

Why Do We Need to Know Imam Mahdi?

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Abstract

Having knowledge about our religion plays an important role in building our religious belief. Knowing the Imam of our age plays numerous roles in furthering this knowledge. Imam al-Mahdi is both a spiritual and a religious leader. This religious leadership serves as an essential tool in our understanding of God.

The Imams are considered as the “lights of God” (Noor Allah) and so any one whose heart is enlightened with their knowledge is actually enlightened with the light of the Almighty. In this article reasons for knowing Imam al-Mahdi will be mentioned with emphasis on the saying of the Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.): “A person who dies while not knowing the Imam of his Age, has died the death of Ignorance.”

We must know more about our religion before we can truly approach it. Apart from theory, a religion also contains a practice, where that religion requires its adherents to perform certain rites and rituals. However even if we were to perform those practices to their fullest extent, we still could not consider ourselves “religious” if we lacked proper knowledge. In fact, this knowledge plays a decisive role in building religious belief. Deeds reflect knowledge, beliefs indicate understanding, and spiritual growth points to insight. With regard to the value of religious insight, the Qur'an says:

“[O messenger!] Is the one who knows that what has been revealed to you from your Creator and Nurturer is the truth, like the one who is blind and cannot see the truth? Only men of reason and understanding realize the truth and receive admonition.” (the holy Qur'an, 7:180)

Religious knowledge is also important in evaluating the faithfulness of a person. A person is truly sincere and his religious performance is indeed perfect when he feels closer to God by performing a certain ritual. And we cannot become closer to God by performing religious acts unless we know God and believe in Him. Therefore if we value sincerity and faithfulness, we must first come to know and understand God.

Knowing the Imam

Knowing the Imam of our age plays numerous roles in furthering our religious knowledge. Knowing him helps us better ourselves and allows us to strive to attain justice in the world, as we attempt to hasten his reappearance.

This religious leadership serves as an essential tool in our understanding of God, for in fact it is intricately connected to another aspect of his leadership, that of knowledge.

In this regard Imam al-Sadiq has said: “The true successors of the Messenger are the gateways to Almighty God, the gates through which believers shall be received by God. He wouldn't have been known if these successors did not exist, and they are God's last proof to mankind.”

Therefore knowing the Imam means discovering the door toward truth regarding God and a path to the field of divine knowledge and light. The reason that the Imams are considered gates to finding God is that existentially, they are the “lesser lights of God” and so any one whose heart is enlightened with their knowledge is actually enlightened with the light of the Almighty.

Imam Mahdi is both a spiritual and religious leader as well as a social and political one. In fact, whereas his social and political leadership depends on the people and their readiness, his function as a religious leader is independent of general society and unconditionally required for all individuals.

When Abu Khaled Kaboli asked Imam al-Baqir about the meaning of light in the following verse, “*So believe in Allah and in His messenger and in the light which we have sent down and [know that] Allah is well informed about what you do...*” (The holy Qur'an, 64:8), the Imam replied,

Oh Abu Khaled, by God that “light” (mentioned in the above verse) is the Imams from the progeny of Mohammad (who remain Imams) until the Day of Resurrection. By God, they are the “lights of God” that He revealed. By God, they are the light of God in the Heavens and the Earth. By God, Abu Khaled, the Imam's light which is in the hearts of believers is brighter than the sun that shines in the day. By God, it illuminates the hearts of the believers.”¹

Knowing our Imam strengthens our belief in God, and bring us closer to Him. Imam al-Mahdi is indeed a means for us to connect to the Almighty, whether it is asking for His blessings, or requesting his Divine Mercy and Grace.

He connects us to the Divine in the same manner as His glorious Names: just as we use particular names of Allah, those that are relevant to our request, we as well can call upon God through the Imam. What is a name but a sign and symbol pointing to that named, an indication towards that indicated? These luminaries, our Imams, exhibit some of God's Infinite Mercy, Kindness, Wisdom, Generosity, Forgiveness and Strength, while at the same time being His human servants. Thus, just as we use those glorious verbal “names of God”, using our tongues to speak to God, knowing these human

1 Usul Al-Kafi vo. 1, p. 194

servants of God allows us to use our entire existence to truly make us closer to the Divine.

Muawiyah ibn Ammar asked Imam al-Sadiq regarding the following verse “*And to Allah belong Names of outstanding excellence, so invoke Him through them...*” (the Holy Qur'an 7:180), Imam al-Sadiq said, “By God, we (the Imams) are those “Names of outstanding excellence,” and God does not approve any deed from any (of His) servants if they do not have enough knowledge and understanding about us.”¹

Dispelling Ignorance

The Prophet of Islam famously said, “A person who dies while not knowing the Imam of his Age, has died the death (the Age) of Ignorance.”

Narrated by both Shia² and non-Shia³, the hadith infers that if a person dies while they fully believed in Tauheed, Prophethood, the Quran, and practiced all mandatory laws of Islam, and yet were unaware and ignorant of their Imam, then that person dies a non-Muslim. This is akin to one who has died while astray. The Prophet inextricably emphasizes the necessity of knowing our Imam for the validity of our other beliefs and actions. However, the Prophet does not imply that whoever retains political authority is regarded as the ruler, sovereign or “Caliph”, who commands a powerful army, or who can establish an emirate is the Imam that must be recognized. If this were so, then anyone who rejects an oppressive tyrant would die with the same status as Abu Lahab and Abu Jahl who rejected Islam during the Prophet's own

1 Mekyal al-Makarim Vol. 1, p. 7

2 *Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 377; *Kamaal al-Din*, Vol. 39, p. 410-11.

3 *Al-Musnad*, Vol. 2, p. 73; *Sahih Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p. 13; *Sahih Muslim*, p. 1459.

lifetime. As the messenger once said, “disregarding the knowledge of the Imam, whose divine leadership is the foundation of Islamic theology and religion and who is the impetus behind religious beliefs, will bring back ignorant thoughts and behaviors.”