

Discussions Concerning Imam Al-Mahdi (a.s.)^(*)

Philosophy of the Delay of Reappearance with the presence of Conditions

Question: Throughout history, we sometimes come across conditions and opportunities in which it is assumed the requisites for reappearance are present, for example, the people's receptiveness to religion, self-sacrifice in the path of Islam, giving their lives, and martyrdom for it was to such an extent or with such fervor and commotion that it appears that rather than 313 people, thousands of people are ready to sacrifice their lives under the command of the Imam (a.s.). With the existence of these conditions, what is the secret of the delay of the reappearance?

Answer: Regarding the presence of the conditions for the reappearance of the Imam of the Age (may Allah hasten his return).

First, no one can claim to know with certainty, that is, say that all the conditions are fulfilled, since claim itself requires knowledge of all the conditions, since it is possible that the traditions have not comprised an exposition of all of the conditions.

Second, assuming that the conditions are limited to those instances that have come in the traditions, as Shaikh al-Saduq has said, in reality one can still not be sure that those particular 313 companions and the remaining conditions are present.

This is because if all of the conditions and circumstances apparently indicate the presence of the requisites of reappearance, without denying, for example, the existence of pure individuals who can be counted among the 313 companions of the Imam (a.s.), we also

(*) From the book with the same title by Ayatullah Shaikh Lutfullah Safi

cannot claim that all of the individuals are like Salman, Abu Dhar, Miqdad, Rashid Hijri and the people of Karbala’.

In the present situation, with all the claims that are put forward in our society for returning to and aspiring at Islam, which are certainly a matter of pride, we still see that many bring the Divine laws under question in a large number of political, economical, and social issues. This is to such an extent that they regard some religious commandments that are not exclusive to a particular time or place as being restricted to the Prophet’s (p.b.u.h) time and on this pretext free themselves from responsibility. With the existence of such individuals and events, how can we say that the conditions for reappearance are ready, let alone asking about the reason for its delay?

On this basis, in this issue it is appropriate for us to submit to the command and will of Allah, the All-Knowing, and not forgo the merit of waiting for the reappearance. And as was indicated in the tradition of ‘Ali ibn Mahziyar, we should attribute the concealment of the Imam (a.s.) to our own actions and always keep the memory of the personage alive in our ears and try to bring about the requisites of his appearance ever more by reforming our own actions.

The Length of the Occultation and Difficult and Formidable Trials

Question: According to what is well known, during the occultation of Imam Mahdi (a.s.), which will be very lengthy, difficult trials will occur such that a person will be a believer in the morning but a disbeliever in the evening. Are there types of trials in the time near the reappearance or will such trials occur throughout the period of occultation?

Answer: According to Islamic principles, the world is a place of tests and trials and people are in a state of being tried during everything that happens to them. During youth and old age, whether wealthy or in need, in health and illness, when in power, when in leadership, they are always in a state of trial; it makes no difference whether the Imam (a.s.) is present or in occultation.

The Quran says in this regard: **﴿Have the people presumed they would be released upon saying ‘We believe’ without being tested﴾** [29:2].

As we know, during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself, while all of the programs and incidents were a test, sometimes, severe trials would occur, in which none but a few were able to fulfill their obligation. For example, in battle, aside from individuals like ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and Abu Dujana and a few others, none were able to stand firm in jihad and defense of Islam and the Prophet. This is because during severe trials, only a limited number of people have the ability to stand firm; many individual would flee out of fear. It has been related that in one of the battles one of the companions fled from the battlefield and returned after three days. Or after the Prophet’s (p.b.u.h.) demise, such a severe trial came to pass that not more than three or seven people were able to successfully perform their duty and remain firm on the line that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) had specified. Afterwards as well, such trials continued and shall continue, so that, in the words of the Quran: **﴿...So that Allah separates the impure from the pure﴾** [8:37].

These trials have wisdom and many benefits, among which is that the disposition of the people of the world, and readying society for that dignified reappearance in which the resolute and steadfast believers will be separated from the remaining people. Preserving one’s faith during the period of the Imam’s (a.s.) occultation is possible by enduring very severe difficulties. Without doubt, millions of people leave this school of trials with pride and heads held high, that is through patience, forbearance, and perseverance of their religion, faith, and honor.

According to the content of some traditions, during this period protecting one’s religion will become more difficult than holding fire in the palm of one’s hand, and oppression, injustice, corruption, and perversion will become prevalent. Values will be regarded as being against values, and things opposed to values will be regarded as values. Sins will be considered a matter of pride and accomplishment. One’s friends will encourage and induce him to sin and reproach him for not cooperating with oppressors, sinners, and corrupt people.

Women will enter into work exclusive to men. Many wars and natural afflictions will come about. In a tradition of Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari regarding the commentary of the verse: ﴿(O you who believer!) Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority amongst you (the legatees of the Messenger)﴾ [4:59].

It has come that the Noble Messenger (p.b.u.h.) gives news about his Khulafa' and successors from Imam Ali (a.s.) until Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return), names them one after one and gives tidings to the people about the conquering of the East and West of the world at the blessed hands of Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return), and says, inter alia: "He is the one who will be concealed from his Shi'a and friends such a concealment that none shall remain firm in belief in his Imamah except one whose heart Allah has tested for faith".

And Amir al-Mu'minin has also informed about these difficulties and tribulations in Nahj al-Balagha. In one instance, he says: "How lengthy is this adversity, and how distant is this hope!"

It has even been related in another tradition, that: "Verily the Master of this Affair has such a concealment that one who grips firmly to his religion during it is like one who picks thorns with his hands".

Therefore, as can be understood from the traditions, the entire period of concealment is a period of trial and examination; of course, the types of those trials are different in the different times and places. The believer during this period must show perseverance in abiding by the commandments of religion.

