

3) Why All This Desire To Prolong His Life?

Now we should deal with the second question which is: Why should Allah, the Exalted, show all this desire for this person in particular? Why should the natural laws be hindered just to prolong his life? Why should the leadership of the appointed day not be left to a person born in the future, who will appear then and assume his expected role?

In other words: What is the use of this long absence and what is the motive behind it? Indeed many people ask these questions, yet at the same time none of them is prepared to accept the Divine answer for them. However we believe that the twelve Imams form a unique group of individuals, none of whom could be substituted. But these people require a social interpretation of the situation, in the light of tangible realities, for the great operation of change and the understandable requirements for the appointed day.

On these bases, we will temporarily disregard the characteristics that we believe should be fulfilled in the infallible Imams and ask the following questions:

As far as the expected operation of change, of the appointed day, is concerned and as far as it is understandable in the light of the norms and the experiences of life, can we consider the prolonged age of its preserved leader as one of the factors for its success? And of his ability to lead it in a better way?

We can give an affirmative answer to this question because of many reasons among which are the following:

First, that the great operation of change requires from its leader a unique psychological attitude, filled with a sense of success and a sense of the insignificance of the mighty existence which he has been prepared to struggle against and transform into a new civilized world.

Thus the more the leader's heart is filled with the triviality of the civilization he is fighting, and the clearer is his sense that it is no more than a speck of dust on the long path of human civilization, the more he is ready from a psychological angle, to oppose, resist and persevere in his efforts against it until victory is achieved.

It is clear, therefore, that the scope required from this psychological attitude ought to be proportionate to the size of change to be brought about and what needs to be rooted out of civilization and existence. So, whenever the opposition is to a mightier existence and a loftier and deeply rooted civilization, the greater is the thrust required from this psychological attitude.

Since the message of the appointed day is to change, in a comprehensive way, a world filled with injustice and tyranny, it is therefore natural that it is looking for an individual whose psychological attitude is superior to that whole world; a person whose age exceeds those who were born in that world and who were brought up in the shade of its civilization which he is to destroy and replace with one based on justice and truth.

For whoever is brought up in a deeply-rooted civilization, that dominates the world with its values and modes of thinking, would be overwhelmed by it, since he would have been born while it had been in existence, and opened his eyes just to see its different aspects, and would have been brought up under its power and influence. Unlike that is a person who has deeply penetrated history, who has come to life long before that civilization which completes the cycle of the story of humanity before the appointed day saw the light.

He sees it as little seeds, hardly visible, then gradually growing and taking roots within human societies, waiting for the right moment to blossom and appear. Then he witnesses it, as it starts to grow and advance, sometimes relapsing, sometimes meeting with success, then when it begins to prosper and become gigantic, gradually dominating the destinies of the world, such a man who has lived through all these stages with sagacity and caution, watching this giant – (against which he has to struggle) under that long historical perspective which he has lived in reality, and not just read about in books of history, such an individual would consider it as a definite destiny, unlike Jean Jacques Rousseau's consideration of the monarchy in France, when he was terrified at the mere imagining of France without a king, in spite of the fact that he was one of the heralds, both intellectually and philosophically, of the evolution of the political situation that existed in those times. That was because Rousseau lived in the shade and under the influence of the monarchy.

On the other hand this individual who has thoroughly penetrated history, would have the dignity and strength of history and a powerful sense that all that surrounds him of civilization and existence was born at a certain time in history, when the way was paved for its existence, that it would disappear to the extent that nothing of it would remain as when there was nothing of it before it came into existence in the distant or near past, that the historical life spans of any civilization, however long they may be, are only limited days in the long era of history.

Have you not read the chapter of the cave in the Qur'an (*surah al-Kahf, n. 18*)? Have you not read of those youths who believed in their Lord, whom Allah increased in guidance, who opposed a ruling pagan existence that was ruthless and did not hesitate to suppress every single seed of *at-tawhid* (Unity of Allah), so that it might not rise above the level of idolatry.

So these youths became depressed to the point of despair, once the windows of hope had been closed before their eyes; so they sought refuge in the cave, where they begged Allah for a solution to their problem after having exhausted all the possibilities. For they could not tolerate the fact that falsehood was ruling, transgressing and subjugating the truth and suppressing anyone whose heart showed an inclination towards the truth.

Do you know what Allah did to them? He made them sleep for three hundred and nine years in that cave and caused them to rise up from their long sleep and sent them to the outside world, after that the existence which had bewildered them with its power and transgression had collapsed and became a chapter in history that could frighten no one nor activate anything. They were brought out so that they could see all this with their own eyes and learn that falsehood is insignificant.

Indeed if this clear vision had been true in the case of the people of the cave, with all that it bore of psychological loftiness and thrust out of that unique event which prolonged their age by three hundred years, then the same event could occur in the case of al- Mahdi, the Expected Leader, whose extended age would make him see the giant as a dwarf, the tall tree as a seed and the hurricane as a breeze.

Add to this that the experience that is granted by the concomitants of those consecutive civilizations and the direct confrontation with all their movements and changes, has a great influence on the intellectual preparation and the deepening of experience of the Expected Leader, since it puts him face to face with the many various practices of others, with all they contain of weakness and strength, and the different aspects of their errors and accuracy. And this enables him to classify the social symptoms with a complete awareness of their causes and their historical circumstances.

Moreover the preserved operation of change, which is the task of the Expected Leader, is founded on a particular message, namely the message of Islam. Therefore, it is natural that in this case, the required leadership should be more proximate with the original sources of Islam, that his personality be fully shaped in an independent way, free from the influence of that civilization which is subject to his struggle on the appointed day, unlike that individual who would have been born and brought up in its atmosphere, whose intellect and feelings would have blossomed within its frame. Quite often such a person cannot free himself from the effects and residues of that civilization, even if he were to lead a movement of change against it.

Thus, in order that the preserved leader be not influenced by the civilization he has been prepared to transform, it is necessary that his personality should be fully shaped during a previous stage of civilization, as near as possible to the universal spirit, and in terms of the principles of that civilized condition, which the appointed day is aiming at realizing under his leadership.

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