

IMAM AL-MEHDI [AS]

امام المهدي (ع)

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Know basic facts about Imam al-al-Mahdi as the living Imam
- Know that the concept of the saviour returning to rescue the world and establishing justice is a universal concept across many creeds
- Know Biblical extracts which include possible references to Imam al-al-Mahdi (atfs)
- Know that the general concept of al-al-Mahdi is shared among all Muslims
- Understand briefly the characteristics of the saviour al-al-Mahdi
- Discuss in detail the main Qur'anic āyāt related to Imam al-al-Mahdi
- Discuss in detail the narrations related to Imam al-al-Mahdi
- In relation to the above, know the characteristics of the Imam (atfs)
- Know briefly the concept of al-Intiḍār
- Know the characteristics of people who will be included in the Imam's group when he reappears
- Know the government of al-al-Mahdi (atfs) when he returns, and its characteristics, from the narrations
- Know in brief some aspects of the reappearance, emphasising the general aspects mentioned in the narrations
- Be encouraged not to occupy themselves with the signs of the reappearance, instead we concentrate on preparing for it

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Lesson 1: al-Mahdi: the Universal Saviour

Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) was born in the time of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tamid, who had tried to prevent his birth but had been unsuccessful.

Among the titles of the Imam (as) are:

- al-Qa'im (the One who Rises)
- al-Ḥujjah (the Proof)
- al-Muntaḍar (the Awaited one)
- al-Muntaḍir (the Waiting one)
- Ṣaḥībul Zamān (the Master of this Age)



Allah (SWT) granted the Imam (as) with wisdom and excellence at birth. Like the Prophets Jesus (as) and John (as), he had the ability to speak in infancy and used to recite verses of the Holy Qur'an from the cradle.

As we have seen from previous lessons, Imam al-Mahdi (as) is the living Imam of our age. He has already been born and is living among us today. Unlike what you may hear from other Muslim schools of thought or other religions (that also believe in a saviour) – that he is still to be born – we believe that Imam al-Mahdi (as) has already been born but is in hiding and we only await his re-appearance by the command of Allah (SWT).

THE BELIEF IN A SAVIOUR – A UNIVERSAL BELIEF

All the major religions in the world, even Buddhism and Hinduism, believe in a saviour who will come to bring the world to a state of ultimate good. They may disagree on the identity of this saviour, but they all agree that such a saviour will come. The belief in a saviour is clearly expressed in the holy books of the divine religions and forms an important part of their belief system.

The belief in a saviour is a major part of Jewish theology. In fact, they- albeit wrongly- see their return to Palestine as a step towards the return of the saviour, and have mobilized their resources and efforts in order to hasten the supposed return of their saviour. Similarly, Christian theology revolves around the return of Jesus (as) and his establishment of a rightful order in the world.

In fact, even non-religious ideologies and philosophies speak of a saviour who will bring peace and justice to the world. Famous men such as Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein have referred to this, as has Bernard Shaw, who even says that the life-span of such a saviour must be long (centuries) prior to the start of his mission. He believes that the saviour needs such a long life-span to build the necessary knowledge and characteristics to truly change the world. Of course, we believe the Awaited Imam already has these qualities, but is in fact waiting for his community to be ready. However, Shaw's writings show that the idea of a saviour who has an extraordinary lifespan is not something strange to human thought, if it can be proven to be possible.

Not only do many religions believe in a saviour, but almost all religions and ideologies who believe in a saviour also believe that the saviour appears after a period of occultation. Christians believe Jesus will reappear, whilst the Jews believe in the reappearance of 'Uzayr and so on.

This is because all humans have an inherent need towards a state of peace and tranquillity at which their constant struggle and work ends. There is an in-built belief that all this movement must end at a place of rest. This is why all ideologies share in this belief that there will come a saviour who will bring about such a state.

POSSIBLE BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO IMAM AL-MAHDI (ATFS)

Here, we take a brief look at one example of the prophecies in the Bible and see who they best apply to. In verses 1-17 of the chapter of "the Inspirations of Johanna", the prophecy speaks of a saviour who is not yet born and who will bring justice to the entire world. This prophecy cannot apply to Jesus (as) because he is already born and because he himself is the one making the prophecy. The prophecy best applies to al-Mahdi (atfs).

In these verses, the Bible speaks about a saviour who comes from the progeny of a woman who has twelve children. Then, the Bible speaks of Allah taking the twelfth child into hiding and protecting him.

Other examples of the Shi'ah belief in al-Mahdi being referred to in the Bible include:

- From the same verses of the Book of Ashi'a mentioned above. There, the saviour is referred to as 'al-Qā'im'
- The book of Armiya (46:2-11) describing the saviour as the avenger of the blood of H̄usayn who is killed on the banks of the Euphrates
- From the book attributed to Enoch – Chapter 62 Book of Parables describes the saviour as "For from the beginning, the Son of Man was hidden, and the Most High preserved him in the presence of His Might, and revealed him to the elect."

The above examples are from famous passages of famous books. There are many other examples which are more clear in indicating our belief in al-Mahdi.

THE COMMON BELIEF AMONGST ALL MUSLIMS ON THE AL-MAHDI (AS)

THE NARRATION OF THE TWELVE CALIPHS

al-Bukhāri narrated in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* through his chain to Jābir ibn Sumārah who said:

"I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) saying: "there will be twelve Emirs", he then said a word I did not hear, so my father said to me that the Prophet had said: "they are all from Quraysh".

This is another narration narrated by Shi'ah and Sunni scholars. It is narrated by:

- al-Bukhāri,
- Muslim in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim
- Al-Tirmithi
- Abu Dawūd

It indicates that after the Prophet, there would be twelve Imams, all from Quraysh. This is another narration that the Prophet stated at important times at the end of his life, such as at 'Arafāt and at the stop in Ghadīr Khumm. This shows that the Prophet was delivering a very important message to his community through these narrations.

These and other narrations from the different schools of Islamic thought all indicate that the belief in al-Mahdi (atfs) is a common belief amongst all Muslims. However, differences do arise in the details of who al-Mahdi is, whether he is born already or yet to be born, which we have already discussed above.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF IMAM AL-MAHDI (ATFS)

As we learnt in previous years, every community must have an Imam. Now we want to learn the characteristics this Imam must have as outlined by the Qur'an:

1. The Imam must be sinless. This is proven by the following āyah where Prophet Abraham asks for his descendants to be Imams, and Allah, the Exalted, replies that only **those who are not wrong-doers** can be Imams.
2. The Imam is from the progeny of Abraham (as), as proven the same āyah below.
3. The Imam must be chosen by Allah, as is also proven by the āyah below where Abraham (as) clearly indicates that an Imam can only be appointed by Allah, the Exalted.

"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, Imamah) does not include the Ḍalimūn (polytheists and wrong-doers)." (2:124)



Like the other infallible Imams, al-Mahdi (atfs) will have special moral excellences. As the Infallibles (as) are perfect human beings and are the models and exemplars of mankind in every aspect, they have the most excellent morality.

Imam al-Reḍā (as) said: "al-Mahdi (atfs) will be the most knowledgeable, humble and virtuous man (of his time).

Of all men (during his time) he will be the most forgiving, brave and pious."ⁱ

One of the salient features of al-Mahdi (atfs) is that he can know the inner personalities of people through their faces; he would be able to distinguish pious from impious personalities.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) said: "When al-Qā'im rises up, no one will be left except the person he knows to be a righteous and good, or the deviant and corrupt."ⁱⁱ

Review Questions

Q1. The difference between the Sunni and Shi'ah beliefs on Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) is:

- a. The Shi'ah believe he is already born but the Sunnis do not
- b. The Sunnis do not believe in al-Mahdi (atfs)
- c. The Shi'ah believe al-Mahdi is from the progeny of the Prophet (saw) but the Sunnis do not

Q2. The characteristics of Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) do NOT include:

- a. He is appointed by God
- b. He is sinless
- c. He is the most peaceful

Lesson 2: al-Mahdi in the Qur'an and Hadith

As we discussed earlier, the unique thing about our belief in al-Mahdi is that we believe that he is living currently. In this lesson, we will study some Qur'anic āyāt which clearly indicate the fact that there must be an Imam in every age and time. This fact means that in our time there must be an Imam too, and this Imam is al-Mahdi (atfs).

AL-MAHDI IN THE QUR'AN

EVERY NATION WILL BE CALLED BY ITS IMAM

Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Qur'an:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ ۗ فَمَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ
فَأُولَئِكَ يَتْرَعُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا

وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ
سَبِيلًا

“(On) the Day when We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imam. So whosoever is given his record in his right hand, such will read their records, and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least. And whoever is blind in this world will be blind in the Hereafter and more astray from the Path.” (17:71-72)



Let us try and understand the possible meanings of the word ‘Imam’ in the context the Ayah is talking about:

Possible Meaning of Imam as Used in the Qur'an	Does it fit the context of this ayah?
1.The Preserved Tablet	No , because there is only one preserved tablet, not one for each community.
2.The Holy books	No , because the communities before Prophet Noah’s time did not have holy books
3.The General Prophet of the Community	No , because not each community had a prophet living amongst it
4.The Divinely appointed leader for the community (prophet or Imam)	Yes , because every community has such a leader

Therefore, the āyah indicates that we will be judged according to how we responded to the Imam of our time and our community. It clearly indicates that every community has to have an Imam, and thus we must have a living Imam amongst us, who is appointed by God. This Imam observes all our actions and will be an Imam and a witness for our community on Judgment Day.

EVERY COMMUNITY HAS A GUIDE

The Holy Qur'an also declares that every community has a guide, and so, in our time, our community too must have a guide.

وَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۗ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ
مُنذِرٌ ۗ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ

“And the disbelievers say: "Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?" You are only a warner, and to every people there is a guide” (13:7)

According to other āyāt of the Qur'an, this guide must be someone who himself is guided directly by Allah, the Exalted, and the only person who fits this criterion is Imam al-al-Mahdi (atfs). The Qur'an also states that this

guide must be someone appointed by Allah, and again the only one who fits this criterion is Imam al-Mahdi (atfs).

AL-MAHDI (ATFS) IN AUTHENTIC NARRATIONS

There are also several authentic narrations we will examine regarding al-al-Mahdi (atfs). We will also examine a number of narrations considered to be authentic by the Sunni school of thought, and see how they apply best to our belief in al-Mahdi.

THE NARRATION OF AL-THAQUALAYN

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said:

“I am leaving among you two things that if you hold on to them you will not go astray after me. One of them is greater than the other: the Book of Allah, a rope stretching from heaven to earth, and my progeny, my household. These two will not separate until they come to me at The Pond, so see how you act in relation to them after me”ⁱⁱⁱ

The above narrations is narrated in several of the most trusted Sunni books. There is no doubt that this narration is authentic and that the Prophet (saw) definitely said these words. In fact, we gather from the narrations that the Prophet (pbuh) used to say these words repeatedly at a number of important situations where the Muslims had gathered.

We know that “my progeny” and “my household” refers to Sayyidah Fāṭimah (as) and the twelve Imams after the Prophet, as is proven by Sunni narrations themselves.

This narration proves the fact that there must always be a living Imam in the following ways:

- The Prophet (saw) said that His household and the Qur’an will never separate. We know the Qur’an is always Truthful, and therefore the Prophet’s Household must always be Truthful, in order not to separate from the Qur’an. This means that they are sinless (ma’ṣūm), and the only sinless person claimed to be alive in our time is al-Mahdi (atfs)
- The Prophet (saw) said that the Qur’an and His household will never separate until the Judgment Day, meaning that at least one sinless

person from among His Household must always be alive till the Judgment Day, and this is none other than al-Mahdi (atfs)

THE NARRATION OF THE TWELVE CALIPHS

The most trusted Sunni compiler of narrations, al-Bukhari narrated in his book from a companion of the Prophet:

“I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) saying: “there will be twelve Emirs”, he then said a word I did not hear, so my father said to me that the Prophet had said: “they are all from Quraysh”^{iv}

It indicates that after the Prophet, there would be twelve Imams, all from Quraysh. This is another narration that the Prophet stated at important times at the end of his life, such as at Arafāt and at the stop in Ghadīr Khumm. This shows that the Prophet was delivering a very important message to his community through these narrations.

These narrations say that these twelve Caliphs have the following characteristics:

- They are from Quraysh
- They are Caliphs and Emirs
- The religion will be upheld as long as they are present
- They will be faced with opposition

The only people to whom this narration can possibly apply are the twelve Imams that we the Shi’a Ithna ‘Ashari believe in, because:

- According to the narrations, these Imams must be alive from the time of the Prophet (saw) till the Judgment Day. Therefore, one of them, al-Mahdi (atfs) must be alive today.
- These twelve Imams must come one after the other, without any gap between them, because as the narrations say Islam’s success depends on their presence
- There have never been twelve consecutive Caliphs who have upheld Islam and its laws in the history of the religion. Whatever part of Islamic history we examine, we find there have been mostly corrupt leaders. Thus this narration can only apply to the twelve Imams we believe in.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AL-MAHDI

It is clear from the above verses of the Holy Qur'an and authentic narrations from both Shi'ah and Sunni sources the following things have not only be true but also necessary about Imam al-Mahdi (atfs);

- He is from the Ahlul Bayt (as) – the progeny of the Holy Prophet (saw) and Prophet Abraham (as)
- He is currently living
- He is appointed by God – because the Qur'an has mentioned him and so has the Prophet (saw) on several occasions. We also know that the Prophet (saw) does not say anything except which Allah (SWT) commands him to say.
- He will come to bring justice by applying the Laws of God

Review Questions

Q1. Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Qur'an that every community has a:

- a. Teacher
- b. Guide
- c. Leader

Q2. Which narration speaks about Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) being a Caliph from among the Quraysh:

- a. The narration of Thaqaalayn
- b. The narration of Ghadir
- c. The narration of the twelve caliphs

Q3. In Surah 17:71-72 (see above) the possible meaning of Imam is:

- a. A Holy Book
- b. A Divinely appointed Imam
- c. The Preserved Tablet

Lesson 3: al-Intidār

THE IMPORTANCE OF AL-INTIDĀR

The narrations indicate that al-Intidār (actively waiting) for the relief to come from Allah, particularly in the form of the reappearance of al-al-Mahdi (atfs) is one of the greatest and most important and rewarding actions.

“The greatest worship of a believing slave is waiting for the relief from Allah”^v

Waiting for the reappearance of the Imam, and truly living as one who is waiting, prepares a person to be one of the companions of the Imam at the time of his reappearance, and 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-Qā'im...”^{vi}

AL-INTIDĀR (ANTICIPATION)

“The one who dies while anticipating the coming of the Imam (atfs), it is as if he was in the tent of the Imam. In fact, it is as if he was fighting the enemies alongside the Messenger of Allah (saw).”

1. al-Intidār: means waiting with alertness. This is the state we are supposed to be in while waiting for our Imam (atfs). It is not waiting lazily or passively. Rather, it is the active anticipation that involves preparation and eagerness.
2. This means that we should have got ourselves ready for our Imam (atfs) and simply be waiting for him to come. This means we should stay away from places our Imam would not want us to be in because the Imam may come while we are in such a place, and we should frequent places where the Imam would want to see us.

DIMENSIONS OF AL-INTIDĀR

- Knowing the Imam: find out as much as you can about your Imam (atfs), because the one who dies without knowing the Imam dies the death of ignorance and disbelief
- Showing your love for the Imam: give charity on his behalf; attend gatherings where he is mentioned etc...
- Develop an emotional connection with the Imam (as) through special supplications and prayers for the Imam (as)
- Show your knowledge and love in action. Perform the deeds that you think the Imam would want you to do. Involve yourself in projects and programs that you think improve the community, and that the Imam (as) would approve of.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOLLOWERS OF IMAM AL-MAHDI (ATFS)

- According to the narrations, the followers of Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) are devout by night and lions by day. This means that they are active in the day, standing up against oppression, dishonesty and all other vices at the same time fulfilling their obligations to their family, community and society. At night they humble themselves in prayer seeking nearness to Allah (SWT).
- They are courageous, determined and submissive on Allah's path. Patience is one of their characteristics; they are never hasty. They are wise and patient in their struggle for Islamic values to dominate the world.
- Submission to Allah is their greatest source of strength in their faith. They are fully submitted to Almighty Allah. In times of danger, they are never uneasy, but say, "It is all for the best." Let us now look at the features of these blessed people of the End Times, the followers of Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) in the light of some narrations.

"The nature of his (Al-al-Mahdi's) followers will be pure and immaculate. They will be free from hypocrisy and all other contaminations."^{vii}

"Their (Al-al-Mahdi's followers') hearts will be untainted and unadulterated by malice, jealousy and enmity."^{viii}

THE GOVERNMENT OF AL-MAHDI (ATFS)

The time of the Imam's government will be a time of happiness where oppression, pressure and persecution end and people can turn to Allah and live peaceful, tranquil lives

"Allah will bring relief to the Muslim community through him. Glad tidings for the one who lives at his time"^{ix}

It will be a time of great material wealth:

"Allah will fill the hearts of the community of Muhammad (pbuh) with wealth, and his justice will encompass all of them"^x

It will be a time of honour and end the degradation of the Muslims

The Imam will be a true leader, who uses his position only to serve people.

"He will be cautious of Allah. He will not place one stone over another, and will not strike anyone with a whip except in judicial punishment"^{xi}

At the same time, the Imam (atfs) will be very kind and compassionate towards his community, such that they will turn him for all their needs.

"They will turn to him, as bees turn towards their homes"^{xii}

The Imam will remove all polytheism and establish the system of Islam universally. The Imam will bring back the original Taurāt and Injīl and use these to argue against the Jews and Christians. Most of them will revert to Islam except for a small and stubborn minority.



He will unify all Muslims under the banner of the true Islam that the Prophet practiced:

The Prophet (saw) said about al-Mahdi (atfs); "His practice is my practice. He will rule people according to my legislation and practice"^{xiii}

The Imam (atfs) will remove all innovations that have been introduced into Islam and will overcome all seditions. The Imam will begin by removing innovations, beginning with the innovations in Masjidul Ḥarām, such as the separation of the Imam of the prayer from the followers.

The Imam will appoint representatives and workers to implement his governance around the world. He will be harsh and strict with them and ensure they do not become corrupt.

The Imam will also be just in distributing wealth equally to all people, without giving people political or racial preference. The narrations also say that he will give generously when asked.

THE REAPPEARANCE

The signs mentioned in the narrations are too many to discuss here. In fact, even the summary of the signs is too long to mention here, so we will have a quick look at part of the summary of the signs given by Sheikh al-Mufīd:

“There are narrations speaking of the signs of the uprising of al-Mahdi (atfs), and events that will be indicators and signs of his uprising. Among them are: the appearance of al-Sufyāni, the killing of al-Ḥasni, conflict between Bani ‘Abbas about kingdom, solar eclipse in the middle of the month of Ramaḍān and lunar eclipse at the end of it- different to the usual circumstance. An eclipse in al-Baydā’, and in al-Maghreb, and in al-Mashriq, the sun not moving from noon-time until the middle of the afternoon, the sun rising from the west, the killing of the innocent soul in Kūfah among seventy pious people, the slaughter of a Hāshimi man between al-Rukn and al-Maqām, destruction of the walls protecting Kūfah, the coming of the black flags from the direction of Khurasān, the appearance of al-Yamāni...”^{xiv}

In addition to keeping ourselves aware of the signs of his return, we should also pay more attention to actually preparing ourselves for the Imam’s return rather than simply looking out for the signs. We can prepare ourselves for his return in the following ways:

- Increase our knowledge of Islam – we should be familiar with the lessons from the Qur’an and the lives of Imams (as)
- Strengthen our faith in Allah through practicing His Commandments and Laws to the best of our ability
- Develop and gain new talents that will be helpful to the community now and also at the time of Imam’s reappearance and government
- ^{xv}Contribute towards the development of the community and the spread of the message of Islam

Review Questions

Q1. According to the narrations, Imam al-Mahdi (atfs) will judge the Jews and Christians and prove Islam to them, according to:

- a. The Qur’an
- b. Common sense
- c. The original books of the Jews and Christians

Q2. What does al-Intiḍār mean?

- a. Waiting with alertness and always preparing through good actions
- b. Only gaining more knowledge but not acting on it
- c. Being lazy and careless about the current state, and waiting for the imam to fix things

Q3. The followers of Imam al-al-Mahdi (atfs) are:

- a. Patient and courageous
- b. Courageous and impatient
- c. Strong and merciless

ⁱ Yanabi’ al-Mawaddah, p. 401; Ithbat al-Hudah, vol. 3, p. 537; Ihqaq al-Haqq, vol. 13, p. 367

ⁱⁱ Kamaluddin, vol. 2, p. 671; Khara’ij, vol. 2, p. 930; Ithbat al-Hudah, vol. 3, p. 493; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 51, p. 58; vol. 52, p. 389

ⁱⁱⁱ This narration is narrated through a huge number of narrators.

- The famous Sunni scholar Ibn Hajar lists 20 chains of narration in his book al-Sawaiq al-Muhriqa
- The famous Sunni scholar al-Tirmithi lists 33 chains of narration in his book Sunan al-Tirmithi
- It is narrated with similar wording (always including the Qur’an and the Ahlul Bayt) by the following famous Sunni narrators:
 - Al-Bukhari, in Tareekh al-Kabir
 - Sunan al-Tirmithi
 - Sahih Muslim
 - Sunan ibn Majah

^{iv} This is another narration narrated by Shi’a and Sunni scholars. It is narrated by: Al-Bukhari, Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Al-Tirmithi, Abu Dawud

^v (Biharul Anwar, 52:131)

^{vi} (Kamalul Din: 645)

^{vii} *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol 52, p. 35
Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 52, p. 35

^{ix} (Ithbatul Hudat, 3:504)

^x (Musnad Ahmad, 3:37)

^{xi} (Malahim Ibn Tawus, p.132)

^{xii} (al-Burhan, al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, p. 78)

^{xiii} (Kamalul Din, p.411)

^{xiv} Kitabul Irshad, 2:368-370

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