



## IMAM MEHDI [AS]

## امام المهدي (ع)

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand that Imam al-Mahdi is our twelfth holy Imam
- Understand the fact that Imam Mahdi is the Living Imam, who is in hiding
- Understand that the Imam sees our actions and observes them, even though we cannot see him or recognise him
- Learn basic biographical facts about the Imam:
- Discuss the context of the Imam's birth and why it was kept secret
- Discuss issues related to the Imam's long life
- Understand the minor occultation and then the beginning of the major occultation
- Discuss two Qur'anic āyāt related to Imam al-Mahdi (atfs)
- Discuss two narrations related to Imam al-Mahdi (atfs)
- The concept of al-Intiḍār
- Explore the supplications related to Imam al-Mahdi (atfs)

## FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

## LEVEL 3

### The Present Imam

Imam Muḥammad al-Mahdi is our 12<sup>th</sup> Imam from the family of the Holy Prophet (saw). All Shi'ah believe that Imam al-Mahdi is currently alive and is in hiding. We also believe that the Imam will reappear from his hiding whenever Allah (SWT) decides so and when we, his followers, are ready for his arrival. So why is our Imam in hiding?

### WHY IS THE IMAM IN HIDING?

Since all the previous Imams have been killed by sword or poisoned by their enemies, Allah (SWT) has kept the Imam in hiding to protect him from his enemies and to keep him safe. This way, the Imam will be able to reappear and remove all the injustice and oppression from this world.

Another reason as to why the Imam is in hiding is because he does not have many strong and sincere followers. He will therefore remain in hiding until he gets a good number of strong believers in his army. Are we doing anything in our lives to make ourselves ready to be part of his army?

However, with the Imam in hiding, this does not mean that we cannot benefit from him. Instead, the Imam benefits us in the same way as the sun benefits the world on a cloudy day. Even though the sun is not apparent, it still gives life and energy to everything.

### CAN THE IMAM SEE US?

Although the Imam is in hiding and we cannot see him, he definitely can see us. He observes our actions and gets a weekly record of whatever good or bad we have

done. He feels happy when his followers do good actions such as praying on time and respecting parents, and gets very sad when his followers commit bad deeds such as lying and swearing.

The Imam is also present at Ḥajj every year and although we may see him there, we will not recognise him as the Imam.

“He attends the (Hajj) season, and sees them, but they do not see him”<sup>i</sup>

## SOME FACTS ABOUT OUR IMAM

<b>Name:</b>	Muḥammad ibn al Ḥasan al Mahdi
<b>Father’s name:</b>	Imam Ḥasan al-‘Askari
<b>Age at which he became Imam:</b>	5 years old
<b>Place and date of birth:</b>	Samarrā, Iraq. 15 <sup>th</sup> Sha’bān 255 AH

## THE BIRTH OF THE IMAM

The birth of the Imam was kept very secret. The night before his birth, his father, Imam al-‘Askari asked his aunt Ḥakīma to stay home to help deliver the baby, whose mother was Narjis. Ḥakīma was surprised because Narjis did not show any signs of pregnancy. However, the Imam (as) explained that this was part of God’s wisdom to protect al-Mahdi (atfs), just as had happened with the mother of Prophet Moses. The Imam was born on Friday morning, just before Fajr time. Once the Imam was born, Imam al-‘Askari informed only a few of his closest family members and he asked them to keep this news very secret.

## WHY WAS HIS BIRTH KEPT SECRET?

The reason as to why the Imam’s birth was kept secret was mainly to protect his life. Just as the tyrants at the time of Prophets Abraham and Moses knew about the birth of a child who would overcome them, the Abbasid tyrants at the time of Imam al-Mahdi knew of his birth and were on the lookout for such a child. These tyrants had fought and killed the three Imams before Imam al-Mahdi so that they could prevent or stop his birth.

Therefore, it was extremely important to keep the birth of the Imam a secret.

## THE IMAM’S LONG LIFE

Many people doubt whether the Imam is still alive. They say that it is not possible for a human being to live for so long. This is what we can argue:

### a) Several Prophets in the past have lived for a long time

Prophet Noah was a Prophet for 950 years. His lifetime would have been even longer because 950 is only the period of his mission.

“And indeed We sent Nuh (Noah) to his people, and he stayed among them a thousand years less fifty years”  
(Holy Qur’an, 29:14)

Similar to Prophet Noah, other Prophets such as Prophet Jesus and Khiḍr are still alive with the permission of God.

### b) It is scientifically possible to live for a long period?

Science has shown us that a person can live for a long time if his organs such as the heart and the brain are given the right foods and a clean environment and are protected from the negative influences of the environment.

### c) It is a miracle by God for the Imam to live a long life

We know that Allah (SWT) has the power to do anything. Therefore, if He wills that the Imam should live a long life, this can certainly happen.

## Review Questions

### Q1. Why was the Imam’s birth kept a secret?

- To keep him safe from his enemies
- To give a surprise to his family
- Because he was an Imam

### Q2. Can the Imam see us even when we cannot see him:

- No, the Imam only gets a report of our actions
- Yes, the Imam can hear and see us and all our actions
- The Imam sees us but does not recognise us

### Q3. Which of these is NOT true?

- It is scientifically possible for a human being to live more than 1500 years.
- Some Prophets in the past lived a very long life
- It is impossible for a person to live a life of 1000 years or more.

## The Imam in Occultation

In the last lesson, we learnt a few things about the life of our 12<sup>th</sup> Imam. We discussed that the Imam is currently alive in hiding and will reappear whenever Allah (SWT) wills. In this lesson we will discuss how the Imam went into hiding and some āyāt of the Holy Qur'an that talk about the Imam

### MINOR OCCULTATION

The word 'occultation' means to go into hiding. The Imam first went into hiding soon after he led the funeral prayers of his father, Imam al-'Askari. Since only an Imam can lead the funeral prayers of another Imam, the enemies were on the lookout for the Imam to lead the prayers so they could kill him. Despite the dangers, the Imam led the prayers and went into hiding immediately after that.

This was the first occultation and the shorter one. It lasted 69 years from 260 A.H. to 328 A.H. The enemies were always in search of the Imam during this time but they could not find him.

During the minor occultation, the three main things that the Imam did were:

- Introduced himself to his followers by meeting with some of them. He also performed several miracles and in this way he proved his existence.
- Selected four people to be his representatives in his absence so that they could answer the questions of the people based on the Imam's instructions. Besides this, the Imam also wrote letters to certain members of his community and constantly kept in touch with them.
- Protected his followers from the enemies. One such example is:

An Abbasid minister made a plot to find the representatives of the Imam. He sent an undercover spy to go to the representative and pretend he wanted to

give him khums money to be delivered to the Imam. Allah (SWT) informed the Imam of this plot. The Imam instructed his representative not to take any money from anyone so that he would not be found.

The minor occultation was to prepare the followers of the Imam for the major occultation in which they would never see the Imam.

### THE MAJOR OCCULTATION

Only six days before the death of the fourth representative, the Imam wrote a letter to him saying that he would now go into hiding for a long time (major occultation) and that he would no longer have any specific representatives through which he could communicate with people. He also instructed the community that anyone who claimed to be his specific representative during the Major Occultation is a liar. The major occultation began after the year 329 A.H and has lasted until today. Only Allah (SWT) knows when this occultation will end, however there are many signs that will appear before the coming of al-Mahdi.

### AL-MAHDI IN THE HOLY QUR'AN

As should always be the case, whatever we believe in must have its roots in the Holy Qur'an and the words of the Prophet and Ahlul Bayt (as). The belief in having an Imam who is currently in hiding is also mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. We will briefly look at two such āyāt:

- Every community has an Imam

“On that Day we shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imam”

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ

The word 'imam' refers to a leader chosen by Allah (SWT) who is present in every community. Therefore, for this verse to apply to our community, it means we must have an Imam among us who is chosen by Allah (SWT). This can be none other than Imam al-Mahdi (atfs), because any other possible leader in our community is not one who is chosen by Allah (SWT).

### b. Every community has a Witness

“And the Day when we shall raise up from every nation a witness against them from amongst themselves. And we shall bring you (O Muhammad) as a witness against these”

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ  
وَجِئْنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَىٰ هَؤُلَاءِ

Here, the Qur'an clearly tells us that every community has someone in it who will be a witness against itself (that community) on the Day of Judgment. At the time of the Prophet's community the witness was Prophet Muḥammad (saw) himself and at our time, it is Imam al-Mahdi.

Can you think of reasons why a witness of a community cannot be an ordinary person like us, but has to be someone chosen by Allah (SWT)?

## AL-MAHDI IN THE HOLY HADITH

Here we will briefly discuss two authentic narrations, narrated by both Shi'ah and Sunni sources. These narrations prove our belief in Imam al-Mahdi.

### a. Imams from Quraysh

This narrations is mentioned in the book of al-Bukhāri, the book considered most authentic by the Sunni school of thought:

“I heard the messenger of Allah saying that there will be twelve Emirs and they are all from Quraysh”

The above narration is mentioned by most Sunni narrators. It proves to us that there will 12 Imams after the Holy Prophet, and they must all come from Quraysh. This ḥadith cannot apply to any other belief except our belief that one of the descendants of the Prophet, i.e. Imam al-Mahdi, is the current and twelfth Imam (as).

### b. Recognising the Imam

“He who dies without recognising the Imam of his time dies the death of Ignorance”

The above narration tells us that every period in the world must have an Imam and whoever does not know the Imam of his time will be treated as an ignorant

person by Allah (SWT) on the Day of Judgement. This indicates that there is an Imam appointed by God for every period, and the Imam of our period cannot be anyone other than Imam al-Mahdi (atfs).

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AL-MAHDI

Now that we have proven the existence of our 12<sup>th</sup> Imam through the Holy Qur'an and the holy words of the Ahlul Bayt, we want to learn about his characteristics. We once again get the answers from the Qur'an:

“And (remember) when the Lord of Abraham tried Him with (certain) Commands, which He fulfilled. He (Allah) said (to him), "Verily, I am going to make You an Imam of mankind." Abraham said, "And of My offspring (to make Imams?)." Allah said, "My Covenant (Prophethood, etc.) includes not Ḍalimīn (those who beliefs or actions are wrong or false)”

From the above āyah, we learn that:

- » The Imam is sinless because Allah does not make the wrong doer an Imam
- » The Imam is from the offspring of Prophet Abraham, same as the Holy Prophet, because Allah (SWT) answered the prayer of Abraham in making the Imams from his progeny
- » The Imam is chosen by Allah because the āyah shows us that only Allah can make someone an Imam.

## Review Questions

### Q1. Why did Imam al-Mahdi go first into Minor Occultation?

- a. To prepare the community for the Major Occultation
- b. To remain safe from the plans of his enemies
- c. Both a & b

### Q2. Why can't an ordinary person be a witness against his community on the Day of Judgement?

- a. He would not be able to remember all the actions of the people
- b. He does not have the wisdom and knowledge to understand people's actions
- c. An ordinary person can easily make mistakes
- d. All of the above

## Al-Intidār

As we have already discussed in the previous lesson, Imam Al Al-Mahdi is currently alive in hiding. One of the reasons for his hiding is that his followers (the Shias) are not yet ready and prepared for him to appear. The Imam will only reappear when his followers are ready for him.

In this lesson we will discuss the concept of *Al-Intidhar*. If we understand this concept well, we can become better followers and therefore quicken the return of our beloved Imam.

### AL-INTIDHAR: THE WAITING

#### The importance of The Waiting

Al-Intidhar literally means 'the waiting'. When we relate it to Imam Al Al-Mahdi, it refers to waiting desperately and anxiously for his reappearance and making all the preparations needed for his arrival. This kind of waiting is very important to the extent that it has been referred to as the best of worship:

**“The greatest worship of a believing slave is waiting for the relief from Allah (return of Al Al-Mahdi)”<sup>1</sup>**

Waiting for the reappearance of the Imam prepares a person to be one of the companions of the Imam at the time of his reappearance. Even if he does not meet the time of the Imam, he will gain the reward of having been one of the Imam's companions:

**“Whoever dies while waiting for this affair (the reappearance), will be like the one who was in the tent of al-Qaim”<sup>2</sup>**

### WHAT SHOULD ONE DO WHILST WAITING FOR THE IMAM?

On the Day of Judgement, if we want to be counted amongst those who were waiting for the Imam to reappear, we should do three things.

#### 1) Increase our knowledge

No one can claim to love somebody without knowing about that person. So, the first thing that we should do

so that we can love our Imam is to try to read and listen to as much correct information about the Imam. The more knowledge we have about our Imam, the more we will be able to correctly prepare ourselves for his reappearance.

We should also learn more about our religion so that we can practice it better. Imam al Al-Mahdi would be very pleased with us if we would spend a few minutes every day trying to learn to recite the Holy Qur'an.

Remember that when the Imam is choosing soldiers for his army, he will not choose those people who do not know how to pray or how to fast correctly.

#### 2) Be careful of our deeds!

The next thing we must do whilst waiting for the Imam to reappear is to train ourselves to become better Muslims. We should try to do those things that please the heart of the Imam such as praying on time, respecting our parents, being truthful and polite to others and helping the poor people. We should also avoid doing those things that anger and sadden the Imam such as backbiting, lying, using swear language and listening to music.

#### 3) Build a strong emotional relationship with the Imam

Our Imam loves us very much. He cares deeply for us and is always praying for us. He feels happy when we are comfortable and he feels sad when we are in problems. We too should always remember our Imam wherever we are and always pray for his safety after every Wajib prayer. If we perform these small acts continuously, we will begin to feel true love for our Imam. There was once a scholar who used to put a few coins away in charity daily with the intention of sending the reward to Imam al Al-Mahdi.

### AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE IMAM

Some people have had the blessing of meeting with the Imam. These people loved the Imam very much and did only those things that made him happy. They also prayed to Allah (SWT) sincerely to give them such an opportunity. Here is one such story:

One day a very confused person came to Sheikh Mufeed, a very knowledgeable man, asking him to help him with his problem. The problem was that a pregnant woman had died but the baby in her womb was still alive.

<sup>1</sup> Biharul Anwar 52:13

<sup>2</sup> Kamalul Din 645

The man did not know whether to bury the mother with her child or to take the child out and then bury the mother.

Sheikh Mufeed had never come across such a situation before and he too was perplexed. He told the man to bury the woman with the baby.

On getting the reply, the man left for his village. On the way, a horse rider crossed his path. He asked the man to stop and said, Sheikh Mufeed has said that the foetus should be removed from the womb through surgery and then the woman be buried alone.

The man accepted the command and acted on it.

After some time, Sheikh Mufeed realised that the person who corrected his ruling was Imam al Al-Mahdi because no one else was aware of this incident. Few days later he received a letter from Imam al Al-Mahdi saying: 'You continue to give rulings; we will save you from mistakes and errors. We will not leave you alone to commit mistakes.

Imam al Al-Mahdi protected Sheikh Mufeed because he was very knowledgeable, lived a life which was free from sin and also he loved the Imam very much. We too should try to develop these qualities in ourselves so that we can meet with our Imam

## **AN EXTRACT FROM DU'A NUDBAH**

In Dua Nudbah, which we should read once every week, we complain to Allah (SWT) about the absence of our Imam. We complain to Allah about the injustice around the world and that we are helpless without our Imam. We are desperately asking Allah to hasten his reappearance. Below are couple of extracts from the Dua where we complain about not seeing our Imam.

*"It is hard for me that I see every creature but I don't see you...*

*...How I wonder! Where has farness taken you?*

*Or which land or soil is carrying you?*

*Is it on Mount Razwa or elsewhere on Mount Tuwa?*

*It is hard for me that problem come to you but not on me,*

*And neither cries nor complaints from me can help you!*

## **Review Questions:**

**Q1. What does truly waiting for the Imam to reappear mean?**

- a) To sit in the mosque the whole day and ask Allah to send the Imam
- b) To improve ourselves so that we are fit for Imam's army
- c) Both a & b

**Q2. Is it possible to communicate with the Imam?**

- a) Yes, but only if we are sincere and if the Imam is happy with us
- b) Yes, but we have to go to Mecca
- c) No, one can never communicate with the Imam.

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<sup>i</sup> Al Kaafi 1:337