

The Occultation Of Imam Mahdi (A.S.)

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The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.S.) said, "O Ali know that the most strangest of the people of Imaan and the greatest of them in certainty are those people who will be in Aakheruzzamaan (the last period of time). They will not meet the Prophet. And their Imam will be hidden from them. But they will believe (only) due to black upon white." (Kamaaluddin vol.1 Pg.288)

The "black upon white" means the writings on paper. It means that these people will believe in the Quran and the sunnat as recorded in the books, even though they may not see their Imam (A.S.).

Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (A.S.) said, "Certainty, the master of this affair has an occupation. Then those who are the pious servants of Allah, will hold firmly to their faith". (Al Kafi vol.1 Pg.335 and 336, Ghaibat-e-Toosi Pg.455. Ghaibat-e-Nomani Pg.169)

Imam Musa al-Kazim (A.S.) said, "Blessed are our followers (the shiites) who during the time of occupation (Ghaybah) of the Imam of the Age, identify themselves with our Authority (wilayah) and keep away from our enemies. They belong to us and we belong to them. They have accepted our leadership and we are pleased with their adherence. Therefore, blessed are they. I swear to Allah that they will be with us in our rank in Paradise". (Kamaaluddin vol.2 Pg.361. Kifayatul Asar Pg.265-266)

It is related from Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (A.S.) that the following dua must be recited during the time of ghaibat.

"O Allah ! O Beneficient ! O Merciful ! O the knower of the thoughts (of the hearts) ! make my heart firm upon your religion." (Kamaaluddin vol.2 Pg.352)

Reasons For The Occultation Of Imam Mahdi (A.S.)

1. Free From Allegiance Of Every Tyrant

Amirul Momineen Ali (A.S.) said, "Certainly', when the Qaem from among us shall arise, he will not have the allegiance of any one upon his neck. It is for this reason that his birth is secret and his person is in Ghaibat."
(Kamaaluddin Vol.1. Pg.303)

It must be mentioned that all of our Imams had to pledge allegiance to every tyrant ruler except for a short period during the rule of Umar ibne Abdul Aziz. This was because, on the face of it, it would seem that they are not against the ruler, In this way they could protect Islam. In the absence of popular support, the Imams were left alone and thus they entered into an understanding with the rulers. Thus even Imam Husain (A.S.) for a particular period did not find it necessary to revolt against the regime of Muawiya.

In this regard Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.) says, "Verily each of my ancestors had the oath of allegiance, upon their necks, of their contemporary tyrant rulers. But I will reappear at such a time that I will not have any tyrant's allegiance upon my neck." (Ghaibat Tusi Pg.292, Kamaaluddin VoL2. Pg.485)

2. Test Of The People

Imam al Kazim (A.S.) said, "My son ! when the fifth descendant of the seventh of the Imams is not visible to you ! It is when Allah will test your belief. Ghaibat is inevitable for the Master of this affair. Till the time when the religion is completely transformed, and only a few people will have belief in him. My son ! That Ghaibat, It is a trial through which Allah, the Almighty tests His servants." (Ghaibat-e-Toosi Pg.166 & 337. Al Kafi vol.1 Pg.336. Kamaaluddin vol.2 Pg.359 and 360. Kifayatul Asar Pg.264-265)

3. Fear Of The Enemy

Imam Musa al-Kazim (A.S.) said, "The Qaem is the one who will purify the earth from the enemies of Allah, the High and the Mighty. And he will fill the earth with justice and equity just as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. He is the fifth of my descendants. He will go into occultation due to the fear of his own (life)." (Kamaaluddin vol.2 Pg.361. Kifayatul Asar Pg.265-266)

According to common sense it is necessary for man not to throw away his precious life without a legitimate aim. Thus, the prophets (A.S.) and the Imams (A.S.) have taught the people that it is their duty to protect their life under every circumstance and should never put their life in danger. Therefore it is the duty of the last of these exalted personalities to protect himself till the time of his reappearance when he will establish the new world order.

4. Weakness And Lack Of Co-operation Of The People

Imam Mahdi (A.S.) said, "If our shias; may Allah help them in His obedience; would have fulfilled their covenant with united hearts then there would have been no delay in our meeting, and they would have been blessed with our visitation at the earliest, along with the recognition of truth and confirmation of our rights."
(Al Ihtejaj vol.2 Pg.602)

Imam al-Mahdi (a.s) was born on the 15th Sha'ban 255 A.H. in Samarra, Iraq. He became the Imam when his father was Martyred in 260 A.H. Imam al-Mahdi (a.s) was only 5 years old when he went into 'ghaibat' (concealment). The Imam's ghaibat was divided into two periods :

- Ghaibat-us-Sughra and
- Ghaibat-ul-Kubra.

Ghaibat-us-Sughra

Ghaibat-us-Sughra means 'the minor concealment.' Its period was about 70 years. It began in 260 A.H. when Imam al-Mahdi (a.s) first went into concealment, and ended in 328 A.H.

During Ghaibat-us-Sughra, the Imam appointed some agents to represent him and the people. The Imam had four agents. After the death of the fourth agent, the Imam went into major concealment (Ghaibat-ul-Kubra). This was on the 10th Shawal 329 A.H.

The Signs Heralding the Reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s)

Prophet Muhammed (s.a.w.) has said, "Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left before Doomsday, Allah will expand that day to such length of time as to accommodate the kingdom of a person from my Ahlul-Bayt who will

be called by name. He will fill out the earth with and justice as it will have been full of injustice and tyranny (by then)"

From this Hadith, it is clear to every Muslim that the twelfth Imam will reappear when this world is full of sins and injustice.

There are many signs mentioned by the Masumeen (a.s) on the reappearance of the 12th Imam. It is reported in Biharul Anwar that after the last pilgrimage the Prophet made, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) stood near the Kaaba, and called his people to listen to him. The Prophet said: 'listen to me carefully so that you transmit these words of mine to those who are absent today.' The Prophet began, 'My people, a time will come when kings and rulers will be tyrannical.' The Prophet also said that the payment of Zakat will be stopped.

According to the Masumeen (a.s), Muslim countries will seek aid from non Muslim countries. This is already evident in a number of Muslim countries. Another prediction that is come true is that 60 impostors will claim to be Prophets. By their attractiveness, their persuasion, and their personality, they will misguide the people. 58 false Prophets have already emerged since the days of the Prophet (s.a.w.). We have only two more to witness.

It is reported in Qayamat-e-Sughra citing 'Oqdatud-Durr' that Hazrat Amir (A.S) has said that the Mahdi will not appear until one-third of the world population will die by being killed and one-third will die as a result of epidemics.

The Last Signs Heralding the Appearance of Imam al-Mahdi (a.s)

There is a Hadith from Imam Muhammed Baqir (a.s) that for three or seven consecutive days, one will see reddish yellow fire raging in the East.

Sufiani will emerge in Palestine, where he will start a revolt in the month of Rajab. He will be an uncompassionate rebel and his rule will last for eight consecutive months. He will conquer and rule Egypt for four consecutive months. Sufiani will conquer Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, and Syria. Sufiani has been specifically described by Aemma A.S. as an ugly, blistered, green-eyed, cross-eyed person who will be an enemy of the friends of the Ahlul-Bait. Imam Ali (a.s) has said that Sufiani's hatred of the devotees of the Ahlul-Bait will be such that any person named Ali, Fatema, Hassan, Hussein, Zainab, Ruquaiya will be arrested and beheaded straight away without further investigations. Sufiani will rip the Mimir of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.). The holy house of the Prophet which contains his grave will be pulled and used as a stable. Horses will be tied in that Holy place.

Sufiani will then decide to attack Makka. His purpose would be to demolish the Holy Kaaba and kill the entire population of Makka. Sufiani's army will set out via Baghdad but, as Allah would have it, when they get between Medina and Makka, in the desert of Baida, suddenly one night they will hear a voice from the sky which will say, 'O Baida eat up the entire army of Sufiani' It is said that the entire army numbering 100,000 persons will be swallowed up by the earth, except for two. The two who will be spared will suddenly encounter an angel. He will slap both of them turning their faces right round, looking behind instead of front. And that will be the time when Imam al-Mahdi (a.s) will already have reappeared in Makka. The Imam will establish his authority in the Holy Mosque at Makka in the Haram. The angel will then order one of them calling him Bashir. 'O Bashir, go straight to Makka, into the Haram and inform the Imam that Sufiani's army has been swallowed up by the land. The other called Nazir will be ordered to go to Sufiani and tell him that the Imam has already appeared. He should proceed straight to Makka and declare allegiance to him.

Sufiani will prepare to attack the Imam but will not have enough courage. The Imam will catch Sufiani in Jerusalem and will kill him.

Imam Ali (a.s) has said that nine definite signs will precede the emergence of Hazrat Mahdi (a.s). These nine signs are:

- Dajjal will emerge.
- A loud voice will be heard from the sky.
- Sufiani will appear and wage a fierce war.
- The army of Sufiani will be swallowed by a sudden opening of the land between Makka and Medina in the desert of Baida.
- A revered wise saint will be murdered in Makka. (This saint is to be a Hashimite descent.)
- A Seyyid descendant of Imam Hassan (a.s) will emerge with his army.
- The army of Seyyid-e-Hassan and an image of a man will appear in the sky opposite the sun.
- There will be two eclipses in the holy month of Ramadhan contrary to the normal order and calculation and the eclipse of the moon.
- On three occasions a loud voice from the sky will be heard in the holy month of Ramadhan.

The Reappearance

Hazrat Isa, Hazrat Khizr, Hazrat Ilias, and Hazrat Idris (a.s) will give allegiance to the Imam when he reappears. Also Jibrael will announce 313 companions of the Imam. These 313 companions will be people of eminent piety, great knowledge and absolutely steadfast in their determination and faith towards the Imam. Another 1000 people will be in the army of the Imam. These people will fight battles and kill enemies like Dajjal, who will appear from India. Dajjal will have the musical tunes with him. Then the Imam will lead the prayers, Hazrat Isa (a.s) will be behind him.

The Major Occultation

After the year 329 A.H, when the major occultation commenced, the special deputation of Imam e Zamana (a.s.) terminated. If anybody claims during the major occultation to be a mediator and a deputy, then, according to the declaration of Imam e Zamana (a.s.) 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 Mahdi), 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-khas) 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.

The honour of seeing Imam e Zamana (a.s.) 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 e Zamana (a.s.),

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, peace be on him. `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 (Baqiyyatu'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'l-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. 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 predecessor 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, peace be on him, 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.

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, peace be on him, who remained faithful despite their very difficult test, and who, by boarding the ark with Prophet Nuh, peace be on him, were saved from the deluge.