

Chapter 6

Traditions on the Occultation (Ghaybah)

The author of *Yanabi' al-Mawadda* (page 447) narrates from the book *Fara'id al-Simtayn* a tradition from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) from his father, from his grandfather, from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib who narrates from the Holy Prophet (S):

“The Mahdi is from my progeny. There shall be an occultation for him. When he emerges, he will fill the earth with equity and justice just as it had been filled with cruelty and oppression.”

In the same book, on page 448, its author narrates from Sa'id ibn Jubayr who narrates from Ibn 'Abbas that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

“Ali is my *Wasi* (legatee) and from his progeny shall come the awaited Qa'im al-Mahdi, who shall fill the earth with equity and justice just as it had been filled with cruelty and oppression. I swear by Allah Who appointed me as a warner and bringer of glad tidings that those whose belief will be firm in the Imamate of the Mahdi during the period of his occultation will be scarcer than red sulphur.”

Then Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari stood and said: “O Messenger of Allah! Shall there be an occultation for the Qa'im from your progeny?” He replied:

“Yes, I swear by my Lord,

so that Allah may purge those who have faith and that He may wipe out the faithless” (3: 141)

Thereafter he said:

“O Jabir, this affair is a divine affair and this secret is a divine secret. So be on guard against any kind of doubt in this affair, because doubt in the divine affair is unbelief (*kufr*)”.

Again, on the same page of the afore-mentioned book, the author narrates from al-Hasan ibn Khalid who narrates from 'Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha:

“Allah shall erase from the earth every cruelty and oppression through my fourth son from my progeny who shall be the son of the chief of slave-girls. He is the one about whose birth the people doubt. He is

the same one who shall go into concealment. When he emerges,

the earth will beam with the light of its Lord.. (39:65)”

Once again, in the same book, on page 454, the author has narrated from Ahmad ibn Zayd who has narrated from Di’bal ibn ‘Ali al-Khuza’i who was in the presence of Imam Ridha and recited an elegy before him, ending in the letter ‘*fā*’ (ف). He narrates that the Imam said:

“The Imam after me is my son Muhammad and the Imam after him will be his son ‘Ali. After him will follow his son al-Hasan and after al-Hasan shall come his son, al-Hujjah al-Qa’im, the one who will be awaited during his occultation and who will be obeyed at his reappearance.

“He will fill the earth with equity and justice just as it had been filled with cruelty and oppression. About his emergence, my father has narrated from my grandfathers who in turn have narrated from the Holy Prophet (S) that:

‘The likeness of the (emergence of) Mahdi is like the likeness of Qiyamah:

it will not come on you but suddenly (7: 187)’.”

The author of the afore-said book (on page 488) has narrated from the book *Ghāyah al-Marām*, from *Fara’id al-Simtayn* that Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Ansari quoted the Holy Prophet (S) as saying:

“The Mahdi shall come from my progeny. His name and agnomen shall be the same as my name and agnomen. Amongst all the people, he shall resemble me the most in appearance and character. There shall occur an occultation for him, and bewilderment (about it) due to which nations will go astray. The Mahdi will emerge like a piercing star and fill the earth with equity and justice just as it had been filled with cruelty and oppression”.

Again on the same page of *Yanabi’ al-Mawadda*, he (i.e. Shaykh al-Qunduzi) narrates from *Fara’id al-Simtayn* from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, from his grandfathers, from ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

“The Mahdi is from my progeny. There shall occur an occultation for him and bewilderment (about it) due to which nations will go astray.... He shall fill the earth with equity and justice just as it had been filled with cruelty and oppression”.

On page 493 of the same book, he has narrated from the book *al-Manaqib*, from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

“Blessed is the one who attains the time of the Qa’im from my Ahl al-Bayt, while believing him to be the Imam during his concealment (i.e. before his emergence) and he befriends his friends and is hostile to his enemies. Such a person shall be amongst my friends and those whom I love and the noblest of my Ummah to me on the Day of Judgment”.

The author of the same book narrates from Abu Basir who narrates from Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq, from his

forefathers, from Amir al-Mu'minin that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

“The Mahdi is from my progeny. His name shall be the same as mine and his agnomen too shall be the same as my agnomen. Amongst all the people he shall resemble me the most in appearance and character. There shall be an occultation for him, and bewilderment among the people (about it), due to which people will go astray from their religion. Then the Mahdi will emerge like a piercing star and will fill the earth with equity and justice just as it had been filled with cruelty and oppression”.

In the same book, a similar tradition from Abu Basir is mentioned but with this difference: “The Mahdi shall emerge like a piercing star and will bring along with him the treasures of the Prophets...” (Till the end)

The author of *Yanabi' al-Mawadda* (on page 494) has narrated from Abu Basir who narrated from Jabir ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi: I heard Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari saying: The Holy Prophet (S) told me:

“O Jabir! My legates and the Imams of the Muslims after me are 'Ali, then al-Hasan, then al-Husayn, then 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, then Muhammad ibn 'Ali, known as al-Baqir. O Jabir! You shall meet him and when you do so send my greetings upon him. After al-Baqir will come Ja'far ibn Muhammad, then Musa ibn Ja'far, then 'Ali ibn Musa, then Muhammad ibn 'Ali, then 'Ali ibn Muhammad, then al-Hasan ibn 'Ali and then al-Qa'im, whose name and agnomen are the same as my name and agnomen. Al-Qa'im is the son of al-Hasan ibn 'Ali. He is the one whom Allah, the Exalted, will give victory over the East and West. It is he who will go into concealment from his friends. No one shall remain firm in his belief of his Imamate except for those whose hearts Allah has tested for faith”.

Mahdi and the manner of his occultation

Ibn Babawayh al-Saduq in his book *Ikmal al-Din wa Itmam al-Ni'mah* said:

“My father and Ibn al-Walid both narrated to me from Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah who said: “Innumerable people who had gathered for the burial of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari narrated to us – and it is impossible for so many people to come together and forge a lie.”

The narrator says: In the year 278 A.H. when eighteen years or more had passed after Imam al-Hasan Al-'Askari's demise, we presented ourselves before Ahmad ibn 'Ubayd Allah ibn Yahya ibn Khaqan. He was the Caliph's representative in Qum, responsible for collecting the tribute. He was amongst the most severe in enmity to the progeny of Abu Talib. In that gathering, discussion took place about the progeny of Abu Talib who were the residents of Samarra and their faith, piety and standing before the Caliph.

Ahmad ibn 'Ubayd Allah said: In the city of Samarra and amongst the Alawis, I have never come across a person like al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ridha, and I have not heard anyone amongst the kings and all the Bani Hashim possessing such chastity, nobility, magnificence and munificence like him. He was given more priority than (even) the aged. Similarly the commanders, ministers, writers and

common people respected him very much.

Ahmad ibn 'Ubayd Allah said: One day I stood beside my father when it was his day for meeting the people. Suddenly, a guard approached and said: "Ibn al-Ridha (i.e. Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari) is at the door." My father said loudly: "Allow him to enter." A young man entered possessing a wheatish complexion broad eyes, good physique, good appearance and a good figure, majestic and awe-inspiring.

As soon as my father saw him, he went forward to welcome him. I had never seen my father doing that for any of the Bani Hashim or the leaders and companions of the Caliph. When Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari came near, my father hugged and kissed his blessed face and hands. He caught hold of his hands and offered him his own place. He himself sat facing Imam al-'Askari and began to converse with him. He would address Imam by his agnomen (i.e. he would say 'O Abu Muhammad) and would often express his willingness to sacrifice his life for him. I was surprised by my father's behavior.

At that moment, the guard once again approached my father and said: "Al-Muwaffaq (who was the Caliph) has come." Whenever Al-Muwaffaq would come to meet my father it was customary for my father's guards and other special men to line up in two rows right from the place of my father's sitting until the doorway of Caliph until al-Muwaffaq would come and then return back. In spite of realizing that the Caliph was going to come, my father was still looking at the Imam's face and conversing with him until the Caliph's special servants were seen.

Then my father told the Imam: "May I be sacrificed for you. Whenever you wish, you may go." My father commanded his servants to take Imam al-'Askari from behind the rows so that the Caliph would be unable to see him. Once again my father hugged and kissed his blessed face and hands and then allowed him to go.

I told my father's door-keepers and servants: "Woe be upon you all. Who was this man that my father respected and honored him so much"?

They replied: "This man is from the Alawis. His name is al-Hasan ibn 'Ali and he is known as Ibn al-Ridha."

My astonishment increased. I passed the whole of that day thinking about the great man, and about my father and his behavior with him, until night approached. After the 'Isha (night) prayers it was always my father's habit to sit and look over the letters and petitions. After he finished reading the letters, I went and sat beside him. My father said: "O Ahmad, what do you want"? I replied: "I wish to ask you a question by your permission". He said: "Ask me whatever you wish to ask."

I said: "Who was that man whom you respected, honored, glorified and paid tribute so much so that you expressed your willingness to sacrifice your own life and your parents' lives for him"?

He replied: "He was Ibn al-Ridha, the Imam of the Shi'a." After a moment's silence my father continued

and said: "If the Caliphate is taken away from the Bani 'Abbas, no person from the Bani Hashim is more entitled to it than this man because of his majesty, chastity, good behavior, self-continenence, piety, worship, good morals and virtuous deeds. If you had seen his father you would have found him to be a great, glorious and benevolent man".

Listening to this, I plunged myself deeper into the sea of thought and amazement and became furious at my father for speaking in this manner.

Later on, I did nothing but enquire about Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari and his affairs. Regarding him, everyone – i.e. leaders, writers, judges, jurists and the common people, expressed his grandness, nobleness, dignity and high personality. Moreover they gave him priority over the rest of the Bani Hashim, the aged, and all other classes of people. All of them would say: "He is the Imam of the Shi'a."

This great man's position and dignity increased in my view because none from the friends and enemies said anything but good things about Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari.

A person who was from the Ash'arites said: "O Abu Bakr! How is this man Ja'far, the brother of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari"?

He replied: "Ja'far is not a man to be asked or rather compared with Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari. Ja'far is a transgressor, adulterer, wine-drinker and an ill behaved personality. I have found fewer people like Ja'far who are disgraceful and ignorant".

I swear by Allah that when news of the demise of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari reached the Caliph and his companions, I witnessed some unexpected scenes which were very astonishing for me. The incident was as follows:

When Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari fell ill, the Caliph called for my father to inform him about the Imam's illness. My father immediately rushed to the Capital and soon returned back. He came back with five special and trusted men of Caliph who were all reliable to him and one of them was Nuhrayr Khadim. He ordered these five men to protect the Imam's house and inquire of his health. He called for several doctors and charged them with the responsibility of looking after the Imam every morning and night.

Two days later, news came of the Imam's deteriorating condition. My father rushed to visit him and commanded the doctors not to leave the Imam alone. Afterwards, he called for the Chief Judge and ordered him to bring ten of his companions who were reliable from the viewpoint of faith, trustworthiness and piety. The Chief Judge summoned those ten men to the Imam's house and ordered them to remain besides the Imam day and night. They too remained at the Imam's service until he passed away.

Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) passed away in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal 260 A.H. and a tumult took place in the city of Samarra.

The Caliph sent several of his men to Imam's house and they in turn searched Imam's rooms and

sealed off everything they could find. They also searched for Imam's son (i.e. Imam of the Age). They brought midwives in order to examine the slave-girls (of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari). One of the midwives said: "So and so slave-girl is pregnant." The Caliph charged Nurayr Khadim, his companions and other women to keep watch over her.

Thereafter, they became busy in the Imam's funeral and the entire city came to a standstill. The Bani Hashim, the commanders, writers and all the common people attended the Imam's funeral. On that day, the city of Samarra resembled the Day of Judgment. As soon as the Imam's body was given the ritual wash and was shrouded, the Caliph sent forward Abu 'Isa Mutawakkil to recite prayers over Imam's dead body.

When Abu 'Isa came close to the Imam's body, he lifted the shroud and exposed his face to the Bani Hashim, (who were from the Alawis) the Abbasids, commanders, writers, judges, jurisprudents and the common people and then said: "This man is Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari who has died a natural death. During the entire period of his illness, so and so doctor, so and so judge, so and so trusted person and so and so just person had been present and they can all bear witness on this affair". After this, he covered Imam's face and recited prayers over him and in his prayers he recited five times *Takbir* (inaugural phrase). By his commands, the Imam's body was taken out from his house and was buried in his great grandfather's house.

After the Imam's burial and the people's dispersal, the Caliph and his companions engaged in seeking the whereabouts of his son (the Imam of the Age). They properly searched various houses. They desisted from distributing the Imam's inheritance. Those people who were charged with the responsibility of keeping watch over the slave-girl continued their task for two years until they realized that she had not been pregnant. Thereafter, they distributed the Imam's inheritance between his mother and his brother (Ja'far al-Kadhhab). Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari's mother claimed that she was the legatee of Imam and the same too was proved before the judge. Meanwhile, the Caliph was still in pursuit of the Imam of the Age.

After distribution of the inheritance, Ja'far al-Kadhhab approached my father and said: "Grant me the status of my father and brother (i.e. the position of Imamate) and I will in turn, give you twenty thousand dinars."

On hearing this, my father became furious and said:

"O stupid person! The Caliph has unsheathed his sword and his whip against those who say that your father and your brother are Imams, in order to turn them away from their belief in that, but he has been unsuccessful until now. If, in the eyes of the Shi'a you are the Imam, then you are no more dependent on Caliph or others for giving you the position of Imamate. Conversely, if you are not the Imam before the Shi'a, the Caliph and others cannot procure this position for you".

When my father realized his stupidity and ignorance, he ordered his men not to allow him to attend his

gathering any more. Thenceforth, he did not attend until my father died.

At present too, the Caliph is still in pursuit of the Imam of the Age but with no trace of him.'

Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni in the first volume of his book *Usul al-Kafi*, in the chapter on the birth of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.), said: Al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-'Ash'ari and Muhammad ibn Yahya and others said: Ahmad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Khaqan was in charge of the estates and collecting the land tax from Qum, and they related the same account as he had done.

Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi in his book *al-Fihrist* in the biography of Ahmad ibn 'Ubayd Allah ibn Yahya has also narrated the afore-mentioned tradition but with a minor difference.

Ahmad ibn 'Abbas ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Najashi has also narrated the same tradition in his book *al-Fihrist*.

The author says: Shaykh Mufid in his book *al-Irshad*, Fadhl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabarsi in his book *I'lam al-Wara*, and Muhammad ibn Muhsin al-Faidh al-Kashani in his book *al-Wafi*, have narrated the afore-said tradition from Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni.

Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'man (i.e. Shaykh Mufid) in his book *al-Irshad* says:

'Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari fell ill on the first day of Rabi' al-Awwal in the year of 260 A.H. and passed away on the Friday, the eighth of Rabi' al-Awwal of the same year. At the time of his demise, Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) was twenty-eight years old. He was laid to rest in the same room in which his grandfather was buried in their house in Samarra. He appointed his awaited son for the establishment of the just government. Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) would keep secret the birth of his son and would conceal his affairs because the situation of that time was unfavorable.

The Caliph of that time searched intensely for Imam's son and made great efforts to find out about his affair because belief in the Mahdi had become widespread amongst the Shi'a Imamiyah, and he knew they were awaiting him. During his life, Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari never disclosed his son in public and after his demise too, the enemies never got the chance of recognizing his son.

Ja'far ibn 'Ali (i.e. Ja'far al-Kadhhab) took away Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari's inheritance and strove hard to imprison his wives and slaves. He rebuked and reprimanded the Imam's companions just because they were awaiting his son's appearance and had faith in his Imamate. He even encouraged the people against them so that in this manner he would be able to strike fear in their hearts and bring pressure on them. As such, the Imam's followers were subjected to all sorts of persecution like arrest, imprisonment, threat, insult, abasement and abjectness.

On the other hand, the Caliph did nothing to assist them. Apparently, Ja'far al-Kadhhab derived inheritance of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari and strove to take his brother's place and become the Imam of the Shi'a. However, none of the Shi'a accepted his Imamate. Thereafter, he sought the Caliph's help and

asked him to bestow the position of Imamate on him. He even agreed to donate huge sums of money but all these were of no avail’.

Mahdi and his place of occultation

We, the Shi’a Imamiyah regard as correct and authentic the afore-mentioned circumstances of the occultation of Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi (a.s.), as related by the great scholars and traditionists upon whom we trust and rely. However what some of the common Shia’s say in this regard, and the Sunni scholars attribute to us, is lacking in any evidence and proper transmission.

What we had previously mentioned about the circumstances of the Mahdi’s occultation is correct in our view but such matters like: where was the Mahdi at the time of his father’s demise? Where did he go into concealment or in which portion of his house did he conceal himself? Was he on the roof of his house or did he go down into the *sardab* (cellar)? Did he hide in the house or flee from its door? Are all uncertain.

Verily, what appears customary is that he should have remained in the house besides his great father at the time of his father’s demise. Why shouldn’t it be so, especially if we consider that the Mahdi at that time was only a child (apparently) and besides had no other place other than his parents’ house?

Perhaps this matter can be inferred from the tradition of Ahmad ibn ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Yahya ibn Khaqan because he at that time was in his own house and disappeared without the people being aware of him. Although the Caliph and his followers and helpers were in search of him, yet they could not find him. Previously it was mentioned that the Caliph had put his trusted men in charge of looking over Imam al-Hasan al-’Askari at the time of his illness pretending to be his helpers because on that day none were present except ‘Aqid, the servant and *‘ayyal*, who was the Mahdi’s mother.

The Caliph had appointed ten of his trusted men under the pretext of serving Imam (a.s.). However his only purpose was to get information about the Mahdi’s whereabouts because it was normal for a child like him to be present in his parents’ house especially at that time when his father was on the verge of departing from this world. However Allah did not wish that they should become informed of the Mahdi and so kept his affairs concealed from them.

Verily, the One who protected Musa ibn ‘Imran in the middle of the sea while the waves were driving him to the left and right, and Who protected him in his infancy in the Pharaoh’s house is Powerful enough to protect our Master Mahdi in his own house.

The God Who protected his noble forefather on the day he fled from the enemies towards the cave, and Who kept secret his trace from the enemies and saved him by His Power and Strength, is not helpless in protecting our Master, al-Mahdi (a.s.) who was then five years old living with his parents.

I do not deny this matter that protection of our Master, the Mahdi at the age of five or six is something unusual. Rather, I am forced to say: Protection of the Imam at that time was through unseen channels

and even if it was through ordinary channels we are compelled to say: These channels are rare and impracticable for majority of the people.

In short, our Master, the Mahdi (a.s.) apparently went into concealment either from inside or outside his own house without its particulars being known to us. Allah knows better this matter.

This is the final word on the place of the Mahdi's disappearance and what can be said on this subject. Whatever has been mentioned by some learned Sunni scholars and some Shi'a writers about the characteristics of the Mahdi's occultation are all lacking authentic references. How good it would have been if they had mentioned those references.

The cellar (sardab) and its pilgrimage

From the book of *al-Sawa'iq* it appears that the Shi'a Imamiyah or a group amongst them reckon that the Mahdi (a.s.) had concealed himself in the cellar. They expect him to emerge from this cellar and they stop near its door with their horses and await his reappearance. How good it would be if the author of *al-Sawa'iq* had mentioned the reference of this information.

I think the author of *al-Sawa'iq* has neither emerged from the land of Hijaz nor entered the country of Iraq nor visited Samarra. Otherwise, he would have realized that this matter bears no truth. Apparently, what is mentioned in some books that the Shi'a claim the Mahdi to have disappeared in the cellar, is because they see the Shi'a Ithna 'Ashari visiting the honoured location of the *sardab*. Thus it is necessary for us to mention the reason for visiting it.

Therefore we say: As per the historical books, the holy courtyard in which is the mausoleum of 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi and al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-'Askari and that courtyard which is behind their holy mausoleum, and the third courtyard in which the cellar is located were all places of residence of those eminent personalities. Some of the great Islamic scholars like Thiqah al-Islam al-Nuri have clearly stated this matter.

Since the Mahdi (a.s.) does not have any specified place to be visited in, it is better and more proper to visit him in his house. On the contrary, it even seems proper to visit his house itself because visiting friends' houses after they have left it is customary among friends.

In this regard, a poet says: [1](#)

أمر على الديار يار ليلي اقبل ذي الجدار و ذي الجدارا

و ما حب الديار شفقت قلبي ولكن حب من سكن الديارا

Verily this matter has been the reason for the Shi'a visiting the cellar even though this reason is hidden and unknown to many. Visiting the *sardab* (cellar) is a good trend and a cordial custom which has become the motto of the Shi'a, and how good and proper this act appears to be even though I have not seen any text or traditions in this regard.

Rather, we have not come across any of the books with any supported tradition, which command us to visit Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.) especially in the *sardab*.

We Shias believe that our Master, the Mahdi (a.s.) is a living being who receives his sustenance and hears words and answers. He is the Imam through whose obedience we should be 'upright' in the divine religion, and he is the channel between God and us. His *Ziyarah* (visitation) is correct; focusing (our attention) on him is permissible; conversing with him in every place and time and in any language is permissible. In this regard the holy *sardab* possesses no special significance except what we have mentioned before. Similarly, the *Ziyarah* (visitations) which have been mentioned do not possess any specification even though is preferable.

The houses over which tens of years have passed; the place where God has been worshipped; the place where God has been remembered; the place where prayers have been performed for days and nights and the place where the sound of recitation of Quran has been raised, are worthy of being honored and visited, and when a pilgrim enters them he is reminded of its dwellers.

One of the main reasons as to why such holy houses and especially the *sardab* (cellar) are visited is this that its owners are alive – the owners who cannot reside in them and have in fact deserted them out of fear of enemies. Besides, we are in need of the Mahdi (a.s.) and are deprived of his favors.

Visitation of these houses with such reminiscences will naturally move the heart of a pilgrim who is a Shi'a. How often a pilgrim weeps, calls out, implores involuntarily and requests God to hasten the emergence of the Mahdi. Verily, factors of spiritual intimacy and love greatly influence man's nature.

Philosophy and reason behind the occultation

Discussion on the occultation is a vast topic and traditions in this regard are many. What is necessary for us to know is the following: Is there anyone to ask about the philosophy behind the occultation and is there anyone who can say: Since I do not know the reason behind occultation, I do not believe as you do in the existence of the Mahdi and I further say: if as per what you say, the Mahdi is the Imam, then he should appear amongst the people and walk in the market-places!

We say: Concerning the numerous *mustafidhah* traditions (traditions with several narrators) which we previously mentioned and few more of which we shall inform you about later on, the awaited Mahdi is Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-'Askari who was born on 15th Sha'ban 256 AH. Besides, we have also mentioned to you the names of those learned scholars who have approved the above point.

Since Allah is All-Wise, He would never command or forbid any matter or action except out of prudent knowledge. The same is true for this particular matter. All that prudent knowledge is referred to those charged with a duty because, in the Holy presence of God, there exists no want and His Holy Self is Needless and All-Sufficient. Thus every action of God is in conformity with prudent interests whether we realize those interests or not and whether we perceive those reasons or not.

From the known affairs where not even a single person dispute is this that every voluntary and involuntary incidents and affairs which occur in this world should be as per the Divine prudence and rather as per the Divine Will. Amongst these affairs, the most important of them is the occultation of the Mahdi (a.s.). Based on this principle, the occultation of the Mahdi must be as per prudence and wisdom, whether we perceive it or not and whether we understand its reason or not.

If we do not believe in what we have said, we are helpless in denying an affair for which we do not possess any reason of its denial – Firstly that the Mahdi is the same Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-'Askari.

Secondly that he is hidden from view. (Its meaning will be mentioned later on).

Thirdly that his occultation has taken place by the Will and Decree of Allah.

If you pay attention and deliberate over each of these three affairs, you will realize that denying any one of them will not be rationally and traditionally permissible. So we are bound to believe that the event of Mahdi's occultation is in accordance with prudence. Otherwise, we have to deny one of the three afore-said affairs.

Shaykh al-Saduq in his book '*Ilal al-Sharā'i*' has narrated from 'Abd Allah ibn al-Fadhl al-Hashimi as saying: "I heard al-Sadiq Ja'far ibn Muhammad saying: "For the Sahib al-'Amr (master of the affair) there shall occur an occultation during which every speaker of falsehood will fall into doubt and skepticism."

I said: "May I be sacrificed for you. For what reason"?

He replied: "For a reason, which we are not at liberty to divulge to you". I asked: "What is the wisdom behind his occultation"?

He replied: "The wisdom for his occultation is similar to the wisdom for the concealment of the past Divine Proofs. The wisdom behind the Mahdi's occultation will not be disclosed until after his emergence, just as the reason for Khidhr's actions (meaning the drilling of a hole in the boat, the killing of a lad and the repairing of the wall) was not divulged until Musa and Khidhr decided to part company.

"O Ibn al-Fadhl, this affair is a divine affair, this secret is a divine secret and this concealment is a divine concealment. We must accept that all His actions are based on wisdom, even if the reason for them is not known to us".

This statement is the final word and the word of truth that every Muslim must submit to and confirm.

Indeed, very often a person seeks the reason and philosophy for some of the Divine Acts for the sake of gaining certainty and tranquility in his own self and not that he wishes to use his confirmation and rejection as a means for perceiving the reason of Divine actions or not. Therefore, before mentioning the philosophy and reason for occultation we are bound to briefly present certain preliminaries. Those interested to know its details should refer to books which have been written in this regard. The preliminaries are as follows:

An person who invites the people towards his call is bound to take resort to the apparent and ordinary channels. For achieving his aims it is not permissible for him to refer to the unseen and supernatural channels because doing so would destroy the essence of reward and punishment. Rather the coming of Prophets and Messengers would all come to vain.

A Prophet and *wasī* (legatee) are the same as far as the afore-said matter (invitation) is concerned and this matter is in fact one of the essential conditions of an evangelist (whether he may be a Prophet or an Imam). However there exists a difference between a Prophet and an Imam from another view-point and it is as such: As a Prophet is the establisher and founder of religion it is obligatory for him to start his invitation and mission in a customary manner and notify the people about the ordinances (as against an Imam).

Since argumentation has been completed upon the people through a Prophet, it is necessary for the people to seek and question from an Imam, and it is not obligatory for an Imam to invite the people.

Rather it is obligatory upon the people to approach the Imam and receive the religious commandments from him, protect him and ward off the enemies from him, just as it was obligator, for the people to protect their Prophet and receive the religious commandments from him. When the people begin to lapse such duties and forsake their Imam and the Imam in turn fears from being killed by his enemies and finds none to defend him from his enemies it is permissible for him to isolate himself from the people and leave aside the duty of invitation and propagation. This responsibility is directed towards the people and not the Imam.

The views of al-Muhaqqiq al-Khawja Nasir al-Din Tusi too are the same. In his book *Tajrid al-I'tiqad* he says: "The presence of Imam is a grace (*luṭf*), and his right of disposal (*tasarruf*) is another grace, and his absence is due to our sake".

Now that you have understood this matter, we say: We may mention the following as the reasons and philosophy behind the occultation of Imam Zaman:

First: Disciplining and Punishing the Shi'a, and in fact all others

If a Prophet or an Imam is present among a nation and that nation does not rise for his obligatory rights or disobeys his commands and does not submit to his prohibitions, and in short, the Prophet's invitation leaves no impression on the nation and rather they exceed the limit and cause harm to their Prophet, it

is permissible for the Prophet to abandon and withdraw from his nation so that in this manner he rectifies them.

Perhaps in this manner, the nation concerned would stop its rebellion and begin to adopt the path of guidance. Perhaps they would obey and attain benefit from the Prophet's and Imam's existence among them as a preacher, guide, leader and the one inviting the people. It is regarding this matter that Allah, the Exalted, says:

وَأَعْتَزُّكُمْ وَمَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

And I will withdraw from you and what you call on besides Allah... (19:48)

When withdrawal and abandonment of invitation becomes the means for rectifying a nation then it is prudent to do the same even though people may be unaware of this matter. Moreover it would be beneficial to them even though they may not possess understanding of the same. This withdrawal and abandonment of invitation does not possess any fixed limit and boundaries and in fact, one cannot say anything about their limit. Rather its limit and duration depends on the nation turning back from its deviated path and becoming enlightened after heedlessness. It depends on the people's awareness of the benefits of the presence of the Prophet or an Imam.

History bears witness to the varieties of hardship and suffering the People of the house of revelation and messengership, and the family of Muhammad, had to face, and the Ummah's not discharging their obligations due to them which Allah had appointed as the reward of this messengership. Indeed, they were always subjected to severe persecution and pressure such as being taken captive, imprisoned, crucified, expelled, banished, exiled and driven away from their land.

The awaited Mahdi is aware of all such matters and knows that he too would be subjected to such cruelties and oppression. Rather, it would be much more severe, greater and bitter in nature because people are aware of his objectives and are aware that he would give orders to rise with arms. Thus the Mahdi has withdrawn from the Ummah as he knows he would receive the same treatment as his father, forefathers, cousins, and relatives had received.

His objective in this is nothing but to discipline the nation and make them aware, bring them back on the path of guidance and comprehend the obligation of his right and the benefits resulting from it. The author of *'Ilal al-Sharḥi'* has narrated a tradition from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.): "When Allah dislikes that we should remain amongst a people, He takes us away from them."

Second: Freedom in invitation and independence in the affair

Anyone who wishes to rise for rectifying a nation in either worldly or religious matters should possess friends and companions and have a pact with some of the superior men so that they either remain his

helpers or at least do not create any obstacles for him. The essential condition of this pact and agreement is this that he should not oppose them and abandon his invitation to them, and go along with them, in the fulfilment of the pact, until when the affair is completed and time of the pact has come to an end, he deals with them as he does with others.

This means that some of the commandments should not be implemented with respect to those who have concluded a pact with him and he deals with them contrary to the realities because of fear and dissimulation. Thus Allah says:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَنْقُصُوكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَحَدًا فَأَتِمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ

...except those of the polytheists with whom you have made an agreement, then they have not failed you in anything and have not backed up anyone against you, so fulfil their agreement....

(9:4)

When the Mahdi (a.s.) shall emerge, he is bound to invite (the people) through ordinary channels and his duty would be to judge according to the realities and not to fear anyone just as can be found in most of the traditions. This is because the Mahdi's period is the period of emergence of truth, the most sparkling emergence and so, fear and dissimulation are inconsistent with this matter. This requires that he should not have allegiance of anyone upon his neck. Indispensably, he should be needless of any pact and agreement, which would result in dissimulation. This would occur only when the ordinary channels for his assistance come to halt.

Shaykh al-Saduq in *Kamal a-Din* has directly narrated from Hisham ibn Salim who in turn has narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) as such: "The Q^u'im shall emerge without having paid allegiance to anyone."

In the same book, Shaykh al-Saduq directly narrates from Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha who said: "It is as if I see my Shi'a, at that time when they will have lost my fourth offspring, (like cattle) seeking grazing land but not finding it."

The narrator said: I asked: "Why will that be, O son of Messenger of Allah"? He replied: "Because their Imam will be concealed from them".

I said: "Why will he be concealed from them"? He replied: "So that when he emerges with the sword, he will not have given allegiance to anyone".

Third: Perfecting and refining the souls

Amongst the well-known facts which are not a subject of dispute is that there exist differences in people's capacities with regards to the assumption of duties, and the acquisition of knowledge and sciences. From this stems differences in levels of faith, in the recognition of Prophets and legatees and in the Divine laws.

﴿ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ﴾

Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability... (2:286)

Rather, how often it happens that when duties exceed a person's ability and his studies are beyond his capacity, the very purpose (for which the duties and studies were performed) is lost. In fact, he would resort to disobedience or would become an apostate or still further, his ignorance would increase more than before.

﴿ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ﴾

..Our Lord, do not burden us with that which we cannot bear.. (2:286)

It is said that if Abu Dharr knew what was in Salman's heart, he would have declared him an unbeliever or killed him.

Shaykh al-Kulayni in *al-Kafi* has narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.): "It is mentioned in the book of 'Ali's (a.s.):

Dawud said: "O Lord, reveal to me the truth as it is (with You) so that I can judge accordingly". It was said: "You do not possess the strength to bear this affair." Dawud insisted until God accepted.

One day a person approached Prophet Dawud with a complaint about another person and said: "This man has taken away my wealth". God revealed to Dawud that the claimant had killed the defendant's father and plundered his wealth. Dawud ordered for the claimant's death and he was killed. His wealth was seized and given back to the defendant. People were amazed by this incident and word on this matter went around until it reached Prophet Dawud's ears. He became worried by this talk and requested God to relieve him from this uneasiness. Afterwards, God revealed to Dawud: "You should judge amongst the people by means of proofs, and persuade them to swear in My Name..."

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "If people knew how Allah has created them, then none amongst them would find fault with the other."

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) said: The believers possess (various) ranks and positions – some of them have one rank, while some others have two, three four, five, six or seven ranks. If faith of the second level is placed on a person having faith of the first level, he will not have the strength for it, and if faith of the third level is placed on a person possessing faith of second level, he will be unable to bear it..."

It has come down from traditions that when the Mahdi emerges, he will rule as per his own knowledge; he will spread the true Divine sciences (*ma'rif*) amongst the people; he will enliven the holy religion of Islam and will annul all that is not in Islam and has been added to it such that people will imagine that

the Mahdi (a.s.) has brought a new religion and a new Book.

Verily, the execution of such reforms and dissemination of the realities the ways it should and must be carried out requires much more perfect aptitudes and intellects than what we have today. Perhaps, the postponement of the Mahdi's emergence and continuation of his occultation is because of the hope of achieving perfection and development which, by the blessings of various sciences, is on the increase day by day.

The magazine "Al-Hilal" published an article about Resurrection a few years ago under the title "Does there exist a world after (the end of) this world?" and while replying to this question, it emphasized that a day will come when the literary and scientific world will reach its perfection like the material world.

Surely, very soon men shall become aware of the literary, scientific and ethical world – more than their cognizance today of the material world. Why shouldn't it be so especially when man has already perceived that the material world has ruined his rights and has put him in pressure and torment? Soon man shall witness how the earth will be illuminated by the Divine Light and by means of the awaited Mahdi's emergence.

Fourth: Trial and examination of the people

Amongst the practices of Allah that prevail amongst His servants right from the time He appointed the Messengers and Prophets – (and Allah's practices never alter or change) – is the matter of human trial and examination so that

"...he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof.." (8:42).

This is in order that the levels of faith of people and their reality is manifested, and in fact, so that their own condition becomes known to themselves. Indeed, it often occurs that man's condition is unknown and remains a secret even for him.

The Divine Shari'ah (laws) contains literary, material, worldly, spiritual, individual and social programs and teachings. This world is a school and the Prophets are teachers and evangelists. Every school or lesson requires an examination appropriate to it. The events that occur in this world are a sort of examination for those lessons in order to ascertain the effect of these lessons on people's souls.

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe", and not be tried? (29:2)

The holy Islamic Shari'ah (religious law) is the most perfect of all the Shari'ah. In the Islamic Shari'ah we

find such divine sciences and instructions which cannot be found in other Shari'ah. So all that was prevalent amongst the previous nations such as the various tests and examinations should, out of necessity, prevail in this nation too because this general rule comprises those lessons and even more than that.

Amongst the most important matters by which the previous nations were subjected to evaluation and examination was the matter of occultation of some of their Prophets. Then, the same occultation should occur for the leaders of this nation too just as the Holy Prophet (S) went into concealment in the mountain pass of Abu Talib for a period of three years. In the same way, the concealment of Mahdi, so that the path of guidance is distinguished from the path of deviation and a believer is distinguished from a hypocrite, is the greatest test and trial for his Shi'a, and in fact, for other than them. It is like the concealment of some Prophets and it makes no difference if the duration of concealment is short or prolonged.

Shaykh al-Saduq in *Kamal al-Din* has narrated a hadith with the chain of transmission ending in Sudayr al-Sayrafi who said:

I, along with Mufadhhal ibn 'Umar, Abu Basir and Abūn ibn Taghlab, were honored with meeting Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.). We saw him sitting on the ground in a coarse woolen cloak which was collarless and had short sleeves. He was weeping like a woman weeping over her lost dear one. The signs of grief and sorrow were visible on his blessed face and tears were flowing from his eyes.

He was moaning and saying: 'My master, your occultation has snatched away the sleep from my eyes. It has taken away my comfort and has deprived tranquility from my heart. My master, your occultation has fastened my grief and sorrow forever. Due to loss of friends one after the other, our gathering has been broken. I do not feel the tears of my eyes and the crying of my heart which result from the past calamities and hardships but that I see the same in my imagination which is greater, more sorrowful, severe and unknown than all other difficulties.

Sudayr said: We were perplexed (at witnessing Imam's condition) and our hearts became upset as a result of Imam's terrifying words about the destructible events. We thought that the calamities and misfortunes of the day, which had befallen on Imam, had brought him to this state of grief and sorrow.

So we said: "O son of the best mankind. May Allah not cause you to cry. For what reason are you weeping and what has made you grieve to such an extent"?

The narrator said: Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) heaved a sad sigh which caused pain to his heart and then said:

"This morning I was looking at the book of *Jafr* (the book which contains knowledge on deaths, calamities, misfortunes and knowledge about the past and future and which was exclusively given to Muhammad and his progeny by the Exalted God). I came across such matters like the Q'aim's birth, occultation, delay in reappearance, his long life, the sufferings of the believers at that time, the appearance of doubt and uncertainty in their hearts because of his prolonged occultation, the deviations

that will occur for the majority of them and their removing the tie of Islam from their necks (i.e. shirking Islamic obligations) while Allah has said:

﴿ وَكُلَّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَائِرَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ ﴾

And We have made every man's actions to cling to his neck.” (17: 13)

and that is *wilayah*.”

(The word ﴿﴾'irah – طائره – here refers to the *wilayah* of the Holy Prophet's progeny).

“These events have overpowered me with grief and sorrow”.

We said: “O son of the Messenger of Allah, honor and ennoble us by sharing with us some of those things of which you have knowledge”.

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “The three characteristics which Allah has assigned for three of His Prophets have been assigned for our Q﴿﴾im too.

First of all, the Q﴿﴾im's birth is the same as was the birth of Musa. Secondly, his occultation is the same as was the occultation of 'Isa and thirdly his delay is the same as was the delay in the case of Hazrat Nuh (Noah). In addition Allah has set the long life of Hazrat Khidhr as a proof for the Q﴿﴾im's long-life”.

The narrator said: I said: “O son of Messenger of Allah, explain these affairs so that they become clear for us”.

He replied: “With regards to Musa's birth, it should be said that when Fir'awn (Pharaoh) learned that his kingdom would fall at Musa's hands, he summoned the soothsayers who. The wizards indicated to Fir'awn the lineage of Musa and that he will be from the Bani Isra'il.

“As a result of that, Fir'awn continued to order his men to slit the bellies of the pregnant women belonging to the tribe of the Bani Isra'il, until, in the search for Musa, they killed more than twenty thousand new born babies. However they were unable to kill Musa as All-Mighty Allah protected him.

“Similarly, when the Bani Umayya and Bani 'Abbas realized that the downfall of their cruel kingdom and empire would take place by Mahdi's hand, they set up enmity with us and engaged in killing and exterminating the descendants of the Holy Prophet (S) in their desire to kill the Q﴿﴾im. However Allah does not let anyone from the oppressors to know His task save He shall complete and perfect His light even though the polytheists may dislike it.

“With regards to Isa's (Jesus') occultation, the Jews and Christians both agreed that 'Isa had been killed. However Allah, the Glorified refuted their view as per these divine words:

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ

..And they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so... (4: 157)

“Similarly, during the occultation of our Q^u’im, the Islamic Ummah (nation) will at any time deny him due to the length of his occultation. Then, some of the deviated amongst them shall say: The Q^u’im is not yet born. Some others will say: The Q^u’im has been born and has died. Others who shall say that the eleventh Imam was barren will become apostates. Still others who would say that Imams are more than thirteen will deviate from the true religion. Yet others will disobey Allah because of their saying that the Q^u’im’s soul has become manifest in the body of another.

The incident of Nuh’s delay is that since he asked Allah for his nation’s punishment, Allah sent Jibra’il (Gabriel) with seven date–seeds.

Jibra’il said: O Nuh! Allah, the Exalted says: “These people are My slaves and My created ones. I do not wish to destroy My slaves in a lightening except after the confirmation of the invitation and completion of argumentation. So continue inviting your nation until I bestow My rewards upon you. Plant these seeds because you will attain salvation and deliverance after they become trees and bear their fruits. Give glad tidings about this matter to your believing followers.”

“When a long time passed and those seeds turned into strong trees possessing leaves, branches and stalks and the trees began to bear dates, Nuh (a.s.) asked Allah to fulfill His promise. For the second time, Allah ordered Nuh to sow fresh date–seeds yet again. He ordered him to strive and adopt patience in this regard and to inform this matter to his believing followers. When Nuh followed these instructions, three hundred of his men turned apostates and they said: ‘If what Nuh claims happens to be the truth, His Lord would not have broken His promise’.

Each time a group turned apostates, Allah commanded Nuh to sow seeds from the dates of the previous trees. This continued until the number of true believers remained only some seventy odd men.[2](#)

Then Allah revealed to Nuh (a.s.): ‘Now, the brightness of dawn has obviated the darkness of night since the truth has been established and faith has been purified except those whose nature are malicious and gloomy. If I had destroyed the unbelievers and spared this group who had brought faith in you and then turned apostates, I would not have been true to My previous promise made to your true believers, whose monotheistic belief was based on sincerity and who had held fast to the rope of your Prophethood. My promise to them was that I will make them vicegerents over the earth, give strength to their religion and turn their fear and anxiety into tranquility so that doubt and uncertainty is obviated from their hearts and they become sincere in their worship for Me.

How could it be for Me to make them successors, give them strength and turn their fear into security while being aware of the shaky faith and evil nature of those who had turned apostates. If at the time of

giving succession to the disbelievers I had given the kingdom to the believers, pride and discord would have overtaken them. A series of afflictions would have become strong in their hearts and they would have created enmity with their brothers and battled with them for gaining power.

If seditions had arisen and battle had taken place how was it possible for the believers to issue commands and how was it feasible to follow the religion? Such was not possible. Now,

“make the ark before Our eyes and (according to) our revelation.. (11:37)”.

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “The same condition shall prevail for our Q^u’im. The period of his occultation will be a long one until absolute truth appears and faith gets clearly distinguished from the evils of discord so that any of the Shi’a who are evil in nature and have feelings of discord will exit from the religion at the time when Caliphate and the affair is divulged and comes into view”.

Al-Mufadhhal said: I said: “O son of Messenger of Allah, the Nawasib (a group belonging to Sunni sect) reckon that this verse³ has been revealed in honor of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman and ‘Ali.

He replied: ‘No. May Allah not guide the Nawasib. During whose period was it that the religion of Allah had been established and had become the object of satisfaction of the Holy Prophet? In which period was it that the Divine command had been divulged amongst the people with no fear in hearts and no doubt in minds? During which era of their time it was as such notwithstanding the fact that the Muslims turned away from the religion and seditions occurred during their time and battles took place between them and the disbelievers!?

Then the Imam (a.s.) recited this verse:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْسَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا

Until when the Messengers despaired and the people became sure that they were indeed told a lie, that Our help came to them... (12: 110)

“As for the incident of ‘Abd al-Salih (the virtuous slave), al-Khidhr, indeed Allah, the Exalted did not prolong his life for the sake of Prophethood He ordained for him, or for a Book He revealed to him, or for a divine law given to him by which he could annul the divine laws of the previous Prophets, or for an Imamate (leadership) by which he made His servants follow him, or for any act of obedience He made incumbent on him.

Rather as Allah is All-Aware that the Q^u’im’s age would be lengthy during the period of his occultation such that His servants would start denying him because of his prolonged life, therefore He lengthened the life of al-Khidhr with no reason for his longevity except to make it an argument in favour of the Q^u’im’s long life. In this way, the proofs and reasons of the enemies and obstinate people is severed

and people will not have any plea against Allah”.

The author of *Rawdhah al-Wa'izin* has narrated from Jabir al-Ju'fi: I asked Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.): “When will be your *faraj* (deliverance)”?

The Imam (a.s.) replied: “Alas! Alas! There shall be no *faraj* until you are sifted (and he repeated this sentence three times) so that impure (believers) are removed and only the pure (believers) remain.”

Again, in the same book, its author narrates with a chain of transmission from ‘Ali ibn Ja’far who narrates from his brother Musa ibn Ja’far (a.s.) who said:

“When the fifth one (i.e. Mahdi) from the progeny of the seventh one (i.e. Musa ibn Ja’far) disappears, then fear Allah with regards to your faith and be careful to see that nobody ruins your religion. This is because the Master of the affair will be compelled to conceal himself until a group who has faith in his Imamate will turn away from their belief. This occultation is only a trial from Allah Who wishes to examine His creatures by this means”.

Fifth: Fear of being killed

One of the reasons of seclusion of the Prophets was the fear of being killed. Thus, they would conceal themselves so that in this manner they could protect themselves and hence achieve their aim later on.

About Musa (a.s.), Allah, the Exalted says:

فَفَرَرْتُ مِنْكُمْ لَمَّا خِفْتُمْ

So I fled from you when I feared you..” (26:21)

Again, about Musa, another verse says:

يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ يَتَمِرُونَ بِكَ لِيُقْتُلُوكَ فَاخْرُجْ

..O Musa, surely the chiefs are consulting together to slay you, therefore depart (at once).. (28:20)

Indeed fear and anxiety was one of the reasons which made Musa ibn ‘Imran (a.s.) flee from Egypt and go to Shu’ayb (a.s.). It was fear that caused the Holy Prophet of Islam to first take retreat first in the mountain-pass of Abu Talib, and later to seek shelter in the cave when the unbelievers decided to kill him, until Allah commanded him to migrate to Medina along with his companion.

Due to absence of the customary methods through which he could get support and invite the people,

and also due to the strength of his enemies, the Mahdi (a.s.) feared from such matters as imprisonment and exile, even crucifixion and being killed. Thus he had no alternative but to go into seclusion and occultation “..**until Allah brings about His command**” (9:24); and ‘Allah has appointed a measure for everything’ (ref. 65:3).

Questions about the Mahdi's fear

With regards to Mahdi's fear and occultation and in the light of what we have mentioned before, there remain a few questions which are worth mentioning:

First Question: Why does Allah, the Powerful not prohibit his enemies and prevent them from killing him?

Reply: Allah, the Exalted, has laid down the prohibition which is not incompatible with the obligation i.e. the command to follow, help and obey him, and forbidding opposition and disobedience to him. However preventing the enemies from him is incompatible with the obligation, and nullifies the reward and punishment. Rather, such a hindrance may give rise to mischief and this cannot emanate from Him, the Exalted.

Second Question: Why is the Mahdi (a.s.) absent amongst the people and why has he isolated himself from them considering that his great fathers were present amongst the people?

Reply: The Mahdi's very foundation is based on emerging with the sword and rising up for God's sake, but such was not the case of his noble forefathers. This is what would expose him to danger especially when it is well-known that he is waiting for an opportunity. Also it was known that if anything happened to one of his forefathers, there would be one to succeed him and take his place, whereas in the case of the Mahdi, there would be no one to take his place before his rising up.

Third Question: If the Mahdi's occultation is due to fear of his enemies, then why has he concealed himself from his friends!?

Reply: If there was a way for his Shi'a, who are in thousands, and for his numerous friends to meet him and visit him, then it would be certain that his whereabouts would be discovered.

Fourth Question: The reply to the third question would be true only if all the Shi'a are able to meet the Imam. However if such a meeting is only for a select group of them, then his whereabouts will not be discovered.

Reply: Among the well-known proverbs: Any secret, which is known to more than two, will no longer remain a secret.

Fifth Question: Why didn't the situation continue as it was during the Mahdi's minor occultation when the special deputies used to serve him?

Reply: The discontinuation of the Mahdi's minor occultation may have been for two reasons:

Firstly that deputyship from Imam's side is especially the post of special deputyship is a very high and lofty position. Since a group amongst the power-seekers falsely claimed the position of deputyship during the last days of the Mahdi's occultation, the door of special deputyship was hence closed.

Secondly the special deputyship, at that time as well, was kept secret and hidden and except for some select people, none were aware of it. If the minor occultation had continued, the position of special deputyship would become known, and the Mahdi's deputies too would have been exposed to danger.

The minor and the major occultation

Our awaited master, the Mahdi, has had two occultations, the minor occultation and the major occultation.

The minor occultation started from the time of the Mahdi's birth and continued till the end of the special deputyship, which lasted for seventy-four years.

The major occultation commenced after the minor occultation and will continue until Allah gives him permission to emerge and rise with the sword.

In his book *Ithbat al-Wasiyah*, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Mas'udi said: "It is narrated that Abu al-Hasan (Imam 'Ali al-Naqi A.S.) was concealed from many of the Shi'a except a select few. When the affairs of Imamate were entrusted to Abu Muhammad (Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari), he used to converse with his special circle of Shi'a and others from behind the curtain, except when he was mounted and would travel towards the Sultan's palace.

Imam al-'Askari (a.s.) and his father were only acting in this manner so as to prepare the ground for the Mahdi's concealment. This was so that the Shi'a would be accustomed to the matter of occultation and would not deny it and would be used to the Imam's absence and concealment.

Verily, right from the time of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) till the period of Imam 'Ali al-Naqi (a.s.) and Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) it was customary for the Shi'a to meet their Imam whenever they wished. If they were deprived of this bounty all at once then doubt and hesitation would have overtaken them. In fact, the faith of some of them would have become shaky. Thus Imam 'Ali al-Naqi (a.s.) and Imam al-'Askari (a.s.) adopted this path as mentioned by al-Mas'udi so that the Shi'a would, little by little, become accustomed to Imam's concealment.

Both Imam 'Ali al-Naqi (a.s.) and Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) adopted this practice for this noble objective. In addition, the strict surveillance of them by the rulers of their time further intensified this practice. This resulted in fewer meetings and contacts with them especially so in the case of their Shi'a who were well-known.

The apparent might and magnificence of the afore-said two Imams (a.s.), the great number of servants and slaves and their state of splendor and eminence, also naturally resulted in fewer meetings with the common Shi'a, in fact even with their special Shi'a except at fixed and special times.

The previous policy of Bani 'Abbas with regards to the twelve Imams had changed. Now their policy demanded respect and honor of the Imams and this path was first put into practice by the Abbasid ruler, Ma'mun.

Those who cast a glance over history of Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha, Imam Muhammad al-Taqi, Imam 'Ali al-Naqi and Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari will see the policy of association of the Caliphs with Imams. They had kept at the disposal of the Imams varieties of grandeur and splendor such as house, furnishing, clothes, servants, slaves and wealth for such motives which they had in mind. The main motive of the Caliphs, was that the Imams should be before their eyes and close to them so that their surveillance over them would be more intense, particularly during the time of Abu al-Hasan (Imam 'Ali al-Naqi) and Abu Muhammad (Imam al-'Askari).

The reason for Imam 'Ali al-Naqi's concealment from the Shi'a and the increased concealment of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) was that there were to be two occultations for our master, the Mahdi. One was the minor occultation during which the deputies and special representatives of the Mahdi (a.s.) had access to him, until the time when the Shi'a became accustomed to the absence and concealment of Imam (a.s.) and the period of major occultation started. In the major occultation, the special deputyship came to an end and the general deputyship started in which no one has the opportunity to meet the Imam officially, unlike the Shi'a of previous times who had the privilege of meeting the Mahdi's noble forefathers.

How people benefit from the hidden Imam

The benefits of Imam al-Zaman's existence from our view-point (i.e. Shi'ite view-point) are of two types:

Firstly, the benefit derived from his existence, since he is among those who are alive, whether he is present or absent, apparent or concealed.

Secondly, the benefit derived from his occupation (of the earth). It was previously reasoned that due to fear and insecurity it is not obligatory for him to put this into practice. However benefits of the first type will necessarily be derived from the Mahdi's existence.

The simile which has been mentioned in the tradition of Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari that the absent Imam is like the sun hidden behind the clouds, is one of the most elegant and beautiful similes.

Various benefits and effects are derived from the sun's existence even though it may be covered by a cloud. Moreover, other benefits are derived from its rays if it is not covered by a cloud or rather anything else. The Imam too is the same.

I believe, this comparison has been made from two aspects and there exists two reasons for this (one aspect when the sun is covered by clouds and the other aspect when the sun is not covered by any object and its light glimmers) Deriving benefit from the sun and making use of it by living, and in fact, non-living creatures, is something prevalent whether it is manifest or concealed under the clouds. Every creature derives its own share from it, with the difference that when it is manifest and radiant, the benefit derived is more than when it is covered and concealed. The Imam (a.s.) too is like the sun in both these cases.

This is the view of the Shi'a Imamiyah about the Imam (a.s.). However the Sunnis believe that the benefits and effects derived from the Imam's existence is confined to the second type (i.e. presence of the Imam).

To this, we reply as such:

Some of the Sunnis reckon the Mahdi's occultation to mean that he is invisible and cannot be seen. However, just as mentioned before, their reckoning is far from truth. Rather, his occultation means that he cannot be individually recognized and seen. Thus, it has come down in some traditions that after the Mahdi's emergence people will say: – "We used to see him before too."

Verily the Mahdi is absent (amongst us) but attends gatherings and meetings. He also accompanies travelers and residents. In fact, very often he presents himself during the Haj season. He wears the *Ihram* (pilgrim's garb), recites the call of *Labbayk*, performs the *tawaf* (circumambulation) and concludes his Haj by visiting his honored grand-father (S) and other forefathers' shrines especially at times of special Ziyarahs. Thus the Mahdi is present amongst the Islamic community but is not recognized.

In fact, we say: Who can dare say that during the major occultation it is not possible to come in contact with Mahdi (a.s.) whereas historical and other books provide us with evidences that a section of people have received the honor of seeing and meeting him. This matter is not inconsistent with the tradition which says: "If anyone claims that he has seen Mahdi, then reject his saying." This is because the rejection of the claim of one who has seen him only means rejecting one who claims his special deputyship.

Rather we can say: The Mahdi is one of the members of society and rather the most important member. It is possible that he acts upon his responsibility even though it may not be obligatory for him.

Verily, it is possible that Mahdi may come in contact with kings, rulers, princes and ministers and make some recommendations to them about reforms, maintenance of order and running of the affairs, whether they follow his recommendation or not.

It is also possible that he sits with the jurists, scholars, writers and the learned people and discusses with them such topics as divine theology, moral rectification and literary matters, guiding them towards the truth and right way, irrespective of whether they act upon his words or not. He may meet traditionists,

historians, genealogists and scholars of *Rijal* and guide them to the true saying, truthfulness of the concerned matter, authenticity of relation (of narration) and their incorrectness, irrespective of whether they confirm his sayings or not.

Perhaps he talks to preachers, inviters (towards the Divine path), clergymen and guides as well, and reveals to them the correct path and an easier way of reaching their objective, whether they act upon it or not. He may visit the helpless, needy, sick and afflicted people, and inform them of the way to fulfil their needs, heal their sick, and attain ease and comfort, whether they accept it from him or not.

The Mahdi (a.s.) undertakes all these affairs without being recognized, or it is possible for him to undertake them, and he is far from being stingy in doing good to others. So how is it possible to say: How do people benefit from the hidden Imam?

Yes indeed, how many questions on the fundamentals and branches of religion has he answered; how many worldly or religious difficulties has he saved people from; how many sick people has he healed; how many distressed ones has he rescued; how many lost ones has he guided; how many thirsty ones has he given to drink and how many weak ones has he held by the hand!

This book and other books which have been written by reliable scholars (who did not know each other and were living in different places and different times) contain such evidences which bear testimony to the truthfulness of what we have written. A person, after going through the particulars and contexts of these kinds of evidences will gain certainty in the veracity of some of them.

The Mahdi's deputies during the period of his occultation

The Mahdi (a.s.) has disappeared from the view of the people – even from the view of his Shi'a and friends – due to fear from his enemies and in order to safeguard himself for achieving the objectives decreed by God. The Mahdi (a.s.) is awaiting the Divine Command just as the Shi'a are awaiting him.

I can say: Had it not been for his submission to the divine command and his contentment with divine destiny, he would have perished out of grief and sorrow for the distressing events that he has witnessed and witnesses. However the Mahdi is from the Ahl al-Bayt. 'They do not precede Him in the Divine Command and they act only according to His command'. (ref. 21:27)

His honored grandfather would say: "Whatever is the pleasure of Allah, is the pleasure of us, the Ahl al-Bayt".

The Mahdi is concealed from the view of the people, even his Shi'a, but his pure heart is filled with grief and sorrow. He (a.s.) shows the true path to the Muslims, particularly the Shi'a, and sets before them a clear path to the truth which, if followed, they would achieve salvation in this world as well as the Hereafter.

وَأَنْ لَوْ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقَيْنَاهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا

And that if they should keep to the (right) way, We would certainly give them to drink of abundant water (72: 16)

The Holy Prophet recommended adhering to the *Thaqalayn*, the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt. They are the gates of salvation and the keys to guidance and holding fast to them would become a source of every good.

As far as the Holy Qur'an is concerned, by the Grace of Allah it is available amongst us. If we are unable to reach the Ahl al-Bayt, yet they have left their knowledge and insight amongst us such that it is possible for each one of us to acquire and learn from it. If you do not believe in this matter, you may refer to the books on traditions especially the four earlier books and the three later ones.[4](#)

In fact, you may refer to the prayers and benedictions which have come down from the Ahl al-Bayt especially the *Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah* which has been narrated with the most authentic chains of transmission from Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (a.s.) It is called the *Zabur* of the ﷺ-Muhammad and it contains great knowledge and insight.

If we are unable to reach the Ahl al-Bayt, yet their sciences, gnosis, ethics and conduct have been written about and safeguarded in books. So, along with the Holy Qur'an, it is necessary for us to hold fast to them too.

Holding fast to them does not mean that we have to catch hold of their hands. Rather it means that we have to act upon their sayings and follow their path. This too is possible and feasible for each and every person. Therefore, there cannot remain any excuse for any Muslim with regards to holding fast to the Ahl al-Bayt, and none can say: The twelfth Imam was hidden and so we could not hold on to him.

Of course, the chain of transmission of these reports and supplications, and their narrators, their denotations, their apparent meanings, common, special, compendious, explanatory, all that which is opposite to them, and such other matters should be considered.

Our master the Mahdi (a.s.) has left behind among the people various reports and traditions from his father and forefathers. In addition to this, various correspondences and epistles have come down from his holiness. Moreover, out of his grace and compassion, he appointed deputies and representatives for the people during the period of minor occultation and it was obligatory for them to refer to these deputies (in spiritual and material affairs of this world and the hereafter). In the period of major occultation too, it is necessary to refer to them, and rely on and trust in them.

The Mahdi's deputies during the minor occultation

During the period of minor occultation, the deputies of the Mahdi who were allowed to visit him and for

whom special epistles were issued were only four:

(1) Shaykh Abu ‘Amr ‘Uthman ibn Sa’id al-‘Amri: He was first appointed to the post of deputyship by Imam ‘Ali al-Naqi and then retained in the same post by Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (a.s.). Still later on, ‘Uthman ibn Sa’id undertook the Sahib al-Zaman’s affairs, and replies to various problems and signed statements (from the Imam) were issued through him.

(2) When ‘Uthman ibn Sa’id passed away, his son Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn ‘Uthman succeeded him and he became his father’s vicegerent in the Imam’s affairs.

(3) When Muhammad ibn ‘Uthman passed away, this lofty position was transferred to Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Ruh. He was from the family of Bani Nawbakht.

(4) When al-Husayn ibn Ruh passed away, Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samari succeeded him.

None of these four deputies undertook the post of special deputyship without an explicit nomination for it by Imam of the Age himself, and a clear statement by the preceding deputy. The Shi’a would not have accepted the sayings of these four deputies but for the various evidences which each of them had at hand which substantiated their sayings.

When Abu al-Hasan al-Samari’s death approached he was asked about his successor. He took out for them a signed statement (*tawqi’*) written by the Mahdi (a.s.) himself. The contents of this *tawqi’* are as follows: –

“In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful,

O ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samari! May Allah increase the reward of your brothers on account of losing you. You will die within six days. So prepare yourself for the inevitable. Do not appoint anyone as your successor because your demise will mark the beginning of the major occultation. I will not emerge but after Allah’s permission, and that will be after a long period of time when the hearts of the people will become hardened and the world will become full of injustice, tyranny and oppression.

There will be some from my Shi’a who will claim to have seen me. Indeed anyone who makes such a claim before the coming out of Sufyani and the call from heaven announcing my reappearance, is a liar and an imposter. There is no might nor strength except with Allah, the All-high, the All-mighty”.

The Mahdi (a.s.) had other deputies too (other than the afore-said four deputies) in such places as Baghdad, Kufa, Ahwaz, Hamadan, Qum, Rayy, Azarbaijan and Naishabour etc.

Signed letters (from Imam of the Age) would be sent to them and they in turn would transfer wealth to his eminence. These deputies were many in number – perhaps a hundred, but they could not visit the Imam. As a matter of fact, the four afore-said deputies acted as the mediators between them and Imam (a.s.).

The Mahdi's deputies during the major occultation

The afore-said minor occultation has come to an end and the second occultation i.e. the major occultation, has started and nobody but Allah knows its termination. The special deputyship has been changed to general deputyship but with specific conditions and stipulations. It is not out of place to mention here some of the traditions which have come down from the Imam of the Age and his honored fathers in this regard.

Al-Kashi narrates: A *tawqi'* (signed letter) was sent for Qasim ibn 'Ali with the following contents: "There is no excuse for any of our friends to doubt in what is narrated from us by our trusted scholars. This is because we have made them partners in our secret and we have entrusted our secrets to them...".

Shaykh Tusi in *Ghaybah*, Shaykh al-Saduq in *Kamal al-Din* and al-Tabarsi in *al-Ihtijaj* have narrated from Ishaq ibn Ya'qub that the Mahdi (a.s.) said:

"As for the new events that occur, refer in them to the narrators of our traditions for their verdicts, as they are my proofs over you, and I am Allah's proof over them..."

Al-Tabarsi in his book *al-Ihtijaj* has narrated from Abu 'Abd Allah Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq (a.s.) a lengthy tradition a part of which is as follows:

"If there is anyone among the jurists (*fuqaha'*) who is in control over his own self, protects his religion, suppresses his evil desires and is obedient to the commands of his master, it is then obligatory upon the people to follow him and these qualities are present only in few of the Shi'a jurists and not in all of them..."

Besides these, there are other traditions, which have been mentioned in their appropriate places. All these reveal that the Mahdi (a.s.) has not left the Muslims, particularly the Shi'a, without a religious authority and support. In this regard, he has followed the path of his fathers and (if you have doubt) you may refer to the comprehensive books written on this subject.

1. 'Amongst the houses I pass over the house of Layla. I kiss this wall and that wall. The love of the house has not captivated my heart, but the love of the one who was residing in it'.

2. The author of *Ithbat al-Wasiya* mentions the number of true believers to have been only eight.

3. Sura al-Nur, verse 55.

4. The four earlier books are: *Al-Kafi*, *Man la Yahzur al-faqih*, *Al-Tahdhib* and *Al-Istibṣar*. The three later books are: *Al-Wafi*, *Wasṭ'il al-Shi'a*, and *Al-Mustadrak*.