

Chapter 13: Further Investigation in the Hadith-Reports

Dr. Jalali: I would request Mr. Hoshyar to continue our previous discussion on the traditions about the merits of awaiting deliverance (faraj) through the advent of the Mahdi.

Mr. Hoshyar: Let us get into our main topic of investigation in the traditions dealing with opposition to political and social activism during the occultation.

As we have pointed out a major part of Islamic teachings which deal with ordinances which relate the Muslim public order to the religiously required deeds. These include participation in the defense of one's family, home, property, and so on; warfare with those who oppress the people; commanding the good and forbidding evil; and all other duties that constitute a necessary prerequisite for a Muslim as a member of society, of a public order. However, it is possible that some people might escape from the burden of these societal obligations and cite a hadith or two to justify their complacency and satisfaction with merely performing some rituals that please them. It is for this reason that I think the traditions that they employ to justify such behavior must be carefully examined to determine their source and validity¹.

First Group of Traditions

There are traditions that advise the Shi'is not to accept the invitation to join a person who rises in armed revolt without first carefully examining his credentials and goals. These traditions, furthermore, require the Shi'is to reject the claims of leadership and the lofty goals of such individuals, even if they happen to be among the descendants of 'Ali b. Abi Talib.

First hadith: It is narrated from Muhammad b. Ya'qub, from 'Ali b. Ibrahim, from his father, from Safwan b. Yahya, from 'Isa b. al-Qasim, who said: I heard Imam Sadiq say:

Do not leave taqwa (fear of) God, the One and without any partners, and watch over yourselves constantly. I solemnly declare that if someone has chosen a shepherd to care for his sheep, but

afterward finds someone else who is more wise than the first one for the task, he will leave the first one and employ the services of the wiser one. By God, if you had two life-times, and you experimented with the first one, and were left with the second lifetime, then there would be no difficulty in utilizing the experience of the first lifetime. But the reality is other than this. Every person has no more than one self, for which, if it falls into peril, there is no possibility for repentance or return. Therefore, it is necessary for you to carefully evaluate and select the best way for your selves.

Hence, if one among us came to you and called upon you to revolt, think carefully and find out for what purpose he has revolted. Do not simply say [to justify his revolt by saying something like:] "Well, Zayd b. 'Ali also had arisen before!" The reason is that Zayd was a learned and truthful person and had not called upon you to acknowledge his own leadership; rather, he was calling towards a person who would be acceptable and endorsed by the ahl al-bayt. Had he succeeded, he would have acted upon his promise and would have handed over the power to its owner.

Zayd revolted against the government so that he could overthrow it. But what is the one who has emerged today calling you? Is he calling you towards a person who is acceptable and endorsed by the ahl al-bayt? No, absolutely not. I am calling you to bear witness that we are not pleased with this person's revolt. This man has not even reached power and he has already started opposing us. And when he does seize power and raises his flag, he would certainly not submit to us in obedience.

Hence, accept the call of the one about whom all the descendants of Fatima are in agreement. That person is your Imam and your leader. When the month of Rajab dawns, come to the help of God. There is no problem if you wish to delay it until the month of Sha'ban. And, it is even better for you, if you wished to keep the fast of Ramadan with your family. If you need any signs, it is sufficient to remind yourselves about the rise of Sufyani².

The hadith is regarded as authentic because the entire chain of transmission has been accredited by scholars.

Meaning and Implications of the hadith

The warning given by Imam Sadiq deals with the problem of individuals from the ahl al-bayt rising against the tyrannical power of the caliphs and claiming for themselves the leadership. The Imam provides the criteria of accepting such claims: if the individual is truly qualified or if he is honest about his goals and about the leader for whom he is revolting, then his Shi'a should have no problem in responding positively to his call.

This was the situation during the times of practically all the Imams before the twelfth Imam went into occultation. The hadith apparently addresses the revolt of Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah b. Hasan b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib, which the Imam compares with an earlier revolt of Zayd b. 'Ali b. Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib. The Imam warns people not to conflate the two upheavals, and thereby justify their positive response to the later revolt. For Zayd's revolt was launched in order to restore the true Imamate to the rightful Imam;

whereas there was no such noble goal in Muhammad's revolt.

Moreover, there was a difference in the leadership of the two movements. Zayd's personality was far more credible than Muhammad's. Imam Sadiq's observation that the latter would not obey him clearly explains his misgivings about the goal of the recent revolt.

Abu Faraj Isfahani, writing about Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah, says that the ahl al-bayt used to call Muhammad the Mahdi, and believed that he was the promised Mahdi of the traditions. The belief was so widespread that a group of people belonging to the Hashimites, descendants of Abi Talib, and the 'Abbasids paid allegiance to him. To add to this atmosphere of expectation and revolution, according to Abu Faraj, Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah used to publicly confirm his own candidacy to Mahdiism³.

In any case Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah arose as the Mahdi during Imam Sadiq's period and called upon people to join him. It was in this context that the above cited hadith was related as a warning to the Shi'a not to be taken in by such messianic claims. In other words, the purpose of the Imam was not to issue a blanket prohibition against any kind of activist response to social and political turmoil. Rather, his efforts were directed towards educating his followers to distinguish between the well-intended revolt of Zayd and the ill-intended rise of Muhammad, both members of the ahl al-bayt. In fact, on the basis of the above narrative, it appears that Imam Sadiq gave his approval to the former, including people's participation in that, while condemning the latter.

It is important to understand the goals of the revolution of Zayd, which received positive commendation from Imam Sadiq. Of course, in the limited space that we have in this study, we can only treat them in brief:

(1) Zayd was a pious, knowledgeable, and truthful person. He had the necessary qualifications for becoming a leader of the movement. Imam Sadiq's own evaluation of his uncle's character provides the main evidence for his endorsement of his revolution. He says: "My uncle Zayd was beneficial to us in this and the next world. Indeed, he attained martyrdom in God's way. He is like those who were killed and attained martyrdom fighting with the Prophet, 'Ali b. Abi Talib, Hasan and Husayn.⁴"

In a tradition reported by Abu Faraj Isfahani, the Prophet told Imam Husayn: "Among your descendants will be born a son whose name will be Zayd. He and his supporters will be resurrected with a brilliant and beautiful face on the Day of Judgement, and will enter Paradise⁵."

(2) Zayd's goal in his revolt was sound. He was not claiming to be an Imam. His main aim was to overthrow the unjust government and to restore the authority to the rightful Imam among the ahl al-bayt. If he had succeeded he would have kept his promise. Again, Imam Sadiq used to say: "May God have mercy on my uncle Zayd! Had he succeeded in his mission he would have fulfilled his promise. He used to call people to acknowledge a person among the ahl al-bayt who was acceptable to and endorsed by them⁶."

In some sources there are statements to the effect that Zayd claimed to be the Imam. His son Yahya,

however, denied that ascription to him and regarded Imam Sadiq as the Imam. Among his followers and his soldiers also Imam Sadiq was acknowledged as the most learned of the Hashimites and the rightful Imam. 'Ammar Sabati relates the occasion when a man asked Sulayman b. Khalid, one of the soldiers in Zayd's army, who had revolted: "What is your opinion of Zayd? Who is more excellent, Zayd or Ja'far b. Muhammad [Sadiq]?" Sulayman replied: "By God, one day of Ja'far b. Muhammad's life is more valuable than the entire life of Zayd." When Zayd was told about this he too acknowledged that excellence by saying: "Ja'far b. Muhammad is our Imam in all the questions that deal with the lawful and unlawful⁷."

(3) Zayd's revolution was a calculated measure; it did not occur as an emotional outburst and without any preparation. The underlying intent was to command the good and forbid the evil, and to combat the forces of tyranny and wickedness. Zayd wanted to overthrow the unjust government by use of force and to replace it with a qualified member of the ahl al-bayt, who had the support of every one. It was mainly for this reason that a large number of Muslims had rallied to his cause. In Kufa alone, 15,000 thousand people had pledged their support for him. His army was made up of peoples from different regions of Iraq and Khurasan⁸.

The importance and legitimacy of Zayd's revolt was underscored by the fact that a great number of Sunni scholars had also responded to his call and joined his revolution. Some, like Abu Hanifa, the Imam of the Sunnis, had endorsed and sent him monetary help for his movement⁹.

Zayd had discussed his intention to rise against the unjust authority with Imam Sadiq, beforehand, to which the Imam replied: "Uncle, if you are willing to be killed and your body hanged in the trash of Kufa, then do what you think is right." Zayd was so determined to go ahead with his plan that in spite of what the Imam had predicted he was willing to die for his cause. He fought in God's path until he was killed. Imam Rida said the following about him:

Zayd was the learned one among the descendants of Muhammad. He was angered for God's sake and fought against God's enemies until he became a martyr in God's path¹⁰.

Let us once again come back to our main inquiry about the tradition. It is evident that one cannot use the tradition reported by 'Isa b. Qasim as being against an activist response to the political turmoil in the Muslim public order. On the contrary, it is among those reports that support a legitimate movement against injustices. The purport of the Imam's warnings is to make sure that his followers do not blindly follow this or that person and movement and put themselves in an unnecessarily dangerous condition. As long as the necessary criteria, as discussed above, were fulfilled, there was no prohibition against joining the leader and his movement. Accordingly, one cannot regard the tradition as among those opposed to any action on the part of the Shi'a during the occultation of the twelfth Imam.

Second hadith: It is reported from Ahmad b. Yahya al-Maktab, from Muhammad b. Yahya al-Suli, from Muhammad b. Zayd al-Nahwi, from Ibn Abi 'Abdun, from his father, from Imam Rida (peace be upon him), who told Ma'mun, the 'Abbasid caliph:

Do not compare my brother Zayd with Zayd b. 'Ali b. Husayn. Zayd b. 'Ali was among the learned authorities of Muhammad's descendants, who was angered for God's sake and fought against God's enemies until he was killed in God's way and attained martyrdom. My father, Musa b. Ja'far said that he heard from his father, Ja'far b. Muhammad, who said: "May God have mercy on my uncle Zayd. He called people towards a person acceptable to and endorsed by the ahl al-bayt. Had he succeeded he would have definitely fulfilled his promise." He also used to say: "Zayd consulted me about his mission and I told him, if you are willing to be killed and your body hanged in the trash of Kufa, then do what you think is right."

Imam Rida then said:

Zayd was not claiming something that was not his right. He was so godfearing that he could never claim something that did not belong to him. On the contrary, he used to tell the people: "I am calling you to acknowledge a person who will be acceptable to the family of the Prophet¹¹."

The hadith is not sound, as far as the chain of transmission (sanad) is concerned. The narrators have been described by scholars of biographical dictionaries as "lacking credibility." As for its content, it cannot be regarded as being opposed to an activist stance during the occultation. After all, it is describing positively Zayd's movement and personality. However, another Zayd, that is, Zayd b. Musa, Imam Rida's brother has been criticized. This Zayd had emerged in Basra and had called people to acknowledge him as their leader. He destroyed the people's homes and plundered them. He was finally defeated and arrested by the caliphal authority. Ma'mun forgave him and sent him to see Imam Rida. Imam Rida ordered him released but asked his brother not to speak to him ever again¹².

Evidently, even this hadith is not evidence against an activist response to the injustices in the Muslim polity during the absence of the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him).

Second Group of Traditions

These are the traditions that indicate that any revolution before the final widespread revolution of the Mahdi will end up in defeat.

First hadith: It is reported from 'Ali b. Ibrahim, from his father, from Hammad b. 'Isa, from Rab'i, reaching back to 'Ali b. Husayn (peace be upon him), who said:

By God, none among us will rise before the revolution of the Qa'im, except the one resembling a chick that leaves its nest before it can fly. Such will fall in the hands of children who will play with it¹³.

This tradition is regarded as weak in transmission because it is incomplete. As such it is not regarded as reliable.

Second hadith: It is reported from Jabir, from Imam Baqir, who said:

The mode of our Qa'im's revolution will resemble the Prophet's emergence. The mode of revolution of any one among us, the ahl al-bayt, before the emergence of the Qa'im, will resemble a chick that leaves its nest [before being ready to fly], and becomes a plaything for children¹⁴.

Third hadith: It is reported from Abu al-Jarud, who heard Imam Baqir say:

None among us, the ahl al-bayt, rises in order to stand against injustices and fight for the truth, except he becomes entangled in difficulties and faces defeat. Until that time, when those who were present in the Battle of Badr, and who went swiftly to help those who were fighting, and did not have any one killed in need of burial nor any one injured in need of treatment, rise.

The reporter asked: 'Who does the Imam mean by that?' Abu Jarud replied: 'Angels¹⁵.'

Fourth hadith: It is reported from Abu al-Jarud, from Imam Baqir. He asked the Imam to recommend to him something for his benefit. In response the Imam said:

I recommend to you that you be godfearing, and remain in your home. And live with these common people. Avoid the people among us who rise up, because they do not have any goals. . . Be aware that there is no group that rises in order to combat injustice and restore the glory of Islam except that they are struck on the ground by calamities until that time when a group that was present in the Battle of Badr arises . . .¹⁶

The rest of the hadith resembles the previous tradition. These last three traditions, again, on account of a weak chain of transmission are regarded as unreliable. Moreover, one of the narrators is Abu Jarud who followed the Zaydi faction and was the founder of the Jarudiyya sect. He has been regarded as a weak transmitter by scholars of biographical dictionaries.

Investigation into the Meanings and Implications of these hadith-Reports

The traditions show Imam Baqir encountering those among his followers who want to know the reason he has not arisen. They relate the external truth about the situation encountered by individuals belonging to the ahl al-bayt who emerged and who initiated a movement against the unjust forces, but met with resistance and destruction. It also recounts the faith in the future revolution of the Mahdi who will receive divine help from the angels, just as those who fought that monumental battle of Badr in the early days of Islam received such miraculous help. In other words, the traditions are engaged in explaining the reason why the Imams could not arise against the unjust authority without adequate preparation and without divine aid.

There is also another aspect to these traditions: as reminders for those who insisted on radical responses at inopportune times for the success of such actions. These are grim reminders about those

'Alawids who had been killed at different times because they had taken off "before they could fly out of the safety of their nest." In other words, success was not guaranteed to any uprising before the revolution of the Mahdi. Nevertheless, the traditions do not convey that the legally and morally imposed obligation of jihad in God's way, defence of Islam and the Muslims, commanding the good and forbidding the evil, confronting injustices and wickedness, were all in abeyance since the Imams had no discretionary authority to effect these duties.

If one is informed of the adverse outcome of a struggle, it does not mean that he is unable, then, to make a decision to put up the struggle. Here Imam Husayn serves as a good example. He knew the outcome that would ensue because of his stance against the injustices of the Umayyads, and still he decided to fulfill his legal and moral obligation of defending Islam and the Qur'an. There is absolutely no doubt that today Islam has survived because of the sacrifices that were made by Imam Husayn, his family and his companions. Hence, it is accurate to maintain that none of the above hadith-reports imply that the obligations to defend and protect the Muslim public order specified by the Shari'a are in suspension until the twelfth Imam returns.

Third Group of Traditions

These are the traditions that require the Shi'a to refrain from joining any movement before the final appearance of the twelfth Imam. First hadith: It is related from several narrators, from Ahmad b. Muhammad b. 'Uthman b. 'Isa, from Bakr b. Muhammad, from Sudyar, who said that Imam Sadiq said:

Stay in your homes. As long as day and night are motionless, you too remain calm. When you hear that Sufyani has arisen, then commute towards us, even if it be on foot¹⁷.

The transmission of the hadith is problematic, because the persons cited in the chain include a waqifi, that is, one of those who stopped believing in the Imamate's continuation after the seventh, Imam Musa Kazim. 'Uthman b. Sa'id was Imam Kazim's agent while the Imam was alive. After his death he became a waqifi, and refrained from sending the Imam's share of khums to Imam Rida. The latter had shown his severe disapproval of him for that. He repented later on and returned all the goods belonging to the Imam. Equally problematic is the reliability of Sudayr b. Hakim Sayrafi.

Second hadith: It is related from Ahmad b. 'Ali b. al-Hakam, from Abi Ayyub al-Khazzaz, from 'Umar b. Hanzala. He said he heard from Imam Sadiq, who said:

"There are five signs that will occur before the rise of the Qa'im: (1) The cry [from the sky]; (2) the [rise of] Sufyani; (3) the sinking [of the earth in some parts]; (4) the killing of Nafs Zakiyya; and, (5) the emergence of a Yamani." The narrator asked: "O son of the Prophet, what if one of the members of the ahl al-bayt rises before these signs occur? Should we follow him?" The Imam said: "No¹⁸."

The chain of transmission in this hadith is also problematic because of the inclusion of 'Umar b. Hanzala, who has not been accredited.

Third hadith: It is reported from Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. al-Fadl b. Shadhan, from al-Hasan b. Mahbub, from 'Amr b. Abi al-Miqdam, from Jabir, from Imam Baqir. He said:

Remain still on earth; do not move your hands and feet, until the signs of which I inform you occur. [These are:], dispute among the family of so and so; and the call of a caller from the sky; and the sound that will come from the direction of Damascus¹⁹.

This tradition also lacks reliability because of its chain of transmission, which includes an unknown narrator by the name of 'Umar b. Abi al-Miqdam. Shaykh Tusi has narrated the tradition from two sources which both happen to be unreliable.

Fourth hadith: It is related from al-Hasan b. Muhammad al-Tusi, from his father, from al-Mufid, from Ahmad b. Muhammad al-'Alawi, from Haydar b. Muhammad b. Nu'aym, from Muhammad b. 'Isa, from al-Hasan b. Khalid, who said: "I told Abu al-Hasan al-Rida that 'Abd Allah b. Bukayr has related a tradition which I would like to tell you." He said, "Go ahead and tell me what is this hadith?" I said: "Ibn Bukayr has related from 'Ubayd b. Zurara who said: 'When Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah b. Hasan revolted I was with Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him). One of the companions came and said: May my life be a sacrifice for you! Muhammad b. Hasan has revolted. What is your opinion about this matter?' The Imam said:

As long as the earth and the heavens are calm you too remain motionless. Hence, if this is the situation there will neither be a Qa'im nor a revolution.

Imam Rida said:

Imam Sadiq is right. But the meaning of what he said is not as Ibn Bukayr has inferred. Rather, the intention of the Imam was to convey that as long as the sky is silent from the final cry and the earth from sinking the army [of God's enemy] you too remain undisturbed²⁰.

This hadith is not sound in its transmission, because Ahmad b. Muhammad has not been identified by scholars of biographical dictionaries. Likewise, three other persons have not been authenticated in this chain, namely, Hasan b. Khalid, Abu al-'Ala' and Sayrafi.

Fifth hadith: It is related from Muhammad b. Humam, from Ja'far b. Malik al-Fazazi, from Muhammad b. Ahmad, from 'Ali b. Asbat, from some of his companions, from Imam Sadiq. He said:

Hold your tongues, and remain within the confines of your homes, because you will not get anything that the rest of the people do not get. Moreover, Zaydis will be your shield [against the atrocities that are being committed]²¹.

This tradition too suffers from a weak chain of transmission and, hence, it is not that reliable. A number of transmitters are omitted and the tradition is taken from 'Ali b. Asbat without any information about his sources. Moreover, Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Malik is regarded as a weak link.

Sixth hadith: It is narrated from 'Ali b. Ahmad, from 'Abd Allah b. Musa al-'Alawi, from Muhammad b. Sinan, from 'Ammar b. Marwan, from Minkhal b. Jamil, from Jabir b. Yazid, from Imam Baqir. He said:

As long as the sky is calm, you too remain calm and do not revolt against anyone. Indeed your situation is not obscure. The exception [to this calmness] is that there are stings from God, on which people have no power²².

The chain of transmission of this hadith also suffers in reliability because Minkhal b. Jamil has been identified as weak and harmful in his narration.

Investigation into the Meanings and Implications of these hadith-Reports

Before examining the implications of these reports, it is relevant to point out that the Shi'a and the companions of the Imams lived in anticipation of the awaited Mahdi's rising. This anticipation was founded upon the traditions that had been handed down from the time of the Prophet and the Imams (peace be upon them) in which it was promised that when the Mahdi appears he will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with tyranny and wickedness.

They had also learnt from the traditions that when that person comes forth he will be triumphant and will enjoy God's special favor. It was for this reason that the subject of the rise and the final victory of the Mahdi and so on was prevalent among the Shi'a. The followers of the Imams used to ask them the reason for their silence in the face of all sorts of atrocities and the inhumanity suffered by the generality of Muslims under the caliphs. At times, they used to ask a very specific question: "Why does not the Qa'im from the ahl al-bayt rise?"

At other times, they wanted to know the signs of the Imam's appearance. It was such conditions that some descendants of 'Ali b. Abi Talib took advantage of appearing as the promised Mahdi of the family of Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) and fight against the evil power of the caliphs. However, within a short time they were defeated, arrested, and mercilessly killed.

This was the background of these hadith-reports that we have examined in this section. Hence, when the Imam advises his followers to adopt quietism in the face of the existing turmoil, he is actually informing them that the person who has revolted is not the promised Mahdi. They have to wait for his appearance which will be attended by some specific signs as well as a movement of resistance. These hadith, then, are meant to warn their followers not to fall into any trap before the real event has taken place. They do not, in any way, relieve them from assuming the tasks laid down by the law for their own and their religion's survival. There is no evidence, whatsoever, to ascribe such illegitimate views to the Imams whose sole purpose in uttering these traditions was to save them from being meaninglessly destroyed. Hence, these traditions cannot be regarded as opposing all activist responses which seek to preserve Islamic public order.

Fourth Group of Traditions

These are the traditions that recommend the Shi'a not to make haste in rising against an unjust government.

First hadith: It is reported from several companions of the Imam, from Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Khalid, from Muhammad b. 'Ali, from Hafs b. 'Asim, from Sayf al-Tammar, from Abi al-Marhaf, from Imam Baqir, who said:

The dirt gets into the eye of the one who stirs it up. Those who make haste destroy themselves. . . . Surely, they (i.e., the government forces) intend to see people rising against them [so that they can get rid of them]. O Abu Marhaf, do you believe that those who persevere will not receive any release from God? Indeed, by God, they will certainly receive deliverance²³.

The chain of transmission of this hadith is weak, because it includes Muhammad b. 'Ali, the Kufan narrator, who is regarded as weak by scholars of biographical dictionaries. Moreover, Abu al-Marhaf's identity is unknown.

The context of the hadith is the period in which a group of people had revolted against the caliphal authority, and were defeated. It is for this reason the narrator appears to be anxious that Shi'is might also be targeted. Hence, the Imam consoles him and assures him that God will deliver those who remain steadfast. Accordingly, this tradition cannot be classified as one of those which opposes any active participation in movements led by legitimate individuals with well-defined goals.

Second hadith: It is related from al-Hasan b. Muhammad al-Tusi, from his father, from al-Mufid, from Ibn Qawlawayh, from his father, from Ahmad b. Muhammad, from 'Ali b. Asbat, from his uncle Ya'qub b. Salim, from Abi al-Hasan al-'Abidi, from Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him). He said: "Anyone who for God's sake adopts perseverance, God will make him enter Paradise²⁴."

This hadith is relatively well authenticated, since its reporters are all regarded as trustworthy.

The context of the hadith is not evident from the text. But it is clear that the Imam is recommending patience in general and the reward that accrues to the person who perseveres. It does not deal necessarily with circumstances of revolt or other social-political turmoil.

Third hadith: Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib says:

Stay where you are, and when visited by calamities be patient. Do not move your hands and swords in the way of fulfilling the inclination of your tongues. Do not be in haste. Surely, any one of you dying on his bed while acknowledging the right of his Lord, and the right of his Prophet and his ahl al-bayt, dies a martyr. He deserves to receive the reward for the intention of his righteous deed. He will also reap the reward for the intention to fight with his sword [in defence of truth and justice]. Undoubtedly, there is a

time and specific limit for everything²⁵.

The hadith is also part of the Nahj al-balagha, and is regarded as authentic.

Fourth hadith: It is related from Muhammad b. Yahya, from Muhammad b. al-Hasan, from 'Abd al-Rahman b. Abu Hashim, from al-Fadl al-Katib. He said that he was in the presence of Imam Sadiq when he received the letter from Abu Muslim [Khurasani]. He told the messenger that there was no reply to carry back and that he should leave his presence immediately. And then he added:

God does not expedite a matter because His servants are in a hurry. To be sure, it is easier to dig a mountain from its place than to overthrow a government whose term has not been decreed to end.

The narrator asked for a sign of such an imminence that would be recognized by the Imam and his followers. The Imam said:

Do not move from where you are until the Sufyani has arisen. At that time run towards us.

And, he repeated the sentence thrice: "The rise of Sufyani is bound to happen²⁶."

The hadith is regarded as reliable on the basis of its chain of transmission.

Fifth hadith: It is reported from Muhammad b. 'Ali b. al-Hasan, from his sources, from Hammad b. 'Amr, from Anas b. Muhammad, from his father, from Imam Sadiq, from his forefathers. This was a recommendation from the Prophet to 'Ali b. Abi Talib. He said:

It is easier to dig huge mountains than to remove those in power whose time to vanish has not come yet²⁷.

This hadith has a problem when examined for its chain of transmission. It includes Hammad whose identity is unknown. In addition, Anas b. Muhammad and his father are regarded as lacking credibility.

Sixth hadith: It is reported from Humayd b. Ziyad, from 'Ubayd Allah b. Ahmad al-Dihqan, from 'Ali b. al-Hasan al-Tatari, from Muhammad b. Ziyad, from Aban, from Sabah b. Siyaba, from al-Mu'alla b. Khunays who said, 'I took letters from 'Abd al-Salam b. Nu'aym, Sudayr, and others to Imam Sadiq at the time when the black-clothed one had arisen. This was just before the 'Abbasids revolted. The letter said: "We have decided that the matter of leadership should be handed over to you. What is your opinion about it?" The Imam threw the letter on the ground and said: "Alas, alas, alas! I am not their (i.e., the insurrectionists') Imam. Do they not know that the awaited Mahdi will kill the Sufyani²⁸""

The hadith is not reliable as far the chain of transmission in concerned. The problem is that Sabah b. Siyaba is unidentified.

Investigation into the Meanings and Implications of these hadith-Reports

It is important to bear in mind what we have said earlier: the followers of the Imams unfailingly anticipated emancipation from tyrannical conditions through the rise of the Qa'im from among the family of the Prophet, as predicted in the traditions from him and the Imams (peace be upon them). In addition, we must not forget that the Shi'a were living under most cruel circumstances in this period. They were under surveillance, in prisons, executed, burnt alive, and so on. Consequently, whenever a member of the ahl al-bayt promised to lead the movement to redress the wrongs committed against them, they did not hesitate to follow him. They even accepted their claim to be the promised Mahdi, and rallied around to lend them support for their revolution.

On the side of the government, the Umayyads, and then the 'Abbasids, were fully aware of the messianic traditions and the political activism it generated among the dispossessed people. They also knew that the Shi'a exerted lot of pressure on their Imams to fight injustices and to replace unjust rulers by assuming power themselves. It was for this reason that 'Abbasid spies constantly reported the whereabouts of the Shi'i Imams and their contacts with their Shi'a, expecting that they would eventually conspire against the government.

This general observation about the times in which the Imams lived and guided their followers explains many traditions cited in this chapter. The main point that the Imams wanted their followers to realize was that the time for the revolution of the promised Mahdi had not as yet arrived. There were specific signs that would precede that revolution under the leadership of the Qa'im of the family of the Prophet. More importantly, there was a realistic assessment of the power of the unjust authorities in such statements as "It is easier to dig huge mountains than to remove those in power whose time to vanish has not come yet."

Hence, the Shi'a were admonished to bear with patience their burdens and to remain alert without causing destruction to themselves at the hands of the wicked rulers. This does not teach submission and quietism, as others have interpreted. On the contrary, it requires the Shi'a to assess each instance of upheaval carefully in order to avoid being drawn into them without any advantage. In fact, all the traditions point towards using one's intellect to understand the realities and not to respond simply emotionally and in reaction.

In the final analysis, the implication of these traditions is an explicit demand that the followers of the Imam, who happened to be in the minority and under the constant hostile watch of the rulers, deliberate and conceive better strategies to work for their self-preservation as well as for the preservation of an Islamic public order. To be sure, the purport of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib's statement: "Stay where you are, and when visited by calamities be patient. Do not move your hands and swords in the way of fulfilling the inclination of your tongues," is a warning not to submit to emotional outbursts, but to learn from

experience the wisdom of caution when the power is unjust and wicked.

Fifth Group of Traditions

These are the traditions that regard the person who leads any revolution prior to the revolution of the Mahdi as an evildoer, taghüt.

First hadith: It is related from Muhammad b. Yahya, from Ahmad b. Muhammad, from 'Isa b. al-Husayn b. al-Mukhtar, from Abu Basir, from Imam Sadiq, who said:

The leader of every flag [in an uprising] that is raised before the rising of the Qa'im is an evildoer who is worshipped (taghüt) [by the people for his daringness] beside God²⁹.

This hadith is authenticated on the basis of its narrators who are all regarded as reliable.

Second hadith: It is reported from Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Nu'mani, from 'Abd al-Wahid b. 'Abd Allah, from Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Rayyah al-Zuhri, from Muhammad b. al-'Abbas, from 'Isa al-Husayni, from al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Abi Hamza, from his father, from Malik b. A'yan al-Jihani, from Imam Baqir, who said:

The leader of any flag that is raised before the raising of the Mahdi's flag, is an evildoer³⁰.

Investigation into the Meanings and Implications of these hadith-Reports

To be sure, "raising of the flag" is a metaphor for beginning a battle against a system in order to establish a new government, and a new system. The standard-bearer is the leader of the movement who is in the process of overthrowing the ruling regime and installing a new government. For this he calls upon the people to join him. Taghüt, as we have seen in other traditions, is a tyrant who has attacked God's creatures and has forced them to accept his rule without opposition. The credo of the leader is captured in the phrase: "the one who worships other than God." Accordingly, he is engaged in undermining God's authority among His people, so that he can pursue his personal ambitions. It is in this sense that the word taghüt is applied to the leader of such a movement.

The meaning of the tradition is that any flag that is raised before the revolution of the Qa'im, and of which the leader calls the people towards himself, that bearer of the flag is to be regarded as an evildoer. Hence, the hadith implies that insurrection for purposes other than the correct religion is to be rejected outright. However, if the purpose of the revolt is to restore violated justice and to make people aware of their spiritual and moral responsibilities, then it is to be regarded as legitimate. The leader of this latter kind of revolt does not call people to himself; rather, he is inviting people towards God. As such, his flag is leading the people in the same direction as that of the Qa'im. It is not engaged in negating the

achievements of the other Imams and the Prophet, who all at different times stood firm against injustices and atrocities committed against innocent peoples.

Conclusions of the Discussion

The majority of the traditions that we examined in this section were classified by the scholars of the science of hadith as weak. As such, they cannot be used as evidence for the argument that is being put forward in opposition to an activist response during the occultation of the twelfth Imam. The traditions, however, provide the guidelines for the Shi'a to consider in acknowledging valid and invalid religious movements led by one or another leader. They also serve as a reminder to them that the time for the appearance of the Mahdi had not arrived yet. Under the circumstances that existed for the Shi'a community living as a minority under those most unfavorable circumstances that were prevalent under the caliphate, it was expedient for them not to join the bandwagon of anyone who invited them to rise against tyranny. In fact, under those conditions patience is a virtue.

Furthermore, it was a duty to determine both the leadership's claim and intent, before making the decision to support or reject an uprising. Not every flag that is raised in the name of fighting injustice deserves unquestioning support from the Shi'a. The criteria for judging a just cause provided in the traditions function as a deterrent rather than as a total prohibition against taking up arms against tyrants. In other words, the traditions do not propose complete withdrawal for the followers of the ahl al-bayt from defending God's laws and the Muslim public order. It simply requires them to be alert at all times about their duty to God and to God's purposes for humanity as specified in the teachings of Islam on interpersonal justice.

To recapitulate our lengthy discussion, let us summarize our major propositions and then derive the final overall conclusion.

(1) Islam is not simply concerned with the spiritual aspects of human religiosity. It has legislated comprehensively on every aspect of human existence -- as individuals related to God, and as members of the human community related to fellow humans. Thus, all the chapters of Islamic law, whether they deal with prayer or with fasting, with warfare or defence, reveal this bi-dimensional feature of Islam.

(2) There is no doubt that Islam was revealed in order to be implemented as a vital aspect of meaningful human existence.

(3) The implementation of Islam depends upon the establishment of a Muslim polity and government that is committed to executing the divine plan on earth by creating an ideal society.

(4) The Prophet was not merely an envoy of God who had come to deliver the message. He was also the executor of the divine will on earth. An integral part of his prophetic obligation was to organize his

people and lead them to establish divine scales of justice on earth.

(5) This obligation of implementing the divine will on earth did not end with the death of the Prophet. It continues as long as Islam remains the religion of humankind.

(6) It is the duty of the people to support and assist the Prophet and his rightful infallible successors who also are invested with the power to create the ideal Muslim public order. This requirement is extended to the times when there is no infallible leader in power or when such a leader is in occultation. As long as there is a Muslim polity that needs support and maintenance through government, a military apparatus, and financial structures, Muslims have the obligation to provide that support. During the occultation, when the twelfth Imam lives an invisible life, the people should choose a most qualified jurist to provide the necessary Islamic governance. This is the meaning of Islamic government. It is a government that is headed by a pious, well-versed jurist, not merely in matters of religion, but also in matters of governance and in administration of an Islamic polity.

In the second part of our discussion we examined all the traditions that are used as documentation for the opinion that opposes an active response from the people during the occultation. As we have demonstrated, it is impossible to take these traditions in that meaning and to regard the fundamental duties of a Muslim as a member of the community as being in abeyance until the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) emerges as the Mahdi. In view of all the verses and the hadith-reports that require Muslims to take up jihad, to command the good and forbid evil, to defend the rights of the dispossessed and downtrodden, and other related public obligations, it is impossible to maintain, even hypothetically, that since the actual ruler of the Muslims is in invisible existence, we cannot undertake these duties that require the presence of an infallible leader like the twelfth Imam as a precondition.

More importantly, if the religion of Islam is faced with a danger, no Muslim can be excused for sitting around and doing nothing about it. Nor can they be forgiven if they do not resist any intervention or interference in Muslim affairs by external or internal enemies. None of the hadith can possibly be interpreted to dictate such irresponsible behavior from Muslims simply because the Imam is in occultation. All the above-cited verses and many more passages of the Qur'an form the most explicit response to those who want to escape that most critical obligation of being a Muslim, namely, to work towards the creation of an ethical public order which reflects God's will.

When there is no ambiguity in such unequivocally required duties to maintain the Muslim public order, there can be no possibility of deducing a quietist attitude that would avoid facing these religious and moral obligations of the Shari'a. Regardless of the need for sacrifices, Muslims at all times must, as a fundamental duty of being a believer in God and His Prophet, protect Islam and its public order.

The scholars of Islam, especially the jurists, have an even greater responsibility in this regard. As heirs to the Prophet's function and as protectors of the true religion, they are the refuge of the people. They cannot acquiesce in the face of a threat that is posed by the ungodly powers to the Muslims. Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib has reminded these leaders saying:

I swear by God, Who has caused the seed to germinate and the human being to be created, if that crowd had not come to pay their allegiance to me, and through that act of theirs, the duty that I had to undertake had not been made clearer, I would have tossed away the reins of the camel of the caliphate and let it go anywhere it pleased. Moreover, had it not been that God has exacted a promise from the learned that they would not give their consent to the wrongdoer to fill his belly while the wronged person goes hungry, then [I would have never accepted the caliphate³¹.

Imam Husayn also made similar remarks when he had to confront the injustices of the Umayyads, by quoting the Prophet, who said:

Whoever sees a tyrant ruler making lawful what God made unlawful, breaking God's covenant with those who exercise authority, opposing the Prophet's tradition, and becoming the enemy of the people by committing acts of disobedience against God, and does not oppose him by action and opinion, then God will make him enter the same place [of hell-fire] as the tyrant³².

Imam Husayn goes on to explain the reason for such a severe indictment of any who fails to oppose wrongdoing:

This is so, because the execution of the laws and administration of affairs is in the hands of those who are knowledgeable about God, entrusted with the preservation of God's legal order dealing with the lawful and unlawful. Hence, it is you who have lost this position. And, this status has not been snatched from you except that you separated yourselves from the truth and disputed in the matter of the tradition of the Prophet after a clear proof was afforded. Had you been patient with the hardships and borne your livelihood for the sake of God, then those matters related to God would have reverted to you, would have been issued by you, and would have been referred to you.

But you let the wrongdoers take your place and you handed over God's affairs to them, being fully aware of their following their ruse and their giving in to their lower appetites. It was your running away from death and your being attracted to life that made them dominate you. It was you who let the downtrodden people fall into their hands, so that they would make some of them their slaves and others their source of feed. All this allowed the tyrants to rule the way they wanted, and brought shame and humiliation to themselves and their subjects. In this behavior of theirs, they follow evil people, and they have become daring in their opposition to God.

There is no doubt that the learned in the community have great responsibilities. If they failed to execute them they would suffer severe sanctions on the Day of Judgment. The duty of the 'ulama' is not limited to teaching, discussing, commenting, leading congregational prayers and so on. Rather, their greater responsibility is to protect the religion of Islam and the Muslims, to fight against unbelievers and evildoers, who are engaged in destroying Islam, and to implement Islamic legal and moral precepts. If they fall short in this then they do not have any excuse in the presence of God. By referring to those weak and brief traditions, they will not be able to exonerate themselves from this extremely critical responsibility.

Can God, the Exalted, and the Prophet of Islam, allow us to remain indifferent to the heinous and dangerous conspiracies against Islam and the pitiful behavior of some of the Muslim countries; continue with our life of teaching, preaching, and leading the prayers as usual? No, never.

-
1. These hadith can be studied in several important collections, such as *Wasa'il al-shi'a*, Vol. 11, pp. 35–41; *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 52
 2. *Wasa'il*, Vol. 11, p. 35; *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 52, p. 301. The tenth hadith in this section is also from the same narrator and, as such, should not be seen as a different tradition
 3. *Maqatil al-talibiyin*, p. 233–240
 4. *'Uyun al-akhbar*, p. 252
 5. *Maqatil al-talibiyin*, p. 140–41
 6. *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 46, p. 199
 7. *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 46, p. 135ff
 8. *Maqatil al-talibiyin*, p. 146–47
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 99
 10. *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 46, p. 174
 11. *Wasa'il al-shi'a*, Vol. 11, p. 39
 12. *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 48, p. 315
 13. *Mustadrak al-wasa'il*, Vol. 2, p. 248
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Wasa'il al-shi'a*, Vol. 11, p. 36; *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 52, p. 302
 16. *Mustadrak al-wasa'il*, Vol. 2, p. 248
 17. *Wasa'il al-shi'a*, Vol. 11, p. 36
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 37
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 41
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 39
 21. *Mustadrak al-wasa'il*, Vol. 2, p. 248
 22. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 247
 23. *Wasa'il al-shi'a*, Vol. 11, p. 36
 24. *Ibid.* p. 39
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 40
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 38
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 37
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 37
 30. *Mustadrak al-wasa'il*, Vol. 2, p. 248
 31. *Nahj al-balagha*, Second sermon
 32. *Ibn Athir, al-Kamil fi al-ta'rikh*, Vol. 4, p. 48

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/al-imam-al-mahdi-just-leader-humanity-ayatullah-ibrahim-amini/chapter-13-further-investigation>