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Chapter 4: The Unseen World and the Imam of the Age

The following session was convened at Dr. Jalali's residence. He was the first person to open the discussion.

Dr. Jalali: A small number of Muslims believe that the Imam of the Age is the son of Imam Hasan 'Askari who was born in the year 256 AH/843 CE. However, they say that he has ascended from this world to the unseen world known as Hurqalya1. When humankind reaches maturity and abandons the striferidden life of this world, preparing itself to meet and behold the Imam of the Age, it will be able to see him.

One of the leading authorities has written thus in his book:

This [unseen] world had gravitated until it merged with the earth. In the time of Adam he was told: 'Ascend!' And, until now he is ascending. He has not set himself free from the worldly attachments and the filth that sticks with them. He has not reached the clean atmosphere yet. Thus, here it is all darkness. In darkness a human being is searching for a religion and is performing deeds. He has a set of beliefs.

When he frees himself from the dust of the traditions and enters the clean space, he will see the brilliant face of the friend of God [= wali = the twelfth Imam] and benefit from his presence without any obstruction, in public. At that time ordinances of religion will become something else, and religion will attain its original form and everything will be different.

Hence, we should ascend to that world where this friend of God is manifest and not wait for him to come to us. If he comes to us and finds us unfit we cannot benefit from him. Moreover, if he comes to us and we are still in the same state [of ungodly existence], we will not be able to see him. This is also against common sense. On the other hand, if our state changes for better and improves, then we have certainly moved upward in station.

Hence we must realize that we should ascend so that we can reach that world. The name of that world in the language of theosophy is Hurqalya. Thus, as the world ascends to that high level it reaches the station of Hurqalya. In that place the Imam's domain is realized. Truth is spread and falsehood is defeated2.

Mr. Hoshyar: The author's intent in this writing is not clear. If he intends to convey that the Imam of the Age (peace be upon him) has relinquished his earthly existence and physical body to ascend to that ideal world, as a result of which he is no more a person existing on this earth needing an earthly form and bound to earthly necessities, this view, besides being in itself irrational, does not conform with the rational and textual proofs that prove the necessity of the Imamate.

To be sure, these proofs point to the fact that there should exist among people that perfect man in whom all the excellent qualities and virtues should become actualized. Such a person, having attained the straight path of the religion himself, should undertake to show that path and lead the people toward it. It is only then that the Imam could serve as a role model and preserve God's ordinances and serve as a competent authority and proof for God's existence. The twelfth Imam is such a person. To put it differently, the need of the guide and leader is felt where people are moving towards that lofty goal, seeking to be instructed to attain that perfection.

However, if the intent of the author regarding Hurqalya is to fix a point in this material world, then we have no disagreement with him in what he believes. But, this more reasonable latter sense does not seem to be congruent with the apparent meaning of his writing. Over all it seems to be an untenable opinion.

Will the Imam Be Born at the End of the Time?

Dr. Fahimi: We can accept this much from what you have said so far, namely, the existence of the Mahdi is among the indisputable religious truths of Islam, about which the Prophet himself had given the information. However, what does it matter if we say that the promised Mahdi is not born yet? Whenever the conditions of the world become favorable God will appoint one of the descendants of the Prophet who will establish the rule of justice and will create conditions for God's sincere worship by destroying the forces of injustice and undertaking to fight against the wrongdoers until victory is gained.

Mr. Hoshyar: To respond to your question, let me begin by pointing out that we have proven by means of all the rational and traditional proofs that no period of human existence is without an Imam, because the absence of the Imam would lead to the decline of humankind. Hence, our age is also not without the Imam.

Moreover, we have established the existence of the Mahdi conclusively by means of the *hadith*-reports from the Prophet and his family. Consequently, we should also obtain a description of his person and character from the same sources. Fortunately, all the characteristics and signs of his existence are

covered in numerous reports, leaving no ambiguity or imprecision on that score. However, if we were to read all these reports it would require several sessions, for which I do not believe that you, with your already busy schedule, would have time. Accordingly, I will provide you with a list of these reports and you are free to undertake a further detailed examination to satisfy your interest.

Descriptions Identifying the Mahdi

The contemporary Scholar, Safi Golpaygani, has collected all these traditions in his book: *Muntakhab al-athar*, citing their Sunni and Shi^li sources. Following is the list of the subject and the number of traditions on that subject:

91 hadith on: "The Imams are twelve in number, among whom the first is 'Ali b. Abi Talib and the last is the Mahdi."

94 hadith on: "The Imams are twelve, and the last one is the Mahdi."

107 *hadith* on: "The Imams are twelve, nine among whom are the descendants of Husayn, and the ninth is the Qa'im."

389 hadith on: "Mahdi is from among the progeny of the Prophet."

214 hadith on: "Mahdi is from among the descendants of 'Ali."

192 hadith on: "Mahdi is from among the descendants of Fatima."

185 hadith on: "Mahdi is from among the descendants of Husayn."

148 hadith on: "Mahdi is the nineth descendant of Husayn."

185 hadith on: "Mahdi is among the descendants of 'Ali b. al-Husayn."

103 hadith on: "Mahdi is among the descendants of Imam Muhammad Bagir."

103 hadith on: "Mahdi is among the descendants of Imam Ja'far Sadiq."

99 hadith on: "Mahdi is the sixth descendant of Imam Sadiq."

101 hadith on: "Mahdi is among the descendants of Imam Musa al-Kazim."

98 hadith on: "Mahdi is the fifth descendant of Imam Kazim."

95 hadith on: "Mahdi is the fourth descendant of Imam 'Ali Rida."

90 hadith on: "Mahdi is the third descendant of Imam Muhammad Tagi."

90 hadith on: "Mahdi is among the descendants of Imam 'Ali al-Hadi."

145 hadith on: "Mahdi is Imam Hasan 'Askari's son."

148 hadith on: "The name of Mahdi's father is Hasan."

47 hadith on: "The name and patronymic of the Mahdi will be that of the Prophet's name and patronymic3."

The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) declared:

The Promised Mahdi is among my descendants. His name and patronymic will be the same as mine. In creation and conduct he will be the closest to me. He will live a life of occultation during which people will become confused and lost. At that time, like a brilliant star he will appear and fill the earth with justice and equity, as it is filled with injustice and tyranny4.

As you can see from these hadith–reports, the Mahdi has been so clearly identified that there remains no doubt as to his identity. At this juncture, it seems appropriate to remind ourselves that on the basis of some of the prophetic traditions and historical reports one can surmise that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) had forbidden the combination of his name and patronymic in one person. Hence, this has been a rare occurrence in history.

In a hadith reported by Abu Hurayra the Prophet said: "Do not combine my name and my patronymic (kunya) in one person5." It was because of this prohibition that when 'Ali b. Abi Talib chose the Prophet's name and patronymic for his son Muhammad b. Hanafiyya, the Prophet's companions objected to it. 'Ali b. Abi Talib in response to this objection said: "I have a special permission from the Prophet in this matter." A number of the companions confirmed 'Ali's statement.

If the content of this report is connected with the hadith-reports which relate that the Mahdi will have the Prophet's name and patronymic, then it becomes apparent that the Prophet wanted this combining of his name and patronymic to be part of the signs of the future Mahdi from which others were excluded. It was because of this coming together of the Prophet's name and patronymic in the case of Muhammad b. Hanafiyya that the latter referred to this fact as a sign of his own Mahdiism saying: "Yes, I am the Mahdi. My name is the Prophet's name; and my patronymic is his patronymic6."

Mahdi Is Among the Descendants of Husayn b. 'Ali

Dr. Fahimi: Our scholars accept that the Mahdi will be from among the descendants of Husayn. They refer to the following hadith reported in Sunan of Abi Dawud:

Abu Ishaq relates: "Ali, while looking at his son Hasan, said, 'This son of mine is the master (sayyid) as declared by the Prophet. Among his progeny will appear a man whose name will be that of the Prophet.

He will resemble the Prophet in his demeanor; but he will not resemble him in appearance7."

Mr. Hoshyar: First, let me point out that in all likelihood, there might have occurred an error in the writing or printing of the hadith. And instead of 'Husayn' it might have recorded 'Hasan'. The reason is that the same hadith has been related in other collections where instead of 'Hasan' it is 'Husayn' to whom the comment is made by 'Ali b. Abi Talib8.

Second, there are far too many hadith–reports in the Sunni and Shi'i collections that regard the Mahdi to be from among the descendants of Husayn. As such, this tradition has no validity. Let us examine some examples from the Sunni compilations on this subject:

Hudhayfa relates the following hadith from the Prophet:

The Prophet said: "If there remains no more than a day for the world, God will prolong it until a man from my progeny, whose name will be my name, will emerge." Salman asked: "From which of your progeny will he emerge?" The Prophet replied: "From this son of mine." And, he struck Husayn with his hand9.

In another tradition Abu Sa'id Khudari relates that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) told Fatima:

"The Mahdi of this community behind whom Jesus will pray is among us." Then he struck Husayn's shoulder with his hand and declared: "The Mahdi of my community will be from the descendants of this son of mine 10."

Once Salman al-Farisi came to see the Prophet when the latter had Husayn in his lap. The Prophet was kissing Husayn's face and mouth and was saying:

You are the master and the son and brother of the master. You are the Imam, son and brother of the Imam. Your are the proof and son and brother of the proof of God's existence. You are the father of nine proofs of God, the nineth among whom will be the Qa'im11.

According to these hadith–reports, the Mahdi is among the descendants of Husayn. Hence, one should abandon those reports that say that the Mahdi will be among the descendants of Hasan. Moreover, even if one accepts these latter traditions as being authentic, it can be asserted that both kinds of traditions point to the fact that Mahdi is certainly the descendant of both Hasan and Husayn, in the sense that Imam Muhammad Baqir's mother was the daughter of Imam Hasan. The following hadith points to the logical connection between the two kinds of traditions about the Mahdi being from the descendants of Hasan and Husayn:

The Prophet told Fatima: The two grandsons of this community are among us. These are Hasan and Husayn who are the masters of the youths of Paradise. By God, their father is more excellent than they. I solemnly declare in the name of the One who has sent me as a prophet that the Mahdi of this community will emerge from among these two sons of yours at the time when chaos will rule 12.

What If the Mahdi WasWell-known?

Dr. Jalali: If the promised Mahdi had been a prominent and well-known personality and if his highly publicized merits and characteristics had reached the ears of the Muslims and the companions of the rightful Imams in the early days of Islam, the road to manipulation and fallacies would have necessarily been closed, and the associates of the Imams and the scholars would not have fallen into an error. On the contrary, one finds that even some of the descendants of the Imams did not have proper information about the subject of the Mahdi.

How, then, did so many individuals claiming to be the Mahdi appear in the early days, introducing themselves as the promised Mahdi of Islam and misleading the people with their false claim? If the Muslims knew the Mahdi by name, and the name of his father and mother, and his patronymic, and that he was the twelfth Imam, and all other details about his age and other characteristics, how did then a group fall into error and regard Muhammad b. Hanafiyya, Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah b. Hasan, Ja'far Sadiq, Musa Kazim, or other such individuals as the Mahdi?

Mr. Hoshyar: As mentioned earlier, the fundamental belief in the existence of the Mahdi was a well-established tenet of faith among early Muslims. In fact, people did not entertain any doubt in his existence. The Prophet had given detailed information about the existence of the Mahdi, his characteristics, his universal mission of instituting the divine government based on justice and equity and of bringing an end to injustice and tyranny by carrying out necessary reforms. Indeed, the Prophet had given many such glad tidings to the Muslims. Nevertheless, he had not provided them with the cues and the actual characteristics and distinctions of the Mahdi. Rather, one can say that such matters were part of the confidential information that was revealed to a few entrusted and loyal followers of Islam. The Prophet had given that confidential information about the Mahdi to 'Ali b. Abi Talib, Fatima and other trusted companions, while keeping that secret from the general public, giving them only hints and general information on the subject. The Imams who came after the Prophet followed the Prophet's example and shared only summary information about the Mahdi with the general public. All the detailed particulars on the subject were handed down from one Imam to the succeeding Imams, one after the other. On occasion, the information was divulged to a few trustworthy associates. Over all, the general public and even some of the family members of the Imams, knew very little about the subject.

There were two reasons for the Prophet and the Imams not to indulge in providing detailed information about the future coming of the Mahdi:

First, they wanted to keep the identity of the promised Mahdi secret from the enemies of God and the unjust rulers so that no harm would befall him from that direction. The Prophet and the Imams were fully aware that if the unjust rulers, caliphs and their agents knew the identity of the Mahdi with all the particulars about his parents, their names, and so on, they would not hesitate to prevent his birth even if that meant killing his parents. The Umayyads and the 'Abbasids were determined to hold on to their

power by eliminating even the slightest threat to it. They did not pause to commit grievous crimes in order to remain in power. In all likelihood, they would have endeavored to get rid of him, even if it meant killing anyone remotely connected with a challenge to their autocratic rule.

It is important to note that even though the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids were not fully informed about the signs of the Mahdi's appearance, they killed thousands of the descendants of 'Ali b. Abi Talib and Fatima, in order to thwart the potential threat of the Mahdi's revolution. In a hadith related from Imam Sadiq to Mufaddal, Abu Basir and Aban b. Taghlib, the Imam said: "Since the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids had heard that tyrannical rule will be overthrown by our Qa'im, they initiated their hostility against us. They labored to kill the descendants of the Prophet and to destroy subsequent generations with the hope that they could get rid of the Qa'im. But since God was determined to fulfill His will, He did not avail the tyrants all the information about the matter 13."

The case with the Imams was not very different than with the Prophet himself. They lived in fear for their lives. Hence, they practiced 'prudential concealment' (taqiyya) in revealing the details about the Mahdi even to their closest associates and other 'Alawites. Abu Khalid, the close associate of Imams Baqir and Sadiq, once requested Imam Baqir to confirm the name of al–Qa'im for him so that he would perfectly recognize him. The Imam said: "O Abu Khalid, you have asked me something about which if the descendants of Fatima come to know anything, the authorities would cut him into pieces 14!"

Second, by providing merely general information about the Mahdi, the Prophet and the Imams wanted those weak in their faith not to be overcome by despair at the weakness of God's religion in the face of the unjust powers. In other words, those who had witnessed or heard about the unpolluted and just rule of the Prophet and Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib in the early days of Islam, had heard about the ultimate victory of true religion and the end of injustice and corruption under Islam. Accordingly, they had accepted the new religion with much hope of seeing an end to all the corruption. However, since they were newcomers to Islam their faith was not that strong. On the one hand, the prevalent turmoil in Muslim society and the unfavorable conditions that ensued had an impact upon these people.

On the other hand, they saw the wicked behavior of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid rulers and the way that that impacted upon society. These unfavorable social and political conditions had made them very perplexed. The concern of the Prophet and the Imams was that people with weak faith would lose hope, with the truth and religion of Islam being overpowered by evil forces, and so these people would abandon Islam. The thing that to a certain extent assured people to remain faithful to Islam and to keep their hearts hopeful was the belief in the deliverance and the revolution of the promised Mahdi.

These Muslims anticipated the revolution of the promised Mahdi to take place any day to redress the injustices in society and to restore universal good order according to the Islamic ideals of justice and equity. It is natural that this hope for a better future in the people would have been effected only when all the true details about the Qa'im's uprising were not clearly known. Otherwise, if the details about the timing, the identity and other related signs of the Mahdi's appearance were public knowledge, such a

positive attitude and hope would not have ensued.

Undoubtedly, it was this general, summary information about the future role of the Mahdi that gave the capacity to the downtrodden people in the early days of Islam to bear with patience the unfavorable living conditions under the corrupt and unjust rulers of the Ummayad and 'Abbasid dynasties.

The intended impact of what was foretold about the Mahdi in brief is captured in the report in which Yaqtin, a supporter of the 'Abbasids, asked his son 'Ali b. Yaqtin, one of the prominent associates of the Imam Musa Kazim: "Why is it that things that were predicted about us have been fulfilled, whereas those about you remain unrealized?" 'Ali b. Yaqtin replied: "The reports that foretold the events came from the same [prophetic] source. However, since the time for your political power has arrived, the prophecies about you are, one by one, being fulfilled.

But, the time for our rule, that is the rule of the Prophet's family, has not come yet. Hence, they have kept us occupied with the glad tidings and future aspirations. If we had been told that the government of the Prophet's family will not be established for the next two or three centuries, the hearts would have been hard and most of the people would have abandoned Islam. But, the events have been reported in such a way that the hearts are pleased and every day we are looking forward to the establishment of God's government15."

The Traditions from the Ahlul Bayt Are Proofs for All Muslims

Dr. Fahimi: One must acknowledge the fact that your traditions identify and describe the Mahdi very well. Unfortunately, such traditions have very little value for a person like me who happens to be a Sunni and who does not attach any significance to the opinions and actions of your Imams.

Mr. Hoshyar: I am not in the process of proving the Imamate and the wilayat (love of the ahl al-bayt) for you. I want to point out something else for you. It is important to emphasize that the opinions and actions of the Imams among the ahl al-bayt have evidential value and are significant for all Muslims across the board, regardless of whether they accept them as Imams or not.

The reason is that there are numerous traditions publicized on the authority of the Prophet and regarded as reliable by both the Shi'i and the Sunni in which the Prophet has introduced his ahl al-bayt as the authoritative source of Islamic knowledge and regarded their opinions and actions as sound. For example, the famous tradition about the "two things of high estimation" (al-thaqalayn), the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) said:

I leave among you two things of high estimation. If you hold on to them you will never be led astray. One of these two things is weightier than the other. One of these two is the Book of God which is a link between the earth and the heaven. The second one is my family, my ahl al-bayt. These two trusts will not separate from each other till the Day of Judgement. Hence, exercise care in the way you treat these two 16.

This hadith has been reported in various forms by both the Shi'i and Sunni sources. Moreover, it has been regarded as an authentic tradition. According to Ibn Hajar, as recorded in his book al–Sawa'iq al–muharriqa, this hadith has been narrated by different sources and through numerous chains of transmission from the Prophet. In fact, more than twenty close companions [of the Prophet] have related it. The Prophet used to attach so much importance to the Qur'an and his ahl al–bayt that on different occasions he had declared their significance for the well being of the Muslim community in the future, including the Farewell Pilgrimage and the Ghadir, and after his return from his journey to Ta'if.

Another tradition which is widely acknowledged in all Sunni and Shi'i sources is related by Ibn 'Abbas who heard the Prophet declare: "The likeness of my family is the Ark of Noah. Whoever embarks upon it is saved; and whoever stays away from it will perish 17."

Jabir b. 'Abd Allah Ansari related from the Prophet another widely quoted hadith in which the latter said:

The two sons of 'Ali [Hasan and Husayn] are the leaders of the youths of Paradise. They are my sons. 'Ali, his two sons, and the Imams after them, are the Proof of God's existence among the people. They are my gates of knowledge in the community. Any one who follows them will be saved from the Hell Fire; and any one who accepts them as his leader has found the way to guidance. God does not bless any one with their love without making them worthy of the Paradise 18.

In one of his orations 'Ali b. Abi Talib told the people:

I ask you to verify this, in the name of God: Do you recall what the Prophet said in his last speech: "O people! I leave among you the Book of God and my family? Hold on to them and you will never lose your way, because God, the Wise, has informed and assured me that these two will never part from each other till the Day of Judgement." At that time 'Umar b. al-Khattab got angry and stood up and asked: "Does this statement include all of your family?"

The Prophet replied: "No. This includes my legatees among whom the first is 'Ali b. Abi Talib, my brother, vizier, heir and caliph. He is the one who has discretionary power over my community. Following 'Ali my son Hasan, following him my son Husayn, and then nine descendants of Husayn are the legatees. They will follow each other until the Day of Judgement. They are the proofs of God's existence for the people, the keepers of divine knowledge, and the repositories of wisdom on earth. Whoever obeys them has obeyed God, and whoever disobeys them has disobeyed God."

When 'Ali's answer reached this point, all those who were present said: 'We bear witness that the Prophet did say all that 19.'

On the basis of all such traditions that are recorded in the Sunni and Shi'i sources the following conclusions can be drawn:

(a) Since the Qur'an will remain with the people until the Day of Judgement, the family of the Prophet, the ahl al-bayt, will also remain with them. Hence, such traditions can be considered as evidence for the

existence of the Hidden Imam.

- (b) The term 'itrat in the hadith actually refers to the twelve legatees of the Prophet.
- (c) The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) has not abandoned the Muslim community without any guidance. Quite to the contrary, he has actually made his family, the ahl al-bayt, the source of divine knowledge and guidance. He has declared their opinions and actions competent and reliable; and has recommended that one hold on to them until the Day of Judgement.
- (d) The Imam, then, will never be separated from the Qur'an and its ordinances. Therefore, he has to be perfectly knowledgeable about its injunctions. Just as the Qur'an does not mislead anyone in the matter of guidance, and leads those who adhere to it to salvation, so does the Imam lead the people to their goal without committing any error. If the people follow the Qur'an and the Imams they would certainly be guided to their prosperity. In other words, the Imam is free from any error and deviation.

`Ali b. Abi Talib, the Paragon of the Prophetic Knowledge

In the light of historical and traditional sources it is accurate to assert that the Prophet knew very well that among his companions not all were capable of carrying the burden of the knowledge that was given to him in his position as the Prophet of God. Moreover, the prevalent circumstances in the community were not favorable to spread such information. However, he was also aware that one day the community would need that kind of knowledge. Consequently, he selected 'Ali b. Abi Talib for the purpose of making him the repository of the prophetic knowledge. He personally undertook to teach him and educate him day and night. Hence, what 'Ali reported reflects the Prophet's own teachings about Islam. To cite some examples, let us consider the following:

'Ali was brought up under the special care of the Prophet and was all the time in his companionship. In this connection the Prophet informed 'Ali that God had required him to befriend 'Ali and to teach him all he had received from God as a prophet. "You too should take care in learning and recording what I have taught you. God will certainly approve your endeavors," the Prophet guided 'Ali b. Abi Talib20.

Hence, 'Ali used to say: "Whatever I learnt from the Prophet I never forgot<u>21</u>." In another report he said: "The Prophet had assigned me a special hour in the night and the day when I used to present myself [to learn from him]22."

On one occasion 'Ali was asked: "What is the reason that in comparison to other companions of the Prophet you have the most traditions?" He replied: "Whenever I asked the Prophet something he gave me an answer. And whenever I kept quiet he would begin the conversation23."

The Prophet, according to Imam 'Ali, used to ask him to write down what he said. 'Ali asked him if the Prophet thought 'Ali might forget. The Prophet said: "No, because I have prayed to God to make you among those who remembers things and records them. However, I want you to preserve it for your

companions and the Imams who will come after you. It is because of the blessed existence of the Imams that the rain falls on earth for the people, their prayers get accepted, the calamities go by them and mercy descends on them." Then the Prophet pointed towards Hasan and said: "This is the second in the line of the Imams," and added, "the Imams will be from the descendants of Husyan."

The Book of 'Ali b. Abi Talib

To be sure, 'Ali b. Abi Talib was able to comprehend and master the prophetic knowledge through a serious commitment and divine help, attended by divinely endowed talent. This knowledge he put to writing and converted the book to a comprehensive corpus to which he added his own recommendations for the future benefit of the community. This matter has been preserved in the hadith–reports related by the ahl al–bayt. For example, we read the following hadith in the collection:

Imam Sadiq said: We have something in our possession which makes us free from any need from the people. However, [because of what we have] people are in need of us. We possess a book which was dictated by the Prophet himself and which is in the hand-writing of 'Ali. It is the comprehensive book that includes all the ordinances about that which is lawful and that which is unlawful24.

In another tradition Imam Baqir told Jabir:

O Jabir, if I had expounded for you our belief and tenets we would have destroyed ourselves. In any case, we are relating for you traditions which we collected from the Prophet, just as people collect gold and silver25.

'Abd Allah b. Sinan heard Imam Sadig, who said:

We have in our possession a leather bag, seventy cubits long. It was written by 'Ali under the dictation of the Prophet. It contains all the knowledge that people need to know down to the minutest detail26.

The Heirs to the Prophet's Knowledge:

Mr. Hoshyar: Dr. Fahimi, you said earlier that you do not accept the Imamate of the family of the Prophet. However, you must accept the evidential nature of what they say, just as you accept the traditions reported from the companions, and the succeeding generation of Muslims. The reason is that even if you do not accept any one of them as the Imam, you cannot deprive them of their right to relate the reliable traditions on the authority of the Prophet. Undoubtedly, the value of what they relate is many times more than the information transmitted by any ordinary Muslim. A number of Sunni scholars have acknowledged the level of their knowledge, piety and strength of character27.

The Imams, time and again, used to say that they do not give opinions based on their own predilections. Rather, their responses were derived from the Prophet's own teachings. In other words, they were the true heirs of the Prophetic knowledge, relating everything going back to the Prophet through the Imams.

According to Imam Sadiq:

My hadith is my father's hadith. My father's hadith is my grandfather's hadith. My grandfather's hadith is Husayn's hadith. Husayn's hadith is Hasan's hadith. Hasan's hadith is Amir al-Mu'minin's ['Ali b. Abi Talib's] hadith. 'Ali b. Abi Talib's hadith is the Prophet's hadith. And, the Prophet's hadith is what God has told him28.

Dr. Fahimi, I ask you to be fair minded. Do you think that the hadith reported on the authority of Hasan and Husayn, the two leaders of the youth of Paradise are not as good as the ones reported by Abu Hurayra, Samra b. Jundab or Ka'b al-Ahbar? How about the hadith related by the pious Imam Zayn al-'Abidin, the righteous Imams Baqir, Sadiq, and so on?

Undoubtedly, the Prophet declared 'Ali and his descendants to be the treasures of prophetic knowledge. He reminded Muslims time and again and in different contexts to look upon them as the sources of reliable knowledge about Islam. More importantly, he encouraged the people to refer to them. Unfortunately, the direction of Islamic history deviated from its straight course and the community deprived itself of the valuable instruction of the ahl al-bayt, which led to backwardness among Muslims.

Dr. Jalali: I have many more questions in mind. But, since its getting very late, I will leave them for the next session.

Engineer Madani: If you all agree, I would like to hold the next session in my home. We will continue our deliberations there.

- 1. The word refers to the mythological universe known to the mystics as very difficult world requiring the strength or courage of Hercules to encounter or accomplish. Tr
- 2. Muhammad Karim Khan, Irshad al-`ulum (Kirman, 1380), Volume 3, p. 401
- 3. See: Lutf Allah al-Safi al-Gulpaygani, Muntakhab al-athar fi al-imam al-thani 'ashar (Tehran: Maktabat al-Sadr, nd.)
- 4. Majlisi, Bihar al-anwar, Volume 51, p. 72.
- 5. Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat al-kubra, Vol. 1, p. 107
- 6. Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 94
- 7. Sunan, Kitab al-mahdi
- 8. Ithbat al-hudat, Vol. 7, p. 208
- 9. Dhakha'ir al-'uqba, p. 136
- 10. al-Bayan fi akhbar sahib al-zaman, p. 502
- 11. Yanabi al-mawadda, Vol. 1, p. 492
- 12. Ithbat al-hudat, Vol. 7, p. 183
- 13. Ibn Babüya, Kamal al-din, Vol. 2, 354
- 14. Shaykh al-Tusi, Kitab al-ghayba, p. 202
- 15. Ibid., p. 208
- 16. Dhakha`ir al-'uqba (Cairo, 1356), p. 16; al-Sawa'iq al-muharriqa, p. 147; al-Fusul al-muhimma, p. 22; al-Bidaya wa al-nihaya, Vol. 5, p. 208; (Hydrabad edition), pp. 153, 167; Sibt b. Jawzi, Tadhkirat al-khawass, p. 182
- 17. All the sources mentioned in the previous note, in addition to Majma' al-zawa'id, Vol. 9, p. 168
- 18. Yanabi' al-mawadda, Vol. 1, p. 54
- 19. Jami' ahadith al-shi'a, Vol. 1, Introduction

- 20. See Manaqib Khwarazmi, p. 199, Kulayni, al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 64
- 21. A'yan al-shi'a, Vol. 3
- 22. Yanabi' al-mawadda, Vol. 1, p. 77
- 23. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 36; Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqat, Vol. 2, Part II, p. 101
- 24. Jami' ahadith al-shi'a, Vol. 1, Introduction
- 25. Ibid
- **26.** Ibid
- 27. There are a number of works authored by the Sunnis that regard the Shi'i Imams as righteous and highly knowledgeable in religious–legal matters. See, for instance, al–Jawzi, Tadhkirat al–khawass, Ibn Sabbagh al–Maliki, Fusul al–muhimma; Shablanji, Nur al–absar; Ibn Hajar, al–Sawa'iq al–muharriqa; and, so on
- 28. Jami' ahadith shi'a, Vol. 1

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