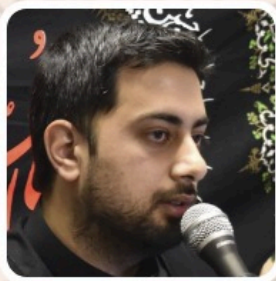


Humans In The Era Of Awaiting

Humans In The Era Of Awaiting



Syed Ali Imran

Al-Islam.org

Article

Authors(s):

[Syed Ali Imran](#) [1]

Humans In The Era Of Awaiting

by Syed Ali Imran

Originally Published on Al-Iqra Online

What is the nature of humans in the era of awaiting (intiḡar), or what ought to be their nature? If we were to describe a human, a believer in particular, who lives in the era of awaiting, what qualities or characteristics would they have? For example, some may say a human living in the era of awaiting is very reactive, others may say they are very proactive, others may say they are radical, or confused, or chaotic etc. Alternatively, we have narrations that speak about the qualities of humans in this era. They describe all sorts of qualities and those qualities are not generally in contradiction with one another.

In reality, humans in the era of awaiting and occultation are humans incapable of reaching spiritual and material perfection – this is in fact an Islamic worldview. ‘Allamah Tabataba’i says humans are essentially incomplete, they require a perfector (mukammil) for both their internal affairs and external affairs. This perfector, according to Tashayyu‘, is the existence of an infallible, who exists to perfect and complete this deficiency, since revelation alone is not enough.

Another quality of humans in this era is that they are awaiting salvation. A human who lives in this era is in a context that is not satisfactory in its totality. There may be certain circumstances where affairs are good, but relatively one’s situation can always be better.

Humans will come very close to fulfilling these two aspects, the perfector and salvation, with the reappearance of the Imam (‘a). However, how do we live and organize our lives in the era of awaiting where the Imam (‘a) is not present, yet these deficiencies exist? What kind of life should and can we live? Since a human in the era of awaiting is deficient, they attempt to create order, based on their own experience, and by utilizing the experience of others. However, the era of awaiting is an era in which chaos and errors even exist within order – in other words, even the order that is constructed is deficient and incomplete. Humans try to create order, but still fail at it in totality. There is relative incapability for humans, and since we are – relatively – intellectually incapable, we are unable to produce consistent order for all of our affairs. Sometimes we construct systems to live by in which there is greater order, other times the order is little.

Thus, a human in an era of awaiting should not be expected to build a society and order that will not have any injustice and oppression whatsoever. In some sense, this era is an era of confusion and dissimulation. Many Shi’a jurists believed it was not possible to build a perfect just Islamic government or

if an Islamic government is formed, it will not be perfect, since such a matter can only be carried out by an infallible Imam ('a). Shaykh Anṣari believed the occultation resulted in the suspension of many religious matters, the Imam ('a) being the most important of those matters, but secondly, the implementation of a perfect Islamic government was also suspended. It is an era of experimentation, error, and precaution – but at the same time it is an era of hope. A Shi'a tries their best, but at the same time they are not hopeless.

Four Theories

There are at least four theories that discuss expectations of a believer in the era of awaiting and occultation, when an infallible is not present.

1) Complete dissimulation and becoming ghettoized: Some scholars believe this era is an era of dissimulation, since it is not possible to form and develop a society and community of believers. They go to lengths to argue that we as Shi'a must learn to ignore society, stay away from getting involved in politics and social matters, projects, and essentially live like we would live in a ghetto or if we were travelers living in an inn.

This group often uses the numerous narrations in the Shi'a tradition that prohibit any involvement in political matters before the reappearance of the 12th Imam ('a), as well as reports that explicitly suggest any uprising or political involvement before the reappearance of the Imam ('a) will lead to a failure.

2) Prohibition of social reforms: Some groups that arose in the middle of the 20th century, like the Hojjatie Society (Anjoman-e Hojjatieh), would believe there is no necessity to participate in any reform or efforts to rectify society. This is because they believed as per the narrations, corruption and injustice will increase in society and that will be the prerequisite for the reappearance of the Imam ('a). On that basis, they believed there was no reason to reform and fix corruption, since corruption was a necessary precursor to the reappearance. Any attempts to rectify society was essentially delaying the reappearance of the Imam ('a).

This was a relatively popular movement in Iran, however it eventually died out after the Islamic Revolution in Iran – at least in the public sphere.

3) Uprisings (qiyam) are necessary for the reappearance: Although there are numerous narrations that prohibit uprisings in the occultation, we also have some narrations that say when people begin to uprising and make demands from authorities, that will essentially lead to the reappearance of the Imam ('a).

Consider the following narration from al-Ghaybah¹ of Nu'mani:

ابن عقدة، عن علي بن الحسين، عن أبيه عن أحمد بن عمر عن الحسين بن موسى، عن معمر بن يحيى بن سام، عن أبي خالد الكابلي، عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام أنه قال: كأني بقوم قد خرجوا بالمشرق، يطلبون الحق فلا يعطونه ثم يطلبونه فلا يعطونه، فإذا رأوا ذلك وضعوا سيوفهم على عواتقهم فيعطون ما سألوا فلا يقبلونه حتى يقوموا، ولا

يدفعونها إلا إلى صاحبكم، قتلاهم شهداء أما إنني لو أدركت ذلك لأبقيت نفسي لصاحب هذا الامر.

Abu Ja'far al-Baqir (as) said: "As if I see some people rising in the east. They will ask for the truth but they will not be given it. They will ask for it again and they will not be given it. Then they will unsheathe their swords and they will be given what they will ask for but they will not accept it. They will revolt and deliver their victory to your man (al-Mahdi). Their killed ones will be martyrs. If I live until that time, I will sacrifice myself to the man of this matter.

Interestingly, 'Allamah Al-Majlisi comments on this narration in Bihar al-Anwar saying: It is not far-fetched that this narration is pointing towards the Safavid government – may Allah strengthen it and connect it with the government of the Qa'im ('a).

What Al-Majlisi writes needs to be understood in light of the general theory these types of narrations gave rise to during the Safavid era. An entire theory of "Merging of the Safavid government with the government of Imam Mahdi ('a)" (Ittiḥād al-Dawlat Ṣafaviyeh ba Dawlat Ḥaḥib al-Zaman)² was developed which pushed the idea that the Islamic Shi'a government of the Safavids was a precursor to the government of Imam Mahdi ('a) and that the Safavid Shah would eventually hand over the flag and government to the Imam ('a).

As for the set of narrations which prohibit any uprisings before the reappearance, a few scholars in the 20th and 21st century have tried to tackle them, perhaps most famously Ayatullah Hussein-Ali Montazeri in his 4-volume work on Wilayat al-Faqih and Islamic government, in which he questions the signification of those reports. Some scholars believe those narrations do not necessarily suggest that uprisings that take place before the reappearance will result in a military defeat, rather they could possibly mean that some uprisings may be successful and victorious, but later on will digress and fall off the track.

4) Suspension: Shaykh Ansari alludes to this and it was a view that had many proponents during the Constitutional Revolution. This group of scholars believed the establishing of an Islamic government is suspended in this era, although this does not mean the Shari'ah is also be suspended. They believed you can have a government built upon human communal conventions, and still generally attribute it to Islam, and the purpose of such a government would be to reduce injustice and oppression to the extent possible. However, the role of this government would not be to completely Islamicize one's individual and communal life, as such a matter was not possible in this era.

In other words, they acknowledged that oppression and injustice will remain, but a Shi'a will also have hope of justice. Here, I want to translate and cite a transcript of a lecture Shahid Beheshti (d. 1981), one of the main architects of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which he delivered before 1979:

What we can derive from the Islamic traditions is that the reappearance of the Imam ('a) will be closer to the Day of Judgement. Meaning, his ('a) reappearance will happen at the end of times – this is what we

can ascertain from the collection of traditions. After all the experimental efforts of humans to build a society free of impurities, and each of these efforts will only achieve their objectives by a certain limited percentage, and none of them will be able to achieve their objectives with a high percentage, let alone a hundred percent, then in a miraculous way, outside the laws of history, an ideal society will be built with the leadership of a Divine Imam (‘a).

From this, we understand two points. Firstly, as long as we continue to strive, we should not be striving to build an ideal society. We must strive to build a very good society, but if we see some deficiencies in our efforts, we should not despair. In fact, one of the issues people who are working under the banner of Islam have is exactly this. They work within the framework of Islam, but they are trying to build an ideal society, heedless of the fact that such a society will only form in the end of times under the leadership of the Imam (‘a). We should know our efforts are only to work towards a better society than the one we currently have, but it will not be a hundred percent ideal society. Thus, we should be realistic with our objectives not delusional³.

According to Beheshti, having such an attitude towards governance and organizing our life in the era of occultation is not only correct, but in fact it keeps one motivated to continue fulfilling their responsibility. If one assumes their responsibility is to establish a perfect community and society, and when the Imam (‘a) comes we shall hand over the leadership of this community to him (‘a), such an assumption will put most people off from doing their responsibility as it is essentially an impossible task. The most we can do is take a step towards improving our situation and decrease imperfections; this is doable and practical, and this is what is expected from us. When one strives hard for this form of order, when there are deficiencies, a person does not despair.

An extension of this fourth view is the view proposed by some contemporary Shi’i scholars⁴ who believe humans in this era are not radical, anarchists, nor are they trying to implement Shari’ah as a maximalist religion, neither are they hopeless or in complete dissimulation. Humans in this era are humble with minimal opportunities at their disposal, which results in the primacy of tolerance, diplomacy and coexistence. The primacy is with these matters, particularly because offensive war is abandoned in the era of occultation, as is the view of most jurists. If offensive war is abandoned, thereafter general propagation of the religion is also suspended, since the purpose of the obligation of offensive war was to propagate religion globally.

A second quality of humans in this era is their reliance on rationality and innate human nature – the *fiṣrah*. They try their best to create a community using these two sources, and while this community or political system should not be against the Shari’ah, but it is not completely Shar’i either. The latter has consequences which a human in the era of awaiting cannot fulfil since they are prone to many mistakes and their intellect is also – relatively – deficient. Since they are prone to so many mistakes, they are open to criticisms, and are meant to hear others’ opinions and learn from their experiences.

¹. Source:

<https://www.al-islam.org/kitab-al-ghayba-book-occultation-sheikh-an-numa...> [2]

2. For an extensive study on the development of this theory during the Safavid era, see the book Naʿariyeh Ittisal Dawlat Safaviyeh ba Dawlat Sahib al-Zaman, published by Shaykh Rasul Ja'fariyan

3. Wilayat, Rahbari, Riq'aniyyat, pg. 94.

4. Shaykh Dawūd Fayrahi (d. 2020) expresses this opinion. He was a professor of political science at the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the University of Tehran. He has authored ten books and sixty research articles.

[Get PDF](#) [3] [Get EPUB](#) [4] [Get MOBI](#) [5]

Topic Tags:

[Awaiting Imam Mahdi](#) [6]

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/humans-era-awaiting-syed-ali-imran>

Links

[1] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/syed-ali-imran>

[2] <https://www.al-islam.org/kitab-al-ghayba-book-occultation-sheikh-an-numani/chapter-14-signs-preceding-appearance>

[3] <https://www.al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/135161>

[4] <https://www.al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/135161>

[5] <https://www.al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/135161>

[6] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/awaiting-imam-mahdi>