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## Chapter 7: Why Did Not the Occultation Become Complete from the Beginning?

The group met at Dr. Jalali's house. The session began on time. Everyone was anxious to hear Dr. Jalali's questions.

Dr. Jalali: What was the purpose of the Short Occultation? If the twelfth Imam was going to be in occultation, why did he not do so immediately following the death of Imam Hasan 'Askari? Why did he not become completely cut off from his followers?

Mr. Hoshyar: You must realize that the disappearance of the Imam and the leader of the community for a long time is an uncommon event and would be hard for the people to believe and get used to. It was for this reason that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) and the Imams decided to make the people aware of such a phenomenon gradually.

Hence, from time to time they related the events connected with the occultation, they spoke about the difficulties people would face in the absence of the Imam, and described the condition of those who would reject the idea and the losses they would suffer, and praised the condition of those who would remain firm and the rewards they would reap. At times, through their own inaccessibility they demonstrated a situation which resembled the era when the last Imam would be living an invisible life.

Mas'udi, the famous historian, in his book *Ithbat al-wasiyya* describes this gradual introduction of the notion of the Imam's occultation. He says that Imam Hadi, the tenth Imam, met very little with the people and, except for some of his special associates, did not maintain contacts with others. When Imam Hasan 'Askari assumed the Imamate, most of the time he spoke with the people from behind a curtain so that his followers would be get used to the idea and be prepared to accept the disappearance of the twelfth Imam<sup>1</sup>.

If the complete occultation had begun immediately following the death of Imam Hasan 'Askari, then, in all likelihood, the fact about the existence of the twelfth Imam would have been ignored and in time people

would have completely forgotten that there exists an Imam in occultation. Consequently, it was the Short Occultation with which the event of the disappearance of the Imam occurred.

During this period the Shi'a were able to contact the Imam through his special deputies and were witness to the signs and miraculous deeds that appeared in the hands of these prominent followers of the Imam. When the notion of occultation and the Imam's ability to provide the necessary guidance through his deputies in that state became firmly accepted, the Complete Occultation occurred.

## **Is There Any Time Limit to the Complete Occultation?**

Engineer Madani: Is there any time limit fixed for the Complete Occultation?

Mr. Hoshyar: No, there is no time limit fixed. However, there are many hadith-reports that point to the prolongation of the occultation to such an extent that some people will fall into doubt about the existence of the Imam. For example, Imam 'Ali has related the following about the Qa'im:

His occultation will be so long that an ignorant person will say: "God does not need the ahl al-bayt<sup>2</sup>."

Similarly, Imam Sajjad has related that among the characteristics of Noah that would recur in the Qa'im would be his long age<sup>3</sup>.

## **The Philosophy of Occultation**

Engineer Madani: If the Imam of the Age was living among the people, they would have been able to reach him and consult with him in times of need to seek solutions to their problems. That would have been better. In spite of such a need among his followers why did he go into occultation?

Mr. Hoshyar: To be sure, if there had been no obstacles to his being present among the people, it would have been more expedient and beneficial to have him around. However, since God has chosen a state of invisible existence for him, and since God's acts are founded upon what is in the best interest of humanity, one should also believe, as one does in other instances, that in this case also the reason for occultation is also based on divine wisdom, about which we have simply an overall knowledge, the details being unknown to us. The following hadith corroborates the point we are trying to make, namely, that the actual reason for occultation was not explained for the people, and except for the Imams themselves no one knew anything about it.

The hadith is reported by 'Abd Allah b. Fadl Hashimi. He relates:

Imam Sadiq said: "The one entrusted with the command will necessarily live an invisible life. This will lead those who are already astray into doubt." So I asked the Imam the reason. He said: "I am not permitted to reveal the reason." I went on to seek the philosophy behind the invisible life [of the Imam of the Age].

He said: "It is the same wisdom that existed in the prior situation when other proofs of God also went into occultation. However, the true understanding behind this occurrence will not take place until after he has reappeared, just as the wisdom behind making the boat defective, killing the boy, and repairing the falling wall [in the story of Moses and Khidr in the Qur'an] were revealed to Moses only after the two had decided to part company.

O the son of Fadl! The subject of occultation is among the divine secrets and a concealed matter whose knowledge is only with God. Since we regard God to be wise we must also affirm that His acts are based on that perfect wisdom, even when the detailed understanding is not accessible to us<sup>4</sup>."

The hadith certainly points to the fact that the main reason for the occultation was not explained to the people either because it was not suitable for the people or because they had no preparation to grasp it. But there are other traditions in which three benefits are given for the occultation of the Imam:

(1) The benefit of being tested and purified: There are some who do not have strong faith. Through the requirement of believing in such a phenomenon as the invisible existence of the Imam their true inner self is made manifest. Then there are those who do have strong faith in hidden things, but because of the prolonged concealment and their awaiting for the deliverance so long, they have suffered a lot. Such people should receive proper recognition and should reap rewards for their steadfastness and patience. Imam Musa Kazim has related this situation in the following hadith:

When the fifth descendant of the seventh Imam disappears watch out for your faith. God forbid, if someone may drive you away from your religion. O my son! Undoubtedly, the Master of the Command will have such an occultation that a group of believers will turn away from religion. God will test the believers with the occultation [of their Imam]<sup>5</sup>.

(2) The benefit of being relieved from having to pay allegiance to unjust rulers. There is a tradition reported by Hasan b. Faddal from Imam Rida, who said:

"I see my followers in the aftermath of the death of my third descendant [i.e., Imam Hasan 'Askari] looking for their Imam everywhere and not finding him." I asked him the reason for that. He said: "Because their Imam will have entered the state of occultation." I went on to ask the reason for the occultation. He said: "This will be so that when he reappears he will have paid no allegiance to anyone<sup>6</sup>."

(3) The benefit of being immune from murder. Zurara reports the hadith from Imam Sadiq, who said:

"The Qa'im must live an invisible existence." I asked for the reason. He said: "He is afraid of being killed," and pointed to his stomach.

These three benefits are reported in various ways in a number of traditions, especially those reported from the ahl al-bayt.

## **What Danger Faced the Imam If He Were Visibly Present?**

Engineer Madani: If the Imam of the Age were visibly present among people, he would have been living in one of the cities of the world, guiding and directing the religious lives of the Muslims, and continuing to fulfil his obligations until the conditions of the world became favorable. At that time he would have been able to launch his revolution and destroy the power of disbelief and injustice. What is wrong with this supposition?

Mr. Hoshyar: I do not see any problem with the supposition. However, we should evaluate its overall impact. Let me try to analyze the situation under ordinary circumstances.

It is important to keep in mind that the Prophet and the Imams had time and again informed the people regarding the major function of the awaited Mahdi, namely, the destruction of the tyrannical powers and the rectification of injustices committed by them. Because of this, two kinds of people were bound to pay particular attention to the presence of the Imam:

First, those who were wronged and persecuted and, unfortunately, whose number has always been large. This group would have rallied around the Imam and put enormous pressure on him to redress the wrongs committed against them and defend their rights. In other words, there would have been endless turmoil and chaos resulting from the rising and revolutions.

Second, those who were in power and were the source of corruption and ill treatment of the people. These tyrants were not afraid to employ any unjust means to remain in power and protect their interests. In fact, they were willing to sacrifice their entire population as long as they retained power. Since they saw the presence of the Imam as a threat and an obstacle to their own interests, they were bound to remove him at any cost so that they could continue to rule. In fact, at times the rulers were united in their elimination of the major threat to their power, namely, the awaited Mahdi. Hence, they were determined to annihilate the source of justice and equity among the people.

## **Why Is the Mahdi Afraid of Being Killed?**

Dr. Jalali: What would be wrong with the Imam suffering death in the path of reforming society and disseminating the true religion and defending the oppressed? Is his blood more dear than that of his forefathers who also suffered martyrdom in defending the religion of God? My question is why at all should he be afraid of being killed?

Mr. Hoshyar: The Imam of the Age, like his forefathers, is not afraid of being killed. Nevertheless, his being killed is not in the interest of the society or the religion. The reason is that whereas when his forefathers were killed they had their offspring to succeed them, the twelfth Imam does not have a son to succeed him should he be killed, and surely the earth cannot remain without God's Proof on it. It is well established that it is God's will that truth shall become triumphant over falsehood and that through the

existence of the twelfth Imam the world will become the abode of godfearing people.

## **Does Not God Have the Power to Protect the Imam?**

Dr. Jalali: Does not God have the power to protect the Imam from the threat posed by his evil enemies?

Mr. Hoshyar: To be sure, God's power is unlimited. However, generally God does things in the most normal fashion, using the regular channel of causation. Moreover, God does not want religion or the messengers and leaders of religion to be protected in an extraordinary way, to deprive people of their freedom of choice and of facing the consequences of their choices. Coercion in these matters would divest human beings of their dignity. On the other hand, as free agents, human beings would face the testing and purification that becomes possible by accepting to follow the guidance of truth provided in the religious teachings of the Prophet and the Imams (peace be upon them).

## **Is It Not Likely That the Unjust Rulers Would Have Submitted to Him?**

Dr. Jalali: If the Imam were visibly present then the oppressors would have access to him and would have heard his teachings and probably would have given up on the idea of killing him. On the contrary, they would have probably been guided and would have abandoned their unjust ways.

Mr. Hoshyar: Not everyone submits to the truth. From the beginning of human history till our own times, there has been a group on earth that has vehemently opposed truth and been the enemy of justice. Moreover, they have tried with all their might to destroy both truth and justice. Did not the Prophets and the Imams teach the truth? Did not the oppressors and unjust rulers have access to their miracles and teachings? In spite of all that, they never hesitated to silence these voices of justice and put out these rays of guidance by the means that were available to them. If the twelfth Imam had not disappeared because of the fear of these tyrants, he too may have suffered the same fate as his forefathers.

## **He Should Remain Silent So That He Would Be Safe**

Dr. Jalali: In my view, if the Imam had entirely withdrawn from politics and had remained silent in the face of these tyrannical rulers' conduct, while continuing to provide moral and religious guidance, he would have been spared from the evil of his enemies.

Mr. Hoshyar: Since the oppressors had heard that the promised Mahdi is their enemy and that, through him, their palaces of injustice would be razed to the ground, they would not have been satisfied with his silence and non-critical approach to their unjust rule. They would have deemed it necessary to get rid of the potential danger to their power. Moreover, when the followers of the Imam saw the silence of the Imams endlessly, year after year, in the face of all the injustices inflicted upon them and their followers,

they would have lost hope in the reform of the world and the victory of truth, and would have doubted in the truthfulness of the promises contained in the Prophet's hadith-reports and the Qur'an. In addition, it is inconceivable that the oppressed and the downtrodden would have permitted the Imam to remain silent.

## **He Could Have Negotiated a Treaty of Non-interference with the Rulers**

Engineer Madani: Would it not have been possible for the Imam to negotiate a treaty of non-interference with the rulers, assuring them that he would not interfere in the workings of their government? In that way he would have established his credibility and truthfulness in observing the terms of his treaty and, in return, the rulers would have left him alone.

Mr. Hoshyar: You must keep this in mind that the function of the awaited Mahdi is different from that of the other Imams who preceded him. The other Imams were under obligation to "command the good and forbid the evil" to their best ability. But they were not required to undertake warfare. On the contrary, from the beginning the role of the Mahdi was to be different. The Mahdi would rise against oppression and injustice. He would not keep silent in the face of corruption; rather, he would undertake warfare (jihad) to uproot oppression and ungodliness. He would actually destroy evil forces. These functions were part and parcel of the signs of the appearance of the Mahdi.

All other Imams were asked by their followers at different times: "Why do not you rise against the oppressors?" They used to answer: "That task is upon our Mahdi." Some Imams were asked: "Are you the Mahdi?" The answer was: "Mahdi will rise with a sword and will fight injustice. But I am not like that, nor do I have the power to do so." Some of them were asked: "Are you the Qa'im?" The reply was: "Yes, I am the one entrusted with truth (qa'im bi-haqq). However, I am not that promised Qa'im who will cleanse the earth of disbelief and injustice." Sometimes the hope was expressed by some in the community: "I hope that you are the Qa'im!"

The answer was: "I am the Qa'im. But the Qa'im who will purify the earth of disbelief and oppression is other than me." When people used to complain about the social and political turmoil and the tyranny of the unjust government and the mistreatment and hardship suffered by the followers of the Imams, the consolation was offered by saying: "The rise of Mahdi is certain. At that time the situation in the world will improve and the revenge against the tyrannical people will be exacted." At other times people would talk about the large number of their enemies and their power compared to their own small number and powerlessness.

The Imams used to comfort their followers and assure them: "The government of the Prophet's rightful successor is a certainty. The final victory belongs to the followers of truth. Be steadfast and pray and expect deliverance through the descendant of Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny)." The believers and the followers of the Imams were waiting for this deliverance to come and willingly accepted

adverse and painful situations created by their opponents.

Now let me ask you, in all fairness, with all these expectations of deliverance through the promised Mahdi that the believers had, do you think that he would have negotiated a treaty of non-interference with the unjust rulers of his time? If he had done that, would he not have shattered all the hopes of his followers and caused them to blame him for selling out to the enemies? In my opinion, such a compromise on the part of the Imam is impossible. Actually, the adverse impact of such a compromise would have led these followers of the Imam to abandon their faith and even pursue injustices to combat persecution.

Moreover, if the Imam had signed a non-intervention and friendship treaty with the unjust authorities, he would have been inevitably bound to the terms of such a document. As a result, at no time would he have undertaken to fight, because Islam regards a treaty binding on those who have agreed to its terms<sup>7</sup>. It is for this reason that many hadith-reports make it explicitly clear that one of the purposes of the occultation and the secrecy surrounding the birth of the last Imam is that he should not become obliged to pay allegiance to the rulers so that whenever he wishes to rise there should be no such obligation on him. In the following tradition Imam Sadiq said:

The birth of the Master of the Command will remain a secret so that when he rises he will have no obligation to abide by any agreement. God will bring about his task in the matter of one night<sup>8</sup>.

Besides all that we have said so far, the oppressors and unjust rulers could never have felt secure with such an agreement, mainly because of the perceived danger to their power. Hence, they regarded murdering him as the only solution for assuring their continued control over the affairs of humanity. They would have, as a consequence, rendered the earth devoid of God's proof.

## **Why Did He Not Appoint Special Deputies During the Complete Occultation?**

Dr. Jalali: We accept in principle the necessity of occultation for the Imam. But, the question arises as to why did he not appoint his special deputies during the Complete Occultation as he had done during the Short Occultation? Such an appointment would have enabled the Shi'a to establish contact with him and ask for his assistance in solving their problems.

Mr. Hoshyar: The enemies did not leave the deputies in peace either. They were imprisoned and tortured so that they would reveal the whereabouts of the Hidden Imam (peace be upon him).

Dr. Jalali: Well, in that case perhaps it was possible for him not to appoint specific individuals as his deputies. However, from time to time he could appear for some of his followers through whom he could convey his injunctions for the community.

Mr. Hoshyar: Even this approach was not feasible because in all likelihood that very person to whom the Imam had appeared would have revealed his domicile to the enemy, leading to the arrest and murder of the Imam.

Dr. Jalali: Such a danger would have been possible if he had appeared in front of any unknown person. But if he had appeared for some trustworthy persons among his followers, the probability of impending danger would have been absent.

## **Mr. Hoshyar: Your supposition can be refuted on several grounds:**

First, if the Imam had decided to appear for anyone he would have needed to perform a miracle to introduce himself. In fact, for a cynical individual he might have been required to perform several miracles so that that person would accept him as his Imam. Among these individuals there was a possibility that there would be some who would resort to trickery and fraud through magic to deceive and mislead the ordinary believers and even claim to be the Imam himself! By the way, it is not possible for everyone to distinguish between a miracle and an act of magic. This very difficulty would have led to further corruption among the people, leading to a disastrous situation.

Second, there were actually some shrewd impostors and fraudulent individuals who had abused such incidents for their own personal ambitions. They used to claim to have seen the Imam and spread laws contrary to the Shari'a on his authority so that they could achieve their evil designs. Whoever intended to do something against the law and further his own ends used to claim that he had reached the presence of the Imam of the Age and that the Imam had come to his house the previous night and had told him that he should do such and such or that the Imam approved what he was doing, and so on. The dangerous consequences of such claims is too self-evident to require any further elaboration.

Third, we do not have any unequivocal proof that the Imam of the Age does not appear for anyone highly trustworthy among his followers. Rather, it is quite likely that his pious and godly followers might reach his presence and might be under oath to keep that secret, without revealing it to anyone. In such cases, everyone is bound to their own experience and has no right to judge any one else.

## **What Is the Benefit of Having the Imam in Occultation?**

Engineer Madani: If the Imam is the leader of the people he should be present among them. What is the benefit of having an Imam who lives an invisible life? What is the use of having an Imam who lives in the state of occultation for centuries without fulfilling any of the functions that he normally undertakes: such as propagating religion, solving the problems of society, responding to the attacks of his opponents, commanding the good and forbidding the evil, helping the poor and redressing the wrongs committed against the downtrodden, upholding the ordinances of God by instituting proper penalties and explaining



the lawful and the unlawful to the people, and so on.

Mr. Hoshyar: The people are surely deprived of the benefits that you have enumerated during the occultation. However, the benefits of the Imam's presence are not limited to these. In fact, there are other benefits that are available during the occultation. The following two are among those many other benefits that you have not enumerated:

First, in accord with all that we have said previously and the proofs that were derived from the writings of Muslim scholars, including the hadith-reports that spoke about the necessity of the Imamate, the existence of the Imam as a perfect and unique embodiment of humanity serves as a link between the material and the spiritual world. If the Imam is absent the human species will be extinct. If there is no Imam then God cannot be known or worshipped perfectly. Without the Imam the link between the material and the spiritual become severed.

The heart of the Imam is like the source of electricity that distributes light to numerous lamps. The illumination and energization of the hidden universe first mirrors on the heart of the Imam and then from there it reflects on the hearts of humankind. The Imam is the heart of the created universe and the leader and guide of humankind. It is evident that his presence and absence have an impact upon these actualities. After all these, can one ask what benefit accrues from the invisible existence of the Imam? I think that you are raising this objection on behalf of someone else who does not have a real understanding of the meaning of wilayat and the Imamate and who does not see the Imam as more than a legal expert and an administrator of justice, whereas the responsibilities of the wilayat and the Imamate are much more than these external functions.

In a long tradition reported from Imam Sadiq it is related that Imam Sajjad said:

We are the leaders of the Muslims, God's proofs for His creatures, masters of the believers, guides for the godfearing, and those invested with discretionary authority over the affairs of Muslims. We are the security for the dwellers of the earth, just as the stars are the security of the dwellers of the heavens. It is because of us that the heavens descend on the earth whenever God permits. It is because of us that the rain descends and blessings of earth come out of it. If we had not been on earth its dwellers would have been consumed in it.

He then went on to say:

From the day God created Adam until today He has not left the earth without a competent authority (=proof=hujjat). But this authority is sometimes manifest and well known; at other times he is in occultation and in concealment. The earth will not be void of such an authority until the Day of Judgement. If there is no Imam, God will not be worshipped.

Sulayman, the narrator, asked Imam Sadiq: "How can people benefit from the existence of an Imam who is in occultation?" The Imam said: "In the same way as they benefit from the sun behind the clouds<sup>9</sup>."

In this and other traditions of this kind the existence of the twelfth Imam and the benefit derived from him are compared to the benefit derived from the sun hidden behind the clouds. To elaborate on this imagery let us remind ourselves of the way natural science explains the phenomenon. It is established in natural science and in astronomy that the sun is the center of our solar system. The laws of gravity protect the earth from falling into an abyss, and permit the earth to revolve around the sun, generating the distinction between day and night and different seasons according to its position in relation to the sun. The thermal energy produced by the sun is the source of life on earth and its light illuminates the otherwise dark earth. This benefit accrues to the earth regardless of the fact of whether the sun is shining directly or from behind the clouds. In other words, all its functions (illumination, providing energy, growth, etc.) are intact even when it shines from behind the clouds. In fact, whether it is from behind the dark clouds or at night when we think the sun is not present, we are still recipients of the sun's thermal energy and all other benefits that are critical for our survival on earth.

The existence of the Imam is like the sun behind the clouds that benefits the dwellers of the earth. He is the heart of humankind and its existential guide. In order for his benefits to reach humanity it does not matter whether he is manifest or in concealment. Let us recall our previous discussions about the necessity of the Prophethood and Imamate and review all their aspects so that we can appreciate the true meaning of wilayat. This review will help us to understand the most important benefit of having an Imam from the progeny of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny), whether manifest or in concealment. As we ponder this matter, we are actually enjoying the blessings of this Imam's invisible existence.

As for other benefits enumerated by you, Engineer Madani, of which people are deprived, actually, both from the direction of God and from the existence of the Imam, there is no obstacle to these benefits reaching the people. The problem is with the people themselves. If these obstructions could be removed and if the people worked towards creating the just order and toward preparing to launch God's government by spreading the right information and strengthening the character of the people to receive the Imam's leadership, then the Imam would appear to lead humanity towards the creation of the divine order on earth.

It is possible that someone might say: Under the circumstances when the overall situation is not favorable to the appearance of the Imam, why should we put ourselves in the dangerous situation of trying to prepare for his return? In response to this it must be pointed out that a Muslim's actions in this connection should not be motivated by the personal gain of some individuals; rather, it should become the goal of each and every person to endeavor for the social reforms affecting all people. Seriousness of purpose in improving the conditions of the people and in removing causes of injustice and tyranny in society are regarded as the most meritorious act of worship in Islam.

Again, it is possible that someone might say: The endeavors of one or a few individuals trying to change the conditions in society may come to nothing. Hence, one should not even try to do anything. Moreover,

in principle, it might be asked what wrong have I done to be deprived of meeting my Imam? In response to this one can point out the benefit that accrues to an individual and to the society in general when we endeavor to raise the standard of thinking and moral awareness among people, informing them about the lofty goals of Islam and bringing them closer to the goals of the Imam (peace be upon him). By doing so we have actually fulfilled our obligation as a follower of the Imam. In return, we have attained the highest reward of having furthered the realization of an ideal society, even if merely by a step. Any rational person can attest to this benefit of striving to further the divine purposes for human society. It is for this reason that there are numerous traditions that speak about the merits of awaiting deliverance through the appearance of the twelfth Imam, and which regard this awaiting as a form of serving God<sup>10</sup>.

Second, faith in the Hidden Imam and awaiting deliverance through his return is a source of hope and peace for the hearts of the believers. Such a hope is one of the major causes of the success and advancement of the Islamic ideal. Any group of people that becomes bogged down by pessimism and despair also suffers from self-imposed negativism that leads to the defeat of the purpose.

There is no doubt that the social and political turmoil in many parts of the world, the decline of moral and ethical vision, the deprivation and poverty suffered by the downtrodden, the spread of tools of various forms of imperialistic intervention in the affairs of the weaker societies, the arms race among the powerful countries --all these -- have led sensitive and conscientious thinkers around the globe to become concerned and even, to a certain extent, pessimistic about the ability of human society to deliver itself from its self-cultivated gradual destruction.

The only door that has remained open for humanity is the door of hope in the darkness of despair. That hope lies in the divine intervention in human affairs by the sending of a divinely guided leader, the Mahdi, to establish a godly society founded upon the divinely ordained laws. Indeed, it is this hope that gives solace to the disturbed hearts of those who have suffered injustices. It is the hope of seeing that government based on the acknowledgement of the Unity of God which has safeguarded the faith of the people, and has made them firm in their commitments to God. It is faith in the ultimate victory of truth that has made these people seek an active role in working towards social reforms and other related matters.

Seeking the help of God under these circumstances helps human beings to avoid becoming hopeless in the face of continued atrocities and wrongs committed against the innocent. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) laid the foundation of this positive attitude by introducing the universal program of reform under the divinely guided leadership that will undertake to unite human resources in creating the ethical order proclaimed in the Qur'an.

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin has conveyed this positive aspect of the hope of deliverance in the tradition in which he says: "To hope for deliverance and release in itself functions as the most profound form of deliverance<sup>11</sup>."

To conclude our discussion at this point, faith in the promised Mahdi has made it possible for the Shi'a

community to hope and work for the ideal. It has eliminated the negative spirit of pessimism, engendering in it the positive spirit of confidence in the human ability to work for its betterment. The belief has, furthermore, required the followers of the twelfth Imam to fight against the forces of disbelief, materialism, corruption, and injustice, and to work for the government of God, the perfection of the human intellect and the establishment of true peace through justice on earth, and to further human knowledge and technology. It is for this reason that the hope for deliverance during the occultation has been regarded as the best form of divine worship and martyrdom in the path of truth in the numerous traditions reported from the ahl al-bayt<sup>12</sup>.

## **The Twelfth Imam Endeavors to Defend Islam during the Occultation**

One of the orations of the Nahj al-balagha points to the fact that the Imam of the Age during the occultation also is engaged in furthering the cause of Islam and solving the problems faced by the Muslims as much as he can. Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib said:

They (i.e., Muslims) took to the right and the left piercing through to the ways of evil and leaving the paths of guidance. Do not make haste for a matter which is to happen and is awaited, and do not wish for delay in what the morrow is to bring for you. For, how many people make haste for a matter, but when they get it they begin to wish they had not got it. How near is today to the dawning of tomorrow. O people, this is the time for the occurrence of every promised event and the approach of things which you do not know.

Whoever from us (i.e., ahl al-bayt) will exist during these days will move through them with a burning lamp and will tread on the footsteps of the virtuous, in order to unfasten knots, to free slates, to divide the united and unite the divided. He will be in concealment (sitra) from people. The stalker will not find his footprints even though he pursues with his eye. Then a group of people will be sharpened like the sharpening of swords by the blacksmith. Their sight will be brightened by the revelation (tanzil, i.e., the Qur'an), the interpretation will be put in their ears and they will be given drinks of wisdom, morning and evening<sup>13</sup>.

The apparent sense of this oration suggests that during the time of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, people were awaiting events about which the Prophet had informed them. In all probability, it was information related to the occultation. The presumable sense of the oration suggests the Imam during the period of concealment would live an extremely veiled life. But he will endeavor to solve the problems facing the community with deep insight and will vindicate the sanctity of Islam. He will remove the difficulties and will come to the aid of the wronged ones. He will disperse the group that would have come together to destroy the Islamic foundations. He will eliminate all the organizations that he would identify as being detrimental to the purposes of God. He will provide the necessary preliminaries needed for bringing about a beneficial society. With the blessed presence of the Imam of the Age a group of people will be trained to defend

the religion, and will be inspired by the Qur'anic sciences in their resolutions about the ideal Muslim society.

Dr. Fahimi: I wanted you to explain to me the reason as to why in our traditions, that is the Sunni hadith, the existence of the Mahdi, especially his other names like Qa'im and Sahib al-'amr (the Master of the Command = the one entrusted with the command), is not mentioned. However, since it is getting very late in the night, I should keep this question for our next session.

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To be sure, it was quite late at night. The meeting was adjourned with the next date announced. It was decided that we should meet at Dr. Fahimi's house.

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1. Ithbat al-wasiyya, p. 206
  2. Ithbat al-hudat, Vol. 2, p. 393
  3. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 51, p. 217
  4. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 91
  5. Ibid., Vol. 52, p. 113
  6. Ibid., Vol. 51, p. 153
  7. There are a number of passages in the Qur'an that require Muslims to abide by the terms of the treaty to which they are signatories. See, for instance, Sura Ma'ida, 1; Mu'minun, 8; and Isra', 34
  8. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 96x
  9. Yanabi' al-mawadda, Vol. 2, p. 317
  10. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 122-150
  11. Ibid., p. 122
  12. Ibid., p. 122-150
  13. Nahj al-balagha, Vol. 2, Sermon No. 146

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