

Imam al-Mahdi (AJ)

Each of the revealed religions uphold the concept of an awaited saviour or messiah figure: the person vested with God's authority and will to fulfil the responsibility of establishing justice in the world.

From the Islamic perspective, there are two important factors to consider. The first is that whilst revelation culminated in the person of Prophet Muhammad (S), it is humanity's progress and completion that culminates in the arrival of the awaited saviour, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ). In this way, it means that all events and processes from the outset, including the process of creation itself, Prophet Adam's (A) expulsion from the Garden, the succession of revealed religions, the event of Karbala and so on, have formed the trajectory towards Imam al-Mahdi's (AJ) reappearance. In this regard, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A) has narrated, 'When our Qa'im rises and sets his authority over the heads of the servants, he will refine their intellectual development and complete their patience and insight.'

The second factor to consider is that Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) is the same awaited saviour of all the revealed religions and whilst his task is the same according to all religions, it is only his name and descent that may differ in the various religions. This is significant because Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) is the representation of all of humanity and not just a particular religion or sect and so this common belief in a messiah will unite humanity in support of the Imam's cause. Allah describes the state of the world at the time of Imam al-Mahdi's (AJ) reappearance, saying,

***'And the earth shall glisten with the light of its Lord.'* (Qur'an, 39:69)**

In order to establish this state of global justice, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) needs love, devotion and fervent support for him and his cause. Allah call us to this devotion, saying, 'O you who believe! Be supporters of Allah just as Isa, son of Maryam, said to the disciples, "Who are my supporters toward Allah?" The disciples replied, ***"We are the supporters of Allah."*** (Qur'an, 61:14) Allah then states that it is through such supporters that His religion will be established, describing them as ***'those whom if we were to establish them in the land, perform the prayers, pay the alms taxes, call towards good and forbid evil.'*** (Qur'an, 22:41)

Story 1

Shaykh Muhammad al-Hilli narrates:

‘I was with a group that had visited Ayatullah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani and people presented their questions and the Sayyid responded. One lady asked, “Have you ever met the Imam of our time, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ)?” Since I was translating, I apologised to the Sayyid, saying that the question just posed by the lady may be problematic but the Sayyid asked for the question to be presented to him.

‘Upon hearing the question, Ayatullah al-Sistani replied, “If I say that I have met the Imam , people will call me a liar. And if I say that I have not met the Imam, people will say, ‘What kind of scholar is this that does not meet the Imam!’” He then explained, “Throughout history, many people have falsely claimed to have met the Imam in order to seek worldly gains and motives ...”

Story 2

Ayatullah Shahid Sayyid Hasan Shirazi wrote a series of books comprising the sayings of Allah, the Ahlul Bayt and the Prophets. One of the volumes is called *Kalimat al-Imam al-Mahdi*¹ and the story behind it has been narrated by the Ayatullah himself to some of his friends, who include this story in the introduction of the book.

Shahid Shirazi relates:

‘When I was under severe torture in the Baathist prisons in Iraq, I sought the intercession of my master, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) to help me escape the oppression. I promised the Imam that I would compile a book comprising what has been narrated from him including his *ziyarah*, supplications, letters and some of his sayings. So days, nights and even months passed whilst I was still tortured in different prisons in Baghdad, until Allah had mercy upon me and brought me out of imprisonment by the supplication of the Master of the Affair, for which I thank God.

‘A short time later, one of my relatives told me, “I saw a man of great honour in my dream; his face was illuminated. He told me, ‘Tell Sayyid Hasan Shirazi the time has come for him to fulfil his promise to the Master of the Affair of writing the book.’” The person [who reported this to me] was unaware of my promise because I did not mention it to anyone! So I hastened to begin and started to collect the references I needed to write the book.

‘Then someone else came to me after a short time and told me something similar to what the first person had said, whilst he was not related to the other nor did he know him! He said, “I saw the Master of the Affair demanding that you must fulfil your promise regarding the book.”

‘I became more involved and started writing the book. When I started writing the main portion of the book, I also saw a dream. I saw an honourable person, very tall and very handsome, having the nature

of the Prophets, the glory of the truthful and the great mannerisms^{2 3} that distinguish the humble. He wore a white garment. He approached me and I thought it was the Master of the Affair and so I stood up out of respect for him. I went toward him. When we approached each other, I took his hand to kiss it but he himself kissed my hand before I could do so and when he kissed my hand I knew he was not the Imam. I asked, "Who are you?" He replied, "I come from the Friend of Allah." I perceived that he was a messenger from the Master of the Affair. He came to me to thank me for having completed the writing of the book.⁴

'It is the first time I saw a vision like this concerning what I have written. I ask Allah to whom belongs all glory, to accept it with His pleasure. And I seek my Master's pleasure also, for his pleasure is my means to pleasing Allah.'

The friends of Shahid al-Shirazi report that Shahid al-Shirazi related this story to them whilst they were next to the grave of the Holy Prophet during the *hajj*.

Story 3

Ayatullah Sayyid Shahab al-Din Mar'ashi Najafi narrated to one of his students:

'During my studying days in Najaf al-Ashraf, I greatly yearned to see the beauty of our 12th Imam and I made a covenant with myself that I would walk every Tuesday night to Masjid al-Sahlah for 40 weeks so that I could attain this great blessing [of meeting the 12th Imam].

'I performed this act of servitude thirty-five or thirty-six times. One night, however, I was delayed in coming out of Najaf because it was cloudy and rainy. Near Masjid al-Sahlah there was a ditch and when I arrived to it in the middle of the night, I felt alone and afraid of highway robbers. I heard a sound behind me which only increased my fright and terror. I looked behind me and saw an Arab man wearing the clothes of a bedouin. He approached me and said in an eloquent tongue, "O Sayyid, peace be upon you!"

'I felt my fear diminish and I became contented and at peace. But it surprised me that he knew I was a Sayyid in spite of the darkness of the night. Anyhow, we started talking and walking together. So he asked me, "Where are you going?" to which I said, "Masjid al-Sahlah." He asked me, "For what reason?" and I replied, "With the goal of being honoured by a visit from the Wali al-Asr."

'After awhile, we reached the Masjid of Zayd bin Sohan which is a small mosque near Masjid al-Sahlah. The Arab said to me, "Why don't we enter this mosque and pray in honour of the sanctity of the mosque?" So we entered and prayed and the Arab started reciting a supplication – and the walls and the stones started reciting with him! I felt a wonderful feeling⁵ that I cannot even explain!⁶

'Upon completing the supplication, the Arab said to me, "O Sayyid, you are hungry. Why not have some dinner?" He brought out some food from under his cloak; there were three pieces of bread and two or

three green cucumbers that looked as though they had been plucked fresh from the garden, although we were in the midst of a biting cold winter. It did not even occur to me to question where he brought the cucumbers from during this cold season. So we ate as the Sayyid suggested, after which he told me, “Stand up so we can go to Masjid al-Sahlah.” We entered the mosque and the Arab performed various acts of worship at the different holy stations and sites and I followed him. He recited the Maghrib and Isha prayers and without a second thought, I followed and prayed behind him. I did not even stop to think, “Who is this man?”

‘After finishing our worship, the man said to me, “O Sayyid, would you like to go, as others do after finishing here, to Masjid al-Kufa or would you like to stay at Masjid al-Sahlah?” to which I replied, “I would like to stay in the mosque.” So we sat in the centre of the mosque at the Station of Imam al-Sadiq (A). I asked the Arab man, “Would you like to have tea or coffee or a smoke so I can prepare it for you?” and he replied in a concise way⁷, “These sort of things are unnecessary in life and we avoid them.”⁸ These words touched the core of my existence and now, whenever I drink tea, I remember that moment and these words echo in my mind.

‘Anyhow, we sat for around two hours and certain events happened that I will now relate:

‘One of the topics we discussed was about *istikharah* [seeking the best solution from God]. So the Arab said to me, “O Sayyid, how do you do your *istikharah* with the *tasbeih* [string of beads used for counting *adhkar* (invocations)]?” So I said, “Three times Salawat and three times, ‘I seek the best of Allah with His mercy, the best in health.’ I then take the *tasbeih* and I count it so that if it reaches an even number, it is negative outcome and if it reaches an odd number, it’s a positive outcome.” The Arab said, “This *istikharah* has its complete way but the conclusion of it has not reached you. So if you stop at an odd bead, one should not judge immediately that it is positive but rather he should pause and do it again. But this time with the intention that he does not want to do that thing. If it again reaches an even number, it shows that the first *istikharah* was good and if it remains at an odd number, it shows that the first *istikharah* was in between. So I said to myself, “According to the fundamentals of the precepts of knowledge, it is upon me to ask for proof for this matter,” and the Arab replied, “This is what has reached us from higher places.”⁹ And I found myself experiencing through these words, a great sense of submission and contentment. But with all this, I still did not ask, “who is this man?!”

‘And other points from that sitting included the Arab recommending and insisting upon reciting certain chapters of the Holy Qur’an after the compulsory prayers. These were the recitation of Surah Ya Seen after Salat al-Fajr, Surat al-Naba after Salat al-Dhuhr, Surat al-Nuh after Salat al-Asr, Surat al-Waqi’ah after Salat al-Maghrib and Surat al-Mulk after Salat al-Isha. Amongst his other teachings, he encouraged the recitation of the following supplication after each compulsory prayer:

“O Allah, free me from my depression and grief and the loneliness of my heart and the whisperings of Shaytan. By Your Mercy, O the most Merciful of the merciful.”¹⁰

‘He praised the book, *Shara’i’ al-Islam* by Muhaqqiq al- Hilli and he said, “Everything is accurate and true except some rulings.” He emphasised the recitation of the Holy Qur’an and gifting it to the Shi’as who do not have inheritors or the dead who are not remembered and prayed for by others. He emphasised the visitation of the Master of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn

(A). He recited a supplication for me by saying “May Allah make you from the servants of the shariah.”

‘I said to him, “I do not know whether the end of my life will be good or whether I will be amongst those who will have illuminated faces in front of Allah,” so he replied, “Your ending is good and your work is appreciated and you are amongst those who have illuminated faces.” And then there were a lot of other teachings but I cannot mention them all now.

‘I needed to leave the mosque for my convenience and so I approached the toilets on the road but before I left the mosque, I thought to myself, “What night is this and what virtuous man is this? Maybe he is my goal?” And as soon as this thought crossed my mind, I returned to the place where we had been sitting and I could not find any sign of the Arab and there was no other person in the mosque. I knew I had found the person I was longing to meet but my heedlessness bothered me and I started wailing and crying like a madman, going round and round the mosque until morning, like a deranged lover who has been tested by being forsaken. Every time I remember that night, I lose myself and sadness overcomes me.’

Story 4

Ayatullah Sayyid Fadhil Milani narrates:

‘In 1972, prior to the time of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Hadi Milani recognised that whilst there were plenty of scholars in the towns and cities, there was a severe lack of scholars in the rural areas of Iran. So he gathered and trained a group of students for the purpose of disseminating them throughout the villages and distant places in the country so that the rural people too would have easy access to Islamic knowledge and guidance.

‘A total of 203 scholars were trained and when it came to the day of their graduation and their being sent to their places of service, Ayatullah Milani stood to address them. He said, “I give you two instructions and pieces of advice that must be adhered to. The first is that I have taught you the jurisprudence and legal opinion of other scholars. Although you may know my opinion, I have not trained you so that you may quote my opinion for I am not doing this for fame; rather I advise you to quote the opinions of another scholar when you are asked.

“And the second is that each night, before you sleep, sit and address the Imam of the time, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ). Tell him of your weaknesses; tell him of your troubles; tell him of the troubles in your village and place them in his hands to resolve. Ask him to change your situation for the better and to maintain

your connection with him!”

Story 5

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Kadhimi al-Qazwini narrates: ‘One of the *maraji*’ [plural of *marja*] of Karbala gave me permission to pay *shahriyah* [11](#) to the students of the hawzah. The first pay day was a Friday but I didn’t have the money to give to the students. What was required was about 1000 dinars – which was a lot in those days. I asked myself if there was anyone from whom I could borrow the money and later pay back. However, I didn’t find anyone who would lend me the money without a guarantor to secure the loan.

‘I wrote an *aridhah* [12](#) to Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) stating, ‘If the story of Ayatullah Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-Ulum in Makkah [13](#) is true and correct, then send this amount to me.’ I then threw the *aridhah* into the shrine of Imam Husayn (A).

‘Before sunrise, a businessman from Baghdad visited me at my house. We ate breakfast together and then he turned to me and gave me 1000 dinars exactly! Shocked and overjoyed, I immediately addressed the Imam and said, “My Master! You did not even wait until sunrise to reply to my request!”

‘This is how the Imam of the time responds to those who sincerely submit to his authority.’

Story 6

Allamah al-Hilli narrates:

‘One Thursday night, I went alone for the visitation of Imam Husayn (A). I was riding on my donkey and had my whip in my hand. On the way, an Arab man walking alone, passed by and

joined me on my journey. We began talking and we discussed various religious and spiritual issues. It turned out that I would ask this Arab man questions regarding many problems and unresolved issues I had, one after another, and he would provide satisfactory and correct answers each time!

‘Eventually, the discussion arrived at one particular issue about which I declared the opposite opinion. I said to him, “There is no narration to support this view.” The Arab man immediately replied, “The narration is found in [such-and-such] chapter of the book, *al-Tahdhib*, by Shaykh al-Tusi.” Upon hearing this, I fell into deep thought and asked myself, “Who could this man possibly be?”

‘The man then asked me, “Allamah, is it possible in the period of the long occultation, to see the Master of the Age or not?” At this question, I was overcome and dropped my riding whip to the floor. The man picked up the whip and returned it back to me, answering his own question by asking, “But how is it not possible to see the Master of the Age when his hand is in yours?” Involuntarily, I fell from my mount. I went to kiss the feet of the Imam but fell unconscious. When I awoke, I did not see anyone.

‘After I returned to my house I opened the book *al-Tahdhib* to the page [the Imam had mentioned] and saw that the narration the Imam had referred to was present, exactly as he had said. And so I decided to write in the footnotes of the book, *al-Tahdhib*, “I was guided to this narration by the Master of the Affair.”’

Story 7

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal al-Hayderi was sitting with his students and discussing the concept of witnessing Imam al-Mahdi (AJ). He asked his students the question, ‘What is the philosophy of the lengthy occultation?’ and then replied his own question, stating:

‘Allah intends for the Muslims and all of humanity, through the experience of the lengthy occultation, to reach their completion. If He had wanted for them to reach their completion through direct guidance, He would have done so through the Commander of the Faithful, Ali

(A). If Imam al-Hujjah (AJ) had wanted to intervene in every big and small issue, then even the Commander of the Faithful Ali (A) could have done so and guided mankind to reach their completion!

‘Let me give you a small example pertaining to medicine. Since mankind has been brought into existence, how many types of cancer have reached us? How many millions of people have died from cancer? Observing this, Allah could have inspired the Prophet with a cure for cancer and prevented people from dying in their millions. He could have done this and yet He didn’t. Why not? Isn’t Allah kind to His servants? Isn’t He merciful?

‘The answer is that if Allah had done so, there would be absolutely no need for striving and scientific research, no purpose behind trials at all; it is the same way with religious matters. Today, how many differences of opinion are there amongst our scholars? Are there very few or many? Can’t Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) by any means and any method intervene? Yes, he is able to intervene! He could make a *risalah* [14](#) and say, “O Shi’a, act according to this.” If someone asks you this, what would you say? If a Sunni or a teenager asks, “Why isn’t the Imam guiding us,” what will be your answer?

‘The answer is – where, then, would be your completion? Where would be your struggle? There would be no need for the Hawzah Ilmiyyah [or other universities or research institutes]. Mankind’s completion lies in this! When Allah creates us as infants, does He make us from that first moment, intelligent, responsible, fully comprehending, or not? He could make us that way but Allah in his care for us, makes our completion gradual and over a period of time – forty years, for example. If it wasn’t this way, we would be more angelic than human.

‘In this way, the philosophy of the lengthy occultation is built upon the aim of mankind to strive for its own completion. Trial would have no meaning, purging our hearts of its evils by ourselves would have no meaning, deriving Allah’s laws through the exercise of comprehension and insight would have no meaning and so there would be no distinction between the knowledgeable and ignorant if everything was

placed before us.

‘And so this is the course for mankind determined by the Divine and as the Holy Qur’an states, **“No change in the way of Allah will you find and no deviation in the way of Allah will you find.”**’ (Qur’an, 35:43)

1. كلمة الامام المهدي

2. وقار

3. Allah mentions this word and quality in the Qur’an, stating, ‘What is the matter with you, that you do not fear the greatness of Allah?’ (Qur’an, 71:13) and a hadith of Imam Ali (A) states, ‘The one who is known for his wisdom is regarded by the eyes with greatness and awe.’ (Tuhaf al-Uqul, hadith no. 97)

4. This insight is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘They shall have good news in this world’s life and in the hereafter.’ (Qur’an, 10:64)

5. Literally, ‘thawrah’ means revolution, transformation, change.

6. واحسست بثورة عجيبة في نفسي اعجز عن وصفها

7. فأجاب بكلمة جامعة

8. هذه الأمور من فضول المعش, و نحن نتجنب فضول المعش

9. وصلنا من مكان رفيع

10. اللهم سرحني من الهموم و الغموم و وحشة الصدري و وسوسة الشيطان برحمتك يا أرحم الراحمين

11. Monthly stipend and salaries.

12. A letter (The connotation of this word is that it is a petition, or a letter of plea).

13. The story Ayatullah Sayyid al-Qazwini is referring to is as follows:

Ayatullah Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum stayed for three years near Bayt al-Haram serving those in Makkah. He would convey religious knowledge and answer jurisprudential issues including replying to the Ahl al-Sunnah according to their own school of thought. He would also distribute funds and aid to people, students, the poor and those in need who knocked on his door requesting help. When his funds dried up, his servant complained, ‘We do not even have money to return to Najaf.’ After a while the money ran out entirely and again the servant complained, ‘Did I not tell you? Now what shall we do?’

Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum ordered the servant to go to the market and visit a particular shop with a letter. The servant narrates, ‘I went to that shop, gave the paper and was given bags full of money. I returned to the Sayyid, shocked at the event. The next day, I returned to the market so that I may find that person but there was no sign of him at all, nor of his shop. I even asked around at the other shops for him. I returned home and I was deep in thought when the Sayyid entered. He asked, “Where have you been?” to which I could only reply, “I had some work, Sayyid!” Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum replied, “No. You went to search for the man that you took the message to, yesterday. Did you think that we did not have our Master with us?”’

14. Book of comprehensive jurisprudential laws.

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