage, from the sons of Fāṭima.”<sup>1</sup>*

### **c) Imam Mahdi’s resemblance to Prophet Muhammad**

The Muslims’ Promised Saviour bears a striking resemblance to the Prophet Muhammad. His name is the same as the Prophet’s and he is completely similar to the Messenger of God in terms of complexion and disposition. It seems that the symmetry and similarity between the Prophet and the Promised Mahdi indicate that as the emergence of Islam and its development was by the Messenger of God, its completion at the End of the

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1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 75, Hadith 30; *Sunan*, by Abī Dāwūd, vol. 4, p. 1832, Hadith 4284; *Sunan*, by Ibn Mājih, *kitāb al-Fitan*, Section Khurūj al-Mahdi, Hadith 4086

Time will also be accomplished by someone resembling the Messenger of God in every way. Shi'a and Sunni in different wordings have narrated many Hadiths from the Prophet on this subject. It is quoted from the Prophet to have said:

*“A man from among my progeny will rise. He is my namesake, and his temperament is the same as mine.”*<sup>1</sup>

In another narration, Prophet Muhammad said:

*“Mahdi is from amongst my offspring ...; he is the most similar person to me in both appearance and character.”*<sup>2</sup>

It is worthy of noting that both Shi'a and Sunni scholars have narrated many traditions regarding the appearance and physical characteristics of the Promised Mahdi in the Appearance Time. For example, we can mention having a luminous face, a broad long forehead, a black mole on his right cheek and non-condensed two front teeth, and being like a forty years-old man.

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1. *Kashf al-Ghummah Fī Ma'rifat al-A'imma*, by Ali Ibn-e 'Isā, al-Irbilī, vol. 3, p. 259; *Ṣaḥīḥ*, by Ibn-e Ḥabbān, vol. 15, p. 237

2. *Al-Ghaybah*, by Sheikh al-Ṭūsī, p. 189

### **d) Establishment of the pervasive Justice by Imam Mahdi**

One of the most famous topics reflected in many narrations related to Imam Mahdi is the prevalence of oppression and violence throughout the world before his appearance, especially on the threshold of his advent. These narrations, before describing the method and conditions of the establishment of global justice at the hands of the Promised Mahdi, talk about the excess of oppression and tyranny before the advent of the Imam such that the following phrase has been mentioned repeatedly with different wording in many Hadiths:

*“If there remains only one day for the world to come to an end, God will prolong that day till a man rises from my progeny who will fill the entire Earth with justice as it would be fraught with injustice and oppression.”<sup>1</sup>*

In this direction, some items like people’s hopelessness and helplessness, the prevalence of inflation, starvation, poverty, recession, wars, killings, and calamities are also among the commonalities between Shi’ite and Sunnite Hadiths in depicting the backbreaking conditions of the

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1. Ibid

period before or near the Imam's advent.

### **The position of Mahdism in Islamic narrations**

It is to be admitted that if there were not numerous narrations about Imam Mahdi in Muslim Hadith-books, it would be impossible to attain correct knowledge and understanding about Mahdism. The narrations on Mahdism, by either Sunnite or Shi'ite scholars in their Hadith-books, have made clear and transparent the matter of Mahdism to a large extent. In most of the authentic Hadith-corpora, a specific chapter has been dedicated to Mahdism, and also some independent Hadith-books have been written about this issue. The compilation of numerous Hadith-books dedicated to Imam Mahdi by the efforts of Sunnite and Shi'ite scholars shows the special position of Mahdism in Islamic narrations and among the Muslim community.

### **Mahdism in the Ḥadiths of Shi'a**

Among the Shi'a scholars, we can name some famous traditionalists like Thiqaṭ al-Islam al-Kulaynī (d. 328 A.H./940 A.D.), Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Nu'mānī (d. 342 A.H./953 A.D.), Sheikh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381 A.H./991 A.D.), Sheikh al-Mufid (d. 413 A.H./1022 A.D.), Sheikh

al-Ṭūsi (d. 460 A.H./1067 A.D.), and 'Allāmah Majlisī (d. 1110 A.H./1698 A.D.). They mentioned the Hadiths related to Mahdism in detail. In the following, some of the most important Shi'a Hadith-sources will be discussed:

1. “*Al-Kāfi*”, written by Muhammad bin Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (known as Thiqat al-Islam Kulaynī)

This book is one of the earliest and most authentic Shi'a narrative books written in the era of Minor Occultation such that it has been under consideration of Shi'ite thinkers and jurists for more than a thousand years. The author of this precious book, Sheikh Abū Ja'far, Muhammad bin Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī Rāzī, is one of the most prominent Shi'a scholars in the second half of the third Hijri century (A.H.) and the beginning of the fourth Hijri century (A.H.). One of the outstanding features of the book “*Al-Kāfi*” is that its author was contemporary with the four special representatives of Imam Mahdi, especially the fact that the Imam's representatives lived in Baghdad where Kulaynī also lived over there for some years, and the date of his demise coincided with the last special representative's year of death.

“*Al-Kāfi*” is one of the oldest and most authentic works

of Shi'a narration, which includes more than 16,000 Hadiths. Although the narrations related to Imam Mahdi are somewhat scattered in this book, the subject of Imam Mahdi has been especially discussed in section “Usūl al-Kāfi”, subsection “*Kitāb al-Hujjat*”.

2. “*Al-Ghaybah*”, written by Muhammad bin Ibrāhim bin Abi Zaynab (known as Nu'mānī)

Nu'mānī is one of the great Shi'a narrators in the early fourth Hijri century. His book is one of the earliest works in the field of narrations related to the status and characteristics of Imam Mahdi, the signs of the End of the Time, and the characteristics of the Appearance time. Nu'mānī allocated his book to the Hadiths related to Mahdism by narrating 478 Hadiths in this regard.

3. “*Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*”, written by Muhammad bin Ali bin Bābiwayh Qommi (known as Sheikh al-Ṣadūq)

Sheikh al-Ṣadūq, as one of the greatest Shi'ite scholars, has allocated all parts of this precious book to Imam Mahdi. Being one of the most important sources of Shi'a Hadiths on the subject of Mahdism, the book is divided into two main parts: The first part is allocated to some

general discussions and comprehensive Hadiths about the Occultation in previous nations and aims to point out that Imam Mahdi's Occultation is not a new event and an impossible and unacceptable matter; rather, the occultation has a long and ancient background.

Sheikh al-Ṣadūq, in the second part of the book *Kamāl al-Dīn*, discusses issues like Imam Mahdi's birth, his Imamate, the Imam's disappearance, and the reasons behind his occultation, as well as the ones who had the divine chance to visit him, his Tawqī'āt (the signed letters from the side of the Imam), the importance of preparation for his advent, and the signs and conditions of the Appearance time.

4. “*Al-Irshād fi Ma'rifat Ḥujaj Allah 'alā al-'Ibād'*”, written by Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Nu'mān al-Baghdādī (known as Sheikh al-Mufīd)

Sheikh al-Mufīd, one of the greatest Shi'ite scholars, compiled his book “*Al-Irshād'*” at the summit of his scientific fame two years before his demise, adding value to the book. This book contains many Hadiths about the Shi'a Imams eras and lives, especially the twelfth Imam- Imam Mahdi- and expressing his virtues and excellence.



It is considered one of the most credible Shi'ite narrative sources about the history and life of the infallible Imams. Sheikh al-Mufīd, in the last section of the book, allocated six entries to the issue of Mahdi and topics related to him.

5. “*Al-Ghaybah*”, written by Abū Ja'far Muhammad bin Hasan (known as Sheikh al-Ṭūsi and Sheikh al-Ṭāifāh)

Sheikh al-Ṭūsi is one of the most prominent and reliable scholarly figures of Shi'a in the 15<sup>th</sup> Hijri century. He has left many works and books in Fiqh (Jurisprudence), Uṣūl (Methodology of Islamic jurisprudence), Ḥadīth (Authentic narrations of the Prophet and the Imams of Shi'a), Tafsīr (Quranic exegesis), Kalām (Theology), and Rijāl (Knowledge of the identity and reliability of Hadith transmitters). Without a doubt, his book “*Al-Ghaybah*” is one of the best and most complete Shi'ite sources concerning the occultation of Imam Mahdi. In this book, the causes of the Imam's disappearance and the divine wisdom behind it are mentioned. To write this valuable book, Sheikh al-Ṭūsi utilized a new and initiative method and proceeded with various aspects of the occultation of the Imam. Also in answering the doubts and questions regarding Mahdism

raised by the opponents, he refuted their objections through referring them to the Quran and Hadiths, as well as rational proofs. In addition to describing the virtues and miracles of Imam Mahdi and his lifestyle while being hidden and also during his appearance, in this renowned book, many signs of the Appearance are mentioned as well.

It is worth mentioning that, in addition to the above-mentioned earlier books, there are some later well-known works in this regard; for instance:

6. “*Bihār al-Anwār li Durar al-Akhhbār al-A’immat al-Aṭhār*”, written by ‘Allāmah Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī

‘Allāmah Majlisī is the greatest Shi’ite narrator in the 11<sup>th</sup> Hijri century. His worthy book, *Bihār al-Anwār*, was compiled in 110 volumes. ‘Allāmah Majlisī gathered a collection of Mahdism Hadiths from the already-mentioned earlier Hadith-books and dedicated three volumes (51, 52, and 53) of the 110-volume *Bihār al-Anwār* to this issue.

7. “*Muntakhab al-Athar fi Imam al-Thānī ‘Ashar*”, written by Āyat Allah Ṣāfi Golpayegani

*Muntakhab al-Athar* is one of the best Hadith-books of

our time written by the late Āyat Allah Ṣāfi Golpayegani (d. 1443 A.H./2022 A.D.), in which he collected 922 eclectic narrations from 157 Hadith-books of both Shi'a and Sunni sources on the topics related to Imam Mahdi orderly.

8. “*Mu'jam Aḥādīth al-Imam al-Mahdī*” by Sheikh Ali Kūrāni and his research associates

As one of the valuable contemporary Hadith-sources, *Mu'jam Aḥādīth al-Imam al-Mahdī* includes 1861 narrations from the Prophet and his pure Household about the Promised Mahdi and issues related to his life and occultation. This valuable work has been organized in eight volumes derived from 400 narrative sources of Shi'a and Sunni about Mahdism.

### **Mahdism in Sunni Ḥadiths**

Due to the widely related and authentic traditions narrated from the Prophet, all Islamic scholars are unanimous on the belief that Imam Mahdi shall indeed appear, reform the world and destroy all oppression. Hence, there is no difference of opinion in Mahdism; all Muslims have faith in it and consider it an inseparable part of their religious belief. All Shi'a scholars, without any exception, believe

that Imam Mahdi is already born and exists and lives in the present time. However, many Sunni scholars believe that he shall be born in the future, but some of them have related the event of the birth of Imam Mahdi and accepted and recorded this event in their books. A large number of Sunni scholars, including the following have mentioned the Hadiths related to Imam Mahdi in their books:

“‘Abd al-Razzāq Ṣan ‘ānī” (211 A.H./826 A.D.) in his book *Al-Muṣṣnaf*, “Ibn Abi Shaybah” (235 A.H./849 A.D.) in *Al-Muṣṣannaḥ fi al-Aḥādith va al-Āthār*, “Ahmad bin Ḥanbal” (241 A.H./855 A.D.) in *Musnad*, “Ibn Mājah” (273 A.H./886 A.D.) in *Sunan*, “Abū Dāwūd” (275 A.H./888 A.D.) in *Sunan*, “Tirmidhī” (297 A.H./909 A.D.) in *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, “Ṭabarānī” (360A.H./970 A.D.) in *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, “Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī” (405 A.H./1014 A.D.) in *Al-Mustadrak 'Ala al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, “Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī” (606 A.H./1209 A.D.) in *Jāmi' al-Usūl fi Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, “Muqaddasi al-Shāfi'ī” (7<sup>th</sup> century A.H./12<sup>th</sup> A.D.) in *Iqd al-Durar fi Akhbār al-Muntaẓar*, “Ibn-e Kathīr al-Dameshqi” (774 A.H./1372 A.D.) in *Al-Nahāyah fi al-Fitan va al-Malāḥim*, “Haythamī” (807 A.H./1404 A.D.) in *Majma' al-Zavayid va Manba' al-Fawayid*, “Jalāl al-Din Suyūṭī” (911 A.H./1505 A.D.) in *Al-Ḥāwī li*

*al-Fatāwī*, “Ibn-e Ḥajar al-Hiytami” (974 A.H./1566 A.D.)  
in *Al-Qavl al-Mukhtaṣar fi 'Alāmāt al-Mahdi al-Muntaẓar*,  
“Muttaqi al-Hindī “ (975 A.H./1567 A.D.) in *Al-Burhān fī*  
*'Alāmāt Mahdi Ākhir al-Zamān*, etc.

# Chapter 2

## Imam Mahdi; from birth to the beginning of his Imamate

With the passage of more than two centuries since the Prophet Muhammad's emigration (Hijrah)<sup>1</sup>, the responsibility of the Imamate was delegated to Imam Ali al-Naqī al-Hādī (the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam of Shi 'a) and then to Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari (the 11<sup>th</sup> Imam). There was a growing concern among the tyrannical 'Abbasid administration due to the prophecies based on the news and Hadiths narrated from the Prophet and his infallible household that the last Imam will overturn the monarchy of the tyrants and oppressors, and will replace the oppression with justice and equity. The multiplicity of Hadiths narrated in both Shi'ite and Sunnite sources regarding the promised Mahdi, and the prophecies about his uprising was such that it left no room for doubt about its occurrence for anyone. Hence, the enemies held out false hopes to recognize the

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1. The Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) upon their invitation in 622 A.D., thirteen years after the Bi'thah (his divine mission as the last Prophet).

son of the 11<sup>th</sup> Imam and annihilate him, and thereby, preventing the fulfillment of the holy Prophet's unfailing promises; they were unaware that nothing can prevent the actualization of God's promise. For this reason, and by the order of the 11<sup>th</sup> Imam, the embryonic period of Imam Mahdi and his birth were kept concealed from the people's vision.

At any rate and despite the 'Abbasid government's agents and spies, Imam Mahdi - the only son of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari- was born on the daybreak of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha'bān in 255 A.H. (August 2<sup>nd</sup> 869 A.D.) in Samarra (a small town in the mid-north Iraq). His secret birth, somehow, resembles the birth of Prophet Moses and Prophet Abraham. Just like these two great divine Prophets, who were born safely in the palaces of Nimrod and Pharaoh, respectively by the will of God despite the strictest obstruction of these tyrant kings, Imam Mahdi was also born safely and secretly while the spies and agents of the 'Abbasid caliph were keeping a close eye on all events in the house of the eleventh Imam, the father of Imam Mahdi.

The honorable mother of Imam Mahdi is a worthy lady, named "Narjis", whose father was the son of the Roman

emperor (Kaiser), and her mother was a descendant of Simon (one of the disciples of Prophet Jesus). In accordance with Islamic narrations, Lady Narjis became Muslim following a strange dream and under the guidance of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari. Being hidden among the Roman troops going to fight against the Muslims, she was, finally, captured by the Muslims army. She lived for some time in the house of Lady Ḥakīmah (the aunt of Imam al-'Askarī), where she was educated and was always highly respected by Lady Ḥakīmah. The respected mother of Imam Mahdi was also called by other names like Sūsan, Rayḥānah, Malīkah, and Şayqal. It would be appropriate to know that in Islamic traditions, this honorable lady has always been mentioned with total honor and respect.

### **Concealed birth**

When a person has a newborn child, naturally, his/her relatives, friends, and even neighbors will be aware of it, especially if he/she enjoys a high rank and meritorious social position. So, how can it be imagined that the son of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari will be born, but none of his opponents, despite assigning many spies and agents in the Imam's house and among his relatives, will know



about this event. Was this a natural issue, or a miracle? To answer this question, it can be said that Imam al- 'Askari was never unaware of the sensitivity of the enemies towards the birth of his son, al-Mahdi, as the last Imam and promised saviour. He knew the political and social conditions very well; therefore, he paved the way for the concealed birth of his child such that not only the enemies but also many of his close friends and companions were not aware of this event either. So, Sheikh al-Ṭūsi considers the concealed birth of Imam Mahdi an ordinary event, saying that this is not the first and the last such an incident as there have been many examples of the kind throughout the mankind history.<sup>1</sup>

According to a narration quoted by Sheikh al-Ṣadūq in *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 424-426, Lady Ḥakīmah, the honorable aunt of the eleventh Imam says:

*“Imam Ḥasan al- 'Askarī sent for me and said: ‘O my aunt! Have your Iḥḫār (dinner) tonight with us. This is the night of mid-Sha'bān and the Almighty God will bring forth the Ḥujjat (Imam Mahdi) on this night. He will be God’s Hujjah (a proof from God) on the Earth.”*

Lady Ḥakīmah continued to say: *“I said to him: ‘And*

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1. See: *Al-Ghaybah*, by Sheikh al-Ṭūsi, pp. 77 & 150

*who is his mother?’ He replied: ‘Narjis’. I again uttered: “But I see no sign of pregnancy in her.” He responded: “It will occur as I said.”*

Lady Ḥakīmah said: *“I came back to Narjis. When I greeted and sat, approaching me and attempting to take my shoes off, she said: ‘O my lady! How are you this evening?’ I responded: ‘Instead, you are my lady and the lady of my household.’ She said: ‘What strange thing are you saying, dear aunt!?’ I replied back and said: ‘My dear daughter! God, the Exalted, will grant you in this glorious night a boy child, the master of this world and the hereafter.’ She sat down and said nothing while shyness and embarrassment covering whole her face.”*

Lady Ḥakīmah continued: *“When I finished the ‘Ishā’ prayer and had my dinner, I went to bed and slept. It was in the middle of the night when I got up to perform the midnight prayers. I finished my prayers while she was sleeping; yet there was no sign of pregnancy in her, miraculously. I sat again, said some supplication, and then went back to my bed. After a while, I woke up suddenly being somehow horrified. I saw that Lady Narjīs woke up, performed prayers, and then slept again (without any signs of pain or pregnancy in her yet).*

Lady Ḥakīmah continues to say: *“Seeking for the Fajr, I came out to search the sky; I saw the first Fajr while Lady Narjīs was still sleeping! As doubts embraced me, Abu Muhammad (Imam al-‘Askarī) being aware of my concern, called out: ‘Do not haste aunt! The affair has come near.’ I started to recite Sūrahs Sajdah and Yāsīn; as a matter of sudden, Lady Narjis woke up; I immediately rushed towards her and told her to recite the name of God! Then I asked her: “Do you feel anything?” and she said: ‘Yes, aunt.’ I said: ‘Be prepared and do not be scared. It will happen as I told you earlier.”*”

Lady Ḥakīmah says: *“Then faintness overwhelmed me and her. When I recovered back, I sensed my Master (Imam Mahdi). I removed the sheet from him, and there he was, prostrating and touching the Earth with his forehead, palms, knees, and toes; I pulled him to myself and there was a pure and clean child, namely Mahdi, the awaited Imam of all generations!”*

*At the same time, Abū Muhammad (the eleventh Imam) called on me: “Bring my son to me, Aunt. I took his son to him. He put his hands under his thighs and back and put the infant’s feet on his chest. He put his tongue inside his mouth and then touched his eyes, ears and joints*

*with his hands and said: 'O My son, talk.' Surprisingly, the newborn (Mahdi) said: 'I bear witness that there is no deity other than God, the One without a partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's messenger.' He then beseeched blessings to the Commander of the Faithful (Imam Ali) and the other Imams until he reached his father, Imam al-'Askarī.*

*Abu Muhammad said: "O aunt! Take him to his mother so he may salute her and then bring him back to me." I took him to his mother and he greeted her. Then I brought him back to the sitting room, and Abu Muhammad said: "O aunt! Come to us seven days later."*

*Lady Ḥakīmah says: "... It was on the seventh day that I came to Abu Muhammad and greeted and sat before him. He said: 'Bring my son to me.' I brought my Master in a wrap. He treated his son in the same way he did the first time. ... Then he said: 'Talk O' my son!' The blessed infant repeated the same words (testimonials) as before and sent blessings to all Imams until his father, Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī. Then he said: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate', and recited the following verse of the Quran:*

*'And We wished to do a favor to those who were*

*left weak or oppressed on the Earth and make them Imams (rulers) and make them inheritors, and establish them on the Earth, and let Pharaoh and Hāmān and their armies receive from them what they feared to happen.*<sup>1</sup>”<sup>2</sup>

## Childhood

Due to being in the suffocating and unbearable conditions and the sensitivity of the 'Abbasid government to arrest the promised Mahdi, like his birth, the first five years of the Imam's life were secret and somehow hidden to avoid any threatening of his life. According to many authentic Hadiths, Imam Mahdi would be in the occultation for a long time; so it is quite clear that in any society, the disappearance of a leader and Imam is an unusual and far-fetched incident, and naturally, it is so difficult for people to believe in such an event and sustain the hardships caused by it. Hence, the Prophet Muhammad and the infallible Imams, before Imam Mahdi, had gradually made people familiar with the issue of the occultation and prepared public opinion to accept it. This became more apparent during the time of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari because, on

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1. *The Quran*, 28:5-6

2. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 424-426; *Al-Ghaybah*, by Sheikh al-Ṭūsī, p. 238

the one hand, the Shi 'as' direct contact with him became less day by day in a way that even in the city of Samarra, the eleventh Imam mainly would answer the questions of the Shi 'as by letters or through his representatives; on the other hand, the eleventh Imam used to conceal his son (Imam Mahdi) from people's vision and even his close companions such that just five years after the birth of Imam Mahdi, only a few number of Imam al-'Askari's relatives and trusted companions had the opportunity to see Imam Mahdi closely. Among these people, there were an elite group of forty Shi 'as who came to the eleventh Imam and asked him to show them the next Imam so that they could recognize him, and the Imam did so.

They saw a fair complexioned boy very similar to Imam al-'Askari, and then Imam al-'Askari said to them:

*“After me, this boy is your Imam and the vicegerent of God among you. Obey him and do not be scattered around his leadership; otherwise, you will fall into ruin and your beliefs will be tainted...”*<sup>1</sup>

By doing this, the eleventh Imam, in the course of introducing the twelfth Imam and clarifying the certainty of

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1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 162

occurrence of the occultation, emphasized the continuity of the Imamate.

### **Physical and moral characteristics**

According to the Hadiths narrated by Prophet Muhammad and the Imams of Shi'a, Imam Mahdi has a well-balanced and strong body, brunet complexion, a high bright forehead, elongated and crescent-shaped eyebrows, black and large eyes, a beautiful narrow nose, and shiny and non-condensed front teeth. There is a black mole on the Imam's right cheek, and he looks like a forty-year-old man at the time of his appearance.

Some of Imam Mahdi's spiritual and moral characteristics mentioned in the words of the infallible Imams are as follows:

He is a person of worshipping at night, asceticism and simplicity, patience and tolerance, justice and generosity. He is the master of masters in wisdom and knowledge, and his existence is a source of blessing and purity. He is a person of the uprising and Jihad in the way of God, and the ultimate saviour and promised reformer of humankind. He is from the lineage of the Messenger of God- Prophet Muhammad- and from the descendants of Lady Fāṭima al-

Zahrā, and the ninth Imam from the generation of Imam al-Ḥusayn. At the time of his appearance, he will lean on the sanctuary of Ka 'bah (in Mecca) while holding the flag of the Prophet. With his uprising, he will revive the religion and the divine decrees of God all over the world. He shall fill the whole Earth with kindness and justice after it has turned into a place of chaos and injustice.



# Chapter 3

## Imam Mahdi's Imamate and the period of his occultation

### **The beginning of Imam Mahdi's Imamate and the initiation of the occultation period**

After five years of living under the care and supervision of his honorable father (Imam Ḥasan al-'Askari) and precious mother (Lady Narjis) and following his father's martyrdom on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Rabī' al-Awwal in 260 A.H. 5<sup>th</sup> January 874 A.D.), Imam Mahdi reached the position of Imamate at the age of five just as Prophet Jesus and Prophet John attained the rank of Prophethood in their childhood. Immediately after offering the funeral prayer on the dead body of his father, Imam Mahdi entered the house and no one saw him again among the people since then; this was the beginning of the Imam's disappearance. It is, however, worth mentioning that, since the Imam used to live secretly in the first five years of his life and the majority of people had no possibility of seeing him, some have calculated the beginning of his occultation

from his birthday.<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to explain that in the house, where Imam Mahdi spent some time and then went into hiding, there was a cool place, namely Sardāb (cellar) to which the people of the house used to take refuge on hot days. Some opponents of Shi'a have claimed that Shi'as consider this Sardāb to be sacred because they believe that Imam Mahdi is hiding there and will expectedly appear from there at the End of the Time. The truth is that Shi'as respect this house and its cellar because three Imams- Imam al-Hādi (the tenth Imam), Imam al-'Askari, and Imam al-Mahdi- used to live and worship God there for a while. It is routine in almost all religions that the believers, due to their love and affection for the religious leaders, may respect all things belonging or attributed to the sacred leaders. The truth is that the story of Imam Mahdi's hiding and living in the cellar, as well as his emergence from this place is a false accusation unjustly ascribed to Shi'a as none of Shi'ite scholars has had such a belief. Beyond that, the Islamic narrations have not mentioned a certain place for the Imam's life during his occultation except that the

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1. *Al-Irshād*, by Sheikh al-Mufīd, vol. 2, p. 340

promised Mahdi will arise from the side of the Ka 'bah.

### **The meaning of Occultation**

The hidden life of Imam Mahdi in this world is called *al-Ghaybah*, which means “being hidden from vision” and not “being absent”. In fact, the Imam is present, but he does not appear and is hidden from the eyes of people. Therefore, in this section, we are going to talk about a period when Imam Mahdi turns away from public’s view, while he is living in this world. In other words, Imam Mahdi does not have an invisible body like the angels, ghosts, and Jinn. He did not even ascend to the heavens like Prophet Jesus, nor does he dwell in another place other than the Earth; rather like other Imams and all human beings, he has a physical and visible body. According to some Hadiths, Imam Mahdi’s disappearance may occur in two ways: people are not able to see the Imam, or they see the Imam but do not recognize him.

### **The history of Imam Mahdi’s occultation**

Disappearance and having a hidden life is not an unprecedented phenomenon and Imam Mahdi is not the only divine leader who disappeared from his nation. Looking at the history of religions and reviewing the

stories of the Prophets, one may realize that some of the previous divine leaders, including Prophets Idrīs, Ṣāliḥ, Jonah, Moses, Jesus, and Khidīr had lived part of their lives secretly or in an unrecognized manner.

To be hidden from the public eye may usually occur due to some reasons like fear of being killed by enemies and opponents, examine people in their beliefs or punish them, test the Prophets in fulfilling their divine mission, or a mystery of divine secrets whose reason and wisdom are hidden from us. For instance, it is mentioned in the story of Prophet Idrīs that the king of the time was trying to kill him nevertheless, the people remained indifferent knowingly and refrained to prevent the forty reckless forces of the king who were after the Prophet to kill him while walking around the city and shouting. After this ingratitude, Prophet Idrīs disappeared from his nation by the will of God and lived in caves for twenty years. Also Prophet Moses had two times of disappearance from his people; the first was much longer than the other. His first occultation, which lasted for twenty-eight years, was from Egypt, and the second one took forty days when he went to Mīqāt (the appointed time and place of talking with God).

In fact, one of the “divine customs”<sup>1</sup> in the lives of some Prophets was that each of them, in congruence with the circumstances, kept distant from his nation and spent a bunch of time in a hidden life. For this reason, some Hadiths consider the occultation of Imam Mahdi as a divine custom or Sunnah.

### **Stages of Imam Mahdi's occultation**

Years before Imam Mahdi's birthday, Prophet Muhammad and the infallible Imams of Shi'a had predicted and emphasized the issue of his disappearance and the certainty of its occurrence. Since all the efforts made by the Prophet and the infallible guides were aimed at strengthening the foundations of the people's faith while worrying that the disappearance of the last Imam would cause serious damage to their religiosity and beliefs, so the occultation of the Imam began with a well-thought-out plan devised by the infallible Imams and through making some preparations, and then the process continued in a stepwise manner. This made the Shi'as familiar with the issue of “Occultation” and its necessity, as well as the events and seditions of the occultation era in a way that by

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1. Divine customs are the unalterable and fundamental divine laws ruling over the present and future as well as the previous nations.

the arrival of this period, people do not fall in hesitation and go astray.

Another attempt for preparing the people to enter the difficult circumstances of the Imam's disappearance was to divide the occultation period into two stages. On this basis and according to the prophecies of the Prophet and the Imams of Shi'a, the occultation of Imam Mahdi is divided into two periods: short-term (Minor Occultation) and long-term (Major Occultation), each with its own specific characteristics.

In the Minor Occultation, although Imam Mahdi was hidden and just a few chosen people had the chance to meet him, the relationship between the Imam and the Ummah (his nation) was not completely severed; rather the Shi'as were in contact with the Imam through his four "Special Deputies", chosen by the Imam himself. This period paved the ground for more nation's preparation to enter the Major Occultation of Imam Mahdi, because benefiting from the experience of Minor Occultation, Shi'as realized that during the Major Occultation, they can stay safe from going astray and confusion by referring to visionary jurisprudent scholars. Similar to the Minor Occultation, religious scholars and jurists, as the general

representatives of the Imam, will be able to answer their questions and meet their intellectual and ideological needs in this period, too. Some key features of the mentioned two periods will be elaborated in the following:

### **1) The Minor Occultation**

The Imamate of Imam Mahdi began in 260 A.H./874 A.D. immediately after the martyrdom of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī. This was also the year of initiation of Imam Mahdi's short-term occultation, known as "Minor Occultation", which lasted for nearly seventy years until 329 A.H./941 A.D. The Minor Occultation, with its specific features, was a necessary period that took place by the Almighty God's will and wisdom to prepare the Shi'a community for a new chapter of its life in the most complete way possible.

#### **Characteristics of the Minor Occultation period**

The most important characteristics of the Minor Occultation period are as follows:

- *Being limited to a certain time*

This occultation was limited in terms of time as it lasted for about seventy years; hence, it is called "Minor

occultation” (unlike Major Occultation, nobody knows its termination except God).

- *Not being the Imam hidden from everyone*

During the time of Minor Occultation, almost all people except a few chosen persons (including the four special deputies as well as some of his trusted agents and representatives) were deprived of meeting Imam Mahdi. These people were privileged to meet the Imam or communicate with him through writing and exchanging letters.

- *Connection between Imam Mahdi and his followers through four chosen men*

As already mentioned, during the Minor Occultation period, Imam Mahdi had four chosen representatives, who were assigned to make a connection between the Imam and the nation. They also knew the Imam’s residing place. As a matter of fact, the most important feature of this period was that the people were in contact and also exchanged messages with Imam Mahdi through the four special deputies. Of course, occasionally some Shi'as were privileged to meet the Imam through the mentioned deputies.



## Special deputies of Imam Mahdi during the Minor Occultation

The special deputies were a few chosen and highly-privileged people among the Shi 'as, who had permission to meet the Imam when needed. They used to present the Shi 'as' problems to the Imam and convey his answers and recommendations back to the people. These four chosen individuals are called *The Special Representatives, The Special Deputies, and The Doors of Imam Mahdi*. They are called *Special* because the infallible Imam appointed certain individuals as his deputies. The first *special deputy* of Imam Mahdi was introduced to the people by the previous Imam (Imam Ḥasan al- 'Askarī) but the next deputies were chosen and introduced by Imam Mahdi himself consecutively. The special deputies were among the most pious, clever, and wise people of their time. In addition to all these desirable characteristics, they had enough experience and high managerial indicators to lead the Shi 'a community. The names of these four special deputies in chronological order were as follows:

1. 'Uthmān bin Sa 'īd al- 'Amrī (d. 267 A.H. / 880 A.D.)
2. Muhammad bin 'Uthmān bin Sa 'īd

*al-'Amrī (d. 305 A.H. / 917 A.D.)*

3. *Abu al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn bin Rūh*

*al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326 A.H. / 938 A.D.)*

4. *Abu al-Ḥasan Ali bin Muhammad al-Sa-  
murī (d. 329 A.H. / 941 A.D.)*

1. 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd al-'Amrī

'Uthmān bin. Sa'īd was the first of the four special deputies of Imam Mahdi during the Minor Occultation. He was called by some titles like *'Amrī* (because of his ancestor who was called 'Amr) and *Sammān* (or *Zayyāt*) that in Arabic refers to a person who transacts oil, as sometimes he used to perform his political-religious activities under the cover of this job to be safe from the spies and agents of the Abbasid government. 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd, as the head of the Advocacy Organization, was the dependable deputy and agent of the tenth Imam of Shi'a (Imam al-Hādī) in the last ten years of his Imamate. Also, after the martyrdom of the tenth Imam, he was the head of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī's agents.

Before his martyrdom, Imam al-'Askari appointed 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd as the first special deputy of Imam Mahdi in the presence of forty Shi'as. After the eleventh

Imam's martyrdom, he was commissioned by Imam Mahdi himself to perform the funeral major ablution of Imam al-'Askari and also enshroud and bury him; this is a clear witness and proof of the high status and dignity of 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd. After the martyrdom of Imam al-'Askarī in 260 A.H./ 874 A.D. 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd left Samarra to Baghdad and settled there in the district of Karkh (the place of residence and gathering of Shi'as), where he was in charge of the affairs of Imam's representation up to the end of his life. He was the first special representative of Imam Mahdi for seven years and died in around 267 A.H. / 880 A.D.

## 2. Muhammad bin 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd al-'Amrī

Muhammad bin 'Uthmān is the son of the first special deputy ('Uthmān bin Sa'īd al-'Amrī). After his father's demise, he was designated by Imam Mahdi as the second special representative. It is worth noting that, during his father's lifetime, Muhammad bin 'Uthmān had been introduced by Imam al-'Askari as Imam Mahdi's deputy such that when a group of Shias from Yemen visited Imam al-'Askari in Samarra, he called 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd (father of Muhammad bin 'Uthman) and reiterated on his

deputyship; then he added: "... *You witness that 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd (the first special deputy) is my deputy and his son, Muhammad bin 'Uthmān, is the deputy of my son, your Mahdi!*"<sup>1</sup>

On the threshold of his death, 'Uthmān bin Sa'īd (the first special deputy) delegated the deputyship to his son Muhammad bin 'Uthmān. In addition to this, Imam Mahdi himself has also specified on Muhammad bin 'Uthmān's deputy position in some Tawqī's (signed letters from the side of the Imam).

Muhammad bin 'Uthmān was the second special deputy of Imam Mahdi for nearly forty years, who was reportedly died in 305 A. H./ 917 A.D.

### 3. Abu al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn bin Rūh al-Nawbakhtī

Ḥusayn bin Rūh, the third special deputy of Imam Mahdi, was an Iranian Shi'ite narrationist, jurist and theologian, and a well-known figure among the Shi'as in Baghdad. He was considered one of the pure and trusted Shi'as of the second special deputy such that Muhammad bin 'Uthmān had chosen him as the connecting link with his other agents in Baghdad. Two or three years before

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1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 345

his demise, the second special deputy paved the way for Ḥusayn bin Rūh to be the next deputy on behalf of Imam Mahdi by referring some Shi 'as- who brought the obligatory religious tax and Imam's share (Khums and Zakāt) to him- to Ḥusayn bin Rūh. To those who were in doubt about this matter, he emphasized that Imam Mahdi himself has issued such an order.

At the time of the third special deputy, Shi 'as enjoyed partial freedom, and Ḥusayn bin Rūh also had a special rank among the government officials; therefore, he used to attend the affairs of Shi 'as. Sometimes, even on his recommendation, the problems of several Shi 'as were solved by the 'Abbasid ministers. After 21 years of serving as a special deputy of the twelfth Imam, he passed away in the year 326 A.H./938 A.D.

#### 4. Abu al-Ḥasan Ali bin Muhammad al-Samurī

The fourth special deputy of Imam Mahdi, Ali bin Muhammad al-Samurī, attained this great position after the demise of the third special deputy. Due to his good background, reputation, and trustworthiness, he could achieve a high position among the Shi 'as, especially among the agents of Imam Mahdi such that when he was

appointed by the Imam as his special representative, it was accepted by all. The period of Samurī's deputyship was short and the conditions of that time were politically hostile and very special; hence, the details of his activities have not been clearly recorded in the history books. The last special deputy of Imam Mahdi, after a three-year period of deputyship, died in 329 A.H./941 A.D., and with this, the era of Minor Occultation also came to end.

## 2) The Major Occultation

In the last days of Ali bin Muhammad al-Samurī, many Shi 'as came to see him and asked him about his successor. In response, he placed the latest Tawqī' (a signed letter from Imam Mahdi) before the people, as saying:

*“In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful”*

*“O Ali bin Muhammad al-Samurī! May God add to the reward of your brothers concerning you (i.e. your demise)! Death will come to you within the next six days. So you complete your works and do not nominate any person after yourself. The sequence of special deputies will come to an end and the Major Occultation will commence with your demise. The Appearance will occur only with the permission of God the*

*Exalted, after a prolonged period when the hearts of people are hardened and the world is filled with oppression. And such a period will emerge on my Shi'as when some people will claim that they have seen me. Be alert that whoever makes such a claim before the advent of Sufyānī and the Call from skies, he is a liar and an impostor. There is no strength and power save that of God's, the High, the Great.”*<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, with the demise of the last special deputy of the twelfth Imam in 329 A.H. / 941 A.D., the era of long-term occultation, known as “Major Occultation” commenced. This period will continue until the day when, by Almighty God's will, the clouds of occultation will be removed and the whole world will benefit from the direct shining light of the existence of the last saviour, Imam al-Mahdi.

### **Features of the Major Occultation period**

As stated earlier, the era of Major Occultation commenced with the demise of the last special deputy and will last till the appearance of Imam Mahdi in the

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1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 516, hadith 44; *Al-Ghaybah*, by Sheikh al-Tūsi, p. 395; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 361, hadith. 7

End of the Time by the will of God. Some features of this occultation that make it distinct from the Minor Occultation are as follows:

- *Long duration of this period:*

Unlike the Minor Occultation, which took about seventy years, the period of the Major Occultation is quite lengthy.

- *Uncertainty of the end of this period:*

There is no doubt that the period of the Major Occultation will also come to end at some point in the End of the Time; however, no one except the Almighty God knows its exact date.

- *No apparent connection with the Imam during this period:*

In the era of the Major Occultation, the Imam is completely hidden from the people's vision, and even there is no room for correspondence with him. In other words, one of the distinguishing features and exigencies of this period is that the promised Mahdi will not be apparent, though this does not mean that he will not be seen in any way as he may show himself to some chosen people and pure Shi'as expediently.

- *The prevalence of oppression and injus-*



*tice throughout the globe:*

One of the most important features of this era is the full expansion of injustice and oppression all over the world, especially at the forerunner of the Imam's advent.

- *Intensification of divine trials:*

Although it is an inevitable divine rule that God may test His servants in all eras, for some reasons, these trials will become more intense and prevalent during the Major Occultation, particularly on the threshold of the Imam's appearance.

- *The generality of Imam Mahdi's deputyship in this era:*

Contrary to the Minor Occultation that people were able to communicate with Imam Mahdi through his special deputies, there is no special deputy anymore in the era of the Major Occultation; rather pious and pure religious scholars, namely "General deputies" will undertake the responsibility of the Islamic community management in this period until the Imam's advent.

Regarding the "General deputyship", there are a set of principles offered by the Imam to be rendered as his general deputies in this period and the lay people have

to refer to these individuals. It is worth noting that the lay people cannot choose someone and ask him to carry on the job as the Imam's deputy, rather this position is only for the highly learned pious jurists who meet those principles. Thus, during the Major Occultation, a fully qualified religious scholar should supervise people's affairs on behalf of the Imam.

### **The reasons behind Imam Mahdi's occultation**

In response to the question about the reasons behind Imam Mahdi's disappearance, some wisdom and reasons for this event based on Shi'ite Hadiths and teachings are as follows:

- *Occultation, one out of the divine mysteries*

After analyzing the Hadiths related to Mahdism, the first accentuating point is that the occultation and hidden life of the promised Mahdi is one out the many divine mysteries, with no explicitly known wisdom and reason to the public. In response to a person who asked him about the philosophy of the occultation, the sixth Imam of Shi'a (Imam al-Şādiq) said:

*“The occultation of Imam Mahdi is a command and mystery out of too many divine commands and mysteries.*

*When we believe that the Almighty God is wise, we acknowledge that all His actions are based on wisdom, though the reason for those things is not clear to us.”<sup>1</sup>*

The explanation is that the All-Wise God does nothing except based on wisdom and expediency, whether we know it or not! Since all the big and small events of the world happen by God's planning and according to his will, likewise, the disappearance of the promised Mahdi as one the most important events is also according to divine wisdom and expediency though we do not know the philosophy beyond that. However, some people, who may consider all God's actions as wise, may also seek to know the secret behind some specific events to gain peace of mind and self-confidence by acquiring the knowledge of the cause and wisdom of a phenomenon. Of course, since the era of Imam Mahdi's advent is the time of truth clarification, it is for sure that the main reason behind his occultation will be revealed at that time.

- *Saving the Imam's life*

One of the factors that caused the Prophets to keep aloof from their nations was to save their lives. When they were

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1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol.52, p.91, hadith. 4

threatened by the opponents, they distanced themselves away from the people or went into hiding to be able to fulfill their mission in more suitable conditions. For instance, Prophet Moses went out of the city fearfully<sup>1</sup>, or Prophet Muhammad secretly left Mecca at night and took refuge and hid in a cave to save his life.<sup>2</sup> Of course, it was all by Almighty God's will and command.

According to some Hadiths, Imam Mahdi's occultation is also for this reason because, after the martyrdom of his father, Imam al- 'Askari, the agents of the 'Abbasid Caliph made their all effort to find the successor of the Imam al- 'Askari and searched wherever there was a possibility of the presence of Imam Mahdi. Their repetitive assaults on the house of Imam al- 'Askari and keeping his close relatives under strict tension were aimed to arrest and kill his son, Imam Mahdi. These pursuits were a great danger for the future of the institution of Imamate; hence, according to God's will and wisdom, the promised Mahdi hid from the public to be safe from the dangers.

It is worth noting that Imam Mahdi has no personal concern for his life because getting martyred in the way

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1. *The Quran*, 28:21

2. *The Quran*, 9:40

of God is the heartfelt wish of all divine men; nonetheless, an ideal martyrdom is to be in the path of fulfilling the divine duty, and in the interest of reforming the society and accomplishment of God's religion. In contrast, the fear of being killed is reasonable and acceptable to avoid losing the noblest goals. Undoubtedly, the assassinated death of the twelfth Imam, who is the last reserve and treasure of God on the earth, would mean the end of the hopes and goals of all Prophets and saints, and thus, the non-fulfillment of God's promise to establish a universal just government at the End of the Time.

- *No dependence on individuals, groups, and governments*

Usually, anyone seeking to bring about a revolution or make changes in a society will inevitably make a pact with some opponents and arrogant powers at the beginning of uprising to be able to achieve his/her goals, but the promised Mahdi- the Great Reformer- will not appease and tolerate any oppressive power on the way of arranging a revolution and establishing the universal just government at all, because according to many Hadiths, the Imam is assigned to fight decisively and openly

against all oppressors; hence, up until the preparation of the conditions of his universal revolution, Imam Mahdi remains hidden to avoid making a pact with the enemies of the Almighty God. Some Islamic narrations imply that the promised Mahdi neither owes allegiance to anyone at the time of his rising, nor is dependent or indebted to any government, group, or person.

- *To test people*

One of the customs of the Almighty God for His servants is exposing to some divine trials<sup>1</sup>, which takes place in various forms so that the extent of their dedication and loyalty in the path of truth becomes manifest.<sup>2</sup> Although the outcome of this testing clear to the All-Knowing God, yet the people themselves need to be nurtured and purified through these tests and realize the essence of their existence.

Since the era of Imam Mahdi's disappearance is one of the most difficult and unbearable realms of testing people, this special condition plays a crucial role in the spiritual perfection of people. In such a case, it becomes clear who remains resolute and who is weak and hesitant in

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1. *The Quran*, 29:2 & 3

2. *The Quran*, 67:2; 18:7

his/ her faith and belief. Almost all Hadiths related to this issue imply that the most important distinguishing feature of the trials and tests in this era is their escaping from religion and religious teachings mainly due to sticking to worldly things. Therefore, in Islamic narrations, after mentioning some features of the Major Occultation period, some warnings are given regarding the difficulty and sensitivity of this period. Accordingly, one can realize that being tested frequently under harsh conditions is one of the major features of this period. It is obvious that, considering the characteristics of this period, anyone being able to keep his/her faith safe and unpolluted and be God-wary will enjoy a sublime spiritual rank and value.

There are numerous other points in the Hadiths related to the reasons behind the Occultation, but we did not mention them here for the sake of brevity. The important point is that all actions of God are based on wisdom and reason, and as already mentioned, the main reason of the promised Imam's occultation will be revealed after his appearance.

### **Effects and functions of the Imam's hiding**

As stated before, the Twelver Shi'a believes that the

promised saviour- Imam Mahdi- is living among the people since his birth in 255 A.H./869 A.D. but in a hidden way. So, naturally, a question is raised that what is the benefit or effect of his hiding. Before talking about the hidden Imam's functions, it has to be noted that in the opinion of Twelver Shi'a and based on Islamic teachings, an infallible Imam is the intermediary of divine grace to all creatures in the world, and without him, the universe would not exist anymore. He is a mediator for every blessing from God to reach all beings. So, the advantages of his existence are not limited to his physical appearance only; his living in hiding is also a full source of life and blessings for all creatures. Accordingly, everyone benefits from the effects of the hidden Imam, and his disappearance makes no problem in this way. Interestingly, according to a well-known Hadith, Imam Mahdi likens his situation and the way people can take advantage of him during his occultation to the Sun hidden behind the clouds. The Imam says:

*“Being benefitted from me in my occultation is like being benefitted from the Sun when it disappears from the eyes behind the clouds.”<sup>1</sup>*

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1. *Kamāl al-Din*, vol. 1, p. 253



Of course, the Prophet had already used this allegorical term in response to the way people may take advantage of the hidden Imam.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, we mention some subtle points on likening Imam Mahdi to the Sun and also his disappearance to the Sun behind clouds:

- As the Sun is the axis and center of the solar system and the planets are arranged around its orbit revolving there regularly, the Shi'a also believes that right now, Imam Mahdi is the axis of the creation and the mediator of the God's grace to all the creatures such that without him, the whole world with all its inhabitants will not be able to continue to exist anymore.

- The Sun does not withhold from shining even for a fraction of time and all beings benefit from its light to the extent of their relationship with and facing the sun. The existence of Imam Mahdi is also a medium between God and His servants for receiving all the material and spiritual blessings; however, everyone benefits from the Imam in proportion to his/her heartfelt relationship with this mediating source of perfection and blessing.

- If *the behind-the-clouds Sun* ceases to shine, the Earth

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1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol.52, p.92

will no more be habitable due to the extreme cold and darkness; likewise, if the world is deprived of the Imam's existence (overt or covert), hardships, disturbances and the incursion of different calamities will make it impossible to continue living.

Accordingly, the sun of the Imam's existence shines on the entire world and distributes the divine graces among all beings based on their capacity, yet with special blessings and favors for humans and Muslims, specifically the Shi 'as and true believers, some of which will be mentioned in the following:

- *Giving hope*

Hope is one of the important human assets and the source of life, vitality, and dynamism. Though the promised Mahdi is in occultation, his existence is an important factor for the continued vitality of the Shi 'a community. Therefore, in Islamic narrations, إنتظارُ الفَرَجِ (*awaiting the deliverance*), by itself, is considered one of the greatest reliefs. Imam Mahdi, fully aware of the conspiracies of the enemies, guards the intellectual and doctrinal boundaries of the Shi 'as by any means possible with the help and guidance of the Almighty God. Whenever the deceit-

ful enemies target the principles of the school and beliefs of the Shi'a with various means, he blocks the passage of penetration and deviation through guiding the chosen Shi'a scholars. This is why throughout the past 1400 years, the Shi'a has continuously been afflicted with all kinds of calamities and hardships, but what has made the Shi'a resist, stand up, move, survive, and not be submissive to the opponents has been "hope for a bright future". True believers have always been seeking for such a real utopian and not a fantastic or mythical future. However, nobody knows but the Almighty God its exact time; may be its actualization is very close!

- *An important factor and motivation for self-refinement*

God, in the Quran addresses Prophet Muhammad and says:

*"And say, "Do [whatever you will] but be aware that God will see your deeds, and (so will) His Messenger and the believers. And you will be brought back to the All-Knower of the Unseen and the Seen. Then He will inform you of what you used to do."*<sup>1</sup>

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1. *The Quran*, 9:105

It is stated in some Hadiths that what is meant by the word “believers” in this verse are the Infallible Twelve Imams; so, Imam Mahdi, as the Imam of our age, is informed of people’s deeds and oversees all affairs. In this regard, Imam Mahdi says:

*“Indeed, our knowledge encompasses all your news (actions, incidents, affairs of life, and even intentions), and nothing out of your news remains hidden from us”.*<sup>1</sup>

This fact has a great educational effect and will lead the Shi 'as to amend their affairs and prevent themselves from being contaminated by ugliness and sins before God’s representative, Imam Mahdi. Yet, the more a person pays attention to the Imam of goodness, the more the mirror of his/her heart and soul will be polished and tranquil, and thereby, will be reflected in his words and behavior, too.

- *Inner guidance and spiritual influence*

The Imam as God’s representative on the Earth is responsible for leading and guiding people to the right path. He strives to guide those seeking to receive the guidance light. To fulfill this divine mission, he may, sometimes, openly communicate with the individuals and

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1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 53, p. 174

shows them the path of felicity, or influence the ready hearts via his divine authority and supernatural power. In inner guidance, there is no need for the Imam's external presence and a direct connection with him; it occurs through inner and spiritual connection, instead.

- *Keeping safe from calamities*

Doubtlessly, security is one of the main needs and assets of life. The occurrence of various events in the world has always exposed the natural life of all beings to destruction. The control of pests and calamities is possible by providing material means; however, spiritual factors have a great impact, too. In the Qur'an and the Islamic Hadiths, the presence of divine authorized individuals is considered a main factor in the security of the earth and its inhabitants. Addressing His Prophet, the Almighty God reiterates:

*“And God would never punish them while you [O Muhammad] are among them, and God would never punish them while they are seeking our forgiveness.”*<sup>1</sup>

Imam Mahdi, as the excellent embodiment of God's mercy, removes big calamities, especially from the Shi'ite

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1. *The Quran*, 8:33

community with his special grace and attention even if they may overlook this special grace and kindness or do not see and recognize his helping hand above their heads. In fact, the presence of the Imam prevents people to be afflicted with severe divine punishments for all the mistakes and sins they commit.

It is quoted from Imam Mahdi in describing himself as saying:

*“I am the last successor of the Prophet (Muhammad); and it is on account of my existence that the Almighty God keeps the calamities away from my friends and Shi'as.”*<sup>1</sup>

- *Giving succor to Shi'as and people*

The last saviour, Imam Mahdi, always is aware of the people's affairs. Although direct access and full benefiting from the presence of the Imam is not possible during the time of his disappearance, he solves the scientific and ideological problems of Shi'as in different ways. During the Minor Occultation, many questions of the people and scholars were answered through signed letters (known as *Tawqī'*) from the side of the Imam. Also, later in the time of Major Occultation, Shi'ite scholars have resorted

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1. *Al-Ghaybah*, by Sheikh Ṭūsī, p. 246

to Imam Mahdi to solve their scientific and intellectual problems and have received the appropriate answer in various ways.

Imam Mahdi's disappearance has not made him withhold his kindness and favor from the people, especially the Shi'as and his lovers. He has been a constant cordial source of the Shi'as and helper of those seeking help from him. Appearing at the patients' bedside, he has cured some incurable diseases in occasions, and guided the lost in the wilderness at other times by the grace of the Almighty God. He constantly fills the hearts of those waiting for his appearance with the warmth of hope in the cold time of despair.

# Chapter 4

## Intizār<sup>1</sup>; the responsibility of the believers in Imam Mahdi

The vitality and dynamism of humans during their individual and social lives are in debt of the blessings of “Hope” and “Awaiting”. The life will be absurd and meaningless in the absence of hope for a bright future. What makes people be hopeful in their lives and easily sustain worries, hardships and problems is the expectation and hope for a better future, in which all their spiritual and physical needs and desires are expected to be fully granted. Accordingly, though the period of Imam Mahdi’s occultation is a challenging and unbearable time, being hopeful of his advent creates excitement and joy in the hearts of the expectants and makes bearing the hardships and enmities easy and even pleasant! This hopefulness and longing for the appearance of the promised Mahdi, which has always been life-saving and facilitator for the believers, has been called “Intizār al-Faraj” (*Awaiting the*

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1. Awaiting the advent of Imam Mahdi.



*deliverance*) in Islamic Hadiths.

### **The meaning of Intizār**

From a lexical point of view, “*Awaiting*” is defined as looking forward and hoping for something to happen; however, in Mahdism terminology, it means to be in anticipation of the advent of the last divine saviour and become prepared for giving succor to him on the way of arranging a global revolution and establishing an all-in-one universal just government. According to this description, *Awaiting* is not only a spiritual and inner state but also an extension of it to one’s outer behavior, leading to some proportional movements and actions. In Islamic narrations, this is considered as one of the best deeds and acts of worship. In fact, the true expectation for the Imam’s appearance has a deep effect on all aspects of the expectants’ lives such that it can direct their entire actions because a loyal expectant must try to provide the prerequisites of the Imam’s appearance and his benevolent government. Consequently, while trying to acquire moral virtues and even strengthening the physical aspect of the individual dimension, a real expectant, in social arena, strives to amend the affairs of the society and pay due

attention to the rights of his/her own fellow citizens. In fact, those who are waiting and preparing for the advent of the universal peacemaker feel much responsibility comparing to the lay people over the others' affairs and follow the path of goodness and truth in all their thoughts and actions. So, "Awaiting" is inconsistent with sitting idle and doing nothing. To further explain, *Awaiting* is made up of three basic pillars:

a) Not to be satisfied or content with the status quo

Undoubtedly, the difficulties and shortcomings during the occultation of Imam Mahdi would have led to many popular protests and dissatisfaction of perfectionists about the ongoing situation. It is clear that these shortcomings mainly originate from the physical absence of the Imam. Shi'a believes that Imam Mahdi's disappearance has caused human society to be deprived of his apparent benefits and blessings; in such a situation, a true expectant is the one who not only suffers out of him/her own deprivation but also to the whole human society. Accordingly, a real expectant feels it necessary to eliminate all the barriers causing the continuation of the Imam's disappearance, to

the best of his/her ability.

b) To be hopeful for a better future

Hope for a better future is one of the main pillars of awaiting Imam Mahdi's appearance. Some believe that this optimistic and aspirational view and attitude toward the future of mankind has been prevalent even among the primitive tribes; so it is quite natural that all religions, especially the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) pay a due attention to the issue of the promised Saviour because every universal religion and school of thought is obligated to fulfill the innate demands and natural requests of its followers in drawing the horizon of the future. Therefore, the main core of all "Futurism" discussions should be sought in the promised peacemaker and redeemer whom all folks are waiting for.

c) Striving to emigrate from the current situation to the desired one

Being hopeful of a bright future and attaining a better situation are key in keeping people away from stagnation and instability, and encouraging them to strive to reach the desired situation. If they do not succeed to achieve the desired and ideal situation for whatever reason, the

Almighty God, because of their sincere efforts and perseverance, will grant them the reward of those reached the climax.

Accordingly, true expectation is not contained only in feeling desperate towards the current situation and wishing for a better future; rather, some concepts like movement, vitality, and enthusiasm lie within *Awaiting* (Intizār). In other words, expectant of a beloved guest try impatiently and restlessly to prepare him/herself and the surroundings for coming of that special guest and also do his/her best to remove any possible obstacles. In line with this, Prophet Muhammad considers the *Awaiting* as the best deed by saying:

*“The best deed of my nation is waiting for the Faraj (relief, or the appearance of the twelfth Imam).”<sup>1</sup>*

### **The duties of those who await the Imam’s appearance**

Out of the many duties of the expectants of Imam Mahdi’s advent, reflected in the narrations from Prophet Muhammad and Infallible Shi’a Imams, we only mention

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1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 644; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 75, p. 208

three main duties in the following:

1. To know the Imam

Without proper knowledge about the expected Imam, it would be almost impossible to be a real expectant as paving the path of *Intizār* requires a great deal of patience and resistance to fulfill the assigned duties. So, in addition to the necessity of acquiring the exoteric information about the Imam, it is also necessary to gain sufficient knowledge about the Imam's magnificent rank and dignity. It is worth noting that this latter knowledge is so important that Prophet Muhammad warned the people of any time saying:

*“Whoever dies with no recognition of the Imam of his/her time, his/her death is like the death of those died at the Age of Ignorance.”*<sup>1</sup>

According to this Hadith, “the death of ignorance” means to pass away in a state of disbelief and hypocrisy. Of course, recognition of the Imam has various dimensions such as knowing the status of the Imam in the whole creation and understanding his characteristics and mode of conduct; this dimension of knowledge makes a profound practical effect on the behavior and character

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1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 409

of the expectant. Obviously, as the more the expectants develop their knowledge multiple dimensions of the Imam's personality and dignity, the more the various parts of their lives will be affected by this knowledge practically.

## 2. Remembrance of the Imam

What helps the expectant believers to obtain a proper cognizance of Imam Mahdi, and thus, follow him and endure pressures is establishing and maintaining a continuous connection with the Imam. Shi'a believes that the Imam cares for the people, especially the Shi'as always and everywhere, and does not forget them even for a fraction of time. Therefore, it is not acceptable that the believers in him entertain themselves with worldly attachments and carnal desires, and thereby, remain oblivious and unaware of the Imam. The prerequisite of real friendship and love for the Imam is that his Shi'as and those who are enamored with him should place the Imam before themselves in all affairs, and when sitting to worship, first of all, ask the Almighty God to safeguard the Imam and hasten his advent because Imam Mahdi himself has commanded us to pray for the hastening of

his advent by saying:

*“... And pray so much for the hastening of the Advent because your relief is in this, indeed.”<sup>1</sup>*

When giving alms, the true expectants consider the health of Imam Mahdi first. They remember the Imam for any reason, take notice and recourse to him, and wail in the passion of yearning for his appearance. They attend circles organized in the name of the Imam for strengthening the roots of his love in their hearts; hence, they go to the places like Mosques of Sahla (in Iraq) and Jamkarān (in Iran) and other sacred places attributed to the Imam.

One of the most significant manifestations of the remembrance of Imam Mahdi in the lives of the expectants of the Imam’s advent is that they renew their covenant with him on daily basis, and pledge an oath of allegiance to him to declare their steadfastness on that pledge. Therefore, we read in a passage from “Du ‘ā al- ‘Ahd” (the supplication of Covenant):

*“O God! I renew on the dawn of this day and the whole remainder of my life my pledge, covenant, and allegiance to him, as my obligation, which*

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1. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, p. 92, Hadith no. 7

*I shall neither ever contravene nor neglect. O God! Include me amongst his helpers, defenders, fulfillers of his wishes and commands, fore-runners for carrying out his intentions, and martyrs before him and in his presence.”<sup>1</sup>*

If a believer recites this supplication continuously and adheres to it from the depth of his/her heart, he/she will never be caught in volatility and laziness, nor will stop for a moment in practicing the Imam’s desires and paving the ground for his appearance; and it deserves for every expectant to help this Divine Reserve, indeed.

### 3. To accompany the Imam

After taking cognizance of Imam Mahdi and his conduct, it is the turn for following him as the paragon of a perfect human being, because, people awaiting the arrival of the universal Reformer must themselves be righteous ones who do good deeds, enjoy virtues, avoid sins, and always be careful with their thoughts and actions; otherwise, they will fall into the trap of Satan and bad things, which may gradually distance them from their Imam. This truth has been reflected in the promised Imam’s admonition as below:

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1. Refer to *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*



*“... So, there is nothing that separates us from the Shi'as except that what reach us about their deeds and actions that are not pleasing to us and we do not expect from them.”<sup>1</sup>*

Although the ultimate heartfelt wish of those awaiting Imam Mahdi is to contribute to the establishment of a universal just government under the leadership of the Imam and attain the honor of being one of his helpers and companions, achieving this great felicity is not possible except with the observance of moral decency, social cohesion, and continuous hearty and spiritual connection with the Imam. Attaining this goal firstly requires self-purification, individual reform and choosing a lifestyle that is pleasant to the Imam. In fact, people's greatest possible help to the Imam is through the efforts they make to correct their beliefs, behaviors, and actions in the way of performing religious duties and avoiding sins. In other words, the expectants of Imam Mahdi can take a constructive step towards the general preparedness to accept the Imam's advent by educating and seeking real

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1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 53, p. 177

reformation in their lifestyles.

### **The expectant society**

The ideal society waiting in the Occultation period is formed based on the social duties of the expectant people. To fulfill the political, social, cultural, and economic goals in such a society, all interactions and relations of citizens are conformable with the culture of *Awaiting*. In this society, “Religion” steers the ship of human’s life, and bilateral relations between the community members are defined based on brotherhood, whose criterion is faith, and not blood, race, and ethnicity. Then one can expect that hearts gather together and all talents and facilities of the society are organized to the actualization of the appearance of Imam Mahdi. It is the duty of all Muslims during the time of Occultation to do their best to establish such a society to hasten the Imam’s advent.

Shi'a believes that Prophet Muhammad and the infallible Imams from his progeny are divinely-appointed leaders for the administering the Muslims’ worldly and spiritual affairs, though the Muslim nation has also a non-deniable crucial and determining role in the establishment and consolidation of the Islamic government through obeying

and following the commands of the Prophet and Imams. This duty still remains valid, even during the time of the last Imam's disappearance, upon all Muslims to establish the Islamic government and implement the laws and socio-political programs of Islam because, the Islamic rules remain valid and irrevocable even in the Imam's occultation period, and Muslims are expected to observe them. The Almighty God orders on different occasions in the Quran some assignments such as Jihād (or struggling in the way of God), enforcing divine rules, increasing readiness for a military confrontation with enemies, enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, establishing justice, and so forth. Obviously, the implementation of these Quranic commands is not restricted only to the time of the Prophet and the early Islamic period; rather, it includes all Muslims in all eras. On the other hand, full implementation of these divine orders is contingent upon the formation of an Islamic government. Based on this, during the time of Major Occultation, Shi'a follows the mechanism of managing the expectant society by the general deputyship of eligible 'Ulamā (religious scholars) on behalf of Imam Mahdi.

## General deputyship of religious scholars on behalf of the Imam

Upon the completion of Minor Occultation and special deputyship and the commencement of Major Occultation, the guidance of Shi'ite society was triggered by Imam Mahdi himself under the title of “General Deputyship” with specific principles and criteria. Consequently, in every era, an outstanding individual from religious figures enjoying the complete exemplification of those principles and criteria - at all levels and in all directions - is recognized as the general deputy of the Imam and the guardian of the Islamic society on his behalf in all worldly and spiritual affairs. Hence, his sayings and orders are the same as the Imam's; so, obeying him is obligatory, and opposing him is forbidden. There is a Hadith from Imam Mahdi in this regard, as saying:

*“As for the new occurrences, you should turn to the narrators of our Hadith (pious Islamic scholars) because they are my proofs on you and I am the proof of the Almighty God.”<sup>1</sup>*

This narration is one of the most famous and clearest Hadiths on the issue of the representational role of great

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1. *Kamāl al-Dīn*, vol. 2, p. 484

Islamic scholars on behalf of Imam Mahdi in the era of his occultation.

In a similar Hadith, Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī mentions the characteristics of the Islamic scholars and general deputies as follows:

*“As for any one of the Islamic jurists restraining himself from committing sins, safeguarding his religion, opposing his carnal desires, and obeying the command of his master; then the common populace must follow him, and note that only some of the Shi'a scholars are qualified for this position, not all of them.”<sup>1</sup>*

In fact, the qualified religious scholars ('Ulamā), assigned as the general deputies of Imam Mahdi within the era of Major Occultation have did their outmost to protect the religion of Islam from deviation, described the issues related to the Muslims' needs, and strengthened the foundations of the believers' faith based on correct beliefs. Since, the “Islamic Revolution of Iran”, as the biggest social transformation in the Islamic nations in the contemporary era, was founded in 1979 based on the doctrine of “the Guardianship of Islamic Scholars”

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1. Wasā'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 18, Chapter 10, Hadith no. 20

(*Wilāyat al-Faqīh*), which is the general deputyship on behalf of Imam Mahdi, it is imperative to talk a little bit more on this Shi'a principle in the following.

In the view of Shi'a, the proof of an Infallible Imam's eligibility to assume the position of Imamate and leadership of the nation is the result of his unique piety and infallibility, his perfect knowledge of the religion, and his comprehensive understanding and knowledge of social and managerial affairs. Now, when it is not possible to access the Infallible Imam in a time like the Major Occultation, then the Muslims must refer to and search for a person possessing the most of these characteristics among all believers, and this person is no one other than a pious religious scholar who has the necessary merits to supervise and manage the nation's and the Islamic society's affairs, because a non-Muslim scholar does not have a true and full knowledge of religious teachings and rulings in order to implement divine laws. On the other hand, a person lacking piety and justice is most likely to be exposed to his or others' carnal desires, so the administration of Islamic society must not be entrusted to a non-trustworthy person. In addition, if this person is not highly capable and resourceful, he cannot make well-

considered and useful decisions for the whole Muslim community.

Consequently, the “Walī Faqīh” (the religious guardian and leader of Shi’ite society on behalf of Imam Mahdi) is someone who is well aware of religious policies and has the potential to establish and promote social justice. Therefore, during the era of Imam Mahdi’s disappearance, the religious authority is the best and most competent decision-making institution for the Islamic community. It is crystal clear that the concentration of power in the hands of a qualified Islamic expert does not lead to dictatorship and autocracy in any way, because the dictator not only does not rule within the framework of divine laws but on his personal perceptions and desires; additionally, his greed to hold the position of governance may prevent him from being pious, and thus, respecting the expediency of the individual members of the community. These two features, in turn, can lead to the weakness of his social and political management; while, as we narrated above from Imam Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the “Walī Faqīh” attains the highly-blessed rank of the guardianship of the Islamic society after acquiring the following three main qualities:

The first characteristic of a *Walī Faqīh* is to be “an ex-

*pert in Islamic jurisprudential rules*” making him capable of managing the affairs of the Islamic society based on divine decrees, and not according to individual or group opinions. The second characteristic is to be “*a just and pious person*”; this causes him avoid pursuing ambition and worldliness, or making decisions based upon his personal and party interests in the administration of society. The third of his characteristics is “*correct political planning and decision-making for the better management of the society*”, which can be achieved through consultation with a group of competent scientific and political experts. It is obvious that the authority of *Walī Faqīh* will be in place as long as all the mentioned characteristics are stable in him as confirmed by the “Experts’ Assembly”<sup>1</sup>; otherwise, in case of losing any one of these characteristics, he will no more be qualified for this position and the Assembly will declare him incompetent, and so, will appoint another eligible scholar as *Walī Faqīh*<sup>2</sup>.

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1. The “*Experts’ Assembly*” is a council composed of some qualified learned religious scholars, which, according to Article 107 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is responsible for determining and supervising the performance of the *Walī Faqīh* (the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic). Members of this council are elected directly by the people to eight-year terms.

2. The religious guardian and leader of Shi’ite society on behalf of Imam Mahdi.



# Chapter 5

## Appearance of Imam Mahdi

### Introduction

Apocalypse (to prophesy the events of the End of Time) is a religious term that refers to the last era of the world, which has been mentioned in a way in all divine religions. In Islamic teachings, this expression refers to three periods of time:

- 1) The era of the birth and Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad, in a way that according to some Hadiths, the Prophet is called the “End-of-Time Prophet”;
- 2) The era of Imam Mahdi’s occultation, especially the end part of this period;
- 3) The era of the promised Mahdi’s appearance and afterward.

The most important features of the End-of-Time are the hard trials and formidable tumult of this era, the confrontation between Right and Wrong, the appearance of Promised Saviour, the victory of Truth over Falsehood, and finally, the arrival of the Golden Age of humanity.

According to popular beliefs, Apocalypse is characterized by some strange events, and the most important of which is the decline of religiosity and morality among people, followed by the appearance of a saviour. Of course, the exact date of the appearance of the Saviour is unknown; however, it is considered to be related to the last part of the era that is connected to the Resurrection.

The advent and arising of the Promised Saviour, as an important event and glad tiding promised by the Prophets and the saints, has long been the focus of attention of those interested in Mahdism and Messianic debates, particularly since so many believers now see themselves close to the fulfillment of this great event, wishing to achieve it. They wish to spend their lives in that bright era, and the enemies and disbelievers also follow it with the fear of losing their position so that they do not get caught with surprise when faced with it.

Most of the narrations about the glorious era of Appearance describe the world before that era as the darkest and cruelest phase of human life. The most important factor in the occurrence of these unfavorable conditions is the distortion of the sublime teachings of Islam in this era, causing the people to deviate from the

right path toward false and illusory beliefs. This situation leads to weak religiosity, a deep sense of personal and social despair and frustration, and prevalence of oppression, injustice, chaos, insecurity, sectarian division, and civil conflict, as well as wars, killings, poverty, and discrimination. According to these narrations, even the nature may undergo some changes such that strong earthquakes, torrential rains, natural disasters, pandemic diseases, and so forth may occur frequently over time. It is worth mentioning that in this bitter era, the true believers remain steadfast and adherent to their covenant with the Almighty God, protect their beliefs and do not drown in the corrupt environment. More importantly, they do not link their fate to the bad destiny of deviants; these are among the best servants of God and among the true Shi'as praised in many Hadiths. They are pure themselves and invite others to purity as they know very well that it is possible to advance the advent of Imam Mahdi by promoting good deeds and creating an environment full of faith to prepare the premises for his arising and ruling, because uprising against the evils would be possible and easy when the Promised Peacemaker (Imam Mahdi) has righteous followers and helpers at hand.

However, though it is a bitter time, the pre-appearance era will come to an end with the sweet period of the Imam's advent. Yes, there will come a time when fear and insecurity will disappear, security and peace will take over everywhere, corruption and oppression will be uprooted from the world, and the entire globe will be overwhelmed with tranquility and justice. Moreover, innumerable blessings will scatter down from the sky, the Earth will reveal its plentiful blessings, treasures, and mines. Also science, industry, and technology will make extraordinary progress, the intellectual growth of people will reach the highest level. All countries and cities will be prosperous, and there will be no sign of devastation on the land. Furthermore, the economic growth will be significant, wealth and incomes will be distributed fairly, medical science and health care will have a full growth and diseases will be eradicated. Yet, all executives and authorities will be chosen from among faithful and competent individuals.

In sum, the old wish of mankind will, ultimately, come true and people will celebrate achieving a Utopia, monotheistic and just government, and an ethical society full of prosperity and security. All these blessings will be

actualized through and after the advent of the Promised Mahdi; hence, it is good to describe and distinguish between the two important issues of “*Requirements of Appearance*” and “*Signs of Appearance*”.

### **Requirements of Imam Mahdi’s advent**

In lexical terms, the word “condition” means something on which the realization of the conditioned depends. To explain it a bit more, every phenomenon in the world comes into existence due to the provision of its conditions and contexts that precede it, and it will be impossible for any creature to exist without the realization of its pre-conditions. Just like the farmers who can expect to harvest a good crop only when they provide the right conditions for it, the occurrence of any revolution and social movement also depends on its contexts and pre-conditions. Thereupon, Imam Mahdi’s arising, as the most significant global movement and uprising, will follow this principle as well, and will not take place without the fulfillment of its conditions and setting the groundwork. Here, the conditions for the appearance of Imam Mahdi mean the requisites upon which the appearance of the Imam will be contingent, in a way that when those conditions are

provided, the appearance will definitely be actualized. Of course, one cannot assume that the Imam's uprising and ruling are excluded from the laws governing the creation and that the Imam's reforming movement will be fulfilled only in a miraculous way and without natural causes and effects; rather, according to the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet and the infallible Imams, the custom of God is based on the fact that the affairs of the world are carried out through regular channel of causation. With this introduction, the requisites for the fulfillment of the promised Mahdi's appearance will be mentioned in the form of the realization of four basic conditions as follows:

a) Existence of a comprehensive and excellent plan

In order to make a major change and transformation, its framework and goals should be defined first before any action. It is, therefore, obvious that the advent of Imam Mahdi, as the greatest and most extensive transformation in human society, will also be accompanied by a pre-devised plan that is commensurate with its greatness and universality; because without proper planning, it is impossible to run even a small society, let alone a society as large as all whole people of a planet. Islamic teachings

express the fact that the Promised Saviour (Imam Mahdi) will compile and adjust his government programs by wiping away the false modifications made in religious teachings and also considering the exigencies of that period of time according to the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah (the manner of conduct and tradition of Prophet Muhammad and the Infallible Imams).

b) Existence of a competent and infallible leader

The presence of an eligible leader is one of the basic conditions of any revolution and uprising in such a way that the wider a movement and the higher its goals, the greater need will be for a capable leader proportionate to its goals. In order to fight against cruelty and tyranny and establish the rule of universal justice all over the world, the existence of a knowledgeable and compassionate leader capable of managing correctly and decisively is the fundamental pillar of the revolution. Shi'a believes that Imam Mahdi, as the embodiment of all Prophets and divine saints, is the unique leader of this universal movement, who is alive and present now. He is the only leader, who has full knowledge of all creation and relationships in it and is the wisest man of his time due to

his connection with the Unseen World. He is the peerless leader, who is free from the bonds of carnal desires and enamored with the Almighty God. So, the world is in the best conditions regarding the existence of a qualified leader for establishing the promised unified universal government.

c) Existence of faithful and devoted companions

Considering the global scope of Imam Mahdi's revolution, the leader of the revolution must have a team of capable individuals to help him achieve this great goal. The history clearly shows that, according to a divine custom, almost all Prophets and divine leaders have always sought for the help of their sincere companions and followers to convey their message to the people.<sup>1</sup> The lack of sufficient companions was one of the primary reasons why the majority of the infallible Shi'a Imams did not take serious actions to establish a divine government.

In the global government of Imam Mahdi, as in all reformist movements, benefiting from true companions and followers will be inevitable because the Almighty God wills to direct the global movement mainly through

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1. *The Quran*, 7:157



regular channel of causation.

The companions of Imam Mahdi have already been introduced within various authentic Hadiths with some specific characteristics such as enjoying proper knowledge and being obedient towards the Almighty God and their Imam; they enter this field with full knowledge such that this knowledge is not only limited to knowing the name and lineage of the Imam but also includes the knowledge of the Imam's right of guardianship and his high position in the universe. Because of enjoying such a high degree of knowledge, their hearts will be filled with the love of Imam and obey his commands ardently as they know that Imam's orders are actually the very orders of God; in other words, obeying him is obeying the Almighty God. The Promised Mahdi's companions merge worshiping and steadfastness with devotion and patience and are consistently unanimous and united with each other. This unanimity is due to their high degree of humility and abandonment of selfishness and personal desires. They rise with an unflinching belief and for one single aim and unite under one flag; this is one of the main factors of their victory over the Wrong front.

Of course, Imam Mahdi's companions are categorized

differently in accordance with their merits and qualifications. As reiterated in some Hadiths, those who acknowledge and accept the Imam's call (*da'wat*) at the beginning of his appearance and join him are classified into two categories: The first group consists of a few highly privileged people who join Imam Mahdi as his special companions in the very beginning of his advent. They will form the kernel of the Imam's global movement, and just as the Imam's uprising begins with their collaboration, they will be his special counsel and ministers after the triumph, and they will hold an important part of the work at that time. In comparison with other companions and helpers of the Imam, they have a higher position and dignity and will take sensitive responsibilities in the structure of Imam Mahdi's government. Among this group of 313 people from different regions and nationalities are 50 women. All these people will miraculously come together from far and near from all corners of the world and join the Imam in one single night or morning in the city of Mecca. The second category includes a group of companions who will join the Imam's army after the Appearance gradually. This category, initially numbered ten thousand people from different regions of the world, will rise and help the

promised Mahdi in fighting against his enemies at the beginning of the Advent.

d) A global mass preparedness

Since the advent of the Promised Saviour is the most life-saving and facilitating factor for the global community, then his appearance and movement must be accompanied by a public feeling of need and acceptance. The Advent cannot be achieved unless the feeling of need for the Promised Redeemer turns into a public demand and acceptance. Here a question is raised, "*How this public demand will be caused or increased*"? To answer this question, it should be taken into consideration that a portion of the thirst for seeking justice inside people will be formed naturally and over time. In other words, people across the world ought to taste the bitters of injustice and disarray and comprehend deeply the insufficiency and shortcoming of human-made laws in realizing social equity. They must find out the truth deeply that the problems of humans cannot be solved just in the shadow of material principles and self-made regulations of humankind; rather there must appear a divine perfect human being who will be able to solve all these problems

and disturbances with the help and guidance of the Almighty God. It is obvious that the passion of yearning for the appearance of the promised Mahdi will reach its summit when the global community, after experiencing various human governments and schools of thought, realizes and concludes that the only redeemer of the world from corruption and destruction is a divine and unique human being whose reform program is exactly according to the divine laws. It is then that they will fully understand the need for this perfect man and strive to prepare the preconditions for the Imam's appearance and eliminate all the obstacles causing the continuation of his disappearance to the best of their abilities. It will be at this time that the *Faraj* (relief) and deliverance will happen.

Another important issue that plays a fundamental role in creating a feeling of need for the Promised Saviour is upbringing and education of people based on religious teachings. In other words, as a result of the intellectual resurrection made by the faithful thinkers and knowledgeable officials of the society, the world community should be gradually led toward the feeling of

need and increasing hope for the arrival of the Saviour.

### **Signs of Imam Mahdi's advent**

In lexical terms, the word “sign” means whatever causes someone or something to be recognized. According to the words of the infallible Imams of Shi'a, the exact time of the appearance of Imam Mahdi is hidden from the people, and specifying a certain time for the Imam's appearance is prohibited such that anyone doing this is deemed to be a liar and unreliable. Instead, a series of signs and symptoms have been narrated in numerous Hadiths from the Prophet and the Infallible Imams regarding the characteristics of the near-Appearance era. These signs have been introduced by them with specific goals and do not play a role in the occurrence of the Imam's advent; rather they are only some clues by which one can understand the approach of the Imam's appearance. However, this issue has always been the focus of attention of believers and those interested in Mahdism, as well as the enemies of this belief. As for the believers, by conforming to the events, they know their position in relation to the time of the Appearance and also observe the activities of the enemies. The enemies are also worried about the occurrence of that

great event and think in vain that by knowing the signs of the Appearance, they can gain victory in confronting the appearance of Imam Mahdi.

### **Difference between the requirements and signs of the Appearance**

As mentioned in the definition of signs and requirements of the Appearance, there is a clear difference between the two. In fact, it can be said that the “requirements of the Appearance” have a real effect on the actualization of the advent of Imam Mahdi so that it will not take place unless all those conditions are met, but the “signs of the Appearance” do not play a role in the occurrence of the Appearance; rather are only the symptoms by which one can realize the approach of Imam Mahdi’s coming. Accordingly, it can be well understood that the *requirements* or conditions are more important and influential than the *signs*; therefore, instead of signs, it is necessary to focus on the subject of the conditions for the realization of the Imam’s appearance and try to fulfill them as much as possible. It is worth noting that knowing the signs of Imam Mahdi’s appearance, as mentioned in numerous Hadiths from infallible Imams of Shi’a, bears

positive effects; some of which are as follows:

On the one hand, the signs of the Appearance are promising and heralding symptoms for the advent of Imam Mahdi so the occurrence of each of them will increase the light of hope in the hearts of those awaiting the Imam. Additionally, the occurrence of those signs will assist those awaiting the Imam to strengthen their beliefs about his coming and gain the merit of being with him. Furthermore, knowing about certain future events, mentioned in the signs of the Appearance like the prevalence of anti-moral values and social corruption, helps Shi'as and believers to plan appropriately to deal with the difficult conditions lying ahead. On the other hand, the signs function as reminders and warnings for the opponents and enemies to cease doing evil and destruction. Moreover, these signs provide an excellent criterion for identifying false or fake claimants of Mahdism. Hence, when someone falsely claims that he is the very Promised Mahdi, while his claim does not accord with what is mentioned in the Hadiths about the signs of the Appearance, his decep-

tion will be revealed.

### **Classification of Imam Mahdi's signs of Appearance**

What is mentioned in Islamic narrations as the signs of Imam Mahdi's appearance includes a multitude of incidents and events that can be divided into different ways; however, most of the narrations specify that the signs of Imam Mahdi's advent are of two types: "Definite Signs" and "Possible Signs". The definite or certain signs will undoubtedly occur at the threshold of the Imam Mahdi's appearance such that according to authentic Islamic narrations, the Advent will occur surely and only after the actualization of all of these definite/certain signs, while the possible or uncertain signs include a variety of events, which will not all of them be realized necessarily. In other words, uncertain signs' occurrence is not inevitable and it is even possible that the Imam appears with part of and/or even none of their fulfillment.

#### **a) Definite signs of Imam Mahdi's advent**

It is declared in Islamic narrations that the definite signs of Imam Mahdi's appearance are restricted to the following five signs:

- 1) *A celestial call from the heavens;* 2) *The Sufyānī's*



*rebellion; 3) The rise of Yamānī; 4) Swallowing up of the Sufyānī army in al-Baydā land; and 5) The murder of the Purified Soul (al-Nafs al-Zakīyyah).*

1) A celestial call from the heavens

Since the uprising of the Promised Universal Redeemer is a global revolution and most people in different religions are expecting his noble advent, a supernatural declaration of this significant event will be one way to make the people all over the world be aware of it. This celestial call is a sound that will be heard at the threshold of Imam Mahdi's appearance, and all people with different languages and dialects will hear it in their language. The content of this miraculous voice is calling unto the truth and supporting and following the Imam. There will be a sense of reassurance and joy among the believers upon hearing this call. Moreover, it is also a warning to the non-believers and enemies to stop doing evils and join the followers of Imam Mahdi.

2) The Sufyānī's rebellion

Sufyānī is a man from the offspring of Abū Sufyān, who will revolt a little before the Imam's advent. He is one of the vilest people of the time, who will pretend to

be religious, deceive many groups of people, kill a lot in some Islamic countries, and deal with his opponents in a heinous way. According to some Hadiths, after taking control of Shām (present-day Syria), he will invade Iraq and its neighborhoods and commit a large-scale massacre there. However, he will rule for only nine months, and overall, it will not take more than fifteen months from the beginning of his rebellion until his death.

### 3) The rise of Yamānī

Another definite sign of Imam Mahdi's appearance is the uprising of a righteous and faithful warlord, named Yamānī. He will rise from the land of Yemen just prior to the Imam's advent. He will play an important role in preparing the ground for the Imam's appearance. Based on some narrations, it is forbidden to oppose Yamānī, and more surprisingly, we see that this kind of forbiddance is mentioned merely about him, not for the other positive figures at the End of Time. It is mentioned in Islamic narrations that this man is an exalted figure and there will be no guiding flag other than Yamānī's.

### 4) Swallowing of the Sufyānī army in al-Baydā

“Al-Baydā” is the name of a land located between

Mecca and Medina. According to Hadiths, Sufyānī will be informed that Imam Mahdi has moved from Medina to Mecca; so he will dispatch a fully-equipped army to Mecca to arrest or assassinate the Imam. They also decide to invade Mecca aiming to demolish the Ka 'bah and kill the Mecca's habitants; however, upon reaching al-Baydā, by the will of the Almighty God, the Earth will miraculously open its mouth to swallow them all except two or three of them who will survive to tell others about what happened to them.

5) The murder of the Purified Soul (Al-Nafs al-Zakīyyah)

“Al-Nafs al-Zakīyyah” is an innocent, devout and pious person, who will be murdered without committing any sin or crime. Based on Islamic narrations, he is a man from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Accordingly, he will be murdered in Mecca in the ambit of the Ka 'bah in *Masjid al-Harām*<sup>1</sup>. It has been narrated that the advent of the Imam will take place no longer than fourteen of fifteen days after his martyrdom.

**b) Possible signs of Imam Mahdi's advent**

In addition to the five definite signs of the Imam

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1. Between the Corner of the Ka 'bah and the Station of Prophet Abraham.

Mahdi's appearance, there are also a lot of uncertain signs mentioned in the Islamic narrations in this regard. The realization of these signs is not certain and necessary, and even if all of these signs are realized of, it is not known how long it will take till the appearance of the Imam. Out of the many those possible signs reflected in the related Hadiths, for brevity, we will suffice to mention only a few of them such as an eclipse of the Sun and the Moon in the month of Ramaḍān, sedition and chaos in Damascus and Iraq, the emergence of Black flags, the rebellion of One-eyed Dajjāl, the rise of Sayyid al-Ḥasanī and al-Khurāsāni and Shu'ayb bin Ṣāliḥ, bloody wars, and the excess of pervasive corruption, oppressions, calamities, crises, unrest, injustice, chaos, insecurity, civil conflicts, killings, poverty and inflation, as well as discord and division among the Muslim nations, etc.

The noteworthy point is that it is important to avoid the temptation to correlate current events with the certain or uncertain signs of Imam Mahdi's advent expressed in Islamic narrations because such claims require a convincing reason. In other words, it is not reasonable to consider every event as a sign of the Imam's appearance just according to personal interpretation. In most cases,

such a perception may gradually create a false hope or a feeling of pessimism or despair among the believers in Mahdism. In addition, some of these signs are related to the portents of the Day of Judgment, not the signs of the advent of Imam Mahdi.

### **Relation between the signs of the approach of Doomsday and the signs of Imam Mahdi's advent**

It appears from the Islamic narrative sources that there is a close relationship between the “signs of the approach of Doomsday” and the “signs of the appearance of Imam Mahdi” such that these two topics are confused in some cases. In many Sunnite Hadith books and also some Shi'ite narrations, these two signs are seemingly intertwined so that some signs known as *signs of Appearance* are considered to be *signs of the Day of Judgment* and vice versa. In this case, two points should be taken into consideration:

a) There is a chapter titled *Ashrāt al-Sā'ah* (signs of Doomsday) in Sunnite Hadith books that mistakenly mentions some signs like the re-appearance of Prophet Jesus, the Sun rising from the west, and the rebellion of Dajjāl (Anti-Christ) as the signs of the Day of Judgment

while Shi'a believes that they are part of the signs of Imam Mahdi's advent.

b) Since several Hadiths mention that if there is only one day left until the occurrence of the Doomsday, the Promised Mahdi will appear definitely; this misconception has been created by some people that the time of Imam Mahdi's appearance is close to the time of the Resurrection. This carelessness has led to confusion between these two types of signs; however, the purpose of those Hadiths is to emphasize the certainty of Imam Mahdi's advent, not that the time of his appearance and uprising will be close to the Day of Resurrection or the world's last days. Overall, it can be said that the greatness of Imam Mahdi's global movement at the End of the Time has caused the signs and symptoms of these two big events to be mixed or confused.

### **Significant apocalyptic individuals**

Here, it is appropriate to briefly highlight two of the most significant apocalyptic individuals and signs:

#### **a) The rebellion of Dajjāl (Anti-Christ)**

In Arabic terminology, the word "Dajjāl" comes from the root "Dajl" that means "to gild something" because,

unlike what is in his heart, it has been narrated that he will mislead the people hypocritically by hiding the truth and adorning the falsity. For this reason, people who are very liars and imposters and make falsehood appear to be true are called Dajjāl. Before Islam, this title was used several times in the Testaments with the term “Anti-Christ” or other phrases, which perhaps shows the alignment of the teachings of all the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) regarding the destructive role of this man at the End of the Time. It is deduced from the Islamic narrations is that Dajjāl is a wrongdoer who will emerge at the End of the Time on the threshold of Imam Mahdi’s appearance, and will mislead a group of people with absurd and deceptive claims, pretending that the lives and livelihoods of all people are in his hands and he manipulates them. He will deceive people by distorting “good deeds” as bad and “bad deeds” as good; of course, his disbelief and hypocrisy will, finally, be obvious to everyone. In Sunni sources, the emergence of the Dajjāl is considered to be a sign of the Day of Judgment; however, Shi'a considers it as one of the most important events occurring on the threshold of Imam Mahdi’s appearance.

There are several possibilities regarding Dajjāl:

- Dajjāl is not the name of a specific person; rather is only a description for whoever attempting to deceive people with deception and baseless claims. This possibility is strengthened due to the fact that several Dajjāls have been mentioned in the narrations. The story of Dajjāl depicts how a few deceitful and hypocritical people, still attached to the anti-values and false systems of the past, make every endeavor to preserve non-divine culture and deceive the lay people by abusing their feelings. Naturally, since the universal revolutionary movement of Imam Mahdi is the greatest and the most comprehensive of all revolutions throughout the mankind history, the damage and destruction of the deceivers will be much more widespread and complicated proportionately. Hence, on the threshold of the Imam's advent, they will do their best to deceive people in various ways in order to discourage and disappoint them with the result of the Imam's revolution and uprising aiming to hinder the ultimate triumph of the "Truth" over the "Falsity".

- Dajjāl refers to a certain person with specific features mentioned in a few Hadiths. Accordingly, he will emerge at the End of the Time and make the people go astray. In this case, it is highly probable that there is one great



Dajjāl who leads and supervises other sub-Dajjāls.

- Some scholars are on the belief that Dajjāl symbolizes the global infidelity and the dominance of “Universal Arrogance” throughout the world based on the teachings of materialistic world-view. They reconcile all the characteristics described for Dajjāl with the characteristics of the global arrogant powers led by deceivers and oppressive materialist leaders in the mechanical world. It means that the Dajjāl may symbolize the highest level of civilization, culture and Western technology that are in conflict with Divine religious values and principles; a holistic arrogant culture that tries to conquer and enslave all.

### **b) Descent (Re-appearance) of Jesus Christ**

Muslims, following the Quran, consider Jesus the son of Mary as a pious and worthy servant of the Almighty God and one of His Prophets, because God has repeatedly praised his purity and high rank, and mentioned him with total honor and respect.<sup>1</sup> But what has made the connection between that noble Prophet and Mahdism is that by God’s will and in order to strengthen the global movement

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1. *The Quran*, 19:30-34

of Imam Mahdi, Prophet Jesus will descend from the heavens. As a decisive belief, Shi'a believes that the re-appearance of Prophet Jesus will occur just before the Promised Mahdi's rising. This significant incident is one of the most amazing events and the most glorious proof of the rightfulness of Imam Mahdi. The wisdom behind the descent of Jesus Christ at this time is to strengthen the global movement of Imam Mahdi and acknowledge his truthfulness, especially the fact that Prophet Jesus will follow the Imam in the "Congregational Prayer", thereby confirming and declaring the superiority and priority of Imam Mahdi.

The simultaneity of the appearance of these two prominent divine characters at the End of the Time probably raises the question, "Which one is then the true Promised Saviour"? In response, it should be said that the name, titles, lineage, and even some of the physical traits and personality characteristics of the Promised Saviour are clearly defined in numerous authentic Hadiths, and there is no doubt about its conformance with Imam Mahdi. Also, with a glance at the Christian sources, the following can be deduced:

- First, almost all contemporary scholars are unanimous

in that Prophet Jesus has never ever claimed to be a “Messiah” and has not introduced himself as the Promised Saviour;<sup>1</sup> such a claim has only been made by his disciples.

- Second, the Gospels’ account of Jesus never reminds us of the “Mighty Ruler” the Jews have long been waiting for. He has not made any attempt to establish a government, and no political theory is evident in his words and teachings. According to the Gospels, Prophet Jesus has not based his redemption hypothesis on the foundation of a governmental institution or a social theory; so no clear social function can be considered for him.

- Third, the Gospel speaks of a person with the title “Son of Man” who cannot be exactly adapted to Jesus Christ; rather the privileged attributes of the *Son of Man* place him in a higher position than Jesus. According to *Hawks*, the term “Son of Man” is mentioned eighty times in the Bible and its attachments, only thirty of which correspond to Jesus.<sup>2</sup> In numerous cases, the words of Jesus often imply that the Son of Man is someone other than him.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, we can say that Imam Mahdi and Prophet Jesus

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1. See: *An Introduction to Christianity*, by Mary Jo Weaver.

2. See: *Persian Bible Dictionary*, by James Hawks, p. 219

3. See: *Luke*, 12:35-40

are two different individuals and two real personalities who will play a key role in fulfilling the Divine Promise at the End of the Time. Jesus will follow Imam Mahdi, and will declare that the Mahdi is the true successor of Prophet Muhammad and his descendants. In this way, a large group of the People of the Book (i.e. Christians and Jews) will join Islam. Indeed, Jesus, like a trusted Vizier, will accompany and help the Promised Mahdi in establishing the promised benevolent global government.

Considering the common goals of Imam Mahdi and Prophet Jesus in establishing the divine government, enforcing the religious rules throughout the world, punishing criminals and completely cleansing the Earth of all evils, destroying the Anti-Christ, filling the world with abiding justice, and establishing the rule of the righteous and the oppressed people in the world, one can conclude that the “The Godly Kingdom of Messiah” that Jesus preached and asked his apostles to proclaim and other people to be prepared to achieve it is the very “Noble Government” of Imam Mahdi.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See: *Matthew 24&25*

## **The uprising of Imam Mahdi**

All people are eager to know what events will happen during Imam Mahdi's global uprising, where and how the Imam's movement will be triggered, how he will deal with different groups, how he will conquer the whole world, and so forth. Although such questions may occupy the mind of every expectant believer, it is indeed very difficult to talk about the incidents and events related to the advent of the Imam, as it is about reporting on the future and events that have not taken place yet; so, naturally no one can gain accurate information about these events. With this explanation, what is presented here is only a very brief look at the events and happenings of the era of the appearance of Imam Mahdi, which is derived from numerous Hadiths cited in Islamic sources in order to draw a general perspective of the events at that time.

When tyranny and oppression are spreading all over the world, and the oppressors and the arrogant powers are making the Earth a place for their carnal lusts, as a matter of sudden and by the will of the Almighty God, a celestial heavenly call will announce the advent of the great Promised Saviour. At this time, Sufyānī, who controls a large territory in the today Syria, Jordan, and Palestine,

will be busy preparing a big army to fight the Imam. The army of Sufyānī, which is pursuing the Imam on his way to Mecca, will be suddenly swallowed up by the Earth and destroyed at a place called al-Baydā, located between Mecca and Medina.

Shortly after the martyrdom of the Purified Soul (al-Nafs al-Zakīyyah), Imam Mahdi will appear in the form of a forty-year-old man in the *holy Mosque* (Masjid al-Ḥarām) in Mecca while wearing the shirt of Prophet Muhammad and holding his flag. He will lean on the sanctuary of the Ka'bah, between the *Corner of the Ka'bah* (Rukn) and the *Station of Prophet Abraham* (Maqām), and speak to the people of the world. After the Imam finishes his words, the angels will descend in groups and pledge allegiance to him, while in front of them is the “Angel of Revelation”, the *Trustworthy Gabriel*. After that, 313 of the most pious people, including 50 women, will come to Mecca from different parts of the world, and, like butterflies encircling around the candle of the Promised Mahdi, will pledge allegiance to him. This process will continue until 10,000 soldiers will gather at the Imam’s camp and swear allegiance to him. It is then that the Imam together with all this loyal army will start the uprising and quickly take control of Mecca and its neighborhoods and cleanse it from the dirt of the unworthy

and opponents. Then the Imam will start to conquer Medina to spread the shadow of justice and mercy on it and defeat the oppressors and murderers of the city.

Then, heading to Iraq, Imam Mahdi will choose the city of Kūfa as headquarter of his global government and lead the uprising from there. Next, he will send his companions and troops to different parts of the world aiming to invite the people of the world to Islam so that they live in the light of the laws of the Quran, and to destroy the tyrants and oppressors. The Almighty God will instill such a fear of him and his companions in the heart of the arrogant throughout the world that no power will be able to face him or resist against his army.

It is worth mentioning that one of the areas conquered by the Imam's army is Jerusalem (the holy city of Al-Quds) in Palestine. At the same time, a very blessed event will take place, which is decisive in the uprising of Imam Mahdi and strengthening his front. Prophet Jesus will descend from the heavens by the will of the Almighty God and will stand to pray behind the Imam; following this, many Christians, who make up a large part of the world's population, will convert to Islam and believe in Imam Mahdi.

It is worth mentioning that the occurrence of miracles by the hands of Imam Mahdi, on the one hand, and provision

of intellectual discussions by him for the guidance of mankind to the right path, on the other, will be among the programs of the Imam's universal government. In this regard, the Imam will uncover the *Holy Tablets* of the undistorted Torah (the divine book of Prophet Moses), which are buried in certain parts of the world. Many Jews, by seeing the signs of the legitimacy of his Imamate in the Tablets will believe in him. Additionally, a large number of the followers of other religions will also join him in groups after observing this great milestone, as well as hearing the message of the "Truth" and observing the miracles and behavior of the Imam. In this way, the definite promise of God will come true and the oppressed of the world will become the inheritors of the Earth.<sup>1</sup> What remains now are only a few arrogant powers and oppressors who are not willing to surrender to the Truth; however, they will not be able to oppose the prevailing trend and the majority of believers. Although Imam Mahdi is the manifestation of the Almighty God's mercy and kindness, he will stand against these small groups of stern opponents and punish them with the sword of justice for their disgraceful deeds in a way that the Earth and all of its inhabitants will be freed and get rid of these wicked bullies and evil-doers forever.

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1. *The Quran*, 28:5



# Chapter 6

## Global government of Imam Mahdi

### Goals of Imam Mahdi's government

The religion of Islam, besides insisting on the establishment of government as a social need, has put the most emphasis on the formation of the ruling of worthy people based on religious teachings because only a virtuous ruler can lead the society to good deeds and salvation. It is easily deduced from the religious teachings that the governance of the *Promised Redeemer*, referred to as the “Promised Mahdi’s Government” in Islam, will be the supreme government on Earth, in which all the necessary elements will be well accommodated; a government that will grant the lofty ideals of all divine Prophets and all righteous people. On this basis, after an all-out battle against oppression, depravity and inhumanity, it is time to establish the rule of divine law and justice to put everyone and everything in their right and proper place and pay the portion of each phenomenon according to the requirements of law and justice. Finally,

all people of the world will experience a government full of truth and justice, and no one will be oppressed in the least; under the shadow of this government, humanity will achieve all its ideals. Undoubtedly, this divine promise will, ultimately, be fulfilled because the Quran says that in the end, *Truth* will triumph over *Falsehood*, and dominion over the Earth will be taken out of the hands of oppressors.<sup>1</sup> Many narratives in Shi'ite and Sunnite sources have also considered the governance of the Promised Mahdi as a reality that will inevitably be fulfilled before the Day of Resurrection, even if there is only one day left in the life of the world.

Since humans are composed of body and soul and their needs are divided into two parts (material and spiritual), it is necessary for them to make a well-considered and sound decisions in both directions to achieve perfection. At the same time, “Justice”, which is the greatest achievement of the divine rule, guarantees the health of humans’ growth in their material and spiritual lives. On this basis, the goals of the Twelfth Imam’s government can be proposed and explained on the two axes of *spiritual growth* and the

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1. *The Quran*, 17:81

*implementation of justice.*

a) The enhancement of morality and spirituality

Spiritual life, which is a privilege of humans compared to animals, forms the main component of human existence. Due to this spiritual life, which brings humans as close as possible to the Almighty God, man is called “the supreme creature of the universe”. The government of Imam Mahdi will take steps to revive this part of human existence to make them enjoy the sweet taste of real life. Thus, during the reign of God’s guardian (i.e. Imam Mahdi), this part of mankind’s life will be tidied up and spiritual and moral values will flourish in all aspects of their lives. Moreover, all kinds of merits and good deeds like placidity, sincerity, truthfulness, fidelity, loyalty, selflessness, sacrifice, righteousness, and so forth will become widespread.

b) The pervasive Justice

In all the past ages, the oppression of oppressive rulers against the oppressed and deprived has always been the biggest wound on the body of human society. Though humans have always been deprived of their rights in various fields, and the material and spiritual bounties

have never been distributed among the people equally, they have always dreamed of achieving justice and equality, reaching the prosperous era of righteousness at the time of Imam Mahdi's appearance. As the greatest just leader, Imam Mahdi will implement justice in the world and in all aspects of human life by the will of God, of course. This sweet truth has been expressed in many Hadiths proclaiming the glad tidings of the coming of the Promised Saviour such that the establishment of justice and righteousness is one of the most important and obvious features of the uprising of Imam Mahdi.

### **The key programs of Imam Mahdi's government**

To achieve the above-mentioned goals and according to many authentic narrations referring to the reign of Imam Mahdi, the three main pivots of the programs of his government would be cultural, social, and economic.

#### a) Cultural programs

In the global government of Imam Mahdi, all cultural activities will be in line with the scientific and practical growth and perfection of the people, and ignorance will be eliminated in all fields. The main axes of his cultural programs are as follows:

1. *Reviving the Scripture (the Quran) and Tradition (Sunnah)*

During the governance of Imam Mahdi, the life-giving teachings of the *Quran* will influence all aspects of human life, which were abandoned and forgotten before. Also *Sunnah*- the manner of conduct (i.e. model practices, customs, and traditions) of Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Lady Fāṭima al-Zahra, and the twelve Infallible Imams of Shia- will be presented everywhere as the best model for human life in a way that all affairs will be evaluated according to the inviolable standard of Quran and Infallible Imams.

2. *Expansion of morality and wisdom*

The teachings of Islam accentuate the moral and spiritual development of mankind the most because the perfection of individual and social ethics is at the forefront of the Prophet's divine mission. Hence, Prophet Muhammad places a great deal of emphasis on moral excellence and says:

*“Indeed, I have been sent to bring the ethical codes to their perfection.”*<sup>1</sup>

Also the Quran introduces the honorable Prophet

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1. *Bihār al Anwār*, vol. 68, p. 382

Muhammad as the best exemplar for all people as saying:

*“Certainly there is an excellent exemplar in the Messenger of God for those of you who seek to see and taste the satisfaction of the Almighty God in the Dooms Day and remember God too much.”*<sup>1</sup>

But, unfortunately, due to turning away of people from the teaching of the Quran and the Infallible Imams, moral degradation has been revealed in the various domains of human life, especially in Muslim society, and this moral decline has always been one of the most important factors in the destruction of people’s individual and social lives.

On the other hand, the universal government of Imam Mahdi, which is God’s dominion and divine values over the whole world, will put the promotion of wisdom and intellect at the top of its plans as well. According to a Hadith from the fifth Imam of the Shi’a (Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir), at that time, humankind will reach the highest level of wisdom and intellectual capacity:

*“Whenever our Uprising Imam (Promised Mahdi) arises, God will put His hand on the heads of His servants, and thereby, people’s*

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1. *The Quran*, 33:21

*wisdom will be put together.*"<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in the light of Imam Mahdi's rule, a suitable ground will be provided for the growth and perfection of mankind, thereby the environment filled with the guidance of the Quran and the divine traditions will lead the people to good deeds and prevent them from being contaminated by ugliness and sins thereupon, all inner and outer forces and attractions are aimed at virtues and beauties, and in this way, the divine and human values will be spread.

### 3. *Scientific movement*

One of the cultural programs of Imam Mahdi's government is a significant scientific movement and unprecedented dissemination of human knowledge. This scientific and intellectual movement will cover all strata of the society. In such a scientific prosperity, there will be no difference between men and women in reaching high ranks in science and knowledge.

### 4. *Fighting against heretical beliefs*

Heresy is the opposite of "Sunnah"<sup>2</sup> and means introducing personal thoughts and opinions into the

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1. *Usūl al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 25, Hadith no. 1

2. The model practices, customs, and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and his infallible household.

religion and religiosity. In other words, it refers to following carnal and personal desires and turning away from God, His Book, and His Messenger. It is clear that this matter is completely different from the interpretations researched and presented with the inspiration of the Quran and Sunnah and based on divine standards. In fact, heresy is something that destroys the Islamic tradition and the manner offered by the Almighty God and His Prophet, and there is no such a destructive and devastating scourge for religion.

One of the most important tasks of Imam Mahdi is to fight and eradicate all kinds of heresies. Regrettably, after the demise of Prophet Muhammad, heresies have entered the religion, and deviations and evils have appeared on the path of the religion so that the true face of the religion has been covered with the veil of personal tastes and whims. Although the Infallible Imams and their true followers and religious scholars have done their best to eliminate these heresies, the way of adding false and fake innovations into Islam is not closed yet, and it seems that spread of heresies will increase during the time of Major Occultation. Now, the world is waiting for the arrival of the Promised Saviour who under the shadow



of his government, the Quran and Sunnah will revive and heresies will be dismantled. Undoubtedly, at the top of the reform programs of the Promised Mahdi are fighting against false innovations and heretics and paving the ground for the guidance, growth, and excellence of mankind. According to the Hadiths, Imam Mahdi will eradicate all heresies and false teachings and revive the forgotten Muhammadan Sunnah.

#### b) Economic programs

A healthy economy is one of the indicators of a healthy society. If the resources of wealth in a society are properly used and the possibilities of production and distribution are not in the hands of a few, and the government pays attention to all strata and allows everyone to use the capital instead, the possibility of spiritual growth will be more convenient in such a society. To achieve this, a comprehensive program will be formulated in the government of Imam Mahdi for the economy of the whole world, in which, firstly, production will be organized and natural resources and God-given gifts will be used in the best possible way, and secondly, the wealth generated will be equitably distributed among all classes of people.

Some of the economic strategies of the global government of Imam Mahdi based on the Islamic narrations are as follows:

1. *Efficient use of natural resources*

The lack of correct and appropriate use of divine bounties and natural resources is one of the problems in the economic sector. Today, the full capacity of the land is not used, nor is the water properly exploited for reclamation of the land. Thanks to the many blessings of Imam Mahdi's Appearance, the sky will rain generously and the Earth will expose all its resources abundantly.

2. *Fair distribution of wealth*

One of the most important factors for the emergence of a sick and incompetent economy in human societies is the accumulation of wealth by and at the hands of a certain group. It has always been the case that some self-declared privileged individuals or populations have grabbed the public wealth and used them for their own personal or communal benefits. Imam Mahdi will fight against these rich profiteers and make public wealth accessible to all. It is then that real justice will be implemented and all people will benefit from their natural and God-given divine rights. As a result of this comprehensive equality, poverty will be

eradicated and there will be no more class differences or discrimination in any community throughout the globe.

### *3. Development and reclamation*

Unlike human governments in which the prosperity of the living environments is only devoted to the rulers and the like-minded people around, or the elite class and the people with influence while the others are usually forgotten, in Imam Mahdi's government, the matter of attending to the affairs of the general public will be organized and transformed such that blessings and prosperity will reach everywhere and everyone.

#### c) Social programs

One of the aspects of reforming the structure of human society is addressing social programs. In the just government of Imam Mahdi, programs will be considered for the organization of the society based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah. In such a divine global community, good deeds will be promoted, evils will be prohibited and destroyed, and legal action will be taken against evildoers. The social rights of all individuals will be rewarded equally and social justice will be established in its true sense. Among the cases mentioned in the

Hadiths concerning the social programs in Imam Mahdi's government, we can mention the following two items:

*1. Revival and prevalence of “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil”*

In the global government of Imam Mahdi, the duty of “enjoining others to the good and forbidding them from the bad” will be implemented comprehensively; a duty that the Quran has emphasized frequently and considered as one of the features of the ideal Islamic nation as the chosen Ummah (nation)<sup>1</sup>. All divine obligations and commands are based on this doctrinal teaching and its desertion is the main cause of the destruction and annihilation of goods and the growth and spread of evils in the society.

One of the highest levels of “enjoining others to the good and forbidding them from the bad” is that the head of the government and his officials should direct themselves and others to good deeds and prevent bad deeds. In Imam Mahdi's government, the prohibition of evil will not be carried out only by speech and preaching but together with practice until the living environment is cleaned of all forms of ugliness and vices.

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1. The Quran, 110:3

## 2. *Enforcing divine rules*

Dealing with corruptors and malefactors in a society will be performed in different methods. In the government of Imam Mahdi, the wicked and criminals will be directed to the path of goodness and truth through cultural activities, as well as imparting knowledge and strengthening faith and beliefs. On the other hand, the prerequisites of corruption and depravity will be removed by providing the legitimate and real needs of life and enforcing social justice. Nevertheless, those remaining on the path of violating the rights of others, undermining the divine commandments, and not accepting the framework of the divine law will be dealt with very harshly according to the penal laws of Islam to form a firm barrier against criminals such that nobody will dare to commit corruption, do crime or violate others rights anymore.

### **The manner of Imam Mahdi's governance**

According to the Hadiths, the manner of Imam Mahdi's governance would be the same as that of Prophet Muhammad; just as the Prophet fought the "First Ignorance"<sup>1</sup> in all its dimensions and made Islam prevail

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1. The time before the advent of Islam.

over the pre-Islamic culture, Imam Mahdi will also deal with the “Modern Ignorance”, which is even more depraved than the ignorance of the Bedouin societies, and build Islamic and divine values on the ruins of Modern Ignorance. This is the general policy of the Imam during his reign. There is no doubt, of course, that differences in time conditions will absolutely lead to changes in the way of implementation and governance. Some of the Imam’s manner of governance can be summarized under the following headings:

a) Jihad<sup>1</sup> and fighting manner

With his global revolution, Imam Mahdi will cleanse the Earth from disbelief and polytheism and invite everyone to the religion of Islam. Although the Imam will govern in a situation where the truth has been introduced in an obvious way and the evidence is exhausted for the people of the world in every way, according to some narrations, he will take the true and undistorted Torah and Bible out of a cave in Antioch to convince the Jews and Christians

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1. Jihad, (Arabic: “struggle” or “effort”) in Islam, is a meritorious struggle or effort. The exact meaning of the term *Jihād* depends on context; it has often been erroneously translated in the West as “holy war.” Jihad, particularly in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong.

of the world according to their own holy Books. Meanwhile, what will increase the tendency of different nations towards Islam is that everyone will clearly see Imam Mahdi being supported by super naturalistic help. Furthermore, the Imam will bring along some signs of the divine Prophets such as the staff of Prophet Moses and the ring of Prophet Solomon, as well as the armor, sword, and banner of Prophet Muhammad, thereby showing that the purpose of his arising is to realize the goals of all Prophets of God and establish a utopian global justice. It is crystal clear that, in such a context where the Truth has been openly introduced to the world, only those who have completely lost their human and divine identity will remain on the wrong front. They have nothing to do but corruption, destruction, and oppression, so it will be necessary to sweep them off the face of the Earth. Just the same approach adopted by Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, the stubborn oppressors who do not accept justice will be dealt with and punished by Imam Mahdi, too.

b) Judicial manner

Since the Promised Saviour has been reserved for the

establishment of justice throughout the Earth, he will need a strong and efficient judicial system to fulfill this big divine mission. Hence, Imam Mahdi will act according to the manner adopted by his ancestor Imam Ali and get people's trampled rights so seriously and strongly. Some Hadiths also imply that Imam Mahdi will judge in the manner of Prophet David and Prophet Solomon and without any need for the usual methods in the proceedings.

c) Managerial manner

Among the most important pillars of a government are its agents and managers. If the government officials are of competent individuals, the affairs of the government and the nation will be conducted in order, and it will be easier for the governors to achieve their desired goals. Imam Mahdi, as the head of the global divine government, will select qualified rulers from among his best companions in different parts of the world. They have all the qualities of an Islamic leader such as management knowledge, commitment, purity in intention and action, and courage in making decisions. However, the Imam, as the greatest ruler and the center of the world administration, will monitor the deeds of the rulers without forbearance, and



observe their works constantly. This important managerial attribute, which was used to be ignored before the rule of Imam Mahdi is mentioned in the Islamic narrations as one of the signs of his global government.

d) Economic manner

Imam Mahdi's manner of arranging the economic and financial affairs of his government will be based on absolute justice. This is the same acceptable approach the Prophet of Islam. Of course, after the demise of Prophet Muhammad, this desirable method was changed, and false criteria took its place for unaccountable payments to individuals and caused inequality in the then Islamic society. After Imam Ali and Imam Hasan (the first and second Imams of Shi'a), who used to strictly adhere to the Prophet's economic method as a fair system of payment for Muslim property during their short governance period, the Umayyad governors took possession of Muslims' properties as their own and in accordance with their personal interests, aiming to consolidate the foundation of their illegitimate government. But Imam Mahdi, who is the epitome of fairness and justice, will distribute the public property as a common wealth shared by all, and

avoid any rent-seeking, bribery, and discrimination.

e) Imam Mahdi's personal lifestyle

The way of life of Imam Mahdi depicts an ideal and exemplary Islamic ruler in his personal conduct and also in his relationship with the people. From the Imam's point of view, the government is considered as an opportunity for serving the people and leading them to highest points of perfection, and not a means for plutocracy, exploitation, and oppression. Having all property and wealth in his possession, the Imam will never misuse them; rather he will live at the lowest level in his personal life and be content with the minimum. He will be a perfect role model of a leader living among the lay people; therefore, he will understand their pains well and know how to treat them. Moreover, he will put all his efforts into improving their condition, and in this way, he will think only of the Almighty God's satisfaction.

### **Characteristics of Imam Mahdi's government**

For brevity, only three items of the characteristics of Imam Mahdi's government will be mentioned here as

follows:

### **a) The government territory**

There is no doubt that the government of Imam Mahdi is a global one as he is the Promised Saviour of all humanity and the fulfiller of all people's dreams. Hence, the beauty and goodness that appear under the shadow of his ruling will cover the whole Earth. The universality of the Imam's government is in that the Islamic narrations, especially from the Shi'a infallible Imams, have mentioned some attributes, powers, and works for the Imam that can be fulfilled only in the shadow of the establishment of a worldwide unity government (e.g. the elimination of all kinds of oppression and tyranny forever and expansion of justice and true religion throughout the world).

### **b) The government headquarter and center**

As clearly mentioned in some narrations, the city of Kūfa (in Iraq) will be the headquarter and center of Imam Mahdi's government. Perhaps the reason behind choosing this city by the Imam as the headquarter of his justice government is that the city of Kūfa was the first city where Imam Ali established his significant justice caliphate there from 36 to 40 A.H. (656-661A.D.), delivered

prayers and sermons, dealt with the judgment affairs, and was, finally, martyred on the Miḥrāb<sup>1</sup> of Kūfa Mosque. In addition to some Hadiths that specify Kūfa city as Imam Mahdi's residence during his governance, some other Hadiths specifically mention the Sahla Mosque (in the same city neighborhood) as the residence of Imam Mahdi.

### **c) The government term time and duration**

The rule of the righteous people, which begins with the reign of Imam Mahdi, will last until the end of the world's life and the era of oppression and tyranny will not be repeated anymore; therefore, a new history of human life will begin with the establishment of a fair system by the Imam. The Islamic narrations describing the duration of the Imam's governance are very diverse; however, but there is no doubt that the period of his ruling should be long enough to allow for the global transformation and the establishment of justice in all regions of the world, but the fact that many years it will take to achieve this goal cannot be estimated or speculated.

Since Imam Mahdi is a divine leader with special capabilities, who is supported by divine success and

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1. The niche of prayers where the Imam of the prayer stands.

unseen assistance, as well as the global preparedness to accept the rule of values at the time of his appearance, it is possible the promised Mahdi's mission will be accomplished in a relatively short period, and the ideal that mankind has not been able to realize for centuries will, finally, be realized in less than a few years. It is necessary to mention that the philosophy of Imam Mahdi's uprising and the establishment of a universal just government by him is the same as the philosophy of sending Prophets and divine Messengers. The purpose of sending the divine Messengers by the Almighty God is to convey His commands and keep ablaze the divine guidance beacon on the way of humanity. So, the long or short duration of a divine message does not harm its essence. The accomplishment of the divine mission of Prophet Muhammad took only 23 years; however, he could light the guiding lamp and delivered the last divine message. Similarly, the main purpose of the Imamate and government of Imam Mahdi is to deliver the divine message and realize the divine universal government as well as the rule of the oppressed all over the world, though the duration of his rule would seem to be very short when

compared to the whole history.

### **Difference between Globalization and Imam Mahdi's global single government**

Shi'a, based on the verses of the Quran and the sayings of divine leaders, believes that a bright end awaits human life in the near future; this great ideal will be realized through the formation of a global unified government led by Imam Mahdi. It is worth noting that, the global government of Imam Mahdi should not be equated with the “*Globalization*” as desired by the Western scholars. Notwithstanding, if globalization proceeds in its natural way, it can lay the ground for the establishment of the promised global government, so the fact that they have agreed on the need to establish a unified world government is a valuable thing per se, because the formation of a single global government was not acceptable before that, but today they consider it inevitable and speak of the “Global Village”. Hence, the world is gradually preparing to accept a global government, and human intellectual ground is being prepared for the implementation of this project.

However, it can clearly be predicted that once the

Globalization project is implemented in the world, it will surely, like other international projects, be a means in the hands of the arrogant powers to overcome the weak and spread modern tyranny across the earth, which will eventually cause troubles and deprive the masses of freedom and comfort. On the contrary, the global government of Imam Mahdi will have both religious support and an executive guarantee to create the promised utopia of religions. Hence, it can be said that the only relation between the globalization in the Western view and the globalization in Imam Mahdi's government is in their geographical scope as both of them consider the realm of globalization to be the entire globe; otherwise, there is no similarity between them in terms of law, leader, people, etc.

Due to its special potentials and capabilities, Mahdism culture is now being studied in many fields, especially from globalization aspect. Mahdism and globalization have been the subject of great research interest to academic communities to the extent that numerous conferences, articles, dissertations, and books have addressed these two topics (i.e. Mahdism and globalization).

## **The fate of other divine religions in the Appearance era**

According to some Quranic verses, Judaism and Christianity will exist until the Day of Judgment;<sup>1</sup> so it can be said that the followers of other religions, especially the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), will continue to live after Imam Mahdi's advent. On the other hand, some other verses of the Quran clearly reiterate the final victory of Islam over all other religions, signifying the demise of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>2</sup> In justifying these two seemingly contradicting verses, different views have been presented; overall, it can be concluded that soon after the establishment of government by Imam Mahdi, the followers of other religions will gradually convert to Islam voluntarily under the guidance of the Imam and his companions, and especially by the re-appearance of Prophet Jesus, who will follow the Imam and pray behind him in the great congregational prayer in the *Quds Mosque* (in Palestine). Following the big miraculous events (including the re-appearance of Prophet Jesus) that will occur on the threshold of the appearance of Imam Mahdi and during his government, the religion of Islam

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1. *The Quran*, 5:14

2. *The Quran*, 9:33



will gradually absorb the minds and hearts of followers of other religions. Before the Imam's advent, all people, being tired of suffering and frustrated due to oppression, wars, bloodshed, and many troubles, expecting a righteous, just, and powerful Saviour, will be ready to accept the Imam. Then with the initiation of Imam's advent, people all around the world, with different languages and races, will hear his call and the announcement of his coming and realize that an important but different event is taking place. In such a situation, when Jesus Christ descends (reappears) and stands to pray behind Imam Mahdi, all Christians and a large number of Jews will convert to Islam. Finally, with the establishment of Imam Mahdi's government, while the strict opponents and the leaders of disbelief and oppression have been killed, the Imam will gradually remove the doubts of the followers of other religions through different divine means such as prospering and perfection of the human intellect, use of heritage and signs of the Prophets and the Infallible Imams, as well as the effective preaching and propagation, and the implementation of justice around the world. As a result, all the remaining surviving people will, ultimately, embrace Islam and become Muslims willingly.

### **Partial resurrection (Raj 'at)**

As one of the specific beliefs of Shi 'a, the phenomenon of “Raj 'at” (meaning the resurrection and return of some dead persons temporarily to this world) will occur during Imam Mahdi’s advent. Although there is much debate regarding the issue of *Raj 'at* among different sects and scholars, according to some authentic Hadiths, after the appearance of Imam Mahdi, two groups of the dead (some of the true believers and some of the absolute unbelievers) will be resurrected and return to this world in the same bodies they used to live before. The philosophy beyond the occurrence of this magnificent and strange event, which is different from the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment, is that the believers be happy for the establishment of a divine global government and attaining the divine grace of accompanying the Imam; on the other hand, the disbelievers will feel meanness and humiliation and receive some worldly punishments for their evil deeds. It can be deduced from the content of diverse related Hadiths that the Raj 'at will begin concurrent to the coming of Imam Mahdi and will continue during the time of Appearance. Like some other strange events of that time, this occurrence will be a miraculous event; the

opening of the graves and the coming out of the dead while their heads and faces are covered with dust and soil and they try to remove them from their face are strange things that people have not seen before.

### **The possibility of occurrence of Raj 'at**

There is no doubt that Raj 'at (meaning the resurrection of some dead in this world and before the Doomsday) is intrinsically possible both in this world and in the Hereafter since the Almighty God emphasizes in the Quran in more than nineteen verses that He is capable of doing anything<sup>1</sup> and He has promised His servants that He will resurrect all the dead on the Day of Judgment.<sup>2</sup> So the temporary resurrection of a small group of the dead in this world is not impossible or a hard job, especially the fact that the Quran mentions several examples of Raj 'at that occurred in previous nations like the resurrection of seventy people from the companions of Prophet Moses,<sup>3</sup> the resurrection of a dead man among the Children of Israel (the Israelites),<sup>4</sup> the resurrection of thousands of the people lived in a city in Shām region (the present-

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1. For instance: *The Quran*, 3:189

2. *The Quran*, 22:7

3. *The Quran*, 2: 55&56

4. *The Quran*, 2:72&73

day Syria),<sup>1</sup> the resurrection of Ezra the Prophet after a hundred years,<sup>2</sup> and the dead resurrected again by Prophet Jesus, with the permission of Almighty God.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, it can be said that since many people had been resurrected with the same body after death and had lived on in this world again by the will of God, repetition of such an event will not be impossible in the future, too. In addition, Shi'a believes that the happening of some examples of Raj'at in previous nations are good evidence of the possibility of its occurrence in the future and even the certainty of its occurrence such that Prophet Muhammad has time and again warned his Ummah that they will face almost all events happened in the past nations, especially those event happened among the Children of Israel:

Prophet Muhammad said: *“All that occurred among the Children of Israel will exactly happen in my Ummah (nation), too.”*<sup>4</sup>

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1. *The Quran*, 2:243

2. *The Quran*, 2:259

3. *The Quran*, 5:110; 3:49

4. *Man lā Yahḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 203

## **Educational effects of believing in Raj 'at**

Just as awaiting the appearance of Imam Mahdi plays a prominent and significant role in the dynamism and vitality of the society, so can the belief in Raj 'at in the age of Advent play an important and influential role in creating religious vitality and hope for being present in Imam Mahdi's universal government as well; otherwise, it is possible for a person to feel disillusioned and disappointed upon seeing that people who have spent their whole lives waiting for the appearance of the Promised Mahdi, but pass away while there is not any sign or realization of such a big event. On the other hand, it will put a tremendous educational effect on the same person if he/she knows for sure that at the time of the Imam's appearance, he/she will be among those who will return to this world again to assist the last Imam. In this case, a real believer and expectant of Imam Mahdi will do his/her best to attain a high level of faith and loyalty in order to be included among the returning believers at the End of the Time.

## **The end of Imam Mahdi's life**

According to the divine custom, there is no doubt that like all other humans, Imam Mahdi will also taste death soon or later and leave this mortal world, but there are some differences of opinion in the Islamic narrations about the length of his rule and the manner of his death.<sup>1</sup> This difference may come from the fact that some narrations only mention the preliminary period required to establish his government, which will not be long; however, some other narratives refer to the entire period of the system and the rule of divine justice after the Advent, which naturally will take a longer time. In any case, according to the Islamic narrations, Imam Mahdi will rule the world for the rest of his life and will close his eye in specific time destined by the will of the Almighty God, but regardless of the duration of his ruling, his global just government will continue to exist even after his demise till the Judgment Day.

Although there is no authentic Hadith on the manner of death of Imam Mahdi, it can be said that despite the possibility that Imam Mahdi will pass away by a natural death, in reference to the narrations mentioning

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1. From 5 to 309 years!

“*martyrdom*” in the way of God as the best kind of death, some scholars are on the belief that Imam Mahdi will, finally, be martyred and leave this world in the best and most virtuous state.

# Chapter 7

## Pathology of Mahdism

To believe in the doctrine of Mahdism has always been one of the most effective factors in the development and growth of the Shi'a community such that it has maintained hope and vitality among those who believe in the advent of Imam Mahdi. However, it should be sadly said that this valuable belief has always faced many misunderstandings and manipulations throughout history so that these misconceptions or abuses have gradually turned into serious harms and plagues for this original doctrine. Nowadays, Islamic societies and even the world community have increasingly turned to the issue of Mahdism, so it is necessary to pay due attention to the items threatening this idea because ignoring deviant beliefs and harms in this area can lead to ideological deviation and prevent reaching the desired outcome. Undoubtedly, the gardener who plants seeds but ignores damages and pests should not expect a good harvest. Therefore, the purpose of a pathological assessment of the subject of Mahdism is to identify the deviations



and biases that have gradually entered this noble belief as well as drawing its true image and wiping away the false modifications made in this religious teaching. The following are some examples of how Mahdism has been harmed over time, either intentionally or unintentionally:

### **Common misconception of Intizār (Awaiting the advent of Imam Mahdi)**

Misunderstanding of the concept of “Awaiting” has caused some people to think that since Imam Mahdi will appear only after the full expansion of injustice and oppression all over the world and in the direction of reforming human society, so this task will be upon him and people do not have any duty to counter the corruption and anomalies. It is even may be said that in order to hasten the time of advent of Imam Mahdi, you should promote oppression and immorality in the society.

It is worth noting that although Islamic narrations provide a glad tidings of the fulfillment of the promised universal justice government by Imam Mahdi after the abundance of oppression and tyranny all over the world, it is clear that this does not mean being indifferent to oppression or persuading people to all kinds of corruption

and injustice, because some may mistakenly understand that the Promised Mahdi's uprising will happen only by spreading oppression, discrimination, suffocation, and destruction. According to this deviant belief, the best help to speed up the advent of the Promised Mahdi and the best form of Awaiting would be the promotion and spread of immorality and corruption or being indifferent in dealing with these anomalies! In fact, this type of understanding of the subject of "Awaiting", which leads to ignoring Islamic rules and regulations, is an illusion and popular misunderstanding that is not compatible with Islamic and Quranic standards in any way. Obviously, this wrong idea is in conflict with the teachings of the religion of Islam, the Quran, and the Prophet and the Infallible Imams, which consider enjoining good deeds and forbidding evils among the essential duties of every Muslim.<sup>1</sup>

In correcting this misconception, when the divine narrations mention that concurrent with the advent of Imam Mahdi, the Earth will be filled with oppression and injustice, it does not mean that all people will be and should be cruel; rather, it refers to the dominant authority of arrogant and oppressive powers, the prevalence of corruption, and

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1. *The Quran*, 3:104&110; 31:17

the existence of many causes of misguidance in all societies. Moreover, as it has been clarified in some Islamic narrations, although many people will be drowning in humiliation and deception during the Occultation time, a remarkable number of people will remain believing (though harshly) in the true Islamic teachings and practicing them and stand firmly on the *Right Path*. On the other hand, it seems that the willingness and readiness to accept the rule of Imam Mahdi not only does not conflict with the spread of oppression and tyranny but also the authority of oppression can also pave the way for this willingness in the general public, because people experiencing all kinds of governments have been disappointed by all of them, will naturally tend to supernatural powers and spiritual aspects from the bottom of their hearts. Although this inner desire has existed in the essence of humans in all eras, the hardships and injustices of the End of the Time era will provide the ground for the emergence and intensification of this natural need and desire.

Besides the mentioned misconception about the *Awaiting*, some people may draw conclusions from the Islamic narrations that any uprising and action to remove oppression and reform the society before the uprising of Imam

Mahdi is condemned and rejected by Islam. Contrary to this claim, it must be said that the implementation of many Islamic laws like the enforcement of divine rules, retribution, fighting enemies (Jihād), and the all-out campaign against corruption is only possible through the formation of an Islamic just government. On this basis, any attempt to establish an Islamic system is desirable and acceptable. What is understood from some narrations on banning any sort of uprising in the pre-Appearance era is, indeed, the prohibition of participating in and assisting in false uprisings and the establishment of unjust governments that have no divine motivation or the movements founded without taking the necessary conditions and contexts into account in the name of the Promised Mahdi's uprising.

### **False claimants and deviant sects in Mahdism**

Divine religions and religious teachings have never been safe from the danger of deviation and distortion throughout the history. Thus, even the “Principle of Monotheism”, as the most central doctrine of the Abrahamic religions, has been subject to distortion by the false claimants and their polytheistic beliefs such that, some individuals have occasionally claimed the position of Prophethood

and misled many people. In the same way, the doctrine of Imamate, especially Mahdism has also been abused many times due to a variety of religious, political, and social reasons. The multitude of Hadiths narrated from Prophet Muhammad about Imam Mahdi and the great popularity and attractiveness of this subject among all Muslims have led some opponents or opportunists to penetrate into this field from the very beginning of Islam and misuse this pure Islamic belief for their personal interests and evil intentions; this process has continued in historical ups and downs until the present time. Therefore, during the long period of Major Occultation, some individuals have falsely claimed to have a special relationship with Imam Mahdi or have been given the position of a special representative by the Imam. Even some of these liars have, sometimes, gone further to claim to be the very Promised Mahdi; based on this false claim, they have founded deviant schools and sects and provided the basis for many religious deviations. When examining these false claims and sects, it becomes crystal clear that many of them were created with the support of colonialism and arrogant powers to divide Muslims, creating differences and ideological deviations among them, and thereby, making

them despair of the bright future under the just leadership of Promised Mahdi. However, adopting these claims and sects, while showing the deep belief of the Muslim masses in the doctrine of Mahdism, is in any case considered a kind of deviation.

If one examines the historical course of these false claims, he/she will find that deviant sects centered on Mahdism were active as early as the first century of Hijrah<sup>1</sup> and even years before the birth of Imam Mahdi such that various deviant sects used to be established after the martyrdom of each Shi'ite Imam; although, in this case, not a particular person usually claimed to be the Promised Mahdi, in some cases, there were a few political opponents, in order to maintain their position, who used to claim that Imam or the person in question had not died, rather he has disappeared and will reappear at another time. To mention some of them, *Kisanites*, *Zaidites*, *Ismailites*, and *Waqifites* fall under this category. Interestingly, while the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers were staunch opponents of the *Alawites* (i.e. Twelver Shi'as), rather than opposing the belief and thought of the coming of Promised Mahdi to abuse this genuine belief, attempted to interpret and

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1. AH. Calendar

exploit it for the benefit of their own political intentions to the extent that some of them were called by the name “al-Mahdi”.

One cannot deny that false claims related to Mahdism are not limited and exclusive to the claimants of being the Promised Mahdi; the claims of being the agents, deputies, and mediators between the hidden Imam and his community are also included in this category. The same deviant trend existed during the Minor Occultation period, and the false claim of Imam Mahdi’s deputyship of was prevalent in this period; however, the conspiracy of these liars was neutralized and ineffective due to the presence and enlightenment of the four “Special Deputies” of the Imam. This trend of deviation, which was not limited to the Shi’a communities, continued during the period of the Major Occultation such that it extended to North Africa and India, too. Ibn Tumart, Mahdi Sudani, Mahdi Somali, and Ghulam Ahmad Qāḍiani are some of the most famous false claimants of Mahdism. Ali Mohammad Shīrazi, known as “Bāb”, can be considered one of the most famous false claimants of Mahdism in recent centuries. The extent of his deviation expanded to the establishment of the false sect of “Bahāism”.

Overall, regarding the reasons and motives behind the emergence of these deviations, it can be said that there have been many false claims of Mahdism in the history of Islam and a huge number of Muslims have been attracted to such false claimants mainly because of the attraction, originality, and universality of this Islamic belief among the Muslims, both Shi'a and Sunni. Therefore, the false claimants have never needed to justify and explain the principle of Mahdism to others, but all their efforts have been to introduce themselves as the Promised Mahdi to the believers.

The fact is that such deviations and abuses in Mahdism have not happened all of a sudden; rather they have roots in various personal, social, political, economic, cultural, and ideological contexts, resulting in the provision of suitable conditions for convincing the public. The aggravation of this situation can also be attributed to other factors like political and sectarian conflicts, a deep sense of personal and social despair, disregard for the true scholars, the role of colonialism in recent times, etc.



### **Fixing a certain time for the Appearance (Tawqīt)**

Another harm that threatens the culture of Mahdism is the determination of a fix time for the appearance of Imam Mahdi. According to authentic narrations, the exact time of the Imam's appearance has been hidden from the public due to a divine wisdom and the will of the Almighty God such that setting a time for the Appearance has been forbidden in the words of the Prophet and the Infallible Imams, and those who set the time called (*al-Waqqātūn*) are considered liars, so it is a duty for everyone to refute them.

As mentioned in the discourse of the uncertain signs of Imam Mahdi's Advent, many signs have been mentioned for his appearance in Islamic narrations; however, since their exact characteristics and qualities are not clear, personal interpretations and speculations have been made about the date of Imam's appearance. Thus, occasionally, some careless or opportunistic people may match some current events with some of the signs mentioned in Islamic narrations and claim that the Imam's advent is near or specify a time range for his appearance. It is clear that such claims can lead to disappointment after the promised time has passed. The real expectants of the Imam's

appearance should protect themselves from deceitful or ignorant people and only await the Almighty God's will in this regard.

### **Depicting a violent character for Imam Mahdi**

In contrast to those who assume that Imam Mahdi will unleash a flood of blood with his sword and kill a lot of people, the Imam, like his noble ancestor Prophet Muhammad, embodies God's compassion and mercy. He will, at first, address all people by calling them to Islam and the Quran with clear statements and unambiguous reasons, and the majority of people will accept this call and join him. Finally, the Imam will stand up and fight against the stubborn opponents and enemies, who consciously reject the truth and those who understand the language of sword only.<sup>1</sup>

### **Incorrect conformance to the signs of the Appearance**

There are many Hadiths in Islamic Hadith sources that mention the indefinite signs of the appearance of Imam Mahdi, which most of them are uncertain signs and their exact quality and characteristics are not clear. So, from

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1. *The Quran*, 2: 193

time to time, some people, as a matter of curiosity, seek to reconcile current events with some signs of the Imam's advent and thereby consider the occurrence of that event as one of the signs of the imminence of his appearance. This misconception is also a serious harm that has always threatened the doctrine of Mahdism, which can result in despair and discouragement for some common populace. For example, if it is claimed that the Sufyāni mentioned in the Hadiths refers to a real person who now lives in a certain region, or if some baseless analyses and alleged comparisons are made about Dajjāl as a current specific person or system, or if it is said with certainty that a specific war or natural phenomena are the signs mentioned in the Hadiths about the signs of the appearance of Imam Mahdi, and following these wrong conformances, is given to everyone the good news of the appearance of the Imam in a very near time, which in turn leads to a false expectation, while after years the promised Mahdi may not appear. In this case, some may get caught in deviations and doubts and waver in their belief in Mahdism.

### **Rushing for Imam Mahdi's appearance**

Another serious harm in Mahdism is to rush for the

Imam's appearance. "Rush" here means expecting the Imam to appear before the proper time arrives and preconditions are met. Hasty people often lose their composure, calm, and peace because of their frailty and weakness, and want to achieve their desires immediately and by any means possible regardless of the circumstances.

In the culture of Mahdism and in dealing with the issue of Awaiting, a real expectant continuously strives for the appearance of the Imam and with all his/her heart and passion and beseeches the Almighty God to hasten the Imam's appearance; however, he/she never rushes for the fulfillment of his/her own wishes, and the longer the disappearance of the Imam, he/she never loses his/her patience; rather, despite the great enthusiasm for the Imam's appearance, he/she is completely obedient and submissive to the command and will of God. In the meantime, he/she strives to provide and achieve all the necessary conditions for the Imam's appearance. It is worth mentioning that the origin of the rush for the advent of Imam Mahdi is that the person does not care about the fact that the appearance of the Promised Mahdi, like all divine affairs, is related to the "custom of God" i.e. *cause and effect*. It will be realized only if all the

required conditions and contexts are met, so the rush for the appearance of the Imam will be fruitless before the fulfillment of its conditions and setting the groundwork. If the Islamic narrations warn the believers to avoid rushing for the Imam's appearance, it is because usually after the rush, a sense of hopelessness and despair may emerge in them, and facing the difficulties of the Occultation era, they may lose their calmness, patience, and belief; it is more probable that their wrong hurry may turn into complaining and restlessness about the delay in the Appearance. Such people usually spread this negative mentality to others, which sometimes may even lead to the state of denying the existence of the Imam over time.

# Chapter 8

## Short answers to a few questions and doubts

### **The longevity of Imam Mahdi**

After passing almost twelve centuries, Imam Mahdi is currently alive and lives among people by the will and power of God the Omnipotence. This long life is because he is the last proof of the Almighty God and divine reserve for realization of the Prophets' goals; therefore, he must remain alive until his global uprising and establishment of the rule of divine justice throughout the world. This fact has been clearly mentioned in many authentic Hadiths.

Now a question may arise: "How can someone live for such a long time?" The origin of this question is the fact that what is common in today's world is the limited life of people that usually does not reach around a hundred years; therefore, the general public cannot believe that a human being may live for hundreds of years, whereas this is not considered an impossible issue from scientific and natural perspectives, and scientists have experimentally found that humans can live for many years. The efforts of scientists to discover the secret of longevity and overcome

aging are clear proofs of such a possibility. It has been mentioned in some Prophetic and divine books that there were people who lived much longer than usual.<sup>1</sup> For instance, according to the Quran, Prophet Noah preached and guided his nation for 950 years,<sup>2</sup> and according to some narrations, he was more than 2000 years old at the time of his death.

Additionally, this is very easy and simple to accomplish considering the endless power of the Omnipotent God. All Abrahamic religions including Judaism, Christianity and Islam, teach that God the Exalted the Glorified controls all atoms of the world and that all causes depend on His will; i.e. if He does not want it, all causes will immediately cease to be effective, and He is capable of doing whatever He wills. He is the same God who made the burning fire cool and safe for Prophet Abraham,<sup>3</sup> parted the sea for Prophet Moses and his followers,<sup>4</sup> and so on. So will He not be able to grant a long life to the Promised Saviour of mankind to fulfill the great promise mentioned in the Quran that is the ultimate triumph of the Truth over

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1. *Genesis*, 5:5-32

2. *The Quran*, 29:14

3. *The Quran*, 21:69

4. *The Quran*, 26:63

the Falsity and the utopian establishment of the rule of the oppressed and the pious faithful people.

### **The possibility of meeting Imam Mahdi during the time of Major Occultation**

As mentioned earlier, Shi 'as were in contact with Imam Mahdi indirectly through four special deputies during the Minor Occultation period. Also in addition, a few Shi 'as had the rare opportunity of being in his presence during that time; however, during the Major Occultation period, such a direct relationship with the Imam is not possible normally and even through special people. Hence, Imam Mahdi, in his last letter to the fourth special deputy (Ali bin Muhammad al-Samurī), called those claiming to have seen and met the Imam after the beginning of Major Occultation as liars:

*“... And such a period will emerge on my Shi 'as when some people will claim that they have seen me or they represent me. Be alert that whoever makes such a claim before the advent of Sufyānī and the Call from the heavens is a liar and an impostor...”<sup>1</sup>*

In this case, “observing” the Imam refers to seeing him

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1. *Bīḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 361, Hadith. 7



and communicating with him, and “claiming” refers to announcing it and making the people aware of it. It is clear that in the above sentences, the liar means the one who claims to be his special representative after the death of his last special deputy and introduces himself as the link between the Imam and the people; otherwise, many Shi'ite scholars believe that meeting the Imam at the era of Major Occultation is not impossible as it has happened many times according to many authentic evidence recorded in the history.

#### **- Types of meeting the Imam**

According to the experiences of people who had the grace to meet Imam Mahdi, visiting him mostly occurs when one is in a state of intense need and hopelessness, though it is also possible to meet him in rare occasions in a normal state, too, especially for highly pious and purified believers. To put it more clearly, sometimes, the visit to the Imam is only aimed to help or guide people being completely hopeless in a difficult situation; e.g. the story of some individuals who got lost in different places like deserts or during the Hajj journey and the Imam or one of his companions saved them from getting lost and wandering around. Even though most of the stories of meet-

ing the Imam have been of the kind mentioned, there are some other cases that the Imam has been met in non-urgent states, too; so those individuals have been granted the chance to visit the Imam at the time of his disappearance because of their high purity and spiritual reputation. It is clear that in such a situation, the pre-condition for visiting Imam Mahdi is the purity of soul and self-improvement, and only those who have a healthy soul and are far away from the sins as well as worldly attachments and carnal desires will be granted such a blessing opportunity.

However, it is important to note that the opportunity of meeting the Imam in the era of Major Occultation does not mean that everyone will be able to gain this chance; rather only a very few pious and righteous people will attain this significant success. Therefore, not every story about visiting the Imam cannot and should be accepted. It is important to mention that the true privileged visitors of the Imam most commonly do not disclose the event to anyone except in very exceptional cases for their close relatives or companions conditioned that they promise not to disclose or disseminate it as long as they are alive.

Another point is that disclosure of the stories of meeting the Imam during the era of Major Occultation by others

has brought about many benefits and blessings through strengthening the people's faith in the hidden Imam, increasing love and compassion for him, and taking recourse to him spiritually. Hence, some Shi'ite scholars have usually quoted or narrated samples of a few authentic stories and even written independent books regarding this issue. It is worth noting that resorting to Imam Mahdi, who is the proof from the side of the Almighty God on the Earth, is in fact an indirect request of help from the All-Wise God, so this request will only be responded to and realized if God wishes and considers it useful and appropriate. Therefore, if a lover does not attain the honor of visiting Imam Mahdi or his/her request is not realized immediately, despite his/her dire passion and effort, he/she should not despair and consider it as a sign of the Imam's lack of grace and care to him/her. Instead, he/she should strive to establish a spiritual connection with this honorable Imam and take advantage of his blessings in the Occultation era; this path is open to all, of course.

Although it is a great honor and pleasure to see the luminous face of Imam Mahdi and speak with him, the Infallible Imams have never advised the Shi'as to concentrate all their efforts and lives only on the subject

of visiting the hidden Imam; they have been highly recommended to constantly remember the Promised Mahdi and pray for the hastening of his appearance, instead. Moreover, they have been advised to try to obtain the Imam's pleasure in their words and deeds and to follow the path of his divine commands and purposes step-by-step so that the conditions for his noble appearance may be eased in the shortest time possible, and thereby, the entire world may benefit from the grace of his appearance. Yes, if the followers and expectants of the Promised Mahdi, instead of excessive focusing on the issue of visiting the Imam, be aware of the reality that the Imam sees and observes all their actions, much of the ground for his appearance will be prepared as the Imam needs pious and well-prepared companions for both his uprising and establishment of the global just government.

### **The issue of the marriage of Imam Mahdi**

Similar to other aspects of Imam Mahdi's personal life, there are differing opinions about the issue of his marriage. According to some scholars, the Imam is married, and the main reason they put forward is that marriage is an Islamic tradition that has been recommended by the Quran and the Prophet of Islam. So, naturally, Imam Mahdi

is more worthy than other Muslims to implement this Islamic tradition. In contrast, some others believe that since the Imam has currently a hidden life in an exceptional situation that limits his communication with people, this can be an obstacle for him to having an ordinary life like other people. So, due to the special circumstances, sometimes, an obligatory (*Wājib*) duty can be taken off a person's shoulders, let alone a recommended (*Mustahabb*) thing. Moreover, this Prophetic tradition of marriage, if performed even once in the life of a Muslim, can be said that this good deed and Islamic tradition has been performed. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that Imam Mahdi will perform this *Sunnah* after his uprising and appearance and establishment the global just government by the help and will of God. On this basis, it can be said that the prayers in which his family is also mentioned probably refer to the post-Appearance time and not to the current time that he is in occultation.

On the other hand, some scholars clearly and decisively deny the marriage of Imam Mahdi and believe that one of the requirements for his marriage is that his wife should also live as long as the Imam's, which there is no evidence for; otherwise, when his first wife dies, he must marry so

many other ladies up until his occultation comes to an end by the will of God and appears at the End of the Time. As a result, he must have too many children and a large generation during all these long years and out of his countless marriages. It inevitably causes the Imam to become known, which is incompatible with the special conditions of Imam Mahdi during the long period of Occultation, because he should take care of his family and children as their father. In better words, the Imam's occultation is more important than his marriage, so he can abandon the *Mustahabb* issue of marriage during his hidden life and postpone the practice of this Muhammadan tradition (*Sunnah*) until after his appearance for the sake of higher expediency. Of course, it can be said that perhaps the Imam was married during either the Minor Occultation or the Major Occultation and his wife passed away after living with him for several years. In this case, the Imam has followed the custom of the Prophet and it has caused no problem for carrying out his big divine mission under special circumstances in the Major Occultation period. Therefore, the issue of Imam Mahdi's marriage during the Occultation era cannot be denied.

In general, it must be said that due to the special

circumstances of the period of Major Occultation, many aspects of the personal life of Imam Mahdi are obscure and unknown; so, it is not possible to comment on them with much certainty.

### **Imam Mahdi's residing place**

As mentioned earlier, due to the special circumstances of the period of Major Occultation, it is not possible to talk about the details of Imam Mahdi's personal life with certainty. The hidden life of the Imam requires that his residence place also remains completely hidden and unknown, like other aspects of his personal life. So, it is not possible to consider a specific area or location as the exact place of his residence or inhabitation. On the other hand, some claims about the Imam residing in an environment other than this material world or in a distant and unknown island are not substantiated and documented, too; what is certain is that, like other humans, the Imam lives on the earth among the people anonymously. Of course, it is not far-fetched that he may, sometimes, live in holy places like Medina or Mecca, or away from people for a while in the mountains and deserts; nobody knows but God.

### The final word

The belief in the advent of the *Promised Saviour* is an important and common principle among all religions and schools of thought optimistic about the end of the world. The Abrahamic religions (including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) also, having an optimistic view of End of the Time, have promised that a pious perfect man will, eventually, put an end to humans' successive failures and establish a global just government. This does not mean, however, that the teachings regarding Futurism, Saviourism, and Messianism are the same in all religions and schools. Although there are different views or different narrations of this common idea (i.e. Saviourism) even among the believers of a particular religion, one can rarely find a religion or school of thought in which the followers are not awaiting a Promised Saviour. As the name of the Promised Redeemer in Islam and among Muslims is *al-Mahdi*, the belief in the appearance of the Promised Redeemer is interpreted as *Mahdism* in Islamic teachings. Since the Quran and the frequent authentic Hadiths narrated from Prophet Muhammad and his infallible household, the doctrine of Mahdism is one of the basic principles and commonalities among all Islamic sects that promise the



appearance of a divine man from the family of the Prophet, who will eventually bring and spread justice all over the world in the End of the Time by the will God.

Back to the Quran, one can see that some verses directly refer to the concept of salvation and a bright future for mankind in this world at the End of the Time,<sup>1</sup> and the doctrine of Mahdism is a perfect example of this divine promise. There are also other group of Quranic verses, though not explicitly refer to the doctrine of human salvation and the appearance of the promised saviour, which can be, according to many authentic Hadiths, interpreted or construed to implying Mahdism or the Promised Mahdi.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that many verses in the Quran give glad tidings about promises that have not been fully fulfilled throughout the world yet, and since Muslims believe that these divine promises are inviolable, the expectation of their fulfillment in the near or far future is justified and reasonable. Furthermore, based on many frequently narrated Hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad and the Infallible Shi'a Imams regarding the physical

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1. *The Quran*, 21:105; 24:55; 28:5

2. *The Quran*, 2:3; 11:6

characteristics of the Promised Mahdi, his occultation, the events before or on the threshold of his appearance, the signs of his appearance, the significant benefits and blessings of his global just government, etc., it is impossible to shed doubt on the authenticity of Mahdism among all Islamic sects.

In the meantime, it can be said that the brightest Islamic view on the issue of Mahdism has emerged among Twelver Shi'as such that Shi'ism is clearly distinguishable from other Islamic sects in this regard. According to Shi'ite teachings, the twelfth Imam is the very Promised Mahdi, who is alive now but is in Occultation. It is important to mention that this occultation never means the non-existence or non-presence of the Imam; rather it refers to his non-appearance and having a hidden life. Despite his concealment from the public's view, the Imam is always aware of the people's deeds and oversees all their affairs throughout the world by the will of God. Moreover, he has always been a cordial source of guidance to Shi'as and a helper of those seeking spiritual and esoteric guidance from him; he guides them to high spiritual authorities. The Promised Mahdi will, eventually, appear at a time when no one but the Almighty God is aware of it

only, and by revealing and presenting the bare truth of Islam and forming a righteous universal government, he will lead the world to everlasting happiness, prosperity, and perfection.

One of the other unique features of the Twelver Shi'a regarding the issue of Mahdism, which is not found in any doctrine of Saviourism of different religions and schools of thought throughout the world, is that the Promised Redeemer must be "an Imam appointed by God". In fact, this infallible leader is the proof and agent of God. In other words, God's proof is the one who, while being a creature, has divine conditions and attributes. For this reason, the Imam can be called the "*God's representative among people*". Also the title "al-Mahdi" is used as the most famous epithet for the Promised Saviour among the many titles and attributes of the Islamic Saviour, which is an evidence of the importance of "guidance" in the list of his goals and functions. Accordingly, it can be said that the most essential function of the Promised Mahdi is his cognitive and guiding function. The result of this sort of Saviouristic belief in Mahdism will be not only the establishment of justice and prosperity, or the enforcement of religious rules throughout the world, but

*“Full Manifestation of the Truth on the Earth”*; something that no Prophet, Imam, or social reformer has succeeded to fully realize it ever.

*Eagerly waiting for that blessed day to come soon!*

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