

The Minor Occultation

When Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) died, the office of Divine Leadership (Imamate) was transferred to the Last Luminous Pearl of the Household of the Holy Prophet, Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.) Although His Eminence did not appear amongst the people, some persons in whom he had trust and confidence were allowed to visit him and present him the problems and questions of the Shi'ites And they communicated to the people the guidance and commands of the Divine Luminous Light.

From the point of view faith, confidence and virtue, these were distinguished persons among the Muslims who were mediators between the Imam and the people And in due time they conveyed the guidance of His Eminence to the people.

By studying the degree of the character and perception of the belief and piety of these individuals, not only does the greatness of their personalities become clear to us, but we become more familiar with the Imam of the Age, because, among the sayings of these distinguished, trustworthy and reliable companions of the Holy Imams, one finds the signs of the greatness of His Eminence (Imam al-Mahdi – a.s.).

Among the companions of Imam az-Zaman, four became his most famous and confidential deputies who acted as mediators between the Imam and the people, and they are known as the *Nawwab al-arb'ah* (the four deputies).

In order to know more about the dignity and greatness of their positions, we give below a brief description of each one of them:

1) 'Uthman ibn Sa'id 'Umari: This honourable figure was not only a deputy (*na'ib*) of *Imam az-Zaman* but he was also a representative (*wakil*) of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) and Imam 'Ali an-Naqi (a.s.) He settled and organized many affairs of the Shi'ites The Tenth Imam (al-Hadi –a.s) said to his followers regarding him.

"This Abu 'Umari is a reliable and trustworthy person. Whatever he says to you he says so on my behalf, and whatever he does he does on my behalf."

This representation continued till 254 A H when Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) died. Then, the Eleventh Imam is reported to have praised the character of Abu 'Umari as having his high esteem in his address to his Shi'ites, saying:

"This Abu 'Umari is a reliable and trustworthy person. He had the confidence of the preceding Imam, and has also my confidence in my lifetime and after my death. Whatever he says to you he says so on my behalf, and whatever he does he does on my behalf."

Likewise, with this certificate of admiration, he became the deputy (*Na'ibu l-Imam*) of the Twelfth Imam after the demise of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.).

On the death of Abu 'Umari, the Lord of the Age (*Sahibu 'z-Zaman*) himself sent condolences to his son, Muhammad ibn 'Uthman saying:

"Verily, we belong to Allah and verily to Him shall we return We submit to His command and are pleased with His decree. Your father has lived in good fortune and has died with dignity. May Allah's mercy be upon him, he has joined his friends and masters. He was always endeavouring to search for whatever would bring him near to Allah and His friends. May Allah make strengthen his countenance."

2) Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Uthman: This man was the second special deputy of *Imam az-Zaman* He was also a deputy of the Eleventh Imam, about whom the latter said:

"The greatness of his dignity and the exaltation of his status among the Shi'ites is so famous that there is no need to explain or dispute it."

Regarding him and his father, 'Uthman ibn Sa'id, Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) said to one of his companions:

"Umar and his son are both trustworthy Whatever they do they do on my behalf, and whatever they say to you, they say so on my behalf Therefore, listen to their words and obey them, because both of them are reliable and trustworthy to us."

And *Imam az-Zaman* himself said about him:

"He is my confident, and his letter is of the same status as mine."

3) Abu 'l-Qasim Husayn ibn Ruh Nawbakhti: Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Uthman, the third deputy of *Imam az-Zaman*, said about him:

This Husayn ibn Ruh ibn Abu Bahr Nawbakhti is my successor. He is a reliable and trust worthy envoy and deputy between you and the *Sahibu l-Amr* (the Master of the Authority). Therefore, in your affairs and important tasks refer to him and trust him. I was given this task; and I have announced it."

Shaykh Tusi (may Allah's mercy be upon him) said about him:

"Abu 'l-Qasim Husayn ibn Ruh was regarded by his friends and opponents as the most learned man among the people."

The integrity of Husayn ibn Ruh's deputyship was acknowledged by his opponents too. Shalmaghani, who was one of the pseudo-claimants to the deputyship, had to confess his falsity when *Imam az-Zaman* ordered Husayn ibn Ruh to expose him. He (Shalmaghani) said:

"It is not right between me and Allah to say anything in the affair of Husayn ibn Ruh other than the truth. Although his crime towards me is a big one, yet this man was appointed by *Imam az-Zaman* for the task. The Shi'ites should not turn away from him."

4) Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari: This honourable figure was the last special deputy (*Na'ibu 'l-khass*) of the Holy *Imam az-Zaman*. His death, coincided with the 15th of Sha'ban 329 A.H. Husayn ibn Ruh introduced him as the deputy of the Imam. The last letter of *Imam az-Zaman* (the Lord of the Age) to the four special deputies was addressed to this honourable man. In this order the Imam announced the death of 'Ali ibn Muhammad and the end of the deputation:

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful You are going to die in six days, may Allah grant patience to your brothers in faith on your departure So, be prepared, but appoint no one in your place, because from the day of your death the period of my major occultation (*ghaybatu 'l-kubra*) will begin.

Henceforth-, no one will see me, unless and until Allah makes me appear My reappearance will take place after a very long time when people will have grown tired of waiting and those who are weak in their faith will say: 'What! Is he still alive?' When men will become cruel and inconsiderate, and the world will be full of injustice and violence. Very soon some men will claim to have seen me. Beware! Anyone who makes such a claim before the coming out of Sufyani and the sound from heaven announcing my reappearance, is a liar and an imposter. There is no might nor strength except in Allah, the Magnificent."

As can be seen from this, it is the last order, in which the door of special deputation is closed by the death of Ali ibn Muhammad; hence, anyone who claims to be a mediator, or claims that the Imam can be seen, is a liar. In the period of the major occultation no – one has made the claim that he has been in the presence of the Holy *Imam az-Zaman*.

The people would not accept the deputation of the four special deputies unless they had been shown the miracles of the *Sahibu 'l-Amr* to verify their truthfulness and accuracy, although they acknowledged them as reliable and trustworthy and had not the smallest doubt in their piety, faith and knowledge.

The special deputies presented to *Imam az-Zaman* the problems and questions of the Shi'ite scholars, and he answered the ones that were necessary in letter form and delivered them through the same deputies.

In these letters, the most important and difficult problems on different subjects of Shi'ite beliefs were

cleared up.

One of these problems was a question as to what would be the responsibility of the Shi'ites who would be faced with new events during the period of occultation, and what should they do to face them?

In the letter issued by Imam az-Zaman to the celebrated and distinguished Shi'ite Is'haq ibn Ya'qub he recounted duties, methods and guidance for the Shi'ites in the period of occultation. This direction was carried out for many centuries, and it is one of the proofs of the comprehensiveness and eternity of Islamic rule.

In one of the letters to *Imam az-Zaman* which he sent through the second special deputy of the Imam, Is'haq ibn Ya'qub asked him some different questions, among which was a question which is the subject of our discussion. The Imam said that in those affairs one must refer to those who really understand their (Imams') sayings and have truly related them:

"But as for the problems which will occur in the future, you should refer to the narrators of our traditions for their verdicts as they are my proofs to you, and I am Allah's Proof (*Hujjatu 'llah*) to them."

Other letters of His Eminence Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.) were issued during the minor occultation (*ghaybatu 's-sughra*), each one of them solved difficulties and gave instruction in the boundless sea of wisdom. All these letters were conveyed through the Holy Imam's special deputy to the desirous seekers.

Yes, the four deputies, who were at the highest level of faith and confidence for many years, were the blessed mediators between the Imam and the people till in the year 329 A. H., when this deputation was closed, and on the basis of the Divine Will the major occultation of *Imam az-Zaman* commenced. This was the very occultation which was prophesied a long time previously by the Holy Prophet and the Shi'ites Imams; and Muslims keep patient in this period of test, till by the order of Almighty Allah, the Awaited Imam will appear and the Divine Aim will reach its fulfilment.

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