

# *The Birth of Hope*



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*(On the Birth and Life of Imam Mahdi: The Promised Savior)*

### **Introduction**

Samarra is a city in North Iraq located in a relatively good climate region along the Tigris River. In the third century A.H., the Abbasid caliphates adopted Bagdad, a city almost near Samarra, as their capital and place of residence; this made life conditions difficult to the citizens of both Bagdad and Samarra. It was around 221 A.H. (836 A.D.) that Mu'tasim, the eighth Abbasid caliph, turned to Samarra aiming to reconstruct it. Since the city had been destructed due to some previous wars, he ordered that the city should be re-built and renovated. Then he chose the city as the government headquarters. As a result, the high-rank military officers and government authorities moved there and the city was transformed into a

military zone. Mutawakkil, another Abbasid caliph, expanded this zone and built a splendid and great palace for himself over there.

Mutawakkil ordained that the Shia's tenth and eleventh Imams (namely, Imam Hādī and Imam Hassan 'Askarī should move to Samarra to live within the military zone so that they could be easily under the control of the caliphate. This is why the eleventh Imam is used to be named, Imam Hassan al-'Askarī; in Arabic language, 'Askari means “belonging to army”.

The question is “why the Abbasid rulers were so afraid of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī while he was still a child, and why did they bring him together with his father, Imam Hādī to Samarra to live within a military zone to be under a strict control?”

The answer is that the Abbasid rulers have had heard through some authentic narrators from Prophet Muhammad to have said something about the birth of a boy child that was contrary to what the Abbasid caliphs wished to do. Some narrations (from the Prophet) in this regard include:

1. “I will have twelve successors.”
2. “They are all my descendants and are from the Quraysh tribe.”
3. “My first successor is Ali bin Abī Tālib and the last one of them is Mahdi.”
4. “The twelfth successor of mine is the son of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī whose name is the same as mine” (The real name of Imam Mahdi is Muhammad and Mahdi is his cognomen).
5. “My twelfth successor is the ninth generation of Imam Hussain, whose other name (or cognomen) is Mahdi.”
6. “The Mahdi will put an end to the oppressive rulers and to their governments; he will establish a global government, implement justice, spread monotheism throughout the world, and uproot the bases of tyranny and unfairness.”

The bloodthirsty and oppressive rulers of Abbasid were sure that Imam Mahdi was not yet born since his father Imam Hassan al-'Askarī was still too young. Therefore, they mobilized all of their forces, and employed many overt and covert officers to keep a close eye on the life of the eleventh Imam so if they were informed that his son was born, kill him immediately. They made use of all their potentials at hand to prevent the birth of Imam Mahdi, i.e. not let him be born alive, or kill him immediately upon birth.

In the year 232 A.H. (847 A.D.), Mutawakkil, who was fully aware of what was supposed to take place, brought the tenth Imam and his son to Samarra with the intention of killing the eleventh Imam, who was fully young and was about to get married, in order to block the path of the birth of the twelfth Imam.

Years later, Mutawakkil passed away in 247 A.H. (861 A.D.) Immediately after his death, his son, Muntasir was crowned. Soon, his cousin, Mu'tasim grasped the royal throne; however, in 252 A.H. (866 A.D.), he was forced to abdicate in favor of his uncle's son, Mu'tazz, to become the next Abbasid caliph. During all these years, Imam Hādī and Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, being under the close control of the tyrant, were living in Samarra in a very harsh and unbearable condition.

Years passed and the oppressive government of Abbasid tried, by any means possible, to control the life of the two Imams, especially Imam Hassan al-'Askarī. They sometimes put the Imams into prison while closely monitoring the movement of men and women to and from their houses. They were totally alert that if the eleventh Imam got married, identify his wife, and if she gave birth to a boy child, kill him immediately so that there would be no one as Imam Mahdi, who was supposed to be the twelfth successor of Prophet Muhammad and the destroyer of tyranny and oppressive rulers.

It would be interesting is to know if the powerful oppressors of Abbasid regime, with all their forces and the efforts they suffered, were successful to prevent the birth of Imam Mahdi or not.

### **The story of Imam Mahdi's honorable mother**

The mother of Imam Mahdi, namely Narjis, as the one giving birth to the last divine savior, must have a highly exalted status of spiritual perfection. Unfortunately, for some reasons, especially her living in a suffocating and unbearable condition in that time in Samarra, our understanding of this noble lady is very limited.

Based on some Islamic narrations and historical reports, there are two major possibilities of her identity:

1. She was a Roman princess captured in a battle by Muslims.
2. She was a slave girl, who was trained in the house of Lady Hakīmah, the aunt of Imam al-'Askarī.

However, according to a well-known genuine narration, she was a slave captured, and subsequently, joined the family of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī. We will mention in the following story that there is no contradiction between these two narrations.

### **The courier of Imam Hādī**

Bishr Ibn-e Sulaymān narrates: “One night, Kāfūr, the servant of Imam Ali al-Naqī al-Hādī (the tenth Imam of Shia) came and summoned me to his master. I immediately got ready. When I went to the Imam, he was talking to his son, Imam 'Askarī and his sister Hakīmah sitting behind a curtain. When I sat down, Imam Hādī said: “O Bishr! You are from the descendants of the Ansār (the Helpers of the Prophet); this devotion to us (the Ahl al-Bayt) is your legacy, i.e. each coming generation of yours inherits from the preceding generation. You are trustworthy

men of us. I am elevating your status and ennobling your character through which you will surpass all Shia in devotion, by sharing a secret with you and sending you to buy a certain slave girl.”

The Imam then wrote a letter in Roman script and sealed it by his personal stamp. He took out a yellow wallet containing 220 dinars. Then the Imam said: “Take this and go with it to Baghdad; go to the shore of the Euphrates on the noon of a specific day. When you reach the boats of the captives, you will see slave girls in them. You will find buyers working for the procurers of the Abbasids and a small group of Arab youths. When you see that, keep an eye on a man called 'Amr bin Yazīd, the slave trader, from a distance all day long, until a slave girl with such-and-such quality is brought before the buyers. Her dress is two thick silks; she refuses to be seen or touched upon by the examiners, and does not submit to anyone who wants to touch her. There you will hear a cry in Roman from behind the veil; you should know that this is the very girl, saying: "Alas for the violation of my hijab".

One of the buyers will say to 'Amr: ‘She is mine for three hundred dinars; her modesty has ever increased my desire for her’. She will reply in Arabic: ‘Even if you come in the form of Solomon, the son of David, and with a kingdom like his, I will not be interested in you. So, save your money’.

“The slave-dealer will say: ‘What is the solution? I have to sell you’. The slave girl will reply: ‘Why the haste? There must be a buyer that my heart finds rest in him and in his fidelity and honesty’.

Then the Imam continued: "At that moment, go to 'Amr bin Yazīd and tell him you have a sealed letter from a certain man of nobility, which is written in Roman language describing therein his benevolence, his fidelity, his excellence, and his generosity, so she may discern from it the character of its author. Give this letter to

the maid to reflect on his morals and attributes. Should she be interested in him and choose him, then I am his representative in buying her from you.”

### **The Roman princess among the prisoners**

Bishr, going further, said: "I performed all that my master, Imam Ali al-Naqī, had ordered me to do concerning the slave girl. When she saw the epistle, she cried very profusely and said to 'Amr bin Yazīd, ‘Sell me to the author of this letter’. She took the most solemn of oaths that should he refuse to sell her to him, she will take her life'. I negotiated the price with the dealer ('Amr bin Yazīd) until he settled exactly on the amount my master had given me."

The money being sufficient so, I took the slave girl, who was very happy and in laughter. I returned with her to the quarters I was residing in Baghdād. She was very restless until she took out the letter of the Imam from her pocket. She would kiss it, put it on her eyes and her cheeks, and then stick it on her chest.

Astonished by this, I said: "You are kissing a letter and you do not know who has written it!"

### **The strange story of the wedding ceremony**

Bishr says: "She told me: O incapable and feeble from knowing the position of the progeny of prophets, lend me your ears and empty your heart for my words, I am Malīkah, the daughter of Yeshua, son of the Caesar of Rome. My mother is from the descendants of the Disciples of Jesus (Hawārīyūn), and her lineage goes back to the successor of the prophet Jesus, Simon. I will narrate to you the wondrous story."

"My grandfather, Caesar, wanted to marry me to his nephew when I was a girl of thirteen. So he gathered, in his palace, almost three hundred priests and monks from the descendants of Hawārīyūn, and their men of stature accounting for seven

hundred men. He gathered four thousand commanders of the army and high-ranking military officers, as well as and chiefs of the tribes. He erected a throne from the dearest of the rich, which was adorned with a variety of jewels and raised over forty steps. When his nephew climbed over, the crosses were fixed about, the bishops took their stands in great reverence, and the pages of the Gospel were opened. Suddenly, all the crosses collapsed from the top and hit the ground and the pillars of the throne crumbled and crashed onto the floor."

"My grandfather's nephew, sitting on the top of the throne, fell unconscious. The bishops' face faded and their whole body started to tremble. The head of them said to my grandfather: 'Please excuse me from facing this evil, which forebodes the demise of the Christian religion and the royal creed.' My grandfather took this as an evil omen and said to the bishops: 'Erect these scaffolds, raise the crosses, and bring the brother of this unconscious man, whose dreams have been ruined, so I may marry him to this young girl in order that the evil of his brother may go away through his fortune.'"

"When they did that, the same happened to the second nephew too. People scattered away. My grandfather, Caesar, stood in great distress and left the place. They dropped the curtains and, with this stupendous event, the wedding ceremony came to an end."

"I, on the same night, had a dream that Jesus, Simon and a number of the Disciples (Hawārīyūn) had gathered at my grandfather's palace. They had installed there a pulpit of light that was defying the heavens in height and elevation. It was in the same spot where my grandfather had established his throne."

"At this moment, Prophet Muhammad, his son-in-law and successor Ali bin Abī Tālib, and a number of Imam Ali's sons entered. Then Prophet Jesus went forward and embraced Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad said to him: 'O the Spirit

of Allah! I have come to you to propose to your successor, Simon for his daughter, Malīkah, for this son of mine, pointing to Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, the son of the writer of the epistle."

"Jesus looked at Simon and said: 'The honor of the two worlds has come to you. Let your relation be bonded with the progeny of Muhammad.' Simon said: 'It will be a great honor for me to do so.'"

"Prophet Muhammad then climbed over that pulpit and uttered the marriage contract and married me to his son, Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, while Prophet Jesus was bearing witness and the sons of Muhammad and the Disciples (Hawārīyūn) were also bearing witness. When I woke up, I was scared of reporting this to my father or grandfather, fearing that they would kill me. I was keeping this a secret and not revealing it to any one of them."

The flames of love of that sun of the Imamate sky, Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, were igniting in the center of my chest every day, and it was destroying the capital of my patience and determination so much that I forsook eating and drinking. I became weaker and weaker such that my body grew lean and I became very sick, due to the projection of an inner hidden love."

"There was no physician left in the cities of Rome that my grandfather did not bring and ask him to heal me. When despair overwhelmed him, he said to me: 'O the light of my eyes! Is there any other wish left in your heart in this world, so I may fulfill it?' I said: 'O Grandfather! I see the doors of relief shut on me. However, if you save the Muslim captives in your prison from torture, remove their chains, do them favors, and kindly release them, I am hopeful that Jesus and his mother will give me back my health.'"



"When he did so as I wished, I made an effort to display health and ate a little food. This made him very happy so that he conferred kindness and respect upon the captives."

"Since this event, it was no longer than forty nights that I saw Lady Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad and the mistress of the ladies of the worlds. She visited me along with Lady Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, and one thousand nymphs from the Heaven. Mary said to me: 'This is the Mistress of the Ladies, the mother of your husband.' So, I held her, cried and complained about why Imam Hassan al-'Askarī did not come to visit me. Lady Fatima said: 'My son, Imam Hassan al-'Askarī will not visit you as long as you believe in a partner with Allah (i.e. believing in Trinity by Christians). This is my sister in faith, Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, and she turns to Allah with disdain for your religion.'<sup>1</sup>

"If you seek the pleasure of Allah, the Exalted, and the pleasure of Prophet Jesus and his mother, and if you wish Imam Hassan al-'Askarī visits you, say: 'I testify that there is no god except Allah, and Muhammad is the last messenger of Allah.'"

"When I spoke these words/testimonials, she pulled me to her chest and my soul was blessed. She said: 'Now expect the visitation of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī. I am sending him to you.'"

"I woke up in great excitement while repeating the above testimonial with the expectation of meeting the Imam. When it was the next night, I saw the Imam and as if I was saying to him: 'You abandoned me, my beloved, after you made me fall in love with you.' He said: 'My delay was not but just for your polytheistic belief.'<sup>2</sup> Now that you have embraced Islam, I am going to visit you every night until Allah brings us together.' Until now, his visitations to me have not ceased."

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, there is no doubt that the religion of Jesus (i.e. Christianity) is holy; however, after the emergence of Islam, no one is allowed to remain in that religion and should convert to Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Christians believe in three gods (namely Trinity).

## **The war and captivity**

Bishr says: "I asked her, 'How did you fall amongst the captives?'"

She (Lady Nargis) said: "On one of the nights, the Imam informed me that your grandfather would shortly be dispatching an army to fight the Muslims on such and such day, and he would follow them. You have to join them in the train of servants along with some servants from such and such route. "

"I did so and the vanguards of Muslims encountered us, which led to my current situation that you see. And no one knew that I am the granddaughter of the Roman Caesar until now, except you and that is because I told you. The gentleman in whose share of booty I fell, asked me of my name. I hid my identity from him and said, 'Narjis.' He said: 'This is the name of servants.'"

Bishr says: "I said to her: 'It is amazing that you are Roman and your language is Arabic.'" She said: "Due to my grandfather's persistence and encouragement that I should increase my Arabic learning, he appointed a woman to me, who was his interpreter to visit me. She would come day and night to teach me Arabic until I became fluent."

## **In the house of Imam Hādī**

Bishr says: "When I brought her back to Samarra, I directly came to my Master, Imam Ali al-Naqī (al-Hādī). He asked her: 'How did Allah show you the glory of Islam and the disgrace of Christianity and the nobility of Muhammad and his Household?'"

She replied, "How would I describe, O the son of Allah's messenger, the thing that you know better than me. I would like to offer my gratitude to you."

The Imam said: "Which one is dearer to you, ten thousand dinars or a happy tidings of eternal grandeur?" "Happy tidings" she said. Then the Imam stated: "Rejoice the

tidings of having a son, who would rule the world from East to West, and will fill it with equity and justice when it is filled with oppression and injustice.”

"From whom?" she asked. The Imam answered: "From the one whom the messenger of Allah proposed for you on such and such night, in such and such year. To whom Prophet Jesus and his successor married you?"

Then the Imam continued: "Do you know him?" She replied: "Has there been a night he has not visited me since I embraced Islam on the hands of the Mistress of Ladies."

Imam Hādī said: "O Kafur! Call my sister Hakimah." And when she entered, the Imam said to her: "Here she is."

Lady Hakimah embraced her long while she was so much happy for seeing her. Imam Hādī said to Lady Hakimah: "O the daughter of the messenger of Allah! Take her to your house and teach her the duties and traditions, for she is the wife of my son and the mother the Qāim (Imam Mahdi).”<sup>3</sup>

### **In the house of Lady Hakīmah**

Lady Hakīmah eagerly welcomed the newly arrived lady into her house, treated her warmly and sincerely, and helped her learn Islamic rules and how to worship Allah.

Everyone aware of the situation attempted not to inform others about the newcomer girl; otherwise, the secret agents of the murderous Abbasid rulers would kill the innocent girl.

One day, Imam al-'Askarī, who was young, went to the house of his aunt, Lady Hakīmah. Upon seeing Lady Narjis over there, surprisingly, he went into a deep

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah, by Shaykh al-Sadūq, vol. 2, chapter. 9, pp. 445-452.

thought. Lady Hakīmah asked him: "What happened? What is the reason for your surprise?"

Imam al-'Askarī answered: "Soon, this lady will give birth to a son who will enjoy an exalted level of spirituality with Allah. Allah, by the help of him, will make the Earth a place full of justice and excellence when it has turned into a place full of oppression and crime."

Lady Hakīmah suggested the Imam: "I think it is the most appropriate time to choose her as your wife."

Imam Hassan al-'Askarī said: "First of all, I have to acquire the permission of my father."

Lady Hakīmah said: "By hearing it, I changed my clothes and went to the house of my brother, Imam al-Hādī. I entered the room of the Imam, saluted him and sat down before him. But before saying anything to him, the Imam told me: 'O sister Hakīmah! Please provide the required arrangements for my son to marry Narjis.'"

Lady Hakīmah said: "Soon, I got ready to go, said goodbye, returned to my home, and talked with Lady Narjis about the matter. Narjis, realizing that after those bitter events, her wishes were about to come true, became exceedingly happy while having a shying smile on her face."<sup>4</sup>

### **An auspicious marriage**

The wedding ceremony of Imam al-'Askarī and Lady Narjis, despite the close control of Abbasid agents, took place and just a few of the bosom friends of Imam Hādī and some of their relatives were aware of the event. They kept all the things secret and did not let anyone become aware of this important event; maybe this was one of the reasons why they used to call the wife of the Imam with different

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<sup>4</sup> Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah, vol. 2, chapter. 10, p. 455.

names like Malīkah, Narjis, Sūsan, and Sayqal. They, in this way, were trying to let no one recognize her real personality so that the government investigators could not find any clue about what was going on. If the household of the Imam fell short of the responsibility of keeping this event secret, the cruel executioners of Abbasid agents would waste no time in killing her in order to prevent the birth of Imam Mahdi.

### **Her demise**

There are two narrations regarding the demise of Lady Narjis:

1) She requested Imam al-'Askarī to beseech Allah for her early demise during his lifetime. Consequently, she died during the life of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, and the following statement is carved on her grave stone: **"This grave belongs to the mother of Muhammad, the real name of Imam Mahdi."**<sup>5</sup>

2) According to another narration, she was alive after the martyrdom of Imam al-'Askarī. When the Imam was martyred, the agents of Abbasids rushed to the house of Imam al-'Askarī and, after inspecting the house, found no sign of a boy child; however, they arrested Lady Narjis, took her to Mu'tamid (the Abbasid Caliph) and asked her to unveil where her newborn son was. Lady Narjis pretended to be pregnant. Mu'tamid gave her to Ibn Abi Shawārib al-Qāzī. After a while, the Abbasids involved in various forms of inner turmoil and neglected to keep a close eye on her. Lady Narjis took this opportunity and escaped. Years later, she passed away in a normal way.<sup>6</sup>

### **The auspicious birthday of Imam Mahdi**

The birthday of the twelfth Imam (Imam Mahdi) occurred on Friday daybreak on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha'bān 255 A.H. (August 2<sup>nd</sup> 869 A.D.) in Samarra (a town in North

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<sup>5</sup> Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 51, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah, vol. 2, p. 476.

Iraq). According to a narration quoted by Sheikh al-Sadūq (d. 381 A.H./ 991 A.D.) in Kamāl al-Dīn, vol. 2, p. 424-426, Lady Hakīmah, the honorable aunt of the eleventh Imam (Hassan al-'Askarī) says:

“Imam Hassan al-'Askarī sent for me and said: ‘O aunt, have your Iftār (dinner) tonight with us. This is the night of mid-Sha'bān and the Almighty Allah will bring forth the Hujjah (Imam Mahdi) on this night. He will be Allah’s Hujjah (a proof from Allah) on the Earth.’”

Lady Hakīmah continued to say: “I said to him: ‘And who is his mother?’ He replied: ‘Narjis’. I again uttered: “There is no sign of pregnancy in her.” He responded: “It will occur as I said.” Lady Hakīmah said, “I came back to Nargis. When I greeted and sat, attempting to take my shoes off, she said: 'O my lady! How are you this evening?' I responded: '**Instead, you are my lady and the lady of my household.**' She said: 'Why did you come here, dear aunt?' I told: 'My dear daughter! Allah, the Exalted, will grant you in this glorious night a boy child, a master in this world and in the hereafter.' She sat down and said nothing while showing shyness and embarrassment on her face.”

Lady Hakīmah continued: “When I finished the ‘Ishā’ prayer and had my dinner, I went to bed and slept. When it was in the middle of the night, I got up to perform midnight prayers. I finished my prayers while she was sleeping and there was still no sign of any kind of pregnancy in her miraculously. I sat again and said some supplication and then I went to bed. After a while, I woke up suddenly being somehow horrified. I saw that Lady Narjis woke up, performed prayers and then slept, revealing no signs of pain or pregnancy in her yet.

Lady Hakīmah says: “As doubts came to me, Abu Muhammad (Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, being aware of my concern, called out: ‘Do not haste Aunt! The affair has come near.’” I started to recite Sūrahs Sajdah and Yāsīn;, suddenly Lady Narjis

woke up. I immediately rushed towards her and told her to recite the name of “Allah”! Then I asked her: “Do you feel anything?” and she said: “Yes, Aunt.” I said: “Be prepared and do not be scared. It will happen as I told you earlier.”

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

At the same time, Abū Muhammad (the eleventh Imam) called on me: "Bring my son to me, Aunt." I took his son to him. He put his hands under his thighs and back, and put the infant's feet on his chest. He put his tongue inside his mouth and then touched his eyes, ears, and joints with his hands and said, “My son, talk.” Surprisingly, the newborn (**Mahdi**) said: **“I bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah, the One without a partner; and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah’s messenger.”** He then beseeched blessings from the Commander of the Faithful (Imam Ali) and the other Imams until he reached his father, Imam Hassan al-‘Askarī and then respectfully stopped.

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

Lady Hakīmah says: “Next day, I went there to offer my greetings to Abu Muhammad. I removed the curtain looking for my Master (Imam Mahdi). Not seeing him, I asked his father: ‘May I be at your ransom, where is my Master?’ He said: ‘We entrusted him to the one who the mother of Moses had entrusted Moses to.’ When it was the seventh day, I came to Abu Muhammad and greeted and sat.

He said: ‘Bring to me my son.’ I brought my Master in a wrap. He acted towards his son in the same way he did the first time. Then he put his tongue inside his mouth; it seemed as if he was feeding him milk or honey. Then he said: ‘Talk O’ my son!’ The blessed infant repeated the same words (testimonials) as before and sent blessing to all Imams until his father, Imam Hassan al-‘Askarī. Then he said: ‘In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate’, and recited the following verse of the Holy Quran:

«وَأُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ \* وَنَمَكِّنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنُرِي فِرْعَوْنَ وَ هَامَانَ وَ جُنُودَهُمَا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ»

“And we desire to confer kindness upon those who have been enfeebled on the Earth and make them Imams and make them heirs and give them power on the Earth and show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their armies from them what they feared to happen to them.” (Quran, 28, 5-6)

### **The birth of Imam Mahdi from the viewpoint of Sunni scholars<sup>7</sup>**

Due to the widely related and authentic traditions narrated from Prophet Muhammad, all Islamic scholars, whether Shiite or Sunni, are unanimous in believing that Imam Mahdi will indeed appear before the End of the Time, reform the world and destroy all forms of oppression. Hence, all Muslims have faith in it and consider it to be an inseparable part of their religion.

Yet, all Shiite scholars, without any exception, believe that Imam Mahdi has already been born and is living in the present time; however, many Sunni scholars say that he shall be born in the future though some of them have narrated the event of the birth of Imam Mahdi in their books. For instance:

1) **Muhammad bin Talhah Shāfe‘ī** writes:

2) “*Abu al-Qāsim Muhammad bin al-Hassan (Imam Mahdi) was born in the year 258 A.H. (873 A.D.) in Samarra. His father’s name was Hassan. Among the titles [of this last*

<sup>7</sup> Source, “Imam al-Mahdi, The Just Leader of Humanity”.



*Imam] are al-Hujjah (a proof from Allah), al-Khalaf al-Sālih (the righteous offspring) and al-Muntazhar (the awaited one).” Following this statement, he has narrated several traditions on the subject of Mahdi, and concluded his statement by saying: “These hadith-reports confirm the existence of Imam Hassan al-‘Askarī’s son, who is in concealment and will appear later.”*

*(Matālib al-Su’ūl (1287 A.H. / 1870 A.D. edition), p. 89)*

**2) Muhammad bin Yūsuf**, following an entry on the death of Imam Hassan al-‘Askarī, writes:

*“He did not have any child except Muhammad. It is said that he is the same as the Awaited Imam (whose title is Mahdi).”*

*(Kifāyat al-Tālib, p. 312)*

**3) Ibn Sabbāgh Mālikī** writes:

*“Section Twelve, on the life of Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad, al-Hujjah, al-Khalaf al-Sālih, the son of Abū Muhammad al-Hassan (the eleventh Imam). He is the twelfth Imam of the Shia.”*

*(Al-Fusūl al-Muhimmah (Second edition), p. 273 and 286)*

Then he records the history of the Imam and narrates some traditions about him.

**4) Sibṭ bin Jūzī**, after revealing his own view on the life of Imam Hassan al-‘Askarī, writes:

*“His son’s name is Muhammad, and his patronymic is Abu ‘Abdullah and Abū al-Qāsim. He is the Proof of Allah’s existence, the Master of the Age, the Qāim, and the Muntazhar. The Imamate has come to an end with him.”*

*(Tadhkirah Khawās al-Ummah, p. 363)*

**5) Shablanjī** in the book, entitled Nūr al-Absār, writes:

*“Muhammad is the son of Hassan al-‘Askarī. His mother was a slave-girl by the name of Narjis. His cognomen is Abū al-Qāsim. The Twelver Shia knows him as al-Hujjah, al-Mahdi, al-Khalaf al-Sālih, al-Qāim, al-Muntazar, and the Master of the Age ...”*

*(Nūr al-Absār (Cairo edition), p. 342)*

**6) Ibn Hajar**, following the biography of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī, writes:

*“He has not left a son except Abū al-Qāsim, also known as Muhammad and al-Hujjah. The boy was five years old when his father passed away.”*

*(Al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqah, p. 206)*

**7) Muhammad Amin al-Baghdādī** writes:

*“Muhammad, also known as Mahdi, was five years old at the time of his father’s demise.”*

*(Sabāik al-Dhahab, p. 78)*

**8) Mīr Khawand** writes:

*“Muhammad is the son of Hassan. His cognomen is Abū al-Qāsim. The Imamiyyah acknowledges that he is the Hujjah, the Qāim, and the Mahdi.”*

*(Rawdāt al-Safā, vol. 3, p. 143)*

**9) Sha'rānī** writes:

*“Mahdi is the son of Imam Hassan al-'Askarī. He was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> night of Sha'bān, 255 A.H. (869 A.D.) He is alive and will remain so until he will emerge together with Prophet Jesus. Now it is 957 A.H. (1550 A.D.); he is, thus, 703 years old.”*

*(Al-Yawāqīt wa al-Jawāhir (1351 A.H./ 1932 A.D.) edition), vol. 2, p. 143)*

**10) Sha'rānī**, quoting Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūhāt Makkīyyah*, Section 366, writes:

*“When the Earth will be filled with tyranny and injustice, Mahdi will rise and fill the Earth with justice and equity. He is one of descendants of Prophet Muhammad and from the line of Fatima. He is from the descendants of Imam Hussain, and his father is Imam Hassan al-'Askarī ...”*

*(Al-Yawāqīt wa al-Jawāhir (1351 A.H. /1932 A.D. edition), vol. 2, p. 143)*

**11) Khājah Parsā**, in his book *Fasl al-Khitāb*, writes:

*“Muhammad, the son of Hassan al-'Askarī, was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> night of Sha'bān, 255 A.H. (870 A.D.). His mother’s name was Narjis. His father passed away when he was five years of age. From that time until now, he is in occultation. He is the awaited Imam of the Shia. His existence is well accepted among his companions, trusted associates, and family ...”*

(As cited in *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, vol. 2, p. 126)

**12) Abū al-Fallāh al-Hanbalī** says:

“*Muhammad is the son of Hassan al-'Askarī. His cognomen is Abū al-Qāsim and the Shia knows him as al-Khalaf al-Sālih, al-Hujjah, al-Mahdi, al-Muntazhar, and Sāhib al-Zamān (the Master of the Age)*”.

(*Shazarāt al-Zahab (Beirut edition)*, vol. 2, p. 141)

**13) Muhammad bin 'Ali al-Hamaw** says:

“*Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad al-Muntazhar was born in the year 259 A.H. (874 A.D.) in Samarra.*”

(*Tā'rikh Mansūrī, a microfilm copy of the Moscow manuscript folio number 114*)

In short, besides all the above-mentioned Hadiths, numerous other Sunni scholars have recorded the birth of Imam Hassan al-'Askari's son to the name of Mahdi. What is important is that many of them confess that the cognomen or the title of the mentioned son is Mahdi, and that he is the Promised Savior, who will emerge in an unknown day before the End of the Time.

(*See the references compiled in the volume **Kashf al-Astār** by Hussain bin Muhammad Taqī al-Nūrī and **Kifāyat al-Muwahhidīn** by Tabarsī, especially volume 2*).

## **The rituals of Mid-Sha'bān**

### **The rituals of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days of Sha'ban**

Sha'bān is the only month in the Islamic calendar that does not have a single day of mourning. It is truly a blessed month, especially for the auspicious occasion of Imam al-Mahdi's birthday on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month.

The eve of Mid-Sha'bān is extraordinarily honorable. Imam al-Sādiq (the Sixth Imam) narrated from his father when Imam al-Bāqir was asked about the merits of the night before the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Sha'bān as saying:

«هِيَ أَفْضَلُ لَيْلَةٍ بَعْدَ لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ فِيهَا يَمْنَحُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى الْعِبَادَ فَضْلَهُ وَ يَغْفِرُ لَهُمْ بِمَنْهٍ فَاجْتَهُدُوا فِي الْقُرْبَةِ إِلَى اللَّهِ فِيهَا فَأَيُّهَا لَيْلَةُ آلِي اللَّهِ تَعَالَى عَلَى نَفْسِهِ أَنْ لَا يَرُدَّ سَائِلًا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا لَمْ يَسْأَلْ مَعْصِيَةً وَ إِنِّي لَأَلْتِي جَعَلَهَا اللَّهُ لَنَا أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ بِإِزَاءِ مَا جَعَلَ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ لِنَبِيِّنَا ص فَاجْتَهُدُوا فِي الدُّعَاءِ وَ الثَّنَاءِ عَلَى اللَّهِ تَعَالَى عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ ...»

*“It is the most favorable night after the Qadr Night. At this night, the Almighty Allah bestows upon His servants with His favors, and grants them His pardon out of His conferral of benefits to them. Therefore, you should exert all efforts to seek nearness to Him at this night, because He has decided not to reject any asker as long as he/she does not ask for an act of disobedience to Him. Almighty Allah has chosen this night for us (the Ahl al-Bayt) just as He has chosen the Qadr Night for our Prophet. Thus, try your best to pray and praise Him, the Exalted, the Glorified diligently ...”*

However, some of the recommended rites to be carried out at this night are as follows:

### **1. To make a major ablution (Ghusl) at the time of sunset**

According to Imam Sādiq:

*“The Ghusl decreases the punishment for one’s sins.”<sup>9</sup>*

### **2. To stay awake at night to pray**

Imam Ali quoting the Prophet says:

*“When the night of the middle of Sha’ban comes, Allah says, ‘Is there anyone begging for forgiveness that I might forgive him? Is there anyone begging for sustenance that I may feed him?’”<sup>1</sup>*

### **3. To visit the tomb of Imam al-Hussain or recite his Ziyārah from distance**

<sup>8</sup> Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 94, p. 85; Misbāh al-Mutahajjid, p. 831.

<sup>9</sup> Misbāh al-Mutahajjid, p. 853.

<sup>1</sup> Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 95, p. 415.

To visit the tomb of Imam al-Hussain is the most favorable act at this night as it brings about forgiveness for one's sins. There is a narration from Imam Sādiq, saying:

*“If one desires that all the 124,000 prophets shake hands with him, he or she may visit the holy shrine of Imam al-Hussain at this night because, by the permission of Allah, the soul of all prophets visits the Imam's tomb then.”<sup>1</sup>*

The least of this Ziyārah is to go up an elevated place, look to the right and the left, raise the head towards the heavens and then say the following:

«السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا بَنِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ، السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ»<sup>2</sup>

*“Peace be upon you, O Abā-'Abdillah! Peace be upon you, O the son of Allah's messenger! Peace be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessing be upon you!”*

#### 4. To recite Kumayl supplication

Kumayl bin Ziyād, one of the sincere companions of Imam Ali, was quoted as saying that he had seen the Imam reciting this supplication in one of his prostrations.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. To recite:

a) (الله اكبر) *Subhānallāh* 100 times; b) (الحمد لله) *Alhamdulillāh* 100 times; c) *Allāhu Akbar* 100 times, and d) (لا اله الا الله) *Lā Ilāha illallah* 100 times

#### 6. To offer some supplications (as written in Mafātīh al-Jinān) like:

«اللَّهُمَّ بِحَقِّ لَيْلَتِنَا هَذِهِ وَ مَوْلُودِهَا وَ حُجَّتِكَ وَ مَوْعُودِهَا الَّتِي قَرَنْتَ إِلَى فَضْلِهَا فَضْلاً فَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُكَ صِدْقاً وَ عَدَلاً لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِكَ وَ لَا مُعَقِّبَ لِأَيَاتِكَ نُورِكَ الْمُتَالِقِ وَ ضِيَاؤِكَ الْمُشْرِقِ وَ الْعِلْمِ النُّورِ فِي طَحْيَاءِ الدَّيْجُورِ الْعَائِبِ الْمَسْتُورِ جَلَّ مَوْلِدُهُ وَ كَرَّمَ مَحْتَدُهُ وَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ شَهِدَةُ وَ اللَّهُ نَاصِرُهُ وَ مُؤَيِّدُهُ إِذَا أَنْ مِيعَادُهُ وَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَمْدَادُهُ سَيِّفُ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَنْبُو وَ نُورُهُ الَّذِي لَا يَخْبُو وَ نُورِ الْحِلْمِ الَّذِي لَا يَصْنُو مَدَارُ الدَّهْرِ وَ نَوَامِيسُ الْعَصْرِ وَ وُلَاةُ الْأَمْرِ وَ الْمُنْتَزِلُ عَلَيْهِمْ مَا يَنْتَزِلُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ ، وَ أَصْحَابُ الْحَشْرِ وَ النَّشْرِ تَرَاجِمُهُ وَ حِيَهُ وَ وُلَاةُ أَمْرِهِ وَ نَهْيِهِ اللَّهُمَّ فَصِّلْ عَلَى خَاتِمِهِمْ وَ قَائِمِهِمُ الْمَسْتُورِ عَنْ عَوَالِمِهِمُ اللَّهُمَّ وَ أَدْرِكْ بِنَا أَيَّامَهُ وَ ظُهُورَهُ وَ قِيَامَهُ وَ اجْعَلْنَا مِنْ أَنْصَارِهِ وَ اقْرُنْ ثَارَنَا بِثَارِهِ وَ اكْتُنِبْنَا فِي أَعْوَانِهِ وَ خُلَصَانِهِ وَ أَحْيِنَا فِي نَوَلْتِهِ نَاعِمِينَ وَ بِصُحْبَتِهِ غَانِمِينَ وَ بِحَقِّهِ

<sup>1</sup> Iqbāl al-A'māl, p. 710.

<sup>2</sup> Zād al-Ma'ād, p. 60.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Misbāh, by Kaf'amī, p. 555.

قَائِمِينَ وَمِنَ السُّوءِ سَالِمِينَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ خَاتَمِ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ وَ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ الصَّادِقِينَ وَ عِتْرَتِهِ النَّاطِقِينَ وَ أَلْعَنَ جَمِيعَ الظَّالِمِينَ وَ أَحْكَمَ بَيْنَنَا وَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَا أَحْكَمَ الْحَاكِمِينَ»<sup>١٤</sup>

“O Allah! For the sake of this night and he who was born tonight, Your decisive proof, Your “promise”, which You joined with him a favor upon favor. So, You fulfilled Your words truly and justly. No one can change Your words nor obscure Your signs. He is your light that is shining and Your luminance that is glowing. He is the bright sign that was previously hidden and covered in the gloominess of darkness. Dignified was his birth, honored was his association, and the angels stood witness to him. Allah is his helper and supporter when the promised event (of his return) approaches. The angels will aid him. He (the Imam) is the sword of Allah, which does not miss (its target); the light of Allah, which cannot be concealed; the possessor of forbearance, who does not act improperly; the pivot of ages; and the aware of the secretes of each set of time. He is one of the authorities of the affair, and descends on him whatever descends on the Night of Qadr. He is one of those who (matter) in the Day of Gathering and Resurrection, (those who) interpret His revelation, guide towards His commands and the forbidden laws. O Allah! Bless the last of them, the one who will rise among them, who is hidden from the cosmos. O Allah! Make us reach his days, his appearance and his rising; cause us to be among his helpers, join our struggle (to achieve the truth) with his struggle, include us among his supporters and sincere friends; and give us life in his reign, gentle so that we receive the bounties, benefit from his company, rise for his rightful (struggle), and are safe from evil. O the Most Merciful of the Merciful! (All) praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds! May His blessings be on Muhammad, the last of prophets and messengers, and upon his family, the truthful, and the articulate progeny. Curse all the oppressors and judge between us and them, O the best of all Judges!”

«الْهِيَ تَعَرَّضَ لَكَ فِي هَذَا اللَّيْلِ الْمُنْعَرِّضُونَ وَ قَصَدَكَ الْفَاصِدُونَ وَ أَمَلَ فَضْلَكَ وَ مَعْرُوفَكَ الطَّالِبُونَ وَ لَكَ فِي هَذَا اللَّيْلِ نَفَحَاتٌ وَ جَوَائِزٌ وَ عَطَايَا وَ مَوَاهِبٌ تَمُنُّ بِهَا عَلَى مَنْ تَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ وَ تَمْنَعُهَا مَنْ لَمْ تَسْبِقْ لَهُ الْعِنَايَةَ مِنْكَ وَ هَا أَنَا دَا عُنَيْدِكَ الْفَقِيرُ إِلَيْكَ الْمَوْمِلُ فَضْلَكَ وَ مَعْرُوفَكَ فَإِنْ كُنْتَ يَا مُؤَلَّي تَفَضَّلْتَ فِي هَذِهِ اللَّيْلَةِ عَلَى أَحَدٍ مِنْ خَلْقِكَ وَ عُدْتَ عَلَيْهِ بِعَائِدَةٍ مِنْ عَطْفِكَ فَصَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْخَيْرِينَ الْفَاضِلِينَ وَ جُدْ عَلَيَّ بِطَوْلِكَ وَ مَعْرُوفِكَ يَا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ خَاتَمِ النَّبِيِّينَ وَ آلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ وَ سَلِّمْ تَسْلِيمًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَدْعُوكَ كَمَا أَمَرْتَ فَاسْتَجِبْ لِي كَمَا وَعَدْتَ إِنَّكَ لَا تُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ».

<sup>1</sup> Iqbāl al-A'māl, p. 705.

<sup>1</sup> Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 95, p. 4f1.

“O Allah! On this night, the seekers have sought You, the aspirers have aspired for You, and the searchers have hoped for Your blessings and grace. And for You are there, on this night, hidden bounties, rewards, presents and gifts, which You bestow upon whom You please from Your servants, and You deny them to those who have not reached Your regard. Here I am, Your abject servant, in need of You, hopeful of Your blessings and grace. So, O my Master! if You bestow blessings on this night, on anyone of Your creatures and turn to him/her with affection, then bless Muhammad and his family, the pure, the purified, the virtuous, the excellent; and favor me with Your bounty, O the Lord of the worlds! O Allah! Bless Muhammad, the last of the prophets, and his family, the purified ones, (and send) a perfect salutation. Surely, Allah is Praiseworthy, Glorious. O Allah! I have supplicated to You as You have commanded, so answer me, as You have promised. Surely, You do not break Your promises.”

### 7. To offer some prayers like

At this night, Imam Bāqir and Imam Sādiq used to pray a four Rak'at (two two-unit prayers) as below:

In each Raka'at, recite Surah al-Fātiha one time and Surah al-Ikhlās hundred times.

At the end of the second prayer, recite the following Du'ā,

«اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي إِلَيْكَ فَاقِعٌ وَمِنْ عَذَابِكَ خَائِفٌ مُسْتَجِيرٌ اللَّهُمَّ لَا تُبَدِّلْ اسْمِي وَلَا تُغَيِّرْ جِسْمِي وَلَا تَجْهَدْ بِلَانِي وَلَا تُشْمِتْ بِي أَعْدَائِي  
أَعُوذُ بِعَفْوِكَ مِنْ عِقَابِكَ وَأَعُوذُ بِرَحْمَتِكَ مِنْ عَذَابِكَ وَأَعُوذُ بِرِضَاكَ مِنْ سَخَطِكَ وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْكَ جَلَّ تَنَاوُكَ أَنْتَ كَمَا أَتْنَيْتَ عَلَي  
نَفْسِكَ وَفَوْقَ مَا يَقُولُ الْفَائِلُونَ»<sup>1</sup>

“O Allah! I stand in need of You, and from Your punishment, I am fearful. Seeking refuge O Allah! Do not change my name nor alter my body, nor try me with a severe trial, and do not make my enemies rejoice (at my failure). I seek refuge in Your forgiveness from Your punishment and I seek refuge in Your mercy from Your chastisement, and in Your pleasure from Your anger, and in You from You. Great is Your praise. You are the way You have praised Yourself and even beyond what is said by the believers.”

**Compiled by:**

<sup>1</sup> Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 94, p. 88.

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