

# 1. The Knowledge of the Present Imam

After submitting ourselves to Allah and believing in the messengership of Muhammad (upon whom be peace), our first duty is to know the Imam of our time. This matter can be studied from three aspects:

- a) The reality of knowing the Imam.
- b) The importance of knowing the Imam from hadith's point of view.
- c) Why knowledge of the Imam is necessary?

## The Reality of Knowing The imam

Knowledge (ma'rifah) means to be acquainted with someone or something. For example, the "knowledge" of the Prophet means studying his biography, understanding his claim of prophethood, his aims, and his teachings, etc. To know the history of a person, his ideas and teachings means to have "knowledge" of him.

The first duty of the Shi'ahs, according to the *ahadith* of the Imams, is to know the Imam of their time. What does this mean? Does it mean only to know that; Our Imam was born on the 15th of Sha'ban, 255 A.H.; there were four representatives of the Imam during the lesser occultation (al-ghaybaha غيبته - غيبته ughrah). These four representatives were: 'Uthman ibn Sa'id al-'Amri, from 260/875-6 to 265/879; Muhammad ibn 'Uthman al-'Amri, from his father's death until his own in 305/917; al-Husayn ibn Rawhan-Nawbakhti, from then until 326/937-8; and finally 'Ali bin Muhammad as-Samari, until his death in 329/940-1; the greater occultation (al-ghaybah al-kubra) began in 329 A.H./940 A.D. ?

Does our duty about knowing the Imam of our time end at these historical informations? Surely not; the reality of the knowledge of the Imam is not just the knowing of these historical facts. Even the non-Shi'ahs are aware of these facts.

So what is the knowledge of the Imam? To fulfill our responsibility in regard to the knowledge of the Present Imam, we have to study the following matters:

1. The need for an Imam and a “proof” (hujjah) of God. In other words, the significance of the divine guidance which takes the form of imamat after the finality of nubuwwah (prophethood) and risalah (messengership).
2. The reality of imamat and wilayah. That is, the nature of the relationship of an Imam with the Prophet and Allah; and the relationship of the Shi‘ahs with the Imam.
3. The evidence of the birth of our twelfth Imam.
4. The proofs that the Present Imam is the son of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari.
5. The important events of the lesser occultation.
6. The causes of occultation.
7. Is it possible for a man to live for over thousand years?
8. The teachings and message of the Present Imam for his Shi‘ahs.
9. The signs which are to appear before the appearance of Imam Mahdi.
10. Studying the *ahadith* describing the appearance of Imam Mahdi.
11. Is the Imam aware of, and in connect with, his people?
12. If his presence is felt in the Shi‘ah community, then what is the nature of his presence?
13. The proofs of the imamat of our twelfth Imam.
14. Is it possible for an Imam to guide his community while he is in occultation?

These are some of the important matters which must be studied by the Shi‘ahs.

## **The Knowledge of The imam from hadith’s point of view**

The Prophet and the Imams of Ahlu ‘l-Bayt have very clearly explained the importance of knowing the Imam of the time. From these sayings we can understand that survival of our faith is based on our knowledge of the Imam of the time. If one lacks the knowledge of the Imam of his time, all his deeds will be valueless.

Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace) said, “One who dies and he does not believe in (lit. “have”) an Imam, his death will be the death of an unbeliever (jahiliyyah).”<sup>1</sup>

Imam Ja‘far aḥ-ḥadiq (upon whom be peace) said, “One who dies and he does not believe in an Imam, his death will be the death of an unbeliever. The people will not be excused unless they know their

Imam.”[2](#)

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (upon whom be peace) said, “Everyone who worships Allah, the Almighty and Great, and goes to a great length for it but does not believe in an Imam appointed by Allah, then his efforts are unacceptable, he is astray and lost. Allah rejects his deeds ... And if he dies in this state, he has died the death of unbelievers and hypocrites. And

... you should know that the unjust leaders and their followers are far from the religion of Allah.”[3](#)

Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (upon whom be peace) said, “One who believes in the Imams who came after the Messenger of Allah and does not believe in my son (Muhammad al-Mahdi), he is like the one who believes in all the prophets and messengers (of Allah) and then rejects the prophethood of (Muhammad, the last) Messenger of Allah.”[4](#)

The importance of knowing the Imam of the time can very clearly be understood from these *ahadith*. From the Islamic point of view, if a person believes in Allah, has faith in Muhammad and the Qur’an but does not know the Imam of his own time, his faith is of no value. And surely this knowledge about the Imam does not only cover the historical informations about him.

## Why Knowledge of the Imam is Necessary?

One of the basic principles of Islam is “love of God” and “love of the Messenger of Allah”. That is, our belief in Allah and His Messenger must have the scent of “love” (*hubb*). Even the Qur’an uses the words “faith and belief” (*iman*) and “love” (*hubb*) interchangeable words. Islam expects its followers to base their faith on love. This can be seen in the following verses of the Qur’an:

*... those who believe, they are stronger in love for Allah... (2: 165)*

***Say (O Muhammad): If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your faults, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (3:31)***

***Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brethren, your spouses, your kinsfolk, the property which you have acquired, the trade (whose slackness you fear) and the houses which you like-are more dearer (“beloved”) to you than Allah, his messenger and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His decision (about you on the day of judgement); and Allah does not guide the transgressing people. (9:24)***

Similarly, all the Shi‘ah ‘*ulama*’ agree that in case of *imamat* also, besides believing in the Imam, we must also love him. And so, we find that the principle of “*tawalla*” has found an important place in the Shi‘ah beliefs. Just to believe that Amiru ‘l-mu‘minin ‘Ali and the other Imams were the most superior, most knowledgeable, most courageous, etc, in their time is not enough; a Shi‘ah is one who, besides believing in these things, also loves his Imams.

But the question is, can a person love someone without knowing him? No. Love comes after knowledge of that particular person or thing.

At this point, we can conclude that the real Shi'ah is one who believes in the Present Imam and also loves him. And as love cannot exist without knowing the Imam, so a Shi'ah has an obligation to know the Imam of his time as much as he can. Without knowledge, one cannot love his Imam; and without loving the Imams, the Prophet and Allah, the faith of that person will be imperfect.

This love of the Imam is so important even in the view of Allah, that He has named it as a "reward for the messengership of Muhammad":

***Say (O Muhammad): 'I do not ask of you any reward for it (messenger ship) but love for my near relatives' ..." (42:23)***

## Which Type of Knowledge Can Create Love?

There are two ways of acquiring knowledge about a person or a thing:

a) knowledge based on research and study (*tahqiq*) and b) the knowledge based on following the others (*taqlid*).

*Tahqiq* means a person himself acquires the knowledge by studying until he reaches to the level of certainty and conviction; whereas *taqlid* means a person blindly follows someone else in that matter. He himself does not study. He just believes in that particular matter because he trusts someone who told him to believe so.

From the Shi'ite point of view, in the matters of belief, it is obligatory for every Muslim to accept them and believe in them only after achieving conviction of their truth. To blindly follow others in matters of belief (like *tawhid*, *nubuwwah*, *imamat*, *qiyamat*) is forbidden. The faith of a person who is a Muslim just because of the influence of the family or the society does not stand on strong foundation, neither will it be valuable. He would not be able to defend himself against the propaganda of the anti-Islamic forces.

We see that many Muslims who were religious in their own country, when they come to the West their religious foundation is destroyed. The main cause behind this destruction of faith is not Islam, it is the "blind following" of these Muslims.

In their own homelands, they were Muslim just because of their society and family; and as soon as they leave the society and the family, the foundation of their "religious beliefs" is lost, and so they are easily exposed to the germs of *kufir* in the Western countries.

If their religious foundation had been on *tahqiq*, the Western or the Eastern society makes no difference for them; and they would be immuned from the germs of *kufir*. The Qur'an clearly condemns blind

following in the matters of belief:

***And when it is said to them, “Come now to what Allah has sent down, and the Messengers,” they say, “Enough for us is what we found our fathers doing”. What, even if their fathers had knowledge of naught and were not (rightly-guided?) (5: 104)***

***And certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the men; (because) they have minds (lit. “hearts”) (but) with which they do not understand, and they have eyes (but) with which they do not see, and they have ears (but) with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are worst; they are heedless ones. (7: 179)***

The last verse clearly shows that those who follow others blindly in the matters of belief (and do not use their own power of perception) are worst, in the view of Allah, than even the animals.

*Imamat* is also a part of the matters of belief (*uḥuluḍ-dīn*) and so, even in this matter the Shi‘ahs have to follow the same method of believing only after achieving certainty and conviction about the truth of the Imams.

It is absolutely necessary for the Shi‘ahs of our time to seek knowledge of our Present Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi (upon whom be peace) so that their faith may rest on strong foundations; not on shaky foundations of blind following. It is this faith, springing from knowledge, which can create love in the hearts of the faithfuls.

- [1.](#) Ha’iri, Shaykh ‘Ali Yazdi; *Ilzamu ‘n-Naḥib fi lthbatiHujjati ‘1-Ga’ib*, p. 5
- [2.](#) aḥ-ḥafi, Luḥfullah; *Muntakhabu ‘1-Athar*, (part 10, chapter 5, hadith No. 5) p. 514.
- [3.](#) Shaykh Kulayni, *Uḥulu ‘l-Kafi*, (kitabu ‘1-hujjah, babma‘rifati ‘1-imam, hadith 8).
- [4.](#) Khazzaz al-Qummi, *Kifayatu ‘l-Athar*, p. 291.

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