

## The Major Occultation

After the year 329 A.H, when the major occultation commenced, the special deputation of Imam e Zamana (a.s.) terminated. If anybody claims during the major occultation to be a mediator and a deputy, then, according to the declaration of Imam e Zamana (a.s.) himself, that claimer is a liar. In the Holy Imams' traditions, the purpose of the Imam's going into occultation is compared to the sun being behind the clouds yet being a source of vitality and life for living creatures. Likewise, while the Imam is behind the curtain of occultation, he is still a source of the existence and remaining of the world.

During the major occultation, many people have had meetings with His Eminence (Imam Mahdi), and have managed to meet him, but none of them have claimed to be able to see him or to represent him, because only the four special deputies (Nawwab al-khas) of the Imam had the honour of meeting with His Eminence whenever they wished. Some of the names of these fortunate persons who have had the honour of meeting the Imam are mentioned in the authentic books. Among these personalities are - `Allamah Hilli - a famous scholar and a rhetorician of the Islamic world; Muqaddas Ardabili - the most pious person and most knowledgeable jurist of his time; Sayyid ibn Tawus - a pious and a virtuous narrator; Sayyid Bahru'l-'Ulum - a distinguished scholar; and other great and notable figures in Islam.

The honour of seeing Imam e Zamana (a.s.) was not exclusive to some special Shi'ite scholars only, but many devout and illiterate people have also had this honour. We are completely amazed when we see people who at one time used to commit sinful and indecent acts, but who after their repentance, and after having their hearts filled with love for Imam e Zamana (a.s.), also had an opportunity to meet him, and among them were also our Sunni brothers. One of the Sunni brothers was Hasan `Iraqi who lived a life of immorality when he was young. One day, he suddenly awoke from the slumber of heedlessness and asked himself, "Was I created to commit these evil deeds?" Then he left the immoral place he was in and went directly to the mosque. By chance, a preacher there was speaking about Imam al-Mahdi, peace be on him. `Iraqi`s fully disturbed soul turned into a heart flaming with enthusiastic love of the Imam. Henceforth, he invoked Allah after every prayer to give him the opportunity to see the Living Imam (Baqiyatu'llah). Finally, his prayers were answered and for seven days and nights he learned the path of salvation in His Eminence's presence. Thereafter, this man became known as one of the great scholars of Islam. `Abdu'l-Wahhab Sha'rani, one of the great Sunni scholars, and the original relater of this anecdote, used to call him by the title, "My great master Shaykh `Iraqi."

During the major occultation, letters were issued by His Eminence to individuals and great scholars of Islam. In those letters new difficult problems were solved, and necessary guidance was given. Among these letters there was one issued in the year 410 A.H. praising a distinguished scholar of Islam, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu' man, alias Shaykh Mufid. Shaykh Mufid has enjoyed a special rank for his knowledge and devoutness, and that letter was an acknowledgement of his efforts and worthy services. The importance of this letter indicates the awareness of the Imam of the mistakes and immoral actions of some of the Shi'ites, and at the same time it gives hope in the purpose of his existence:

We are well informed of all your affairs and none of them is hidden from us. We are aware of the problems which have occupied you from the time when you found pleasure and kept committing indecent deeds which your predecessors had avoided. We are aware from that time when your predecessor broke the covenant made with them, as if they knew not about it. We will not neglect or forget you lest calamity and troubles fall on you, and enemies have the opportunity to overpower you. Therefore, remember Allah and fear Him.

The valuable writings of Imam al-Mahdi, peace be on him, during the major occultation are the most important guidance for his Shi'ites (followers). These writings can be referred to in the authentic Shi'ite books.

In Islamic traditions, a comparison is drawn between the sincere faith of the Shi'ites and the faith of a few followers of the Prophet Nuh, peace be on him, who remained faithful despite their very difficult test, and who, by boarding the ark with Prophet Nuh, peace be on him, were saved from the deluge.