

How can we believe in the existence
of Al-Mehdi?

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Supposing that the hypothesis of the Expected Leader and all that it comprehends of prolonged life, early leadership and a silent absence, is possible, that would not be enough proof for his existence, thus, how can we indeed believe in the existence of al-Mahdi? Would some narratives related in books on the Great Messenger (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) be enough for perfect conviction in the existence of the Twelfth Imam, in spite of what this supposition bears of peculiarity and deviation from the norms? Or rather, how can we prove that al-Mahdi had a true historical existence and that he is not only an assumption, for which psychological circumstances have been combined to confirm his existence in many people's minds?

reference : ,

In this article, you read the answers of the below questions:

1. How was this long life granted to Al-Mehdi?
2. Why all this desire to prolong Imam Mahdis life?
3. How can we believe in the existence of Al-Mehdi?

How was this long life granted to Al-Mehdi?

In other words, is it possible for a man to live for many centuries, as is the case with the Expected Leader, for the change of the world, whose age must be actually one thousand one hundred and forty years, or fourteen times the average age of an ordinary person who would pass through the phases of life from childhood to old age normally.

The word possibility here has one of the three following meanings, namely: Practical possibility, scientific possibility and philosophical or logical possibility.

I mean by practical possibility that a task is feasible in a manner that enables me, you or a third

person to perform it, such as a journey across the ocean, reaching the depth of the sea or going to the moon, all of which are practically possible since they have actually been performed by people in one way or another.

By scientific possibility I mean that there are some tasks that neither I nor you nor a third person can practically perform with the means that are accessible to present civilisation. However there is nothing in the alterable trends of science which can indicate a justification for the rejection of the possibility of these tasks and their occurrence conforming to certain special circumstances and means. For example, there is nothing in science that could deny the possibility of travelling to Venus, because all its existing trends indicate the possibility of such a task, although that is still not possible for me or you since the difference between going to the moon and travelling to Venus is only one of degree. The latter representing a stage of overcoming some relative difficulties stemming from the fact that the distance is longer. From this we deduce that it is scientifically possible to travel to Venus even if it is still not feasible from a practical angle.

Contrary to that is the idea of travelling to the sun in distant space since it is scientifically impossible, meaning that science would never entertain the possibility of this task, for one cannot assume scientifically or empirically the possibility of inventing that preventive armour that could protect the body against the heat of the sun which is like an enormous kiln constantly burning with a degree impossible to imagine.

By logical or philosophical possibility I mean that there is nothing in the intellect, conforming to what it knows of previous laws - (preceding the experiment) that could justify the rejection of a task nor decide that it could not occur.

Say, for example, the grouping of three oranges into two equal parts, this is logically impossible, since the intellect knows - before carrying out such an experiment - that three is an odd number, thus it is impossible to divide it into two equal parts, first it would turn into an even number, which would be a contradiction, which is impossible in logic.

But if a man were to be exposed to fire, or if he were to go to the sun without burning, that would not be impossible from a logical point of view, since there is no contradiction in the assumption that heat does not penetrate into a body of Lower temperature from one of higher temperature. That would only run contrary to the experiment which proved that heat actually penetrates into a body of lower temperature from one of higher temperature until both bodies get an equal temperature.

Therefore, we come to realise that logical possibility has a wider scope than scientific

possibility and that the latter is wider than practical possibility.

There is no doubt about the logical possibility of the prolongation of human life for some thousands of years, because that is not impossible from an abstract intellectual point of view, also there is no contradiction in an assumption of this sort, since life as it is understood does not fathom sudden death and no one can dispute this fact.

Also, there is no doubt or controversy that this prolonged life is not possible from the practical aspect, as is the case in going down to the depths of the ocean or ascending to the moon. That is because science with what it owns of mod-em means and instruments, that were made available by concomitant human experiments, cannot prolong human life for hundreds of years, this is why we find that even those among people who are more eager about life and more able to utilise scientific possibilities can only live to the extent of what is usual.

As far as scientific possibility is concerned, there is nothing in science, nowadays which could justify the denial of that fact from a theoretical point of view. This inquiry is in reality related to the nature of the physiological interpretation of the phenomenon of old-age and decrepitude among people. Does this phenomenon indicate a natural law that compels the tissues of the human body and its cells to harden gradually and become less efficient in the performance of their task once they have reached the summit of their growth, until they die at a particular moment, even if we were to isolate them from the influence of some external failure? Or is this hardening of the bodily tissues and cells and the lack of efficiency in the performance of their physiological tasks a result of their struggle against certain external factors, such as microbes or poison that penetrate the body from an excess in food or from the heavy work that the person might perform or any other factor.

Now this is the question that science has to find an answer to, yet many answers present themselves on a scientific level in this respect.

If we are to consider the scientific point of view that tends to interpret old-age and the weakness that goes with it, as a result of reactions against some external factors, it means that it is theoretically possible, once we have isolated the tissues that compose the body from these influences, to prolong life to the extent of surpassing the phenomenon of old-age and even overcoming it.

On the other hand, if we consider the other point of view which sees old-age as a natural process with regards to the living tissues and cells, it will mean that they bear within themselves the seed of their own ultimate death, once the phase of old-age has been completed.

I say: If we take this point of view into consideration it should not mean that there is no flexibility in this natural law, rather the assumption of its existence shows that it is in fact flexible, since we find in our everyday life, in addition to what has been found by scientists through the experiments that they carry out in their laboratories, that old-age as a physiological phenomenon has no fixed time, since a man can be very old and yet possess tender limbs, with no trace of old-age appearing on him as has been mentioned by some doctors. Moreover some scientists take advantage of this flexibility and prolong the life of some animals by a hundred times their natural age, by creating certain circumstances and factors that delay the process of old-age.

Thus it has been proved scientifically that this process can be postponed, by creating specific circumstances and factors, even if this experiment has not been carried out by science on a particular complicated creature such as the human being, owing to the difference in the difficulty of carrying it out on the human being and other organisms.

This means that, from a theoretical point of view, science, with all its alterable orientations, has never had any objection to the prolongation of human life, whether old-age has been interpreted as the product of a struggle and close con-tact with some external influences, or as a result of a natural process of the cells and tissues that leads them towards their death.

Thus we deduce that the prolongation of human life and its survival over many centuries is possible logically as well as scientifically but it is still impossible from a practical angle, and that nevertheless scientific progress has a long way to go before realising this possibility.

In light of what has been discussed we shall deal with the age of al-Mehdi (peace be upon him) and what has been surrounding it of wonder and surprise.

Thus we notice that since the possibility of this prolonged life has been confirmed both logically and scientifically, science is in the process of gradually transforming the theoretical possibility into a practical one. There is no room left for wonder except the remoteness of the probability that al-Mehdi might have preceded science in this transformation, before that the latter could have, in its evolutionary course, reached the standard of actual capacity for such a transformation, which would make him equal to that person who had pre-ceded science in discovering the cure for cancer.

The question now is How could Islam - which determined the age of the Expected Leader - have preceded science in the field of this transformation?

The answer is that this is not the only field in which Islam preceded science. Has the Islamic

shari'ah (revealed law) as a whole not come before science and the evolution of human thought by many centuries? Did it not promulgate certain symbols that submitted plans to be put into practice, which man could achieve only after hundreds of years of his independent activity? Did it not formulate certain regulations perfect in wisdom, the secrets of which were realised by man only after a certain length of time? Did the Divine message not reveal mysteries about the universe, that could never have occurred to people's minds, which science came later to confirm and support?

So, if we are convinced by these facts why then should we regard as too much that the sender of this message - the Exalted - anticipates science in determining the age of al-Mehdi?

Here I mentioned only those aspects of precedence that we can notice in a direct manner, we can also include the aspects of precedence mentioned in the Divine message, for example, when it informs us about the night journey which the Prophet undertook from al-Haram Mosque to al-Aqsa Mosque. If we are to understand this journey within the frame of natural laws, we will find that it shows that these laws were utilised in a way that science could achieve only after hundreds of years.

Therefore, the same Divine knowledge which enabled the Messenger (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) to undertake this fast motion before science could achieve it, has also enabled his designated successors to have a prolonged life before science could realise such a project.

Certainly, this prolonged age that Allah, the Exalted, has bestowed on the Expected Saviour may seem rather strange, if it is considered within the limits of the everyday in people's lives and what has been achieved by the experiments of scientists. But is the decisive and transformative role which has been prepared for this Saviour not strange within the limits of the ordinary in people's lives and what they have experienced of historical evolution? Has he not been entrusted with the task of changing the world and rebuilding its civilisation on the basis of justice and truth? Why should we disapprove if the preparation of this great role is characterised by strange and unusual aspects, such as the prolongation of the Expected Leader's age?

For this remoteness of those aspects and their unusual aspects, however great they are, cannot surpass the remoteness of the great role that has to be achieved on the appointed day? Therefore, if we approve the validity of that unique role from a historical angle in spite of the fact that there has never been in the history of humanity a role similar to it, why should not we also approve that pro-longed age which is still unique in our ordinary life?

I wonder if it is a coincidence that only two individuals should carry out the task of emptying human civilisation of its corrupt elements and re-building it, which means that they must have been of an excessive age many times superior to our the applicability of a natural law under a certain circumstances, in order to preserve the life of a particular individual whose role is to cherish Divine message.

Yet this is not the only miracle of its kind, nor is it remote from a Muslim's faith, which derives from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. More over the process of old-age is no more rigid than is the process of the passage of heat from a body of higher temperature to another of lower temperature until both of them become equal. This had occurred in the case of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) when the only way to preserve his life was by hindering that process, when it was said to the fire in which he was thrown:

We said, "O fire be cool on Ibrahim and keep him safe." (Quran, 21:69)

So, he emerged from it safe and unharmed. There are also other cases where natural laws were hindered to protect some of the prophets or Proofs of Allah on earth. When the sea was split for Musa (Moses), when the Romans were misled in thinking they had caught 'Isa (Jesus) or when Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) left his house while it was surrounded by the troops of Quraysh who were waiting for hours to attack him but Allah, the Exalted, hid him from their eyes while he was walking in their midst. All of these cases show a hindrance of the laws of nature to protect an individual, whom the Divine wisdom wished to preserve. Therefore, why not include here the process of old age and decrepitude?

From this we can deduce a general notion, which is that whenever the preservation of the Prophet's life (the Proof of Allah on earth) depends on the hindrance of a natural law, and the prolongation of his life comes to be necessary for the performance of his task, Divine care then intervenes by delaying the process so that the task of that individual can be accomplished., On the other hand, once the Divine mission of that individual has been fulfilled he either dies naturally or as a martyr depending on what is determined by natural laws.

Thus we find ourselves confronted with the present question in connection with this general notion: How can the process be obstructed? How can the necessary correlation that exists between natural phenomena, be sundered? Does it not contradict science, which discovered the existence of that natural law or process and defined that necessary correlation on experimental and deductive bases?

The answer is that science has already solved the problem by giving up the idea of necessity as far as natural laws are concerned. To clarify this we can say that science discovers natural laws

through systematic observations and experiments. For example, when the occurrence of a natural phenomenon is followed another one, we deduce from this a natural law which is: that whenever the first phenomenon comes into existence it is automatically followed by another phenomenon.

However, science does not propose a necessary correlation between the two phenomena stemming from their nature, since necessity is an invisible condition that experimentation and the instruments of scientific and inductive inquiry cannot demonstrate. Therefore, the logic of modern science emphasises that natural law as it is defined by science does not indicate a necessary correlation, but an uninterrupted connection, between two phenomena. But when the miracle occurs and separates one from the other, it does not mean that their correlation was sundered.

The truth of the matter is that the miracle, in its religious sense, has become, in the light of modern scientific logic, more understandable than before, under the classical view of causal correlation. This old view assumed that every two phenomena, in which one is followed automatically by the other, must have a necessary correlation, which means that it is impossible to separate one from the other. However, this correlation has been transformed thanks to modern scientific logic into a law of correlation or of consecutive succession between two phenomena without the hypothesis of invisible necessity.

Thereby the miracle becomes an exceptional condition with regard to this connective succession without running against a necessity or leading to impossibility.

So, in the light of the logical foundation of induction we agree with the modern point of view which says that induction does not demonstrate the existence of a necessary correlation between two phenomena. We find that it shows that there is a common interpretation for the consecutive connection between the two - Since this common interpretation can be formed on the basis of the assumption of subjective necessity, it can also be formed on the assumption of a wisdom that made the Creator of the universe to continuously combine some particular phenomena with others. The same wisdom sometimes calls for exception; thus a miracle occurs.

Why all this desire to prolong Imam Mahdis life?

Now we should deal with the second question which is: Why should Allah, the Exalted, show all, this desire for this person in particular? Why should the natural laws be hindered just to pro-

long his life? Why should the leadership of the appointed day not be left to a person born in the future, who will appear then and assume his expected role?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since the message of the appointed day is to change, in a comprehensive way, a world filled with injustice and tyranny, it is therefore natural that it is looking for an individual whose psycho-logical attitude is superior to that whole world; a person whose age exceeds those who were born in that world and who were brought up in the shade of its civilisation which he is to

destroy and replace with one based on justice and truth. For whoever is brought up in a deeply-rooted civilisation, that dominates the world with its values and modes of thinking, would be overwhelmed by it, since he would have been born while it had been in existence, and opened his eyes just to see its different aspects, and would have been brought up under its power and influence.

Unlike that is a person who has deeply penetrated history, who has come to life long before that civilisation which completes the cycle of the story of humanity before the appointed day saw the light - He sees it as little seeds, hardly visible, then gradually growing and taking roots within human societies, waiting for the right moment to blossom and appear.

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

That was because Rousseau lived in the shade and under the influence of the monarchy.

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

Have you not read the chapter of the cave in the Quran (Surah-al-Kahf) Have you not read of those youths who believed in their Lord, whom Allah increased in guidance, who opposed a ruling pagan existence that was ruthless and did not hesitate to suppress every single seed of at-tawhid (Unity of Allah), so that it might not rise above the level of idolatry. So these youths became depressed to the point of despair, once the windows of hope had been closed before their eyes; so they sought refuge in the cave, where they begged Allah for a solution to their problem after having exhausted all the possibilities. For they could not tolerate the fact that falsehood was ruling, transgressing and subjugating the truth and suppressing anyone whose heart showed an inclination towards the truth.

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

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

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

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

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

How can we believe in the existence of Al-Mehdi?

Now we have reached the fourth question (the third question we publish in here) which is: Supposing that the hypothesis of the Expected Leader and all that it comprehends of prolonged life, early leadership and a silent absence, is possible, that would not be enough proof for his existence, thus, how can we indeed believe in the existence of al-Mahdi? Would some narratives related in books on the Great Messenger (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) be enough for perfect conviction in the existence of the Twelfth Imam, in spite of what this supposition bears of peculiarity and deviation from the norms? Or rather, how can we prove that al-Mahdi had a true historical existence and that he is not only an assumption, for which psychological circumstances have been combined to confirm his existence in many people's minds?

The answer is: That the idea of al-Mahdi, as the Expected Leader, who will change the world for the best, has been already mentioned in several OF the narratives (ahadith) related from the Great Messenger in general, and the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt in particular. Moreover, it has been reconfirmed, with a degree beyond doubt, in many texts. I could count up to four hundred narratives of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) which reach-ed us through our brothers, the Sunnis, (e.g., the book al-Mahdi written by my uncle as-Sayyid Sadru'd-Din as-Sadr, may Allah bless his noble soul), as well as a great number of reports about al-Imam al-Mahdi through both the Shi'ites and the Sunnis - nearly more than six thousand narratives, [Selection of traditions concerning the Twelfth Imam] by ash-Shaykh Lutfullah Safi), which is very high statistical number, not found in many of the self-evident Islamic issues.

As regards the materialisation of this idea in the Twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) we do possess enough justifications to be convinced that he is the one. They can be summed up into two groups of evidence; the first Islamic, and the other scientific,

By the Islamic evidence we confirm the existence of the Expected Leader.

By the scientific evidence, we can prove that al-Mahdi is not just a myth or a supposition but a reality which has been confirmed by historical experience. The Islamic evidence appears in the hundreds of narratives related from Allahs Messenger (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) and the Imams of Ahlul-bayt (peace be upon them), which prove that al-Mahdi will be appointed as Imam, that he is from the descendants of the Prophet and Fatimah and the ninth descendants from al-Husayn, that the caliphs (Prophet's successors) are twelve.

All of these narratives limited that universal idea by personifying it in al-Mahdi, the Twelfth

Imam of Ahlul-Bayt. Moreover they reached a great number and diffusion, although the Imams took a great precaution and care, fearing their exposure on a general level, in order to protect the righteous descendants against assassination or an unpredicted assault on his life.

However, the numerical abundance of these narratives is not the only reason for their validity, for in addition to this, there are certain virtues and coherence to be taken into account for proving their validity.

The Prophet's narratives (ahadith) about the fact that the Imams. caliphs, depending on the style of the narrative in its different ways -are twelve. Some writers counted up to more than two hundred and seventy narratives taken from the most well-known books of Sunni and Shi'ah traditions such as al-Bukhari al-Muslim, at-Tirmidhi Abi Dawud and the collection of Ahmad ibn Han-bal and the Rectification of the Judge on the Two Saths (al- Hikim, Mustadrak 'ala s-sahihayn). We should bear in mind here that al-Bukhiri who had compiled these narratives, was a contemporary to both al-Imam al-Hadi and al-Imam al-'Askari which means quite a lot, since it proves that the narratives were recorded from the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) before that the realisation of their contents and the idea of the Twelfth Imam had materialised.

This means, therefore, that there is no room left for doubt, that the recording of the narratives was not influenced by the fact of the Twelfth Imam or that it might have been a reflection of it, because the false narratives (ahadith) that are related from the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) are either a reflection or a justification for a fact occurring later in time. Now, they did not precede in their appearance and recording in the books, that fact which they came to reflect, therefore, as long as we possess the material evidence, which is that the mentioned narrative had already preceded the historical sequence of the twelve Imams, and that it had been recorded in the books of ahadith (books of traditions) before that the event took place, we can be sure that this narrative is not a reflection of an event but an expression to a truth from Allah, uttered by the one who did not speak out of fancy (the Holy Prophet) when he said: "Surely the caliphs after me are twelve". So, the event of the twelve Imams was fulfilled, starting with al- Imam, Ali and ending in al-Mahdi, this way being the only rational interpretation to that noble narrative of the Prophet.

As far as the scientific evidence is concerned it is formed out an experience, lived by a community of people, lasting nearly seventy years, which we call the period of the minor occultation (ghaybah as-sughra) To elucidate this point, we will pave the way by giving a brief description.

This minor occultation marks the first phase in the Imamate of the Expected Leader (peace be

upon him). From the time that had been predestined, from the time he assumed the role, he remained hidden from the outside world, distant from all the events that were taking place although being at the same time proximate to them in his mind and heart.

We should bear in mind that had this occultation occurred suddenly, the result would have been a great shock among the popular masses, who believed in the Imamate since they were used to contacting their Imam in every period, to consulting him for solutions to their various problems. Thus, had he suddenly vanished, his supporters would have felt cut off from spiritual and intellectual leadership. Such an event would have created an enormous gap which would have thoroughly shaken the whole structure and under-mined its unity. Therefore, it proved necessary that the way should be paved to this occultation, so that these bases might get used to it and gradually adapt themselves to the new situation.

So the plan was this minor occultation, during which al-Imam al-Mahdi vanished from the universal scene, while keeping in touch with his popular bases and supporters through his delegates or representatives and the most reliable among his companions, who acted as a link between the Imam and those who believed in his line.

The position of representative of the Imam was held in those times, by four personalities, whom the popular bases agreed as to their fear of Allah, piety and integrity. They were:

- 1) ‘Uthman ibn Said al-’Amri;
- 2) Muhammad ibn ‘Uthman ibn Said al-’Amri;
- 3) Abul-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Rfih; and
- 4) Abul-Hasan ‘All ibn Muhammad as-Samuri.

These four individuals assumed the role of representative of the Imam (al- Mahdi) according to the above classification. So whenever one of them died, the other succeeded him, after being designated by al-Imam al-Mahdi (peace be upon him).

The representative of the Imam used to get in touch with the Shi’ ahs and submit their questions and problems to the Imam and return to them with his answers. Sometimes orally and very often in a written form. So these masses who lacked the vision of their Imam, found some comfort and consolation in these indirect communications.

Moreover they could notice that the signatures and the letters were all written in the same way, during the time of the four representatives that lasted nearly seventy years. The last representative, as-Samuri, declared that the period of the minor occultation, which was characterised by the designated delegates, was over; that the period of the major occultation, in

which there would be no designated individuals to mediate between the Imam and the Shi'ites, had began. This transition meant that the minor occultation had already accomplished its mission and achieved its goal, since it immunised the Shi'ites against the great shock and the feeling of the profound gap caused by the Imams occultation. In that way, it enabled them to adapt themselves to the situation and gradually prepared them to accept the idea of general representation on behalf of the Imam. By this token the latter changed from a representation by a designated individual to a more general line manifested in the just Mujtahid (a legalist who arrives at an independent judgement), who has a keen insight into the religious and worldly issues of the Muslims, in view of the transition from the minor to the major occultation.

Now you can have an idea about the situation, in the light of what has been discussed up to now, so you can clearly realise that al-Mahdi is a reality that a community of people has lived and which has been expressed for seventy years, by the representatives and the mediators of the Imam, whom no one could suspect of cheating nor of playing on words.

For can you imagine - by your Lord - that a lie could survive for nearly seventy years, which four individuals would successively assume and agree upon and continue to interact with others on its basis as if it were a reality that they lived; that nothing would escape their control, which would cause a doubt in people's minds; that there would be no particular relation between the four through which they could gain the trust of everyone and their belief in the truth of the matter, which they pretend to live and feel?

An old proverb said, "The rope of lies is short"; also logic in life confirms the fact that it is impossible that a lie could survive in this way and for all time through these relations and still wins everyone's confidence.

Thus, the phenomenon of the minor occultation can be considered as a scientific experiment which has confirmed the factual objectivity of the Imams existence, his birth, life and occultation, on account of which he has been hidden from the world and has not revealed himself to anyone ever since.

Ref: Imam al-Mehdi, Resaleh team

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