

RESPONSIBILITY ONE

MA'RIFAT OF THE IMĀM – PART I

One of the most important responsibilities for a Shi'a is to acquire ma'rifah (a detailed and profound understanding) of the Imām of the time, and the testimony to this can be seen in both the logical and narrated proofs (ahādīth).

It is clear from the traditions that we must know the characteristics and specific traits of the Imām whom we are all obliged to follow. This must be done so that we do not mistake him for someone who claims his status. In addition, there are also numerous traditions which oblige us to have a ma'rifah of our Imām.

It has been related from Imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq عليه السلام that the Prophet of Allāh صلى الله عليه وآله said:

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ إِمَامَ زَمَانِهِ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً

“One who dies while he does not have ma'rifah of the Imām of his time, dies the death of Jāhiliyyah (the period of Ignorance before the time of the Prophet.)”⁸

In another tradition, this one from the eleventh Imām, Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-'Askarī عليه السلام, it is mentioned that:

أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ لَا تَخْلُو مِنْ حُجَّةِ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ وَأَنَّ مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ إِمَامَ زَمَانِهِ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً فَقَالَ: إِنَّ هَذَا حَقٌّ كَمَا أَنَّ النَّارَ حَقٌّ فَقِيلَ: يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ الْحُجَّةُ وَالْإِمَامُ بَعْدَكَ؟ فَقَالَ: ابْنِي مُحَمَّدٌ هُوَ الْإِمَامُ وَالْحُجَّةُ بَعْدِي فَمَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْهُ مَاتَ

⁸ Biḥārul Anwār, vol. 53, pg. 175, sec. 31, no. 7; al-Iḥtijāj, pg. 498

مِيتَةٌ جَاهِلِيَّةٌ

“Unquestionably, the Earth can never remain devoid of a ḥujjat (proof) of Allāh over His creations. Indeed the person who dies without recognizing the Imām of his age has died the death of Jāhiliyyah.” The Imām continued: “Surely this (the issue of an Imām existing for all ages) is true, just as the (existence of) hell-fire is true.” It was said to the Imām: “O’ son of the Messenger of Allāh! Who is the ḥujjat and Imām after you?” The Imām replied: “My son, Muḥammad is the Imām and ḥujjat after me. Whoever dies and has not recognized him (as his Imām) has died the death of Jāhiliyyah.”⁹

Without doubt, the meaning of these traditions which state that it is obligatory to recognize the Imām of the time is that those who possess true faith must know the Imām in the way and to the extent that would lead to their happiness in this world and the next. In addition, the recognition of the Imām must be such that there remains no room for misguidance or confusion in regards to this noble personality.

Thus, recognition can be divided into two types:

1. Ma‘rifah of the personality of the Imām;
2. Ma‘rifah of the Imām himself.

In order to acquire these two forms of ma‘rifah, we must refer to the writings of the scholars of the faith.¹⁰

We must realize that recognizing the character and personality of the Imām can only be achieved through understanding his qualities, attributes and special traits which are related to the status of Imāmate.

If we are successful in becoming acquainted with the status of Imāmate, its central role in Islām and its characteristics and qualities, then we will become acquainted with any Imām since all of the A‘immah ؑ are created from one nūr (Divine celestial light) and in the words of the leaders of true guidance

⁹ Wasā’il ash-Shī‘a, vol. 11, pg. 491, sec. 33, no. 23

¹⁰ Books such as: al-Ghaybah, written by Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Nu‘mānī better known as Ibne Abī Zainab; al-Ghaybah of Shaykh Ṭūsī; Najm al-Thāqib of Shaykh Ṭabrisī Nūrī; Kamāl ad-Dīn wa Tamām an-Ni‘mah of Shaykh Ṣadūq; A‘yān ash-Shī‘a (section on Imām al-Mahdī); Biḥārul Anwār (section on Imāmah and the book of Imām al-Mahdī); Usūl al-Kāfī, vol. 1 and 2.

themselves: “The first of us is Muḥammad, the middle of us is Muḥammad and the last of us is Muḥammad!”¹¹ Thus, we must have ma‘rifah of the merits and excellence of all of our A‘immah ؑ since they share these traits amongst themselves!

On the other hand, we must also become acquainted with the merits of excellence which are specific to the Imām whom we wish to know more about so that our ma‘rifah of him can become complete. This form of ma‘rifah can be acquired through knowledge of his name, title, titles of appellation, genealogy, characteristics, virtues, and other traits which relate to the specific time and place in which he lives.

The minimum and maximum limits of these two types of ma‘rifah of the Imām can be understood by our intellect and in brief, we will mention the minimum limit as stated in the traditions.

Imām Ja‘far b. Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq ؑ has said: “The minimum level of ma‘rifah of the Imām is to know that he is on par with the Prophet except in the status of prophethood. The Imām is the inheritor of the Prophet, and obedience to the Imām is equivalent to obedience of Allāh and the Messenger of Allāh. Thus, you must submit to the Imām in all issues, and all questions must be referred to him. You must act in accordance with his commands and must know that the Imām after the Messenger of Allāh was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. After him it was Ḥasan, then Ḥusain, then ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusain, then Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, then Ja‘far b. Muḥammad, then Mūsā b. Ja‘far, then ‘Alī b. Mūsā, then Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, then ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, then Ḥasan b. ‘Alī and then al-Ḥujjah b. al-Ḥasan – these are your leaders.”¹²

As was previously mentioned, in order to recognize the Imām, we must know his name, titles of appellation, the name of his father and other incidental facts. However, we must also know his qualities of excellence and special merits.

The Imām of our time shares the same first name as the Prophet Muḥammad ؑ. His title is also the same as that of the Prophet of Allāh ؑ (Abul Qāsim) and his title of appellation is al-Mahdī. He has a beautiful black mark on his

¹¹ al-Ghaybah of Nu‘mānī, pg. 85; Biḥārul Anwār, vol. 36, pg. 399, sec. 46, no. 9

¹² al-Burhān, vol. 2, pg. 35, no. 3

right shoulder blade, a very handsome face with a nose that is slightly protruded and is of average height.

In addition, we also need to understand the specialties related to the time and place of the Imām and the events surrounding him including his actions and speech.

For example, we need to know that in order for the Imām to make his advent, five signs must be fulfilled.

We know that when he makes his appearance, the Earth would be full of oppression and corruption. However, before his advent, a sound will be heard from the sky; an image of a hand will be seen on the moon; the staff of Mūsā ﷺ will be seen with him and many other signs. It should be noted that all of these signs are mentioned in the books of traditions¹³ and the appearance of these will herald his return. In addition, there are also other special signs related to him which we must know and understand. Therefore knowing these signs constitutes one of the ways in which we can recognize our living Imām. ❁

¹³ Books such as al-Ghaybah of Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Nu‘mānī better known as Ibne Abī Zainab; al-Ghaybah of Shaykh Ṭūsī; Najm al-Thāqib of Shaykh Ṭabrisī Nūrī; Kamāl ad-Din wa Tamām an-Ni‘māh of Shaykh Ṣadūq.

RESPONSIBILITY TWO

MA'RIFAT OF THE IMĀM – PART II

Another responsibility which the believers have is to ask Allāh ﷻ for a thorough ma'rifah of Imām al-Zamān ﷺ and one must be sincere in praying for this.

Just as was previously stated, after attaining the ma'rifah of Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ, the next most important action for the believers is to have ma'rifah of Walīul 'Amr, Imām al-Zamān ﷺ.

Only Allāh ﷻ can grant this level of ma'rifah to His servants for this is something which is out of the power of human beings to acquire without the help of Allāh ﷻ. Thus, this ma'rifah cannot be achieved through a person's own struggles as this is a nūr (Divine celestial light) which Allāh ﷻ places in the heart of those whom He wishes. Therefore, we must request the recognition of our Imām from the Almighty through supplications.

It has been narrated that Muḥammad b. Ḥakīm said to Abū 'Abdillāh, Ja'far b. Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq ﷺ:

أَلْمَعْرِفَةُ مِنْ صُنْعِ مَنْ هِيَ؟ قَالَ مَنْ صُنِعَ اللَّهُ لَيْسَ لِلْعِبَادِ فِيهَا صُنْعٌ

“Who is responsible for granting this ma'rifah (of the Imām)?” He replied: “It is the doing of Allāh and the servants have no role in it (on their own - without the intervention of Allāh).”¹⁴

In order to arrive at the recognition of the Imām, the following supplication is very effective:

اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ...

“O' Allāh! Grant me ma'rifah of Your Self...”¹⁵ ❁

¹⁴ al-Kāfi, vol. 1, pg. 163, sec. on the “Necessity of Having a Ḥujjah”, no. 2

¹⁵ The full text of this supplication will be mentioned in the next responsibility.

RESPONSIBILITY THREE

MA'RIFAT OF THE IMĀM – PART III

Reciting the supplications which the Ahlul Bayt عليهم السلام have advised us is another responsibility of the believers.

The books of tradition have stated that the following supplication should be recited and this is clearly seen in the following tradition.

It has been narrated from Zurārah that he heard Imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq عليه السلام say:

إِنَّ لِلْعُلَامِ غَيْبَةً قَبْلَ أَنْ يَقُومَ قَالَ: قُلْتُ: وَ لِمَ؟ قَالَ: يَخَافُ وَ
أَوْمَى بِيَدِهِ إِلَى بَطْنِهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا زُرَّارَةُ وَ هُوَ الْمُنْتَظَرُ وَ هُوَ
الَّذِي يُشَكُّ فِيهِ وَ لِأَدَاتِهِ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ مَاتَ أَبُوهُ بِلَا خَلْفٍ وَ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ
يَقُولُ حَمَلٌ وَ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ إِنَّهُ وُلِدَ قَبْلَ مَوْتِ أَبِيهِ بِسَنَتَيْنِ وَ هُوَ
الْمُنْتَظَرُ غَيْرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَمْتَحِنَ الشَّيْعَةَ فَعِنْدَ ذَلِكَ
يَرْتَابُ الْمُبْطِلُونَ! يَا زُرَّارَةُ إِذَا أَدْرَكَتَ ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانَ فَادْعُ بِهَذَا الدُّعَاءِ:
اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ نَبِيَّكَ.
اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي رَسُولَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي رَسُولَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ
حُجَّتَكَ. اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي حُجَّتَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي حُجَّتَكَ
ضَلَلْتُ عَنْ دِينِي.

“Verily there is a period of occultation for my son before he makes his advent.’ It was said to the Imām: ‘And why is this?’ The Imām replied: ‘He will be frightened’ and placed his hand on his abdomen and then said: ‘O’

Zurārah! He is the one who will be awaited, and he is the one whom the people will have doubt in with regards to his birth. Some people will say: ‘His father died without a child’; others will say: ‘His mother was pregnant with him (when his father died)’; others will say: ‘He was born two years before his father passed away’ and he is awaited, for surely Allāh, the Noble and Grand, loves to test the Shī‘a and it is then that the impugners begin to doubt. O’ Zurārah! If you witness that period (of confusion) then supplicate with this supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي نَفْسَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ نَبِيَّكَ. اللَّهُمَّ
عَرِّفْنِي رَسُولَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي رَسُولَكَ لَمْ أَعْرِفْ مُحَبَّتَكَ. اللَّهُمَّ عَرِّفْنِي
مُحَبَّتَكَ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ لَمْ تُعَرِّفْنِي مُحَبَّتَكَ ضَلَلْتُ عَنْ دِينِي

“O’ Allāh! Grant me ma‘rifah of Yourself for if I do not have the ma‘rifah of You then I will never know Your Prophet. O’ Allāh! Grant me ma‘rifah of Your Messenger for if I do not have the ma‘rifah of Your Messenger than I will never know Your Representative. O’ Allāh! Grant me ma‘rifah of Your Representative for if I do not have the ma‘rifah of Your Representative, then surely I have gone astray from my religion.”¹⁶ ❁

¹⁶ al-Kāfī, vol. 1, pg. 337; al-Ghaybah of Nu‘mānī, pg. 166, no. 6

RESPONSIBILITY FOUR

MA^ʿRIFAT OF THE IMĀM – PART IV

Another responsibility of the true believers is to be familiar with the signs of the reappearance of Imām al-Zamān عليه السلام.

Just as was previously mentioned, it is important for us to recognize the signs of his return, as this is actually considered as a part of knowing the Imām!

There are numerous signs which will herald his advent and they are divided into two categories:

1. Signs which are absolute and will definitely happen;
2. Signs which may or may not take place.

According to the narrations, it is obligatory to know and understand both types of signs. However, it is much more important to know the first type – those that will definitely occur before his return.

According to the Islāmic narrations, the signs that must occur before the Imām will return are five - with a small discrepancy in some of them (due to there being various traditions in this regards). The differences in the signs will become obvious when we look at them directly from the traditions.

In brief, these signs are:

1. The arrival of Sufyānī.
2. The arrival and uprising of Yamānī.
3. A loud noise from the sky.
4. The killing of a pure soul (Nafs-e-Zakiyyah).
5. The sinking of Baydā'.

It has also been mentioned in the traditions that the image of a hand will be seen on the moon and this is also considered as one of the definite signs.

Imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq عليه السلام has said:

لِلْقَائِمِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ خَمْسُ عَلَامَاتٍ: ظُهُورُ السُّفْيَانِيِّ وَ الْيَمَانِيِّ وَ الصَّيْحَةُ مِنْ
السَّمَاءِ وَ قَتْلُ النَّفْسِ الزَّكِيَّةِ وَ الْخَسْفُ بِالْبَيْدَاءِ

“There are five (definite) signs for the return of al-Qāim عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: the appearance of al-Sufyānī; (the appearance of) al-Yamānī; a loud cry from the sky; the killing of a pure soul [an-Nafs al-Zakiyyah]; and the caving in (of the earth) at Baydā’.”¹⁷

It has been mentioned in the traditions that al-Sufyānī is a reddish-white coloured man with a black eye and that he will make his advent during the month of Rajab. We are told that he will take over a few countries of the world and that the advent of al-Mahdī عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ will be in the same year. After many victories, al-Sufyānī will turn his attention towards ‘Irāq and it is at this time that Imām al-Mahdī عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ will make his advent from Makkah. At this point, a large contingent of forces will be sent to attack the Imām (by al-Sufyānī), however when this army will reach the place known as Baydā’ - a location between Makkah and Madīnah - they will be swallowed into the Earth.

In addition, before the advent of the Imām, many uprisings will take place such as the revolts of al-Ḥasanī and al-Yamānī - and according to some traditions, the uprising of al-Yamānī is also one of the definite signs.

The hearing of two cries - one from the sky and the other from within the Earth is also one of the definite signs. During the first call, Jibra’īl عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ will call the name of Imām al-Qā’im عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ and his father عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ and will proclaim that the truth is with ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ and his Shī‘a (followers). Everyone will hear this call in their own language and even the women who are in their house behind locked doors will hear the call.

As well, before the advent of the Imām, a noble person will be killed during the Ḥajj rites in Makkah. In the traditions, this person has been referred to as the Pure Soul or an-Nafs al-Zakiyyah. Detailed information about this individual has been mentioned in the books concerning the occultation of Imām al-Zamān عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.

¹⁷ al-Ghaybah of Nu‘mānī, sec. 252 on the signs of the return, no. 9

The importance of knowing the signs which will take place before the advent of our Imām, especially the definite signs that must occur, can best be understood when we review the history of Islām.

We see that some other signs may have already taken place and thus, a number of people falsely claimed to be the Mahdī! Without doubt, these people have fallen out of the fold of Islām and it is they who are misguided and are left alone in utter spiritual darkness. The reason for them falling into this state is that they were not acquainted with the signs related to the advent and uprising of the Imām such that they could follow them. In addition, they lacked awareness of the specific signs which will herald in the advent of the Imām. If they had knowledge of these signs, then they would not have been led astray and would have stayed firm on the Imāmate and Wilāyat of the Imām! They would not have been fooled nor would they have mistaken anyone else for the real Mahdī!

Possessing a ma‘rifah of the signs of the advent, especially the definite signs which must take place, helps us in differentiating between truth and falsehood, and by recognizing Imām al-Zamān ﷺ, we would actually look forward to and prepare the groundwork for his uprising. We would also not falter in our obedience to him or our delay in adhering to him!

It has been narrated by Zurārah that Imām Ja‘far b. Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq عليه السلام has said:

يُنَادِي مُنَادٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ أَنَّ فُلَانًا هُوَ الْأَمِيرُ وَ يُنَادِي مُنَادٍ أَنَّ عَلِيًّا وَ شِيعَتَهُ
هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ. قُلْتُ: فَمَنْ يُقَاتِلُ الْمَهْدِيَّ بَعْدَ هَذَا؟ فَقَالَ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ
يُنَادِي أَنَّ فُلَانًا وَ شِيعَتَهُ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ يَعْنِي رَجُلًا مِنْ بَنِي أُمَيَّةَ. قُلْتُ:
فَمَنْ يَعْرِفُ الصَّادِقَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِ؟ قَالَ: يَعْرِفُهُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يَرَوُونَ
حَدِيثًا وَ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ يَكُونُ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَكُونَ وَ يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُحِقُّونَ
الصَّادِقُونَ

“A caller will announce from the sky: ‘Certainly so and so is the leader.’ Then a caller will announce: ‘Certainly ‘Alī and his followers are the victorious

ones.” I said to the Imām: “So then who will fight against the Mahdī after this (call)?” The Imām replied: “Unquestionably, Satan will also call out: ‘Certainly, so and so and his followers will be the successful ones’ meaning a man from the tribe of Banī Umayyah.’ I said to the Imām: ‘So then how will a person be able to recognize the truthful one from the imposter?’ The Imām replied: ‘Those who narrate traditions will recognize (the difference) and they will say that it (the call from the sky) will come before (the advent), and they will understand this and will know that they (the ones who make the first call) are speaking the truth.’”¹⁸ ❁

¹⁸ al-Ghaybah of Nu‘mānī, pg. 246, no. 28

RESPONSIBILITY FIVE

FULFILLING THE RIGHTS OF THE IMĀM

Another responsibility of the Shī'a, is to fulfill the rights which the Imām has over us.

Without doubt, the most important right which we owe to others starts with those which we owe to Allāh ﷻ, followed by the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and then the rights which we must fulfill to our Imām. Obviously, the rights which our Imām demands from us must be carried out in the most perfect way.

In regards to this responsibility, there are numerous traditions which have been mentioned. Since it is not possible to narrate all of them, we suffice with one tradition from the Infallibles عليهم السلام which states:

مَا كَانَ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى مِنْ حَقٍّ فَهُوَ لَنَا

“Any right or privilege which belongs to Allāh, the Most High, is also a privilege that belongs to us (the Ahlul Bayt).”¹⁹ ❁

¹⁹ Mikyāl al-Makārim, vol. 2, pg. 282; in Biḥārul Anwār, vol. 27, pg. 314, sec. 9, no. 11 it is mentioned with a slight variation in the wording.