

Chapter 12: How Will the Imam Know That the Time for the Appearance (Zuhur) Has Come?

The meeting started on time. Dr. Jalali welcomed the group and opened the session with his question.

Dr. Jalali: How will the Imam of the Age know that the time for his emergence has arrived? If it is said that at that moment he will receive the information from God, then it becomes necessary that he too, like the Prophets, receives revelation. In that case there would be no difference between a Prophet and an Imam.

Mr. Hoshyar: First of all, it must be pointed out that both the rational arguments and hadith that speak about the Imamate regard it possible that the sacred existence of the Imam has contact with the hidden world. At times of dire necessity the Imam is empowered to know such religious truths. In some traditions it is reported that the Imam can hear the voice of an angel, although he does not see him¹.

Consequently, it is possible that God, the Almighty, might inform the twelfth Imam through inspiration. Imam Sadiq has related:

One of us, the Imams, is victorious although in concealment. When God wills to make his task public He will impact his heart with a hint, and he will emerge and take charge of the affairs with God's command².

It is reported by Abu Jarud, who came to meet with Imam Baqir and asked him to tell him about the Master of the Command. The Imam said:

At night he would appear to be one of the most fearful persons, whereas in the morning he will turn into one of the most confident and secure persons. His program will be revealed to him in a matter of one night and a day.¹ Abu Jarud went on to ask: "Will he receive revelation?" The Imam said: "Yes, he will receive revelation. But it will not be the revelation Prophets receive. Rather, it will be a revelation similar to the one ascribed to Maryam, the daughter of 'Imran, to the mother of Moses and to a honey bee. O Abu Jarud, the Qa'im of the family of the Prophet is more respectable than Maryam, the mother of

Moses and a honey bee!³

These and other similar traditions suggest that the Imams too receive revelation and inspiration, while the difference between the two divinely ordained offices of the Prophet and the Imam remains intact. After all, the Prophet is the lawgiver and received the norms and the injunctions of the Shari'a through revelation. On the other hand, the Imam is merely a protector of the law who does not receive the injunctions and the laws through revelation.

Moreover, it is possible that the Prophet has informed the Imams about the actual time of the Mahdi's appearance, through his provision of some indications about the signs of appearance that shall occur at the time. The Imam of the Age is also awaiting the fulfillment of these signs. For instance, in the following tradition the Prophet is reported to have predicted the emergence of the Mahdi. He said:

When the time of the zuhur arrives, God will bring the sword and the standard of the Mahdi to a sound calling out: 'O God's friend, rise and kill the enemy of God!⁴

One piece of probable documentation that is provided in the hadith is the tradition that describes God's sealed instructions given for each Imam about their role by means of a revelation to the Prophet who handed that scroll to 'Ali b. Abi Talib. When 'Ali assumed the caliphate he opened the scroll and read the instructions for him and followed them during his public mission. Similarly, each Imam following him did the same thing during their period of Imamate. At present the sealed scroll with the instructions for the twelfth Imam is with him⁵.

The Preparation for the Emergence Will Take Place Overnight

There are many traditions from the Imams that describe the events in the last days before the rise of the Mahdi which will actually prepare the way for his revolution and its ultimate success. Moreover, these events will occur overnight, advancing his plans and ushering in the final advent. For instance, in a tradition reported by 'Abd al-'Azim Hasani, he cites Imam Jawad saying:

'Our Qa'im is that Mahdi who should be awaited during his occultation and should be obeyed when he appears. He will be my third descendant. I solemnly declare by swearing upon God who selected Muhammad to be His Prophet and favored us with the Imamate that if there remains only one day in the life of this world, God will prolong it so much that the Mahdi will appear and fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with tyranny and wickedness. God will carry out His reform work overnight just as He accomplished the task He assigned to Moses overnight when he went to fetch fire for his wife and returned with the crown of Prophethood.' He then added: 'One of the best deeds of our followers is to await for deliverance [through our Qa'im]⁶.'

Similarly, the Prophet declared that the Mahdi is among his descendants and that God will accomplish his task overnight⁷. Imam Sadiq related a tradition in which he explained the reason for keeping the birth

of the twelfth Imam concealed and then added: 'God will help him accomplish his task overnight⁸.' Finally, in a tradition from Imam Husayn, he says: 'In my ninth descendant a tradition from Joseph and a tradition from Moses will recur. He will be the Qa'im from the ahl al-bayt. God will help him accomplish his task overnight⁹.'

Awaiting Deliverance through the Appearance of the Imam

Dr. Jalali: What are the Muslims supposed to do during the period of occultation? In other words, what are their obligations during this period?

Mr. Hoshyar: Our scholars have identified and written in their books certain things Muslims ought to do during the occultation: to pray for the twelfth Imam; to do charitable works for him; to perform hajj and to appoint someone to do that on his behalf; to seek his help and assistance in times of difficulty, and so on. There is no doubt that all these suggestions are praiseworthy and there is no need to enter into any discussion about them. However, the most important obligation mentioned in the sources and that which needs further elaboration is awaiting deliverance through him (intizar faraj). To some extent, this obligation has been neglected and no detailed discussion about it has been undertaken. There are many traditions from the Imams, both recommending the awaiting and enumerating its merits and excellences, during the occultation. Let us cite some examples:

Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) says:

Any one who dies with the love (wilayat) of the ahl al-bayt while awaiting deliverance [through the appearance of the Qa'im], resembles the one who will be in the Qa'im's tent¹⁰.

Imam 'Ali Rida (peace be upon him) reporting from his forefathers and from the Prophet relates the hadith from the latter, who said: 'The best deed of my community is to await for the deliverance¹¹.'

Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him) says:

Any one who awaits our government, resembles the one who, in the way of God, has rolled in his own blood¹².

In another tradition Imam Rida praises the one who awaits the deliverance, and says:

How praiseworthy are patience and awaiting for deliverance! Have you not heard that God says in the Qur'an: "You await, and We too are awaiting?" So be patient because deliverance will come after despair. Those who were before you were even more patient than you¹³.

There are numerous traditions on a similar theme. The Imams always used to advise their followers to await deliverance. They reminded them that the mere act of awaiting for deliverance is a kind of emancipation. The one who awaits is like the one who fights against the disbelievers on the battlefield

and has rolled in his own blood. As such, there is no doubt that the most weighty obligation for Muslims during the occultation is to anticipate deliverance. Let us now consider the meaning of this awaiting or anticipating deliverance.

How can a person who anticipates deliverance acquire the greatest reward that accrues to the one who does good? Is it sufficient for the one awaiting the deliverance to materialize to just say with their tongue that they are awaiting the appearance of the Imam of the Age? Or, perhaps, from time to time, he should cry out and pray: "O God, send the deliverance through the Imam of the Age!" Or, after the daily prayers or in the holy shrines he should beseech God to hasten the deliverance! Or, following the blessing on the Prophet and his family he should add: *allahumma 'ajjil farajahu-shsharif*, meaning, "O God, hasten the deliverance through this noble [Imam]!" Or, maybe he should read the special prayer of *nudba* (lamentation) on Friday mornings with a loud lament and sob.

All these recommendations are in their own place fitting. However, I do not think that by merely saying these things a person can attain the true benefit of awaiting the deliverance, whose excellences are enumerated in several traditions on the subject. Especially the comparison of the one awaiting the deliverance with the one dying on the battlefield fighting against the enemy of God, as related in one of the hadith above, cannot be just an exaggeration, since it is coming from the Imam to whom no false statement can be ascribed.

Imagine a person or persons who escape from every kind of social responsibility, from the moral responsibility of commanding the good and forbidding the evil, from taking a stance against corrupt and sinful behavior, from doing anything to stop injustices, by simply saying: 'O God, let the deliverance through the Imam of the Age be imminent so that he can prevent this corrupt behavior!' Can your conscience accept that this person's status is comparable to the status of the one who is killed defending his religion? Can he be equal to the one who has sacrificed all his wealth, his family, and his comfort and security in the way of God and attained the status of a martyr?

To be sure, there is a deeper meaning and significance to the act of awaiting the appearance of the Imam. In order to understand that let me preface the discussion with two general observations:

First, in the light of the traditions dealing with the function of the Mahdi, it is possible to suggest that the program that the Imam intends to implement is ideal, comprehensive and, of course, difficult. It has as its target the reform of the entire world, the defeat of the forces of tyranny and wickedness in their entirety, the raising of Islam as the official religion of all the inhabitants of this world, the removal of prejudices and wrong attitudes from the minds of the people so that they can all live in peace and harmony under the government of God. In addition, the Mahdi's revolution aspires to found a global community under one God, one religion, and one ideal system of law, and to bring all other communities under the united flag of Islam.

Obviously, such a goal is not easy to accomplish. This program is practicable only when the human

mind is prepared to accept those goals and to go beyond the narrow confines of materialistic ideologies to realize the value of God's guidance for humanity. The need for the revolution and the desire to promulgate the divine blueprint for an ideal human society have to come from the people who have actively participated in preparing the way for the twelfth Imam to launch his program for the new world order.

Second, in view of several traditions reported from the Imams, it appears that the Imam of the Age and his supporters will overcome the forces of disbelief and godless materialism by undertaking jihad. It will be with the power of just warfare that the forces of God's enemy and the supporters of disbelief and injustices will be exterminated. There are numerous traditions that speak about the impending use of force to achieve the goal. For example, Imam Baqir said:

The Mahdi resembles his grandfather Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) in the way in which the latter began his struggle with the sword. He will kill the enemies of God, His Prophet, and those who have oppressed the people and have led them astray. He will gain victory through sword and creating fear [in the enemy]. None of his army will face defeat¹⁴.

A companion of Imam Baqir by the name of Bashir told the Imam:

People say that when the Mahdi launches his revolution his tasks will become easy for him and there will be no bloodshed even to the smallest measure of a wound made for the purpose of cupping.

The Imam said: 'By God, that is not the case. If such a thing were possible it would have taken place for the Prophet. On the contrary, his teeth were wounded and his forehead injured on the battlefield. I solemnly declare that the revolution of the Master of the Command will not take place without our endeavors on the battlefield and without our blood being spilt.' He then wiped his forehead with his hand¹⁵.

The traditions suggest that the victory of the Mahdi's revolution will not simply be the result of God's endorsement and endowment of some hidden power to the Imam. It is not expected to succeed without manifest forces like a miracle that brings to fruition its program of reform and revival; victory does not depend on the ordinary course of events. Besides this divine endorsement the revolution will rest upon a well-equipped army that is capable of handling the most advanced weaponry in the contemporary arsenals.

With these observations derived from different traditions about the final revolution under the Mahdi we can begin to understand the preconditions for the advent of the Imam. This will also help us in grasping the responsibilities Muslims have towards this revolution, and then in judging whether Muslims today are ready to actively support this difficult task and whether their awaiting for the establishment of the ideal rule under the Qa'im has any merit.

My own understanding, which is based on the traditions from the ahl al-bayt, indicates that the most important duty of the Muslims during this period when the twelfth Imam lives a life of invisible existence (ghayba) is, first of all, to work diligently at reforming ourselves from within and with all the necessary seriousness. Muslims should adorn themselves with Islamic virtues, perform all the duties that are made obligatory on them, and apply the directives provided by the Qur'an in their daily lives. Second, they should extract the social teachings of Islam from the teachings of the Qur'an, the Prophet and the ahl al-bayt, in order to execute those perfectly in their societies.

By implementing the Islamic economic programs they should resolve their economic problems and fight against poverty, unemployment, and concentration of illicit wealth. By adopting the divinely ordained laws they should rid themselves of injustices and corruption. In short, they should commit themselves to set in motion the realization of an Islamic political, social, economic, and legal system, and present this to the world as a viable alternative.

More importantly, Muslims should learn modern sciences with extreme seriousness in order to not only benefit themselves but also other societies around the world. They should, in fact, seek to be the leaders in all fields of human knowledge. Through their own religious and scientific progress they should demonstrate to the entire world that Islamic laws and ethics can serve as the ideal global system that strikes the balance between this and the next world. Moreover, by combining the concerns of a complete legal codex with the spiritual and moral concerns of the Islamic system, Muslims can become the source of emulation for a humane political, social and economic system.

In other words, Muslims have the obligation of excelling in every possible field related to the betterment of human society in order to provide each discipline with the moral and spiritual dimensions that Islam seeks from its followers. It is only then that they can expect to lead and to establish an ideal Islamic system under the leadership of the Mahdi.

Those who are engaged in these endeavors to make the revolution of the Mahdi possible and successful are the ones who are truly awaiting for deliverance through the appearance of the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him). These hard-working, self-sacrificing individuals are the soldiers of the twelfth Imam and can be compared with those who are actually on the field of battle fighting the forces of evil and wickedness.

As for those people who expect their problems to be solved by the political, social, and economic system created by those who have no commitment to the faith or to its moral and spiritual components, have so far created systems which give rise to inequalities, immoderation in spending, injustices in distribution of resources, and the many other evils with which humanity is confounded today. The situation is so desperate that it is hard to imagine the level of exploitation, corruption, and conflict that is generated by the new wealth and power, the byproducts of scientific and technological advancements.

The rich countries intend to dominate; the poor countries have shamelessly submitted to the overbearing compromises negotiated by their own rulers, the majority of whom are corrupt and morally bankrupt. In

order to remain in power, they have sold out their own peoples and countries to their powerful masters, who make for them their decisions through a remote control of providing destructive military hardware for use against their own citizens.

Now, individual Muslims who sit around and do not even think about these matters that face their fellow Muslims cannot be said to anticipate the appearance of the twelfth Imam. These people do not have the necessary preparation to institute Islamic world government, even if they repeat a hundred times: *allahumma 'ajjil farajahu-shsharif*, meaning, "O God, hasten the deliverance through this noble [Imam]!"

This is what I have understood from the traditions that speak about the merits of anticipating the appearance of the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him). The entire philosophy of *intizar* ('awaiting,' 'anticipation') is summed up by Imam Sadiq who said:

Prepare yourselves for the revolution of our Qa'im, even if it means to gather an arrow [for fighting God's enemies]¹⁶.

Abd al-Hamid Wasiti mentioned to Imam Baqir: 'In anticipation of the occurrence [of the Qa'im's revolution] we have even withdrawn from engaging in trade!' The Imam said:

O 'Abd al-Hamid, do you think that the one who has given up his life in the way of God, God does not make deliverance guaranteed for him? By God, God will certainly deliver him. May God have mercy on the one who keeps our mission alive.

Abd al-Hamid asked: "What happens if I die before the deliverance comes?" The Imam replied:

Any of those who say: 'If I meet the Qa'im I will help him,' then such a person will share the status of the one who will have fought near the Imam [defending him]. Indeed, he will share the status of the one who will have been killed [defending him]¹⁷.

According to Abu Basir, one of most prominent companions of the sixth Imam, one day Imam Sadiq told his companions: "Should I inform you about a deed without which God does not accept people's achievements?" Abu Basir told the Imam to do so. The Imam said:

To bear witness about God's unity and Muhammad's prophethood; to acknowledge God's commands and prohibitions; to love us and disassociate from our enemies; to accept the authority of the Imams, and to act with piety and seriousness; to adopt gentleness and to await the deliverance through the appearance of the Qa'im.

He, then, went on to say:

We will have the authority, which God will establish at the proper time. Whoever wishes to be a companion and close associate of our Qa'im should await deliverance through him. Moreover, such a person should adopt piety and virtuous life and continue to anticipate our Qa'im in that state. If they live

like that and if they die before the advent of the Qa'im, then they will reap the reward of someone who has actually been with the Qa'im. O my followers, be serious and work hard while awaiting the Qa'im's emergence. O you who are blessed with God's mercy, may you taste the sweetness of the final victory¹⁸.

Investigation into the Traditions against the Rise (qiyam)

Engineer Madani: Mr. Hoshyar! From your discussions on the subject of awaiting the appearance of the Mahdi, it would seem that during the occultation of the twelfth Imam the Shi'is are required to adopt an active posture and work to establish an Islamic government, to endeavor to execute an Islamic political and social system, and to engage in the jihad to achieve all that. By doing so, as you have pointed out, they would be actually preparing the way for the emergence of the Imam to launch his global revolution.

I suspect that your interpretation might not be in agreement with the subject of some other traditions. As you know there are a number of traditions which forbid any involvement of the Shi'is in the revolutionary movements before the rise of the Mahdi. It would be highly beneficial to discuss some of those traditions.

Mr. Hoshyar: I am grateful to you for reminding me of a different perspective on the philosophy of awaiting. It is relevant to investigate these traditions in order to evaluate their authenticity. Thus, first we should examine their chain of transmission to determine their reliability. Second, we should examine their content to determine the validity of the view that is derived from them. However, let me preface our investigation into these two areas by a general remark on the following two topics:

(1) The question of governance in religion

(2) The investigation of the hadith-reports

Governance within Religion

On the basis of the teachings of Islam one can say that Islam is not a religion confined to belief and worship. It is a complete system of belief, worship, ethics, politics and society. Islamic principles and teachings can be generally classified into two parts:

(1) Individual injunctions that are required of each believing man and woman, such as the five daily prayers, fasting of Ramadan, ritual purification, annual pilgrimage, and so on. A person does not need a government or social organization in order to carry these out. He is capable of performing them on his own, because these injunctions deal with the God-human relationship.

(2) Collective injunctions that are required of a group of believers, such as engaging in just war (jihad), commanding the good and forbidding the evil; administering justice, resolving conflicts, instituting legal punishments, and so on. These injunctions are social and political, dealing with the individual's

relationship to other humans. As a member of a society, each person needs to learn to respect the rights of others and to protect his own. God has provided principles of inter-personal human relationships which are fundamentally based on justice and equity.

Hence, the Islamic system has taken care to regulate this relationship with due consideration to cover all spheres of humans' involvement with each other. In other words, Islam provides a comprehensive legal and religious system that caters to the needs of the society without making any distinction between temporal and spiritual realms of human existence. For instance, jihad in God's way is an obligation to defend oneself and others living in the society. Islamic law furnishes all the necessary regulations to cover every aspect of the Muslim community's obligation to defend and fight for its rights. Thus, the Qur'an in requiring the obligation of jihad says:

Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is God's. (Baqara [2], 193)

But if they (i.e., the unbelievers) break their oaths after their covenant and thrust at your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief; they have no sacred oaths; haply they will give over. (Tawba [9], 12)

There are numerous such verses that indicate that Muslims have an obligation to spread Islam and fight the forces of unbelief and persecution. It, moreover, calls upon Muslims to mobilize themselves and stand firm against the enemy:

Make ready for them whatever force and strings of horses you can, to terrify thereby the enemy of God and your enemy, and others besides them that you know not; God knows them. (Anfal [8], 60)

Consequently, it is correct to surmise that establishing and instituting social and political structures to further the cause of the Muslim community is part of Islamic religious teaching. Muslims have the obligation to do everything within their means to further these interests and to inspire the enemy with a fear and awe of Islam so that they will not try to intervene and interfere with their affairs.

The Obligation to Command the Good and Forbid the Evil

This obligation is one of the most important teachings of Islam for achieving Islamic justice. It actually forms the basis for the existence of government in Islam. It is the duty of every Muslim to stand firm against any act of injustice and corrupt sinful behavior. The spread of true religion is impossible without moral purification -- which provides the justification for this social duty. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an that require Muslims to undertake the responsibility to command the good and forbid the evil as part of their moral responsibility as believers in One God. Thus, the Qur'an says:

Let there be one nation of you, calling to good, and bidding to honor, and forbidding dishonor; those are prosperers. (Al 'Imran, 104)

You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding honor, and forbidding dishonor, and believing

in God. (Al 'Imran, 110)

Concluding Remarks

All the above discussion instills in us a confidence that Islam as a religion demands the creation of a worldwide society which acknowledges, on the one hand, an individual's personal relationship with God by requiring him or her to carry out the injunctions imposed on them by God; and, on the other, an individual's responsibility as a member of a society in which interpersonal relationships are regulated by the principles of justice and equity as defined by God's revelation.

Consequently, the establishment of government to manage the affairs of humanity was part and parcel of the Islamic creed. Just as God provided the laws to direct human affairs, God also provided directives pertaining to the exercise of authority in Muslim society. How can one imagine a duty to fight without any guidance in the matter of who can command the Muslim army, or make critical decisions about the war strategies, and so on? In other words, Muslims needed both the law and the executor of the divine will on earth. Hence, it is accurate to say that governance is an integral part of Islamic faith and tradition.

The Prophet as the Leader of the Muslims

The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) was in actuality the head of the Muslim community during his lifetime. As God's representative he managed the affairs of the community. He had been given a wide range of authority in matters related to the everyday existence of his community and the first Muslim polity. He, according to the Qur'an, had discretionary control over his followers' affairs¹⁹. In another place the Qur'an says:

So judge between them according to what God has sent down, and do not follow their caprices.
(Ma'ida [5], 48)

Accordingly, the Prophet of God held two positions: on the one hand, by means of revelation he was connected to God, from Whom he received the injunctions which he conveyed to the people; on the other, he was in charge as the head of the community, which he organized politically and socially by promulgating the laws of Islam.

A study of the Prophet's biography reveals that he was practically in charge of the affairs of the community and ruled over them. He used to appoint governors and commanders, judges and administrators; he used to declare war, dispatch armies for defense and oversee every aspect of community life in the Muslim polity²⁰.

The position that he held in the community was divinely ordained. In accordance with his appointment he was to legislate in the areas of the social and political life of the people as members of the Islamic umma, and see to the law's execution. Whereas Muslims were required to participate in the warfare, the

Prophet was to prepare them for it and to call upon them when it was the proper jihad. For instance, the Qur'an commands the Prophet to encourage people to participate in warfare in the way of God:

O Prophet, urge on the believers to fight. (Anfal [8], 65)

O Prophet, struggle (jihad) with the unbelievers and hypocrites, and be thou harsh with them. (Tawba [9], 73)

Surely We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, so that thou mayest judge between people by that which God has shown thee. So be not an advocate for the traitors. (Nisa' [4], 105)

Besides being the Prophet, which meant that he received the message from God and delivered it to the people, he was the head of the Muslims, invested with power to make decisions and give judgements, administer justice and institute penalties. In other words, to perform all those functions that strictly speaking belong to the head of a state. In this regard, the Qur'an required Muslims to obey the commands of God that were relayed to them through the Prophet. Thus the Qur'an says:

O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. (Nisa' [4], 59)

And obey God, and His Messenger, and do not quarrel together, and so lose heart, and your power depart. (Anfal, 46)

We sent not ever any Messenger, but that he should be obeyed, by the leave of God. (Nisa' [4], 64)

In all these verses obedience to the Prophet is prefaced by obedience to God. Muslims are commanded to obey God and the Prophet. Obedience to God is materialized by accepting the ordinances sent through the Prophet. In addition, Muslims are specifically required to obey the Prophet's commands, which include all that he, as the head of the community, requires Muslims to carry out. It is evident that obedience to the Prophet is derived from an obedience to God, and it is in this sense that it has become obligatory. It is accurate to maintain that governance was, from the very inception of Islam as a religion, an integral part of the Prophet's function as the leader of the community and its social-political structure.

Islamic Governance after the Prophet

Following his death, the prophethood and the revelation were terminated. But the ordinances and laws of religion, including the Islamic social-political programs, remained with Muslims as the directives of Islam. Here one should raise an important question: Did the end of the Prophethood mean that the governance of the community also was to be terminated? Did the Prophet himself conceive of the future of his community? Did he not leave any directives to ensure that his legacy would continue after him? Or, did he simply leave the entire issue of the leadership to the community to do as it pleased?

The Shi'a believe that the Prophet of Islam was also the statesman and ruler over the affairs of the

community. He effected the programs that were revealed to him. He understood fully the critical importance of leadership for the umma. In order for Muslims to continue as a community they needed governance under a qualified leader who would implement the Islamic goals for humanity.

The Prophet himself was aware that his community could not survive without a just government to carry on his mission. It was for this reason that from the beginning of his mission, as the opportunity presented itself, and in accordance with the instructions received from God, the Prophet introduced 'Ali b. Abi Talib as his caliph and the Imam of the community after him. The books written by both the Sunni and the Shi'i scholars have recorded several occasions when 'Ali b. Abi Talib was introduced as the vicegerent of the Prophet. Among these occasions is the monumental speech of the Prophet during the Farewell Pilgrimage, in the Ghadir Khumm, when he stood in the midst of his community, including the major figures of early Islam, and said:

'O people who is more worthy ('awla) [in the eyes of] the believers than their ownelves?' They said: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'God is my Master and I am the Master of the Believers and I am worthier in their eyes than their ownelves. Whoever has me for his Master has 'Ali for his Master.' He said it thrice, and according to Ahmad, the Imam of the Hanbalis, four times²¹.

The above proclamation at the Ghadir Khumm regarding the leadership of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib occurred in the last year of the Prophet's life (10 AH/632 CE). Following the proclamation 'Umar b. al-Khattab met 'Ali and congratulated him saying: "O son of Abu Talib, congratulations for attaining the new position. From now on you are my master and the master of all believing men and women."

There are far too many such reports in the sources to mention. However, they all establish the fact that the Prophet made sure that his position as the ruler of the community would continue in 'Ali b. Abi Talib. He prepared him for this day on many occasions by giving him the necessary information about the responsibility he had. Moreover, he knew that 'Ali was endowed with infallibility and it was with the designation from God that he had acquired the position of the Imam after him.

'Ali too was aware of the great responsibility that was placed upon his shoulders. He was the protector of the Islamic ordinances and their executor. As such, the event at Ghadir Khumm was the culmination of a process that had begun in the early days of the Prophet's mission. In fact, 'Umar's statement while congratulating 'Ali indicates that he understood the meaning of the word mawla in its proper signification of a 'master.' Other Muslims also understood the Prophet's statement: 'Whoever has me for his Master has 'Ali for his Master,' as a statement of designation and, therefore, they paid their allegiance and remained loyal to him. Had the statement had any other than a political meaning, there would have been no need to pay allegiance.

'Ali b. Abi Talib, the Designated Caliph of the Prophet of God

Although the Prophet had ensured that his right to governance would continue through 'Ali b. Abi Talib's

designation to the Imamate, after his death a number of his close companions decided to acquire the caliphate for themselves. Taking advantage of the ignorance and weakness of the people they usurped the legitimate right of 'Ali to rule. This marked the deviation of Islamic governance from its true path. His refusal to pay allegiance to those who came to power and his several orations in which he critically evaluated the situation after the death of the Prophet, indicate that 'Ali b. Abi Talib clearly saw the rupture between the ideal Islamic governance and the one that was pursued by the companions. Moreover, these orations show the importance that was attached to the question of the comprehensive governance of the community, and not simply its religious and spiritual dimensions. The caliphs had not usurped the religious and spiritual authority of 'Ali, to whom they referred all their problems in those areas; rather, they had usurped his political power, the power to effect the laws of Islam.

When, finally, he assumed the caliphate in 35 AH/656 CE, he shouldered the comprehensive power which included everything that the Prophet had done as the ruler. When Talha and Zubayr opposed his caliphate, they opposed this comprehensive aspect of his governance. They never opposed his religious and spiritual authority per se. Mu'awiya had disputed Imam 'Ali not in the matter of interpretation of an ordinance; rather he disputed him on his right of governance and his position as a comprehensive leader of the community.

From all this discussion it is possible to conclude that Islamic governance did not come to an end with the death of the Prophet. On the contrary, by appointing 'Ali, the Prophet ensured its perpetuity for posterity. It also demonstrates that the lawgiver of Islam never conceived of a system for the people which could do without governing the community's social-political structure. In other words, Islamic governance should be a permanent part of Muslim life in general throughout history.

Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib designated his son Hasan to follow him in his position as the Imam of the Muslims. In turn, Imam Hasan appointed his brother Husayn to succeed him in the Imamate. From Imam Husayn the Imamate went to his son Zayn al-'Abidin and in this way it continued until the line reached the last Imam, Hujjat b. al-Hasan (peace be upon him).

All these twelve Imams, besides being endowed with divine protection in the form of infallibility and profound knowledge of Islamic revelation, were also granted the wisdom to govern and rule in accordance with the divine laws and scales of justice. Hence, the Imamate of the community and the governance of the infallible leader are indispensable aspects of the ideal Muslim public order. And yet, apart from the short time of the governance by 'Ali b. Abi Talib, no other had been given the opportunity to rule in accordance with the laws of God and to restore a true direction to and generate confidence in Islamic public order.

Islamic Governance during the Period of Occultation

Now the question arises about the status of Islamic social-political programs during the occultation. What should the Muslims do when they do not have access to the Imam, the rightful ruler? Who should

take charge of leading the community to its divinely ordained goal? Should the faithful simply abandon the idea of following the tradition of the Prophet in matters of governance? Were the directives given by the Prophet relevant only during his own short period of earthly life, and will they again be implemented only when the Mahdi appears?

Must the majority of God's ordinances dealing with social–political–legal matters remain in abeyance during this period of the invisible presence of the twelfth Imam? In other words, are we to read these verses of the Qur'an and discuss them in the light of the hadith–reports in order to enlighten ourselves without trying to effect them in our contemporary social and political existence?

Doubtless a Muslim ought not regard these Islamic ideals and directives as in abeyance until a qualified leader like the Imam himself assumes the governance. In particular, no scholar would ever concede that these ideals were given to the Prophet so that later generations should merely discuss them, dispute about them and ultimately write them down for the future generations. If this is so, then one has no choice but to agree that neither the Prophet nor the Imams left all these directives for an Islamic governance only in the future age of the Mahdi. Under no circumstance can one say that Islam came to provide the community with ordinances and social–political legislation without providing it the means for executing these ideals through the executor of the divine will, the leader, the Imam.

The Obligations of Muslims during the Occultation

It is true that the Prophet and the infallible Imam were appointed by God to undertake the governance of the community affairs as their rulers, and that the Prophet and the Imam should exert themselves to execute the divine will in this regard. Nevertheless, the essential obligation lies on the shoulders of the people who should provide the critical support needed by the Prophet and the Imam to attain the power and use it for advancing the purposes of God.

As long as the people do not show their loyalty and obedience to these divinely designated leaders, it is simply unthinkable to see the ideal governance being effected. By the same token, during the absence of the Imam, as in our own times, Muslims have the responsibility to seriously work for the establishment of the Islamic form of government. Islam, even under present conditions, has not suspended the duty of Muslims to implement and to follow its directives. In fact, many Islamic rulings are directed towards the generality of the Muslim community:

Go forth, light and heavy! Struggle in God's way with your possessions and your selves; that is better for you, did you know. (Tawba [9], 41)

Struggle in the way of God with your possessions and your selves. (Saff [61], 11)

And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not. (Baqara [2], 190)

As to the thief, male and female, cut off the hands of both, as a recompense for what they have

earned, and a punishment exemplary from God; God is All-mighty, All-wise. (Ma'ida [5], 38)

The fornicatress and the fornicator -- scourge each one of them a hundred stripes, and in the matter of God's religion let no tenderness for them seize you . . . (Nur [24], 2)

O believers, be you securers of justice, witnesses for God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kinsmen, whether the man be rich or poor. (Nisa' [4], 135)

All these verses are addressed to the generality of the Muslims and demand from them that they respond to their social obligations that are related to the betterment of Islamic public order. It is evident that carrying out these social injunctions cannot be possible without an authority who can ensure its fair execution. The nature of injunctions dealing with public order inevitably requires a governing body invested with executive powers to effectuate Islamic ordinances. In other words, the comprehensive realization of an Islamic public order with all its spiritual, moral and legal dimensions is impossible without a government invested with executive powers. To practice Islam in all its dimensions necessarily requires the existence of a government that is committed to do its bidding. Thus the Qur'an says:

***He has laid down for you as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee, and that We charged Abraham with, Moses and Jesus: 'Perform religion, and scatter not regarding it.'* (Shura [42], 13.)**

It is possible to conclude from these general addresses of the Qur'an to all believing Muslims and the provisions made by the Prophet for giving permanence to the governance of Islamic public order through Islam's social-political-legal-moral teachings that during the occultation of the twelfth Imam Muslims have the obligation to work seriously towards the implementation of Islamic ideals in their everyday personal and social lives. As long as we believe that Islam came to provide happiness in this and the next world and, therefore, it legislated laws to cover every aspect of God-human and human interpersonal relationships, then we must maintain the necessity of managing our affairs in accordance with these laws.

This conclusion becomes even more pertinent if we remind ourselves that we also believe that these laws were not given for the short period of the Prophet's life only; they will be with us until God resurrects us for the Final Judgement. Hence, our endeavors to effect these norms today assume some urgency. Muslims must resolve to prepare themselves to be worthy of supporting the final revolution of the Mahdi by constantly evaluating their shortcomings and reforming themselves to undertake the great responsibility of making the Islamic public order the only viable order that can guarantee peace with justice and harmony on the earth.

Two Evidences

(1) The need to establish a government and to endeavor to make it stable is a rational need upon which

all reasonable persons agree. Islam has not only not rejected this rational deduction, it has actually sanctioned it. During the Battle of Uhud in the early days of Islam, when the false news about the Prophet having been killed was spread among the Muslims, the consequence of such a story was the demoralization of Muslim soldiers who immediately abandoned their positions and were scattered. That moment has been captured in the following verse of the Qur'an:

Muhammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? (Al 'Imran, 144)

Does it mean that after the Prophet dies Muslims should revert to their old habits? In other words, Islam is a reality that will remain even after the Prophet dies. Consequently, Muslims should assess their loyalty to the teachings of Islam and should work for its implementation without interruption. No explicit duty imposed by the Qur'an becomes invalidated by the death of the Prophet or the occultation of the Imam.

(2) The second evidence is provided by the Muslims during the early history in the aftermath of the Prophet's death. The companions had gathered in the Thaqifa of Banu Sa'ida, all in agreement that the governance of the Muslim polity had to continue through a new leader, the caliph. The disagreement touched upon the question of who that leader would be, not upon the need for the leadership itself. The Ansar maintained that the leader had to be one of their group; the Muhajirun disputed them and contended that the leadership actually belonged to the Meccans. The compromise that was proposed suggested a caliph from one and a commander from the other group. However, no one ever said that there was no need for a leader and that they could continue an umma (community) without anyone directing their social and political life.

More importantly, even 'Ali b. Abi Talib, who disagreed with the outcome of the Thaqifa deliberations and opposed their decision, knowing very well that he was being denied his right to lead the community at its most critical stage, did not even for a moment dispute the fundamental need for someone to continue to provide governance to the nascent Islamic polity. The caliphate, as it emerged after the Thaqifa was, in 'Ali b. Abi Talib's opinion, a deviation from its original goal, but it was still a necessary instrument for the continuation of the social-political life of the umma.

It was for this reason that he never attempted to undermine the caliphate.

On the contrary, realizing the danger that was posed by the political turmoil to Islam, he never refrained from offering the best advice for Islam's preservation. Moreover, he never prevented his most loyal supporters and family members from accepting official assignments under the caliphs. He was fully committed to the principle of governance for the continuation of Islamic public order in the future. In his dispute with the Khawarij, who seceded from his army in rebellion, and who had misused the Qur'anic verse: 'The judgement is God's alone' to rebel against 'Ali's authority, he refuted their interpretation by pointing out:

The statement is in itself a truth, but they infer an erroneous conclusion out of it. Indeed, there can be no judgement except that it belongs to God. However, they are implying that there should be no governance except that exercised by God. People necessarily need a ruler, whether he be godly or unjust, so that under his government a believer may be able to continue doing what he does, and an unbeliever may continue enjoying [his life] in it, until God's decree reaches its final decision in their regard.

[Moreover, the need to have the governance is underscored by the fact that] under his governance taxes can be collected and the enemy can be fought, and the highways kept secure and safe. [In addition,] the rights of the weak can be exacted from the strong, so that a godly person can live in peace and remain immune from the harm of a wicked person²².

Accordingly, one should not doubt the principle that establishment and continuation of the government is among the necessary things. Moreover, this responsibility has been laid on the shoulders of the people. When the Prophet or the Imam is accessible, the people should support and help him to manage the affairs of the nation; when the Imam is in occultation, the people should search for and elect a well qualified jurist (faqih), knowledgeable in the detail of the laws of Islam, fully experienced in the social and political realm, and endowed with political insight to administer the Muslim public order.

The justification for electing a qualified jurist to govern the Muslim polity is found in the hadith of the Imams who not only accepted the jurist's governance in the absence of the twelfth Imam, but even recommended that their followers seek such leaders among themselves. Such a person is capable of leading the Muslim umma and of executing the Islamic social and political program.

It is relevant to point out that the debate about Islamic government and its relation to the `governance of the jurist' (wilayat-i faqih) is intricate and needs a detailed exposition which we cannot undertake at this point in our discussion about the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him). Nevertheless, we will briefly treat the subject and conclude our discussion.

Our purpose in going through all these details about the necessity of Islamic governance during the occultation is to make you aware that when we consider traditions that object to any active involvement in social and political movements prior to the advent of the Mahdi, we should be aware that all those obligations are classified as part of the collective duties -- such as warfare, defence, institution of penalties, administration of justice, and so on and therefore are among the required matters of Islamic juridical tradition.

Accordingly, one can not doubt about their execution in a Muslim public order. In order to do so effectively, there ought to be a Muslim authority invested with the power to execute the social and political agenda of Islam. Hence, we should examine the traditions that encourage political quietism within the context of the need to manage Muslim affairs. I hope to take up this issue next time we meet and to elaborate on it in some detail so that we can arrive at our conclusion more objectively. It is running late, and we should adjourn now.

Dr. Jalali: Let me extend to you the invitation to meet once again here in my house for our next session.

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1. Kulyani, Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 271
 2. Ithbat al-hudat, Vol. 6, p. 364
 3. Ithbat al-hudat, Vol. 7, p. 172; Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 389
 4. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 389
 5. Kulayni, Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 279
 6. Ithbat al-hudat, Vol. 6, p. 420
 7. Suyuti, Kitab al-hawi li al-fatawa, Vol 2, p. 78
 8. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 96
 9. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 51, p. 133
 10. Kamal al-din, Vol. 2, p. 644
 11. Ibid
 12. Ibid
 13. Ibid., p. 645
 14. Bihar al-anwar, Vol 51, p. 218
 15. Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 358
 16. Ibid., p. 366
 17. Kamal al-din, Vol. 2, p. 644
 18. Nu'mani, Kitab al-ghayba, p. 211
 19. Nu'mani, Kitab al-ghayba, p. 211
 20. For details see: Shaykh 'Abd al-Haqq, Kitab al-taratib al-idariyya and Hafiz Abu 'Ubayd, Kitab al-amwal
 21. Yanabi' al-mawadda, p. 3
 22. Nahj al-balagha, Speech No. 39

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