

## The Fourteenth Infallible, Hadhrat Hujjat b. al-Hasan al-‘Askari, The Twelfth Imam

Imam al-Mahdi (as), the Lord of the Time, was born on Thursday eve, Sha‘ban 15, 255 or 256/July 29, 869 or 870.

When about two centuries had elapsed since the Hijra of the Holy Prophet (S) and after the Imamate had been handed over to the tenth and eleventh Imams, i.e., Imam al-Hadi (as) and Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as), little by little the rulers and tyrannical ruling establishments began to be stirred by worries and apprehensions.

And that was due to the traditions and reports quoting that, “A boy would be born to Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) who would overthrow the rules of the despots and tyrants and would spread justice and equity on the ruins of oppression and dictatorship.” This has been frequently stated in traditions, especially from the Holy Prophet (S), and heard by the office-holders.

At this time, i.e. the birth of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.), the Abbasid Mu‘tasim, the eight Abbasid caliph, whose reign had started in 218/833, chose the newly built Samarra as his capital.

This idea – that the advent of a savior would tremble the pillars of the ruling power of tyrants and therefore the birth of infants is to be prevented, and even the innocent mothers must be killed, and midwives should be secretly sent to houses to identify the pregnant women – has some parallels in history.

In the time of the Prophet Abraham (as), Nimrud did so. In the time of Moses (as), Pharaoh followed the same path. But in each case, Allah's will worked against their plots. The tyrants always seek to put out Allah's Light, not knowing that Allah completes and accomplishes His Light, although the infidels and tyrants wish it otherwise.

As for Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as)'s newly born blessed baby, the historic story was amazingly and

miraculously repeated, too.

The tenth Imam was under home arrest in Samarra for twenty years, and after him, the eleventh Imam was also under control and constant watch by the ruling system there.

“When the time of the birth of this bright star, Imam al-Mahdi (as), drew near and his threat to the despots thus intensified, they sought to prevent the birth of the infant, or if he would have been born, to put an end to his life. That was why everything about al-Mahdi (a.s.)'s whereabouts, the time before and after his birth, were all hidden from people. Nobody would see him except some of the relatives, disciples, and close companions of Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as), who only saw him once in a while.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Devoted Shi‘as Saw Imam al-Mahdi (as)**

In the early four or five years of al-Mahdi (as)'s life, during which his noble father was still alive, the devoted Shi‘as had audience with him. Of these, forty had audience with the eleventh Imam (as) and requested him to show them the Hujjah and the next Imam after him, so that they would get to know him.

The Imam did so, and they managed to see the boy, elegant and handsome as his father. Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) said: “After me, this boy will be your Imam and my vicegerent among you. Obey him, and do not disperse from around his leadership, lest you perish and your religion be demolished. Also, let it be known that you will not see him from today on, until the lapse of a long time. Thus, obey his deputy, Uthman b. Sa‘id.”<sup>2</sup> And this way, the eleventh Imam, asserting explicitly the event of major occultation, introduced Imam al-Mahdi (as) to the group of Shi‘as, and proclaimed the continuation of the chain of Imamate.

One of the thinkers and philosophers of the third/ninth century, who has had audience with the Imam, is Abu Sahl Nowbakhti.

Anyway, Imam al-Mahdi (as) lived in hiding until his noble father Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (as) passed away on Rabi‘ al-Awwal 8, 260/January 1, 874. According to the Islamic tradition, on this day Imam al-Mahdi (as) was supposed to say funeral prayers for the sacred body of his father, so that the tyrannical Abbasid caliphs could not declare the Imamate as terminated, or the malevolent divert it from its main path; and to delegate the spiritual heritage, Islamic mission, and religious authority to others.

Thus, people saw a boy like a shining moon, so elegantly came out of the Imam (as)'s house, set back his uncle, Ja‘far Kadhdhab, who was preparing to say prayers, and himself said prayers over the sacred body of his father.

## **Necessity of the Last Imam's Occultation**

The appearing of Imam al-Mahdi (as) and his saying funeral prayers was widely spread around. Abbasid Mu‘tamid's functionaries and agents assaulted Imam al-‘Askari (as)'s house, but the more they searched

the less they found.

It was in such a situation that for the purpose of preserving the life of Hujja of the Almighty Allah, the occultation of the twelfth Imam (as) took place, which was the only practical way left to preserve the life of “Allah's caliph on earth.” That was because his presence among people would leave him open to being assassinated.

Thus, divine decree destined his Holiness to be hidden from sight so that the enemies' hands would be away from him and the intermediary of Divine blessings for the people of the whole world would remain safe and sound. In this way, although not being present, the guiding light of Allah's Hujja is directing his lovers and friends from behind the curtain of occultation.

Meanwhile, this was a punishment for the Muslim community who had not only deviated from the straight path of *Wilayat* and obedience to Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (as) and his Infallible progeny, but also committed persecution and murder to them, which all in all led to the necessity of living a hidden life for the last Imam (as).

There is much to be said in this respect, but due to being pressed by time and in order to make the reader briefly acquainted with the importance of the hidden Imam in the Shi'a worldview, we here relate what was stated by professor Henry Corbin in his meeting with 'Allama Tabataba'i:

“To my opinion Shi'ism is the only school which has constantly maintained a relation of Divine guidance between Allah and mankind and is continuously keeping *Wilayat* revived and firmly rooted.... It is only the Shi'ism that considers prophethood as sealed with the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S), but regards *Wilayat*, i.e. the relation between guidance and completion, after his Holiness as existing forever.

That is a relation emerged out of connection of human world to Divine world, due to religious missions before Moses (as), in his era and the eras of Jesus (as) and Muhammad (S), and after him through the *Wilayat* of his successors (according to the Shi'as), which has been and will be a living reality that can never be called superstitious and eliminated from the list of realities by scientific theories... Anyway, it is Shi'ism which has actualized the continuation and permanence of this reality, and contends that this reality will remain eternal and everlasting – between human world and Divine world.”<sup>3</sup> That is of course based on believing in the living Hidden Imam.

## **Countenance and Conduct of al-Mahdi (as)**

Shi'a and Sunni narrators have described al-Mahdi (as)'s countenance and appearance as follows: “He has a swarthy complexion, arched eyebrows, attractive black large eyes, broad shoulders, slightly apart shining teeth, beautifully elongated nose, and high, bright forehead. His bone structure is firmly set and hard as a rock, and his fingers are large.

His cheeks are not plump and his face is a little pale – due to nocturnal vigilance – and there is a beauty

spot on his right cheek. His muscles are twisted and firm; his hair hanging over his ears; he has a moderate, good-looking, and charming stature, and a face haloed in a dignified and glorified prudence. His countenance radiates with grandeur and magnificence of leadership, his look is penetrating, his uproar like an ocean and his outcry overwhelming.”<sup>4</sup>

Imam al-Mahdi (as) possesses vast knowledge and wisdom and is endowed with the legacy of the prophets. He is the ninth Imam from among the progeny of Imam al-Husayn (as) and is now hidden from people's eyes. He is the absolute *Wali*, the last of Saints, the legatee of the legatees, the universal Riser and the greatest revolutionary man. When he appears, he will lean against the Ka'ba and, holding the Holy Prophet (S)'s standard in hand, will revive the faith in Allah and spread His ordinances all over the world. He is the one who will fill the world with justice and affection.

Imam al-Mahdi (as) is humble before Allah Almighty and His Majesty. Allah with His Grandeur is manifested in him and has permeated all through his being. Al-Mahdi (as) is just, blessed, and purified. He will not neglect even one iota of truth. Allah will strengthen and glorify Islam at his hands. In his sovereignty no one will be troubled except in cases the Divine punishment needs to be executed.

Imam al-Mahdi (as) will restore the right of every rightful person and will give it back to him. Even if someone's right is between the clenched teeth of any invader and usurper, he will pull it out and give it back to the possessor of the right. In his rule, the rule of the despots and the arrogant and political dominion of hypocrites and traitors will be abolished. Mecca – the *Qibla* of the Muslims – will become al-Mahdi (as)'s revolutionary ruling center. His First comrades will gather there to join him.

Some people will join him and others will fight him. And there will remain no possessors of power or holders of high office; there will run no more politics or governments worldwide, except the rightful rule and the just politics of the Holy Qur'an. When al-Mahdi (as) rises, no land will be left but reverberating the muezzins' call to prayer: *“I bear witness that there is no god but Allah”*, and, *“I bear witness that Muhammad [S] is Allah's Apostle.”*

In the time of al-Mahdi (as)'s rule all people will be taught wisdom and knowledge, to the extent that women at homes will judge with the Book of Allah and the tradition of the Prophet (S). In that time the rational power of the masses will be concentrated. With Divine confirmation, al-Mahdi (as) will perfect people's wisdom and generate sagacity in all.

Imam al-Mahdi (as) is a savior designated by Allah to defend people of the world. In his time all people will attain matchless abundance, welfare, and peace of mind. Even animals will multiply and will live in peace with other beasts. There will flow plenty of water in the rivers and a great deal of plants and grass will grow. Buried treasures and other minerals will be uncovered. In the time of al-Mahdi (as) the fire of intrigues and riots will be extinguished; oppression, onslaught, and plundering will be abandoned; and wars will be abolished.

There will remain no ruins in the world, except that al-Mahdi (as) will reconstruct them. In his judgments,

verdicts, and rule not a bit of injustice and oppression will be inflicted on anyone and no one will be offended by any means.<sup>5</sup> Al-Mahdi (as) will bring justice into homes just as heat and cold enter homes. His righteousness will pervade the whole world.

## Imam al-Mahdi (as)'s Sword

Imam al-Mahdi (as)'s sword is the “Sword of Allah” (*Sayfullah*) and the “Sword of Allah, the Avenger.” It is a Divine Sword for avenging the tyrants and the arrogant. His sword will be revenging all criminals throughout the history. He will kill the civilized murderer beasts, while showering the weak and the oppressed with mercy and blessing.

In his time, there will be no more room for preaching and delivering sermons. Prophets, Imams, and saints have already given people whatever advice they needed. Many of the people did not hear it and took their own false path and even killed the saints of Allah with poison. In the time of Imam al-Mahdi (as) however, they will all be taken revenge on.

Imam al-Mahdi (as) will allegedly kill such a great number of the oppressors that some will say: this man does not belong to the family of Muhammad (S). But he is in fact a descendant of Muhammad (S), that is, a descendant of righteousness, of justice, of infallibility, and of humanity.

One of the astonishing traditions narrated about Imam al-Mahdi (as) is quoted from Imam al-Baqir (as) as saying: “Riding in roaring vehicles in which fire and light are devised, al-Mahdi (as) will travel through skies, all skies.”

Also Imam al-Baqir (as) is quoted as saying that most skies are inhabitable. This Islamic astronomy which is adopted from the Infallible Imams (as), however, has nothing to do with the Greek astronomy and Ptolemaic system of astronomy. In Greek astronomy more emphasis is placed on the limitedness of constellations, skies, and stars.

In the Islamic astronomy, however, the great expanse and dimensions of the universe and innumerable stars, satellites and galaxies are talked about. Talking about such issues by the Holy Prophet (S) and Imam al-Baqir (as) has not been possible except through relation with the Unseen World and through Divine knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

## Short-time or Minor Occultation

Minor occultation lasted no longer than seventy years (from 260/873 to 329/940), during which special deputies used to take audience with Imam al-Mahdi (as) and deliver his replies to the letters and questions sent through them to the Holy Imam (as). There have been four deputies who had the honor to take audience with Imam al-Mahdi (as). They are known as “special deputies”:

1. The first special deputy of al-Mahdi (as) is ‘Uthman b. Sa‘id al-Asadi. He is said to have died

apparently after 260/873, and been buried in Baghdad. He was a trusted companion and disciple of the tenth and eleventh Imams (as), and was personally trained in the school of Imamate.

2. Muhammad b. ‘Uthman b. Sa‘id was Imam al-Mahdi (as)<sup>1</sup>'s second deputy and representative who died in 305/917 and was buried in Baghdad. His deputyship lasted about forty years.

3. Husayn b. Ruh al-Nowbakhti was the third representative who died in 326/937.

4. ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Samari was the fourth and the last deputy of Imam Hujjat b. al-Hasan (as) who died in 329/940 and was buried in Baghdad. His burial place is near the tomb of the great scholar and traditionist Muhammad b. Ya‘qub Kulayni.

These prominent, pious, and knowledgeable nobles, scholars, and clergymen were the mediators between the people and the occulted Imam (as) and helped in solving their problems through Imam al-Mahdi (as) during his minor occultation.

## **The Long-term or Major Occultation and the General Deputyship**

This period began after the minor occultation and is still going on. This time is for testing and measuring people's faith and their deeds.

For the time of general deputyship, the holy Imam (as) has provided codes and rules, so that in each era a prominent person who is fully qualified in those codes and rules can be a deputy of the Imam (as) and represent him in the community both in worldly and religious affairs.

Therefore, in no periods has there been dissociation between Imam (as) and the people. Similarly, now, that is the period of general deputyship, a great scholar who is fully qualified in jurisprudence and knowledge of religion as well as in leadership is at the head of society and is referred to by people as the possessor of legal guardianship (*wilayat al-shar‘iyya*) and as a deputy of Imam al-Mahdi (as).

Thus, if in this period the Imam (as)'s deputy does not view a ruling system as righteous, that system is tyrannical, for it has no relation with Allah, His religion, Imamate, and the Islamic legal supervision. As enjoined by the Lord of Time (may Allah hasten his reappearance), in order to preserve and lead Shi‘ism and the religion of Allah, there must always be a righteous scholar and a competent jurist at the head of the Shi‘a community.

And when such a knowledgeable and superior scholar is placed at the head of the religious and Islamic community, he should be respected by other *mujtahids* and scholars, and be assisted by them to preserve Islamic unity and the integrity of religious power. In this way, the corrupt powers fail to topple it down or to weaken it.

Although our separation from the savior of the oppressed and the deprived and the earnest seekers –

i.e. Imam al-Mahdi (as) – is very painful, yet our belief is that Imam al-Mahdi (as) is alive by the power and under the protection of Allah, living hidden from the eyes of the people of the world. He will reappear once it is “fully expedient” and through an all-out revolution; a bloody and pervasive uprising will release the oppressed humanity from the claws of tyrants, and will bring back glory and power to monotheism and the Islamic doctrines.

## **Belief in Mahdism in the Past Periods**

Belief in the End of Time and expecting the reappearance of a savior has been accepted as an undeniable principle by other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and the claimants of prophethood in general and the Holy Faith of Islam in particular.

## **Belief in Imam al-Mahdi (as) is not Confined to Shi'ism**

Belief in the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi does not belong only to the Shi'as and Shi'ism, but many of the Sunni schools (e.g., the Malikite, the Hanafite, the Shafi'ite, and the Hanbalite) believe in this principle and their scholars have mentioned it in their numerous books, knowing the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) about al-Mahdi (as) as among the widely transmitted and sound traditions.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Holy Qur'an and Imam al-Mahdi (as)**

There exist some verses in the Holy Qur'an about Imam al-Mahdi (as) and the advent of a savior as well as the ruling of the righteous and the triumph of the good-doers over the evil-doers. Following are some of such verses:

**﴿Certainly We wrote in the Psalms, after the Torah: “Indeed My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.”﴾ (21:105)**

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (as) has stated that the “righteous servants” are meant to be the companions of Imam al-Mahdi (as) in the End of Time.

**Also, ﴿And We desired to show favor to those who were abased in the land, and to make them imams, and to make them the heirs.﴾ (28:5)**

**﴿Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment. What will show you what is the Night of Ordainment? The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months. In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. It is peaceful until the rising of the dawn.﴾ (97:1-5)**

As clearly understood by the verses of *Surat al-Qadr*, there is a night in every year which is better than a thousand months in value and in excellence. What is also understood from the traditions in

interpretation of this *Sura* and of the opening verses of *Surat al-Dukhan* is that on the night of *al-Qadr* the angels present the Divine decrees (*muqaddarat*) to the Absolute Guardian of time and surrender them to him. In the time of the Holy Prophet (S) the descent place of the angels at *al-Qadr* night was the threshold of Holy Prophet Mustafa (S).

As we conclude, through the Qur'anic knowledge, that *al-Qadr* night does exist in every year, we should therefore notice that the "Lord of *al-Qadr* night" must also exist, otherwise on whom should the angels descend? So, as the Holy Qur'an will exist until the Resurrection Day and is the Hujja of Allah, so will the Lord of *al-Qadr* night who is the Hujja of Allah. The Hujja of Allah at this time is none but his Holiness the Lord of the Age (*Wali al-Asr*) (as).

As Imam al-Ridha (as) has stated: "The Imam is Allah's trustee on earth, Allah's Hujja among people, and Allah's Vicegerent in towns and lands..."

Khwaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, the well-known philosopher, theologian, and mathematician said:

"To the wise people it is clear that Divine grace is exclusive in the appointment of the Imam (as), and the existence of the Imam (as) is by itself a Divine Grace, and his domination over everything is another Grace. His occultation, however, is dependent on us."<sup>8</sup>

## [The length of Imam \(as\)'s Life](#)

The Imam (as)'s long life is by no means something impossible, comparing the long lives mentioned by the Qur'an as well as the numerous long-aged people pointed out in history books. Rather, by reason and through scientific deliberation, it is by no means impossible to happen. Besides, in view of Divine power, this is by no means impossible.

By the power of Allah, which prevails over everything, long age, like that of the Prophet Noah (a.s.) and those longer or shorter than his are entirely feasible. To the All-Powerful and the All-Wise Allah all and everything, whether small or big, little or much, are equal. Thus, His perfect and mature wisdom will preserve his devotee in perfect health for as long as He deems fit.

So, according to Divine wisdom, the twelfth Imam, the Awaited Imam al-Mahdi (as) must be hidden from view, living a long life, keeping the secrets of the world, and be a mediator of Divine blessings for the world peoples, waiting to reappear whenever Allah wills. He will spread justice all over the world after it is filled with injustice and cruelty.

## [Awaiting the Reappearance of the Qa'im \(as\)](#)

It is totally false to suppose that awaiting the reappearance of the Hidden Imam (as) means doing nothing, withdrawing from social reforming movements, only getting over one's own difficulties, and remaining indifferent to the trends in social and religious issues. On the contrary, awaiting means making

attempt in search of justice, broad-mindedness, and freedom; and rejecting injustice, falsehood, slavery, and vulgarity; as well as standing out against any untruthfulness, tyranny, and despotism.

The tireless struggles and bloody insurgencies by the Shi'as throughout the history bear witness to the fact that there is no place for compromise or laxity in this school. In relation to "awaiting", i.e., awaiting the prevalence of truth over falsehood, justice over injustice, knowledge over ignorance, and piety over sinfulness, the Shi'as are constantly prepared to participate in the puritan and sacred movements, carrying the blood stained torch of great struggles high above their heads in remembrance of the devoted Shi'a combatants throughout their bloody and epic history.

That the Shi'as as the awaiting ones are enjoined to constantly keep their weapons prepared and to rise to their feet as they hear the name of the Qa'im of the household of Muahmmad (S), reflects the preparedness and movement as mentioned above.

We wind up our discussion here with a part of writing by the well-known struggling Muslim scholar, Ayatollah Taliqani:

"... Drawing people's attention to the bright future and the rule of Haqq and to promise them the full implementation of social justice, the establishment of the Islamic rule (*hukuma*), and the appearance of an eminent Godly Figure who is the founder and leader of that rule and government is among the doctrines of the founders of religions, and it is considered as a part of the creed in Shi'ism, which is the true school of Islam and the principal preserver of its spiritualities....

It has encouraged its followers to await such a day, and has even considered "awaiting the reappearance" as a part of Divine worship just to keep true Muslims encouraged and help them not to lose heart and hope due to the oppression and injustice by egotistic office holders and rulers, domination of false rules, social vicissitudes and the rule of materialistic states, both eastern and western, and to keep the community always alert.

And it is this idea which still keeps the Muslims hopeful and active. Such pressures and plights from the beginning of the abject and mean dynasty of Umayyads, to the Crusades and Mongol invasion, as well as the stranglehold and wrongdoings by the colonizing states would have totally killed off any nation. However, such a religion whose true leaders enjoin you to rise to your feet whenever the very name Qa'im, the founder of the true Islamic state, is uttered, and to display your power and preparedness to obey all ordinances, will never die out...."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Khurshid Maghrib, pp.21-22.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>. Maktab-i Tashayyu', Almanac No. 2 (Ordibehesht 1339 Sh/1960), interview of Ustad 'Allama Tabataba'i with Professor Henry Corbin about Shi'ism, pp. 2021.

<sup>4</sup>. Khurshid Maghrib, pp. 32, 34 (summarized and slightly changed).

<sup>5</sup>. Khurshid Maghrib.

<sup>6</sup>. See: Khurshid Maghrib, p. 46 onward.

[7.](#) See: Khurshid Maghrib, p. 76 onward.

[8.](#) Khurshid Maghrib, p. 195.

[9.](#) Khurshid Maghrib, p. 338.

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