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Lesson 29: The Twelfth Imam And The Fourteenth Infallible Figure, The Promised Mahdi, The Imam of The Age

The arrival of a universal savior, who will transform the face of the earth and replace a world of oppression and tyranny with one of justice and fairness, has been raised in all the divine religions and their scriptures. The great Prophet, according to both Shi'ah and Sunni narrations, has said, "When the world is overflowing with tyranny and oppression (and the human society is teeming with savage predators) my eleventh son who bears my name, Muhammad, and my nickname, Abu'l-Qasim, will emerge and put an end to all the iniquities and spread true Islam across the world."

The characteristics of the twelfth Imam, Hadhrat Mahdi, have been described in both Shi'ah and Sunni narrations; here we cite some of them:

He descends from the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatimah and Husayn. He is the ninth descendant of Imam al-Husayn, the sixth descendant of Imam al-Sadiq, the fourth descendant of Imam al-Ridha and the immediate son of Imam al-Hasan 'Askari.

He has two periods of absence, the first one is short but the other will be very protracted. His second absence will be so prolonged that those who are not steadfastly faithful, will gradually lose faith. His lifetime will be very long.

When he emerges, he will fill the world with justness and fairness and will establish a divine rule throughout the world.

These qualifications and many more have been recorded in hundreds of Shi'ah and Sunni narrations lest people be taken in by those who might introduce themselves as Mahdi by trickery and deception and be diverted from the straight path.

The twelfth Imam, Mahdi (‘a) was born in 255 or 256 in Samarra. Until his father’s demise in 260, many people saw him as a child at Imam al-Hasan ‘Askari’s household and noticed the marks of greatness and leadership in him. Imam al-Hasan ‘Askari (‘a) also reminded people of his prospective leadership on any propitious occasion.

Since 260, when his father passed away, he was concealed from the sight of people (because the ‘Abbasi rulers intended to kill him and were firmly determined to detain him). But for almost seventy years which is called the minor occultation, he was in contact with his followers because he had determined four individuals, one after another as his special representatives with whom people met and through whom, they posed their religious and scientific questions and received answers.

But since 329, when his fourth special representative passed away, the major absence set in, and he did not appoint any other representative and referred people to jurists and great religious scholars to learn their religious edicts and teachings from them.

It is over 1000 years since the start of the major absence that the Shi’ahs have been looking forward to the emergence of the embodiment of divine justice and fairness who will put an end to the misfortunes of Muslims and direct them toward genuine Islam and felicity.

Of course, the anticipation of the arrival of the Imam of the age, does not mean that all Muslims and Shi’ahs remain idle and take no steps in advancing Islamic goals and merely wait for him but as noted scholars and Shi’ah scientists have said long ago, all Muslims and Shi’ahs are duty-bound to do their best for the prevalence and promulgation of Islamic rules and teaching under any circumstances and resist and struggle against oppression, tyranny, and wrongdoing, and exploit their resources to oppose them.

In other words, they should try to pave the way for the rule of justice and fairness, that is, they should train the society in a way that everyone demands justice and if oppression and injustice dominate the society, everyone protests against it and turns away from it. In short, every Muslim is obliged to sacrifice for the cause of faith and Islam and be constantly ready to welcome the promised Mahdi (‘a), that is, he should plan his life in a way that it is in accordance with that of the Imam, as to follow his line.

As it was noted earlier, the Imam of the age (‘a) has been absent since 260 and the date of his reappearance is not known to anyone and if someone sets a date for his arrival, we are obliged to reject him.

Indeed, when oppression and injustice reach their height, when people are tired of tyranny and everyone demands genuine justice, that is, their mentalities have undergone a change, and when God deems it proper to send the twelfth Imam, he will reappear and the world will turn into a utopia and a heavenly garden.

Peoples' Duties During The Occultation

As it has been quoted from the Imam of the age ('a), during his occultation people are obliged to consult scholars and jurists and jurisprudents concerning their religious duties and affairs and obey their commands in every area of their lives. It is manifest that the great jurisprudents and scholars do not invent edicts and *fatwas* but they draw on the Qur'an, the Prophet's sayings, and those of the infallible Imams and present them to people and thus, consulting them is the same as consulting the Prophet and the Imams and the Qur'an and objection to them is like objection to the Qur'an and the Imam of the Age (look at lesson 30).

Is It Possible That Someone Might Live Over 1000 Years?

Researchers and scientists hold that the length or span of life is not the chief cause of death but it results from the disorders that beset one or all the organs of the body and so long as that has not occurred, the person won't die. If those disorders take place before old age and the natural length of life, the person will experience an early death, otherwise, death will typically seize us at old age. Therefore, if someone protects himself from such disorders, the length of age won't bring about death.

And the fact that at times, we read in newspapers and magazines that scientists are trying to find a medicine through which to raise the body's aptitude for longevity confirms the point that mankind have the potential to live long but to do so he must work hard to overcome the obstacles.

Given this, if someone enjoys healthy and robust brain, heart, nerves, lungs, and stomach and knows all the hygienic precautions and takes them and knows the benefits and harms of all the edible and the potable and utilizes them when necessary, it is not strange that he may live several times longer than typical people and even he might live thousands of years.

Of course, given the present conditions, not everyone can do so but considering the fact that the presence of such an individual (Imam) is indispensable, it is probable that God may arrange the system of creation and the chain of cause and effects in a way that he might take any precaution that is essential for longevity.

As we have already proved the necessity of the presence of the Imam of the Age with rational and quoted reasons, and also that it is possible for mankind to live a long life, if essential precautions are taken, and the fact that God can provide its necessary means for anyone He pleases, one can conclude that God, the Exalted, has supplied all the essential conditions for the Imam of the Age to prolong his lifetime. Therefore, this belief of the Shi'ahs, that the twelfth Imam was born in 255 or 256 and to this date (1392 AH concurrent with 1351 (AHS) that this book was written) and more than that up to the time that God wills, will have lived, does not provoke any natural or scientific objection.

Furthermore, even if his lifetime is not consistent with natural laws, God, the Exalted can keep someone

young for thousands of years with His boundless power and through miraculous means. As the poet has written,

God that sustains the world

He will be able to keep a proof alive.

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