

BENEFITS FROM AN OCCULT IMAM

Whenever the discussion of occultation crops up, queries of various kinds invade the minds of the people. The most common among them being as to what is the benefit of an Imam who is in occultation? In other words, what is the purpose of having a leader with whom neither we can come in contact nor meet?

In this article, we shall attempt to convey to our readers the answer to the query and make people realize as to how can one derive advantages from an Imam during occultation.

Benefits During Occultation

The root of this question lies in the fact that the criteria for measuring the benefits of a particular thing are relative, artificial and man made. In other words, if something is apparently useful and profitable for him, it is beneficial, not otherwise.

Such queries are raised because we do not seem to obtain any apparent benefit from Imam Mahdi (a.s.) during his occultation. Although, it is a genuine problem, yet we must know that if we are not receiving from Imam (a.s.), it is due to our own shortcomings. Our laziness and defects may have closed the gates of beneficence for us.

Criteria Of Utilitarianism

Before the questions are answered, it will not be out of place to ask that is it necessary that Allah should create only that thing which is of utility to other creatures or rather only its existence is enough for itself? Consequently, other creatures would claim that since man is not beneficial for them then his existence is not required.

The prophets came, propagated religion and departed from this world. What were they for use in our existence to the prophets? The Almighty Allah did not send the prophet and messengers to serve our purpose. He had sent them to complete his proof.

He sent them to achieve a sublime position by withstanding difficulties in the way of propagation. May be it is because of this, that whenever the people offered to recompense them for their efforts, they replied, **"I do not seek any reward from you. My reward is with Allah."** (Holy Quran) Thus, they never expected any encouragement or praise from the people nor did they despair on account of the people's apathy.

Hence, when we are not the criterion to determine the utility of a particular thing and the prophets were not sent to serve our purpose, we cannot, in the first place, question the benefits of the Imam (a.s.) existence during occultation.

Survival Of The Universe

Putting our personal interests aside, we can consider the benefits and advantages of the Imam's (a.s.) existence. At this point it must be known that utility of each entity depends upon its individual capacity.

The beggar and the king can never be equal. The Prophets and the Imam (a.s.) are the proofs of Allah upon this earth. The universe continues to exist because of their presence, Today, the proof of Allah upon earth is Hazrat Imam-e-Zamana (a.s.). He is the pivot and the center of the universe. It survives because he exists. He is the Imam of the whole universe and that is why every particle of the universe acknowledges his presence. A tradition from Imam Jafar as Sadiq (a.s.) says:

"Had the earth been without an Imam, it would sink, swallowing its inhabitants."

(Al-Kafi, vol, 1, p, 179).

Another report states:

"The proof was prior to creation, it is with creation and shall continue to exist after the creation has perished"(Al Kafi Vol. 1, p. 177).

The same concept has come in an invocation, "Imam is the one whose continued existence is the cause of the universe's survival. Sustenance descends due to his presence. The earth and the heavens survive due to his existence." (Mafaatihul Jinaan, Dua-e-Adeelah)

Thus if the earth and the heavens exist, it is only because of Imam (a. s.)'s presence. We live and continue to receive sustenance due to him. Every living being in the world owes its existence to his presence. These are the consequences of the existence of Imam (a.s.). The central factor is the existence of Imam (a.s.) which neither depends upon his reappearance nor occupation. Whether apparent or concealed, he is the pivot of the universe. How meaningful are the following sentence of Ziarat Jameah:

"Allah initiated the creation for your sake and will terminate it with you. Rain descends for your sake and due to your existence, the sky is prevented from crashing to the earth. Only through your mediation are our sorrows and griefs dispelled."

(Mafaatihul Jinan)

The question however remains as to how can we derive benefit from Imam (a.s.) during his occultation? The question is as ancient as the phenomenon of occultation.

Sun Behind The Clouds

Explaining the following Quranic verse,

"O those who believe! Obey Allah and Obey the Messenger and those who have authority amongst you", the Holy Prophet (s.a.) said to Jabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari,

"They will go into occultation from their partisans and followers. (And then) only those whose hearts have been tested for faith by Allah shall remain steadfast on their Imamate (and those with weak faith shall deviate)."

At this point Jabir ibne Abdullah (r.a.) inquired, "O Messenger of Allah, would his partisans attain benefit from him while he is in occultation ?" The Holy Prophet (s.a.) replied, "By the One who has sent me as a Prophet, people will receive light from his splendor and benefit from his guardianship during his occultation just like they benefit from the sun when it hides behind the clouds." (Kamaaluddin by Shaykh Sadooq, p. 253)

A similar question was put to Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (a.s.) by Mahraan Al

Damish: "How shall the people benefit from the hidden and the concealed proof?" Imam Sadiq (a.s.) replied, "[Just like they derive benefits from the sun when it is concealed behind the clouds.](#)" (Ibid., p. 207)

The above tradition has been quoted by Shaykh Sulayman bin Shaykh Ibrahim Qandoozi on page 477 of his book "[Yanaabiul Mawaddah](#)", quoting from "[Faraaidus Simtain](#)" of Shaykh Hammui. Both the aforementioned are Sunni scholars of repute.

When the same query was put to Hazrat Hujjat (a.s.) himself, he remarked in his letter to Ishaq bin Yaqoob: "[Deriving benefit from me during my occultation is like obtaining advantage from the sun when concealed behind the clouds.](#)" This letter was sent through the second special deputy of Imam (a.s.), Muhammad ibn Uthman Amri (r.a.). (Ibid., p. 485)

Noteworthy it is that the question was posed to three infallibles and the reply from each of them was but one. Thereby ascertaining that the patron of them all is one - and He is Allah, Blessed and High be He. Imam (a.s.)'s occultation is likened to the hiding of the sun behind the clouds. Some of the points understood in this analogy are explained by Allama Majlisi (r.a.) and are produced hereunder :

(1) **Existence** - Imam (a.s.) is the means for illuminating mankind with the light of guidance and knowledge.

It is only because of Imam (a.s.) that erudition and science have appeared in the world. Had he not been existing, divine wrath would have befallen on the world. Allah (s.w.t.) declares in the Holy Quran, **"O Prophet! as long as you are there amongst them. God will not inflict His wrath upon them"**.

Time and again during occultation, we have witnessed that when engulfed in difficulties and tribulations, things are placed in order with the support of Imam (a.s.) and our path is smoothed.

(2) When the sun is behind the clouds, people derive benefit from its existence. Yet, all eagerly await the clouds to sail past the sun to obtain maximum benefit from the visible sun. Similarly, at all times, the ardent Shias and the true lovers of Hazrat await the re-appearance of their leader.

(3) The denial of the existence of Imam (a.s.) during occultation after witnessing the signs is parallel to the denial of the sun when behind the clouds and not visible to the eye.

(4) Occasionally, the clouds move and let the sun be seen for some moments and the zealous manage to steal a glance at it. Similarly, some fortunate people are honored with the opportunity of seeing Imam (a.s.) during his major occultation.

(5) Just like the sun is beneficial to all, all benefit from the blessings of Imam (a.s.). However, just like a blind cannot obtain complete benefit from the sun, the one with - a blind heart does not achieve much from Imam (a.s.)'s existence.

(6) The rays of the sun enter the homes depending on the windows and ventilators. More that these impediments are done away with, more rays enter the house. Likewise, when a man cleans the veils from his own self, the windows of his mind and spirit open for him and he will benefit all the more from the guiding light of Imam (a.s.) and thus illuminating his own personality.

Purification of the self from carnal desires, animal instincts, sins and evil deeds is directly proportionate to the reception of light and guidance of

Imamat. If the purification of the heart and reformation of the soul continues, a time will come when he finds himself very close to the edifying star and his own personality exuding radiance.

(7) Apart from the above, more analogies can be presented. Just like the sun is the center of the solar system and all planets revolve around it, Imam (a.s.) is the axis of the universe and everything circumambulates his divine persona. Even the sun itself revolves around Imam (a.s.) and is subject to his orders.

(8) The sun is the source of heat and light in the universe. The brilliance of the moon is because of the solar rays. Nothing possesses its own light or heat. Similarly, Imam (a.s.) is the light of guidance for this universe. Even the sun has obtained its light from Imam (a.s.) because the day there is no Imam on this earth, the sun will be devoid of its light.

Guiding The Affair

The Almighty Allah has appointed the Pure Imams (a.s.) to guide the people through His Order. **"And We made them Imams who guide (the people) by Our Command..."** (Anbiya : 72)

Guidance of the people through the command of Allah is the most significant factor. Generally, everything in the world of creation comes into existence through a process. A child enters this world after a period of nine months in the womb of its mother. However, if Allah wills, this period can be reduced to moments and that is when Allah commands, "Be" and "It is".

The Almighty Allah has bestowed the Imams (a.s.) of "guiding with command". They have the capacity to transform a period just by looking at it. Imam Hasan (a.s.) changed the Syrian foe into a humble friend, Imam Husain (a.s.) transformed Zohair Qayn, Imam Mohammad Taqi (a.s.) changed the heart of the Syrian worshipper, etc. . Similarly, Hazrat Vali-e-Asr (a.s.) has brought profound changes in the lives of people like Hasan Iraqi. Apparent presence is not a pre-requisite for such transformations. If the person is deserving and is given the opportunity by Allah, he can benefit from the same. Today even we can obtain guidance from Imam (a.s.) but the necessary condition is that we must sacrifice our desires for his pleasure.

Protection From Calamities

Various traditions have emphasized the fact that the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) are those personalities due to whom this universe is safe and sound. Hazrat Hujjat (a.s.) himself is reported to have said, **"Certainly, I am the cause of the safety of this world as the stars are the cause of safety of the heavens."**

(Kamaaluddin, p. 485; Al-Ihtijaaj by Shaykh Tabarsi, p. 471)

Moreover, Hazrat Vali-e-Asr (a.s.) has remarked in his letter to the respected Shaykh Mufeed (r.a.) for which the readers may refer to the back cover.

Each and every word of this letter is a witness to the deep love and affection of Imam Asr (a.s.) for his Shias. Notwithstanding their shortcomings and defects, he protects them. If the help and assistance of Imam (a.s.) was missing, we would have most certainly perished. There is someone who is protecting us all. Numerous incidents prove this fact. Imam (a.s.) has saved a number of people and protected them. Readers can refer to the books that have recorded such incidents. Moreover, due to the presence of Imam (a.s.), people receive sustenance, the sick are cured and the childless bear children. In brief, there is no problem that cannot be solved by the help of Imam (a.s.), despite his occultation.

He is prepared to favor us but we do not call him in the proper way.

May Allah count us among his sincere and loyal servants.