

Chapter 4: Occultation Divine

[Secrecy of the birth of the 12th Imam al-Mahdi, al-Qaim](#)

The events of the life of the 12th Imam, al-Mahdi, upon who be peace, are like those in the life of Musa. The unjust rulers of the year 256 A.H/868 A.D. knew the prophecy about his birth, disappearance (*ghayba*), and overthrow of their rule. They feared his birth just as Pharaoh had feared the birth of Musa. The Imam's birth was kept secret from the ruler of the time as was done in the case of Musa; the prominent followers of Islam were aware, including in particular the 40 well-known Shi'ahs.

The latter were introduced to the Mahdi of the house of his father Hassan al-'Askari, the 11th Imam, who told his followers to keep the matter secret from the rulers. Imam Mahdi lived with his father for six years.

According to the Shi'ah and Sunni schools of thought, Jesus, from among the past vicegerents of God, will be the first one who will reappear on the terrestrial scene to follow al-Mahdi's lead. Jesus was the last outstanding link in the chain of the divine vicegerents of the Israelites branch of Ibrahim's issue. He disappeared from the terrestrial scene in an unusual way. Al-Mahdi is the last link of the divine vicegerents of the Ishmaelite branch of Ibrahim's issue who also went into an unusual occultation. Narjis, the mother of al-Mahdi, fell into the hands of Muslims as a captive of war and was brought to Bagdad as a slave girl. She was the daughter of one of the patriarchal princes who ruled the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire bordering the Abbasid Empire. Her father's ancestry traced back to Simon; the Peter of Israelite descent who was the nominated successor of Jesus.

The tenth Imam of the house, Ali al-Hadi an-Naqi had been well aware of her life story, her genealogy and her destiny. He sent one of his devotees from Samarra to Bagdad to wait for the arrival of the slave trader, who was bringing her along with the other women captives for sale. The Imam gave a brief description of Narjis to the man, with a fixed amount for the bargain with the trader and a letter to be handed to her, on behalf of the Imam. Everything went exactly as the Imam had predicted. To his surprise, the man found her well-acquainted with the Imam, her husband to be, Hassan al-'Askari. She had already seen al-'Askari in a dream as mentioned elaborately in the early records of the life story of

the 11th and 12th Imams. She set out with the agent of the Imam for Samarra, anxious to meet her beloved and his family.

After arrival in Samarra she married al-'Askari of her choice, as a free lady. The marriage was solemnized by the tenth Imam on her behalf, but it is said that in a dream she had seen the wedding solemnized by Prophet Jesus on her behalf and Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, on al-'Askari's behalf. In her dream the ceremony took place in the presence of Jesus' mother Maryam, Peter and 11 disciples of Jesus on the bride's side, and Ali, Khadijah, Fatima and the other ten Imams of the house of the bridegroom's side. The presence of 14 divine luminaries taking part from each side, as she had dreamt was actually substantiated and assumed its real interpretation in the state of awakening after the arrival of Narjis at Samarra, towards the close of the year 254 A.H.

The promised al-Mahdi was born from the union of Hassan al-'Askari and Lady Narjis, as such the last word of Allah in its complete form of Imamate appeared on the terrestrial horizon at the dawn of the 15th of Sha'ban at the end of the year 255 A.H./868 A.D. In the celebrated *Lauh-e Fatimi* (the heavenly tablet in the possession of Fatima, daughter of Prophet Muhammad), the name of the 12th Imam, same as that of the Holy Prophet, is mentioned in alphabetical order *Mim Ha Mim Dal* (M H M D), describing "the grace of all worlds." He is usually mentioned by his titles of *Sahib al-Zaman* (the Lord of the Age), *Imam-e Asr* (The Imam of the Period), *al-Qaim* (the Existent), *al-Muntazar* (the One Who is Awaited), and the Promised Mahdi (One who Rightly Guided and the Guider).

Minor Occultation and Deputies

After the demise of the 11th Imam by poison (260 A.H./872 A.D.) the government sent a posse in search of the child. They raided the house and searched all the apartments (*sardab*) there. After a thorough search they went down to the basement. To their extreme surprise, the hall appeared filled with water and like an island; a prayer mat was spread over the water in the middle of the hall. They saw the young Imam standing on the mat, wholly absorbed in his prayers. One or two members of the party attempted to cross the water to reach the Imam, but from fear of drowning they withdrew. They all stood in awe. They went back to their superiors and informed them of what they had seen. The officers warned them not to disclose to anybody what they had seen. After the incident the government thought it wiser to give up further search and to spread the rumour in which the 11th Imam had died without leaving any offspring. Accordingly the government distributed the property left by the 11th Imam among the nearest kin on the presumption he had left no child.

The disappearance of the last Imam in the cave (*sardab*) meant only the ruling party, who were searching for him, last glimpsed him in that place. Later, they could not find any trace of him. Even his followers could not meet with him in the usual manner. Nevertheless, there was regular communication between him and his followers, mostly through the four successive agents who were nominated by his father and him. But some of the most trustworthy followers had directed communication with him during

the period of the nominated “honorary agents” (*nawabin*). This period is termed as *al-Ghayba al-Sughra*, “Minor Occultation.” During this period the Imam used to give written replies to the questions of his followers, and issue directive letters (*tawqi’at*) through his nominated deputies (i.e. *Nawab* or *Wikala* or *Sufrat*). The names of the nominated deputies are (1) ‘Uthman ibn Sa‘id al-‘Umari (260 A.D./974 A.D. – 265 A.H./879 A.D.), and (2) his son, Muhammad (d. 305 A.H./917A.D.), his *kunya* was Abu Ja‘far, (3) Abul al-Qasim Hussain ibn Ruh ibn Abi Bakr al-Nawbakhti (d.326 A.H./937 A.D.), and (4) Abu al-Hassan ‘Ali bin Muhammad al-Sammari (his career 326 A.H./937A.D. – 329 A.H./941A.D.).

The period continued for almost 70 years. It began with the martyrdom of the 11th Imam Hassan al-‘Askari, on the 9th of Rabi‘ al-Awwal 260 A.H./874 A.D. The ninth of this month as the first day of accession of al-Mahdi, the last Imam of the house to the seat of Imam, is still celebrated by the Shi‘ahs as one of the religious festivals. The period of “minor occultation” ended in the year 329 A.H./940 A.D., when the last deputy, ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sammari received the following letter from the Imam, “Oh Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sammari, behold you shall die six days after the receipt of this letter. You shall not nominate anyone to succeed you as my special and nominated agent. Oh Ali, behold the time of my major disappearance has come. The time for my total and all-dominating reappearance (*zuhoor-e kulli*), as promised by God and prophesized by the Prophets and vicegerents, is known only to God. Behold! The following signs shall inevitably occur on the *eve of my reappearance*: (a) the onslaught of Sufyani, the embodiment of the evil forces, who disguising himself in the garb of the well-wisher of humankind will try to spread his domain all over the globe and (b) the heavenly cry being heard all over the world, as if it is coming from a nearby place.

“During this major occultation and before the appearance of the said signs, if anyone claims that (a) he has a regular meeting or audience with me (in a cognisable manner) or (b) he has established a regular communication with me in any shape or form, physical or spiritual, *he must be considered a liar and his claim as false.*” This is a free translation of the text of the epoch-making letter (*tyawqi*), with a few explanatory phrases taken from other apostolic reports.

Major Occultation

a) The Qur’an and Hadith

The aforesaid major occultation or disappearance of the 12th Imam, which means severance of all contacts of any follower with the Imam is considered by the *Ithna-‘Ashari Shi‘ah* as one of the fundamental articles of their faith. During this period the Imam will continue until the time of his reappearance, to live in his terrestrial body in the terrestrial realm, though in an invisible manner. They also believe that severance of contact is one sided, in the sense that only the followers have lost contact. So far as the Imam is concerned, the Shi‘ahs believe his invisible and spiritual domination over the world as the vicegerent of God and the last link in the chain of imamate, has not ceased. The state of his occultation is like a sun behind the clouds. While illuminating the surface of the Earth, the disc of

the sun cannot be seen.

The vicegerent of God in his terrestrial form is the centre of human society in whom the light of both the creative and legislative will of God is focused. Thus, as a spiritual sun (the Imam) re-radiates, reflects and diffuses all that he has received as a permanent blessing from the above, to his surroundings, the sub-ordinate social and individual centres of humanity. The reflection even expands to the animal, vegetable and inanimate centres below human level. The real disc of this spiritual sun is the mind and not the body of the Imam and it is the case with all the Imams hidden from the bulk of their followers even during their physical presence. A very few accomplished persons might have a sort of spiritual communion with the Imam or the vicegerent of the time during his physical appearance. The contact of the rest of the followers with the Imam is only through oral or written speech, directly or through narrators.

The Imam is commissioned by God either (a) to deliver a new message to humankind as Prophets who are termed as *Ul ul-Azm* (the Prophet with decisive power) or (b) to explain the message of the Prophet whom they succeed, as it is the case of the successors of the *Ul ul-Azm*. So from Adam to the end of the minor occultation of the 12th Imam, the presence of the vicegerents or regular contact with them meant the contact of an ordinary student with his teacher through the external senses. There was no domination of the master mind over the mind of the followers. This communion of the Imam with the soul of his followers is presented in the Qur'an in 33:6: "*That the Prophet has the greater claim on the believers than they have on their own selves.*" It is this communion which Ali refers in *Nahj al-Balagha*, "I used to see the light of revelation and smell the fragrance of prophethood. The Prophet told me, 'Oh Ali, surely you see whatever I see and you hear whatever I hear but you are not a prophet. You are my assistant (next to the Prophet in spirit).'" Next to Ali only a very few, such as Salman Farsi, Abu Dharr, 'Ammar Yasir and others of their rank attained communion with the Prophet. The same is the case with the followers of every one of the 12 Imams of the house. Few had spiritual intimacy with the person of the Imam.

The people approached the Imams in their capacity as preachers and as *walayat*, the all-dominating spiritual authority. It is immaterial for the Imam to be known or unknown to the people of the world, which is spiritually managed and administered by him. For instance, Musa was commissioned to preach the precepts of God to humankind so it was necessary he should be known to the people. But the man who was given the task of executing the will of God in secrecy should not be known to the people or even to the Prophets of limited jurisdiction (vide the Qur'an 17:60 – 82: the story of Musa and Khidr). Ali confirms what the Qur'an asserts, "The earth is never left by God devoid of a man of divinely authoritative status (*hujjah*) to function as an "intermedia" between him (God) and the rest of the creatures of the world. He may be seen and unknown (to the people) and he may be in obscurity, unseen and unknown (to the people)." In other words, the divine vicegerency of a perfect man on Earth has two functions: one is to preach what God has ordered men to know; the other is to exercise the spiritual power delegated to him by God.

For enabling the vicegerents to preach the heavenly books and the explanatory notes which were revealed to them, it is necessary people should have ways of contacting them. But to exercise the spiritual authority in his jurisdiction, it is not necessary the vicegerent be known to the people. Thus from Adam to the last Prophet, the vicegerents would appear, after some intervals, to establish contact with the people, as preacher and teacher. Then again they would retreat from the scene to occultation, leaving people to apply the revealed directives. With the last Prophet the most comprehensive message of God was revealed in the form of the Qur'an. It took almost 22 years and ten months to complete its communication. As the most concise code of the creative and legislative will of God, the Qur'an formed the constitution of Islam. For further details and explanation, the Prophet, whose life embodied the divine revelation, gave directives in words, deeds and endorsements. Thus the *Sunnah* was declared by the Qur'an as an indispensable part of the divine constitution.

But to enable the people to have a coherent idea of these two inseparable parts of the Islamic constitution in its final form, the 23 years' time of the Prophet's ministry was not sufficient. It took almost 300 years for the Muslims to try to codify the second part of the constitution and to put it into material which would help readers to grasp the two parts. This is the period of codification, explanation and amplification. It is the period of consolidation of the Islamic constitution, *al-Shari'ah*. The presence of the successive vicegerents and the infallible successors of the last Prophet, the 12 Imams of the house of the Prophet, were necessary during this period as guides for the people to follow a proper course of consolidation. For this purpose, the Prophet declared he was leaving behind two precious things: the book of God and his *Ahl al-Bayt* as guides.

They shall not separate from each other until the Day of Resurrection and whoever adheres to these two shall never go astray. All schools of thought in Islam have their origin in this consolidatory period. Therefore, the presence of the Imams during the period in question was a special grace with which God blessed the seekers of truth, who were anxious to have a true version of the revealed constitution.

b) Ijtihad: personal meetings with al-Qaim

When the consolidation was over and a detailed form of divine constitution was made available to the people, the aim of *Imamate*, in the capacity of a divine preacher, had been achieved and reached its final stage in 330 A.H. After this achievement the retreat of the Imam from the scene of apparent guidance to the state of occultation was also a divine blessing and grace, but in disguise. It was necessary people be given the chance to apply their mind to understand the implications of the detailed constitution of Islam which was placed within their reach in the form of the Qur'an, the life of the Prophet, and mirrored in the life of the 12 Imams. It is the period to make all efforts with care, piety and sincerity, to grasp the significance of the revelation through the rational approach. This is called *ijtihad*, i.e. rationalization of revelation.

During this period the presence of the Imam as an ordained teacher is not needed. Therefore, his existence in the terrestrial realm as the focus of the legislative and creative "rays of divine will" is an

indispensable blessing and grace of God. Nevertheless, it is also true his occultation is another blessing and grace of God. Thus, his existence is a grace, his functioning another grace, and his functioning behind the clouds of occultation is a further grace.

During this period the course open to the people is: (1) to make all efforts with utmost piety to obtain a thorough knowledge of the sciences and topics which are required to grasp every part of the constitution of Islam, i.e. the Qur'an and the directives of the Prophet and his *Ahl al-Bayt*, and (2) to follow the opinion of qualified persons in the manner prescribed in the treatise on *ijtihad* and *taqlid*. It is open to everyone, irrespective of race or nationality, to obtain the qualifications required to become an authority on the Islamic constitution. It only requires knowledge and piety.

The requisite knowledge here means: (1) the knowledge of the relation of the creatures to their Creator, (2) the knowledge of the essence and attributes of the Creator, (3) the knowledge of the relation of the Creator with His creatures and, then (4) the knowledge of the relations of the creatures to each other as established by the creative and legislative will of the Creator. All this knowledge should be obtained from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* through a rational approach. The requisite piety here means to develop such care and attention as not to displease the merciful Creator by neglecting the duties towards Him, His creatures and towards one's own self, as prescribed by the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. These two conditions may be considered as the distinctive features of the Shi'ah faith. The pious *mujtahids*, or representatives of the imams, are authorities to the extent of their knowledge and piety. The deeper their piety and knowledge, the higher their authority.

To lead congregational prayers, a considerable knowledge and piety are necessary. To be a recognized authority on Islamic sciences, the highest standard of knowledge and piety is essential. In the case of difference of opinion among the *mujtihad*, laymen are bound to follow the opinion of the best living *mujtahid* of the time. After acquiring the basic proficiency and knowledge for *ijtihad*, each student of theology and Islamic sciences may specialize in one or more branches of the subjects concerned. In that case the laymen have to follow the best specialist in each branch of study. For example, one *mujtahid* might have specialized in the ritual branch of *fiqh* (Islamic law) for devotional services and another *mujtahid* in personal law. The laymen have to follow each in the specific branch in which the *mujtahid* is an expert.

In the case of *fatwa*, the legal opinion of the best living *mujtahid* is considered the authority. But for judicial and administrative purposes, knowledge and piety are enough. There is no need of his being the best *mujtahid*. Any pious *mujtahid* can discharge judicial functions and his judgment will be binding. He can perform all the administrative duties which Islam enjoins concerning various aspects of human life – the personal, domestic, social, economic and the political.

However, knowledge and piety are two indispensable verifiable conditions required to be a *mujtahid*. To attain them no master's permission, mystic transfer of power to the disciple, nomination or non-Qur'anic declaration of the outgoing authority on his successor is required, as is the case with mystic orders and

“*hazir* Imams,” and *da'is* of the hereditary authorities in Islam. Nor will voting raise a person to authority. Of course, the opinion of other *mujtahids* about the competency of a person may be sought by the layman.

There are methods recommended by some people for having personal communion with the Imam al-Mahdi (*Sahib al-Zaman*) or receiving a blessing from him. Some are baseless, and others are uncertain. But piety and devotion to the cause of the *Ahl al-Bayt* reduces the thickness of the veil between the follower and the Imam. Materialistic desires and tendencies are the main obstacles.

Thus any directive supposed to have been received from the Imam through such occasional contacts, shall be classed under the category of (a) visions and dreams of fallible people, (b) the subjective findings of the systems, (c) the esoterical contact and inner experience of the gnostics, and (d) alphabetical and astrological calculations of the occultists. Of these none can be considered to have any authoritative value, unless the result is confirmed by clear verdict of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Any method to grasp the legislative or the creative will of God, other than the rational and logical approach to the contents of the Qur'an and the teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, should be treated as nothing more than a hypothesis. We are in the age of rationalization of revelation, which means all our efforts to understand and explain the significance of revelation in the light of certain measurable and verifiable logical principles, rules and conditions.

The period of interpretation of previous revelations by some new revelation or inspiration is over. Anyone who claims to have a super-rational authoritative method to ascertain the divine will, besides the scriptural and apostolic texts left among the people before the major occultation of the 12th Imam, is false, and the claimant is an imposter. The greater knowledge and piety, the thinner will be the cloud and veil of occultation between the qualified person and the Imam. But the veil cannot be removed in such a way that the outer disc (body) of the luminary (Imam) can be seen and at the same time be recognized in which the person is the Imam himself. Nor can any regular communion of the soul of the qualified person with the soul of the Imam be established. There are reports of learned or pious people having physical or spiritual contact with the Imam during this period of major occultation. Some of these accounts are authentic and reliable. But of these, none shows the person actually knew he was in the presence of the Imam.

According to the Shi'ah faith, there is nothing more required for the perfection of the human personality than to follow the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and his household. This is implied in the Qur'anic declaration regarding the perfection of religion (5:3), the details of which are given by the Holy Prophet and the Imams of the house. It would be enough here to quote the Holy Prophet's statement, "There is nothing which brings you close to God and keeps you away from hell except what I have ordered you, and there is nothing which brings you close to hell and away from God except what I have prohibited you. Surely God has fixed limitations (for human activities), do not trespass them." This is part of one of his sermons delivered during his last pilgrimage to Mecca. There is no need of any addition,

omission or alteration by people. It is the duty of the qualified *mujtahids* to understand the requisite rules and apply them as the occasions arise during the major occultation.

Appearance of al-Qaim

The reappearance of the Imam in human society after the major occultation is not for the purpose of delivering any new message, nor any alteration in the system of human life, not already provided for or implied in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. His reappearance is as the chosen executor of the divine law. He reappears with the sole purpose of reducing all religions of the world into one approved by God, namely Islam, and then seeing it is extended throughout the world and practiced by every human being. He reappears to spread justice, prescribed by Islam, all over the globe. "He fills the Earth with fairness and justice, after the Earth would be filled with injustice and aggression" (Majlisi, II, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 42, p. 336). The apostolic reports assert He will reappear with such divine power in which all temporal forces will be vanquished. He reappears not as a preacher of the divine will, as the pretending Mahdis of modern time would claim.

He reappears as the powerful executor of the divine will and command. He reappears as the all dominating *walayat*. His "total reappearance" is in the period wherein the spiritual mastership of perfect man over the realm of humanity will be manifested in the person of the 12th Imam, the last vicegerent of the last Prophet. He represents Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, in both name and the real meaning of the word. "Muhammad," as pointed out earlier, is the term divinely assigned to the created being who is the first and the last in degree of perfection in the arcs of descent and ascent, and who is in the highest possible stage of communion with the Absolute. So his reappearance is the manifestation of *walayat* – mastership of Muhammad – on Earth.

Some apostolic reports assert the time will come when al-Mahdi will be ordered by God to appear on the scene of humanity for the performance of the executive task assigned to him. He will then enter the sacred mosque at Mecca and keeping his back to the wall of the Ka'ba, declare his appearance to deliver humankind from the miseries of injustice and the licentious existence of the time. Hours prior to the declaration, there will be a similar declaration from Dajjal – the anti-Muslim personality. Both declarations will be heard throughout the globe at once. The chosen devotees of al-Mahdi, who are the same in number as the faithful warriors of Badr, and others willing to respond to the sacred call will reach Mecca within a very short time. The communication throughout the world will be very quick. The people will see each other from remote places.

These prophecies were made and recorded at a time when the natural forces and the means of communication at the disposal of man were confined only to donkeys, mules, horses and camels on the land, sailboats on the sea, and pigeons, hawks and other trained birds in the sky. Nobody had even dreamt of the modern means which man is using for communication and contact today. The impossible of that time is becoming the simple fact of today. Confirming the assertion of the Qur'an, Ali states the

stars and heavenly bodies are populated by living beings. The cities there are like our cities, but connected with each other by columns of light, which we have just started to use for communication. There are many statements of this kind from saintly men long before the advent of scientific discoveries and inventions. Such statements show the insight of their author into the nature of the universe.

Now, with atomic energy man is trying to establish communications with the moon, Mars, and other planets. This attempt is possible according to the Qur'an, provided man has the requisite authority at his disposal (55:33). But until now the power and forces discovered and used by man are material ones. Nevertheless, they are producing wonders. The superhuman incorporeal powers of the spiritual and psychic type have not yet been properly understood, measured, controlled, and used by men. Undoubtedly there are occasional displays of supernatural forces in the form of miracles of the vicegerents of God. These instances may only be taken as convincing proofs of the existence of supernatural energies dominating the material realms. But the time for regular use of these spiritual energies has not yet come. When God will allow the "perfect man" possessing these energies to display their regular use for the welfare of humanity, the impact shall be greater than the use of atomic energy. With such super-material energies, only the space distances will be removed.

Communication between the living and the dead may be established. Many vicegerents and saintly men of the past who had played a part in the advancement of the noble and final aim will reappear on the scene of the divine kingdom on Earth when it is established. When the time distance is removed, the godly men who sacrificed themselves for the complete manifestation of the divine kingdom through the person of the Imam will appear and enjoy the results of the sacred role they performed. Not only the good people of the past will reappear but some of the opponents, too, may be brought to the scene, to reveal the wretched ends of those evil doers (28:83). The verse refers to a sort of "partial resurrection" prior to the "total resurrection" which is referred to 18:47.

Al-Mahdi combines in him the dignity of Musa in perfection, the grace of Jesus and the patience of Job. Thus, in the person of al-Mahdi the two chosen branches of Ibrahim's issue are reunited. By the reappearance of Jesus, to follow the lead of al-Mahdi, the kingdom given by God to the family of Ibrahim will be manifested under the banner of Islam, the sole religion approved by God. The heavenly kingdom will be established on the Earth, the last Prophet, Muhammad, upon whom be peace. His leadership will be accepted by Jesus, and other godly men of spiritual attainments will appear on the scene, of their own choice. Also, some of their opponents will be forced into the scene by the agencies functioning in that realm.

The reappearance of al-Mahdi and his reign is termed as *Zahoor Mahdi Alaihis Salaam*, the descent of Al-Mahdi; the appearance of *'Isa Alaihis Sallam*, the descent of Jesus. The appearance of other people who died or their wicked opponents is termed as *Raj'at*. The process is termed as the minor resurrection (*Qayamat-e Sughra*), the rule of the perfect man over the world. It has to precede the major resurrection (*Qayamat-e Kubra*), the manifestation of the divine kingdom over man and the universe.

It has been proven the return of a departed soul to a body in the form of an embryo in the womb of a mother and rebirth in the usual manner known to us, is impossible. Return of the dead to life, whether in an individual or collective way, means the soul assuming a new body, similar to the previous one. This process can be in two ways: (1) the development of the earthly realm into the celestial form as the Qur'an says: "The day when the Earth is replaced by a different Earth and the Earth will be illuminated with the light of its Lord (and not with the light of the sun)" or (2) the descent of the soul to the earthly level by assuming an earthly body as the angels do (19:17). Both are possible and both may take shape towards the ultimate resurrection. The Muslims, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians firmly believe in individual and collective resurrection of human souls after death. So, to the followers of these faiths, the reappearance of al-Mahdi, the descent of Christ and the return of some virtuous and wicked men to life is a sort of partial resurrection, prior to the ultimate resurrection should not appear strange.

As the Qur'an asserts: **"And among His signs is the creation of (1) the heavens and the earth and (2) the living beings which He spread in the heavens and the earth. And He is able to bring them together as he wills (whenever and in whatever manner He wills and intends)"** (42:29). He may collect all or some groups of them on the terrestrial level or in the celestial sphere. The basis of theistic religions is the faith which the material world, which appeals to our external senses, is the seen, "*Alam-e Shahadat*, and held world, "*Alam-e Mulk*. It has holding power by itself. It is controlled by the unseen worlds and spheres of agencies. They are termed as *malakut*. These unseen agencies are of grades; the lower ones are controlled by higher grades. But whether lower or higher, all the unseen holding agencies, like the seen and held world, are created, held and controlled by the creative will and might of the All-gracious, Absolute One. To such might and will of the Absolute Creator, controlling all the seen and unseen spheres of the universe, no proposition can be considered impossible.

Ponder of the Qur'an

All the following events, asserted in the Qur'an or other scriptures and apostolic reports confirmed by the Qur'an are undeniable:

- (1) The creation of a living being, man, other animals, or plants, through a process unknown to us. (15:25 – 30, 18:51, 56:61, and similar verses. *Al-Sahifat al-Kamilat al-Sajjadiyya*, The Muhammadi trust, London, England, Supplication 63 for Monday, p. 223; *Nahj al-Balagha*, 55:14 – 15).
- (2) The transformation of an inanimate object to animal and vice versa, sudden or gradual transformation of one animal to another animal of a different species. (27:10, 12, and chapter 20.)
- (3) The return from death to life after the lapse of a considerable time (2:259, chapter 18), the return of a departed soul to the same body and stage of life at which it had left, but not through the process of rebirth and return from the actual stage to a potential one. (In every chapter of the Qur'an there are verses relating to the resurrection, *Qiyamat*, adding to more than 500 verses spread over the Qur'an. 2:260 is one example for Prophet Ibrahim.)

- (4) The living of a perfect man who is freed from material fetters and controlling the material realm for one or 2000 years or more. For example, in the case of Jesus and the 12th Imam, al-Mahdi: the time factor is controlled by God. (27:143 – 144 and 8:60 – 82).
- (5) The descent of angelical, celestial and ethereal entities to the terrestrial sphere by assuming human forms. (12:17 – 21 and 11:69, 78.)
- (6) The ascent of the highly developed terrestrial entities to the super-terrestrial spheres without suffering death. Instead of separation of the body from the soul, the body assimilates for a period of conditions of the sphere to which the soul ascends. (18:1, ch. 53, 3:55.)
- (7) The transfer of a heavy object from its place to a remote place in the twinkling of an eye. (28:40 – 41.)
- (8) The birth of a child from a virgin without an insemination. (3:46 – 47.)
- (9) The curing of diseases, the blind, deaf, lepers and insane people and bringing the dead to life without any medical means. (5:110)
- (10) The splitting of the sea and making a dry passage for people to cross from one side to the other. (22:77 – 78)
- (11) The descent of angels to help godly people against the disbelievers. (3:124 – 126)
- (12) The sleeping of a few believers for 309 years in a cave and their waking after such a long period, as mentioned in the Qur'an and pre-Islamic apostolic records of the seven sleepers. (18:9, 22, 25 – 26)

All these wonders have their own category, they are possible in themselves. They may not be possible in the sense they do not take place through the means known to man. As the Qur'an says, "***Oh company jinns and man, if you are able to penetrate the diameters of the Earth and Heaven, then do it, but you penetrate not except with certain force (which has not yet come within your disposal)***" (55:33).

Today, man is able to reach the moon, something which was once considered impossible. Science extends the scope of man's contact with his surroundings, but no power can make a triangle with more or less than three angles, not a part of a whole greater than the whole itself, because the proposition is self-contradictory.

The birth, growth and the minor and major occultation of the 12th Imam, and his reappearance are not stranger than the wonders and miracles narrated in the Qur'an, scriptures and the apostolic reports. The historical evidence of his past and present is more authentic than those of others. How he will be recognized at the time of reappearance is a basic question, as he will reappear with the same divine signs and powers with which all the vicegerents of God have appeared on Earth.

All the aforesaid is based on the monotheistic view and on a faith in the unseen, as explained before. As the Qur'an says, "***The Book wherein and about which no doubt exists, is guidance for the pious ones, who believe in the unseen***" (2: 1), which includes the occultation of the Imam also. The absolute materialistic existentialism of today has no place for miracles like the occultation of the 12th Imam.

Pseudo-religious movements

Ideologies which concentrate on subjective values of religious and ethical thoughts tend towards materialism in the garb of religion or moralism. During the period of the partial occultation of the 12th Imam, movements were started under the name of a false Mahdi with political aims and economic benefits. The pretenders' main attempt was to interrupt the miraculous assertions of previous scriptures as common facts of the terrestrial world. To them the word "al-Mahdi" was more appealing and convincing than the actual belief in the resurrection and the life hereafter. Some were impudent enough to announce the abrogation of Islam and its replacement by a new message and new commandments. Some of them call themselves the subordinates of prophets. They claim to give a different interpretation to some Qur'anic passages in which they show little or no originality.

They move towards adapting any thought, belief and practice which is an outcome of empirical knowledge and materialistic values: they do so even at the violation of the sacred aspect of human life. The best evidence of what they stand for is the religious texts which these pretenders prepared which are full of absurd thoughts. The immediate successors of the founders of the pseudo-religious movements considered it wiser to get those texts withdrawn from the market and religious circles of the world.

The source of these movements can be traced in the old gnostic movements appearing in the Islamic garb of the ultra-Shi'ahs, and some Sufi sects of the Sunnis. These gnostic and mystic ideas infiltrated the Shiekhi and Kashfi movements which flourished among the Shi'ah traditionists of the 18th and 19th centuries A.D., and then manifested themselves among the Shi'ahs in the garb of the Mahdi and among the Sunnis in the form of the Messiah. Here also the pretenders were actually the camp followers of the pretenders calling themselves Mahdis. The founders of the new movements try to hide the absurdity of their religious ideas by having a very good organization for propaganda and a plan for solving the economic requirements of their adherents. It attracts these people who are anxious to be in some religious group and at the same time keep pace with the modern materialist progress.

Unable to satisfy the religious urge of the people though a rational approach to the Qur'an and the scriptural and apostolic records, the founders of these movements have given mystic shades of meaning to unequivocal religious terms. They could not offer a clear solution of the religious problems about the creation of the universe, man's place in it, and the revealed purpose of creation. Neither have the rights and obligations of individuals been defined. They have intended theosophical phrases and terminologies which confuse human thought.

The ritual and doctrinal contributions can be estimated from a few examples. In some of these groups, a calendar for ritual purposes has been introduced. It is based on a year of 361 days. It is divided into 19 months. Each month contains 19 days. It differs from both the lunar and the solar calendars used by humankind from time immemorial. Of the two, one is based on the astronomical calculation of the 28 revolutionary phases of the moon around the earth; the other is based on the seasonal revolution of the Earth around the sun. Both the old calendars, based on regular phenomenal changes, are natural and useful for calculation of time.

In the view of their geographical and astronomical backgrounds and utility, both have been recognized since the beginning of human civilization. Both are recognized by Islam to the extent of its expedience for ritual and economical purposes (vide 2:189, 197; 9:36; 10:6; 16:12; 17:12).¹ But the year comprised of 361 days, 19 months each of 19 days seems to have no scientific basis except its oddity. It is said it is based on some numerical and symbolical considerations which may have some significance, but no bearing on the solution to religious problems.

(b) It is a common belief among the Christians and Muslims that Jesus was lifted by God to heaven. But whether the ascent was made through the instrument of death and departure of the soul from the body or the ascent happened with the living body, is a matter of dispute among Muslim theologians. Some hold the first view in which he was made to die and then take up. The origin of this view goes back to the first, second, third, and fourth centuries A.H. Sheikh Saduq in his treatise on *Beliefs (al-'Iteqadat)* seems to hold this opinion. But other theologians insist he was taken up alive in the same manner as the Holy Prophet was and brought back again. Then the difference between the ascents of the two Prophets would be a matter of: (a) the duration of the ascents and (b) the stage to which each had ascended.

The duration of Jesus' ascent will be much longer than the Prophet. But the stage to which the latter ascended was the farthest and highest possible. We have already pointed out the possibility of both kinds of ascents during the life and after death. Both Christians and Muslims are unanimous about the descent of Jesus before the total resurrection occurs. Jesus will descend to the terrestrial realm once again to lead men, as the Christians say, or to be led, by al-Mahdi towards the establishment of the godly kingdom throughout the world, as the Muslims believe.

According to the first view about his ascent, his descent will be his *Raj'at*, return to life, and according to the other view of his ascent, his descent will mean his descending alive after a very long stay in the region of his ascent. To those who believe in the resurrection and return of the entire dead to life, it will not be difficult to accept the idea of the return of one person to life before the total resurrection. In the same way, to those who believe in the physical ascent of the Holy Prophet to the heavenly regions and his descending back to Earth, it should not be surprising if the same is said about Jesus. His ascent has been to a lower stage of the heavens, but for a longer period, while that of the Prophet has been to the highest terminus, *Sidrat al-Muntaha*, but for a shorter period.

This in mind, one may ask the pseudo-religious societies and so-called reformers why they attach so

much importance to this issue. Whether he died and went to the heavenly region assigned to him or he ascended alive, does not make any essential difference, nor does it necessarily mean he has vacated the terrestrial regions for another man to come long after him. Sometimes the man claims to represent Muhammad, sometimes Krishna, and sometimes Buddha. God can send back to this terrestrial region, every one of these spiritual leaders in person, if necessary. There is no need to send the imitators. Supposing their return in person is not expedient, then God would send a new messenger with a new title, new mission and with convincing signs.

Even the imitators' claim to being the expected messiah or Mahdi, has no bearing on the question of whether the heavenly life of Jesus or the invisible life of the son of al-'Askari, followed their earthly death or not. Because the pretender can say the holy individuals formerly born on Earth, have been raised alive or through the instrument of death, and they may come back to Earth before the resurrection day. The pretenders may claim they are for the time being the Messiah or the Mahdi of Earth, and the belief of the Sheikhis, Kashfis and some of the Sufi leaders of the Sunni and Shi'ah schools and some sections of the ultra-Shi'ahs imply this claim. They claim a mysterious communion with the Imam and the previous vicegerents of God living beyond the terrestrial sphere. While there is no demonstration of their claims, there is more twisting of the previous scriptures and apostolic statements. All are false.

All the reliable reports show the same Jesus, son of the Virgin Mary, and the same Mahdi, son of Hassan al-'Askari, will appear on the terrestrial scene for the establishment of the divine kingdom.

One should be optimistic about human progress towards the sublime achievement. All the miseries and sorrows inflicted by temporal life upon individuals and societies are for the best. No misery would afflict a person who has faith in the manifestation of the divine kingdom through a man who has inherited the virtues of the vicegerents of God from Adam to the Last Prophet and his *Ahl al-Bayt*. That faithful person who has no doubt that his firm devotion to the ideal rule will not only be rewarded in the life hereafter, but in the life here also, looks upon unpleasant events as steps towards the fulfilment of God's promises in the Qur'an. The task ahead for the faithful is to reach the truth through rationalization of revelation by means of the Islamic sciences and to preserve justice by acting in accord with the constitution of Islam. It is an attainment which has no limits. Therefore, the door is open for man to keep increasing the extent of his knowledge and piety, until the period of occultation.

According to this school of thought, it is wrong to consider anyone else, other than the vicegerents of God, to be perfect in knowledge and piety. So the door on *ijtihad* in theory and practice is always open to anyone willing to secure the above object to the best of his ability.

But if any person denies the truth of such prophecies or accepts them in part or interprets them in a way to suit his own end, it is better for him to put aside all the prophecies of the past whether or not they are clear in their meanings. Let him not base his claim only on religious statements prior to the time of the claimant, which are capable of different interpretations and applications. It is illogical to prove one doubtful proposition by another doubtful one. Let him come out with a clear and unambiguous claim of

being God or being in communion and contact with him in a super-reasoning manner which is not open to other people of his time. There is no need for assuming the names or titles of people whose advent is expected by some communities.

The Prophet of Islam claimed to have been commissioned by God to guide the people of all times and all places. He did not invite only the Jews, Christians or the followers of the other faiths on the grounds he was the one whose advent they were expecting. He invited all, even those who did not believe in the prophets or anything revealed to them, and those who deny the existence and the life hereafter. By the force of his arguments and tremendous character, *Khulq-e 'Azim*, he proved his claim and introduced God, the previous Prophets and other articles of faith to those who had no faith in anything but *dahr* (nature). He, as a known historical figure, with a forceful and challenging testimony, the Qur'an stood facing all shades of opinion, tendencies and schools of thought. On the basis of his established claim, he has proved to all what was unknown or doubtful to them, and his divinely chosen successors from his house are the link of divine guidance, as has been discussed in detail.

Apostates

Ever since the occultation of the 12th Imam all those who claimed to have authority over people on account of their being in communion with the Imam, the Prophet, the angels or God, are imposters. Shalmaghani and Mansur Hallaj, during the period of the minor occultation and other imposters of the 13th and 14th and even 15th centuries of Hijrah, tried to deny all miracles and supernatural wonders attributed to the Prophets and godly men. They interpret all the scriptural and apostolic records of miraculous deeds as something ordinary. They planned it so that nobody should ask them to produce the same miracles or some other convincing wonders in support of their claims. But this strategy failed because the negation of evidence for the claims of the previous Prophets did not result in anything positive in favour of their own claims. They sensed the failure and resorted to some theurgical imitations. The easiest course of such imitative miracles is vague prophecies and ambiguous predictions which are not based on astrological calculations or ecstatic visions. In most cases these predictions and prophecies, in spite of being capable of various interpretations due to their vagueness, remain unfulfilled or proved false.

The only attraction in these pseudo-religious movements is their organization. In some of these movements there are sensory and sensual entertainments as well. The organizational and the entertaining temptations may not be of use in one's progress towards the religious objects, but they cement the organizations so well as to be used by political powers for their ends. These organizations can serve imperialism as a strong fifth column. Here is an example of a common misinterpretation of 32:5 of the Qur'an to prove their pseudo-religious movement as a substitute of Islam. The Qur'anic passage refers to the course (procedure) of the divine authority exercised in respect of His creative and legislative will and command (*al-'Amr*). The course begins from the highest heavenly sphere and descends to the material and terrestrial end.

Then it takes an upward course from the terrestrial terminus to the heavenly sphere. It (the Qur'an) refers to the two corresponding courses of descent and ascent. The course of descent (*nuzul*), moving away from the light of perfection and things becoming dark is termed in the Qur'an as "night" and the course of ascent (*'uruj*), progressing towards the light of the perfect and things becoming brighter is termed as "day." These two administrative courses of descent and ascent have been referred to in the Qur'an in several places. Here, to avoid confusion with the ordinary day of 24 hours, the passage clarifies the term day (*yaum*) to days (*ayyam*) used in the Qur'an in connection with the creative, administrative and legislative developments in the upward course. Here, like 22:47, the Qur'an asserts the length of a day in the upward course is like a thousand years in which men calculate; it may a lunar, solar or light years. 70:4 points out the length of the day for the upward movement of the angels and the spirit to be 50 thousand years.

In short, the day or days in question means the evolutionary period required for completion of a certain course of development. The evolution of any system of creation, administration or legislation is judged by the degree of its manifesting divine perfection. Upward movement of any revealed system means it is becoming closer to the absolute perfection. Nowhere in the Qur'an or in the apostolic usages, has the term upward move (*'uruj*) been used to mean abrogation of religion or law or deterioration of a system. But the promoters of pseudo-religious movements wanted to find some way to abandon the Qur'an and Islamic teachings and make room for their views and activities.

So, those who were arrogantly bold, interpreted: (a) the word *al-'amr* (command) to mean the religion of Islam only, (b) the word *'uruj* (ascent) to mean becoming obsolete, and (c) the day of 1000 years' length (22:47) to mean the period when the gradual decadence of the religion takes its turn until its total eradication. The question is from which level is *'Amr* (the teachings of Islam) eradicated? Is it from the field of utility, the memory of its adherents, the realm of human society, or the state of validity? Eradication from none of the above states makes sense, except the last which means abrogation. But abrogation of legislation cannot be gradual. Abrogation means repealing of a few. It does not require any length of time unless it is the abrogation of the code of law by instalments. If it is so then it must be shown from the date when the instalment plan of abrogation had started and by what date it is to be completed. At the same time, a substitute for the abrogated part must be pointed out, if there is any, and through the number of agencies the process of abrogation has taken place.

But others, except Babis and the Baha'is, were not so bold as to claim the total abrogation of Islam and the Qur'an. They wanted to share their faith within the fold of Islam, so they interpreted the upward move, *'uruj*, to mean the negligence and detachment of people from the real meaning of the Qur'an. On this basis they argued that God has sent a new messiah, Mahdi, reformer, *muhaddith* or a new *Wali-Ullah* to point out what the Qur'an means.

To support the contention the apostates have to prove, (a) how could the term *'uruj* (ascent) and its synonyms mean negligence when in the Qur'an the term *mahjur* (forsaken) has been precisely used for

negligence? (b) When did the negligence or misconception of the Qur'anic teachings begin? (c) Why did God leave people to have wrong ideas of the teachings, without a guide for a period of 1000 years? (d) What made God send a guide now and not before? (e) What is the reformer's contribution towards the interpretation of the Qur'anic teachings? (f) Or what are the neglected interpretations which the reformers of today have remedied? (g) When does this decaying day of 1000 years, which is wrongly termed as upward move, begin and when does it end? (h) Can any of these interpreters of the passage show us one instance of an exact interval of 1000 years between two Prophets, reformers or vicegerents of God?

They appeared on the scene claiming to be commissioned by God to deliver some divine message, to exercise some authority, or to do something which was not done between the real vicegerents of God or even the pretenders, either exceed the limit or fall short of it.

However, it is not necessary to pay much attention to those movements from a religious point of view. Their own literature is the best evidence of the shallowness of their religious ideas. From an organizational point of view they may play into the hands of political powers of the day and prove subversive against the Muslim States.

The Great Divine Kingdom –Mulkan Azima (5:54)

Let all anti-Islamic movements of the world do whatever they can against Islam and against the Shi'ah faith. God has promised His last Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him and his household, to make the true religion dominant over all religions of the world. This promise will be fulfilled. He has challenged the idolaters and disbelievers, who plot to extinguish the light of God, to make His light reach the final stage of perfection. He has promised the righteous believers from among the followers of the last Prophet to make them succeed on Earth (as His vicegerents) in the same manner which He made those who were before them (before the followers of the Prophet) to succeed on Earth. And He shall make for them their religion, which he has approved for them, to be all-pervading and powerful.

They will be in the state of safety, so they may worship Him and associate no one with Him in worship. He has declared the Earth is His and His servant, only the righteous ones shall finally inherit it. He has chosen Adam, Nuh and the families of Ibrahim and 'Imran over all the worlds. The divine choice of vicegerents shall continue in a particular lineage until it reached Ibrahim. Ibrahim achieved success in the divine test, and was appointed leader (Imam) for all the people. This vicegerency was made a permanent decree in the family of Ibrahim. After Jesus, his *real successors* continued in their rank, but historically remained obscure. In Ibrahim's issue, the divine leadership in service and obedience to God as *Ummatum-Muslematun* continued, but after Isma'il it remained historically obscure until the advent of Hashim, Abdul Muttalib, 'Abdullah and Abu Talib when the light of ancestral leadership began to glow.

It was with the advent of the Holy Prophet and revelation of the Qur'an in which the grace of God bestowed on Al-e Ibrahim began to shine in its fullness. Next to the Holy Prophet in purity of blood and

spirit was the closest of the close relatives (*al-Aqrabin*) from Al-e Ibrahim, was 'Ali, whose issue was declared by the Prophet his own through the Queen of Paradise, Fatima, peace be on her, his daughter. Thus the Book (the Qur'an), the wisdom and the great kingdom which have been bestowed on Al-e Ibrahim in their perfect and final forms were enshrined in the house of the Prophet and 'Ali.

The two divine gifts, the Book and the wisdom, have been manifested in the teachings and lives of the 11 Imams of the house. The third gift of God which has remained unmanifested in its fullness is the last phase of divine sovereignty, the great kingdom (*Mulkkan 'Azima*), and the executive authority over the world. The kingdom which God has described as great, could not be the land of Mecca, the Arabian Peninsula, nor the whole of the Muslim empire in its supposed golden days. These may be great in the eyes of Abu Sufyan, but in the eyes of God, the kingdom of Earth is nothing but a ringlet, as the Prophet said, thrown in a vast desert. It is true God bestowed upon Dawud and his son Sulayman such a kingdom. He bestowed on them great spiritual powers of dominating the air, sea, land and animals and inanimate beings existing in them besides a hold over "*jinn and human being*" (chs. 21, 27, 34, 39). He also bestowed on Dawud and Sulayman extensive knowledge and the capacity to dispense justice. Nevertheless, God did not describe their kingdom as great, but asserts the kingdom given by Him to Al-e Ibrahim is "great."

Thus the greatness of the kingdom of Al'e Ibrahim should be estimated with regard to the fact the creator of the universe described it as "great." The divine kingdom was given to Muhammad as the Imam of Al-e Ibrahim, and was to be inherited after Muhammad by the chosen servants of God from Al-e Ibrahim, who inherited the other two gifts of God, namely the Book and wisdom. They are the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

In short, the great kingdom is bound to be manifested before the total resurrection in the person of al-Mahdi, who represents the Prophet, in name, nature and features which the real adjectival meaning of the word "Muhammad" (the Praised One) implies.

The statement of the prophet, "Whoever dies without recognizing the Imam of his time shall die the death of ignorance and paganism," clearly asserts, according to the Qur'an, that every age has an Imam and no time shall lapse without an Imam. It indicates that mere belief in God, the Prophet, the scriptures, angels and the life hereafter and performance of obligatory rites and observation of other precepts of Islam are not sufficient to make one a Muslim in the true sense of the term. It is by recognition of the Imam in which the tie between human beings and God is established. No one but God chooses the qualified one to represent Him and His will as Imam. In essence, (a) during every period after the Prophet there must be an Imam from his family of Al-e Ibrahim, (b) the number of successive Imams is neither less nor more than 12: they are those nominated by God through His last Prophet, otherwise they would not be the divine nominee, (c) of the Muslim rulers, from the first three caliphs, excluding 'Ali the fourth, down to the present day, and of other Muslim authorities, such as eminent jurists, theologians, Sufi saints, *sayyids* or scholars, no chain of 12 successive people have ever claimed to have been nominated by God through the Prophet as Imams, except the 12 Imams of the house of the

Prophet.

So, keeping all the aforesaid Qur'anic assertions and the apostolic statements of the Prophet together, coupled with the absence of revelation as evidence in support of anyone else, one is bound to accept the 12th of the 12 Imams is alive in the terrestrial realm though we do not see him in a cognizable manner, and he shall remain so until the manifestation of the Great Kingdom of Al-e Ibrahim.[2](#)

There are many scholars of the Sunnis school who believe firmly in the spiritual *Imamate* of all the 12 Imams of the house and particularly the birth and life of the last Imam, almost in the same manner as believed by the Shi'ah Ithna 'Asharis. The only difference between the Ithna 'Asharis and this school of Sunnis is the latter follow one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence – Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i or Hanbali – all associate themselves with the rulers who opposed the *Ahl al-Bayt* and presented Islam as a means to gain temporal power. There is a vast literature in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu on this topic.

Divine Consent

Relating to faith in al-Mahdi, mere rational arguments and traditional or historical evidence may not be sufficient. It is the great message, divine vicegerency of Adam, about which the chiefs of the high order (the angels) have disputed, and Satan rebelled. It is the last testing part of the divine irrevocable "covenant" that God shall be represented on Earth by a man who is gifted with the knowledge of such perfect and comprehensive names of the mediators which represent the Creator and the creatures to each other. This representative status of the perfect man has been such a difficult test of obedience that even the angels questioned God at first and then accepted it. Satan refused it and was condemned forever, in spite of his long period of devotional obedience to God. Ever since the creation of Adam, the acceptance of the divine representative status of the perfect man has become the final touchstone with which every rational being's submission and obedience to God is tested. Of the issues of Adam, very few have come out successful in this final test. The present subject of discussion is the last part of that final test of one's belief in Islam, i.e. absolute submission and obedience to God.

Criticism against the Qur'an and Apostolic Statements

Most non-Shi'ahs, who have written or preached against the Shi'ias, like most non-Muslims, who criticized Islam, are ignorant of their subject. They rely on information furnished by people who are prejudiced and were making efforts to misrepresent Shi'ism as though it were an extinguished sect. It is self-evident that from the beginning of the message of Islam to the present day with no gap, along with the revelation of the Qur'an and the statements of the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatima, Hassan, Hussain and the nine successive Imams descended from Hussain, the Shi'ahs have the most authentic record of what they believe and what they practice. The Shi'ite literature on faith surpasses similar literature of all other schools of thought in quantity, quality, continuity and consistency. For the Oneness of God, angelical

order, creation of the universe, advent of all the Prophets, from Adam to the last one, Muhammad, the chain of *Imamate* after him up to the reappearance of the last Imam, al-Mahdi, *raj'at*, and then *qiyamat-e kubra*, the Shi'ahs have a continuity of coherent thought in complete accord with the Qur'an and the apostolic records.

The *Imamate* or authoritative leadership of the perfect man, as outlined by the Shi'ahs, is the axis of the theocratic form of rule implied in the very term "Islam." In the monarchical hereditary system no perfect man, foremost in obedience to God and in all that is good and excellent, is required. The monarchical system based on racial, tribal or family right of sovereignty may apply to those systems of authority, caliphate or *murshids* which confine the rights to particular branch of descent without fixing the number and making any verifiable qualifications necessary for the person such as a certain branch of the Isma'ili sect.

The Zaidi sect (followers of Zaid, the son of Imam Zayn al-'Abideen) believes that any descendant of Fatima who is a *mujtahid* and draws he sword to fight evil, is an Imam. It is a common belief among Sunnis that any member of the clan of Quraysh who comes to power by any means, whether qualified or not, is an Imam like the Umayyads, 'Abbasids and all Muslim rulers. These views are opposite to the doctrine of *Imamate (Imamology)* in the Shi'ah Ithna 'Ashari (Twelvers).

It is also malicious to accuse the Shi'ah Ithna 'Asharis of drawing their ideas of *Imamate* from the ancient Iranian idea of the divine right of monarchs. To Shi'ahs, the royal throne or dynastic considerations have no value and no man is entitled to exercise authority over anybody unless he possesses the requisite knowledge and piety. The divinely declared messengers of God, or their divinely nominated successors or Imams, are the real authorities, obedience to whom is obedience to God. Whether they be in power or in prison. In case the vicegerent of God is not approachable, the Shi'ahs turn to the person next in authority, the pious *mujtahid* in power, prison or in exile. In short, the Shi'ahs are distinguishable from the crown and power worshippers. The Shi'ah attitude is underlined in this couplet:

Pie dar silsilah Sajjad wa ba sar taj Yazid!

Khak-e Alam ba sar-e afsar wa day him wa qusur.

*The legs of the godly saint ('Ali Zayn al-'Abideen Sajjad,
son of Hussain) be in chains and the crown on the head of Yazid!*

Let the dust be thrown on the crown, throne and palaces.

For a brief outline of the Shi'ah conception of divine *Imamate*, one may study *Saheefa-e Sajjadyah (Sahifa al-Kamila)*, the outstanding, authentic classic work of the fourth Imam of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, 'Ali ibn Hussain (Zayn al-'Abideen), produced in the second half of the first century A.H., and *Ziarat-e Jami'ah*, among the most exalted and inimitable works of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, produced by the tenth Imam, 'Ali ibn Muhammad (an-Naqi), in the first half of the third century A.H. For details about these two works one should refer to works produced by the three prominent Shi'ah compilers of traditions, Kulayni, Saduq and Sheikh Tusi.

Ziarat-e Jami'ah is one of the comprehensive salutations addressed to the vicegerents of God. As a descriptive, solemn salutation to godly persons, it is recommended in the Qur'an. It should be offered in remembrance of (a) the leading status of the addressees in their nearness to God and (b) their representation in conveying His will and order to humankind and making people grasp his attributes from every angle.

Here the reader's attention is drawn to lines from the *Ziarat (Mifathi al-Jinan)*:[3](#)

My assistance is ready for you, waiting until God, the Sublime,
Revives His religion through you, and brings you
Back (to power) during His (chosen) days and establishes
Your hold over all to make His justice prevail
And cause you to dominate throughout the earth.
Thus, I am with you and with no one else.
I believe in you and submit our sheer love
To the last of you as I do to the first of you.
I denounce in the presence of God, the Most Glorious
And High, your enemies, the *jibt*
(the power unauthorized by God) and *taghut*
(the rebel against God), the devils
And their party who opposed you, who denied your right
Who have discarded the love of your domain and hold,
Who have usurped your heritage, who doubted or disputed
Or denied you (your godliness) and those who
Dissociated from you.
I denounce before God (the Most Glorious and High)
All means of approach to God, other than you.
I denounce the imams, leaders who call people
To the path of hell.

The above piece indicates the political ideas and stand of the followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in the third century of Islam. This may be compared with the following lines from the supplication of 'Ali ibn Hussain Zayn al-'Abideen recited by him on the ninth of Dhil Hijja, the day known as 'Arafat, when he was performing the rituals of Hajj. After invoking God to bless the Prophets in general and the last Prophet in particular, he invokes God to bless the members of the house of the Prophet. The invocation gives the description of the people concerned. It runs as follows:

Oh God! Send down your blessings on the unstained members
Of his house (the house of Muhammad, upon whom be peace),
Whom You have selected for executing Your command

And You made them treasures of Your knowledge,
Guardians of Your religion and Your representatives
On the Earth and authority of Your creatures.
You have by Your creative might purified them all
Of uncleanness to the utmost extent of purification.
You then have made them the means of approach to Yourself.
Their path is the path of paradise and Your pleasure.

After mentioning the various blessings of God with which the house has been and would be honoured, the fourth Imam points out the status of the Imam and at no time has Earth ever been left without an Imam. He says,

“Oh God! Surely, You have supported Your religion every moment with an Imam (leader), whom You have raised as Your distinguished sign for Your servants and have made them the beacon of guidance in Your cities. You have done this after making the ties of the Imams with the people firmly linked with the connecting link between You and your creatures, You have made the Imams the means and the instruments of gaining Your paradise and pleasure. You have made obedience to the Imams compulsory and have warned people not to disobey them. You have ordered the people to carry out that command and to refrain from doing what they have prohibited. You have ordered that no person should go ahead of the Imam, nor should one remain behind, detached from the Imam.

“Therefore, the Imam is the stronghold for those who take refuge with him; he is the fortress of the believer and he is the rope to be adhered to by the seekers of truth, and he is the light of the worlds. Therefore, oh God, inspire Your representative (the Imam) to thank You for all the bounties which you have bestowed on him and inspire us, oh Lord, to thank you for blessing us by appointing him (the Imam) as our guide and leader. Oh Lord! Give him on Your behalf power and make him win in the easiest manner of success. Oh Lord! Help him with Your strongest support and back him to the utmost extent, strengthen his shoulder and watch him with Your eyes and protect him with Your protection, help him with Your angels, reinforce him with Your victorious army and establish through him Your book and the limits of duties and rights fixed by You, establish through him Your precepts and conduct recommended by Your Prophet, your peace be on him and his family.

“Oh Lord! Revive through the Imam the outstanding teachings of the religion which have been obliterated by the unjust despots. Oh Lord! Remove through him the rust of injustice which has covered Your path. Push aside through him the obstacles which have come in the way leading to you. Remove through him those perverted ones who push people backward.”

Then, after a few lines in the same prayer, Imam 'Ali ibn Hussain begins to invoke God's blessings on those who are totally devoted in words and in deeds to the Imams. He says:

Oh Lord! Bless those who yield to the Imams out of sheer love,

Those who profess their (Imams') status, stick to their path,
Follow their footprints, adhere to their rope and cling firmly
To their leadership to follow their instructions,
Submit to their orders and make full efforts to obey them,
And are waiting the days of their (Imam's) rule to come.
Their (followers') eyes are focused on the divine days to come.

The consistency of the Shi'ah faith is also reflected in the salutation known as *Salawat ul-Hujaj al-Tahira*, dictated by the 11th Imam, Hassan al-'Askari, to one of his devoted followers, Abu Muhammad 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad, known as *Abid* (pious) in the year 255 A.H. In those petitions to God, the Imam invokes God's blessings on each of the 14 infallible members of the house (the Holy Prophet is included in it). In the petition, the reader will find the description of each of the 14 in complete accord with the Shi'ah faith. The *Du'a Nudba* from the 12th Imam, al-Mahdi, during the period of the minor occultation, bears the same glowing aspect of faith which is reflected in the above passages of prayer. Next, the salutation addressed to the four successive agents, *nawabin*, of the last Imam, during the minor occultation, preserve the same light. The composition is said to be dictated by the third deputy of the 12th Imam, Sheikh Abul Qasim Hussain ibn Ruh Nawbakti (vide *Thadhib* by Sheikh Tusi). The above quotations bear testimony to the fact the Shi'ah faith from its inception to the end of the minor occultation in 330 A.H. and from the beginning of the major occultation to the present day has not lost the continuity of its traditions nor the consistency of its thought.

The above quotations bear sufficient testimony to the fact of its thought which has preserved the light of the prophet's tradition, "Whoever dies without known the Imam of his time, his death will be a paganish death."

[The Development of Shi'ah Thought After Minor Occultation](#)

[First Period – Pure Rational Approach](#)

Al-Kulayni to Sheiky Tusi

(329 A.H./941 A.D. – 460 A.H./1067 A.D.)

The period of the major occultation of the Imam begins from 329 A.H./941 A.D. The teachings of Islam as explained and adhered to by the 12 vicegerents of God assumed its final form in the work of Sheikh Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Kulayni, author of *al-Kafi*. He died in 329 A.H./941 A.D. a year before the major occultation. The method of classification of the apostolic teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt* throws light on the direction which the Shi'ah thought follows. It begins with the book (the term used in *Kafi* for chapter) on the importance of reason and the disadvantages of ignorance, the various kinds of knowledge, and their important recognition of sound reasoning as the sole internal evidence to be relied upon in one's effort to conceive God and realize His existence, the importance of the Prophets and

revelations of the main authority for the knowledge of godhead (*uluhiyat*, His essence, attributes, actions, and commands).

The next chapter of *al-Kafi* deals with the problems of the godhead and the vicegerents as the intermediaries between people and God. This chapter deals with the divine vicegerency of the chosen lineage of men on Earth, the qualifications of the vicegerents of God, their education, when their education begins, their means of acquiring knowledge and the infallibility and scope of their knowledge. The book also discusses the birth, name, parents, date of birth and departure and days of ministry of the 14 infallibles, the announcements by the preceding vicegerents concerning his successor and a brief account of the spiritual and heavenly accomplishments of each.

The following chapter is about faith and infidelity. This part covers the main moral virtues which are the necessary qualification for faith in God and the vices which originate from its absence.

The *Furu-e Kafi* deals with human actions. It contains treatises on the rules of devotional and ritual performance, matters of domestic and economic nature (known as personal laws) and administration, judicial and political affairs. This code of the Shi'ah faith was compiled and placed within the reach of the people, a few years before the end of the minor occultation in 330 A.H. Many scholars received the book from the author directly hearing him reciting his work before them. Therefore, the collection of the teachings of the Holy Prophet, known as the *Sunnah*, which is part of the Islamic constitution, was made available to the people before the close of the apostolic days of the Infallible Imams. But the earliest collection of the Prophet's teachings, prepared by the scholars of the other schools of thought contain more discrepancies and distortions due to a considerable lapse of time between the infallible source, the Prophet, and the compilers of the collections.

The chains of narrators are fallible people who differ from each other in character, capability and knowledge. Moreover, the rulers of the time influenced the narrators to conceal the truth. Also, throughout the consolidatory period of Islam, attempts were made by the rulers to suppress Shi'ah narrators. *Al-Kafi*, its sources and other Shi'ah literary products of the period, ranging from the time of departure of the Prophet to the demise of Kulayni in 320 A.H. and Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sumari (the last deputy of the 12th Imam) in 330 A.H./942 A.D., were saved from being influenced or tampered with. The force of the saintliness of the Imams of the house which manifested in all fields of spiritual accomplishments was so strong it over-awed some temporal rulers.

They could not resist submission to the supreme authority of the Imams of the house as the sole representatives of the divine will in spite of their being in prison, house arrest, or under strict vigilance. The consolidated teachings of Islam, as manifested in the life of the 12 Imams of the house, began to dominate temporal powers after 330 A.H./942 A.D. at some places.

In the case of the majority school of thought in Islam the temporal powers which succeeded each other after the Prophet, dominated Islamic thought in general and the chain of narrators of the Prophet's

sayings in particular. In the later days of the political history of the Shi'ah faith the force of right produced some temporal might. It was after the consolidatory and apostolic period which the Shi'ahs began to gain temporal power in particular countries during the Buwayhid dynasties in Iran and Iraq, under the independent rule of the Da'is of Tabarestan and the Fatamids of Egypt. So subsequent religious literature has been produced in those countries on the pattern of original Shi'ah works.

The works of Sheikh Saduq (d. 381 A.D./991 – 992 A.D.) Sheikh Mufid (d. 413 A.H./1022 A.D.), Sayyid Murtadha (d. 436 A.H./1044 A.D.), Syed Razi and Sheikh Tusi (Abu Ja'far ibn Hassan al-Tusi, known as Sheikh al-Taifa, d. 460 A.H./1067 A.D.) and the works of other contemporary scholars of the same school, are mainly moulded on the same pattern of *Kafi*. There may be minor differences, but they are due to the rational approach of the individuals. They do not, however, affect the substance of the doctrine.

The first period of Shi'ah rationalization of revelation, i.e. of *ijtihad* after the major occultation, ends with the migration of Sheikh al-Taifa al-Tusi from Baghdad to Najaf.

Before proceeding, this point should be borne in mind. During the apostolic period beginning with the Prophet's mission and ending with the occultation of the last Imam, as also during the first period of *ijtihad*, beginning with Kulayni and ending with Sheikh Tusi, the Shi'ahs were always in touch with various Islamic and non-Islamic schools of thought. It was necessary, according to the Qur'an and the apostolic instructions to have a careful comparative study of all thoughts concerning religion, so they would be cautious of any thought against apostolic statements authenticated by the Imams. The rationalists (Mu'tazilites), the traditionists ('Asharites), dealing with the pure theory, the mystic or ascetic school explaining the ethical aspect of the religion, the jurists, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali, defining the ritual precepts and other practical laws of Islam, and the gnostics and philosophers disclosing the spirit and the inner aspects of the teachings of Islam, all move to enjoy the support of the house of the Prophet for themselves.

There are several theoretical and practical problems on which clear and unanimous verdicts of the *Ahl al-Bayt* go against the views held by the other schools. Nevertheless, the opposite schools try to interpret the verdict of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in their own favour. The unanimous verdict of the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* about the legality of *aul* and *taseeb*, concerning inheritance and the impossibility of God being seen, are established facts of Shi'ah doctrine. Nevertheless, the traditionists such as Bukhari and Muslim are inclined to hold the opposite view, by narrating reports which 'Ali held the same views as theirs.

The Mu'tazilites are no exception; they present their views as approved by the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Sheikh Tusi, in his work, *Tahdhib*, in the chapter on *jihad*, narrates the story of the meeting of the foremost Mu'tazilites leaders with the sixth Imam (Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq) at Mina during the Hajj season. They requested him to join them in the political movement as planned by them. The discussion throws light on the political-theological trends of the time and the stand of the Imam against all the issues raised by

them. It would be unfair to present the Shi'ahs as the camp of followers of the Mu'tazilites or any other school of thought in Islam. It shows the ignorance or malicious tendency of those writers who allege the main stem of the Shi'ah Ithna 'Ashari school was bent on the course of its development by doctrines alien to the teachings of the Imams of the house.

Shi'ah thought in its development was so clearly distinguished that it gave no chance to any temporal power to divert its course. From the time of Kulayni to Sheikh Tusi's migration to Najaf will be considered the first period of Shi'ah *ijtihad*. It developed from purified apostolic roots without being grafted with any foreign idea or doctrine. It became one of the examples of the purified world and the purified tree mentioned in the Qur'an 14:24 – 25, *Kalima-e Tayyaba* and *Shajraah-e Tayyaba*.

Second Period – Continuity

Muhaqia Hilli (676 A.H. 1274 A.D.)

'Allama Hilli (726 A.H./1325 A.D.)

Shahid Awal (786 A.H./1385 A.D.)

Muhaqia Karaki (940 A.H./1539 A.D.)

Safavids

During the second period from Tusi to Muhaqia Hilli, from Muhaqiq Hilli to 'Allama Hilla, from 'Allama to Shahid Awal (the first Shi'ah divine, who was executed by the order of the Sunni *mullas*), and from him to Muhaqia Karaki (the beginning of the establishment of the Safavid reign in Iran), the Shi'ah school continued to produce innumerable scholars of high standards in all branches of Islamic sciences. The consistency of thought remained undisturbed and continued until the middle of the Safavid reign.

Third Period

a) Mixture of mystic, intuitive and rationalistic interpretation

b) Traditionalism – 'Akhbari

Baha al-Din al-Amili (1030 A.H./ 1721 A.D.)

Mir Damad-Muhammad Baqir (1040 A.H./1630 – 1631 A.D.)

Mullah Sadra-Sadr al-Din Shirazi (1060 A.H./1651 A.D.)

Majlisi I, Muhammad Taqi (1070 A.H./1659 – 1660 A.D.)

Mulla Muhsin al-Faid Kashani (1091 A.H./ 1680 A.D.)

Majlisi II, Mulla Muhammad Baqir (1110 A.H./1699 A.D.)

In this period the pure rational to revelation is responsible for the development of two other tendencies in religious studies. Eminent scholars, such as Mir Damad, Sheikh Bhai, Mulla Sadr, with some reservations, and Mulla Muhsin Faid Kashani and Mulla Muhammad Taqi (Majlisi I), were inclined towards the mystic and intuitive interpretation of the Qur'an. But the traditionalist tendency, depending more on the literal and verbal significance of apostolic traditions rather than rational principles for

inferences from the apostolic statements, was dominant. Mulla Muhammad Baqir (Majlisi II) and his followers were more inclined towards this course of study. The first group may be termed as theosophist. Among them are traditionists ('Akhbari) and rationalists (Usuli).

There was a third purely 'Akhbari group. Pure and partly – 'Akhbaris did not agree with the rationalists who were known as pure Usuli in certain doctrinal issues, and differ from each other in approving or disapproving the mystical method. The controversial issues seemed in the beginning to be less important as to provoke factions in the ranks of the Shi'ah theologians, but gradually the schismatic spirit of scholasticism, under the influence of politics turned the least religious issues into important concerns of the ecclesiastical circles and caused sectarian feelings among followers of the respective scholars. However, the school of 'Allama Majlisi appealed to the religious tendencies of the masses and it succeeded in influencing the majority of the theologians until today.

Even a great number of Usuli scholars, who denounce boldly, the 'Akhbari school and its branches are not free from the influence of the vast literature of Arabic and Persian, produced by Allama Majlisi II. There is no doubt that as a compiler of traditions, with the royal libraries and numerous assistants at his disposal, he is one of the greatest contributors on the subject for the development of Shi'ah religious thought. But those matters without the rational methods may be misleading and harmful. The same is true of literature produced by various branches of the 'Akhbari school. One may find precious gems in that literature but all are required to be properly selected and polished with the instrument of reasoning as prescribed in the logical science for the treatment of scriptural and apostolic traditions, based on *'Ilm al-Usul* and *'Ilm al-Dinya*. From Majlisi II to Muhammad Baqir Behbahani (1205 A.H./1791 A.D.) the theological conflict between these three schools continued. Majlisi's school, however, remained dominant.

Fourth Period

Rationalism based on the Qur'an and Ahadith

Muhammad Baqir Behbahani, al-Wahid (1205 A.H./1791 A.D.)

Sheikh Murtadha Ansari (1291 A.H./1864 A.D.)

Behbahani, known as al-Wahid, the Great Master (Ustad al-Akbar), the champion of the Usuli school, drew his rational weapon against the 'Akhbaris and their branches and defeated them in all fields of thought. He revived the school of Karbala, the place selected by the 'Akhbaris as their stronghold. He produced numerous well versed scholars, writers and teachers for advocating and expounding the Usuli method and refuting the opposite doctrines and principles. Within a short period, Behbahani's school succeeded in limiting the influence of other schools. Among the prominent personalities of this school are Mirza Abul Qasim Qummi known as Mirza Qummi (1231 A.H. 1816 A.D.), the author of *Qawanin* (Principles of Jurisprudence); Mulla Mehda Naraq, the author of *Jami' al-Sa'dat* (Treatise on Ethics); Mulla Mahdi Fatuni, Sayyid Mahdi Sharistani, and Syed Mahdi Bahar ul-Ulum, who, though junior in age

is greater than his seniors in spiritual attainment.

Also included were Sheikh Ja'far, the author of *Kashif al-Ghitar*, Sayyid Ali, the author *Riaz*, Sayyid Muhammad Mujahid, brother Sheikh Muhammad Hussain, the author of the treatise on *Usul* (Principles of Jurisprudence), and his prominent students. Then the chain dazzles with the name of Sheikh Muhammad Hassan, author of the book, *Jawahir al-Kalam* (The Practical laws of Islam), containing the minutest points and arguments and view on every practical problem of jurisprudence. It is a commentary on the concise but comprehensive work of Muhaqiq Hilli, known as *Shar'i al-Islam*. the text written by Muhaqiq in the seventh century A.H. and the commentary referred to above, written at the beginning of the 13th century A.H., are still the standard books on Shi'ah jurisprudence.

This period, from Behbahani to the author of *Jawahir al-Kalam*, may be considered as the golden period of the Shi'ah rationalist school. The author of *Jawahir* was succeeded by a scholar of Shi'ah jurisprudence whose works revolutionized the whole system and opened a new era for religious studies. This luminary, Sheikh Murtadha Ansari, was the author of the valuable books on principles of jurisprudence, *Fara'id al-Usul* and *Makasib*, dealing with the principles of transactions and trade, *Taharat*, dealing with the principles of physical purity required by Islam and many other small treatises on various juristic issues.

His method of exposition eclipsed all the previous systems and served as a link between extreme rationalism and extreme traditionalism. In his works the arguments are based on the Qur'an and apostolic statements. This leading scholar showed how the implications of the scriptural instructions as the principles of inference should be brought out. To him, though reason has its value, it is secondary when there are clear scriptural statements on a field of study. He tried to show how the two sources, the scriptural assertions and pure reason should be reconciled. The school of Sheikh Ansari is still the leading school of Shi'ah theology. It is flourishing wherever comparative Islamic jurisprudence is studied.

The last revelational literature, the Qur'an, with the apostolic statements, contain all which is required by men for their spiritual and temporal progress. Both rigid conservatism and extreme radicalism are un-Islamic. The ever productive, growing tree of life, Islam needs to be watered with pure and irrefutable reasoning.

The Qur'anic injunctions have made study of all branches of knowledge compulsory so there shall be qualified students specialized in every field of study. Comparative study of relevant views and theories are inevitable, otherwise the study will remain incomplete.

In view of these facts, it is surprising in certain centres of Shi'ah theology students are allowed to be content with superficial knowledge and as such discouraged from study of the metaphysical treatises of even eminent Shi'ah theologians. A Shi'ah student of theology should not neglect any school of creation. The task of rationalization of revelations concerning the practical aspect of Islam was carried on in detail by the jurists of all ages and regions, as the exigency of time demanded it.

In the last century the term *tafaqqahu-fiddin*, the effort to understand religion, has lost its comprehensiveness and universality and narrowed to the science of jurisprudence and certain hair-splitting juristic problems.

Correct Approach

a. Tafaqahu-fiddin

Effort to understand religion

The principles of juristic inference of Islamic law contain two parts. One deals with (a) the authoritative status of scriptural and apostolic record, (b) the deductive and inductive reasoning and analogical inference, (c) the consensus of opinion of jurists or Muslim intelligentsia, and (d) the principles to be resorted to in the case of ambiguity or in conflicting scriptural and apostolic statements. This part may be termed as discourse on the authoritative principles and the extent of their validity. The second part deals with the universal principles of speech common to all languages.

There is no doubt that a study of both parts is necessary to be able to deal with the scriptural and apostolic statements concerning the practical teachings of Islam, but one may not be content with the above information. A thorough study of Arabic grammar, philology, etymology, syntax, rhetoric and prosody, with special reference to the Qur'an and other apostolic records, and the biography of the narrators of the apostolic statements (*'Ilm-e Rijal*) and history is inevitable. Without the knowledge of mathematics, astrology, logic, metaphysics and general principles of physical and natural sciences, and socio-economic sciences, with special references to the teachings of Islam, a scholarly approach to the problem of life cannot be developed. The knowledge of logic and metaphysics is required for sound thinking.

Metaphysics is the science of all sciences. It deals with universal concepts and propositions which form the background of human thinking. Without the proper knowledge of metaphysics, the study of the principles of juristic inferences, which cover problems based on the rationalization of revelation, remains incomplete.

Great scholars like Mir Muhammad Baqir Damad, Sheikh Bhai, Sadr ul-Muta'allihin (known as Sadr) and their followers, Faiz of Kashan and Fayyaz of Lahijan (two sons-in-law of Sadr) and their supporters concentrated on the religio-metaphysical science and their best in filling the gap between the revealed statement and pure reason. Though appreciated by a large number of jurists, it was opposed to those of Usuli jurists who were not well-versed in the sciences.

(b) Anti-rationalism and New Cults

Sheikh Ahmad Ahsai and other similar leaders – theosophic and mystics

In the middle of the 13th century A.H. the champion of the 'Akhbari school of theology, Sheikh Ahmad Ahsai, appeared on the scene. He was not a student of logic and metaphysics, but had good knowledge of scriptural and apostolic records with particular aptitude in theological thinking. His main attempt was to disprove the religio-metaphysical views of the Sadr school, on the one hand, and please a section of the anti-Sadr jurists, on the other.

His commentaries of *Asfar* of Mulla Sadr and the commentary on *Ziarat-e Jami'a* betray the defects of the 'Akhbari scholars of his time. Ahsai refutes the validity of rational approach to understand the significance of revelation and to secure an authoritative status as the vicegerent of the Imam. According to him, without inner communication with the soul of the Imam, one will be entitled to claim authority as a representative of the Imam, the prophet God. On this ground he wanted to put an end to the dominating leadership of the Usuli jurists and start a new era of his own school. His attempt met with severe opposition, from the Usuli school, and he could not advance his ideology in any academic field. It opened a new way for the development of sectarian views, mostly in the rank of the 'Akhbari school, to which some credulous Usulis also were inclined. Ahsai and his illogical views became the basis of all new sects of Shaykhi, Kashafi, Sufi within the fold of Islam, and Babi, outside the fold.

The background of the ideologies advocated by Ahsai and the off shoots of his school are actually the same as the ideologies of the ultra-Shi'ahs of the second and third century Hijrah.

But the origin of the schools of the Zahbis of Shiraz, Ni'matullahi of Kerman and Safi 'Ali Shahi of Tehran can be traced back to the Sufi orders of Safavid and pre-Safavid times. The Safavids themselves, before gaining temporal power, were in the garb of spiritual leaders and saints of a Sufi order. During their reign, they also have encouraged and supported the Sufi order of Dervishes, the religio-mystic Qalandars, and wandering hermits. Ever since then, the Shi'ah rulers patronized the Shi'ah dervishes.

They have much in common with theosophic mysticism and they seem to have the same theomystic tendencies of the Sunni Sufis with liberal touches of Shi'ah ideology. Safi 'Ali Shah of Tehran has written a commentary of the Qur'an in Persian poetry in the style of Rumi. His mystic presentation of the tragedy of Karbala seems quite forceful and fascinating. Another exegesis by Hajj Mulla Sultan 'Ali Shah of Gunabad, the founder of Sunabadi school of Shi'ah Sufis, on the Qur'an, in Arabic, known as *Tafsir-e Bayan al-Sa'dah*, is the main a theomystic, philosophical interpretation of the Qur'an, almost on the lines of the Sadr school as presented by Haji Mulla Hadi Subzwari, author of the standard text on logic and philosophy, known as *Manzumah* and *Shraha Manumah*.

Sultan 'Ali is one of the disciples of Subzwari. The writer could not find in his work any originality of thought or presentation. As an offshoot of Subzwari school he created a new Sufi order of his own to which Subzwari could have no claim. The common element between him and the post-Ahsai 'Akhbari schools is both deny the sufficiency of knowledge or rational scholastic method of approach for the interpretation of revelation and representing the infallible Imam. The Sufis, the Sheikhs and Kashfis of Shi'ah school, all are inclined towards the Sufism of the Sunnis and Gnosticism and esoterism of the

Isma'ilites.

These tendencies paved the way for the rise of Baha'ism and Qadianism on the one hand, and the development of absolutism in political trends on the other. The possessors of political power welcome the use of the flattering title "The Shadow of God" for themselves in the political field and claim to have the right to introduce drastic changes in Islamic laws concerning the daily practical life of Muslims. The Sufi saint, the Shaykhi head, the Kashfi chief, the Qadyani Masih, the Sabbahi Hazir Imam and the Bohras "living Da'iyas" all claim to be in communion with some infallible agency higher sphere of beings, a source from which they receive the requisite guidance directly. As such they are beyond formal rules of religious and moral obligations and formalities. The head of the group is to be obeyed, whatever his knowledge or character.

The Baha'is have gone to the extreme; they not only hold the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* as out-dated, they even treat their new-born scriptures of the present century as obsolete. Their last spiritual head, Showqie Afendy of Akkan died in London without leaving any will or successor. So at present the Baha'is are receiving inspiration directly from Tel Aviv, the modern Tur Sinai of all pseudo-religions. Hence, their commandments and precepts are subject to daily changes inspired by the modern *Tur*. The only difference between Rabwah of Pakistan and Akka of Israel is the former tries to retain the garb of Islam while the latter has thrown it away. Otherwise the Tabwa ideology, in general, is copied from those of Akka. It is noteworthy their literary and academic contributions are insignificant; hence remain unpublished, or withdrawn soon after their publication.

There are undoubtedly many political and temporal factors for the flourishing of these new heretical schools of thought during the last two centuries. But it is not proposed to deal here in detail. The factor which concerned us is the temporal support of the Iranian monarchs of the later centuries of the Shi'ah faith, developed an unexpected intolerance in some leading jurists of the time. Depending on the use of force, they were not prepared to listen to any argument not in conformity with their views.

The fatherly affection and godly tendencies of the Shi'ah divines which would convince their opponents of logic was replaced by the use of bigotry. The people reacted against it by welcoming any movement which would free them from the yoke of bigoted Mullas.

Broad Vision

Unfortunately, the undesirable consequences of the use of such wrong means were soon realized by the divines at the helm of ecclesiastical administration. They now do not allow the use of such dogmatic authoritative weapons against criticism. In asserting their spiritual authoritative status, they are now resorting more and more to the godly force of knowledge and piety which no temporal force can suppress. The Shi'ahs have never depended and shall never depend in their progressive moves on any power other than the inner strength of sound knowledge, excellent character and selflessness. This is the teaching of the Qur'an and the written, oral and practical teaching of the Holy Prophet and the

infallible Imams of the house.

The Shi'ah religious authorities in charge of religious administration do not bother or worry themselves about the temporal and political circumstances of the time, whether favourable or unfavourable. They concentrate on producing the best students of theology, who sacrifice their limited interest for the welfare of humankind. It is expected they will prove worthy of being termed true slaves of *Rahmat ul-lil 'Alameen* (the Divine Grace). The temporal world with all its might and power is bound to bow before these forces, sooner or later. As history records, 'Ali stated his sublime movement with five or, at the most, seven supporters. At the time of the tragedy of Karbala, the number increased to not more than 120 people, who laid down their lives in support of the right cause.

Now they are counted in very large numbers with a glorious heritage of knowledge and righteousness to their credit. Let the Shi'ahs continue progressing in these lines disregarding any geographical boundaries and political barriers until the time of the expected saviour, the 12th Imam, to establish the divine kingdom given to Al-e Ibrahim, throughout the world. He will use spiritual force in the face of which all physical temporal forces, even of atomic energy, will become ineffective. Before the ultimate ideal is achieved the Shi'ah religious authorities should enlighten the followers with a correct and proper presentation of the Shi'ah faith.

And We intend to show favour to those who are considered weak on Earth and to make them Imams (guides in faith) and the inheritors. And to establish them on Earth and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts which they feared from them. (28:5 – 6)

1. In both systems the number of months cannot be more or less than 12. The seasonal revolution of Earth round the sun completes its circuit in 364 or 365 days. During this seasonal revolution, the moon's phases change 12 times, of which six times the moon shows its crescent phase after 29 days or 30 days in the others. The change of 29 or 30 days usually takes place every alternate month. But it is possible that in certain regions the crescent phase can be sighted for two successive months after 20 or 30 days. Six months of 30 days aggregated to 180 days while six months of 29 days to 174 days, totalling 354 days altogether. The circuit of the lunar year is 10 days shorter than that of the solar year. The lunar year which begins with the sighting of the crescent phase of the moon in any of its 12 months, in a given year, will naturally coincide with a particular day (first, second, third, and so on) of certain days of the solar month. The following year the lunar year will complete its circuit 10 days before the particular day of the solar month with which the first day of the given month of the year started. The result of this is that, during a given period of 30 years, every day of every month of the lunar year will coincide with every day of every month of the solar year. Thus, for the performance of periodical rites, such as fasting and pilgrimage, Islam preferred the lunar year and calendar, so the devotees should have the opportunity to perform the rites periodically every day of each of the four seasons of the solar year.

But for daily rites, such as the daily prayers, Islam takes into account the rotational movements of the earth towards the sun, which are responsible for the 24 hour alternation of day, night and dawn. For daily prayers, the Qur'an considers sunrise, sunset, mid-noon and dawn as important. These segments of the day hold good for everyone, whether they are inhabitants of the 24 hour rotational movement of Earth, the sun appears to rise above and set below the horizon. There are also the remote northern and southern regions, far above 80 degrees from the equator where during six months of their respective summer, the sun never sets but only changes position during six months of the 24 hour cycle. During winter, the sun is not seen at all in that region. Its position can only be located through the change in the position of its rays. For timings of the mid-noon prayer and the night prayer can be observed. For the other prayers the requirements would be

they should be performed after the mid-noon prayer after regular intervals. For those who may be on the exact poles, where all the longitudes end, there is no observable time at all but the daily prayers must be performed within 24 hours. They should begin with the mid-noon prayer and end with the morning prayer. The person inside the Holy Ka'ba has the option to say his prayers facing any direction. The people on the exact poles have the option to say their daily prayers within 24 hours at any time facing any direction.

2. One question remains, namely, why the number of the vicegerents of God after the last Prophet should be confined to 12. All that we must know is that, whatever action is taken by God in any of the three fields of activity, has its reasons which makes such action necessary and its contrary impossible. But what is the particular justification for any particular action no one can claim to know, except to the extent of what He "has willed the people to know." However, the number of divine actions, whose reasons have become known to us, through reasoning or revelation, are small in comparison to those which are still unknown to us.

The system of the universe as a whole and the fixed measures, numbers, positions, conditions, the quantitative and qualitative peculiarities, found in every part and particle of the universe and the fixed and proportionate speed of the biggest and the smallest parts of the whole, all are puzzling. The particular justifying reasons for the fixities are not known to us, though the fixities are indisputable.

The seasonal rotations of the earth and the sun are fixed in terms of the number of days and speed, as are the moon's around the Earth. According to the Qur'an everything has been created in a fixed measure. The life of every solar system is fixed. The life of every part of it is fixed. The life of the Earth and earthly beings is fixed.

The number of the prophets, vicegerents of God, and their genealogical line from Adam to the day of resurrection are pre-ordained. All these pre-determinations are based on particular reasons and wisdom known only to God. The same is true about the fixation of the number (12) of the Imams of the house and the last Imam should live in a particular manner for a long period, the end of which is only known to Him.

3. "My" refers to the devotee who is saluting the Imam. The pronouns in the first and second person used in the above translation refer respectively to the devotee and the Imams.

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