



IMAM AL-MAHDI [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 5

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-Qā'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.

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.

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

THE NARRATION OF THE TWELVE CALIPHS

al-Bukhārī 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-Bukhārī,
- 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.

SIGNS OF THE REAPPEARANCE

In this lesson, we will discuss some issues related to the signs that come prior to the reappearance of the Imam (as).

As we have learnt previously, we believe the Imam could reappear at any time. However, there are narrations that talk about the signs that indicate that his reappearance is very near. If we think these signs are absent, this does not mean the Imam’s reappearance is far away, because these signs can occur at any time as well.

Some of these signs will definitely occur, whereas others may not, and some occur very close to the reappearance of the Imam whilst others occur a long period before it. The narrations discussing these signs use a lot of symbolism and special language, and so we must be careful in interpreting them correctly, and not applying them to any event that has some similarity to the narrations. We must also be careful of distinguishing the authentic narrations from the false ones.

There are three primary books that were written in the early era of Islam and are important Shi’ah references:

- al-Ghaybah, by al-Na’māni
- Kamal al-Din, by Sheikh al-Ṣaduq and al-Ghaybah, by Sheikh al-Ṭusi

Most of the narrations written in these three books speak about the signs of the reappearance, but are of weak narration, which means many of them cannot be used because of their unauthenticity, or that most of them are questionable as far as their authenticity is concerned.

In opposite to this are some authentic Ḥadīth that are reliable with regards to the reappearance, in particular, with relation to the definitive signs of the reappearance. There are five of these definitive signs that are based on Ḥadīth that are authenticated and are accepted by a large amount of scholars:

- The revolt of Sufyāni
- The appearance of al-Yamāni
- The scream from the sky
- Sinking of the land
- Killing the Innocent Soul

The late Sheikh al-Kulayni, author of *al-Kāfi*, narrates this aforementioned tradition that quotes the five definitive signs, with only five mediums to Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (as), and all five of them are reliable and trustworthy.

As far as other signs are concerned, they must be scrutinised individually by the relevant expert scholar and its result could differ from one to another.

THE REAPPEARANCE IN THE HOLY QUR'AN

It is also important to look at some of the Qur'anic āyat that discuss events after the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (atfs):

a- Islam's Victory and Prominence over other Religions

“They intend to put out the Light of Allah with their mouths. But Allah will complete His Light even though the disbelievers hate (it). He it is Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth (Islamic Monotheism) to make it victorious over all (other) religions even though the polytheists hate (it).” (61:8-9)

b- The Virtuous Believers Take Control of the World

“And indeed We have written in al-Zabūr, after the Remembrance, that My righteous slaves shall inherit the land” (21:105)

c- The Establishment of a Truly Monotheistic Society

“Those (Muslim rulers) who, if We give them power in the land, they establish prayer, give in charity, enjoin good and forbid evil. And with Allah rests the end of (all) matters (of creatures).” (22:41)

d- Realising the Purpose of Humanity

“And I created not the Jinn and humans except they should worship Me (Alone)” (51:56)

e- Ending Deviation in Apparently Muslim Communities

“O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion (Islam), Allah will bring a people whom He will love and they will love Him; humble towards the believers, stern towards the disbelievers, fighting in the Way of Allah, and never afraid of the blame of the blamers. That is the Grace of Allah which He bestows on whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower.” (5:54)

CAN ONE GIVE A SPECIFIC DATE FOR THE REAPPEARANCE OF IMAM AL-MAHDI?

Unfortunately, some people get carried away when interpreting some narrations related to the signs of the reappearance. Due to their lack of understanding and

analysis of these narrations, they often give very specific dates for the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (as).

This practice has been clearly condemned by the Ahlul Bayt (as), who have instructed us not to give specific dates for the reappearance at all, as this is subject to God's Absolute Authority and only He knows the specifics of it.

WILL THERE BE IMAMS AFTER AL-MAHDI?

QUESTION:

Can you please comment on the validity (or invalidity) of the following Ḥadith:

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) said: “from among us, after the Qā'im (Imam al-Mahdi), we shall have twelve Mahdis from the descendants of Ḥusayn (as)”ⁱ

Some Shias are using this Ḥadith and other similar ones to claim that there is a man living today who is the son of Imam Mahdi (ajtf) and that he is one of the '12 Mahdis' mentioned in narrations such as the one above. Please clarify if this can be true.

ANSWER:

There are a few narrations like that in our books of Ḥadith. Please consider the following points about them:

1. These narrations are weak in their Esnad (Chain of transmitters), there are unknown narrators among them, and in some of them part of the Sanad (chain of transmitters) is missing.
2. They are contrary to many other authentic and famous narrations that state: 'The Imams from the pure Progeny of the Prophet (P) are twelve, and they are all Mahdi' (i.e. in the literal sense: 'guided'). For example see: Behar, vol. 36, p. 385.
3. Irrespective of the above points, these narrations are talking about the time after the appearance of Imam Mahdi (atfs), thus no one can relate them to any individual or group during our occultation time.
4. Sheikh al-Mufīd; one of the most eminent early Shi'ah scholars comments on such narrations as follows:ⁱⁱ

“And there will be no state for anyone after the state of the Qā'im (Imam al-Mahdi), although there are some narrations about his son ruling if God willed so, but there is no certain narration about it, instead most of the narrations say that the Mahdi of (the Islamic) Ummah will not pass away till 40 days prior to the Day

of Judgment, whence there will be the relief (or great commotion) and the signs of the resurrection of the dead (from their graves) and the hour of judgment and recompense.”ⁱⁱⁱ

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

Lesson 2: al-Mahdi in the Qur’an and Ḥadith

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 review 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). We have discussed this in previous years, but will be reviewing this topic due to its great importance.

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 يَفْرَهُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا
وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هُدًى 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)



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”^{iv}

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”.^v

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 Ghadir 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”^{vi}

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...”^{vii}

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."^{viii}

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

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"^x

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"^{xi}

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"^{xii}

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"^{xiii}

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"^{xiv}

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.

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 [Bihar Al Anwar (Oceans of Lights), chapter 53 page 148, and Ghaybat Al Tousi (Occultation by Al Tousi) page 4478]

ⁱⁱ Sheikh Mansour Leghaei, askthesheikh.com

ⁱⁱⁱ (Al-Irshad – 2:387)

^{iv} 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*

^v 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

^{vi} (*Biharul Anwar*, 52:131)

^{vii} (*Kamalul Din*: 645)

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

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

^x (*Ithbatul Hudat*, 3:504)

^{xi} (*Musnad Ahmad*, 3:37)

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

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

^{xiv} (*Kamalul Din*, p.411)