A Glance at the Beloved

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The book 'A Glance at the Beloved' outlines how recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) can be acquired in the era of occultation, its distinguishing features and its effects on those who possess this recognition. It shows the way to those who are captivated by the love of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and are in quest of his recognition, by comprehending the significance, origin and necessity of recognition in the light of traditions of the Infallibles Imams (a.s.).

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بسم الله الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ و صلى الله عليك يا وليّ العصر أدركنا

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) says,

"فهؤلاء مصابيح الدجى و أئمة الهدى و أعلام التقى من أحبهم وتولاهم كنت

ضامناً له على الله الجنة"

'They (Imams) are the lamps in darkness and the Imams of guidance and signs of piety. One who loves them and accepts their Mastership, then I assure Paradise for him near Allah.'1

Most of us have heard the famous Prophetic (s.a.w.s.) tradition:
"One who dies while he has not recognized the Imam of his era, has died the death of ignorance."

Shias and Ahlul Sunnah scholars alike have narrated this tradition, which highlights the status of the Imam of the age and the role of his recognition in the acceptance of religion.

All of us know that this recognition is not acquired only by knowing his name and his genealogy; because even the deniers of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and other Muslims have access to such information. Therefore, the interpretation of 'recognition' in this important tradition assumes a higher level than mere information of his name and genealogy. More out of ignorance than anything else, everyone will make an attempt to explain this higher meaning (of recognition) based on his own limited understanding and comprehension.

Till now, the significance of this recognition is not really evident for us. Indeed this significance will become evident by reading the traditions, wherein, the consequences of not recognizing the Imam are made amply clear. Also, the benefits of his recognition have been highlighted. For instance, pay attention to this esteemed tradition from Imam Baqir (a.s) on recognition.

"One who dies without the recognition of Imam, he has died the death of ignorance. And the one who dies with the recognition of his Imam, the advancement or postponement of this affair (i.e. reappearance) will not harm him. And one who dies with the recognition of his Imam, he is like the one who was along with the Qaim (a.t.f.s.) in his tent."

Here one discovers a very profound matter, and is confronted with a very critical question: How does the recognition of Imam (a.s.) find such importance in religion? What is death with the recognition of Imam (a.s) that has got all these effects and blessings? Reaching the era of reappearance of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and being in his tent is good fortune. Indeed this is the greatest desire of the lovers of I mam (a.t.f.s.). But what is the recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.), acquiring which ensures such high status? How can one acquire it so that he may attain guidance and good fortune that has been promised to him in traditions?

An effort is made in this book to answer some of the questions mentioned above. We have explained the points in a simple and lucid manner. By referring to it, the reader, will understand the various dimensions of the subject as per his capacity and will be able to gauge his responsibilities in this matter. Our method of explaining the subject is by referring to traditions of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) only and refraining from any kind of logical analogy. It is due to this reason that you will find several traditions in the book and sometimes

we have explained one tradition in the light of another tradition.

This book, 'A Glance at the Beloved', outlines how recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) can be acquired in the era of occultation, its distinguishing features and its effects on those who possess this recognition. It shows the way to those who are captivated by the love of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and are in quest of his recognition.

It is important for us to comprehend the significance, origin and necessity of recognition in the light of traditions of the infallibles (a.s.).

The origin of recognition is a spiritual process that initiates from the heart. However its relation with the external persona of the individual cannot be denied. To enhance the discussion, it is imperative to divide this topic in 10 parts and deal with each separately. The practical aspects of these 10 parts will become clear as we progress.

1. Bihar al–Anwar, Vol. 36, Pg. 296

The most critical characteristic of recognition that can deliver man from deviation and regression is its correctness. If the recognition is not correct, then the underlying expectation that the possessor of recognition will remain steadfast on the Mastership of Imams will not hold true.
Imam Zainul Abedeen (a.s.) prophesied,

وانّ للقائم منا غيبتين، أحدهما أطول من الأخرى فلا يثبت على إمامته، إلاّ من قوى يقينه وصحت معرفته ولم يجد في نفسه حرجا مما قضيناه ، وسلم لنا أهل البيت

'Indeed our Qaim has two occultation, one of which is longer than the other. This period (of occultation) will extend to such an extent that most people who believe in him will turn away. None will remain steadfast save those whose certainty is strong and recognition correct. Then he will not have any hesitation in accepting our decrees and will submit to us – the Ahle Bait (a.s.).' 1

The condition mentioned in the last statement is critical for all kinds of recognition, be it Allah's recognition, the Prophet's (s.a.w.s.) recognition or the Imam's (a.s.) recognition. This recognition should be correct from all religious aspects and in a way that Allah desires.

Given the above conditions, the most obvious question is – what are the criteria for correct recognition, and how can one be sure of the correctness of his recognition? This question is best replied by referring to the definition of recognition as outlined by the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s) while

addressing his son declares,

يا بني اعرف منازل الشيعة على قدر روايتهم ومعرفتهم، فإن المعرفة هي الدراية للرواية، وبالدرايات للروايات يعلو المؤمن إلى أقصى درجات الايمان، إني نظرت في كتاب لعلي (عليه السلام) فوجدت في الكتاب أن قيمة كل امرئ وقدره معرفته

'O my son, know the level of the Shias from the number of traditions they narrate and from (the level of) their recognition. For surely recognition is the comprehension of traditions. And by comprehending traditions, a believer scales the highest level of faith. Then surely I have seen the Book of Ali (a.s.) and I found in it that the value of a man is in proportion to the measure of his recognition.'2

As highlighted by this tradition, recognition is nothing but the comprehension of traditions, and this is the scale for discerning between true and flawed recognition. Then true recognition of a subject implies comprehension of all traditions related to that subject. For instance, true recognition of Tauheed involves comprehending all traditions related to the topic.

This underlines the necessity to refer to the traditions of Ahlul Bayt (a.s) in order to acquire recognition on any subject and there by scale the peaks of faith. Every believer's faith enjoys a status proportionate to the depth of his insight of traditions of the infallibles (a.s.).

So, if any believer in his pursuit of recognition acquires his knowledge from other than these traditions, he will never attain his goal, i.e. recognition. Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) declares that the value of a believer is related directly to the level of his recognition. The standard of recognition is referring only to the traditions of the Imams (a.s.) as true knowledge is only with them.

Divine knowledge is always correct and guiding, while it is human knowledge that is flawed and misleading. Allah has made the pure and immaculate hearts of the 14 infallibles (a.s.) as the fountainhead of divine knowledge. He then commanded those in thirst of this knowledge to turn only to the infallibles (a.s.) for their queries. As Imam Sadiq (a.s.) revealed to Yunus b. Zabyan

إن أردت العلم الصحيح فعندنا أهل البيت فنحن اهل الذكر الذي قال الله عز وجل فاسألوا اهل الذكر ان كنتم لا تعلمون.

'If you desire true knowledge, then it is with us, the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Then we are the 'People of

Remembrance', those regarding whom Allah declares – 'so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know.' (***16: 43***)3

There is no source of divine knowledge other than the People of Remembrance. Had there been any other source, surely Allah would have commanded us to refer to it. That is why Imam Baqir (a .s.) narrates,

والله لا يوجد العلم الا من أهل بيت نزل عليهم جبرئيل

'By Allah, Knowledge cannot be found from any other source other than Ahlul Bayt (a.s) – Jibrail (a.s.) (himself) has descended upon them.' 4

Therefore if a new branch of knowledge has been discovered, its origin is in the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) although we may not pay attention to this fact at the time of discovery. Imam Baqir (a.s.) discloses,

أما إنه ليس عند أحد من الناس حق ولا صواب إلا شئ أخذوه منا أهل البيت

'Then surely there is no truth and reality with the people, except that it has been acquired from us, the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).'5

The root of true information and correct knowledge is only with the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Anything from other than the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is flawed and misguiding. It is with respect to this that Imam Baqir (a.s.) narrates,

كل ما لم يخرج من هذا البيت، فهو باطل

'Everything that has emanated from other than this House (of Revelation) is invalid.'6

Therefore the highest level of faith is attained by only taking knowledge from the House of Revelation and submitting to its members unconditionally. If a Shia acts on this precept, he will achieve the honour of being from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)

As Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) reveals to Kumayl b. Ziad Nakhaee,

يا كميل، لا تأخذ إل عنّا، تكُن منّا.

'O Kumayl! Do not acquire except from us so that you may become from us.'7

This high status is reserved only for the friends of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). In this period of occultation, although a Shia is deprived of his Imam's (a.t.f.s.) presence, he can be in close proximity to the Ahlul Bayt (a. s.) by referring to them as the only source of knowledge.

So if one wishes to acquire true recognition, must reject all the other sources of knowledge and focus only on the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). He should not taint the knowledge acquired from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) with information acquired from other sources. And if he is successful in doing so, his recognition will reach a station whereby he is protected with the power of certitude from all doubts and suspicion. His faith will reach to such a level of surety that mountains may move, but not his faith. And this is what Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) informed Muhammad b. Hanafiyya,

تزول الجبال و لا تزل.

'Even if mountains move, you don't move.'8

This advice of Ameerul Mo'mineen is of particular relevance in the context of faith and beliefs. The emphasis over here is to acquire one's beliefs from the correct source (Ahlul Bayt (a. s.)) and not from the ignorant. This is the only way to guarantee that our beliefs remain secure from doubt and uncertainty. It is the only way to ensure that our faith remains unshakeable even if gigantic mountains are unable to remain firm.

Then the only route to safeguard one's faith from doubts and Satanic whisperings is to acquire knowledge from the channel recommended by Allah Himself. Therefore if one is anxious of his faith then he must pay minute attention to this detail and should only collect his beliefs from the side of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

من اخذ دينه من كتاب الله وسنة نبيه صلى الله عليه واله زالت الجبال قبل ان يزول ومن اخذ دينه من افواه الرجال ردته الرجال

'If one takes his religion from Allah's Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet (s.a.w.s.), mountains may move, but he will not move. And one who takes his religion from the mouths of the people, the people will turn him away (from religion).'9

The intelligent ones are not those who refer to the views of the people, but intelligence in the Quranic verse is attributed to those who have found themselves to be ignorant and have turned to the Ahlul Bayt

(a.s.) for guidance. The intelligent ones are those who have submitted themselves completely to the traditions of the Ahlul Bayt (a .s.) without any objection or modification in its interpretation. They do not doubt the sayings of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and never advance their opinion against that of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). It is here we realise the importance of the Ahlul Bayt (a. s) in the acquisition of correct recognition.

The Ahlul Bayt's (a.s.) school of thought is nourished with divine revelation, which offers man deliverance and liberation from all fallacies. Their proximity to divine sources of knowledge reassures man of their guidance. He feels he can refer to them in moments of doubt and indecision and is comforted with their response that guides him towards certitude and conviction. This can be compared to the similitude of a very sick person who refers to a specialist doctor, one in whom he enjoys complete confidence. This sick person will not like to experiment with a doctor of whose credentials he is not so sure.

Then if a man attaches so much importance to his health and physical well–being, the significance he accords to his spiritual well – being should be considerably higher. This is because the soul must be dealt with more care and caution than the body. So, just like he would never surrender his physical well–being in the hands of an incompetent doctor, he must never submit his spiritual well–being to the opinions of incompetent people. He must surrender his spiritual well–being only to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) – the spiritual doctors assigned by Allah Himself.

1. Kamaluddin, Part 31, Tradition 8
2. Bihar al–Anwar, Vol. 2 Pg. 186
3. Wasa'il ush–Shi'ah, Vol. 18, Pg. 49, taken from Rejaal al–Kashi
4. Bihar al–Anwar, Vol. 2, Pg. 91
5. Bihar al–Anwar, Vol. 2, Pg. 94
6. Wasa'il ush–Shi'ah, Vol. 18, Pg. 50
7. Wasa'il ush–Shi'ah, Vol. 18, Pg. 16
8. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 11
9. Preface of Usul al–Kafi

Recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) cannot be acquired except with submission.

One of the necessary conditions for acquisition of recognition is total submission to the desires of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). In fact it would be not be an exaggeration to state that acquiring recognition is possible only and only through complete submission to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Imam Sadiq (a.s.) declares:

انكم لا تكونون صالحين حتى تعرفوا. و لا تعرفون حتى تصدَّقوا. و لا تُصَدِّقون حتّى تُسلِموا

'You cannot become from the virtuous ones until you have recognition. You will not have recognition until you have believed and confessed. You have not believed and confessed until you submit.'1

Thus affirmation leads towards recognition (of Imam) and submission leads towards affirmation. When a man has all these traits (of submission and affirmation) he will be included among the virtuous ones. This is because virtuous actions spring from pure hearts and recognition and this is attained only through submission. Then the one who does not possess these traits will find himself deprived of recognition and mastership and will be most distant from any virtue. For, testimony is equal to belief and confession by heart. And till such a time that the person inculcates this in himself, he will never taste certainty in recognition.

Thus these four criteria – submission, testimony, recognition and good deeds are critical for every believer, and unless these criteria converge in a person, he will never know the reality of faith. The lowest level of recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s) is in submission to his exhortations and prohibitions. As traditions declare:

لا يكون العبد مؤمناً حتى يعرف الله و رسوله و الائمة كلّهم و إمام زمانه و يرد إليه و يسلم له.

'A worshipper cannot become a believer unless he recognizes Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and all the Imams (a.s.) and the Imam of his age and turn to him and submit to him.'2

While unconditional submission was always crucial in the acquisition of recognition, it assumes even more significance in this era of occultation. That is why traditions reiterate the concept of submission thus:

و لم يجد في نفسه حرجاً ممّا قضينا و سلَّمَ لنا أهل البيت.

And he does not find any straitness in his heart as to what we have decided and submit to us – the Ahlul Bayt.3

Submission over here implies heartily submission and not superfluous obedience. This means that the believer should submit to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) cheerfully and willingly and not grudgingly and reluctantly. Satisfaction and contentment in submission are vital. This is because even if a man believes in the apparent of religion but does not find submission in himself, he will be far from faith, and can possibly venture into polytheism (shirk). The degree of one's faith is directly related to the degree of one's submission to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). To the extent this submission is weak, faith will be weak, dragging

man towards idolatry. This is exactly what Imam Sadiq (a.s.) explains in this tradition:

لو أن قوما عبدوا الله وحده لاشريك له وأقاموا الصلاة وآتوا الزكاة وحجوا البيت وصاموا شهر رمضا ثم قالوا لشئ صنعه الله أوصنعه النبي (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) ألا صنع خلاف الذي صنع أو وجدوا ذلك في قلوبهم لكانوا بذلك مشركين

'Surely if a nation worships Allah associating naught with Him, and establishes prayers, pays zakaat, performs Hajj, fasts in the month of Ramazan, (then in spite of all this) say why did Allah not do this or why did the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) not do this, instead of doing that, or they have some doubt (although they do not voice these doubts) then due to this they turn polytheists.'

Then Imam (a.s.) related the following verse,

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

'But no! by your Lord! They do not believe (in reality) until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then do not find any straightness in their hearts as to what you have decided and submit with entire submission.'

Then Abu Abdillah (Imam Sadiq) (a.s.) said,

فعليكم بالتسليم

'Submission is obligatory upon you.'4

The above tradition reveals that the condition of submission is attained when the heart is completely satisfied with everything that the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) has done or commanded us to do, and has no reservations in accepting it. Indeed this is the reality of faith and the soul of religion. Imam Sajjad (a.s.) declares,

'Certainly the religion of Allah, the Almighty, cannot be acquired by deficient intellects and false opinions and erroneous conjecture, it is achieved only through submission. Then one who submits to us is safe

and one who follows us is guided. One who acts based on their own opinion and conjecture is destroyed. One who objects to a thing that we have said or decreed has disbelieved in the One who has revealed the Seven Verses (Sura al-Hamd) and the Holy Quran, while he is unaware (of his disbelief).'[5]

The great danger to one's faith is when one commits a mistake without being aware of its consequences, which are so dangerous that he turns into an apostate, while he considers himself to be a believer. Then safety for man's faith lies in his submission to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) without corrupting it with his own opinion and conjecture.

This, by no means is an easy task, more so in the period of occultation, when there is no direct contact with Imam (a.t.f.s.). The only possible way to reach Imam (a.t.f.s.) in this era is through the traditions of the Imams (a.s.). We must refer to the Imams (a.s.) in all our problems, religious as well as worldly.

Submission to Imamite traditions in occultation

One of the signs of submission to Imam (a.t.f.s.) in the occultation is submission to the traditions of the infallible guides (a.s.).

Submission to the Imams (a.s.) should be with respect to all traditions that have reached us from their side, particularly those that are not compatible with our existing knowledge. In such a scenario, submission demands that we try to conform our existing knowledge to the tradition and not try to conform the tradition to our existing knowledge. In other words, we must change our mindset to fit into the tradition and not try to change the interpretation of the tradition to fit into our mindset.

The reason behind this is that so often we are not aware of the deeper meaning of the tradition, although it may not be in conformity to what we already know. This is because all branches of science and knowledge are restricted to the Imams (a.s.) and their insight is perfect, while our knowledge is imperfect and flawed. So if a tradition contradicts our existing knowledge then we should rectify our knowledge on the basis of the tradition. If we cannot do this, it is necessary that we refer to the Imams (a.s.) themselves, but under no condition are we permitted to reject the tradition.

True submission demands that we accept a tradition under all conditions regardless of whether the tradition is compatible with our existing knowledge or not. We must not take a tradition to be weak simply because of its incompatibility with our knowledge, which is flawed and defective. Rather we must seek an explanation from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) themselves. It is quite possible that by referring to the scholars of the traditions of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) one may become enlightened. And finally if such scholars are not available, then the only option for him is to be patient and accept the tradition, and insha'Allah he will be guided by the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) themselves and the meaning of the tradition will become clear for him.

The most beloved companions of the Imams (a.s.) are those who understand their traditions well and with their deep understanding accept it. And the worst of them are those who when they do not

understand its meaning reject it simply because it is incompatible with their existing knowledge.

Embracing Mastership implies that the Shia considers his Master (Imam) as possessing more authority over himself as compared to all others. Then Mastership demands that one gives preference to his Master's views and his desires over that of his own.

A person must constantly beseech the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and approach them with a lot of mediation (tawassul) and seek their help alone, so that all our actions are under the constant supervision and direction of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and nothing happens without their grace and blessings. Particularly in the field of knowledge and learning nothing is more critical than this supervision and direction. For, there is more danger directed towards the scholars by Shaitaan, than other groups of people.

So the course undertaken by the scholars and religious thinkers is ridden with pitfalls and perils. It is for this reason that scholars need to have a higher level of faith and their mediation (tawassul) with the infallibles with particular reference to Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) must be more intense. The scholars must firmly believe that their progress in the field of knowledge is only with their belief in Imamat and Mastership of Imam (a.t.f.s.).

If a person observes that he has comprehended the minute details of a tradition, he must acknowledge that it is only because of the grace and bounty of Imam (a.t.f.s.). By keeping this point in mind, we must understand the importance of tawassul – so as to draw Imam' s (a.t.f.s.) attention in the pursuit of religious knowledge.

Submission to Allah while seeking early reappearance

Allah is very pleased with the supplications of His servants and accords it the status of the highest form of worship and therefore it is the best means to draw His attention. Imam Ali (a.s.) while recommending supplications to Imam Hasan (a.s.) says:

وَاعْلَمْ، أَنَّ الَّذي بِيَدِهِ خَزَائِنُ السَّموَات وَالأَرْضِ قَدْ أَذِنَ لَكَ فِي الدُّعَاءِ، وَتَكفَّلَ لَكَ بِالإِجَابَةِ،أَمَرَكَ أَنْ تَسْأَلَهُ لِيُعْطِيَكَ، وَتَسْتَرْحِمَهُ لِيَرْحَمَكَ، وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ مَنْ يَحْجُبُكَ عَنْهُ

'Know that the One in Whose hand is the treasure of the sky and the earth has permitted you to pray to Him and has guaranteed you a reply, and commanded you to beseech so that He bestows. Seek mercy from Him so that He showers mercy upon you and so that there is no barrier between you and Him.'6

Supplication suggests recitation and question (سؤال) indicates request. It is possible that one combines supplication with questioning. Sometimes t he worshipper seeks something from Allah and at other times

he prays as well as requests Him and both these conditions please Allah and are among the actions that Allah has recommended for His servants . Worship higher than this, is persistent beseeching, which Allah loves in a worshipper. About this Imam Sadiq (a.s.) reveals:

إن الله كره إلحاح الناس بعضهم على بعض في المسألة و أحب ذلك لنفسه

'Allah does not like the people to be persistent in their beseeching with each other. However, He loves that for Himself.'7

So Allah not only likes His servants to beseech Him, rather He loves His servants persistently seeking their demands only from Him and not from anybody else.

Allah has deemed this beseeching and pleading as the highest form of worship. Therefore praying and beseeching Allah for removal of difficulties is in fact submission to His order.

Occultation is the biggest calamity that we are facing today. Allah has destined occultation so that people are afflicted with separation from their Imam (a.t.f.s.) in such a manner that their entire existence cries out in pain and suffering and they despair from all people, places and things and in such a state of helplessness they turn towards Allah, begging and pleading with Him to hasten the reappearance of their master. This crying and begging for the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) is itself worship and is effective in alleviating the calamity through reappearance.

Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) declares with regards to the role of supplication in shortening calamities,

ما من بلاء ينزل على عبدٍ مؤمنٍ فيلهمه الله الدّعاء ، إلاّ كان كشف ذلك البلاء وشيكاً ، وما من بلاء ينزل على عبدٍ مؤمنٍ فيمسك عن الدعاء إلاّ كان ذلك البلاء طويلاً ،فإذا نزل البلاء فعليكم بالدّعاء و التضرع الى الله عزَّ و جل

'No calamity reaches to a servant, but Allah inspires him with supplication (for removal of that calamity), except that the easing of that calamity is near. And no calamity reaches a believer, and he refrains from praying for its removal, but the period of that calamity is lengthened. Then when the calamity descends, you should pray and be humble in front of Him.'8

The term (inspiring an invocation) الهام دعا that is ascribed to Allah in the above tradition underlines the fact that when calamity descends upon a believer, he is reminded to turn to Allah with pleading and beseeching. Such a believer must realize that this is a grace and bounty from Allah, which He does not bestow upon everyone in their calamities. Therefore the essence of prayer at the time of calamity is an

indication that the afflicted person is under the domain of Allah's grace and bounty. And when the believer gets the grace توفيق to pray he must realize that the calamity will soon be lifted, insha'Allah. Allah with inspiration إلهام of supplication only wishes to arrange for some channel for the removal of the calamity, provided that man understands the value of this gift.

From this we can conclude that praying to Allah for the early reappearance of Imam (a.t.f .s.) is perfectly valid. On the same lines, there are several examples that highlight the fact that praying to Allah can alleviate an entire nation's calamity. For instance, Bani Israel received salvation after intense supplication and pleading. According to a tradition of Imam Sadiq (a.s.), Allah had destined salvation for the children of Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) that were from the lineage of his wife Sara (viz. Bani Israel) after 400 years of oppression at the hands of Firaun. The salvation was to come in the form of Hazrat Moosa (a .s.) and Hazrat Haroon (a.s.). But Bani Israel managed to reduce this period of tyranny and oppression after pleading and begging in front of Allah. Imam's (a.s.) original phrase is as follows:

لما طال على بني إسرائيل العذاب ضجوا وبكوا إلى الله أربعين صباحا فأوحى الله إلى موسى وهارون يخلصهم من فرعون ، فحط عنهم سبعين ومائة سنة

'Then when the period of chastisement on Bani Israel lengthened, they cried in front of Allah for 40 mornings so that Allah reveals up on Moosa and Haroon to give salvation from the (evil of) Firaun. Due to this (persistent crying), 170 years from the destined oppression was reduced.

Then Imam Sadiq (a.s.) declared:

هكذا أنتم لو فعلتم لفرج الله عنا فأما إذ لم تكونوا فان الامر ينتهي إلى منتهاه

'Your salvation is similar. If you also do it (cry intensely), Allah will hasten your salvation (faraj). And if you don't do it (cry), the matter of salvation will reach to the last limit.'9

Beware it is strange that if the believers desire salvation from Allah, (through reappearance of their Imam), they should know the way which is defined by the previous Imams (a .s.) and they should be serious and make preparation in this regard.

1. Usul al-Kafi, Chapter. of 'recognition of Imam and turning to him' Tradition 6
2. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Hujjat, Chap. of recognition of Imam Tradition 2
3. Kamaluddin, Chp. 31, Tradition 8
4. Usul al-Kafi Kitabul Imaan wal Kufr, Chap. of Shirk, Tradition 6
5. Kamaluddin, Chap. 31, Tradition 9
6. Nahjul Balagha, Letter 31

7. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabod Dua, Chapter-Ilhaao fi Dua, Tradition 4
8. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabud Dua, (chapter of Ilhaamod Dua), Tradition 2
9. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 52, Pg. 131, Tradition 34

Submission is a condition for love and love is a Pre-requisite for faith (imaan)

One of the signs of submission in a Shia is his love and attachment towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). It is a sign of recognition of the Imams (a.s.), especially in the period of occultation. As far as love is considered, it is sufficient to say that it is the foundation of Islam.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asserts,

لكلِّ شيء أساس ، وأساس الإِسلام حبنا أهل البيت

'Everything has a foundation and the foundation of Islam is the love for us, the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).'1

Therefore, traditions have introduced love of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) as the highest and the most privileged form of worship. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) informs further,

إنّ فوق كلّ عبادة عبادة وحبّنا أهل البيت أفضل عبادة

'Love of us Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is the highest form of worship.'2

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) introduced the names of all the Imams (a.s.) to the Muslims. When he introduced Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) he declared,

من احب ان يلقي الله وقد كمل ايمانه وحسن اسلامه فليوال الحجة صاحب الزمان المنتظر

'One who wants to meet Allah in such a condition that his faith is perfect and his Islam is in good condition then he should accept Mastership of Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) the awaited.'

And at the end of the tradition he (s.a.w.s.) stated,

فهولاء مصابيح الدجى وأئمة الهدى وأعلام التقى ومن أحبهم وتولاهم كنت ضامناُ له على الله الجنة.

They (Imams) are the lamps in darkness and the Imams of guidance and signs of piety. One who loves them and accepts their Mastership, then I assure Paradise for him near Allah.'3

Faith begins with Mastership and love of Amirul Mo'mineen (a.s.), and attains perfection with mastership and love for Hazrat Hujjat (a.t.f.s.). Therefore without love for the unseen Imam (a.t.f.s.), faith will never reach perfection.

But love by itself is not something that Allah would simply bestow on all His servants just like that. Rather He grants it only to such servants that He wishes to guide.

Love and affection towards Imam (a.t.f.s.) is one way of reaching this grace, and this one of the most important bestowals from Allah's side.

Imam Baqir (a.s.) reveals to Abu Khalid:
'By Allah, O Abu Khalid! Unless Allah purifies the heart of a servant, he cannot love us nor can he accept our Mastership. And Allah does not purify his heart till he does not submit to us and is not in a state of submission towards us. If he is submissive towards us, Allah will protect him from strict accounting and will keep him in His security from the great fear on the Day of Judgment.'4

If the heart is not pure, love and Mastership of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) cannot find a place in it. And purity of the heart comes only from submission towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Hence, one who seeks the love of his Imam (a.t.f.s.) will strengthen in himself the feeling of submission. As he scales the peak of submission, the purity of his heart will increase and consequently his attachment and affection towards Imam (a.t.f.s.) will intensify.

The way to perfect the feeling of submission is that man should try in every matter to act as per the wishes of the Imams (a.s.) and should not have an opinion against them. He must always give preference to their wishes over his own and over that of the others. And the wishes of the Imams (a.s.) can be realised in occultation by referring to their traditions. This particular trait can help man in scaling the highest peaks of faith.

A person asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.), 'How often have I heard you remembering Salman al–Farsi (r.a.)!'
Imam (a.s.) said,
'Don't say Salman – e – Farsi, rather say Salman al– Muhammadi.'

Imam (a.s.) asked,
'Do you know why I remember him so much?'
The person replied, 'I don't know.' Imam (a.s.) revealed,

'Due to three characteristics – the first one is giving preference to wishes of Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.) over his own wishes...'5

Thus, Salman al–Muhammadi (r.a.) scaled such a high peak that Imam Sajjad (a.s.) uses the term 'from us Ahlul Bayt'. Salman al–Muhammadi (r.a.) attained this elevated position near the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) with his complete and unconditional submission in front of their wishes and commands. His spirit of submission was so dominant that Ameer ul Mo'mineen (a.s.) did not have to give him instructions. Rather, the moment he knew his Imam's (a.s.) implicit wish, he rushed to implement it and gave it preference over his own wishes.

Indeed this position is higher than the position of obedience concerning Imam's (a.s.) explicit wishes. To obey Imam's wish and implement his commands even before he (a.s.) can convey it verbally is the highest form of submission. So, one of the conditions to attain the position of ' from us Ahle Bait' is submission to the wishes of the Imams (a.s.) in the manner Salman al–Muhammadi (r.a.) did. Even earlier we have discussed Ameerul Mo'mineen's (a.s.) advice to Kumayl b. Ziyad (r.a.)

لا تأخذ إلَّا عنَّا تَكُن منِّا.

'Don't acquire (knowledge) but from us, you will be from us.'

Submission in the period of occultation can only be realized by referring to the traditions of the Imams (a.s.) and being bound to them concerning all our problems and uncertainties in belief, actions or worldly affairs. In this period, when there is restricted access to Imam (a.t.f.s.), one should take additional precaution in binding oneself to the traditions of the Imams (a.s.). Separation from Imam (a.t.f.s.) must not make us lax in submitting to his wishes and commands.

Crying for Imam (a.t.f.s.) out of intense attachment

Love is one of the most powerful emotions that is directly related to the level of recognition and attachment towards the beloved. So, higher the level of recognition, more intense would be the affection and attachment. Among the most unmistakable symptoms of attachment is constant remembrance of the beloved, mixed with an intense craving for his meeting.

Just a mention of the beloved along with a narration of his hardship and difficulties provokes acute restlessness and turmoil within the person, finding expression in his tears. Allah, out of His Grace and Mercy has sowed this attachment in our hearts, thereby purifying our polluted hearts and cleansing it of the filth of sins. As Imam Sadiq (a.s.) reveals to Fuzail b. Yasir:

يا فضيل من ذكرنا أو ذُكرنا عنده فخرج من عينيه مثل جناح ذباب غفر الله ذنوبه ولو كانت أكثر من زبد البحر

'O Fuzail, one who remembers us or our mention is made in his presence and if tears flow from his eyes even to the extent of the wing of a fly, Allah will erase all his sins even if they are to the extent of the foam of the ocean.'6

The magnitude of this reward is a direct reflection on the esteemed status of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Allah in His Mercy has graced the lover with this bounty.

The pain of separation from Imam's (a.t.f.s.) holy existence in the period of occultation and his remembrance in moments of solitude and loneliness, intensified further with his own sorrow are just some of the factors that make his Shias weep for him. As it was mentioned earlier, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) narrates,

أما واللهِ لَيُغَيَّبَنَّ إمامُكُم سِنيناً من دَهرِكم.... وَ لَتَدْمُعَنَّ عليهِ عُيوُنَ المؤْمِنين.

'Pay attention, by Allah! Certainly your Imam will be in occultation for some years in your time. ....the eyes of the believer will surely cry for him.'7

How valuable is the painful heart, wails and tearful eyes of longing near Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that he has prayed especially for such Shias. Moaviyah b.Wahab narrates, ' I saw Imam Sadiq (a.s.) in prostration. He was praying for the visitors of the shrine of Imam Husain (a.s.) at Karbala –

O Allah, those eyes which cry for us, makes them a place of Your mercy. Shower mercy on those hearts which are restless and burn for our sake. Show mercy to those who wail and complain for us.'8

This is the reward of the tears that are shed out of sympathy and grief from intense longing for Imam (a.t.f.s.) in the period of occultation. Indeed how incredible is the reward and how amazing is the glad tidings that Imam (a.s.) has promised those who shed a few tears for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). This is one of the reasons why Dua-e-Nudbah has been highly recommended on the four Eids – Fitr, Azhaa, Ghadir and Fridays.

These are the four most important days on which Allah showers His Mercy upon His creatures. On the days of Eid, Allah establishes everything on the earth for the sake of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) holy existence. Ghadeer is the day when the Muslims renew their allegiance with the Imam appointed by Allah. And now that the divinely selected Imam is absent, the Muslims must wail and complain by remembering him at all times and feel the pangs of separation.

اَيْنَ الطّالِبُ (المُطالِبُ) بِدَمِ الْمَقْتُولِ بِكَرْبَلاءَ؟

'Where is the one who will avenge the blood of the martyrs of Karbala?'

اَيْنَ الْمُضْطَرُّ الَّذي يُجابُ اِذا دَعا

'Where is the distressed one, who is answered when he calls?'

In this supplication, friends of Imam (a.t.f.s) express their restlessness at the separation from him (a.t.f.s.) thus,

'O son of Taha and Clear Verses, O son of Yasin and Zaariyat, O son of Tur and Aadiyat, I wish I had known where you are living? It is indeed intolerable for me that I see everybody but am unable to see you and I do not hear your sighs and whispering. It is indeed unbearable for me that all have deserted you while I still cry for you!'

While seeking other friends and companions of Imam (a.t.f.s.) we wail,

هَلْ مِنْ مُعينٍ فَأُطيلَ مَعَهُ الْعَويلَ وَالْبُكاءَ، هَلْ مِنْ جَزُوعٍ فَأُساعِدَ جَزَعَهُ اِذا خَلا، هَلْ قَذِيَتْ عَيْنٌ فَساعَدَتْها عَيْني عَلَى الْقَذى

'Is there any supporter along with whom I may prolong my wailing? Is there a restless friend with whom I may share his restlessness? Is there an eye, which is afflicted with excess crying that I may sympathize with it?

These are but some of the expressions of the friends of Imam (a.t.f.s.) that emanate from the hearts on the occasion of Eid. These expressions serve to highlight the grief of the friend on separation from his beloved master on an important occasion like Eid.

Friendship with the friends of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and enmity with his enemies

One of the prime requisites of love and affection towards Imam (a.t.f.s.) is that one must seek proximity with his friends and distance himself from his enemies. This particular aspect has been emphasised with some detail in the period of occultation.

'Glad tidings to the one who understands the Qaim of my Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), while he believes in his Imamat during occultation, preceding his reappearance, and befriends his friends and maintains enmity with his enemies. Such a person is from my friends and will be from the most honourable of people on the Day of Judgment.'9

It must be noted here that friendship with Imam's (a.t.f.s.) friends and enmity with his enemies is not distinct from his Mastership. Rather it is propounded in traditions as an inseparable part of Mastership. In another tradition of Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) this particular aspect has been outlined thus,

'Glad tidings to our Shias who are attached to our rope (of Mastership) in the time of occultation of our Qaim, are steadfast on our friendship and are aloof from our enemies. They are from us and we are from them. They are satisfied with our Imamat and we are pleased with them. Glad tidings be to them, then again glad tidings be to them! By Allah, they will be with us on the Day of Judgment in our grade.'10

Explaining the meaning of the term طوبی, Abu Basir (r.a.) has narrated a tradition from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) thus:

طُوبَى لِمَنْ تَمَسَّكَ بِأَمْرِنَا فِي غَيْبَةِ قَائِمِنَا فَلَمْ يَزِغْ قَلْبُهُ بَعْدَ الْهِدَايَةِ.

'Tooba is for the one who is attached to our Mastership at the time of our Qaim's occultation. Then his heart is never deviated after guidance.'

Then Abu Basir (r.a.) asked Imam (a.s.), 'May I be sacrificed for you, what is Tooba?' Imam (a.s.) replied,

'It is a tree in Paradise – its trunk and roots are in the house of Imam Ali b. Abi Talib (a.s.) and a branch from its branch is in the house of each believer. And this is the meaning of Allah's saying, 'Tooba and food is for them.'11

From this tradition we can gauge the significance of befriending the friends of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and distancing oneself from their enemies. This act is so important near Allah that He will reward for it with a position in the neighborhood of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and such a person will enjoy an exalted status near the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) on the Day of Judgment.

This means that if a person is from the friends of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), he should be befriended and not be spurned and deserted. It is quite possible that this person is a sinner, in which case it is necessary to despise his evil action, while holding him dear because of his status near the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Then out of personal enmity and animosity, we should not turn hostile towards him, rather we should become proximate towards him because of his love for Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

In fact such a person should be given preference over others who are more cultured and ethical, but do not love the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). In other words, the only benchmark for friendship must be one's love for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). And this is a test of sincerity for the one who possesses recognition of the Imams (a. s.). Such a person disregards his own differences and gives preference to the wishes of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) in matters of friendship.

The next step after establishing friendship is to observe the rights of the friend. One's sincerity in fulfilling the rights of the friend (due to the latter's love for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) underlines the extent of his sincerity and his commitment towards friendship with the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Then one who is indifferent in observing the rights of a friend, has in fact shown indifference and disregard for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Fulfilling the rights of those who have the love and Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and who are described in traditions as believers, has excessive importance. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) declares:

ما عُبِدَ اللهُ بِشيءٍ أفضَلُ مِنْ أَداءِ حقِّ المؤْمِنْ.

'Allah is not worshipped by anything better than fulfilling the right of a believer.'12

Once when Moalla b. Khunais asked Imam (a.s.) about the rights of a believer, Imam (a.s.) replied:

سبعون حقا لا اخبرك إلا بسبعة ، فإني عليك مشفق أخشى ان لا تحتمل

'There are 70 rights, but I will inform you only about 7, because I am worried that you will not be able to bear it.'

Thereafter Imam (a .s.) explained those seven rights thus:

'Do not be satiated, when he is hungry. Do not be clothed when he does not have clothes to wear. Be a guide for him, and be a dress for him that he wears (i.e. conceal his defects). Be a tongue for him with which he speaks. Whatever you desire for yourself, desire the same for him. If you have a servant sends him to your brother-in-faith so that he may sweep his floor and prepare his bed and make effort day and night to fulfill his needs. If you are like that, then you have joined your Mastership, with our Mastership and our Mastership with Allah, the Almighty's Mastership.'13

The assertion made in the above tradition is very categorical, without a shred of ambiguity or uncertainty. A believer is expected to be a dress and a tongue to his brethren-in-faith at all times. Just like the dress protects a man from nakedness and dangers and gives him apparent respect, a man should also safeguard his brethren from dangers and disgrace. The tongue is a medium for narrating needs and a mode for mutual communication with other believers.

A believer should be such that his brethren benefit from him and are able to get their needs fulfilled. A maidservant is constantly in the service of her master. So a believer should be such that if he is able to facilitate some matter for his brother, he should do it in every possible way. Then he should not withhold this facility from his brother be it of a financial nature or some other worldly possession that he has or can acquire from his social position. He should try t o make his brother as comfortable as possible with all his financial and social faculties. If fulfilling the needs of his brethren involves that he wake up in the nights, then he should sacrifice his sleep and strive for his brethren.

This offers a brief insight in to the rights of believers over each other. It is evident that if one is serious and committed in fulfilling the demands of Mastership, he must first fulfill the demands of his brethren and take great care in this regard.

Alleviating the distress of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) friends

Fulfilling the needs of one's brother assumes a more serious nature, when the distressed brother himself approaches one with his demands so as to ease his difficulty. Till such a time that a distressed brother does not approach another brother with his difficulties, the latter's responsibilities are limited.

However, when a distressed brother approaches another with his problems in the hope that the latter, out of love for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), will address his needs, the responsibilities of that brother increase manifold. This reference by the distressed brother is in fact a mercy from Allah's side. The believer must realise this point.

'When a believer approaches another brother for removal of his difficulties, this reference is a mercy from Allah's side, which He has dispatched towards the servant. Then if he addresses the distressed believer's needs, he has attached (himself) with our Mastership while our Mastership is attached with Allah's Mastership. But if he rejects the distressed believer despite being able to fulfill his demands, Allah appoints one python from the Fire over him, that chews his toe in the grave till the Day of Judgment, regardless of whether he is forgiven or is in chastisement. And if that distressed believer excuses him (from fulfilling his demands) then that person's condition becomes even worse.'14

The one who approaches another believer for solving his problem, has in fact placed his respect and honour at stake. And since a believer is very honourable near Allah, He does not like his honour and respect treated callously and does not tolerate rejection of the believer's requests without a valid reason. And due to this reason, if another believer is in a position to fulfill his need but does not do it, then he has invited the chastisement of the grave upon himself, even if his end is in goodness. He will remain in that condition of chastisement till the Day of Judgment.

The point worth noting in this tradition is that the Holy Imams (a.s.) have considered fulfilling the needs of another believer as a matter related to their Mastership and the one who befriends them should take precedence in fulfilling the demands of a distressed believer as a measure of friendship with the Ahlul

Bayt (a.s.). His intention behind fulfilling the demand of another believer is to fulfill the rights of his Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

The latter half of the tradition – 'if that distressed believer excuses him (from fulfilling his demands) then that person's condition becomes even worse' is particularly interesting. Allama Majlisi (r.a.) explains that by excusing himself, the distressed person has shown his sense of dignity and respect to the other person. Due to his dignity and respect, he enjoys a higher level of faith and Mastership and enjoys a greater right over his believer brethren. And out of regard for his brotherhood, his demands need to be fulfilled more promptly and he should not be turned back in disappointment. Therefore rejecting him is not like rejecting the one who is not as elevated in nobility and faith as him. Rejecting a believer with strong faith and high nobility is a more serious offense near the Ahlul Bait (a .s.) as compared to rejecting an ordinary believer.

Therefore under no condition should a believer be left to fend for himself. The believer who deserts his brother in his time of need will incur Allah's wrath and the displeasure of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Therefore a believer should do everything in his power to alleviate the grief and distress of his brethren, and he will be rewarded for the same, regardless of whether he is successful in his endeavours. Such is the importance of answering the call of a distressed believer that Allah rewards him even if his efforts to help the believer prove to be futile. In this regard, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) reveals,

'One who goes forth to solve the pro b le m o f his brother–in–faith, with the intention of earning Allah's satisfaction in fulfilling the needs of the (afflicted) brother, Allah writes for him reward of one Hajj and one Umrah, which are accepted, and fasts of two months from the respected months along with their إعتكاف in Masjid ul Haraam. And the one who strives to fulfill his brother's need, with the intention of earning Allah's satisfaction, but is unable to complete that work, Allah writes for him one Hajj which is accepted, for his endeavours. Therefore you should be inclined towards good deeds.'15

As is more than evident from the above tradition, Allah likes the effort and endeavor of one brother in the way of fulfilling another brother's needs and rewards the former for that. If the work is successfully completed, the brother who has endeavored will earn more reward, while if he is unsuccessful, he will nevertheless be rewarded for his efforts in trying to complete that work, as the intention of a believer is more important than his action.

The position of that believer is even higher (than what has been outlined above), who knows that he does not have the power and capacity to fulfill the need of his brother–in–faith (who has approached him), but nevertheless aspires in his heart to fulfill that in such a way that if it was within his power, he would have employed his faculties to fulfill his need. Such a believer, who is unable to complete the work, will none the less be rewarded by Allah with an extra–ordinary reward only on the basis of his selfless and sincere intention. Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) says:

'A believer who is approached by his brother–in–faith with some problem, but does not have the power to

help him, while in his heart he wants to help him, (in such a way that if he was capable he would have certainly done it), then Allah, the Almighty, due to his sincere intention, includes him from the people of Paradise.'16

From traditions like the one highlighted above, it is apparent that near Allah more important than actually doing the work of an afflicted brother, is to have the intention to help him and relieve him of his distress. Friends of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) should be sincere and affectionate with each other so that the importance of Mastership and love of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is clear to everyone in this world as well as the hereafter.

1. Usul al-Kaafi, Kitaab-ul-Imaan wal Kufr, Bab Nisbat-ul-Islam, Tradition 2
2. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 27, Pg. 91, Tradition 48
3. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 36, Pg. 296
4. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Hujjat, Chapter about Imams are the lights
5. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 22, Pg. 327
6. Behaar-ul-Anwaar, Vol. 44, Pg. 282, Tradition 14
7. Kamaluddin, Chap. 33, Tradition 35
8. Kameluz Ziarat, Pg. 117
9. Kamaluddin, Chap. 25, Tradition 2
10. Kamaluddin, Chap. 34, Tradition 2
11. (13: 29) Kamaluddin, Chap. 33, Tradition 55
12. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Iman wal Kufr, Chapter of a Believer's rights over others, Tradition 4
13. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of a Believer's right over others, Tradition 14
14. Usul al-Kafi, Kitab ul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of Fulfilling the needs of believers, Tradition 13
15. Usul al-Kafi, Kitab ul Iman wal Kufr, Chapter of Fulfilling the needs of believers, Tradition 9
16. (Usul al-Kafi, Kitab ul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of Fulfilling the needs of believers, Tradition 14)

Being engrossed in the remembrance of Imams (a.s.)

Another effect and sign of Imams' (a.s.) recognition is remembering them on different occasions. In fact this remembrance should be perpetual as this is the effect of the love of Imams (a.s.). When a person is attached to someone intensely, he is not oblivious to him and remembers him constantly. The more intense the attachment, the harder it is for him to forget the person, till such a time that the remembrance of the person becomes etched in his heart and an inseparable part of his existence. Therefore those who have faith and recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) in occultation, wherein they are deprived of seeing him (a.t.f.s.), they must never forget him in their hearts.

A person asked Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) about the Quranic verse,

'And apparent and hidden bounties are completed upon you. (***31 : 20***)

Imam (a.s.) said,

'Apparent bounty is the apparent Imam and the hidden bounty is the hidden Imam.'

Then the narrator asked, 'Do the Imams (a.s.) go into occultation?'
Imam (a.s.) declared:

'Yes he gets concealed from the eyes of the people, however his remembrance does not disappear from the hearts of the believers and he will be the twelfth from us.'

It is possible that the unbelievers may forget Imam (a.s.), because they don't know him. But the one who knows him and recognizes him and has his Mastership cannot forget him. In occultation, the attachment of the believer with his Imam should be so strong, that nothing should make him oblivious of his presence and nothing should hinder him from Imam's (a.s.) remembrance.

To quote Ayatullah Syed Muhammad Taqi Musavi Isfahani (r.a.), author of Mikyalul Makarim fi favaaedu dua lil Qaim (a.t.f.s.):

"The believers are in various grades and levels in the remembrance of their master. Their grade is in direct proportion to their level of faith, recognition and certitude. The condition of some of the believers in remembering their master is such, as the poet declares,

'Allah knows that I don't remember you
Because how can I remember you, when I never forget you?'1

Then the author elaborates on how we can enliven the remembrance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) day and night. We have translated below the relevant passage.

'When you mourn, remember that this life that Allah has gifted you is with the blessing and mediation of Imam (a.t.f.s.). So, thank Allah and Imam (a.t.f.s.) for it. And be careful not to employ this bounty in actions for other than Allah's satisfaction, because by earning Allah's displeasure, you are aggrieved and burdened. Then when you are in a place of sin and disobedience, remember that your master is observing you in that condition (of sin). Then out of his respect and honour, abandon the sin.

Similarly if you come across a good action, then take precedence in acting upon it, and understand that it is a bounty from Allah's side that He has bestowed out of our attachment with our Imam (a.t.f.s.). Thank Allah for it and gift it to Imam (a.t.f .s.) by performing it in a manner befitting it. Thus, request Imam (a.t.f.s.) like the brothers of Yusuf (a.s.), pleading,

يا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلَنَا الضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِبِضَاعَةٍ مُّزْجَاةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّ اللَّـهَ يَجْزِي الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ.

'O chief! Distress has afflicted us and our family and we have brought scanty measure (funds). So give us full measure and be charitable towards us. Surely Allah rewards the charitable.' **(12 :**

88)

And be humble and fearful of him, like a slave who lowers his head before his master. Every morning and evening salutes him with the salutation of a slave who is eager to see his master and who melts in pain due to his separation. Salute him with the sincerity of one who is so moved with this separation that tears flow down his cheeks, as he is aware that he is standing in the presence of his master.

When the time of namaz draws near, remember the condition of your master (a.t.f.s.) as he stands in front of His Lord. Follow your master (a.t.f.s.) with presence of heart and a humble gait, closing your eyes to everything except Allah and understand that the taufiq for this has come only with the blessings of your master (a.t.f.s.). This worship is not accepted from you except with your master's (a.t.f.s.) consent, after you have obeyed him and acquired his recognition. As your recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) increases, Allah will enhance your status, reward and rank near Himself.

When you are finished with namaz make Imam (a.t.f.s.) a mediator between Allah and yourself, so that He accepts that namaz out of your love and attachment towards him. And when you raise your hands for supplication begin by asking for his relief, before your own, because he has the highest authority over you and his favours upon you are boundless. And when you are confronted with a seemingly impossible situation with no way out, plead your case in front of him and wail before him, so that he may mediate with Allah for the solution of your problem. He is after all a means towards Allah's satisfaction and a door towards His Mercy. We have been commanded to enter the house only from its door:

وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا

'Enter the house from its door.' (***2 : 189***)2

If someone has even a little recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.), he knows that remembering Imam (a.t.f.s.) is among the highest form of worship. And it is due to its importance that we have been commanded to beseech Allah thus:

ولا تُنْسِنا ذِكْرَه...

'O Allah, don't make us forget his remembrance.'3

Remembrance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) means immersing oneself i n his remembrance as well as constantly discussing and reflecting on his condition. The first condition is spiritual in nature while the second is external. The first condition is for man himself, while the other is for those around him. Man should always be in search of reasons to enliven Imam's (a.t.f.s.) remembrance for himself and his friends.

Attending gatherings in the remembrance of Imams (a.s.)

Our Imams (a.s.) have encouraged organising of and participating in gatherings for the remembrance of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says to Dawood b. Sarhan,

'O Dawood, convey my salaam to my friends and give them my message – May Allah have mercy upon a servant who when is with some other person mentions about our affair (mastership). In such a situation, the third among them is an angel who seeks forgiveness for them. No two persons gather for remembering us expect that Allah takes pride in them over His angels. Then whenever you gather, proceed with our remembrance. Because your gathering and your remembering is to enliven our affair. And the best after us, are those who discuss about our affairs and invite towards our remembrance.'4

It is indeed noteworthy that how much blessing and good fortune exits in organising gatherings for the remembrance of Ahlul Bait (a.s.). Thus, if a gathering is organised and due to negligence and inattention, the remembrance of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is overlooked, then one can only imagine the misfortune and remorse of those participating in that gathering.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said:
'Every gathering that is organised in which Allah's remembrance and our remembrance is missing, that gathering will be a cause of regret to its organizers.'5

Remembrance of Imams (a.s.) is enlivened by discussing their limitless virtues and indescribable calamities and that too in their own words and traditions. That is why it is highly recommended that believers should visit each other frequently to discuss the extra-ordinary traits and life sketches of the Imams (a.s.). The aim behind this recommendation is that they should be engaged in the narration of the excellence and tribulations of the Imams (a.s.). Imam Sadiq (a.s.) exhorts:

'Visit each other because that enlivens the heart and is the medium of remembering our traditions because our traditions make you merciful towards each other. Therefore, if you act on it, you will get guidance and find success. And if you leave it you will be deviated and get destroyed. Therefore take benefit from our traditions and I guarantee that you will find success.'6

Surely acting on the traditions of the Imams (a.s.) is not possible without Allah's guidance and good fortune. Gatherings and assemblies organised for the remembrance of the Imams (a.s.) is one medium to achieve this guidance and good fortune. In reality remembrance of the Imams (a.s.) is food for the heart and soul. For, Allah has made Mastership and love of the Imams (a.s.) a foundation for the enlivening of hearts. Hence, one who wishes to keep his heart alive should keep Mastership alive in his heart.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asked Fuzail:

تَجلُسون وَ تَتَحَدَّثُون؟

'Do you sit and narrate traditions for each other?

Fuzail replied: Yes.' Imam Sadiq (a.s.)

إن تلك ألمجالس أحبها فأحيو أمرنا يافضيل ! فرحم الله من أحيا أمرنا.

'I like such gatherings. Then O Fuzail, keep our affairs alive. May Allah have mercy on the one who keeps our affairs alive?'

يافضيل من ذكرنا أو ذُكرنا عنده فخرج من عينه مثل جناح ألذباب غفر الله له ذنوبه ولو كانت أكثر من زبد ألبحر.

'O Fuzail, one who remembers us or our mention is made in his presence, then if tears flow from his eyes even to the extent of the wing of a fly, then Allah will erase all his sins even if they are to the extent of the foam of the ocean.'7

This crying may be due to intense love and restlessness of the heart or due to severe grief at separation from Imam al-Ghaib (a.t.f.s.) or due to strong attachment to, and Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Regardless of the reason, crying purifies the heart and washes away the sins, no matter how sinful he may be.

Imam Ridha' (a.s.) says

ومن ذكر بمصابنا فبكى وأبكى لم تبك عينه يوم تبكي العيون، ومن جلس مجلسا يحيى فيه أمرنا لم يمت قلبه يوم تموت القلوب.

'One who remembers our calamities, then cries and makes others cry, his eyes will not cry on the day, when other eyes will be crying. Anyone who sits in the gathering wherein our affairs are enlivened, his heart will not die on the day when other hearts will die.'8

1. Mikyalul Makarim, Vol. 2, Pg. 358
2. Mikyalul Makarim, Vol. 2, Pg. 443-444

3. Kamaluddin, Chap. 45, Tradition 43
4. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 1, Pg. 200
5. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Imaan wal Kufr, Chap. of 'Necessity of Allah's remembrance in all gatherings', Tradition 2
6. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Imaan wal Kufr, Chap. of 'Discussion with brothers', Tradition 2
7. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 44, Pg. 282, Tradition 14
8. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 44, Pg. 278, Tradition 1

Learning and imparting the knowledge of Imams (a.s.)

From the preceding pages, we have learnt the superiority of enlivening the affairs of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Now it follows that we learn one of the best ways of acquiring this virtue, which the Imams (a.s.) themselves have determined for us. Indeed this is one of the most important necessities and a sign of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) recognition in his occultation

Imam Ridha' (a.s.) declares:

رَحِمَ اللهُ عَبْداً أَحْيا أَمْرَنا

'May Allah have mercy upon the slave who enlivens our affairs?'

Hirvi who is the narrator of this tradition asked Imam (a.s.), 'How can we enliven your affair?' Imam (a.s.) replied:

يتعلّم علومنا ويعلّمها الناس ، فإنّ الناس لو علموا محاسن كلامنا لاتّبعونا

'Learn our knowledge and teach it to the people. For certainly, had the people known the goodness of our statements, they would have surely obeyed us.'1

Thus the emphasis is on learning and disseminating the knowledge of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and our approach to this crucial task can be accomplished by referring and stating their traditions. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) advised his Shias:

تلاقُوا و تحادثوا العلم. فإن الحديث تُجلى القلوب الرانية. و بالحديث إحياءُ امرنا. فَرحم الله من احيا امرنا.

'Visit each other and discuss the concepts of knowledge with each other. With the medium of traditions, hearts become pure and our affair is enlivened. May Allah have mercy on the one who enlivens our affair?'2

Knowledge that emanates from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is the only real and correct source of knowledge. This knowledge makes man pure and helps him attain true prosperity and good fortune. At the same time, this knowledge has in it, tremendous magnetism that attracts the hearts of the pure ones towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). If the tradition of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is conveyed to the people correctly, people will see the wisdom, beauty and freshness that is extremely striking when compared to the speech of others. They will find the tradition of Imams (a.s.) penetrating their hearts like the speech of no other mortal.

They will realise that traditions of Imams (a.s.) appeal to human nature (fitrat) and are in conformity with it. When they absorb these points, they will be drawn towards the personalities who have narrated these traditions. Is there anything better than inviting people towards these personalities so they can examine their sayings and teachings and understand their status vis-à-vis other leaders of the world?!

Therefore the Shias must always be in search of tradition of the Imams (a.s.) and after learning them, must teach others and invite the m towards the teachings of the Imams (a.s.). This is one of the most important duties of the Shias, more so in the time of occultation. Indeed there cannot be anything better for the Shias because the period of occultation will be marked with indifference (towards faith), as a result of which irreligiousness will envelope the people. Consequently no one will be safe from doubt and skepticism. Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) reveals:

'If during the occultation of our Qaim, there were no learned scholars who call the people towards him and guide them towards him and defend the religion with divine arguments and save the weak servants of Allah from the traps of Shaitan and his rebellion and from the traps which are laid by enemies of Imams (a.s.) (in the path of guidance of people), certainly no one would remain except that he turns away from the religion of Allah. Those who hold the reins of the hearts of the weak Shias, are like the sailors who guide their ships by controlling the steering wheel. These are the best people in front of Allah.'3

In this tradition, Imam (a.s.) has very explicitly outlined the duties of the learned at the time of occultation. The learned should more than anything else invite the people towards Imam-e-Ghaib (a.t.f.s.).This duty can be performed by enlivening his remembrance, announcing his virtues and narrating traditions regarding Imam Asr (a.t.f.s.). This is a very crucial task entrusted by the Imams (a .s.) to the learned in occultation, and anyone who treasures the Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) cannot ignore this task.

The scholar at the time of occultation should not invite the people towards his own devotion, virtues, and recognition. Rather he should be like a bridge over which friends of Imam (a.t.f.s.) can traverse and

reach their desired destination, i.e. the Mastership and recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.).

Attachment and friendship with Imam-e-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is not in need of any medium, that any one may invite the people towards himself on this pretext, and present his own greatness in front of them before the greatness of Imam (a.t.f.s.). The role of the scholar is in kindling the light of love and Mastership of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) in the heart of the one who has forgotten his master – the bestower of bounties upon him is perplexed and in a state of confusion, searches for an asylum running from pillar to post.

By reminding such a conf used person of his Imam (a.t.f.s.), narrating about him (a.t.f.s.) and kindling his recognition, the scholar will introduce the light of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) remembrance in the heart of that misguided person and the latter will then be able to traverse the path towards Imam's (a.t.f.s.) recognition. Removing doubts and obstacles is the duty of the scholar, but rectification and changing the condition of the heart is the work of Imam (a.t.f.s.) himself. The true scholars should find these characteristics in themselves and feel privileged about it, because in that condition they will be the best creatures in front of Allah.

1. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2 Pg. 30
2. Mikyalul Makarim, Vol. 1 Pg. 320
3. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2 Pg. 6

Awaiting the reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.)

Among the most important signs and essentials of recognition of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) (may Allah hasten his appearance) is awaiting his reappearance. In traditions awaiting the reappearance is described as the best worship. Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) declares:

أَفْضَلُ العِبادةِ انتِظارُ الفَرَجْ.

'The best worship is awaiting the reappearance.'1

Awaiting for all solutions from Allah's side is propounded as worship. When this matter is in relation to the Imams (a.s.), that too in the time of occultation, it assumes special status and becomes the highest form of worship as underlined by traditions. We have brought some of these traditions to impress our point. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asserts:

من مات منكم وهو منتظر لهذا الأمر كمن هو مع القائم في فسطاطه

'One who dies while he is awaiting this matter (of reappearance), he is like the one who was with Qaim (a.t.f.s.) himself in his tent'.

Then Imam (a.s.) paused for a few moments and said:

لا، بل كمن قارَعَ مَعَهُ بِسَيْفِهْ.

'Nay, he is like the one fought along with him (Qaim (a.t.f.s.)), with his sword.'

Then Imam (a.s.) added:

لا واللهِ اَلا كَمَنْ اُسْتُشْهِدَ مَعَ رَسُولِ الله (ص).

No by Allah! He is not but like the one who was martyred in front of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.).2

But this will not be the case with every Shia, and not all of them will enjoy such an esteemed position. Only that person will enjoy this exalted status who has complete understanding and deep recognition about his Imam (a.t.f.s.) and his occultation, and is not superficial in his beliefs like others. Only then will he be better than the people of all times. In this context, Imam Zainul Abedeen (a.s.) declares:

O Abu Khalid, certainly people in the time of his occultation, who have belief in his Imamat and are awaiting his reappearance, are the best people of all times. For Allah has given them wisdom, understanding and recognition with which occultation for them is like seeing Imam (a.s.) in person. Allah has made them such as if they have fought in the way of Allah with sword in front of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.). These are the true believers and the real Shias who call towards Allah's religion secretly and openly.'3

These people who are the best of all times have two characteristics – they acknowledge the Imamat of Imam al–Asr (a.t.f.s.) and they await his reappearance, which makes them true Shias as they invite others towards Allah's religion openly and secretly.

Allah's religion implies more than anything else the pure existence of Imam al–Zamana (a.t.f.s.) and calling others towards his recognition and love. Indeed one of the most evident signs of waiting in the period of occultation is this very act of calling others openly and secretly towards Imam al– Asr (a.t.f.s.).

Considering the reappearance as near

Awaiting is purely a spiritual relationship, linked with one's heart. And this spiritual relationship will reach

its perfection only when man does not become disappointed of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance under any condition and does not consider it as a very distant possibility. The awaiting one is attentive and his eyes are focused at Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance every morning and evening and he never considers it as a distant eventually. Keeping such a ready disposition towards reappearance at the time of occultation is the cause of Allah's satisfaction and pleasure. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) declares,

'That person is closest to Allah and Allah is most happy with him, when he has lost his Imam who is not evident, rather he is hidden from him, and he does not know his whereabouts while he knows that his proofs and signs have not vanished. Then at such a time he should await the reappearance every morning and evening.'4

Considering reappearance as very proximate is a spiritual feeling and underlines the unshakeable certainty and strong faith of the person in relation to the promise of reappearance not being fixed and the possibility of its occurrence at any time, morning or evening. Considering reappearance as near is from the signs of submission because Allah is satisfied with it and the Imams (a.s.) have strongly recommended it.

Those who consider reappearance as near are safe and sound. We recite in Dua al-Ahad:

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا، وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

'...they (the opponents) consider reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) as distant while we consider it near.'5

Of course, believing reappearance as near does not tantamount to fixing a time for it. Because forecasting their appearance incites Allah's wrath and displeasure and is far from the Sunnat of Imams (a.s.). The Imams (a.s.) have also castigated those who fix a time for reappearance and have considered them as liars. Once a person asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.) about the time for reappearance. He asked, 'May I be sacrificed for you, inform us about this affair, which we are awaiting. When will it occur?' Imam (a.s.) warned:

كَذَبَ الوقَّاتون. و هَلَكَ المُسْتَعجِلونْ. ونَجا المُسَلِّمون.

'Those who fix the time are liars, those who hasten are destroyed and those who submit are safe.'6

Then those who make claims about reappearance being very near, to attract the people towards Imam-e-Zamana (a.t.f.s.) and provide some background for reappearance in the name of ظهور صغرا (minor reappearance), are themselves deviated and misguide others. The duty of the awaiter is to submit to Allah's destiny with regards to the time of reappearance and never despair of Imam's (a.t.f.s.)

reappearance at morning or evening and consider it to be very near. But he must not fall prey to hastening and not to pull oneself or others towards deviation and doubt by creating a false and deceptive atmosphere of reappearance being very near. Therefore, considering reappearance as near should never lead one to forecast the time of reappearance. The former is praised and the latter condemned and both are totally distinct from each other.

Intention of awaiter to help Imam (a.t.f.s.)

The awaiter of reappearance prepares himself for helping Imam (a.t.f.s.) at the time of his reappearance. He fulfills this important responsibility by making a sincere intention from the depth of his heart in the time of occultation. The value of intention in the performance of good deeds is highlighted by the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.) thus:

نيَّةُ المؤمِن خيرٌ من عمله

'The intention of a believer is better than his action'.7

At times a believer decides to do a good deed, but is unsuccessful in doing so. And often with respect to some good deeds he falls prey to ostentation and showoff, which affect his sincerity. Thus the intention behind the deed is very important. As per traditions, intention of a good deed is better than the deed itself and Allah the High, due to His grace and obligation upon believer rewards him just for the intention, regardless of whether He actually performs the action. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) says:

'Surely the poor believer says: O Lord give me sustenance so that I do such and such good deeds. Then since Allah knows that his intention is true, Allah writes the reward equal to that deed as if he has actually performed it. Surely Allah's nobility is boundless.'8

On this basis, correct and sincere intention for a believer assumes extraordinary importance. The intention of a believer should be purely for Allah's and Imam's (a.t.f.s.) pleasure. On the same basis, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has considered himself as a helper of Sayyadush Shohada (a.s.) in Karbala and believes he will be rewarded like the martyrs of Karbala.

'I do consider myself as one of the martyrs of Karbala and do not consider my reward lesser than their reward. This is because my intention is that if I was present in those days, I would certainly have helped Imam Husain (a.s.). And similarly our Shias are (considered as martyrs), though they may die in their beds.' 9

Therefore one who passes the day in awaiting the reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.), and if he is sincere in his awaiting, and helps Imam (a.t.f.s.), then even if he does not find the era of reappearance,

it will not make any difference to him. This is because he gets the reward of attaining the reappearance and being present along with Imam (a.t.f.s.) and fighting his enemies without actually lifting a sword. He gets this reward in the period of occultation itself.

The rationale behind this reward is that as far as helping the Imam (a.t.f.s.) is concerned, all that the Shia is capable of doing is his intention and spiritual preparation from the heart. As for the actualization of his intention, it is an affair beyond his control and depends on Allah's decree. Then although Allah has deprived him of this taufiq (of helping Imam (a.t.f.s.)), but due to His boundless grace and mercy, He has not deprived him of the reward of intending to help his Imam (a.t.f.s.).

One of the awaiters of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) was a person by the name of Abdul Hamid Waasti who lived at the time of Imam Baqir (a.s.). Once after narrating his condition of awaiting and discussing about the reappearance of Qaim al-Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), he asked Imam (a.s.): 'If I die before meeting the Qaim (a.t.f.s.), what will happen?'

Imam (a.s.) soothed him by saying:

إنَّ القائل منكم إن أدركت القائم من آل محمد نصرته كالمقارع معه بسيفه.

'Anyone of you who says (from his heart): If I attain the time of Imam al-Zamana (a.t.f.s.), I will help him, he is like the one who wields the sword alongside him.'10

Finding such a belief is the outcome of true recognition regarding Allah and the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Imam (a.t.f.s.), and cognizance of their rights. Amirul Mo'mineen (a.s.) says:

'Do not venture out (i.e. stay in your house) and be patient in calamites. Do not draw the sword as per the wishes of your tongue and do not be hasty in whatever Allah has not hastened for you. For whoever amongst you dies on his bed while he is aware of the right of Allah, his Lord, and the rights of His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the rights of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), he dies a martyr and his reward is with Allah and he will find the reward of the good action which was in his intention and that intent ion will be considered (for reward) even if he has not (actually) lifted the sword. And for everything a period and its expiry is fixed.'11

A noteworthy point in this tradition is the importance of recognizing the rights of Allah, His Messenger (s.a.w.s.) and Imam (a.t.f.s.), which arises only from their recognition. The level of this recognition of rights varies to the extent of man's recognition about them. His recognition of their rights upon him will enable him to understand his duties better and consequently he will perform these duties in the desired manner. Thus the key to man's actions lies in the depth of his recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.).
Therefore, the true awaiter in the time of occultation is the one who claims with his tongue as well as his heart:

نُصرَتي مُعَدَةٌ لَكُمْ

'My help is ready for you.'12

And if all the followers of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) in the time of occultation have such a condition, then they will not remain deprived of seeing him. Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) in a signed letter (tauqee') to Shaikh Mufid (r.a.) has promised:

'If our followers – may Allah give them taufeeq of His obedience – are united in fulfilling with their hearts, the covenant which they have upon their necks, the bounty of seeing me will not be delayed for them and soon they will achieve the good fortune of our visit with true recognition from their side in relation to us.'13

Expressing intention of helping through renewal of allegiance (bay'at)

For keeping alive the intention of helping Imam (a.t.f.s.), indeed how nice would it be if man brings his intention to his tongue and binds himself by promising Allah that he will never be negligent of this intention. It is with this objective that we are discussing the matter of allegiance (bay'at) to Imam al-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in the time of occultation. Bay'at is in fact expressing with the tongue and the heart the intention of obeying Imam (a.t.f.s.) and helping him at all times. We repeat this action on several occasions, to renew our intention through a fresh bay at. For instance, renewal of bay'at in Dua al-Ahad every morning is done thus:

'O Allah I renew today morning and on all other days that I am alive, the bay'at for him, which is upon my neck, in such a way that I shall never turn back from it and shall not desist from it. O Allah make me from his friends and helpers, those who defend him, hasten in fulfilling his needs, are obedient to his orders, protect his holy existence, take precedence in fulfilling his wishes and attain the bounty of martyrdom in front of him.'14

The promise covers the wishes and aspirations of the awaiter, which he expresses every day. This brings about a transformation in him and every day that he renews his bay'at, his intention becomes stronger and he finds himself more prepared and equipped than earlier in fulfilling his promise towards his master.

One who nears the end of his life in this condition and finds himself confronted with death, while his master has not reappeared, his entire existence burns and is filled with regret. Such a person is overwhelmed with feelings of disappointment and is distressed at praying and waiting for his entire life for his master, only to find death at his doorstep, while his master still has not reappeared. He is left with a feeling of remorse and emptiness at not being able to help his master and considers his life

unsuccessful and meaningless.

Consequences of awaiting the entire life for reappearance

Let us see how Imams (a.s.) approach the one who is sincerely awaiting reappearance. Mas'adah narrates, 'I was with Imam Sadiq (a.s.) when an old man, stooping and leaning heavily on a stick entered and did salaam to Imam (a.s.). Imam (a.s.) replied to his salaam. The old man said, 'O son of Allah's Messenger, give me your hand so that I may kiss it.' Imam (a.s.) obliged. The old man kissed it and began crying. Imam (a.s.) asked, 'O Shaykh, why are you crying?'

He replied, 'May I be sacrificed for you, it is now 100 years since I have been faithful to the feet of your Qaim. I keep saying he will reappear this month, this year. But now my age has increased, my bones have become fragile and my death is approaching. And whatever I see about you (i.e. Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)), I do not like. I see you being killed and rendered homeless and on the other hand, I see your enemies dominant. Then why should I not cry?'

The old man's words moved Imam (a.s.) to tears. He said to the old man:

'O Shaykh, if Allah keeps you alive so that you see our Qaim, you will be at an elevated position. But if death overtakes you (and you do not see the time of Qaim (a.s.)) then on the Day of Judgment you will be raised along with the weight ثقل of Hazrat Mohammed (s.a.w.s.) and we are his weight. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) said so often: 'I am leaving behind you two weighty things. Then fasten to these two things so that you are never deviated: the Book of Allah and my progeny, who are my Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).'

The old man said, 'After hearing this news, I am not afraid and my he art has become tranquil.' He did not know who would be the Qaim of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). Therefore, Imam (a.s.) introduced him to the Qaim (a.t.f.s.) and said that the Qaim (a.t.f.s.) will be the son of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), from the progeny of Hazrat Hadi (a.s.) and he will be (a descendant) of my son.'

Then Imam (a.s.) said:
'O Shaykh! I swear by Allah! If from the age of the world, only one day remains, Allah will lengthen that day so that the Qaim of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) reappears. Remember that our Shias in the time of occultation will be involved in severe examination and distress. In that period, Allah will keep steadfast in his guidance, those who are sincere. O Allah help them (Shias) in this matter (of sincerity and steadfastness)'15

A similar incident occurred with another old man in the time of Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.). Hakam b. Otaibah who witnessed this incident narrates: 'I was with Imam Muhammad Baqir (a.s.) and the house was filled with people. At that moment, an old man entered, leaning on his staff. He stood at the door of the room and said – Salutation to you, O son of Allah's Messenger, and may His mercy and blessings be upon you. Imam (a.s.) replied,

"Peace be upon you and His mercy and blessings."

Thereafter the old man did salaam to those who were present in the gathering and they also replied to him.

Later, the old man turned his face to Imam Baqir (a.s.) and said: O son of Allah's Messenger, please give me a seat near you, may I be sacrificed for you. I swear by Allah that I love you and I love your friends as well. I swear by Allah, my love for you and your friends is not for the sake of the world. I keep enmity with your enemies and I am disgusted with them, and I swear by Allah, keeping enmity and disgust with regards to them is not due to any jealousy between them and me. I swear by Allah, I consider your permissible (halaal) as permissible and your prohibited (haraam) as prohibited and I am awaiting the reappearance of your affair. Now while it is as I have said, may my life be sacrificed for you, what hope (and glad tidings) do you have for me?'

Imam Baqir (a.s.) said:
'Come, come by my side and Imam (a.s.) pointed at a place near him. Then he (a.s.) said to him: O Shaykh, a man came to see my father, Ali b. Husain (a.s.) and asked him the same question (as you have asked). My father replied to him thus:

'If you die (in this condition) you will join the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) and Hasan (a.s.) and Husain (a.s.) and Ali b. Husain (a.s.), your heart will turn cool, your eyes will become bright and you will be welcomed along with the honorable angels, Ruh and Rayhan, as soon as your soul reaches here – and he (a.s.) indicated by his hand to the throat. And if you remain alive, you will see whatever delights your eyes, and reach to the highest grade along with us.'16

When the old man heard this statement, he said:
'O Abu Jafer what did you say?' Imam (a.s.) repeated the statement of his father. The old man exclaimed اللهُ أَكْبَرُ 'If I die I will join Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) and Hasan (a.s.) and Husain (a.s.) and Ali b. Husain (a.s.) and my heart will turn cool, my eyes will become bright and I shall be welcomed along with the honorable angels, Ruh and Rayhan as soon as my soul reaches here (i.e. throat). And if I remain alive I shall see whatever delights my eyes and I shall reach at the highest grade along with you?!"

Saying this, the old man starting weeping and lamenting till he collapsed. When others in the crowd saw his condition, all of them cried and wept. Imam Baqir (a.s.) wiped the old man's tears with his own hands. The old man raised his head and said to Imam (a.s.): O son of Allah's Messenger, may Allah sacrifice me upon you, give your hand to me.' Imam (a.s.) gave his hand to him. He kissed his hand and rubbed it on his eyes and cheeks. Then he lifted his dress over his stomach and chest and put Imam's (a.s.) hand over it.

Then the old man rose, did salaam and left. When he had turned his back, Imam (a.s.), looking towards him, turned the people in the gathering and said:

مَنْ أَحَبَ أن ينظُر الى رَجُلٍ مِنَ الجنَّةِ فَلْيَنْظُرُ الى هذا

'If anyone likes to see a person from the people of Paradise, he should look at this man.'

Hakambi n Otaibah said: 'I have not seen any gathering wherein the people were wailing like this.' (i.e. all people were crying very intensely)

Yes, this is the end of the one who has passed his life with the love of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and their friends, and hatred and hostility towards their enemies. He accepts whatever is made permissible and unlawful by the Imams (a.s.) and awaits the reappearance of Qaim al-Ahlul Bait (a .s.) with intense fervor and anticipation.

Then let us beseech Allah that he never deprives us of the fervor of awaiting for our beloved Imam (a.t.f.s.) and that separation from him (a.t.f.s.) never makes us forgetful of his remembrance!

و لا تُنْسِنا ذِكرَهُ و انتِظارَهُ...

(O Allah), do not let me forget his remembrance and his awaiting.'17

This is one sentence from a dua, which has reached us from the first deputy of I mam al- Asr (a.t.f.s.). Those who await the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) must recite it after namaz al-Asr on Fridays in the period of occultation.

1. Muntakhabul Athar, Part 15, Chp. 2, Tradition 16
2. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 52, Pg. 126, Tradition 18.
3. Kamaluddin, Chap. 31, Tradition 2
4. Kamaluddin, Chap. 33, Tradition 17
5. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 102, Pg. 112
6. Ghaibat al-No'mani, Chap. 16, Tradition 11
7. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Imaan wal Kufr, Chp. of Niyyat, Tradition 2
8. Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of Niyyat, Tradition 3
9. Mikyalul Makareem, Vol. 2, Pg. 228 quoted from Sharh Sahife Sajjadiyah of Sayyed Naimatullah Jazaeri
10. Rauza al-Kafi, Pg. 81, Tradition 37
11. Nahjul Balagah, Sermon 190
12. Ihtejaj al-Tabarsi, Volume 2, Pg. 317, Ziarat al-Aale Yasin
13. Ihtejaj al-Tabarsi, Vol. 2, Pg. 325
14. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 102, Pg. 112
15. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 36, Pg. 408
16. Rauza al-Kafi, Pg. 76, Tradition 30
17. Kamaluddin Chp. 45, Tradition 43

Importance of praying for hastening of Imam Zamana's (a.s.) reappearance

For the one whose sole objective in life is awaiting for the reappearance of Imam al–Asr (a.t.f.s.), salvation with the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) is his most ardent desire in life. Then the actions that make him most sad and grievous are the difficulties and discomforts caused to Imam (a.t.f.s.) during the period of occultation. Therefore he considers it as his duty to find a solution for the removal of Imam's (a. t. f. s) sorrows, difficulties and calamities. To achieve this aim he is not negligent in doing whatever he is called upon to do.

By paying attention to the point highlighted above we can understand that the best and the most important relief (faraj) for Imam al– Asr (a.t.f.s.) is nothing but the permission for his reappearance from Allah, which apart from being his own salvation is also the salvation of Allah's Prophets (a.s.) and His friends (awliyya) (a.s.). And the most effective medium for achieving this aim is supplication for the hastening of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance, which is among the necessary conditions and one of the most evident indications of his recognition in the time of occultation, without which all claims of recognition and Mastership of Imam (a.t.f.s.) will sound hollow.

This excellent practice (of dua) is highlighted by Imam (a.t.f.s.) himself at the time of his birth. Hakima Khatoon (a.r.), the respected paternal aunt of Imam Hasan al–Askari (a.s.) saw that immediately after coming to this world, Imam (a.t.f.s.) put his head down in prostration and raised his index finger towards the sky and recited thus:

'I give witness that there is no God except Allah, He is One and has no partner and I bear witness that my great grandfather (s.a.w.s.) is the Messenger of Allah and my father is Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.). Then he recited the names of all other Imams (a.s.) till he came to his own name. Then he prayed to Allah thus:

اللهم أنجز لي وعدي و أتمم لي أمري وثبت وطأتي و إملأ الأرض بي عدلاً وقسطا

'O Allah! Implement that which You have promised me and complete my affair and make my step steadfast and fill the earth with justice and equity through me.'1

And the practice of beseeching Allah for the hastening of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance (faraj), is evident even in the lives of the earlier Imams (a.s.). From the traditions of Imam Sadiq (a.s.), we see that in the morning of the 21st of the month of Ramazan, after praying the Namaz al–Subh, he used to go in prostration, and then recite a particular dua, at the end of which he used to plead loudly to Allah:

'O Allah! By the greatness of Your Majesty, I ask from You by the right of all that I asked You and also by whatever I did not ask, which had I known I would certainly have asked, that send blessings on Mohammed (s.a.w.s.) and his progeny and give permission for the salvation of the one with whose salvation is the salvation of all your friends and chosen ones from Your creation. Then remove the oppressors through him and destroy them. O Lord of the universe! Hasten this matter!'

The narrator (of this tradition) says: After Imam (a.s.) raised his head from prostration, I asked: May I be sacrificed upon you, I heard you praying thus: Are you not that one? He (a.s.) informed:
'No, he is Qaim al-Ale Muhammad (s.a.w.s.).'

Then Imam (a.s.) recommended:
'Anticipate the affair (reappearance) of your master day and night. This is because Allah manifests an affair every day and the manifestation of one affair does not prevent Him from manifesting other affairs. This is Allah, Lord of the universe.'2

The last sentence is a pointer towards the fact that the time of reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) is subject to change (بِداء).

An interesting point in this tradition is the question asked by the narrator to Imam (a.s.). It serves to remind us that supplication for hastening the salvation of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f. s.) is in fact a supplication for the salvation of all the chosen ones of Allah, from the best of the creation - Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) till his (s.a.w.s.) successors and the angels of Allah, as all of them are awaiting the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.). In Dua al-Ahad, we ask from Allah:

اَللّـهُمَّ وَسُرَّ نَبِيَّكَ مُحَمَّداً صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ بِرُؤْيَتِهِ وَمَنْ تَبِعَهُ عَلى دَعْوَتِهِ

'O Allah! Make your Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.s.) rejoice and those who follow his call by the sight of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.).'3

But the most important benefit of praying for the reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is that if the believer truly acknowledges his Imamat and testifies in his Mastership, his faith is protected in the period of occultation, and his religion is safeguarded from destruction. This is the glad tiding that Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) gave to Ahmed b. Ishaaq:

'O Ahmed b. Ishaaq! His example in the nation is like the example of Khizr and Zulqarnain. I swear by Allah, occultation will be there (for him) in which (period) no one will be saved from destruction, except the one whom Allah keeps steadfast on belief of his Imamat and to whom Allah gives taufiq during the period of occultation to pray for the hastening of his appearance.'

Next day when Ahmed b. Ishaaq went again to see Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), he asked: 'What is the

sunnat of Khizr and Zulqarnain, which will be continued in him (Qaim)?'

Imam replied:
'Yes, I swear by my Lord! He will be in occultation, until most of those who believe in him will turn away (from faith). None will remain steadfast except the one from whom Allah has taken the covenant of our Mastership and upon whose heart Allah has established faith and strengthened him with the angel Ruhul Quds from His side.'4

It must be pointed out that in this tradition, supplication for hastening the reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) in the period of occultation has been put at par along with the belief in his Imamat which is the root and axis of one's faith. The second point is that both these pillars i.e. belief in Imamat and supplication for hastening of reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) is subject to grace (taufiq) from Allah's side.

And when Allah bestows someone with this taufiq, it shows that Allah wants to protect him in the period of occultation from the dangers of irreligiousness. He gives this taufiq of praying for the hastening of salvation to whomsoever He pleases. One who is not granted this vital grace and bounty will slip and deviate from the straight path.

Therefore one should constantly seek guidance and taufiq from Allah and should never make the blunder of relying upon him. This is because if Allah leaves someone on his own, he will lose the medium of salvation i.e. belief in Imamat and Mastership. At the end of the tradition it is underlined that believers in Imamat will forsake their belief. Reverting from the belief of Imamat is very simple and easy so much so that it may actually happen without the person even realising it. It is not necessary that a person may refuse Imamat explicitly and object to it. Often he may memorise the names of the Imams (a.s.) but his belief about Imamat under the guise of faith and certainty, may actually be distorted, and deviate him far from the true belief of Imamat and Mastership.

This could be because he has taken his knowledge independently, not derived on the basis of revelation and traditions of Imams (a.s.). In this case, he may totally miss the essence of Imamat and the reality of Mastership. The standard for correct belief in Imamat is not simply knowing and memorising names of Imams (a.s.). Rather, the true essence and belief in Imamat should be derived from only the Book and traditions.

This alone will safe guard man from irreligiousness as most of the disbelief stems from a distorted belief in Imamat. Therefore this point is very delicate and one should address it very carefully. Our emphasis on the first condition of possessing correct recognition is to save us from this hidden peril of deviation. Man should always check his belief with the standard of the Book and traditions and his learning should never rely on anything other than traditions of the infallibles (a.s.).

Often we see that one invalid statement and one deviated belief contaminates the thinking and rationale of a person in such a way that he explains even Quranic verses and traditions under the effect of the same improper line of thinking. Consequently although he cites traditions, but he has not taken the

essence of his own belief from Imams (a.s.). He has simply brought the concept from somewhere else and has given it the colour of traditions. This is not how correct recognition ought to be. In a way, this amounts to deviation from the belief of Imamat.

The bottom-line in the preceding discussion is that we should never let Allah leave us to fend for ourselves and that we should never refer and rely on any house except that of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) – Ahlul Bayt (a.s). So those who remain steadfast on the belief of Imamat and Mastership and combine this belief with supplication for the hastening of reappearance of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.), will remain secure from destruction in the period of occultation. Therefore we should give the supplication for hastening of reappearance a place of pride in our lives and pray for it with the intensity and effort that it deserves.

أَكْثِرُوا الدُّعاءَ بِتَعْجيلِ الفَرَجِ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ فَرَجُكُمْ.

'Pray more for the hastening of reappearance, because in it lies your salvation.'[5]

More than anything else, the most important reward for the one who prays for the salvation of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.), is his end in safety of religion, at a time when most of the believers in Imamat will turn away from religion. Of course, there are spiritual and material benefits, which Allah grants him due to the blessings of the supplication for salvation of Imam al-Zamana (a.t.f.s.).

1. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 51, Pg. 13
2. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 98, Pg. 158
3. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 102, Pg. 112
4. Kamaluddin Chp. 38, Tradition 1
5. Kamaluddin Chp. 45, Tradition 4

Allah helps those who help Him

....إِنْ تَنْصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

'If you help Allah, He will help you and will keep your feet steadfast.' **(*47: 7*)**

إِن تَنصُرُوا اللَّـهَ يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

***'And surely Allah helps those who help Him.'* (*22: 45*)**

The questions that come foremost to the mind after reading the above two verses is 'Is it possible for a man to help Allah?' 'How to help Allah?' 'How do we know that our help will reach Him? ' As mentioned earlier, 'Mastership and love' is the soul of Islam and the reality of faith. In a tradition, mentioned above, Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has elucidated the meaning of Allah's satisfaction and His anger, war with Him, obeying Him, becoming a cause of regret to Him, distancing oneself from Him, etc.

The gist of this tradition was that when any of these actions – obedience, regret, anger, war, is performed against Allah's chosen ones and His friends, Allah ascribes these actions to Himself. For instance, obeying the وَلي of Allah amounts to Allah's obedience, distancing (برائت) oneself from the ولي of Allah is tantamount to distancing oneself from Allah Himself, and war with the ولي of Allah, is equal to going to war against Allah Himself.

In light of the above discussion, we can say that helping Allah actually means helping His friends. By this interpretation, one who helps the Imams (a.s.), has in fact helped Allah Himself. Then the promise of Allah's help will extend to all those who help his ولي Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.). Thus, helping the Imam (a.t.f.s.) is one of the most crucial duties of the Shias accompanied with correct Mastership and recognition of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

Of course, in the time of occultation, it is not easy to help Imam (a.t.f.s.) as compared to assisting him while he is physically present. Hence, in the discussion of awaiting, we propounded the idea of the intention to help Imam (a.t.f.s.) and explained that according to traditions, one who sincerely intends to help Imam (a.t.f.s.) while he is in occultation, Allah will reward Him purely on his intention. So one who sincerely intends to help Imam (a.t.f.s.), must do so under any pretext and to whatever extent possible.

One way of helping Imam (a.t.f.s.) in occultation, is by supporting him with the tongue. In this regard Imam Husain (a.s.) declares:

'My grandfather informed me that my son Husain will be killed in the desert of Karbala, while I am a stranger, totally alone, in a condition of extreme thirst. Then whoever helps him has helped me and my son Qaim. And whoever helps me with his tongue, he will be in our company on the Day of Judgment.'1

This statement was made by the chief of the Martyrs, Imam Husain (a.s.) on the eve of Ashura in front of his companions. His assertion implies that everyone should assist his Imam in every possible manner. One of the means to extend help and support to Imam is by the tongue. By doing this, one will attain the status of martyrs of the highest level.

Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) declares:
'One who helps Allah and His Messenger (s.a.w.s.) in occultation and defends Imam (a.t.f.s.) from the side of Allah and His Messenger (s.a.w.s.), will be among the martyrs of the highest standing on the Day of Judgment.'

We have been commanded to help and defend Imam (a.t.f.s.) from Allah's side and His Messenger's (s.a.w.s.) side, even in his (a.t.f.s.) occultation, and not just in his (a.t.f.s.) presence. It is possible to help Imam (a.t.f.s.) in several forms and one of these is the tongue. One can make the hearts of the people attentive towards the Ahlul Bait (a.s.) through his speech. He can employ his tongue to revive the remembrance of the Imams (a.s.) by reciting elegies and poems related to the Imams (a.s.), by simply narrating their virtues and excellence and/or by recounting their traditions so as to establish their superiority over all others.

De'bal al-Khozaee (r.a.) was among the poets of Aal al-Muhammad (a.s.) and praised them excessively and narrated their virtues abundantly in his poems and elegies. Once he went to meet Imam Ali Raza (a.s.) on the Day of Ashoora. When Imam (a.s.) saw him, he exclaimed,
'Welcome O De'bal! Welcome Oh our helper with the hand and tongue!'

Then Imam (a.s.) made some place and seated De'bal (r.a.) next to himself. Imam (a.s.) asked De'bal (r. a.) to recite poems on the afflictions of Imam Husain (a.s.) and said to him:

'O De'bal, recite elegies for Imam Husain (a.s.) You are our helper and exalter for the rest of your life. Then do not neglect to help us in whatever way you can.'

This is Imam's (a.s.) recommendation not only to De' bal (r .a.), but to all Shias in the period of occultation, that they should help the cause of Imamat and Mastership in whatever way they can. Hence, every step towards the exaltation and propagation of the remembrance of Imams (a.s.) will be accounted as a help and support to their cause. And Allah's promise extends to all those who fall in this category. Allah promises to help them and keep them steadfast.

These glad tidings of help and steadfastness apply more to the Shias in the period of occultation, as the perils of irreligiousness, faithlessness and lapses are more severe in this period than in all previous periods. Then those who wish to secure for themselves the good fortune of Allah's help and support should endeavour to propagate the virtues and remembrance of the Imams (a.s.) with all means possible. They should understand the gravity of this responsibility and never be negligent of it. If we do this, then Allah will protect us from all pitfalls in occultation and will catch our hands in slippery places.

The manifestation of Allah's grace and mercy is the holy existence of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.). The one who helps him, attracts the grace and bounty of Imam (a.t.f.s.) towards himself and makes himself aspirant for Allah's light of guidance and recognition. One of the ways of helping Imam (a.t.f.s.) and attracting his attention is by praying for the hastening of his reappearance. Imam (a.t.f.s.) considers this help as a favour from his Shias and therefore he never forsakes his Shias. Then the one who prays for Imam (a.t.f.s.) attracts Imam's (a.t.f.s.) supplications and attention towards him and becomes eligible for his favours.

In the time of Mutawakkil, the Abbasid Emperor, one person – Abdul Rahman, staying in Isfahan, had converted to Shi'ism. He was asked, 'How did you start believing in the Imamat of Ali Naqi (a.s.)?' He

replied. 'I witnessed an incident that became instrumental in my becoming a Shia. I was very poor, so much so that I did not dare speak out of shame for my poverty. One day, the people of Isfahan expelled me from the city. I, along with some others, went to Motavakkil to complain about the treatment of the people. When we reached the threshold of the court, Motavakkil issued an order to summon Ali b. Muhammad ar-Raza (a.s.). I asked one of the men – who is this per son who has been summoned by Motavakkil? He replied, 'He is one of the Alawis and the Shias believe in his Imamat. Motavakkil has summoned him to kill him.' At this I said to myself, 'I will not leave until I see this man.'

Abdul Rahman recounts, 'The man came riding on his horse, while the people thronged to catch a glimpse of him. There were people standing in rows on his right and left. When I saw him, my heart brimmed with his love. I began praying – May Allah remove the evil of Motavakkil from him. He advanced forward keeping his sight fixed on the mane of the horse, not looking either left or right. I began praying for him sincerely. When he passed by in front of me, he looked at me and said,

اسْتَجابَ اللهُ دُعائَكَ. وَ طَوَّلَ عُمْرَكَ. و كَثَّرَ مالَكَ.

'May Allah accept your prayers, has prolong your life and multiply your wealth and children.'

He continues, 'I was shaken with the awe of his majesty and collapsed among my companions. They asked me as to what had happened. I replied: Nothing. I did not breathe a word about this to anyone. After this incident had transpired I returned to Isfahan.

'Then due to the blessings of my prayers for Imam's (a.s.) safety, Allah expanded my means of income, and today I have a million dirham at home in addition to what I have outside the house. Allah has given me 10 sons, while my age is over 70. And I am believing in the Imamat of the one who knew what was in my heart and Allah accepted his supplication for me.'2

This is but a small specimen of Imam(a.s.)'s favours at a time when the person does not believe in his Imamat and has no trace of Mastership. Now if we acknowledge his Imamat and Mastership, pray for his safety, is it possible that his favours and grace remain concealed from us? Is it possible that he is aware of the one who prays for him, but is not attentive towards him and neglects him? The truth is far from this. It is Allah's promise that He helps the one who helps Him, through Imam (a.s.).

1. Mikyalul Makarim, Vol. 1, Pg. 507
2. Al-Kharaaej al-Qutb al-Rawandi, Chp. 11 about miracles of Imam Hadi (a.s.)

Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is attentive towards all the believers

On the basis of traditions, Shias believe that Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is aware of all actions and conditions of Allah's creatures, whether they are on the earth, in the skies, in the solar system or any other part of the universe. And out of everything he observes, he has special attention and consideration towards the believers. This is evident from the incident outlined below that highlights the concern of the Imam (a.s.) towards his Shias.

Ramila says: I became very sick during the reign of Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.). On Friday, I felt a little relief. I said to myself that the best thing to do was to sprinkle a little water on my face and go and pray behind Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.). So I went to the mosque. When Imam (a.s.) went on the pulpit, my condition worsened again. When Imam (a.s.) returned from the mosque and entered a place called 'Qasr' I entered along with him. He turned towards me and said: O Ramila I saw that you were uneasy. I replied: Yes and revealed my illness and explained my objective of attending the prayer. Imam(a.s.) declared:

'O Ramila, no believer becomes ill except that we also fall ill due to his illness and he does not become sorrowful that we also become sorrowful due to his sorrow. And he does not pray except that we say Amin to his supplication. And when he remains silent we pray for him.

I said: O Amirul Mo'mineen! May I be sacrificed upon you. Whether this is also concerning those believers who are in قصر? What about those who are around the earth? He said:

يا رُمَيْله، لَيسَ يَغيبُ عَنَّا مؤمِنٌ في شَرقِ الأرض و لا في غَربِها.

'O Ramila! No believer in the east or west of the earth remains concealed from us.'1

What can be more fortunate for a Shia than to have such an Imam? Then what is more beneficial for him that he prays for the hastening of reappearance and surrenders his desires to Imam (a.t.f.s.). Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is nobler than this that his Shia remembers him, while he himself neglects him. Imam (a.t.f.s.) wrote to Sheikh Mufid (r.a.):

إنّا نحيط علماً بأنبائكم، ولا يعزب عنّا شيء من أخباركم.. إنَّا غير مهملين لِمُراعاتِكُم ولا ناسين لذكركم

'We are aware of everything that happens to you, and your information is never hidden from us. We are not negligent about looking after you and we do not forget your remembrance.2

From the above letter, it is apparent that although Imam (a.t.f.s.) is hidden from the eyes of the people, the actions of the people are not concealed from his vision. He is aware of the conditions of the people in east and the west and with regards to the believers, he pays special attention.

In fact , it mea ns that while he is identity is not apparent to the people, he witnesses all the people – their bodies and souls, in such a way that nothing from the apparent or unseen is hidden from his eyes and no one is beyond his domain.

As we recite in ziyarat on Friday:

السَّلامُ عليكَ يا عَيْنَ الله في خَلقِه

'Peace be upon you, O eye of Allah amongst His creation'.3

In light of the above, how can one conclude that he is not aware of the condition of Allah's servants?

The important thing here is that man should realize the reality of this fact and should feel the presence of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) holy existence everywhere, at all times. In this situation, for him occultation is tantamount to witnessing Imam (a.t.f.s.) and he always feels Imam's (a.t.f.s.) presence. Then such a person will sincerely and genuinely try to observe the respect and honour towards his Imam's (a.t.f.s.) existence. And by this, he will embrace the path of certainty in the period of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) occultation. For experiencing such a condition (i.e. feeling presence of Imam al–Ghaib (a.t.f.s.)), there is only one way and this is evident from the tradition of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) to Abu Khalid:

'O Abu Khalid, certainly the people of the time of His (Imam Mahdi ((a.t.f.s.)) occultation who believe in his Imamat and are awaiting his reappearance are better than the people of all times. This is because Allah has given them such intelligence understanding and recognition that occultation for them has become akin to his presence.'4

Yes, achieving this condition is possible through a deeper and a more perfect sense of recognition of all fundamentals of religion. The base and the root of every recognition is recognition of Allah, which man must realize. If man is able to realise Allah's Unity (Tauheed) as is outlined in traditions, his actions and behaviour will automatically fall in line with Allah's wishes. Similarly, the recognition of Prophethood and Imamat should be correct, i.e. it should be in conformity with the Quran and traditions, without any reliance on one's own intellect and rationale. Amongst all these beliefs, recognition of Imamat possesses special importance.

In addition to correct beliefs, actions also play a crucial role in acquiring certainty. Actions are equally essential and are a sign of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) recognition and therefore should be pursued with more efforts. Gradually more and more similarity will be found between the Imam(a.s.) and the follower. This

spiritual similarity will prepare the ground for feeling the presence of Imam al-Ghaib (a.t.f.s.) at all times as outlined in Imam Sajjad 's (a.s.) tradition to Abu Khalid.

At times Imams (a.s.) used to lift the veil of the unseen and manifest the reality to the Shias so that they may realise the concept. Abu Basir (r.a.) quotes: I entered the mosque along with Imam Baqir (a.s.), while people were entering and leaving. Imam (a.s.) said to me, 'Ask the people whether they are able to see me?' Then whoever passed from there I asked him: 'Do you see Imam Baqir (a.s.)?' He used to reply in the negative while he was standing right beside me. Abu Haroon who was blind entered the masjid. Imam (a.s.) said: 'Ask him.' I said: 'Did you not see Imam Baqir (a.s.)?' He said: 'Is he not standing here?' I inquired: 'How did you come to know?' He replied: 'How would I not know while he is a shining light?'

Abu Basir (r.a.) narrates: 'I heard Imam (a.s.) conversing with a man from Africa – How is Rashid? The African replied: 'I left him alive, while he had correct belief and he has conveyed salam to you.' Imam (a.s.) said: 'May Allah have mercy upon him!' The African asked, 'Did Rashid pass away? Imam (a.s.) said: 'Yes' He asked: 'When?' Imam (a.s.) said: 'Two days after you left.' He said: 'I swear by Allah, Rashid was not sick nor was he in any sort of trouble and a man usually dies under the effect of sickness or disease.' I (Abu Basir) asked: 'Who was this person?' Imam (a.s.) said: 'He was one with my Mastership and love.' Then Imam (a.s.) asserted:

'If you think that I am not seeing you and hearing you then you have imagined wrongly. I swear by Allah, none of your actions are hidden from us. Therefore always consider me present[5] and make yourself habituated to good work and be from the good doers so that you are known by it. I recommend this to my children and my Shias.'[6]

Yes, it is possible that a blind person feels the presence of his Imam (a.s.) while a person with eyes is unable to see him. Imam (a.t.f.s.) is a brilliant light and seeing him is not dependent upon the apparent eyes. If a person's heart sees, he will be able to see Imam (a.t.f.s.) and feel his presence.

What is important is a spiritual bond and communication between us and Imam's (a.t.f.s.) holy existence. Imam Baqir (a.s.) has guided us towards this spiritual bond by recommending that we always feel the presence of our Imam and try to do good deeds so as to be habituated to goodness and perform it consistently so that we are recognised with piety and associated with virtue.

1. Basair-ud-Darajaat, Chap. 16, Tradition 1
2. Ihtejaj al-Tabarsi, Vol. 2, Pg. 323
3. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2 Pg. 215
4. Kamaluddin, Chap. 31, Tradition 2
5. It obviously means: consider me present and feel my presence.
6. Al Kharaaej al-Qutb al-Rawandi, Pg. 92

Observing traditions of the Imams (a.s.) by the Shias in occultation

Those who feel themselves in Imam's (a.t.f .s.) presence at all times, to the extent that they possess his true recognition, abstain from all acts that incur Imam's (a.t.f.s.) wrath and displeasure. At the same time they do not leave any action that will earn his pleasure and satisfaction. In fact, this is one of the most evident signs of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) true recognition in his occultation. Ameerul Mo'mineen (a.s.):

'O Allah, You always have Your Hujjat (proof) on the earth for the creatures. The Hujjat guides them towards Your religion and teaches them Your knowledge, so that Your servants are not scattered (in misguidance). At times Your Hujjat is manifest, but is not obeyed, and at times they are concealed due to fear and their reappearance is awaited. The Hujjat maybe in occultation even in peace due to an unjust government, but his knowledge does not remain concealed from the people. His teachings are etched in the hearts of the believers and they act upon it.'1

Two critical points are highlighted in this tradition with a lot of emphasis. One is referring to knowledge and teachings of Imams (a.s.) and the other point is about the Shias acting upon their exhortations and their way in all walks of our life. And both these tasks are possible in occultation, although not to the same extent as in the presence of Allah's Hujjat. Therefore just because Imam (a.t.f.s.) is in occultation it does not mean in any way that these two critical tasks are ignored. As regards the necessity of referring to the teachings and traditions of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) in all walks of life, we have already discussed this in the preceding chapters. The following discussion shall cover the other point.

اداب is plural of ادب and means 'affairs' and 'habit' (according to Firozabadi) and we have translated as morals, and by this we mean attributes, habits and morals, which have reached us from our Imams (a.s.). We are not meant to simply believe in these teachings but to actually act upon it. Believing in these teachings and acknowledging them with the heart constitutes the first stage and implementing these in our lives marks the second stage, which is as important as the first one. That is the reason why so much importance has been placed on implementing the teachings of the Imams (a.s.) under the topic of إجْتِهاد and وَرَعْ so much so that these teachings should be deemed as the fundamentals (اركان) of religion.

A blind person approached Imam Mohammad Baqir (a.s.) and asked: 'O son of Allah's messenger, are you aware of my love, my submissive heart and my Mastership towards you?' Imam (a.s.) replied,
'Yes.'

The blind man remarked, 'I have a question to ask you. Please answer it keeping in mind that I am blind and cannot travel too often (to meet you). Imam (a.s.) said,
'You may ask.'

He said, 'Please tell me the religion by which you and your Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) worship Allah, so that I worship Allah with the same religion.'

'You have stated a small thing, but have propounded a big question. I swear by Allah, I reveal to you, my religion and the religion of my forefathers by which we worship Allah, i.e. testifying to Allah's Unity, Messengership of the prophet of Islam (s.a.w.s.), accepting everything that was revealed upon him from Allah's side, friendship with our friends, distancing oneself from our enemies, submitting to our orders, awaiting our Qaim's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance, seeking and striving to observe the obligatory, and refraining from the prohibited acts and assuming piety.'2

Acknowledging everything that has been revealed upon the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) from Allah's side and submitting to it with one's heart, is aspiritual condition, and is among the cornerstones of the belief in Imamat and Mastership of the Imams (a.s.). أجتهاد and ورع also have their origin in the hearts and therefore implies a spiritual condition. However these two traits are also manifested externally and their signs cannot be ignored.

إجْتِهاد (ijtehad) is derived from the word جهد (jahada) which means to search, to try. In other words, it implies to put in effort in observing/refraining from halaal/haraam (حلال/حرام) of the Islamic shariat and not to take its laws lightly. Carelessness in observing matters of the shariat will never make one completely obedient which is a necessary condition for submission and accepting Mastership of Allah, His Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the Imams (a.s.). Therefore, the more one is particular in respecting the laws of the shariat and complying with its articles, the more perfect will be his obedience and submission towards Allah and His Prophet (s.a.w.s.). Conversely, when one is careless with regards to religious duties, his submission and Mastership will be weak and flawed.

Good end through Precautious Piety

Safe guarding and protecting one's religion is called as Precautious Piety. Man should give the highest priority to protecting his own religion. For instance, when a valuable object is handed over to someone and he accepts responsibility for it, then what is that person's approach in safeguarding the object? Certainly he will preserve it so that no calamity reaches it and no danger threatens it. If the object is put in a place where there exists even a remote possibility of danger, the person will never place the object there. Then when one observes this for his religion, which is his most prized and valuable possession, it is called ورع (Precautious piety).

Therefore مُتَوَرِّع is that person who not only abstains from prohibited actions, but even doubtful ones. He is worried that if he performs even doubtful actions, his religion may come to some harm. He chooses to act in a manner that gives him satisfaction about the safety and security of his religion. Such a person is always careful about venturing in to doubtful places and takes utmost precaution under such circumstances. This is comparable to a person who passes by a steep cliff and keeps away from it, because he knows that every step towards the cliff is an invitation towards danger and peril. So he

distances himself from the cliff until he is satisfied that he will not fall into it.

Therefore, Precautious Piety is like the string of a rosary (tasbeeh) which connects all the beads and prevents them from being scattered. So long as the thread is safe and secure, all the beads will be cohesive and interconnected. However, once the string breaks down, the beads will scatter instantly in all directions and the rosary will lose its very existence. Imam Zainul Abedeen (a.s.) reveals

الورع نِظامُ العِبادةِ. فاِذا انقطع الورع، ذهبت الديانة. كما انه اذا انقطع السلك اتبعه النظام.

Precautious Piety is the like the string that unites all the acts of worship. If Precautious Piety is severed, religion will vanish, just like all the objects attached to a string get scattered, if the string is severed.'3

Therefore observing the obligatory acts and refraining from the prohibited acts, which becomes possible with اجتهاد, should be glued together with the cohesiveness of ورع, so that it protects one's religion. Therefore traditions underline the futility of اجتهاد withoutورع In this regard Imam Sadiq (a.s.) asserts:

إعْلَمْ اَنَّهُ لا يَنْفَعُ اجْتِهادٌ لا وَرَعَ فيْه.

'Know that struggle without precautious piety is not beneficial.'4

The 'benefit' mentioned in the above tradition refers to the protection of religion which is not possible only with اجتهاد unless ورع is accompanied with it. A person asked Imam Sadiq (a.s.) – Which action stabilises a person's faith?'
Imam (a.s.) replied,

الَّذي يُثْبِتُهُ فيه الوَرَعُ.

'ورع keeps a person's faith steadfast.'5

Thus it is evident from the traditions highlighted above, that اجتهاد and ورع are two distinct traits and a person needs to combine both these traits in himself if he has to safeguard his religion. Another point underlined by traditions is that ورع is superior to اجتهاد . اجتهاد at the highest level is abandoning sins, while the highest form of ورع is abandoning even the doubtful matters (that even hint at sins). Imam Sadiq (a.s.) narrates:

اورَعُ النَّاسِ مَنْ وَقَفَ عِنْدَ الشُبْهَةِ..... اَشَدُّ النَّاسِ اجْتِهاداً مَنْ تَرَكَ الّذُّنوب؟

'The person with maximum ورع desists from committing even doubtful acts. And the person with maximum اجتهاد leaves all sins.'6

At the end of the discussion we would like to remind readers about a point stressed earlier, i.e. foundation of religion is belief in Imamat and Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and submission to their traditions and that this is reality of Islam and faith. What protects this foundation from being destroyed is observing Allah's laws. And ورع is man's best companion in protecting religion. It is due to this reason that the Imams (a.s.), who have announced themselves to be the helpers in Allah's affairs and a means of salvation for their friends, have strongly recommended ورع for their Shias. As declared by traditions, Shias help their Imams (a.s.) by adopting ورع

وَ اللهِ اِنَّكُمْ لَعَلى دِينِ اللهِ وَ مَلائِكَتِهِ. فَاعينُونا على ذلك بِوَرَعٍ و اجْتِهادٍ.

'I swear by Allah, you are on the religion of Allah and the religion of angels. Then help us through ورع and اجتهاد'7

Imams (a.s.) exhort us to adopt ورع so that by doing this we can help them in protecting our religion. Protecting religion is our concern and not that of the Imams (a.s.). However, as the Imams (a.s.) are inclined towards the Shias and consider themselves as our guardians and masters, they cannot be indifferent to the condition of our religion.

Their grace and bounty helps their friends, who are attached to them and possess their Mastership, with which their religion remains free from blemishes and flaws and their faith remains protected from errors and lapses. Our duty over here is to adopt ورع and اجتهاد so that we may assist ourselves in our own salvation. We must avoid sinning as this will preserve our religion and save our Imams (a.s.) a lot of embarrassment from seeing their Shias sinning constantly. Imam Sadiq (a.s.) exhorts:

'It is necessary for you to observe Precautious Piety. Certainly Precautious Piety is that religion to which we are bound and through which Allah is worshipped. And we expect the same from those who possess our Mastership. Do not put us in difficulty, while interceding for you (on the Day of Judgment).'8

Ultimately the cause of our salvation and good fortune in the hereafter is certainly the intercession of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). When Allah's close angels, His prophets (a.s.) and the examined believers are in need of intercession in the hereafter, then what can we say about sinners like ours elves. Imam Moosa Kazim (a.s.) advises:

'When you want something from Allah, then say: 'O Allah, I ask you by the right of Muhammad and Ali.

Surely on the Day of Resurrection none among the close angels, the prophets sent by Allah and believers will remain, but they will all be in need of both of them.'9

Of course, the infallibles, be it angels or prophets (a.s.), will be in need of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), not for salvation from Allah's chastisement, but for an elevated status near Allah, which can be guaranteed to them only with the intercession of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) In short, no creature is needless of the intercession of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and Ali (a.s.) in the hereafter. In this regard Imam Sadiq (a.s.) reveals:

'No one from first to last will be there except that he will be in need of intercession of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.).'10

Of course intercession of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) is not distinct from the intercession of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the intercession from any member of the Prophet's (s.a.w.s.) household is like the Prophet's (s.a.w.s.) personal intercession. All our hopes and aspirations in a providential end in this world and good fortune in the hereafter hinges on the assistance and intercession of the Ahlul Bait (a .s.).

Then we should abstain from doing actions that will embarrass them while interceding for us in the hereafter. This is the reason the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) have recommended ورع for us, so that by adopting it, we make ourselves eligible for their intercession, rather than distressing them with our sins and transgression.

Summary of the Shias' most important duties during the period of occultation

In the end of this section we summarise the discussion covered in the preceding chapters, by recapitulating the important duties, so that this can serve as a timely reminder to the readers.

1. Possessing correct belief in line with the Quran and traditions

2. Complete submission to whatever has reached us from Imams (a.s.) (in traditions)

3. Love and attachment towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)

4. Friendship with the believers and fulfilling their needs

5. Enmity with the opponents of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)

6. Living with the remembrance of Imam–e –Asr (a.t.f.s.)

7. Acquiring knowledge of Imams (a.s.) and teaching it

8. Awaiting for Imam's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance

9. Considering the reappearance as proximate without affixing a time for it

10. Firm intention to assist Imam (a.t.f.s.) at the time of reappearance

11. Renewing the allegiance with Imam (a.t.f.s.) at frequent intervals.

12. Praying intensely for the earliest reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.)

13. Helping Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) in every possible way

14. Feeling the presence of Imam (a.t.f.s.) at all times in occultation

15. Adopting piety and اجتهاد in religion

These are the most important traits that a person, with recognition of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and Mastership of Imams (a.s.) must possess in the period of occultation. By observing these duties, a person will be secure from the death of disbelief and even if he does not get the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.) his faith will be safe.

For more details regarding duties and responsibilities in occultation, readers can refer to the 8th chapter of 'Mikyalul Makarim fi favaide dua lil Qaim' by Sayed Muhammad Taqi Musavi Isfahani (may Allah's mercy be on him).

1. (Ghaibat al-No'mani, Chap. 8, Tradition 2)
2. (Usul al-Kafi, Kitabul Iman wal Kufr, Chap. of Da'ae mul Islam, Tradition 10)
3. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 308
4. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 296
5. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 304
6. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 305
7. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 306, Tradition 27
8. Behar ul Anwar, Vol. 70, Pg. 306, Tradition 29
9. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 8, Pg. 59
10. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 8, Pg. 62, Tradtion 31

Finally we quote the supplication, which the first representative of Imam (a.t.f.s.) in Ghaibat al-Sughraa,- Abu Amr Uthman bin Saeed Amri (r.a.) has dictated and ordered the Shias to recite in occultation. Sayyid Ibne Taoos (r.a.) has included this supplication among the rituals (aa'maal) of Friday after Namaz al-Asr. The subject matter of this supplication highlights to a great extent the duties of those who are living their lives awaiting the reappearance of Imam (a.t.f.s.).

'O Allah, due to the lengthening of the period of occultation of Imam (a.t.f.s.), do not take away certainty from us. And do not make us forget his remembrance, awaiting for him, believing in him, our certainty

about his reappearance and praying for him and invoking blessing for him. Let not the prolonging of the occultation, disillusion me from his rising. And let my certainty in this regard be like the certainty in the rising of Allah's Messenger (s.a.w.s.) and whatever was revealed upon him.'

'Strengthen my heart with belief in him, so that You can put me, through his hand, on the highway of guidance, the manifest passage and the straight path.

Strengthen me in his obedience and make me steadfast in following him. Admit me in his creed and among his friends and helpers and among the ones with whose work he is pleased. Do not deprive me of this condition throughout my life and in my death. And until I am in this world, do not make me from those who doubt (about him) and break the promise (with him) and turn away (from him) and deny (him).'1

1. Jamalul Usboo', Part 47, Pg. 316, Kamaluddin, Chap. 45, Pg. 43

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