



عبدالمعز
عليه السلام

A Brief Biography of
IMAM MUHAMMAD BIN HASSAN AL MAHDI (AS)

by M.M. Dungersi Ph.D

**A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF
IMAM MUHAMMAD
BIN HASAN (A.S.)**

**BY:
MOHAMED RAZA DUNGERSI, Ph.D.**

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CONTENTS

Preface . . . 1

Introduction . . . 4

Chapter 1: Imam Muhammad Ibn Hasan (a.s.) Al-Mahdi: His Birth
and Childhood . . . 6

Chapter 2: Imam Mahdi (a.s.): The Short and Long Occultations
("Ghaiba Al-Sughra" And "Ghaiba Al-Kubra") . . . 18

Chapter 3: Philosophy of Occultation . . . 30

Chapter 4: Where is The Abode of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) . . . 39

Chapter 5: Duties and Responsibilities of the Followers of Imam
Mahdi (a.s.) During the Time of Ghaiba . . . 41

Chapter 6: Re-Appearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) . . . 47

Chapter 7: Rajat (Return) . . . 55

Chapter 8: Miracles of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) . . . 59

Chapter 9: Imam Mahdi (a.s.): His Sayings . . . 62

Questions . . . 65

PREFACE

This is how it all started.

I received a letter from the then Chief Missionary of Bilal Muslim Mission, Tanzania, Allama Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, requesting me to write course work for the International Correspondence Course on Islamic History that the Mission had embarked upon. To be more specific, my task was to write 13 different units, in the form of booklets, encompassing short, biographic accounts of the lives of Hadhrat Fatima (s.a.) and the 12 Infallible Imams. The catch was: These booklets were to be simple digests, meant for recent converts and young people of the Muslim communities, seeking knowledge about the Infallible Imams. Allama Rizvi specifically stated that these booklets were not meant for scholars but common readers and should therefore avoid scholastic trappings.

For me, it meant a unique honor and recognition. That Allama Rizvi, one of the most outstanding authorities and scholars in the Shia world, should consider me capable of undertaking this venture, was something I had never imagined in my wildest dreams! Now that this opportunity was there, I accepted this challenge for two reasons. First, this would give me a rare opportunity of working under the close supervision of Allama Rizvi, whose guidance would open up for me numerous venues of insights into vital areas of Islamic History. Second, I would engage in a work that could be a cause for me to earn 'SAWAB-E-JARI' once I am gone from this world to the hereafter.

I accepted the commission. The immediate result was the first unit in the form of a booklet: *IMAM ALI (A.S.)* in 1992. This booklet came out after it had gone through a thorough scrutiny and appraisal by Allama Rizvi himself. By Grace of Allah, it was well received by the community. I was greatly encouraged by another renowned scholar, Malim Ali Mohamed Jafar of Bilal Muslim Mission,

Kenya. He commended me for coming out with such a simple but intensively informative work, suitable for those who needed to acquire basic knowledge about Imams from the Family of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.). Moreover, Malim Ali Mohamed Jafar insisted that I should go ahead and produce similar booklets on the remaining 11 Imams. And I did so, unit by unit, in the course of years to come.

Come to think of it, completion of this project has not been a plain sailing for me. The task involved intensive and extensive amount of research, consuming enormous amount of time and labor. This was so because to write on the lives of these illustrious personalities calls for maximum precaution in the usage of authentic material and appropriate diction. Add to this, the project was on voluntary basis and had to be done at the time when I had a full time job to earn a living. All these factors explain why it took such a long time for me to complete this project; a book at a time stretching from 1992-2010. The last booklet to be produced was on the life of our 11th Imam Hadhrat Hasan Askari (a.s.) and it was published in 2001.

After a lapse of many years, the last booklet on the life of Imam Mahdi (A.S.), may Allah keep him safe and hasten his reappearance, is now in your hands. It is sad that Allama Rizvi is no more with us today to witness the completion of this project. Malim Ali Mohamed Jafar, too, has left this transient world for the hereafter. May Allah reward these two scholars eternal bliss for their efforts to serve His cause.

I would be doing a great injustice if I do not acknowledge the efforts of Al-Haj Fidahusein Hameer, one of the Founding Fathers of the Bilal Muslim Mission, Tanzania. Fidahusein bhai has shown unparallel degree of patience and tolerance in dealing with my lapses pertaining to the completion of this project. None would have tolerated my tardiness for so long and would have long ago given up on me. But not Fidahusein bhai. His constant but

gentle reminders have paid dividends. May Allah reward him and give him long and healthy life to continue serving His cause.

All said and done, I have observed maximum precaution to weed out any errors, factual or otherwise, from this work. However, if there are still errors of any kind, material or cosmetic, I seek Allah's forgiveness.

Mohamed Raza Mohamed Husein Dungersi, Ph.D.

New York, USA

June 6th, 2010

Jamdiul Thani 22nd, 1431

ADDENDUM

Before publication, Haji Fidahusein bhai Hameer passed away on February 6th 2011.

My only consolation is that I managed to hand over the manuscript to him during his life time and he left this world, knowing that his mission was complete. May Allah rest Marhum's soul in the vicinity of our Fourteen Masoomin.

February 1, 2012

1st Rabiul Awwal 1433

New York, USA

IMAM MUHAMMAD BIN HASAN AL-MAHDI (A.S.)

INTRODUCTION

“DO NOT RECKON AS DEAD THOSE WHO ARE SLAIN IN THE WAY OF ALLAH, NO! THEY ARE ALIVE WITH THEIR LORD AND ARE SUSTAINED” (Ch.3, v.169)

All the eleven divinely appointed Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (about whose lives we have already discussed in the foregone 11 booklets) were martyred in service of the cause of Allah. Imam Ali (a.s.) was assassinated in the state of performing morning prayers in the Mosque of Kufa. Imam Husayn's head was severed while in prostration in the battlefield of Kerbala. The remaining nine Imams (a.s.) were all poisoned, thus their physical lives ended through unnatural cause. They were therefore all martyrs. In accordance with the verses of the Quran quoted at the beginning, all these Imams, in a way unknown to us, are alive and receive their sustenance from the bounties of Allah. The Twelfth and last Imam, Hadhrat Muhammad Bin Hasan Askari (a.s.), known as Imam Mahdi, has not yet experienced the physical death. He is the Imam of the time – Al Hujjah (the proof/evidence), Al-Qaim (the Establisher) - currently with the command of Allah, he is in “GHAIBA” (OCCULTATION) and not accessible to the believers though he is aware of the welfare of each follower, through the powers endowed to him by Allah. With the command of Allah, he shall reappear and establish the realm of Allah on this earth before the coming of QIYAMA (Day of Justice).

For Muslims in general and the Shia's in particular, it is essential that they all acquire the basic information about Hadhrat Mahdi, may Allah protect him during the period of occultation, and may He hasten his reappearance. This is because the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said that “He, who dies and does not have knowledge of the Imam of his time, dies the death of the ignorant (JAHIL).”

Scholars interpret ‘ignorance’ to mean lack of knowledge about the roots and fundamentals of Islam. In other words, the meaning of the hadith is he who dies without having the basic information about the divinely appointed Imam of his time, dies the death of a non-Muslim.

In a nutshell, the information about the Imam of our time, Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.), can be categorized into two divisions; the primary information and the secondary information. The primary information includes knowledge about the personality, the existence, and the functions and the final reappearance of the Imam (a.s.). In light of these, we need to understand about our duties and responsibilities towards the Imam when he is in occultation. On the other hand, the secondary information encompasses such subjects as to Imam’s current abode, his whereabouts, the signs that will appear before his appearance etc. This information is important to know, but is not as vital as the information under the primary category.

In this unit, focus will be both on the primary and secondary knowledge about the Twelfth Imam, Hadhrat Mahdi, may Allah protect him during his occultation and may He hasten his reappearance. Emphasis will also be on the role of “marjah” (those in the period of ghaiba of the Imam (a.s.)).

CHAPTER 1

IMAM MUHAMMAD IBN HASAN (A.S.)

AL-MAHDI: HIS BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “MAHDISM”, or the coming of the savior in the last days of the existence of life on this earth as we know it, is not a later day innovation concocted by the Shias when they were driven to a point of deadly desperation in face of oppression from their enemies. For the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) had told the Muslims in his circle on several occasions about the coming of the Mahdi. Renowned Sunni and Shia Scholars have invariably confirmed this in their reputable sources. For example, Shaykhul Islam, Shaykh Sulaiman bin Ibrahim Al-Qunduzi Al-Hanafi writes in his book *YANABI UL MAWADDAH* that the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) while discussing with a Jew by the name of Naasaal, declared Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) as his successor, who would, in turn, be succeeded by his son Hasan (a.s.) and then Husayn (a.s.). The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) then told the Jew that the line of succession would be continued through nine Imams, all being the direct descendants of Imam Husayn (a.s.). The Jew wanted to know the names of these nine descendants. The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) then named them thus: “AFTER HUSAYN WILL BE HIS SON ALI IBN HUSAYN, AFTER HIM HIS SON MUHAMMAD IBN ALI, AFTER HIM JAFAR IBN MUHAMMAD, THEN MUSA IBN JAFAR, THEN ALI IBN MUSA, THEN MUHAMMAD IBN ALI, THEN ALI IBN MUHAMMAD, THEN HASAN IBN ALI, AND AFTER HIM, HIS SON MUHAMMAD IBN HASAN AL-MAHDI.”

Again, Shaykh Sulaiman states in the same book, that a companion of the Prophet, Jabir Ibn Samara, heard the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) say: “Islam will last as long as my twelve successors remain, and they will all be from the Qureish.” Bukhari, Muslim and Tirmidh report similar traditions of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.).

However, some of the Sunni scholars, though do not deny these traditions, argue that the twelve Imams mentioned by the Prophet are the first four caliphs and the eight rulers from the Umayyad rulers. This argument is baseless because of the following reasons:

1. The Umayyad 'Imams' include Muawiya, Yazid and the Marwani Caliphs, who were all oppressors, tyrants, and anti-Islam. They cannot be considered even Muslims, let alone successors of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.).
2. The Abbasid Caliphs were equally notorious, if not more; they too cannot be regarded as the successors of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.).
3. For one moment and for the sake of argument, let us accept the twelve successors mentioned by Sunnis; the last of the twelfth would be Omar Ibn Abdul Aziz (according to Mulla Ali Kari in *Sharhe Mishkat*) or Walid Ibn Yazid (according to Ibn Hajar in *Sharhe Bukhari*). There is no chain of continuity. The question that arises is after the death of the last so called successor, who would be the Imam of the time? Who would be the "hujjah" of Allah on earth without whom the entire universe will cease to exist?

Only the followers of Madhhab of Jafary, the Shia Ithna-Ashery, believe in twelve Imams, the last one being Imam Mahdi (a.s.), who is still alive. Each one of these Imams was a paragon of piety and purity, accepted as such by friends and foes alike. Therefore, only in the Madhhab followed by the Shias is the chain of continuity of the twelve Imams undisturbed.

There are other Sunnis, who believe in the concept of Mahdism, but argue that the said Mahdi is not yet born. Our concern is that the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said that without a 'hujjah' of Allah, the universe cannot survive even for an iota of a second. As such, if the Mahdi is not born, then who is the 'hujjah' of Allah on the universe? It is opportune at this point to look into the background

in which the present Imam of the time was born. It is relevant to note here that there are some eminent Sunni scholars who not only admit the birth of Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.), but also agree that he was the son of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Such scholars include: Ubaidullah Amritsari (*SAWANAH UMRY HADHRAT ALI*), Ibn Khaldun (*TARIKH IBN KHALDUN*), and Abdul Rehman Jami (*SAWAI DUNNU BUWAH*).

BIRTH OF IMAM MAHDI (A.S.)

The Umayyad and later on the Abbasid caliphs, knew all very well about the Prophet's hadith, vis-à-vis the coming of Al-Mahdi, who would be the twelfth divinely appointed Imam from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) through his daughter Fatima (s.a.). Evidently, when the eleventh Imam (a.s.) had been identified as being alive, the efforts to prevent the birth or to end the existence of the twelfth Imam was intensified. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), the eleventh Imam (a.s.), was kept in isolation, away from his family and under a total surveillance. When Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) uncovered the trick of a Christian monk, and he himself through prescribed prayers, averted the drought in Samarra, the caliph Mo'tamid let him stay with his family for a while. It was then that Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) was conceived.

Shaykh Saduq report that Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) once called his follower, Bashir Ibn Sulaiman, and assigned him a task to go to the slave market in Baghdad and purchase a particular slave. The Imam (a.s.) gave full description of the slave: AMONGST THE SIGNS WERE THAT SHE WOULD BE IN COMPLETE HIJAB AND SHE WOULD BE PROTESTING TO BE SOLD TO ALL BIDDERS. Bashir was to give her the letter that the Imam had given to him. On reading the letter, she would press the slave owner to accept the bid from Bashir. This bid was of 120 Dinars; he would get the slave and then bring her to the Imam (a.s.).

Bashir reports that he went to Baghdad and witnessed the scene

exactly as foretold by Imam Naqi (a.s.). He presented the letter to the slave, who, on reading the letter, kissed it with respect and got herself to be in possession of Bashir. Later on, Bashir learnt from her that she was from the royal family of the Roman Emperor. She was supposed to be married to her cousin but ‘accidents’ after ‘accidents’ occurred before the marriage could be solemnized. By the advice from the astronauts, her marriage had to be shelved for the time being.

In the meanwhile, she had a dream in which her marriage with Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was officiated by Prophet Isa (as she was the descendant of Simon, Prophet Isa’s disciple) and Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.), in her dream. Hadhrat Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, converted her into Islam. Then onwards, she would have several visitations, in her dreams, from Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Once, the Imam advised her to disguise herself as an ordinary maid and join the forces of the Christians that were marching to fight the Muslims. In the skirmish, she would be taken as a slave by the Muslims and end up in Baghdad. The Imam (a.s.) would then ‘acquire’ her and she would join his company.

She did as she was advised and this is how she ended up being with Bashir. Bashir then brought her to Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.), who married her to Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

Imam’s mother is known by such names as NARGIS, SAUSAN, RAYHANA and MALIKA.

Imam Ali Naqi’s sister, Hakima, was given the responsibility of training her about Islam, and she proved a very willing and able learner.

It was during her short stay with Imam Hasan Askari (A.S.) that she conceived the pregnancy, leading to the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.); her pregnancy remained unnoticed, as was the case with the

mother of Prophet Musa (a.s.). This pregnancy was kept a complete secret even from the close family members, including Hakima. Hakima came to know of Nargis's pregnancy only on the eve of the birth of the child.

Hakima, the sister of the Imam Naqi (a.s.), reports that she used to visit her nephew, Imam Askari (a.s.) regularly, and return to her home in the evening. On the eve of 14th Shaban 255 AH, when she wanted to return home, Imam Askari (a.s.) requested her to stay behind, as a child was expected to be born. Hakima was taken by surprise "WHO IS THE MOTHER OF THE CHILD?" she inquired. "NARGIS" the Imam (a.s.) replied. "BUT SHE HAS NO SIGNS OF PREGNANCY!" said Hakima. "THE CASE OF NARGIS IS LIKE THAT OF PROPHET MUSA'S MOTHER. TO PROTECT HIS HUJJAH, ALLAH KEPT PROPHET MUSA'S MOTHER'S PREGNANCY A SECRET. BY THE SAME TOKEN, NARGIS IS CARRYING IN HER WOMB ALLAH'S HUJJAH WITHOUT SHOWING ANY SIGNS, FOR HIS PROTECTION."

Hakima reports that she stayed behind. After midnight she woke up to perform the recommended prayers (SALATUL LAYL). She woke up Nargis also who still showed no signs of pregnancy. Nargis prayed and went to rest. Soon after that, she began to have labor pains. The Imam (a.s.) recommended her to read the verses of the Quran – Sura Inna Anzalnah. Hakima says she could hear the same recitation from the womb of Nargis! It was then that there was a flash of light that covered the room and Hakima could not vision what was happening. When she regained her vision, Hakima witnessed that a child was already born.

As was the case with all the preceding eleven divinely appointed Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) too was born free from impurities. He was also born duly circumcised. On his right arm was the seal of Imamatus reading "TRUTH HAS COME, FALSEHOOD HAS BEEN BANISHED.

INDEED, FALSEHOOD IS DESTINED TO BE BANISHED.”
(Ch.17, v.81)

As narrated by Hakima, when Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was born, he went into prostration, recited the Kalima and read out the names of the eleven Imams who had come before him. When he came to his own name, addressing his Creator, Allah, the Exalted, he said, “OH MY CREATOR! FULFILL YOUR PROMISE REGARDING MY PROTECTION, MY LEADERSHIP (IMAM) AND MY ADMINISTRATION (KHILAFAT). SEEK MY REVENGE FROM MY ENEMIES. GIVE ME OVERT AUTHORITY AND THROUGH ME FILL THE UNIVERSE WITH JUSTICE.” This was on Friday, 15th Shaban 255 AH (868 AD).

The child was then brought to his father. When in the arms of his father, the child saluted his father, repeated the Kalima and the names of the twelve Imams. He then recited these verses of the Quran “WE WISH TO BESTOW OUR FAVORS ON THOSE WHO WERE DEEMED WEAK ON THIS EARTH, AND TO MAKE THEM THE IMAMS AND TO MAKE THEM THE HEIRS.”(Ch.28, v.5)
The child was then taken in the arms of his joyous mother.

After a while, some white birds appeared and took away the child. Naturally, the mother burst into tears. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) consoled her, telling her that this was a divine arrangement to protect the child from his enemies. He, however, promised her that the child would be back and would feed on none other’s milk but hers.

Hakima confirms that after a few days when she visited Imam Askari’s house, she found the child there, only he had grown up very fast. Again, the Imam explained to her that this was a special child and by divine command and grace, his growth process had been fast. She continues to say that when she saw the child a short while before the martyrdom of Imam Askari (a.s.), he had blossomed

into a handsome young man. His father then told her that he, the father, would soon depart from this world, and that the young man, his son, would be the Imam of the time. Hakima concludes that since then she regularly visited him and obtained clarifications on matters that she needed to learn about.

THE BIRTH OF THE IMAM KEPT SECRET

For reasons cited earlier, the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was kept secret except to a few family members and followers. A couple of examples are given here to show how the news of the birth of the Imam was kept secret, but at the same time disclosed to a few trusted people so that later on, there should be no confusion about his birth.

1. Hakima, the daughter of Imam Taqi (a.s.), was called upon to be present at the time of the child's birth and be a later day eyewitness.
2. On the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.), Imam Askari (a.s.) ordered his "Wakil", Othman Ibn Sayid, to distribute 10,000 ratl (1 ratl \approx 406.25 gms) of bread and 10,000 ratl of meat for the '*aqiqah*' of the newly born. The beneficiaries were thus implicitly informed about the birth of a child in the house of Imam Askari (a.s.). As a result, some of the followers responded by paying him a visit to congratulate on this auspicious birth occasion. Hasan Ibn Husayn says he paid the Imam (a.s.) a visit to express his joys on the birth of the child. Another similar visitor was Abdulla Ibn Abbas Alawi.
3. Daw Bin Ali quotes a Persian servant of Imam Askari (a.s.) to have witnessed a child born in the house of Imam (a.s.).
4. Muhammad Ibn Bilal Ibn Muhammad claims that Imam Askari (a.s.) had informed him of his successor.
5. Abu Hashim Al-Jafari, a close follower of Imam Askari (a.s.)

once asked the Imam (a.s.), “O, MASTER, DO YOU HAVE A SON?” The Imam (a.s.) replied “YES!” Abu Hashim continued, “IF SOMETHING WERE TO HAPPEN TO YOU, WHERE WOULD WE FIND HIM?” The Imam replied “IN MEDINA.”

6. Ahmad Ibn Ishaq, a close follower of Imam Askari, reports that he heard the Imam (a.s.) say: “ALL PRAISE IS DUE TO ALLAH WHO DID NOT TAKE ME OUT OF THIS WORLD UNTIL HE SHOWED ME MY SUCCESSOR; MOSTLY RESEMBLING THE PROPHET OF ALLAH IN FEATURES, IN CHARACTER.” As a matter of fact, according to some reports, Imam Askari (a.s.) wrote a letter to Ahmad Ibn Ishaq, stating: “A MALE CHILD HAS GIVEN BIRTH IN MY HOUSEHOLD. HOWEVER, THIS NEEDS TO BE KEPT A COMPLETE SECRET EXCEPT TO THOSE WHO ARE MY CLOSE FRIENDS AND FOLLOWERES.”
7. Muawiya Ibn Hakim, Muhammad Ibn Ayyub and Muhammad Ibn Othman state that Imam Askari (a.s.) called in his house 40 of his followers and showed them the newly born male child, Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.).

Too many such instances have been recorded to be mentioned all here. It suffices to note that where as the birth of Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) was generally kept a secret, yet at the same time some close friends and followers were given an opportunity to see the child so that they could later on spread the news to the community at large.

Whereas the few followers and friends knew about the existence of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) but his whereabouts was kept a secret even to them. For the time that he was with his parents, Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) remained concealed with his mother in the basement – the “Sardab”. An attendant was present to bring him to his father as and when required. According to Jassim Hussain, Imam Askari (a.s.) moved his son outside Samarra. He further quotes Al-Masudi

as his source and states that Imam Askari (a.s.) sent his son accompanied by his Grandmother, Hadhrat Hadisa, to Medina to live there. Imam Mahdi (a.s.) came back to Samarra just before the martyrdom of his father and attended to all the requirements that one infallible Imam has to do at the passing away of the previous infallible Imam. Hadhrat Mahdi's existence became very clear when he asked his uncle, Jafar, to give place to him to lead his father's funeral prayers. This led the caliph to intensify his search to locate the child and kill him. But his efforts were all in vain.

IMAM MAHDI'S MOTHER

It was mentioned earlier that according to Shaykh Saduq, she was the granddaughter of the Roman Emperor and she came to Samarra as a slave and was ultimately acquired, set free and married to Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Jassim Hussain, in his book, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (1982 ed., Pg 68-69), doubts about her nationality as a Christian from the Royal family. He considers her as an ordinary "slave girl brought up in the house of Hakima, the sister of the tenth Imam." Jassim Hussain gives three reasons for his stand:

FIRST REASON: He says: "There was no major battle between the Abbasids and the Byzantines after 242/856 and there is no indication in the sources that the Emperor of Byzantium appealed to the Abbasids to liberate his granddaughter."

WEAKNESSES OF THIS REASON:

Syed Ameer Ali, in his *A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SARACENS*, discussing on the political confusion of the caliphate of Mu'taz says, "The Byzantines took advantage of the troubles that beset the caliphate and made several inroads into Moslem territory. At first they carried everything before them... (later on) defeated in a series of battles."

To discount the coming of Nargis to Iraq on the basis that there was no major battle, therefore, does not stand the test of history.

Moreover, the mere fact that there is no record of the Emperor claiming for a member of his family does not rule out her presence in the house of Imam (a.s.).

SECOND REASON: The second reason that Jassim Hussain advances rests on the fact that the major sources that report about Nargis's nationality are based on the narration of Shaybani who was 'an extremist' and therefore unreliable.

WEAKNESS OF THIS REASON:

Abu Muhammad al-Fadl Ibn Shadhan in his *MUKHTASARU ITHBATI'R - RAJAH* under hadith number 9, names Muhammad Ibn Abu Jabbar saying that he inquired from Imam Askari (a.s.) as to who would succeed him. The Imam (a.s.) replied: "VERILY, THE HUJJAH AFTER ME IS MY SON... WHO IS THE LAST HUJJAT AND KHALIFA OF ALLAH."

Muhammad further inquired "FROM WHOM WILL HE BE BORN?" The Imam (a.s.) replied "FROM THE DAUGHTER OF CEASER, THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR..."

Why is Abu Muhammad al-Fadl Ibn Shadhan a reliable source?

- He was living at the same time as Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and was in constant touch with him. He wouldn't report about the mother of the twelfth Imam the way he does unless he was sure about it.
- Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) had a very high opinion about him. Once Fadl sent his book to the Imam (a.s.) for his verification. The Imam (a.s.) commended Fadl in these words: "ALLAH'S MERCY BE UPON AL-FADL. I ENVY THE PEOPLE OF KHURASAN BECAUSE OF AL-FADL IBN SHADHAN..." As a matter of fact, he was a companion of Imam Ridha (a.s.), Imam Jawad (a.s.), Imam Hadi (a.s.) and Imam Askari (a.s.), and quotes hadith from them directly.

The argument that the source reporting Hadhrat Nargis as granddaughter of the Byzantine Emperor is unreliable does not hold any ground.

Moreover, commenting on Muhammad Shaybani as an unreliable source, Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi responds thus: “Muhammad Shaybani is ...MAJHUL, i.e. nothing is known about him (independently) or his credibility. As such we cannot say that he is reliable or that he is unreliable.”

THIRD REASON: Jassim Hussain argues that al-Kulayni, al-Numani and al-Saduq state that Hadhrat Mahdi’s mother was to be “a black slave-girl.”

WEAKNESSES OF THE REASON:

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (*The Light* vol. 27 No 3 June 1993 pg 7-10) responds to this reasoning and points out its faults lucidly. Some extracts of Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi’s reply are reproduced here under:

“I know Mr. Jassim Hussain, he is a good Muslim. But in this matter he has not understood the hadith correctly. Remember that merely being an Englishman does not make one qualified to understand every book on Philosophy, Physics, Chemistry or Higher Mathematics just because they are written in English. The same is the case with Islamic studies including Hadith...”

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi then analyses the Hadith in question and proves that the Nubian lady mentioned in this hadith is the wife of Imam Ridha (a.s.) not Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi argues “...Imam Ridha by narrating that hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) he wanted to show to his Uncle that the Prophet had called the 12th Imam (a.s.) as the son of Nubian girl, and it was not to happen except through me (Imam Ridha) because the 8th Imam did marry the Nubian girl who gave birth to the Great Grandfather of the 12th Imam, and thus he would be the son of that Nubian mother...”

Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi concludes “it was Imam Ali ar-Ridha (a.s.) who was destined to marry a Nubian lady, and not Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.)”

CONCLUSION

To protect him and to let him carry out his functions, the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was kept a secret. However, the knowledge about his existence was conveyed to some reliable individuals in the community so that through them the community could be convinced of the existence of their Imam, at the appropriate time.

As a matter of fact, having taken over from his father, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) remained accessible to his trusted followers for a period of 69 years, before he went into a period of longer occultation, beginning with 329 AH and stretching up to today and will continue till when he reappears.

CHAPTER 2

IMAM MAHDI (A.S.):

THE SHORT AND THE LONG OCCULTATION

(“GHAIBA AL-SUGHRA” AND “GHAIBA AL-KUBRA”)

INTRODUCTION

When Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was martyred in 260 AH, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was about 5 years old. However, he took over as the Imam of the age and continues to do so till the end of the time. Whereas the previous eleven Imams were accessible to the public all the time, so far as they were not restricted by the governments of their times, the twelfth Imam is not so accessible for reasons already discussed. In terms of his accessibility, it is appropriate to view it from two angles:

1. The period of Short Occultation
2. The period of Long Occultation

THE SHORT OCCULTATION: (AL-GHAIBA AL-SUGHRA)

(260 AH - 329 AH / 874 AD - 939 AD)

With the passing away of eleventh Imam (a.s.), the Abbasid caliphs were concerned about the twelfth hujjah. There were two possibilities:

- He was already born.

or

- He was in his mother's womb and about to be born.

The report that Jafar submitted to the Caliph regarding the child who led Imam Askari's burial prayers, convinced Caliph of the first possibility. However, when his efforts to trace the child failed, he took two steps. First, he kept his spy network alert and instructed them to inform him wherever they found out the whereabouts of the young Imam, who would then be seized and put to immediate death. Secondly, the Caliph had a plan to ensure that if the child was not yet born, then on his birth he should be seized and put to death.

During this period, it was important that the whereabouts of the Imam (a.s.) remain a complete secret. However, so that the Imam could remain in touch with the community and serve them thoroughly, he chose his deputy – Uthman Ibn Said, who would head the institution of WIKALA, that had been started earlier by Imam Sadiq (a.s.) and that had grown very strong under the supervision of the other Imams who came after the sixth Imam. This stage of occultation stretched from 260 AH (874 AD) to 329 AH (940 AD), for a period of about 69 years. This period is referred to as the Lesser Occultation (or al-Ghaiba al-Sughra). During this period Imam (a.s.) appointed Four SUFARA (Safir - singular; or ambassador) or NAIBS (representatives) one after another. They were:

1. Uthman Ibn Said al-Umari
2. Muhammad Ibn Uthman Ibn Said al-Umari
3. Husayn Ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti
4. Ali Ibn Muhammad al-Sammari

The following is a brief profile of these four Naibs or representatives of the Imam:

UTHMAN IBN SAID AL-UMARI : THE FIRST SAFIR (260 AH - 280 AH)

When he was only eleven years old, he was employed as a servant in the house of Imam Muhammad Taqi (a.s.). He served the Imam (a.s.) very well; his first assignment was to work as a gatekeeper; he ended up being the ‘right hand’ man of Imam (a.s.). He continued serving Imam Naqi (a.s.), and Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). Imam Naqi (a.s.) presented him to his followers as a man of honor and stated that whatever he did was in the name of Imam (a.s.), done with the knowledge and consent of the Imam (a.s.). Imam Hasan Askari also introduced him with the same laudation.

At the death of Imam Askari (a.s.), Imam Mahdi (a.s.) appointed him as his representative. He became the main link between Imam Mahdi (a.s.) and the Shia community, taking their questions and

dues to the Imam (a.s.) and bringing back to them replies to their questions and instructions regarding their day to day activities.

This trend of communication continued for about 20 years when in 280 AH Uthman Ibn Said passed away.

When Uthman Ibn Said passed away, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) wrote a letter of consolation to the former's son, in which the Imam (a.s.) also appointed the son to be his next 'Safir'. The gist of the letter was: "FROM ALLAH DO WE COME, AND TO HIM IS THE RETURN. WE ARE PLEASED WITH THE WILL OF ALLAH. AS FOR YOUR FATHER, HE LED A LIFE OF SUCCESS AND ACQUIRED HIS DEATH WITH HONOR. MAY ALLAH HAVE MERCY ON HIM, AND GIVE HIM SPACE IN THE PROXIMITY OF HIS BELOVED ONES. YOUR FATHER ALWAYS ENDEAVORED TO DO THAT WHICH WOULD EARN HIM NEARNESS TO ALLAH AND HIS CHOSEN REPRESENTATIVES. MAY ALLAH KEEP HIM SAFE AND LET HIM ENJOY EVERLASTING BLISS."

ABU JAFAR MUHAMMAD IBN UTHMAN (280 AH – 305 AH)

He had always helped his father in carrying out his heavy and dangerous duties, as the representative of Imam Mahdi (a.s.). After his father's death, he served as Imam's Chief Representative for over twenty years. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) had high regards for him, too, and had instructed followers to regard his words as those of the Imam himself. Imam Mahdi (a.s.) too, considered him as very reliable, and wanted his followers to regard his words as those of the Imam (a.s.) himself.

To be able to move about linking the followers with their Imam, he disguised himself as a butter-seller and by so doing averted the close spy network of the government.

He died in 305 AH. He foretold the day and time of his death and

prepared his own gravestone. He was buried in his own house in Baghdad.

ABUL QASIM HUSAYN IBN RUH (305 AH – 326 AH)

He was the third Safir. He was born in Qum – Iran and came to Iraq as a young man. He then joined the services of the second Safir and became one of the most useful assistants to the Safir. When the second Safir was about to die, he named Husayn Bin Ruh as the next Safir; he had made this appointment acting on the instructions from Imam Mahdi (a.s.) himself. He further stated: “HUSAYN IBN RUH IS LOYAL, TRUSTWORTHY AND RELIABLE. IN YOUR AFFAIRS TURN TO HIM AND TRUST HIM. IT WAS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO TRANSMIT THIS MESSAGE TO YOU AND I HAVE DONE SO.”

Husayn Bin Ruh was a capable administrator and served the course of Allah very well. Both his friends and foes alike came to respect him and confirm about his honesty and integrity.

He died in the year 326 AH.

ABUL HASAN ALI IBN MUHAMMAD AL- SAMMARI (326 AH – 329 AH)

When Husayn Ibn Ruh was about to die, he named Ali Ibn Muhammad al-Samari as the next Safir. Again, Husayn made it clear that this choice was not his but that of the Imam (a.s.) himself. He was an active assistant of Husayn Bin Ruh and came from a prominent Shia family. His term of office was rather short.

A week before his death, he received written instructions from Imam Mahdi (a.s.), the gist of which was: “MAY ALLAH REWARD YOUR BROTHERS ON YOUR DEATH, FOR YOU SHALL DIE AFTER SIX DAYS. SO PREPARE YOURSELF BUT APPOINT NO ONE TO TAKE YOUR PLACE AFTER YOUR DEATH. FOR THE SECOND OCCULTATION HAS NOW BEGUN...”

When his assistants asked him as to whom should they turn to on his death, he said “THIS MATTER RESTS WITH ALLAH AND HE SHALL TAKE CARE OF IT.” These were his last words. He passed away on the 15th day of Shaban 329 AH.

With the death of the fourth Safir, came the end of the period of Short Occultation and the beginning of the Long Occultation.

FUNCTIONS OF THE FOUR SUFARA

Their main function was to undertake certain tasks that were previously done by the Imams. This was to relieve the twelfth Imam (a.s.) from the persecution that the previous Imams had to go through from the hands of their enemies.

To accomplish the above function, the SUFARA had to give the impression to the enemies that the twelfth Imam did not exist so as to keep them away from committing mischief and endangering the life of the Imam (a.s.), and enabling him to keep alive the true message of Islam. On the other hand, they had the duty to convince the followers and friends about the existence of the Imam (a.s.) without revealing his whereabouts.

They also had the job of protecting the Shias from splitting into different groups, not having direct access to their living Imam. They did so by reminding the Shias of the traditions of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and the previous eleven Imams, who had told them of the situation when their twelfth Imam, Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.), would be in occultation, and advised them accordingly how to conduct their religious affairs during such a critical time.

The SUFARA also collected the dues (Khums etc.) on behalf of the Imam (a.s.) and disbursed them in accordance with the wishes and instructions of the Imam (a.s.).

The SUFARA were therefore a strong link between Imam Mahdi

(a.s.) and his followers. Through their unimpeachable character, laced and lined with honesty, reliability and integrity, did the SUFARA convince the followers of the Imam (a.s.) that, indeed, they did represent the Imam (a.s.) and were in direct contact with him.

THE LONG OCCULTATION (AL-GHAIBA AL-KUBRA)

After a period of 69 to 70 years marked by the representation by the four SUFARA, came the period of Long Occultation. There would be no more direct appointments made by the Imam (a.s.). Does it mean therefore that the followers of the Madhhab of Ahlul-Bayt were left on their own, without a guide? No. During the 70 years of the Short Occultation, the SUFARA had successfully trained the Shia community to prepare themselves for the Long Occultation. They had exposed them to all those traditions from the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and the eleven Imams, who had laid down rules and regulations that their followers were to adopt on the advent of the Long Occultation. According to these traditions, the obligation would now be on the jurists of the community to act as guides.

WHO IS A JURIST (“FAQIH”)

The following ‘ahadith’ (traditions) will enable us to recognize who a jurist is.

TRADITION 1:

Umar Ibn Hanzala asked Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) to describe a jurist. The Imam (a.s.) said: “ONE WHO NARRATES OUR TRADITIONS, WHO IS VERSED IN WHAT IS PERMISSIBLE AND WHAT IS FORBIDDEN, WHO IS WELL ACQUAINTED WITH OUR LAWS AND ORDINANCES.” Imam (a.s.) then advised Ibn Hanzala to consider such a jurist or jurists as the judges of the community, and to abide by their judgment. For rejecting the verdict of such a jurist, the Imam said, is same as rejecting the Imam of the time and rejecting Imam of the time is equal to rejecting Allah. And he who rejects Allah is no longer a Muslim.

TRADITION 2:

According to Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), a jurist who has the following qualities should be followed:

He should:

- Have control over himself,
- Protect his religion,
- Suppresses his carnal desires, and
- Be obedient to the commands of his master.

TRADITION 3:

Ishaq Ibn Yakub had sent a question to the twelfth Imam (a.s.) through the second SAFIR, inquiring about leadership during the times of Long Occultation, the Imam (a.s.) responded thus:

“AS FOR THE EVENTS TO OCCUR, TURN TO THE NARRATORS OF OUR TRADITIONS, BECAUSE THEY ARE MY PROOF TO YOU WHILE I AM THE PROOF OF ALLAH TO THEM.”

Where as the three traditions tell us about who a jurist is, the fourth tradition that we shall now consider, defines the role of these jurists, as the representative of the Imam (a.s.).

TRADITION 4:

Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) is reported to have said: “AFTER THE OCCULTATION OF YOUR QAIM, A GROUP OF ULAMA WILL CALL PEOPLE TO BELIEVE IN AL-QAIM’S IMAMAT AND TO DEFEND HIS RELIGION... AS THE PILOT HOLDS THE RUDDER OF THE SHIP, THE ULAMA WILL HOLD FIRMLY ONTO THE HEARTS OF THE WEAK-MINDED SHIAS, PREVENTING THEM FROM STRAYING. THE ULAMA ARE THE MOST EXCELLENT IN THE VIEW OF ALLAH, THE EXALTED.”

Not only had the Imams left behind solid and clear instructions as to how their followers were to appoint their leaders in faith, but they also demonstrated this practice during their life time.

EXAMPLES OF HOW THE PROPHET (S.A.W.W.) AND THE IMAMS (A.S.) LEFT BEHIND PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATIONS TO BE USED BY THE FOLLOWERS WHEN THE LONG OCCULTATION OCCURS

The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) sent Musab Ibn Umayr and Saad Ibn Maaz to Mecca and Medina respectively as his representatives to guide the Muslims there.

When Imam Ali (a.s.) was in power, he instructed his Governor of Mecca, Qasim Ibn Abbas, to be present in the morning and in the evening in the mosque and talk on religious edicts.

Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) trained his trusted students like Mohammad Ibn Muslim, and Abu Basir Asadi so that members of the community could be referred to them for religious guidance. He also encouraged Aban Ibn Taghlab to give rulings on matters of Jurisprudence.

Imam Ridha (a.s.) is known to have referred some of his followers, who needed religious guidance, to his representatives such as Zakaria Ibn Adam and Yunus Ibn Abdul Rehman.

Because of these efforts by the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and the Imams (a.s.), when the Long Occultation finally dawned upon the community, it was ready to accept it without any serious trauma.

THE FUQAHA (JURISTS) AS THE REPRESENTATIVES OF IMAM MAHDI (A.S.) DURING THE LONG OCCULTATION

The Fuqaha extended their activities and assumed the position of leadership so as to prevent the Shia community from falling apart due to absence of an effective guide. One of the most prominent Faqihs who became accepted as the guide of the community during the beginning of the Long Occultation was Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Muhmmad Ibn Noaman, popularly known as Shaykh Mufid. He was a great scholar and wrote extensively on various issues of religion. He was also a great teacher.

Amongst his distinctions are: The Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is known to have written to him on three different occasions; when he died, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) wrote verses lamenting his death and the loss that it brought about.

In the earlier stages of the Long Occultation, the Jurists considered themselves as mere narrators of ahadith. But because of the prolongation of this occultation, they took the role of MUJTAHIDEEN. Whereas the SUFARA acted as mere 'messengers' to take the issues of religion to the Imam (a.s.) and bring back replies to the inquirers, this became impossible during the Long Occultation; it became incumbent upon the jurists themselves to answer such questions. The process of IJTIHAD had begun. It can be safely assumed that the Shaykh Mufid was the first Faqih to practice Ijtihad, and to give legal judgments (FATAWA).

It took no time for the Shia community to adjust itself to be guided by the Faqih, one after another. This trend continues till today.

THE CONCEPT OF IJTIHAD AND MARJAEAT

When the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) was alive, he guided the Muslim community and helped them solve their problems in understanding and observing the Divine Laws. After the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), this duty of guiding the masses was shouldered by the divinely appointed Imams. During the Short Occultation, the Muslim community got its guidance from the SUFARA, appointed by the Imam (a.s.) and guided by him. With the coming of the Long Occultation, the role of guidance has been taken over by the Faqih, who are popularly known as MUJTAHIDEEN (Singular: MUJTAHID)

WHO IS A MUJTAHID

A Mujtahid is he who is an expert in Islamic Jurisprudence (fiqh); he is also called a Faqih. Through the process of IJTIHAD, he can give rulings (fatawa) based on the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.).

IJTIHAD literally means struggling. In other words, a jurist who has the necessary qualifications and who struggles to find legal solutions on issues of religion is a Mujtahid.

In context of Islamic law, IJTIHAD is tied up with knowledge of religious sciences, and related subjects like Arabic language, grammar, syntax, logic, exegesis, hadith, usool, fiqh etc. etc.

The common man who is not a Mujtahid himself does the ‘TAQLID’ of a Mujtahid. Those who depend on the Taqlid of a Mujtahid are the Muqallids.

It must be remembered, however, that Taqlid applies only to the matter of ‘Furu’ of Islam not ‘Usul’.

In his *TAUDHIHUL MASAEL*, Ayatullah al-Uzama, Sayyid Ali Husseini Sistani comments on this issue in these words: “IT IS NECESSARY FOR A MUSLIM TO BELIEVE IN THE FUNDATMENTALS OF FAITH WITH HIS OWN INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING, AND HE CANNOT FOLLOW ANYONE IN THIS RESPECT...”

REMEMBER: TAQLID IS ONLY ON “MATTERS OF RELIGIOUS LAWS”.

QUALIFICATIONS OF A MUJTAHID

In the words of Ayatullah Sistani, a Mujtahid must be:

- Male
- Shia Ithna-Ashery
- Adult
- Sane
- Of legitimate birth
- Living
- Just (Adil)

He then adds a further requirement: “The Mujtahid who is followed must be Alam, (the most learned) who is more capable

of understanding the divine laws than any of the contemporary Mujtahids.”

The concept of Alam is not new. It was there since the beginning of the Long Occultation. Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin Al-Hakim mentions in his *MUSTAMSAK* Volume 1, that Sayyid Murtagha Alamal Huda (355 AH – 438 AH) states in his *AZ ZAREEH* that the concept of Taqlid of an Alam Mujtahid has been accepted unanimously by the Shia community.

It is possible (and as a matter of fact, it is so currently) to have more than one Alam. One has a choice of being a Muqalid of any one such Alam. How does a layman make such a choice? There are three ways by which an ordinary believer can find out who is an Alam to be followed:

1. By his own personal knowledge, if he is himself a religious scholar.
2. By the testimony of two “Adil”, knowledgeable persons who name an Alam.
3. When a number of learned persons who are competent to identify an Alam – AHLUL KHIBRA – provide a testimony.

CONCLUSION

The Muslim community received direct guidance in their affairs from the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and then by the Imams (a.s.) up to the time of the eleventh Imam, Hadhrat Hasan Askari (a.s.). However, all along, these divinely guides informed their followers of the times to come when followers would not have direct access to their Imam. The Imams then laid out strategies to be adopted by the followers, who would come to live in these times when their Imam would be living in occultation.

Because of this training, when finally the occultation dawned upon them, the followers of the Madhhab of Ahlul-Bayt were not left in the lurch. The jurists, in the personality like Shaykh Al-Mufid, took over the reins of leadership and began functioning in the way the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and the divinely appointed Imams (a.s.) had

wished them to do. It should be noted that although the Mujtahid is a very pious person and represents the Imam, he is not masoom (infallible). He derives at the rulings after long and careful research. If it happens that a particular ruling is not in agreement with the command of Allah, the Mujtahid will not be punished on the Day of Judgment. Also the Muqallid will not be responsible for this honest human error.

In current times, the two most renowned Mujtahid e Taqlid are: Ayatullah Sayyid Ali al-Husaini Sistani (residing in Najaf, Iraq) and Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Husseini Khamenei (residing in Tehran, Iran).¹ May Allah keep these Marajas and all others, in His protection and may He hasten the re-appearance of Hazrat Hujjat Ibnul Hasan (a.s.).

It would be wrong to think that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) himself is totally uninvolved. Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (*Your Questions Answered Volume 1*. Q. 45) explains the role of Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) in these words: “OUR PRESENT IMAM STILL GUIDES THE SCHOLARS BUT ONLY WHEN THE MATTER OR THE QUESTION IS SUCH WHICH WAS NOT CLEARED PREVIOUSLY. IF A PREVIOUS IMAM OR ALIM HAS ALREADY THROWN LIGHT ON THAT QUESTION, THE PRESENT IMAM REMAINS SILENT. BUT IF THE QUESTION IS A NEW ONE AND THE ALIM IS UNABLE TO SOLVE IT BY HIMSELF, IMAM INVARIABLY ALWAYS GUIDES THE ULAMA IN THAT RESPECT. I COULD HAVE GIVEN YOU MANY EXAMPLES WHICH I AM PERSONALLY AWARE, BUT I AM NOT AT LIBERTY TO NARRATE THEM.”

¹ Webmaster's Note: Other Renowned Mujtahids are Ayatullah Shaykh Bashir Hussain al-Najafi, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Saeed al-Hakeem and Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayadh (all residing in Najaf, Iraq. These three, together with Ayatullah Sistani, are known as The Big Four; These four are contemporary leading Grand Ayatullahs of Shias based in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq); Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarresi (residing in Kerbala, Iraq), Ayatullah al-Shaykh Wahid Khurasani (residing in Qum, Iran) and Ayatullah Sayyid Sadiq Hussaini Shirazi (residing in Qum, Iran).

CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHY OF OCCULTATION

INTRODUCTION

Allah, the most Praiseworthy, the most Elevated, has never left His creatures without a guide. All in all, he sent 124,000 Guides as his Messengers to different communities at different times. The last Messenger was Hadhrat Muhammad Mustafa, may peace be upon him and his pure progeny. After the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), came the Imams from his progeny, each of whom, despite obstructions put on them by their enemies, was a clear guide and beacon of light for the community. This arrangement continued to function till the martyrdom of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) in 260 AH, when the dawn of GHAIBA or Occultation became to cast its shadow on the lives of the believers.

This must have come as a great challenge to the Shia community; the realization that they would now have to learn to live without having a direct access to the Imam of their times. They must have looked back nostalgically at those times when their parents and grandparents had the privilege of communicating directly with their divinely appointed Imams. However, they had the consolation that the Imam (a.s.) himself had appointed his “deputy” who in turn could link the believer with their Imam. Also these were the times when Imam (a.s.) would directly communicate with his followers through letters, the medium of exchange being the deputies – the SUFARA.

It is difficult even by the wildest stretch of imagination to perceive the dilemma of the believers when this arrangement of communication through the “deputies” also came to an end with the beginning of the Long Occultation – GHAIBA AL-KUBRA. From then on, there would be no more direct appointment of deputies by the Imam (a.s.) himself. The “elders” of the community would have this responsibility of choosing a Faqih to guide them. Such a “faqih”

in the persons like Shaykh Mufid, had to come out to explain the wisdom and philosophy behind such an arrangement.

In this Chapter, we shall briefly consider some of the challenging issues that cross the minds of the believers regarding the question of the occultation of our twelfth Imam, Hadhrat Hujjat Ibnul Hasan, may Allah keep him safe and hasten his re-appearance.

MAJOR ISSUES PERTAINING TO THE LONG OCCULTATION

A believer, who is familiar with Islamic history and has read about those “golden days” when his ancestors used to have “free” access to divinely appointed Imams, asks questions that can be categorized as under:

- Why are we denied access to our Imam?
- Does it make any sense that the divinely appointed Imam should remain in occultation, when he is supposed to serve the ‘Ummah’ of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.)?
- The present Imam, Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) was born in 255 AH. Today we are in 1431 AH. That makes the life of the Imam about 1176 years. Moreover, he will live until the day of Qiyama. Is it possible that a human being should live that long?

WHY ARE WE DENIED ACCESS TO OUR IMAM (A.S.)

First and foremost, let one point be clear and that is the physical absence of the Imam (a.s.) does not necessarily mean he is inaccessible. As a matter of fact, in his letter to Shaykh Mufid, our twelfth Imam (a.s.) states that he is aware about us all, though we may not be conscious about that. He assures us of his latent guidance and help, and categorically states that we would all have perished at the hands of our enemies if it had not been for his aid and assistance. Believe it or not, each action, good and bad, by a follower is reported to him through divine agents. He is happy to

note the good deeds of a follower and is made to grieve over the bad deeds of a follower.

In addition, when a believer is in need, he can call upon for the Imam's help. With Allah's permission, the Imam (a.s.) either helps unseen or he helps directly and visibly. Many instances have been reported when the Imam (a.s.) has appeared in person to help believers. Lack of space prevents us narrating such instances which would otherwise overwhelm the scope of this booklet. Various ways and means of calling the Imam (a.s.) have been described in the books of "DUAS" and "AMALS" to which an interested reader may revert. For us, we shall focus on the various possible reasons as to why Allah chose this arrangement for us.

REASONS BEHIND OCCULTATION

The phenomenon of occultation of the Twelfth Imam (a.s.) is a divine arrangement; that Allah chose this method of continuing His guidance may not be fully understood by us, the humans. For in His infinite wisdom, He could have designed any other arrangement but that He decided to have this particular arrangement in place, is His secret, known best to Him and His Divinely appointed Imams. To understand this phenomenon, we need to seek the help of the Prophet and Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.).

Shaykh Saduq in his *KAMALUDDIN* and Shaykh Kulaini in his *AL-KAFI* quote the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) to have said: "THE IMAMS ARE MY SUCCESSORS AND THEY ARE 12 IN NUMBER AND THE FOREMOST AMONG THEM IS ALI WHILE THE LAST IS MAHDI ABUL QASIM MUHAMMAD BIN HASAN AL-ASKARI. HE IS MY 12TH SUCCESSOR AND DEPUTY. HE IS THE 12TH AUTHORITY OF ALLAH UNTO THE PEOPLE. HIS OCCULTATION WILL BE LONG AND WILL BE A TEST AND TRIAL UNTO PEOPLE OF THAT AGE."

According to this hadith, through the process of occultation, the

believer's faith is put to test. Those who will prove their worth will be rewarded by their Creator abundantly, according to the following hadith from Imam Ali (a.s.):

“KNOW THAT WHOEVER AMONG THE SHIAS IS FIRM IN FAITH, NEVER DEVIATES FROM THE PATH OF ISLAM, NOR GOES ASTRAY DEVIATING INTO ERROR AND HIS HEART REMAINS THE SAME DURING THE ABSENCE OF THE IMAM, HE WILL BE CLOSE TO ME AND ATTAIN TO A GRADE EQUAL TO MINE ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION.”
(*ALAM AL-WARA* by Shaykh Tabrasi)

Indeed, all the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) had alerted their believers of these periods of trial and tribulation, and had indicated their concern for those who would be living in such a period of occultation. However, they had promised that true believers would go through this period of trial successfully and would therefore be rewarded abundantly for having such a strong faith. We should therefore regard ourselves as lucky to have been given this rare opportunity of proving our loyalty to the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and his last representative on this earth, and then to be compensated accordingly. This is confirmed by a hadith of Imam Musa Kadhim (a.s.) quoted in *ASBAT UL HUDA* by Shaykh Hur Aamili; commenting on the status of the Shias living in the times of greater occultation, the Imam (a.s.) said: “WHAT DO YOU SAY OF THOSE SHIAS WHO WILL REMAIN ATTACHED TO US DURING THE PERIOD OF OCCULTATION? THEY WILL REMAIN FIRM ON OUR FRIENDSHIP AND ABHOR OUR ENEMIES. THEY ARE FROM US AS WE ARE FROM THEM. THEY ARE SATISFIED WITH OUR LEADERSHIP AND WE ARE PLEASED WITH THEM AS OUR FOLLOWERS. HOW LUCKY ARE THEY! BY ALLAH, IN PARADISE THEY WILL BE IN OUR PROXIMITY?”

Allah could have chosen any other means to protect the Imam (a.s.). Why did He choose this particular method? If you think deeply

on this issue, you will see that, as a matter of fact, through the phenomenon of occultation, the Imam (a.s.) and the followers of Imam (a.s.) are protected more than anyone else. A careful study of the period of the first eleven Imams will reveal the fact that oppression against the Imams and their followers was ubiquitous as it was intense and severe. The intensity of the oppression was because the Imam of the time was visible and as such those who associated with him were also easily identifiable and punishable. On the other hand, when the Imam is not visible, his enemies are minimal because in their view he does not exist. Followers of the Imam are not treated as a real threat. Consequently, the dangers to which the followers are exposed are limited. Ironic though it may sound, yet it is true that the message of Allah has gained strength and effectiveness more in the period of the Long Occultation than before. Similarly, the depth and extent of the global oppression against the followers of the Madhhab of Ahlul-Bayt is relatively less severe now than in those days when the Imams were visible and accessible to all and sundry.

The protection then that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) enjoys through the occultation is that, he is free from the persecution and harassment that other Imams were exposed to because they were visible. He continues serving the cause of Allah uninterrupted.

There is also a practical angle to the concept of the Ghaiba of Imam Mahdi (a.s.). In the delivery of His message to the human race, to the large extent, Allah has used ways that are totally in-keeping with the ways of the humans. You will notice therefore that the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and Imams (a.s.) though endowed with superhuman knowledge and powers, yet they lived like ordinary humans and used their miraculous powers only when absolutely necessary and with command from Allah. The passing away of the eleventh Imam (a.s.) marked a change in the divine arrangement of delivering and protecting the divine message. The twelfth Imam was to be the last divinely appointed representative of Allah on the

universe. As such, he was not to go through the natural course of life and death, in contrast to the living. For the Imam (a.s.) to be active and not to display the natural human tendencies such as the aging process would be considered an anomaly, given the fact that all the Prophets (with a couple of exceptions) and the eleven Imams before him had gone through these processes. Besides, if the Imam (a.s.) was to be in complete control, that would be a complete change of the order: meaning the prevalent of the period of “Qiyama Sughra” or “Rajaat”. This period is yet to come when Allah wills it to be so. In the interim period, we have the Long Occultation.

The Long Occultation, therefore, challenges the followers of the Madhhab of Ahlul-Bayt to prove their loyalty to the message of Allah, brought by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.), and kept alive by the divinely appointed Imams (a.s.). In short, it is an opportunity given to the followers, to work within the framework, designed and defined by the divinely appointed representatives of Allah, and to do so in keeping with the general trend of the ways of the universe, occupied by the humans.

CAN A DIVINELY APPOINTED IMAM SERVE THE CAUSE OF ALLAH IN OCCULTATION

Because Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is invisible, it does not make him ineffective in any way. Allah, the Magnificent, the most Elevated, is invisible and shall never be visible. Yet it would be blasphemous to think that He is ineffective. The air that we breathe cannot be seen, yet its presence is always felt. By the same token, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) serves the cause of Allah to the utmost though this may not be obvious to us. Remember: the occultation of the Imam (a.s.) is neither complete nor absolute; neither permanent nor immemorial. There were times when he was totally accessible to his family, close friends and followers. Then, during the Short Occultation, he was accessible through his appointed deputies. Now with some exceptions, he is not accessible. There will come a time during the RAJAAT when he will be totally accessible and in full command of the events of the universe.

Over and above that, during the times of emergency, he does make himself available. Numerous instances have been mentioned when Imam Mahdi (a.s.) came to the rescue of those who needed his help for personal needs, or for the cause of Allah's message.

This fact is substantiated by Imam Mahdi's letter that he sent to Shaykh Mufid; the extracts of the letter are reproduced here under: "WE ARE AWARE OF YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES AND NOTHING OF YOUR AFFAIRS ARE CONCEALED FROM US. WE ARE NOT REGARDLESS OF CONSIDERING YOU NOR ARE WE FORGETFUL OF YOU, BECAUSE IF IT WERE NOT SO, AFFLICTIONS WOULD SHOWER ON YOU AND ENEMIES WOULD ERADICATE YOU. HENCE FEAR ALLAH AND OBEY HIM, GLORY BE TO HIS MAJESTY."

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A PERSON CAN LIVE THAT LONG

It is a fact that Allah has set certain laws that govern the affairs of the universe and these laws have remained unchanged. But does it necessarily mean that Allah is not capable of changing these so called "laws of nature" as and when He pleases? As a matter of fact, these laws are changed time and again under two circumstances:

1. When Allah wants to get a message across that He is omnipotent (KADIR) and can change the laws that He had made, and that He is not bound or limited in any form or nature.
2. When His chosen Messenger is challenged to prove that, indeed, he is the Messenger of Allah; the chosen messenger than is endowed with miraculous powers that overcomes the limitations imposed by the "laws of nature".

The issue of the long life of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is a glaring example of these two circumstances. However, he is not the only example. There are several examples of human beings who were given "unnaturally" long life. First and foremost, there are four

personalities who are older than Imam Mahdi (a.s.) and who are still alive; they are:

1. Hadhrat Khizr.
2. Hadhrat Isa.
3. Hadhrat Ilyas.
4. Hadhrat Idrees.

All Muslims believe that these four personalities are alive and active. As for Nabi Isa, he is waiting for Imam Mahdi (a.s.) to return; he will then join him.

All Muslims also believe that Azazil or Shaitan has been alive since times immemorial and will live till the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).

Over and above these examples, a few more examples are given of those personalities whom Allah favored with long lives. They are:

- Prophet Nuh - 2500 years.
- Prophet Suleiman - 700 years.
- Prophet Hood - 464 years.
- Prophet Adam - 900 years.
- Prophet Sheeth - 900 years.

Some of the infidels and polytheists who got long life:

- Iblees - since time immemorial.
- Anak, daughter of Prophet Adam - 3000 years.
- Shaddad - 900 years.
- Dajjal - over 1400 years.

It follows, therefore, that Imam Mahdi's longevity is neither a new phenomenon nor a marginal one. By will of Allah, he enjoys a long life. And by will of Allah, he is currently invisible and under concealment. He is waiting for that day when Allah will command him to reappear and establish Allah's rule on the universe. That is the day we should all wish to be alive, to welcome Imam Mahdi (a.s.).

CONCLUSION

The Divine decision that there should be only 12 Imams, after Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.), made it necessary for special provisions to be made for the Twelfth Imam (a.s.) to live and function without restrictions. The major characteristics of these “special provisions” are:

1. The Imam (a.s.) is invisible. He is generally not accessible. His whereabouts are not known. He will continue to live under this condition till when Allah commands him to reappear.
2. Imam Mahdi (a.s.) has been freed from the aging process; whenever he has appeared, he has done so as a young man in his early forties. When he shall finally come out of the Long Occultation, he shall be of the age people had seen him during the time of Occultation: a young man in his early forties.
3. He remains invisible and is not generally accessible to his followers. However, through Divine Grace, he is fully informed of the affairs of the world. He is also informed about the well-being of the ‘Ummah’. He helps those in need without them knowing about it. In case of emergency when his follower calls him for help, he responds without delay.
4. Because he is not visible and his whereabouts are not known, he functions without the restrictions under which the previous 11 Imams had to operate.

CHAPTER 4: WHERE IS THE ABODE OF IMAM MAHDI (A.S.)

INTRODUCTION

The whereabouts of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is a secret known to Allah alone. No one can tell, with any certainty, about the Imam's presence at a given time. However, based on the personal experience of certain reliable individuals, who, one time or another, have had the luck of meeting the Imam (a.s.), it is possible to make a few intelligent guesswork about the movements of the Imam (a.s.).

Places where Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is reported to have been seen:

- In MASJID-UL-HARAM at KAABA – MECCA
- In MASJID-SAHLA in Iraq
- At MASJID JAMKARAN in Iran

MASJID-UL-HARAM

It is strongly believed that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) performs Hajj every year and mingles with the believers, unrecognized. Several people have had the chance of meeting the Imam (a.s.) during the season of Hajj.

MASJID-SAHLA

It is recommended that those who intend to be in the presence of the Imam (a.s.) visit this mosque on the eve of Tuesday. There are several reliable people who claim to have seen the Imam (a.s.) in this mosque on Tuesday evening. It is also stated that if one visits this mosque for 40 Tuesday nights continually without a break, he will have the fortune of seeing the Imam (a.s.) in person.

MASJID-JAMKARAN

This mosque is situated about 6 km to the east of the holy city of Qum. This mosque was constructed by the commands of Imam Hujjat himself through a pious believer by the name of Shaykh Hasan Bin Muthil in the year 373 AH. The Imam (a.s.) has also

recommended believers to visit this mosque and offer their prayers, as two rakaat prayers in this mosque is rewarded as if such prayers were offered in the vicinity of the Kaaba, the House of Allah.

Other than that, there are some reports about the secret abode of the Imam called JAZIRA AL-KHAZRA (or the Green Islands) which have been visited by some people by “ACCIDENT”. Details about these islands have been described in several books but are not repeated here owing to the limited scope of this work.

CHAPTER 5: DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF IMAM MAHDI (A.S.) DURING THE TIME OF GHAIBA

Although our Imam (a.s.) is in occultation, he is always there for us. He knows about each one of us and is deeply concerned about our welfare. Had it not been for him and the protection he offers to us with the permission of Allah, we would have perished long time ago. Bearing this in mind, it becomes incumbent upon us to learn of our own obligations towards him. In this Chapter, we shall briefly examine a few of such obligations expected from a true believer of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).

First and foremost, because he is the Imam of the time and the living representative of Allah, we must remember him all the time. The best way to remember him is to make it our habit to recite and ponder upon the supplications focused on him as the divinely appointed Imam from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and representing the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) in the universe. Some of these supplications are to be read and acted upon on daily basis, others, like Dua Nudba, are to be recited on special occasions. For example, it is recommended to recite Dua Nudba on Fridays, on the days of EID UL FITR and EID UL ADHHA and on EID UL GHADEER. Then there are various salutations (ZIYARAT) that are to be recited, again on daily basis as well as on special occasions.

Secondly, as our Imam (a.s.) is so much concerned about our safety, it behooves us, to pray for his safety. Sinful and undeserving though we all are, nonetheless, when we pray for him, it makes a great difference to him, in a sense that he feels happy that his followers have him on their minds.

Thirdly, we have to remember that he is the master, appointed

as such, by Allah, and that his allegiance supersedes all other allegiances that we may be called upon to make in our day to day lives. We must assure him that in the last analysis, he and he alone, is the ruler of our affairs.

To prove that we mean what we say, our next duty is to structure our lives on those deeds that please him, and to stay away from all those actions that displease him. Remember: The Imam (a.s.) is fully informed about our deeds; the good ones give him joy, and the bad ones grieve him.

One of the main concerns of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is to keep the message of Islam alive and to spread it among mankind. Our duty therefore is to carry out this function in the name of Imam Mahdi (a.s.). There are a lot of activities that we can undertake in the promotion of the cause of Allah. Such activities include: building of schools, printing of books and investing in human resources that could be used as a means to propagate the message of Islam.

Again, as a gesture of goodwill toward our living Imam, we have to spend whatever we can in his name. For example, we can give charities in his name.

Last but not least, we have to remember all the time that he is alive and he is our protector, appointed to do so by Allah. We are therefore required to observe patience and to pray to Allah to speed up the Imam's reappearance.

During this period, the followers of the Imam (a.s.) go through a series of trials and tribulations. The Imam (a.s.) states them in that famous dua that is recited in every month of Ramadhan:

‘Dua Iftitah’. This is what the dua states:

O ALLAH, WE COMPLAIN TO YOU:

OF THE ABSENCE OF OUR PROPHET, YOUR

BLESSINGS BE ON HIM AND HIS FAMILY,
AND THE CONCEALMENT OF OUR LEADER,
AND THE ABUNDANCE OF OUR ENEMIES,
THE SCARCITY OF OUR NUMBERS,
THE SEVERITY OF OUR TRIALS,
AND THE VICTORY OF THE TIME AGAINST US.

As a result of the challenges mentioned above, the followers of Imam (a.s.) may face four main problems: disunity among them, doubts regarding the existence of the Imam, despair and loss of faith. The Imams who came before Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) have warned us of these problems. For example, Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) is reported to have said:

“YOU WILL BE TESTED IN THE STEADFASTNESS OF YOUR FAITH. IT MAY SLIP AWAY FROM YOU WITHOUT YOU BEING AWARE, JUST LIKE KOHL WHEN PUT IN EYES MAKE ITS PRESENCE FELT BUT DISAPPEARS WITHOUT BEING CONSCIOUS. SAME WAY SOME WILL HAVE FAITH IN THE MORNING BUT LOSE IT BY NIGHT, NOT KNOWING IT.”

Our sixth Imam, Hadhrat Jafar Sadiq (a.s.), told Abu Basir, one of his companions, that during the Long Occultation, two thirds of the followers of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) will turn away from religion through doubts and despair.

Consequently, those followers of the Imam (a.s.) who will remain firm on their faith will be considered weak. In the words of Imam Ali (a.s.), such followers will be regarded as lowly and unworthy, like an insect. Division among the followers will occur. They will spit on one another and call each other liars. Ultimately, only a few will remain firm on their faith.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES THE FOLLOWERS OF IMAM (A.S.) NEED TO TAKE

First and foremost, we need to remember the Imam (a.s.) all the

time and pray for his safety and quick reappearance from the occultation. Special supplications and prayers for this purpose can be found from books of supplications like *MAFATIH UL JINAN* by Shaykh Abbas Qummi.

Second, we should accept genuinely the fact that not only is Imam Mahdi (a.s.) alive but also capable, by permission from Allah, of helping all those who call for his help. One must, however, have full faith in the limitless powers of Allah and the capabilities of the Imam, and call him with full conviction. Doubtlessly, help will come, so said the Prophet(s.a.w.w.):

“EVEN WHEN A KNIFE IS ON YOUR NECK AND YOU CALL YOUR IMAM OF THE TIME, HE WILL COME TO YOUR HELP”

SOME WAYS TO CALL THE IMAM FOR HELP

- Read with understanding supplications that have been recommended for specially calling Imam (a.s.) for immediate help.
- Send your written petition – AREEZA – to him stating your problems and seeking solutions. Traditionally, this is done on the 15th Night of the month of Shaban, the birth anniversary of Imam Mahdi (a.s.). However, this can be done any time. The said Areeza is forwarded through any one of the Imam’s ‘SUFARA’ (normally through Husayn Ibn Ruh) and is put in a well, or a running stream, or is buried.
- Address the Imam (a.s.) through salutations (Ziyarat) specially recommended for seeking Imam’s help. One such salutation is Ziyarat read on Fridays. Another salutation is called Ziyarat of ALE YASIN.
- There is a prayer of ISTAGHASA, to be performed when one is in need of an immediate help. Method of performing this prayer can be found in *MAFATIH UL JINAN*.

- After helping a man, by the name of Said Hashim Ibn Hasan Musawi Rishti, Imam (a.s.) advised him that should he need Imam's help in future, he should do three things: PERFORM AFTER MIDNIGHT PRAYERS (SALAT UL LAYL), RECITE ZIYARAT OF ASHURA AND RECITE ZIYARAT JAMIA KABIRA.

THE REWARDS FOR THOSE WHO STAY ON THE RIGHT PATH DESPITE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

There are many rewards for those who have complete faith in the presence of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) and who have patiently waited for his reappearance but have passed away. Some of these benefits are:

- The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) informed his companions that the rewards for a good deed by his followers during Last Days would be twenty times more than the same deed done by his companions. This was because of the intensity of the trials and tribulations that the later day followers would have to endure.
- Imam Ali (a.s.) is reported to have said that those who were ready and waiting (for the reappearance of the Imam) would get from Allah the status of martyrs rolling in their blood.
- A tradition from Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) states that a person who dies, waiting for the Imam to come out of occultation, will be rewarded as one who actually joined the Imam at his reappearance.
- There is yet another tradition from Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) saying that those who shall bear patiently the trials and tribulations and keep alive their faith in their Imam will acquire the following benefits:
 - Their sins will be forgiven;
 - Their deeds will be classified as acts of worship;
 - Because of them, Divine Punishment will be averted.

CONCLUSION

Now that we know of the pitfalls that lie ahead of us in the absence of the Imam of our times and also the ways to avoid falling into them, we need to lead a life full of caution. At no time should we let Shaitan to sow seeds of doubts in our minds regarding our Imam. For such doubts breed discontent, despair and ultimately loss of faith. Our focus should be to remain steadfast in acts of worship and lead a life of piety and Allah consciousness, as dictated to us by the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and our infallible Imams, peace be on them all. To keep our minds constantly filled with remembrance of our Imam, let the following extract from the salutation of Friday be our daily mantra:

“I AM YOUR GUEST FOR THIS DAY, SEEKING SHELTER AND CHARITY AS YOU ARE FROM THE FAMILY OF THOSE WHO ARE BENEVOLENT AND GENEROUS IN PROVIDING PROTECTION AND SHELTER.”

CHAPTER 6: RE-APPEARANCE OF IMAM Mahdi (A.S.)

INTRODUCTION

Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is eager to come out of the occultation. It is said that he is ready all the time to reappear but he has to receive the command to do so from Allah. From the various “ahadith” coming from the divinely appointed Imams, we come to know that even Imam Mahdi (a.s.) himself does not know when exactly he will be commanded to come out of the occultation. The following “ahadith” supports this fact:

Abu Hamza Thimali quotes Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) to have said that the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), when asked by Salman Farsi as to when Hadhrat Mahdi’s reappearance will take place, replied: “NO ONE KNOWS IT OTHER THAN ALLAH...”

However, before He reappears, there will be some signs which shall enable the followers to prepare themselves for this great occasion. The various “ahadith” received from the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and the Imams (a.s.), describing the various signs that will appear prior to the end of long occultation, can be grouped into:

- a. General Signs.
- b. Specific Signs.

Remember: These signs are regarded as MUTASHARIHAT: We believe that they will happen but their true meaning and interpretation is known by Allah only.

GENERAL SIGNS

HADITH 1:

The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) is reported to have told his companions that in the last days of the world the following signs will be seen:

- Wealth will be worshipped; people will be honored and respected because of their wealth.

- Faith will be in name only; Islam will be given lip-service only.
- Quran will be recited in special occasions and its dictates will not be followed.
- Mosques will be full with worshippers but their hearts will be full of enmity and jealousy towards each other.
- Most of the religious scholars will be greedy and materialistic.

HADITH 2:

Imam Ali (a.s.) in his sermon in the Mosque of Kufa declared: “I AM THE FATHER OF MAHDI.” When asked when Mahdi will re-appear, he cites instances some of which are:

- Laws of Allah will be concealed; rules of religion will not be disclosed out of fear.
- Virtuous, kind and respectable women will be harassed and oppressed.
- Innovations will be introduced in religion.
- Iraq would have been conquered, terrible oppression would have prevailed, and blood would have been shed.

HADITH 3:

Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) told his companions that in the last days of the world, the following signs will appear:

- Virtuous people will die in great numbers whereas the tyrants and oppressors will prevail.
- The Quran will be interpreted in accordance with ones wishes and whims.
- Infidelity and falsehood will gain strength.
- Forbidden acts and sins will be committed openly and no one will object to that.
- Homosexuality and lesbianism will become common.
- False praises will be found everywhere.
- The youth will have no respect for the old.
- Wealth will be spent in sinful activities to gain fame and no one will come out to put a stop to this.

- The pious and the virtuous will be despised and ignored.
- Drinking will be done publicly and evils of this nature will be admired.
- Calling people to virtue will become difficult, whereas it will be easy to do acts of evil and sins.
- Women will convene and hold meetings.
- The wealthy, though irreligious, will be honored because of their wealth; the virtuous will be despised (because of lack of wealth).
- Interest will be charged; fornication will become praiseworthy.
- People will act in accordance with their wishes and whims though this is contrary to the dictates of the Quran and traditions (of the Prophet).
- Donations will not be given in the way dictated by Allah but in ways to bring fame and popularity.
- Women will dominate men.
- People will not be eager to listen to Quran, traditions or religious discussions but eager to participate in frivolous talks.
- People will have wealth but would not want to fulfill their religiously ordained financial obligations.
- When told of the religious injunctions, people will respond saying, “This does not make sense to me.”
- Disobedience to parents will become common, children will disgrace their parents and make false accusations against them; they will be eagerly waiting for their parents to die and rejoice on the death of their parents.
- A day that has been spent without commission of a sin will be regarded as a day spent wastefully.
- Alms and charity will be made based on people’s recommendations.
- People will become very much materialistic, attracted by this world’s grandeur, comfort and wealth.

The Imam (a.s.) then warned his followers that when such signs appear, people of that time must seek refuge in Allah from His punishment that would be in the form of calamities and sudden death.

SPECIFIC SIGNS

Imam Ali (a.s.) has said that just before Imam Mahdi (a.s.) reappears, nine specific signs will be observed:

1. Dajjal will appear.
2. A loud voice will be heard from the sky.
3. Sufiani will appear and wage a fierce war.
4. Sufiani's army will be swallowed in an opening in the ground between Mecca and Medina
5. A pious Sayyid will be murdered in Mecca.
6. A Sayyid from the progeny of Imam Hasan (a.s.) will rise with an army of his own.
7. An image of a man will appear in the sky opposite the sun.
8. There will be the solar and the moon eclipses in the month of Ramadhan on the 15th and on the last day respectively.
9. On three different occasions, loud voices will be heard from the sky in the month of Ramadhan.

Some of these signs have been explained in details, others are not explained in greater details; their meanings are known only by Allah.

APPEARANCE OF DAJJAL

Dajjal will appear 18 days after the appearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s.). He was born during the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), who is believed to have visited him together with his companions. He is imprisoned but will come out from his imprisonment just to be killed by Imam Mahdi (a.s.). There are conflicting "ahadith" regarding the place from where he will appear. Some traditions say that he will emerge from India; others say that he will come out from Palestine. Others yet say that he will come out in Isphahan (Iran).

Dajjal will have a strong army with him, this will include 70,000 Jews. He will come out when the world would have been hit by a draught for three consecutive years. He will proclaim to be God Himself. He will promise those who join him with food and paradise. On the other hand those who reject him will be threatened with Hell Fire.

Over and above that, he will be able to produce images of heaven and hell. He will also play music. Those who have love for music will be attracted to him.

These will be the most critical moments for believers. They will have to guard themselves against the temptations with which Dajjal will offer them in exchange for their allegiance and faith. Many people with weak faith will fall prey to Dajjal's tricks.

Imam Mahdi will then proceed to end the danger coming from Dajjal. After a heavy battle, Imam (a.s.) will kill Dajjal. The period of Dajjal's appearance and his annihilation will extend for forty days.

APPEARANCE OF SUFIYANI AND HIS DECLARATION

Sufiyani is an ugly and mean person filled with hatred for the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), his progeny and their followers. He will emerge from Palestine in the month of Rajab. He will rule for eight months only but those will be terrible days. He will conquer Syria, Egypt and the North-West African States of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. He will also invade Jordan and annex it to his newly formed Empire. Damascus will be his Capital.

His army would be made of 70,000 non-believers who will terrorize Muslims wherever they go. They will invade Iraq and destroy walls surrounding the Mosque of Kufa. They will then capture Medina and cause havoc in that city. The end of his tyrannical rule will come when he will decide to march toward Mecca to desecrate the House of Allah.

On his way to Mecca, Sufiyani's army will meet divine punishment. The ground they will be marching upon will swallow them all, except two individuals, who would be spared so that they could report to the rest of the world what befell Sufiyani and his army.

Another tradition from the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) describes 10 events that will ultimately lead to the Day of Judgment. These few occurrences are:

1. **THE SMOKE:** Smoke will engulf the world environment. It will cause irritation like common cold. The overall effect will be people will feel as if they are in the house of fire. This will continue for forty days. This will be a warning for people to put their acts together. Some will do so, but the majority will not.
2. **DAJJAL:** As explained before, Dajjal will be a powerful being who will tempt people to accept him as God and join his forces. Prophet Isa (a.s.) and Imam Mahdi (a.s.) will fight with him, defeat him and finally kill him. Some scholars are of the opinion that Dajjal will be the dominant system of government at that time and it will be replaced by the reign of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).
3. **DABATUL ARDH:** Literally this means "WALKER OF THE EARTH". This will be a person who will separate believers from non-believers. He will raise his head and people will see him. According to some "ahadith", this person will be Imam Ali (a.s.).
4. **RISING OF THE SUN FROM THE WEST:** Some Scholars give a literal interpretation of this tradition; others give it a metaphorical explanation.

Literal explanation: Through the scientific process called "precession of the equinoxes", North Pole will take the position of South Pole and South Pole will take the position of North Pole. With this change, the sun will appear to rise from the west.

Metaphorical explanation: Describing the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s.), Imam Ali (a.s.) said: “HE IS THE SUN THAT WILL RISE FROM THE SETTING PLACE (WEST).”

5. **COMING OF NABI ISA (A.S.):** He will appear in the Eastern part of Damascus. He will pray behind Imam Mahdi (a.s.). Together with Imam Mahdi (a.s.), he will kill Dajjal and will break the cross.
6. **APPEARANCE OF GOG AND MAGOG:** Most likely, they will be humans from a particular tribe and nationality. They will dominate the world. They will have a complete control of the sky ways. They will be able to shoot ‘arrows’ to the sky and bring them back. Some scholars have taken the ‘arrows’ to mean space crafts. They will be arrogant. Finally, “worms” will kill them all. Again, some scholars have taken “worms” to mean epidemic virus.
- 7, 8, 9. **THREE LANDSLIDES:** One of them in the East and one in the West and one in the Arabian Peninsula will occur.
10. **APPEARANCE OF FIRE:** It will Starting in Yemen and drive people to meet at one point, the Mahshar.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that sooner or later, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) will come out of occultation to establish the Kingdom of Allah on earth, based on justice and equity. However, when will this happen, no one knows except Allah. Nonetheless, we have been given some indications as to when we should expect it to happen. We have been told of some signs which when they become apparent, we should prepare ourselves to welcome the Imam (a.s.).

True, some of us may not live that long to witness this great occasion. However, it is stated in the traditions that those who truly

and sincerely wish to be with Imam Mahdi (a.s.) when he comes out of occultation, but died with this wish, they will be raised from their graves when the Imam (a.s.) reappears. Do you wish to be one of such people?

CHAPTER 7: RAJAT (RETURN)

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Rajat is one of the commonly accepted beliefs of the Shia Ithna-Ashery faith. Rejection of this concept puts one amongst those who do not fully accept the 'Madhhab' of Alhul-Bayt. This concept is mentioned succinctly in the Quran and supported by various traditions (ahadith) from the Prophet, and his successors, the Imams, may peace be upon them all. It is therefore very important to understand what the concept of Rajat is all about, and to comprehend its implications in light of the verses of the Quran and some of the traditions from the Prophet and Imams, peace be upon them all.

WHAT IS RAJAT

Rajat is an Arabic word which means the Return. However, in the context of the Shia Ithna-Ashery faith, it refers to that period, after the appearance of Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.), when some people who have already died will be brought back to life; there will be a partial resurrection. Total resurrection for all who have died will occur at Qiyama. In a nutshell, therefore, there are two types of resurrections mentioned in the Quran: Rajat or a partial and selective resurrection; and Qiyama or an all inclusive resurrection. This idea is stated in the Quran. Consider the following verses:

Ch 27, Verse 83:

“AND ON THAT DAY WE SHALL GATHER FROM EVERY PEOPLE A PARTY FROM AMONG THOSE WHO REJECTED OUR SIGNS, THEN THEY SHALL BE FORMED INTO GROUPS.”

Compare this verse which states of “A PARTY” “FROM EVERY PEOPLE” with the following verse Ch.18, v.47 which states that: **“AND THE DAY WHEN WE SHALL GATHER THEM (AND) THEN LEAVE NOT ANY ONE OF THEM BEHIND.”**

Ch.27, Verse 83 Refers to Partial Resurrection (Only A PARTY shall be gathered); that is RAJAT.

Ch. 18,Verse 47 Refers to All Inclusive Resurrection (WE SHALL GATHER THEM ALL) that is QIYAMA.

WHO WILL COME BACK FROM THEIR DEATHS DURING RAJAT

After Imam Mahdi (a.s.) has come out of occultation (Ghaiba), some very pious and some very evil persons, who have already died, will be brought back to life by Allah. The main reason behind this resurrection is to let the good people see and benefit from the true Kingdom of Allah and for the evil people to be punished for their evil deeds that they carried against the good people. In support of this fact, consider the following tradition mentioned by Fadl Ibn Shadhan in his *MUKHTASARU ITHBATT'R – RAJAH* (Tradition #7). This tradition says that on the night of Ashura, Imam Husayn (a.s.) informed his supporters, who were to be martyred on the following day:

“...THEN REJOICE (WITH THE GOOD NEWS OF) THE GARDEN. BY ALLAH! WE SHALL ABIDE, AFTER WHAT IS TO BEFALL US, AS LONG AS ALLAH WISHES; THEN ALLAH WILL RESURRECT US AND YOU WHEN OUR QAIM WILL APPEAR. HE WILL TAKE THE REVENGE FROM THE OPPRESSORS AND YOU WILL SEE THEM, (AND THEY WILL BE) WEARING CHAINS AND SHACLES AND (UNDERGOING) VARIOUS TYPES OF CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT..”

So according to this tradition, all the martyrs of Karbala will be resurrected and so will those who took part in oppressing them on the day of Ashura, including Yazid, Obaydullah Ibn Ziyad, Omar Ibn Saad and Shimr Ibn Ziljaushan. The martyrs will have an opportunity to seek their revenge from those who oppressed or killed them.

During Rajat, the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), Imam Ali (a.s.) and all other ten Imams will return. Together with them will be their followers who truly loved and wished to be with Imam Mahdi (a.s.) but died before the Imam (a.s.) had come out of occultation.

It is during this time that Prophet Isa (a.s.) will come down from Heaven to support Imam Mahdi (a.s.) to defeat Shaitan (Satan) and his supporters.

THE HEAVEN OF ALLAH ON EARTH DURING RAJAT

Imam Mahdi (a.s.) will kill Shaitan and those who supported him and will establish the Kingdom of Allah on the surface of earth. To that effect Abu Saeed Khudri, a well known companion of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), quotes the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) to have said:

“THE PEOPLE SHALL FLOCK AROUND MAHDI, LIKE THE HONEYBEES FLOCK AROUND THEIR CHIEF. MAHDI SHALL FILL THE EARTH WITH EQUITY AND JUSTICE LIKE IT HAD BEEN OVERWHELMED WITH OPPRESSION. THE PEOPLE SHALL REVERT TO GOODNESS AND RETURN TO THEIR PAST VIRTUOUS SELVES...”

Imam Mahdi (a.s.) will rule for an indefinite time. Finally, he will be martyred. After him all Imams, each at a time, will rule for a time known only by Allah.

During this period, there will be a complete state of peace, prosperity and tranquility. The lion and the camel, the cheetah and the cow and the goat, will live in harmony with each other.

END OF RAJAT

The concept of Rajat is clear; however, its details are not fully known. But this is not an exception. There are many details pertaining to life and death that Allah has kept secret from us.

All said and done, finally Rajat too, will come to an end. Every

creation of Allah will come to an end; they will cease to exist. This period of 'non-existence' will prevail for a time known only to Allah. The following verses of the Quran briefly but clearly describes the end of Rajat and the beginning of Qiyama:

“AND THE DAY WHEN WE WILL CAUSE THE MOUNTAINS TO PASS AWAY, AND YOU SHALL SEE THE EARTH A LEVELED PLAIN, AND WE SHALL GATHER THEM (AND) THEN LEAVE NOT ANY ONE OF THEM BEHIND.” (Ch.18, v.47)

CONCLUSION

The concept of Rajat is an essential part of the faith of the Shia Ithna-Ashery. It has its roots in the Quran and numerous traditions from Prophet Muhammad and his divinely appointed successors, the Imams, Peace be upon them all. Its rejection amounts to rejection of a vital part of the belief of the 'MADHHAB' of Ahlul-Bayt.

Rajat is sometimes referred to as 'QIYAMA SUGHRA' or The Minor Day of Resurrection. The Quranic Chapter 40, verse 11 puts to focus the various stages of human existence in these words:

“THEY SHALL SAY: 'O OUR LORD! TWICE DID YOU CAUSE US TO DIE AND TWICE DID YOU CAUSE US TO LIVE. WE DO CONFESS OUR SINS. IS THERE ANY WAY OUT OF THIS?’”

The two Deaths referred to are:

- Death following this worldly life.
- Death after Rajat.

And the two instances of life are:

- Life during Rajat.
- Life at Qiyama.

CHAPTER 8: MIRACLES OF IMAM MAHDI (A.S.)

INTRODUCTION

What could be more miraculous than the fact that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is alive today, having been born in 255 AH, and shall live till the time of Rajat. Over and above that, he is free from the ravages of time on his physical being. More than that: He is not restricted by the limitation of space, nor movement and is all the time aware of the well-being of the 'UMMAH'. The very existence of this universe depends on his presence and he attends to the needs and calls of believers.

SOME OF HIS MIRACLES

1. During the time when he was in his mother's womb, she did not show any signs of pregnancy. This is confirmed by Imam Hasan Askari's aunt, Hakima Khatoon. She came to know of Nargis's (Imam Mahdi's mother) pregnancy hours before delivering the child.
2. Unlike a common human child, Imam Mahdi's childhood was extraordinary. On the next day of his birth, a servant of the house, Naseem by the name, sneezed near the cradle in which the infant Imam was lying. The Imam (a.s.), to the amazement of the servant, spoke in clear Arabic: "MAY ALLAH HAVE MERCY ON YOU." And then added "WHOEVER SNEEZES, HIS LIFE IS ASSURED FOR ATLEAST THREE DAYS."
3. Forty days after Imam Mahdi's birth, Hakima Khatoon visited Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). She was surprised to see the infant Imam Mahdi (a.s.) had grown up so fast that he looked like he was already two years old.
4. As the living Imam of the time, Hadhrat Mahdi (a.s.) is a continuous source of guidance to whomever calls him for help

as illustrated by a few illustrations given below:

- Muhammad son of Yusuf al-Shasti reports that he had incurable tumors on his back. The doctors of the time had given up on him. He wrote a letter of appeal to Imam Mahdi (a.s.), asking for his help. Imam (a.s.) replied him with prayers. Muhammad was totally cured, to the amazement of the doctors who said: "HEALTH COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN RESTORED THROUGH ALLAH DIRCECTLY"
- Hasan son of Fadl had three questions that he wanted the Imam (a.s.) to reply. He wrote a letter to the Imam (a.s.), pausing two questions, not mentioning the third question, thinking that it was improper to ask that question. Imam (a.s.) wrote back giving answers to the two questions, and an answer to the third question as well, though it was not stated to him in the letter of request.
- Allama Hilli was one of the most renowned jurists of his times, living in Hilla. A pregnant woman died. Her relatives asked for a ruling; if they were allowed to remove the child from the mother's womb. Allama's ruling was that the dead woman be buried with the child in her womb. Some years after this event, a man with a child paid Allama a visit. On inquiry, the Allama was informed that the child in question was the one whose mother had died and Allama had first given the ruling that the woman be buried with the child but then reversed his ruling and the child was thus removed from the dead mother. Allama was shocked to hear this. He had not reversed his ruling. He was convinced that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) had come to his rescue. Allama decided not to give any rulings from that moment onwards. However, he received a letter from the Imam, commanding him to continue with his work and that whenever the need arose, the Imam himself would help him, as he had done in this particular case.

- Allama Shaykh Hur Aameli is a great Shia scholar and compiler of a monumental work on Jurisprudence called *WASAIL USH-SHIA*. He reports that when he was young, he fell sick and his condition was so bad that there was no hope for recovery. His relatives had given up on him for the dead. He then had a dream in which he saw the infallible Imams. He remembered to have greeted Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) and then he went to Imam Mahdi (a.s.). He cried out to the Imam (a.s.), beseeching the Imam to pray for his recovery from this incurable sickness. The Imam (a.s.) assured him that he would be fine. The Imam (a.s.) then gave him a cup full of water. He drank the water. When he woke up he was totally cured.

Many more such miracles have taken place but the scope of this does not allow to mention any more.

CHAPTER 9

IMAM MAHDI (A.S.): HIS SAYINGS

INTRODUCTION

Unlike the other Imams from the Ahlul-Bayt who were accessible to their followers despite restrictions, Imam Mahdi (a.s.), for reasons already explained, spends most of his time in occultation. Because the direct one-to-one meeting with this Imam has been minimal, the sayings and advice from him are limited in number but not in scope. Most of the advices from this Imam came through his 'SUFARA' or through his letters, responding to the issues raised by the followers. In addition to that, the 'DUAS' (supplications) and 'ZIYARATS' (salutations) that the Imam (a.s.) recommended to his followers also contain vital pieces of advice.

The following are some of the advices obtained from these sources:

1. Allah's creation is not done in vain nor has He let his creatures be there without any purpose.
2. Allah raised Muhammad (s.a.w.w.) in Prophethood as a mercy to the universe and through him completed his favors, the series of Prophets, and sent him as the guide to mankind.
3. Our hearts are the receptors of Divine Will. Whatever Allah wishes, we (the Ahlul-Bayt) wish the same.
4. Liars are those who fix a time regarding the coming out of occultation of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).
5. Indeed, I (Imam Mahdi) am the source of security for the people of this earth.
6. Any person who devours any part of our dues (like khums), indeed, it amounts to him eating fire and he will end in hell fire.

7. Every one of you must adhere to all those acts that bring you close to our love and distance you away from our displeasure and anger.
8. Close the doors to those questions that are of no benefit to you.
9. I am Mahdi (the Messiah). I am the Qaim (of the age). I am the one to fill the earth with justice as it is filled with injustice. The earth is never without Allah's Hujjah (evidence).
10. Nothing irritates (rubs nose on dust) Satan more than prayers, so observe prayers to irritate Satan.
11. Surely, we have complete knowledge of your situation and there is nothing which is hidden from us concerning you.
12. Verily, we are not inattentive in taking care of you nor are we heedless in remembering you.

In the form of a supplication, Imam Mahdi (a.s.) advises his followers to do the following:

1. Scholars, to observe piety and admonish others.
2. Students, to struggle and be keen in acquiring knowledge.
3. Learners, to listen and accept what is advised to them.
4. All Muslims to:
 - Take care of the sick and give them comfort.
 - Remember the dead with kindness and compassion.
 - Treat the old and aged with grace, peace and tranquility.
5. The youth, to lean toward goodness and repentance.
6. The women, to observe modesty and shame.
7. The poor, to be patient and contented.
8. The wealthy, to be humble and giving.

CONCLUSION

May Allah, the All mighty, give us all the wisdom and courage

to put to practice these teachings of our Imam. If we do so, we shall acquire the benefits of this world and the hereafter. For the Imam (a.s.) has promised us about these benefits in these words: “AND IF OUR FOLLOWERS, MAY ALLAH MAKE THEM SUCCESSFUL IN OBEYING HIM, WERE UNITED WITH THEIR HEARTS IN FULFILLING THE PROMISE THAT IS UPON THEM, THERE WOULD BE NO DELAY FOR THEM FROM THE GOOD FORTUNE OF MEETING US, AND THEIR HAPPINESS WOULD BE HASTENED BY WITNESSING OUR ADVENT WITH COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING.”

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

1. Explain briefly how would you defend the fact that the concept of Mahdism is acceptable by the majority of Muslims.
2. Why is the argument that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is not yet born, a weak one?
3. Why is it that the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was kept secret?
4. Give three examples that surround the miraculous birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).
5. How did Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) send a message to a few of his followers regarding the birth of his son, Imam Mahdi (a.s.)?
6. Each item in column (A) below has its equal in column (B). Match each item, (1) to (10) from column (A) with its equivalent in column (B).

ITEM	Column A	ITEM	Column B
1.	Othman Ibn Sayid	i.	Daughter of Ninth Imam
2.	Ahmad Ibn Ishaq	ii.	Imam Mahdi's Mother
3.	Hadhrat Hadisa	iii.	Recommended night prayers
4.	A Nubian lady	iv.	Imam Hasan Askari's "WAKIL"
5.	Salatul Layl	v.	A close follower of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.)
6.	Fadl Ibn Shadhan	vi.	Imam Hasan Askari's Mother
7.	Sausan	vii.	The city where Imam Mahdi (a.s.) was born
8.	329 AH	viii.	Imam Ridha (a.s.)'s wife
9.	Hakima	ix.	Beginning of the Long Occultation
10.	Samarah	x.	Narrator of Traditions ("AHADITH")

CHAPTER 2

1. Indicate by the letter (F) for statements given below which are false, and by letter (T) for statements that are correct. For each false statement explain why it is false.
 - i. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was martyred in the year 260 AH just after the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).
 - ii. Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is not as accessible to the public as were the other eleven Imams before him.
 - iii. We are currently living in the period called “GHAIBAT SUGHRA”.
 - iv. Imam Mahdi (a.s.) communicated with the public through his “SUFARA” during the GHAIBA SUGHRA.
 - v. The death of Imam Mahdi (a.s.)’s last SAFIR coincides with the beginning of GHAIBA KUBRA.
2. Briefly describe the characters of Imam Mahdi’s SUFARA.
3. Explain why the job of the Safir was full of dangers.
4. For questions (I) to (V) below, there are four options given. Choose one which is the most appropriate.
 - I) The death of the 4th Safir meant:
 - a) There would be no more guidance from the Imam (a.s.).
 - b) There would be limited guidance from the Imam.
 - c) The Shia community would be left on their own.
 - d) The end of the Short Occultation and the beginning of the Long Occultation.
 - II) To reject a JURIST is a serious offence because:
 - a) He protects the religion.
 - b) He is obedient to the commands of his master.
 - c) To reject him amounts to reject both the Imam (a.s.) and Allah.
 - d) None of the above.

III) Zakaria Ibn Adam and Yunus Ibn Abdulrehman are mentioned as

- a) Examples of how Imams appointed equivalent of Jurists.
- b) They were followers of Imam Ridha (a.s.).
- c) They were Jurists of their times.
- d) None of the above.

IV) Mujtahids (MUJTAHIDEEN) differ from SUFARA as

- a) MUJTAHIDEEN came after SUFARA.
- b) MUJTAHIDEEN are in greater numbers than SUFARA who were only four.
- c) Their functions differed.
- d) All of the above.

V) A "MUQALLID" is

- a) One who struggles.
- b) A Jurist.
- c) A Mujtahid.
- d) None of the above

5. Explain what you understand by the following:

- a) Ijtihad
- b) Mujtahid
- c) Taqlid
- d) Muqalid
- e) Alam

6. Complete the following statements by filling in the blanks:

- i) A Jurist must be
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
 - d) _____

ii) Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) trained his trusted students so that they could _____.

- iii) The Fuqaha took the position of leadership because _____.
- iv) _____ was the first person during the period of _____ to give legal judgments (FATAWA.)
- v) According to Ayatullah Sistani, a Mujtahid apart from being a male and Shia Ithna-Ashery, he must also be
- _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

CHAPTER 3

- What was the main problem facing the Shia community at the beginning of GHAIBAT KUBRA?
 - How was this problem solved?
- In partial statements under (A) to (E) below, there are four options given to complete the statements. For each statement, choose, one option which is the most appropriate answer to complete the statement:
 - After the passing away of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.)
 - The Shia community was left without a guide because he was the last Prophet.
 - The Shia community was left to look for their own guide.
 - Guidance came through the Prophet's successors, the Imams.
 - Guidance came through Ijtihad.
 - With the martyrdom of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.)
 - The direct guidance from Imams came to an end.
 - The Shia community was left without guidance.

- iii. The Shia community turned to Jurists for guidance.
- iv. All of the above

C) In the letter sent by Imam Mahdi (a.s.) to Shaykh Mufid, the Imam said:

- i. Shia community was targets of their enemies.
- ii. He was aware of the needs of the community.
- iii. He will come to their help anytime they need him.
- iv. All of the above (i-iii)

D) When called for help

- i. The Imam always helps indirectly.
- ii. The Imam helps directly, with the permission of Allah.
- iii. The Imam never helps directly.
- iv. The Imam appears for help directly or indirectly.

E) One advantage that Imam Mahdi (a.s.) has under the protection through occultation (GHAIBA) is:

- i. He is free from direct persecution and harassment from his enemies.
- ii. He leads a life of comfort.
- iii. He is not bothered by people, including his followers.
- iv. His responsibilities are limited.

3. a) What is the main problem that the Shia community faces during the period of Long Occultation?
b) What will be the reward for them?
4. Explain how the Long Occultation benefits both the Imam (a.s.) and the Shia community.
5. Give examples to explain the statement: "Imam Mahdi's long life is neither a new phenomenon nor an exceptional one."

CHAPTER 4 & 5

1. What are the places where Imam Mahdi (a.s.) is reported to have been seen in person?
2. Briefly explain, giving two or three specific examples, how to remember Imam Mahdi (a.s.) all the time.
3. What are the responsibilities of the followers of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) in the era of GHAIBA KUBRA?
4. (a) What are the main problems that the followers of the Imam Mahdi (a.s.) must be aware of during Long Occultation?
(b) How can these problems be dealt with?
5. (a) What benefits can be obtained by the followers of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) in the process of waiting for his reappearance?
(b) What are the requirements for receiving these benefits?

CHAPTER 6

The statements below are all false. Explain why they are false?

1. Other than Imam Mahdi (a.s.) himself, no one else knows when he will come out of the occultation.
2. All the signs mentioned in the “ahadith”, regarding the time before the Imam comes out of occultation, are going to take place, sooner or later.
3. The appearance of Dajjal is an example of the “secondary knowledge”.
4. When the smoke appears, all doors of repentance will be closed.
5. All signs of reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) should be taken literally.

CHAPTER 7

1. Explain the difference between Rajat and Qiyama.
2. Briefly explain who will be brought back to life during Rajat and for what reason.
3. Why is Rajat referred to as “Heaven on Earth”?
4. Why is it necessary to acquire knowledge about Rajat?

CHAPTER 9

1. In what ways is the advice from Imam Mahdi (a.s.) somehow different from those of the other Imams who came before him?
2. Choose any TWO advices from the Imam conveyed through his supplications (Dua) and explain how you will put them in practice.



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