



ALI 297: The Nature and Reasons for the Major Occultation

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Etymology of Ghaybah

- The word ghaybah in the Arabic language is derived from the word ghayb.
- The word ghayb refers to something that is hidden from sight.
- The word ghayb in usage is like a homonym. A homonym is a group of words that share the same spelling but distinct meanings.
- Hence the word ghayb can only be understood in reference to its antonym.
- The word ghayb is used in contrast to the following words: shahadah (observed/witnessed), hudur (presence) and zuhur (apparent).

Ghaybah of the 12th Imam.

- The word ghaybah for the twelfth Imam is used in contrast to zuhur.
- The Imam had two occultation: al-ghaybah al-sughra (the minor occultation) and al-ghaybah al-kubrah (the major occultation).
- The minor occultation started upon the death of the 11th Imam (260 AH) and ended in the year 329 AH.
- During the minor occultation the Imam had 4 representatives who spoke on his behalf.

Communication during the minor occultation

- The Imam would communicate with his followers using letters.
- These letters were known as *tawqi'* or the *tawqi'aat*.
- The writing of the 12th Imam was known to some of his followers.
- Muhammad b. 'Uthman 'Amri says: *A signed note was issued from the Imam and the handwriting was well known to me.*
- Some of our great scholars who had a letter from the 12th Imam in their possession include Shaykh al-Saduq and Shaykh al-Mufid (a).

End of the Minor Occultation

- The minor occultation ended with the death of the 4th representative.
- A few days before his death, he received the following tawqi' from the 12th Imam:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمُرِيُّ! أَعْظَمَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَ إِخْوَانِكَ فِيكَ، فَإِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ، فَاجْمَعْ أَمْرَكَ وَ لَا تُوصِ إِلَى أَحَدٍ فَيَقُومَ مَقَامَكَ بَعْدَ وَفَاتِكَ

In the name of Allah the beneficent the merciful.

O Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samuriyy! May Allah increase the reward of your brothers (in their grief) over you. Surely you will die in another six days. Therefore organize your affairs and do not appoint anyone as your executor lest he undertake your position after your death.

The last Tawqi'

، فقد وقعت الغيبه التّامّه فلا ظهور الاّ بعد اذن الله تعالى ذكره و ذلك بعد طول الأمد و قسوه
القلوب و امتلاء الأرض جوراً و سيّأتى من شيعتى من يدعى المشاهده،

The major occultation has now transpired, and there will be no appearance until God (magnified be His remembrance) permits. This will happen after the passage of a long time, and after the hearts have hardened, and the earth is filled with oppression.

The Last Tawqi

ألا فمن ادّعى المشاهده قبل خروج السّفياني و الصّيحة فهو كذّابٌ مُفترٍ، و لا حول و لا قوّه الاّ
بالله العليّ العظيم.

There will be some from my followers who will claim to have seen me, therefore the one who claims to have seen me before the rising of the sufyani, then he is a liar, a .

There is no change or strength except with Allah, the most High, the most Sublime.

The Major Occultation

- The major occultation began in the year 329 AH.
- The end of this period, in particular or in general, is not known to anyone except Allah (s).
- The narrations state that the zuhur will occur at a time when it is least expected.
- The narrations liken it to the day of Judgment. The Qur'an uses the word bagtah (sudden) to describe the day of Judgement.
- The coming of the 12th Imam will also be sudden.
- No one is allowed to claim to know when the 12th Imam will come.

The Nature of the Ghaybah

- Upon the coming of the Imam, other humans will also come back with the 12th Imam.
- There are a group of people who will come back to life during the zuhur of the 12th Imam.
- This is known as the concept of raj'ah, or to return.
- The concept of raj'ah is claimed to be one of the daruriyyat of the madhab.
- There is no difference on opinion on the principal of raj'ah, though there is a difference of opinion on who will come back.

The Nature of Ghaybah

- The word for the return of the 12th Imam is zuhur and not raj'ah.
- Another person that will come back with the coming of the 12th Imam is Prophet Isa (a).
- The word used for the return of prophet Isa (a) is nuzul, since the word used for his leaving is raf (elevation):

بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

Rather Allah raised him up toward Himself, and Allah is all-mighty, all-wise. (4:158)

- This implies that the body of Prophet Isa (a) was raised from the earth.

The Nature of the Ghaybah

- In the two previous cases, we noted that the word raj'ah was used for those who had died, and nuzul was used for Prophet Isa (a) who is alive but was raised by Allah.
- Therefore if the word zuhur is used for the 12th Imam.
- This implies that the Imam is alive and living on this earth.
- The nature of his ghaybah is very similar to the ghaybah of Prophet Yusuf (a) from his brothers.
- He was in their midst, but they did not recognize him.

Reasons for the Ghaybah of the 12th Imam

- The natural state of the Imam is to be present amongst the people.
- This allows the Imam to fulfill his role of political and spiritual guidance.
- Therefore we must look at the reasons for the ghaybah of the 12th Imam.
- The ahadith mention a number of reasons for the ghaybah of the 12th Imam. However they also mention that the actual reason for the ghaybah is not known.

Reasons for Going into Occultation

- The essential reason for occultation is not known.
- Imam al-Sadiq (a) states that the wisdom of his occultation is the same as the wisdom behind the occultation of the other prophets.
- Imam (a) adds that the wisdom will be unveiled upon the reappearance of the 12th Imam, similar to the story of Khidr (a).
- Some of the ahadith do mention some secondary reasons for his ghaybah:

إِنَّ لِلْغُلَامِ غَيْبَةً قَبْلَ أَنْ يَقُومَ قَالَ قُلْتُ وَ لِمَ قَالَ يَخَافُ وَ أَوْمَأَ بِيَدِهِ إِلَى بَطْنِهِ

Surely the young man will have an occultation before he rises. I said, why is that? He said, he fears (for his life) and pointed to his stomach.

Reasons for Going into Occultation

- Another reason for the occultation is that the Imam would not have to be under the authority of any other ruler before his rising:

عن أبي عبد الله ع قال يقوم القائم ع و ليس لأحد في عنقه بيعة

He (a) will rise and he will not have pledged allegiance to anyone

- Yet another reason given for the occultation is that it is a test for the faith of the believers:

أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَمْتَحِنَ الشَّيْعَةَ

Surely Allah (awj) likes to test the Shia.

- This is similar to the occultation of Prophet Musa (a) from his community.

Du'ā during occultation

اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِن لَّمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ نَبِيَّكَ

اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي رَسُولَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِن لَّمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي رَسُولَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ

حُجَّتَكَ، اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي حُجَّتَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِن لَّمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي حُجَّتَكَ

ضَلَلْتُ عَنْ دِينِي

Reason for Remaining in Occultation

- The shia are awaiting the qiyam of the Imam, and not just the zuhur of the Imam.
- Why is the Imam not initiating his qiyam?
- A number of narrations blame the lack of faith and ethics amongst the believers. Examples of this include:
 - The meeting of the people of Kufa with the 5th Imam
 - The meeting of the people of khurasan with the 6th Imam

Reason for Remaining in Occultation.

- With respect to this, Khwaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi states the following:
The occultation cannot be attributed to the choice of Allah (s) or the 12th Imam (a). Rather, you must find the reason for the occultation within the deeds of the believers, which is the cause of their fear and disobedience, and the reappearance will become incumbent once the need for the occultation is removed.
- This reason in itself is not sufficient to explain the absence of the Imam from human society.

Reason for Remaining in Occultation

- Shahid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (r) posits that a number of conditions must materialize before the qiyam of the Imam.
- The goal of the Imam (a) is to create a global revolution and movement for justice.
- The faith and ethics of his helpers is one of the conditions to materialize this goal.
- Another condition is the general preparedness and acceptance of humanity for a Divinely appointed leader.
- The situation is analogous to the coming of the Holy Prophet (s).