

The Shi'ites During The Imam's Occultation

So now, what is a duty of a Shi'ite? What responsibilities does he have?

Truly, are we reckoned among the real followers of His Eminence (Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.)?)

If we study the lives of the devout Shi'ites (followers) of the Holy Imams before the Twelfth Imam, and consider their sacrifices without the slightest hesitation, we shall at once awake from our neglectful slumber and realize our weakness and guilt.

Were not Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, 'Ammar ibn Yasir and Malik al-Ashtar the followers of the contemporary Imam 'Ali, Amir al-mu'minin (a.s.), and are we too the followers of the Imam of our Age?

Was not Maytham at-Tammar, who did not cease to praise 'Ali, the Lord of the faithful, a follower of His Eminence 'Ali, and are we too, who are passing with the Imam of our Age through a strange period, the followers of His Eminence?

Were not the martyrs of Karbala', who with love strived in the way of defending the Imam of their time, Husayn (a.s.), and were martyred, the followers of His Eminence, and are we too, who refuse to give our wealth, lives and other means in the way of the Imam of our time, His Eminence's followers?

Is a person like Hisham ibn Hakam, who in his extraordinary and valuable debates crushed and defamed the opponents of the Divine Leadership (Imamate) in such a way that he was called the "assistant of the Imam" by Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.), a Shi'ite? And are we too, who are sluggish in fulfilling our foremost duty to recognize the Imam of our time, Shi'ites?

From what we read of the glad tidings in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and the infallible Imams, the Imam of the Age (*Imam az-Zaman*) has special responsibilities which other Imams did not have. *Imam az-Zaman* will establish a Universal Government. He will fill the earth with righteousness and justice. He will exploit the earth's treasures and natural resources. He will improve and develop the land, and in this way people's awareness and understanding will improve.

Therefore, do not the followers of His Eminence have a very particular duty? Should not the Shi'ites endeavour to obtain the competence and merit of being His Eminence's special companions when he reappears by Divine Command?

Therefore, let us see what our duties are and how we should observe them. Undoubtedly, our first duty is to become acquainted with him.

Recognizing *Imam az-Zaman* is so important and essential that in the Holy Prophet's traditions we read:

"He who dies without recognizing the Imam of his age is like one who had died during the *jahiliyyah* (the pagan era before the advent of Islam)."

To die during the *jahiliyyah* means a death devoid of Islam and faith. And it is obvious that one who dies without recognizing the Imam of his age is counted in the group of the faithless.

In another tradition, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) is quoted as having said on the same subject :

"One who dies without having (accepted) the Imam, it is as if he died in the *jahiliyyah*, and people are not exempted from recognizing their Imam."

Therefore, we must endeavour to recognize His Eminence (*Imam az-Zaman*) for the sake of Islam and our faith, and so that we may be reckoned among those who have gained salvation and among the faithful.

Another duty of the Shi'ites during the major occultation, which the Holy Imam have alluded to, is the question of being ready for the Saviour. Hence, the first step for salvation is to recognize the Imam of the age; and the second step is to be prepared for the establishment of just Government by His Eminence.

One who is waiting (*mntazir*) and preparing himself for the appearance of the Imam must have the characters and merits of the companions of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.), and should sacrifice his life and wealth in his way. For this reason, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said:

"One who waits for our commands is like a person who sacrifices his own blood in the way of Allah."

Yes, he who is really ready for the *Imamu 'l-'Asr* (the Imam of the Period) becomes like a martyr in the way of Allah.

In another tradition, the same Imam told some of his followers about the person who is really waiting for *the Imam az-Zaman*, saying:

"One who dies while expecting the Government of *al-Qa'im* is like one who is in the presence of *al-Qa'im* (Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.)."

After a pause he added:

"But he is like one who has been struck with a sword while accompanying him."

Then he insisted further by adding:

"Nay, by Allah! He is like one who has been martyred in the presence of the Messenger of Allah."

Are we reckoned among those who are expecting His Eminence? Are we at least waiting for the Divine Promise of the Authority of Allah (*Waliyyu 'llah*) in the same manner as we wait for the return of our loved ones from a journey?

In another tradition, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) narrated the virtues of the companions of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.) saying:

"If one takes pleasure in being among the companions of *al-Qa'im*, then he must wait for him and must act with good behaviour and modestly. If he dies before the appearance of *al-Qa'im*, then he will be rewarded like one who has followed him. Then act diligently, and await, that this effort and awaiting will give you delight, O' you who have found salvation."

So, one who is awaiting and has not ceased from good and worthy deeds should earnestly endeavour to be in an excellent and worthy position in such a way that Allah may shower His blessings on him.

So, we should pray to Allah that He may include us among those who are waiting for the Imam of the age, and that our acts and conduct may also symbolize the truth of our claim. Firstly, we should acquaint ourselves with His Eminence, the Imam, and then we should guide others, his opponents and enemies. We should gain the virtues of the companions of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.), and should always be in the expectation of his appearance. Henceforth, we will be able to sacrifice our worthless souls and thus to make them worthy.

Shi'ites must have a devout link with His Eminence during the occultation.

Their hearts and souls should be filled with love and affection for him.

Their thoughts should be devoted to his service and their desire should be to meet him.

Their prayers should be to ask for the blessing of Allah to be showered on His Eminence, and their supplication should be for salvation.

Their existence should be one welded and fused unit, and their life should blaze with love for him.