

## The Major Occultation

After the year 329 A.H., when the major occultation commenced the special deputation of *Imam az-Zaman* terminated. If anybody claims during the major occultation to be a mediator and a deputy, then, according to the declaration of *Imam az-Zaman* himself, that claimer is a liar.

In the Holy Imams' traditions, the purpose of the Imam's going into occultation is compared to the sun being behind the clouds yet being a source of vitality and life for living creatures. Likewise, while the Imam is behind the curtain of occultation, he is still a source of the existence and remaining of the world.

During the major occultation, many people have had meetings with His Eminence (Imam al-Mahdi – a.s.), and have managed to meet him, but none of them have claimed to be able to see him or to represent him, because only the four special deputies (*Nawwab al-khass*) of the Imam had the honour of meeting with His Eminence whenever they wished.

Some of the names of these fortunate persons who have had the honour of meeting the Imam are mentioned in the authentic books. Among these personalities are – 'Allamah Hilli -- a famous scholar and a rhetorician of the Islamic world; Muqaddas Ardibili – the most pious person and most knowledgeable jurist of his time; Sayyid ibn Tawus – a pious and a virtuous narrator, Sayyid Bahru 'l-'Ulum – a distinguished scholar. and other great and notable figures in Islam.

Yes, they saw the "sun" (Imam) with their own eyes, and their hearts were filled with the faith of *Imamu 'l-'Asr* (the Imam of the Period), and with sympathetic explanations they informed others about their meeting with His Eminence.

As an example, we can examine part of the will of Sayyid ibn Tawus which he wrote to his son in the year 650 A.H. In his own words he explained to his son, implying the truth of the matter without claiming to have perceived him:

"O' my son! If success in discovering the truth and mysteries has been granted to you, then I will inform you regarding Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.) in such a way that you will never have any doubt, and you will not need intellectual proofs and recorded traditions; because His Eminence is certainly alive and exists, and

as long as Merciful Allah does not allow him to plan events, he is excused from revealing and declaring his workings. And this matter is not exclusively to him, but was usual among many prophets and their successors. Then you must know with confidence and consider it as your faith and creed. And know that the insight of your father into His Eminence is brighter than his knowledge of the world."

The honour of seeing *Imam az-Zaman* was not exclusive to some special Shi'ite scholars only, but many devout and illiterate people have also had this honour. We are completely amazed when we see people who at one time used to commit sinful and indecent acts, but who after their repentance, and after having their hearts filled with love for *Imam az-Zaman*, also had an opportunity to meet him, and among them were also our Sunni brothers.

One of the Sunni brothers was Hasan 'Iraqi who lived a life of immorality when he was young. One day, he suddenly awoke from the slumber of heedlessness and asked himself, "Was I created to commit these evil deeds?" Then he left the immoral place he was in and went directly to the mosque.

By chance, a preacher there was speaking about Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.). 'Iraqi's fully disturbed soul turned into a heart flaming with enthusiastic love of the Imam Henceforth, he invoked Allah after every prayer to give him the opportunity to see the Living Imam (*Baqiyatu 'llah*) Finally, his prayers were answered and for seven days and nights he learned the path of salvation in His Eminence's presence.

Thereafter, this man became known as one of the great scholars of Islam 'Abdu '-Wahhab Sha'rani, one of the great Sunni scholars, and the original relater of this anecdote, used to call him by the title, "My great master Shaykh 'Iraqi."

During the major occultation, letters were issued by His Eminence to individuals and great scholars of Islam. In those letters new difficult problems were solved, and necessary guidance was given. Among these letters there was one issued in the year 410 A.H. praising a distinguished scholar of Islam, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'man, alias Shaykh Mufid.

Shaykh Mufid has enjoyed a special rank for his knowledge and devoutness, and that letter was an acknowledgement of his efforts and worthy services. Even after the passing of many centuries, people still admire him with honour and respect.

The importance of this letter indicates the awareness of the Imam of the mistakes and immoral actions of some of the Shi'ites, and at the same time it gives hope in the purpose of his existence.

"We are well informed of all your affairs and none of them is hidden from us. We are aware of the problems which have occupied you from the time when you found pleasure and kept committing indecent deeds which your predecessors had avoided. We are aware from that time when your predecessors broke the covenant made with them, as if they knew not about it. We will not neglect or forget you lest calamity and troubles fall on you, and enemies have the opportunity to overpower you. Therefore, remember Allah and fear Him."

The valuable writings of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.) during the major occultation are the most important guidance for his Shi'ites (followers). These writings can be referred to in the authentic Shi'ite books.

However, we are now passing through a very sensitive period in the major occultation.

In Islamic traditions, when the subject of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam is discussed, reference is made to the complex nature of this Divine test. In this Divine test, the sincere and faithful Shi'ites are distinguished from others "and becomes as pure as a pure gold."

In Islamic traditions, a comparison is drawn between the sincere faith of the Shi'ites and the faith of a few followers of the Prophet Nuh –Noah (a.s.), who remained faithful despite their very difficult test, and who, by boarding the ark with Prophet Nuh (a.s.), were saved from the Deluge.

Therefore, blessed are those who have passed this Divine test; we hope to be among their rank.

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