Mahdaviyat and God's Sunnah in Quran

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Jan. 2017

Abstract: *The author of the present article deals with sunnah of God, namely istikhlaf, Imtihan, Tamhis, istidraj, istidraj, and I'mla according to Quran and traditions, then their relationship with Mahdaviyat, disappearance and reappearance have been depicted.*

Keywords: *Imam Mahdi, Mahdaviyat verses/Mahdaviyat, Quran authenticity, Quran, God's Sunnah/ Istikhlaf/ Imtihan and Tamhis/ Istidraj and Imla*

Introduction

One of the issues which all Muslims are agreed upon is "prior to the day of doom, one of the offspring of the last Prophet will rise and will be a ruler over the world. He is going to full the earth with justice after it is replete with cruelty and injustice." The belief in this promised future maker in Islamic culture is called as " Mahdivisim" .

Awaiting the revelation of Promised Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) is of the most significant issues in Islam and is regarded as the essentialities of religion and the infallible imams always invited people to this understanding. In traditions

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awaiting his reappearance is mentioned as the paramount of worships.

The holy Prophet stated,

افضل العبادة انتظار الفرج[1].

"The best of worship is waiting for revelation [of him]."

Only those can benefit from this blessing that enjoy comprehensive and deep knowledge about Imam and his unseen situation and like others not to be superficial and shallow minded, which in this case they would be the best of all times; as imam Sajjād stated:

يا أباخالد، إنّ اهل زمان غيبة القائلين بإمامته و المنتظرين لظهوره أفضل من أهل كلّ زمان[2]

"Oh Aba-Khalid, the people of the time of that Imam of disappearance who believe in his imamate and are waiting for his reappearance are superior to the people of all other time."

In various traditions from infallible imams, it is said waiting for his reappearance is obligatory. As an example from imam Jawad, it has been narrated that he said,

إنَّ القائم منّا هو المهدى الَّذى يجب ان ينتظر فى غيبته[3]

"Surely the one who will rise from among us is Mahdi for whom waiting in the time of his disappearance is obligatory."

Being obligatory in the words of imam Jawad pointes to the essentiality of being awaited at the time of his hidden existence and it also brings a duty which is it is necessary to train faithful and honest individuals at the time of sedition and deviation. Holding this belief, human beings can stay stable in front of hardship, adversities and chaos of the time and do not step out of the right path, pass this test of God successfully, and get ready to accept his leadership at that promised time.

We should bear in our mind that the time of imam's reappearance is dependent on the Will of God; as Imam asserted this himself:

فَلا ظهور إلاّ بإذن الله[4]

"*Reappearance [of me] is only dependent on the Permission of God."*

But what prepares the conditions of reappearance is people preparation and desire and the aim of God's tests is to reach people to this preparation. Therefore, Shia at the time of His disappearance should place himself in the path of Ahlul Bayt and acquire necessary knowledge to get to this preparation.

The reappearance of imam Zaman (p.b.u.h.) is Sunnah of God which is rooted in Quran. To review this Sunnah,

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we should refer to some Qurānic points explained by infallibles and commentators. God in Quran in various verses points to the final triumph of Right over Wrong all around the world. In these verses, these concepts have been highlighted:

Finally God will give the world – which is in fact for Him and His friends- to the hands of faithfuls and virtues servants of Him and the earth will be for those best ones who were oppressed in past by oppressors.

Now we refer to the verses including this meaning.

1.1. First verse

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ

We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance: 'The righteous among My worshipers shall inherit the earth. (21:105)

The issue of rulership of benefactors on the earth is a promise that God has given to pious people in His Books. It shows that this decree is an eternal decree and is essential for human community which without it human community will not reach its perfection.

Traditions of Amme عامه and Khasse خاص also assert this point and mention the time of his reappearance as the perfection time and golden time, and the final inheritors of the world are his followers.

In some traditions clearly this verse has been interpreted as imam Mahdi and his friends uprising. Imam Baqir in the interpretation of this verse said,

هُم أصحاب المهدی مِن آخر الزّمان[5]

"These – pious servants of God- are the companions of imam Mahdi at the end of the time."

Close to this meaning is mentioned in the tradition books from imam Baqir and imam Sadiq who said,

«هُم القائم و أصحابُهُ[6]»-

Another proof is the well-known tradition narrated by Shia and Sunni from Prophet who said,

لَوْ لَم يَبق مِن الدُّنيا إلاّ يَوم لطوّل اللّه ذلِکَ اليوم حتّی يأتی رجل مِن عترتی اسمهُ اسمی يَملاءُ الأرضِ قِسطا وَ عَدلاً کَما مُلِئَت ظلما وَ جَورا[7]

"*If it remains only a day of the lifetime of the world, God will extend it to be so long that a man from my offspring whose name is similar to mine be raised to spread justice all over the world as it used to be depleted with oppression and injustice."*

In fact such a belief shows the opinion of Islam to the future of human beings. Human beings are always worried about their future and are terrified of facing a bitter end. Different schools of thoughts

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eventually have to answer this. A group of them introduces the end of human beings dark and deadly, they held a pessimistic stance; but another group takes an optimistic stance towards the end of the human beings and Islam is among this group.

In another tradition he said,

هذِهِ الأُمَّة مرحومة فمنها نبيّها و منها مهديّها. بنا فتح هذا الأمر و بنا يختم و لنا ملک مؤجل و ليس بعد ملک لامنا اهل العاقبة للمتّقين[8]

"*This nation, is the nation of forgiven one, which its Prophet is from it and his Mahdi is from it. This starts from us and will end by us. There is a rulership for us which will form in future and after our rulership, there would be no other rulership. Because we belong to the end and end is for the pious ones*."

1.2. The second verse

إِنَّ الأرض لِلّهِ يُورِثُها مَن يَشاءُ مِنْ عِبادِهِ وَ العاقِبَة لِلمتَّقين

"Moses said to his nation: 'Seek help from Allah and be patient. The earth belongs to Allah; He gives it as a heritage to whom He chooses amongst His worshipers. The outcome is for the cautious." (7:28)

Imam Baqir said in this regard,

أنا و أهل بيتى الَّذينَ أورثنا اللّه الارض وَ نحن المتّقون، وَ الأرض كلّها لنا... حتّى يظهر القائم من أهل بيتى بالسّيف، فيحوزها[9]

"My family and I are the ones whom God leave the earth to us and we are pious. All the earth is for us… till Qaim (imam Mahdi) from us rises with a sword and occupy the earth."

1.3. The third verse

The verse 5 of surah Qisas refers to this fact that the Will of God is "the oppressed ones become imams and inheritors of the earth":

و نريد أن نَمُنَّ عَلى الَّذين استضعفوا فى الأرض و نجعلهم ائمّة و نجعلهم الوارثين».

"But We wanted to be gracious to those abased in the land, and to make them leaders and inheritors"

This verse in Quran is preceded by the story of Bani Israel but as Imam Ali explained in his interpretation, it refers to Ahlul Bayt and their followers:

هم آل محمّد عليهم‌السلام يبعث اللّه مهديّهم بعد جهدهم فيعزّهم و يذلّ عدوّهم[10].

"The oppressed one in this verse are the family of Mohammad whom God will appoint Mahdi from them after hardship and then he will bring honor to them and humiliate their enemies."

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In the book of Amme also it is narrated from Imam Ali who said, "This verse has been sent down about us."

1.4. The fourth verse

God in surah noor, verse 55 asserts that appointing faithful ones of Muslim to govern the world will happen:

وَعد اللّه الَّذينَ آمنوا مِنكم و عَملوا الصّالحات لَيَستخلفنَّهم فِى الأءرض كما استخلَفَ الَّذين مِن قبلهم و لَيُمكنَنَّ لهم دينهم الَّذى ارتضى لهم وَ لَيبدِّلنَّهُم مِن بَعد خوفهم امنا يعبدوننى لايُشركون بى شيئا

"***Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good works that He will indeed make them successors in the land as He made those who were before them successors, and that He will indeed establish their religion for them; that which He has approved for them, and will exchange safety for them after their fear. They worship Me and associate nothing with Me. After that, those who disbelieve are the impious***."

Sucessorship means to be someone's substitute for some reasons; for example absence or death. In this situation, a second person replaces the former one or due to the former one disability or the honor and dignity of the second person. In the latter meaning, God gives successorship to His Friends on the earth. As God says in verse 26 surah saad,

يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَى فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا نَسُوا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ

"(We said): 'David, We have made you a caliph in the earth. Judge with justice among people and do not yield to your own preference in case it should lead you from the Path of Allah. Surely, a terrible punishment awaits those who stray from the Path of Allah, because they forget the Day of Reckoning." (38: 26)

God even before of Creation talked about this successorship where He said,

وَ إذ قالَ ربُّکَ لِلمَلائِکَةِ إنّى جاعِل فِى الأءرضِ خليفة[13]

"When your Lord said to the angels: 'I am placing on the earth a caliph, ' they replied: 'Will You put there who corrupts and sheds blood, when we exalt Your praises and sanctify You? ' He said: 'I know what you do not know."

It means that Hikamh (reason) of successorship is prior to Hikmah of Creation and if God creates a thing while there is no Caliph in the earth, He exposes that creature to being ruined but this is against Hikmah of God. God is Wise and never does a vain aimless Act.

Therefore, the earth would not exist without a caliph and caliphate will

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continue till the Day of Doom. In tradition books by different wordings, it is narrated from infallibles that

و إنَّ الأءرض لاتخلوا من حجّةاللّه تعالى على خلقه فى كلّ عصر و أوان[14].

"***The earth will not remain without presence of a proof of God to people, [always His proof exists] in all time and all era."***

Imam Sajjad (a.s.) said in its interpretation:

هُم وَ اللّهُ شيعَتُنا أهل البيت، يفعَلُ اللّهُ ذلِکَ بِهِم عَلَى يدى رجل منّا و هُوَ مهدىّ هذِهِ الأُمَّة[15]

"*By God, they are Shia (followers) of us, Ahlul Bayt. God will do this by a hand of a man from us, and he is Mahdi (p.b.u.h.) of this nation*."

Aba-Basir asked Imam Sadiq about the meaning of this verse, imam Answered,

نَزلت فِى القائِم وَ أصحابه[16]

Imam Sadiq introduced imam Mahdi(p.b.u.h.) and his companions in this verse "*those who are promised to inherit this world*." From this verse, it can be realized that God gives glad tidings of three things to a group of Muslims who have Faith and do good:

1.successorship and ruling over this world

2. spreading the right belief everywhere

3.destroying all causes of fear and insecurity[17]

But regarding the nature of this group, there are different ideas among commentators: some of them specifically linked it to companions of the Prophet who came into power at the time of Prophet after the victory of Islam. Some commentators of Amme know the era of the next four caliphs after Prophet to be the meaning of the verse. And some believe this promise has been given to all Muslims who have this attribute. And a group who says it refers to the rulership of Imam Mahdi, as frequently narrated news talked about his reappearance which will overcome the earth with justice after it was surrounded by cruelty and oppression.

From the verse, we can understand that doubtlessly this verse is about some members of nation (because of the word (مِن) in the sentence «وعد اللّه الَّذينَ آمنوا منكم و عملوا الصّالحات» , it means this promise is only given to those who have faith and also do good deeds.

And there is no reason neither in the wording nor logical-wise to say that it refers to companions of Prophet or the whole nation. Likewise in the verse «وَ ليمكنّن لهم دينهم الَّذى ارتضى لهُم the word ليمكنّن refers to what is practiced in the society and no hindrance can stop its effect, no shed can put a barrier in front. In fact a righteous society in all senses

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will be built. Such a society with these features, from the prophethood of Muhammad till now has not been established yet. In addition to it, Muslims and faithfuls could not gain complete power on the earth. Therefore, a day should come when God fulfills His promise; as God never breaks His promise.[18]

Contemplating on these verses and referring to Islamic news and traditions which some examples have been mentioned, we conclude that fulfilment of these promises can happen at the time of imam Mahdi's rulership. Faithful ones rulership over cruel ones is the stable sunnah of God in all nations. As successorship of friends of God is not only related to future and in the past we can find some examples for, God has mentioned the general principles regarding successorship inside the story of previous nations. For example, at the time of Noah, when his enemies were destroyed, he and his followers inherit the earth. They lived a long life on earth and established cities and states on it.

وَ لَقد أرسَلنا نوحا إلى قومه.... فَكذّبوهُ فانجيناهُ وَ الَّذينَ معهُ فِی الفُلک وَ اغرقنا الَّذينَ كذَّبوا بآياتنا أنّهم كانوا قوما عمين

"We sent forth Noah to his nation … (But) they belied him, so We saved him and those who were with him in the Ark, and We drowned those who belied Our verses. Surely, they were a blind nation."

The story of Noah has been mentioned in Quran in surah Hood, Anbiya, Momenoon, and Shoara. At the time of Moses, the promise of God has been fulfilled. Pharaoh and Haman and their troops after some years of rebel were humiliated and the nation of Moses inherited Moses' throne.

نتلوا عليک من نبأ موسى و فرعون... و نريد أن نمنّ عَلى الَّذين استضعفوا فِی الأرض و نجعلهم أئمّة وَ نجعَلهُمُ الوارثين[19]

"We shall in truth recite to you some of the news of Moses and Pharaoh…But We wanted to be gracious to those abased in the land, and to make them leaders and inheritors."

The story of other prophets and their nations like Thamoud, Hud, Salih and Ad are mentioned in verses of holy Quran, for example in surah Yunes verses 71-75, Hud 25-96, Shoara 65-190, Anbiya 69-90, Qamar 8-46. This is the asserted Will of God, as it happened for the previous nations, it will happen for this nation as well; as the Prophet said,

لتركبنّ سنن من كان قبلكم شبرا بشبر و ذراعا بذراع[20]

"Whatever had happened for the previous nations will happen exactly for

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our nation, you will tread in the way they put their feet in."

But the time and place of it depends on God's decision and no one is aware except God.

It is important to notice Quranic approach is to mention general laws and not detailed examples. Explanations of details are assigned to the Prophet and Ahlul Bayt. There are numerous examples in Quran in which instead of detailed and extended explanation, a succinct point has been said. For example the verse

أطيعوا الله و أطيعوا الرَّسول و أولى الأمر منكم

Quran in this verse has the same method in explaining the principles of following infallibles. The principle of obedience of Vali is directly mentioned in Quran, but the tangible examples of vali should be pictured by Prophet. [21]

God used the same method in Quran to talk about "rulership of righteous ones". In Quranic expression, overthrowing Rebellious unbelievers and empowering righteous ones is called "istikhlaf" استخلاف (i.e. substitution). The examples of it has been clarified by Prophet.

As we have seen, istikhlaf has been happened for previous nations but the rulership of righteous ones did not last, but in the nation of Prophet, by reappearance of Imam Mahdi, it will continue to the day of doom and in the period of Rajat it will continue. The rulership of righteous ones will extend till the resurrection day and unfaithful and corrupt ones will not find any opportunity of ruling.

A general look at the verses

1. The mentioned verses never picture a subject-based or specific plan for a nation, but depict a general law true for all ages and centuries and for all nations; because "وعد الله" is certain and definite.

2. The rulership of Bani Israel and collapse of Pharaoh's government are examples of fulfillment of God's Providence. The rulership of Prophet and the uprising of his son Mahdi (p.b.u.h.) are the perfect examples of fulfillment of God's Providence.

3. The expression of " الَّذينَ آمنوا منكم و عملوا الصّالحات" emphasizes on this point that faith and good deeds to enjoy God's promises are essential, as in " العاقبة للمتّقين" and " عبادى الصّالحون" these points are obvious.

4. The word "منكم" in " وعد الله الّذين آمنوا منكم و عملوا الصّالحات" and in " من قبلهم" are emphasizing on this point that the substitution which has happened in previous nations will happen in this nation as well.

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5. The great rulership of imam Mahdi is the beginning of the global ruling of righteous people on the earth, and puts an end to all injustice and chaos.

Test of God and purification in Quran

Test of God is one of the unchangeable and permanent Sunah of God. The system of the world is a system of growth and perfection-oriented way. All living creatures are on the way of getting to perfection. Therefore, all people from infallibles to others, according to this general rule, should be tested to reveal their dormant talents. As Quran said:

أَحَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

"Do people think that they are left alone by saying: 'We are believers, ' and will not be tried?" (29:2)

From Quranic verses, it can be realized that difficulties and problems and religious duties are all test of God to differentiate (Tamhis) تمحيص people, good from bad; good ones will follow the path of perfection and bad ones evil path.

To make clear this Sunnah was God's program, happened to the previous nations, God said in the following verse:

وَ لَقَد فتنّا الّذين من قبلهم

"We tried those who have gone before them. Allah knows those who are truthful and those who lie."

The test includes intentions and desires.

وَلِيَبْتَلِيَ اللَّهُ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ»

Allah might try what was in your chests and that He will examine what is in your hearts. (3:154) '

Tamhis literally means purification from all kinds of shortcoming. In this verse, it means purification. The tools in our daily life even can be a reason for testing. As God said:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

"We have appointed all that is on the earth an adornment for it, in order that We try which of them is finest in works."(18:7)

It is worth knowing that the words "Fitnah" فتنه , "Ibtila" ابتلا , "Tamhis" تمحيص and "Imtihan" امتحان are used in Quran, meaning test. In Arabic they mean "evaluation and testing" and "purification".

The meaning of this test of God is in fact growth of people. Test of God reveals itself to human beings in different ways. In Quran more than twenty types of tests have been

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attributed to God. Each group and nation is involved in this Sunnah of God. A group is put in a place where is polluted from every aspects and Satanic temptations surrounded them from all sides. Their great exam is not to be the same as their environment and to keep their purity. A group is placed in hardship and plight. At this situation, their duty is to keep their faith, follow the path of God, and believe in the Mercy of God. Another group, in contrast, is placed in wealth, possessing whatever they want. This is to test them if they thank God or they sink in ignorance, arrogance, selfishness, lust, and sins.

From this verse, we can understand that one of the important tools of test of God is wealth, especially after turning into God. In the part of istidraj استدراج we will talk about it more.

In summary, it can be said that God in each blessing and hardship, relief or difficulty, health or illness, and in each case, hides a test in order to reach us to the ultimate goal of Creation which is perfection, and appearance of just and perfect human beings, and a just government.

Definitely we know that since creation up to know, during all courses of history, this just government has not been formed. As overcoming the world by a just rulership is the Will of God, therefore in future, this Will of God will be fulfilled.

Though this goal will be reached when mankind goes through problems and difficulties, passes demanding tests of God. As it becomes clear, test of God is general. In Qurānic stories, we find examples of these tests that even prophets were exposed to.

The Prophet Ibrahim was ordered to sacrifice his son for the sake of God and put his family in that dry place of Mecca. The Prophet Noah had been inviting his nation to God for 950 years, but a few people accepted him. But he continued, until God gave him the glad tidings of his and his nation rescue.

The nations who believe in God also are tested by God, sometimes they pass and sometimes fail. Islamic nations also are not exception, we mention two examples here.

1.2.God has given lots of blessings to human beings which are not countable.

إِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا

If you count the blessings of Allah, you will never number them.(14:13)

Among these uncountable blessings, some are materialistic blessings that

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God has given to His servants out of His Kindness, and some are spiritual blessings which are the guidance of human to eternal prosperity. From the greatest spiritual blessings, is the blessing of wilayah and obedience and love of Ahlul Bayt.

فَاذْكُرُوا آلَاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

«Give thanks to God for His blessings so that perhaps you will have everlasting happiness."

In Quran we read,

Imam Sadiq said about this verse,

هی أعظم نعم اللّه علی خلقه و هو ولایتنا.

That best blessing of God to His servants is our wilayah.

This is that blessing which will be asked in the day of doom.

ثُمَّ لتسئلنّ یومئذ عن النّعیم
نحن النّعیم

Imam Ali explained this blessing as,

This blessing is we

وَاشْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

and be thankful for the favors of Allah if it is He you worship.(16:114)

Thanking God is obligatory logical-wise and tradition-wise. Each wise human being, should know himself responsible for thanking his bless-giver who is God. According to Quran, the requisite of being a servant is to thank His blessing.

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

"If you are unthankful My punishment is indeed stern."

God promises rewards in return for carrying out this responsibility and in case of disobedience, punishment is waiting for them.

Therefore, regardless of the duty of each person towards his bless giver, if he wants to benefit more, he should thank Him. Otherwise, he deserves punishment. This is the sunnah of God.

One of the greatest blessings of God which was disregarded after the demise of prophet was wilayah.

Imamat is one of the principles of religion and accepting it is as significant as believing in the Unity of God, Prophethood, and resurrection day. Imamat is considered as the extension of prophethood of Muhammad and infallibles have the same responsibility as Prophet's except for messengership. From various logical and traditional reasons, it can be understood that all Muslims in every places and time, should know the present imam of their time and accept his wilayah (guardian

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ship), otherwise, their connection to true religion will be torn apart and will be returned to the ignorance time.

من مات و لا يعرف امام زمانه مات ميتة جاهليّة

Anyone who dies but does not know imam of his time dies like a person lives in ignorant time.

Accepting wilayah of Ahlul Bayt is a definite sunnah of God which is in progress for all the world; it had been introduced to the heaven settlers and inhabitants of the earth. Even infallibles have been tested by wilayah. Choosing those five great prophets among thousands of Prophets was based on this test. In a tradition, the holy Prophet said,

In that night when I was carried away towards God (Meraj night), God has revealed to me: oh, Muhammad, I have created "you, Ali, Fatemah, Hassan and Husayn and imams from his offspring" from the main light of me and I introduced your wilayah to the heaven settlers and earth inhabitants.

Anyone who accepted, becomes faithful and anyone who denied, became a disbelievers.

Oh, Muhammad, if one of my servants worships me so long as to be cut into parts, and wears out like skin bottle, then came to me while denying your wilayah, I do not forgive him until he confesses to your wilayah.

Therefore, the criterion of faith and disbelief is ***wilayah***. As Muslims were tested for this after the demise of the Prophet. For this reason, the holy Prophet, at the beginning of his prophethood and then in various periods, in Ghadir khum, by hadith Thaqalayn or at the time of his death, emphasized on ***wilayah*** and successorship of imam Ali and called those who denied as misled.

But plots and treacherous hid truth to the extent that except a small group like Salman, Ammaar, Abuzar and Miqdad, other people revolted against him.

Therefore, imamat and ***wilayah*** of Ali and his innocent children were forgotten. This event had happened at the beginning of imamat and ***wilayah*** chain. For the end of this chain, which is the time of imamat and ***wilayah*** of imam Mahdi, this test is in progress, shedding light on the life of all people of that time. Imam Mahdi wrote to his second representative, Muhammad ibn Uthman that,

I take refuge to God from darkness after light, from astray after guidance, from practical evils and doubt raising Fitnah, the very God who says,

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وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

"We tried those who have gone before them. Allah knows those who are truthful and those who lie."

How are they sinking in the waves of Fitnah and are wondering in the whirlpool of wonder, do they choose the separation way from religion of God, or are doubtful, or are in the war of God or neglect the news and traditions or do they know them all but forgot?

Now, we are present in the arena of test. What is suitable behavior? Should we go to wrong way in spite of all lights, similar to the mentioned stories? Or should we keep our right belief and do not forget that unseen imam? Hope to pass this test proudly.

2.2. Test in the time of imam disappearance

In Shia traditions, imam Mahdi's disappearance has been counted as a test for people. Imam Musa Kadim said, *The owner of this responsibility,* ***wilayah*** *and imamat, has a period of disappearance, in which believers in imamat, change their minds. This issue, disappearance, is not but a test from God to test His creatures by that.*

This test is what a lot of Muslim can not pass, even those who believe in imamat and ***wilayah***. Basically, this test is specifically for imamat believers, because others fail the prerequisite tests before this test, which is accepting Prophet successorship. Now, at the time of disappearance of the last imam, God wants to separate weak believers from strong believers. Therefore, in a tradition from imam Sadiq in this regard we read,

و اللّه لايكون ما تمدّون إليه اعينكم حتّى تغربلوا، لا و اللّه لايكون ما تمدّون إليه اعينكم حتّى تمحصوا، لا و اللّه لايكون ما تمدّون إليه اعينكم حتّى تميّزوا، لا و اللّه لايكون ما تمدّون إليه اعينكم إلاّ بعد اياس، لا و اللّه لايكون ما تمدّون إليه اعينكم حتّى يشقى من شقى و يسعد من سعد.

His holiness will reappear after hard tests which reveals pious people from evil doers.

3.2. Tests, tools for training

We know that one goal of all prophets and the main program of them was to establish a rulership based on the Unity of God all around the world. Quranic verses assert that all prophets were on mission and committed to administer it. God says,

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

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We have sent Our Messengers with proofs, and sent them with the Book and the Scales, so that people might establish the Scale (of justice). We have sent down iron in which there is great might and diverse benefit for people, so that Allah knows those who help Him and His Messengers in the Unseen. Indeed, Allah is the Strong, the Almighty.

By a brief look at the human history, we can conclude that prophets, in their endeavor could not reach a complete success. If there was any success, it was for a short period of time. And even in that short period, they faced enemies. According to Quranic teaching, all of these goals and plans will be fulfilled one day. A great man from prophets family, will organize this world, spread justice, and ruin disbelief, and his majesty will revitalize the earth and its residence by faith and justice.

This plan is not only in a special part of the world, but it is all over the world, and in all aspects of religion, economy, intellect, ...

In the society before reappearance, God is not worshipped in true sense, people's rights are violated, Quran is not obeyed, ahkams are not administered, all types of hardship and cruelties, oppression, poverty, famine, war, ... will overcome societies.

To rescue such a society, a number of faithful, purified, and ready to fight people are needed to carry the heavy burden of such vast reforms around the world on their shoulders.

Training these people definitely needs passage of time. In this burning desert, there should grow some flowers to prepare a garden. In traditions, one of the reasons of prolonged disappearance of imam is cited as a test of people to choose the best ones. Shia at the time of disappearance, should await their imam, it means to be completely ready, and in addition to purifying himself, try to purify others.

4.2.imam disappearance, a difficult exam for Shia

The biggest danger at the time of imam Mahdi’s disappearance which threatens us is to lose true faith and turn into disbeliever. Therefore, the most emphasizes are on keeping faith; Because people lose their faith in a way that they do not even realize. A day from morning to the evening is enough to turn into disbelievers. Imam Sadiq talked about some Fitnah engaging people in an eloquent speech:

Before the time of imam reappearance, some fitnah will pour on people.

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Men are believers in the early morning and lose their faith late at night. The early night are faithful but by the end of night their faith has been taken away from them. Some groups of people exchange their beliefs with small things belonged to the world.

From words of imam Sadiq, it can infer that the era at the time of imam's disappearance is not going to be a peaceful time. At that era, Muslims should not be indifferent to the threats towards their belief. To be indifferent equals to lose their faith. This is one of the most difficult tests in front of Muslims after imam's disappearance. To save faith, one should care a lot. Because at this time the number of wrong or doubtful ideas are more than any other time. Therefore, if a person could stick to his true believes against all difficulties and temptations, he will stay a true believer in imamat of imam Zaman. Due to this sticking to true religion at the time of disappearance is said to be similar to holding fire in hands.

These people who believe in unseen imam are superior to those who met Prophet and imams and converted to Islam after witnessing great signs. The holy Prophet said,

Oh Ali! know that the most wondrous people in faith and the greatest ones in certainty is the group that do not visit Prophet and also their imam is hidden from them but they believe in black which is on white [the words written on white sheets reached them from their ancestors).

3. Istedraj and Emla املاء in Quran and traditions

As it is said, God tests His servants through various ways. A type of test and punishment that He applies to many of arrogant evil doers is Istidraj and Emla. These two words are taken from Quran surah 'Araf verses182-183.

The meaning of two words of Istidraj and Imla

In Mofradat Ragheb, istidraj has two meanings:

1. سنستدرجهم من حيث لايعلمون "***We will draw them on little by little, from where they cannot tell."***

2. وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ "***and I respite them, My stratagem is firm."*** *(7; 182-183) which means we gradually approach them to the punishment which is outcome of their actions.*

Imam Sadiq said in this regard, "Istidraj is when a person is given time by God after his sins and pours His blessings to him, then distracts him from repent and finally he is trapped gradually."

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Istidraj and Imla at the time of disappearance

In Islamic source books, there are various traditions which depict the corruption and distortions of nations at the time of Imam's disappearance. According to these traditions, one of the worst threats of then is prevalence of sins to the extent that they seem usual. Many examples of these sins are named by Prophet. For example, prevalence of lie and divorce, wines, usury, oppression, … .

According to Istidraj, people little by little forget their religious duty, sink in mundane pleasures of the world and think these blessings are because they deserve. But in the contrary, God is testing them by blessings and is giving them time, but as Quran says abruptly God seize them and throws them in the abyss of torture.

Therefore, we see in traditions one of the important duties of Shia at the time of Gheibah (disappearance) is to wait for reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s.).

Reappearance will happen suddenly like Moses who was lost in the darkness of a desert along with his family. He went away to look for fire but he went back to them while he was appointed as a prophet.

God Almighty will act the same concerning imam Zaman and He will makes him appear when there is no hope in his reappearance, while people are absorbed by assets of the world. At that time repent would be fruitless; as imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) wrote in his letter to sheikh Mofid:

فان امرنا يبعثه فجاة حين لا ينفعه توبه[1]

Truly, our reappearance would happen abruptly, when repent is fruitless for people.

Therefore, hope in his holiness reappearance, in days and nights, should exist and in every minute should await his reappearance.

[1] Mikyal al-Makarim, Sayyed Muhammad Taqi Mosavi Isfahani, Qum

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