

2.11 Imām al-Mahdī

عَجَلَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِرْجَهُ الشَّرِيفَ

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Outline some of the reasons why the 12th Imām ﷺ is in a concealed state.
- Develop strategies to incorporate the remembrance of the Imām ﷺ of our time, and gain closeness to him.
- Come up with some ideas of how to engage in active *intidhār* (awaiting) the rightly guided final Imām ﷺ.

Activity 2.11a: Pre-Reading Vocabulary

In small groups, answer one of the assigned questions. Be ready to share with the class what you think!

1. The word ‘ghaybah’—‘occultation’—means ‘in a hidden or a concealed state.’ This refers to the 12th Imām ﷺ, Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ, who is concealed from us. Related words in Arabic are ‘ghāib’ which means ‘absent,’ and ‘ghayb’ which means ‘unseen or hidden.’ **What is the difference between someone being ‘absent’ and someone who is ‘unseen?’**
2. *Intidhār* means ‘waiting’ which in this lesson refers to ‘waiting for the rightly guided Imām ﷺ’—‘*Intidhār al-Mahdī*.’ People who wait for the Imām ﷺ are known as ‘*muntadhirin*.’ **What do you think ‘waiting for the Imām ﷺ’ actually means? How do you act, or what do you do when you are really waiting for someone, or for something to happen?**
3. *Hujjah* refers to ‘a Divine representative of Allah ﷺ.’ This can also mean ‘proof’ where we say that each of the Imāms ﷺ are the ‘*hujjatullāh*’—‘proof of Allah ﷺ.’ **How do you think the two definitions of *hujjah* are related?**





STOP AND REFLECT: How does Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ affect our daily lives?

Think about the last time you remembered the Imām ﷺ. What made you think about him? Has it been a long time?

OUR NEED FOR A ḤUJJAH

At all times, this Earth needs to have a *ḥujjah*—a Divinely-appointed representative. Allah ﷺ created this Earth for us to reach perfection, which as we learned in previous lessons, can only be done through Divine guides and revelation that were sent by Him.

WHY IS THE 12TH IMĀM ﷺ IN OCCULTATION?

The complete wisdom behind the decision of Allah ﷺ for the *ghaybah* of our 12th Imām ﷺ is unknown to us. ‘Abdullāh ibn Faḍl Ḥāshimī once asked Imām Ja‘far as-Ṣādiq ﷺ about the reason behind the occlusion of the final Imām ﷺ, to which he replied:

O son of Fadl! The subject of the ghaybah is among the Divine secrets, and a concealed matter whose knowledge is only with Allah ﷺ. Since we regard Allah ﷺ to be All-Wise, we must also affirm that His actions are based on that perfect wisdom, even when the detailed understandings are not accessible to us.¹

Although we do not know all of the reasons for Allah’s actions, there are certain reasons for the *ghaybah* that the previous Imāms ﷺ did explain. One reason is that Allah ﷺ wished for Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ to never be forced to have to give allegiance to any tyrant during his lifetime. Another reason is because if the Imām ﷺ was not in occultation, then his life would be in constant danger.²



STOP AND REFLECT: Why were the other Imāms ﷺ not in occultation even though their lives were also in danger?

People wanted to take away the rights of the Divine guides because they sought power for themselves. All of the Imāms ﷺ faced great dangers from the enemies who wanted to kill them, and/or make them give allegiance to them. But the Imāms ﷺ wanted to lead and guide the people because this was a responsibility that was given to them by Allah ﷺ; and due to the fact that they were free from any sins (*ma’ṣūm*) they did everything perfectly, exactly the way that Allah ﷺ wanted.



INTIDHĀR: waiting

GHAYBAH: occultation, in a hidden or a concealed state

ḤUJJAH: proof, refers to a Divine representative of Allah ﷺ

MA’ṢŪM: free from any sins

¹ Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Kamāl ad-Dīn wa Tamām an-Ni’mah*, Chapter on the Wisdoms of the Occultation.

² *Kamāl ad-Dīn wa Tamām an-Ni’mah*, Chapter on the Wisdoms of the Occultation.

He is like the sun behind the clouds



During the time of Imām ‘Alī ؑ, people tried to take the leadership away from the Imām ؑ because they knew that he would be fair to everyone, and would not favor anyone unjustly. Even though this upset our Imām ؑ, he made it clear that he did not care about power, money, fame, or glory. He explained this in a famous sermon called *Shaqshaqiyah*:

...I put a curtain up against the caliphate and kept myself detached from it. Then I began to think whether I should attack or endure calmly the blinding darkness of tribulations... I found that endurance thereon was wiser. So I adopted patience—although there was pricking in the eye and suffocation in the throat...³



STOP AND REFLECT: How does Imām al-Mahdī ؑ guide us while he is in occultation?

Although Imām al-Mahdī ؑ is concealed from humanity, he is still an active guide on Earth. An example that is used in the traditions (*ḥadīth*) about our Imām ؑ in occultation is that ‘he is like the sun behind the clouds.’ Although he is concealed from us, we still benefit from his light and guidance.

We must also understand that the Imām ؑ is hidden from us, but we are not hidden from him. He has knowledge about the state of his believers.



STOP AND REFLECT: What do we do when we are waiting for guests to come to our house? How does this apply to how we should wait for the Imām ؑ?

One of the best actions for us to do during this time is to truly await the Imām ؑ and the victory that will come with his return, as Imām al-Jawād ؑ said:

“The best of the actions that our Shī‘ahs can do is anticipate the deliverance (*faraj*).”⁴

This *ḥadīth* refers to the return of the 12th Imām ؑ, and the word ‘actions’ is important because we need to be ‘actively waiting’ for the Imām ؑ.

What does it mean to actively wait for something or someone? When we talk about waiting for a guest to arrive, it means that we prepare for their arrival. We may get dressed up in our nicest clothes, make sure that our house is clean and everything is neat and tidy, and prepare some delicious food. If we know that a guest is coming to our house and everything is a mess, then we cannot say that we were really waiting for them to come.

³ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 3, Vol. 1, P. 48.

⁴ ‘Allāmah Majlisi, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Vol. 51, P. 156.

If we want to actively wait for the Imām ﷺ—do true *intidhār*—and be one of his sincere followers, then we need to fulfill our responsibilities toward him.

In *Du‘ā’ an-Nudbah*, we say:

“May my soul be sacrificed for you; although you are hidden from us, you have never abandoned us.

May my soul be sacrificed for you; although you are away (concealed), you are never away from us.”

STAYING CONNECTED TO THE IMĀM ﷺ

We should try to remember Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ every day of our life. While some of the ways in which we can do this are prescribed, like the specific supplications, prayers, and different actions (*a‘māl*) we can do on his behalf, we should also speak to the Imām ﷺ whenever we want to, and in any language we desire. We can send our salutations (*salāms*) to him, or speak to him silently inside our hearts. Sometimes, we hear people saying: “*Ya ‘Alī Madad*”—“O ‘Alī help”—calling for help from Imām ‘Alī ؓ; or “*Ya Mahdī Adriknī*”—“O Mahdī assist me”—calling for aide from Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ, in which they can feel the presence of these great personalities in their lives, and they never forget about them.

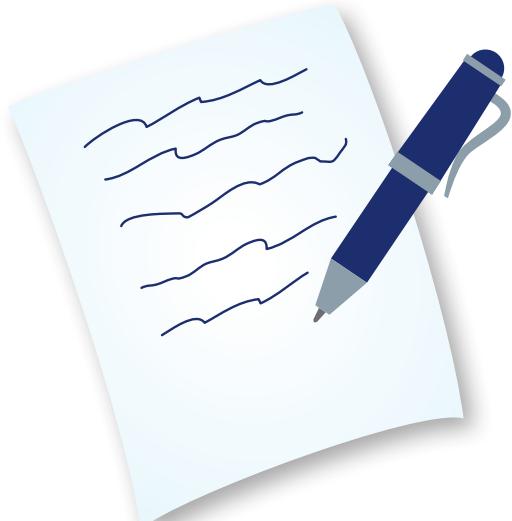
Thus, we can speak to the Imām ﷺ of our time in our own words, ask for his return, and tell him how we wish we could be better human beings. We can ask him to pray to Allah ﷺ for us for whatever we may be having trouble with, so that we can be one of his true followers. We should know that even though we cannot really see Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ, he is still constantly helping the universe, and is capable of guiding us within a split second, or by the slightest attention.

We can also write a “*arīdah*” which is ‘a letter to the Imām ﷺ’ and put it in flowing water, bury it, or take it to the gravesite of one of the other Imāms ؓ. Although we can still speak to him without doing this, sometimes symbolic actions like this have effects that we are unaware of. Writing down our thoughts, desires, and feelings also has a lot of benefits to it, rather than just verbalizing them.

Some different actions (*a‘māl*) that we can do for our living Imām ﷺ include:

- Prayer (*Ṣalāh*) of Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ
- *Du‘ā’ al-Hujjah*
- *Du‘ā’ al-Faraj*
- *Du‘ā’ an-Nudbah*
- *Du‘ā’ al-‘Ahd*
- Do good deeds, take out *ṣadaqah*, perform *ziyārah* on his behalf, or basically perform any good action and gift the rewards of that to the Imām ﷺ
- Avoid forbidden acts

Most importantly, we should strive to follow the examples of the Imām ﷺ, and act in such a way that we would if he were with us here right now.



Activity 2.11b: Explain it!

DIRECTIONS: Sarah and her older brother Jawaad are on their way back from Sunday School. Sarah has a lot of questions after her Islamic Studies class. Help Jawaad answer Sarah's questions.

SARAH: Jawaad, my Islamic Studies class today was really confusing, but I want to understand Imām al-Mahdī عليه السلام better. I understand that our Imām is in a concealed state, but why does it have to be this way? Would it not be better for all of us if he was present among us?

JAWAAD: I used to have a lot of the same questions Sarah, and sometimes I still ask questions about the Imāms عليهم السلام. But in regards to this, I best understand this concealed state in the following way:

SARAH: Hmm, okay Jawaad, I think I understand this now, but what should we be doing while he is in occultation? I know my teacher said that we should be waiting for the Imām عليه السلام, but how will that help?

JAWAAD:

SARAH: I wish I could be closer to the Imām عليه السلام right now.

JAWAAD: Sarah, do not be sad, there are still ways to be close to the Imām عليه السلام even right now.

SARAH: How though? He is so far away from us, we do not even know where he is.

JAWAAD:

Activity 2.11c: Waiting for my Imām

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Look again at the section on “Our Responsibilities towards our Imām ﷺ.” What are some actions that you plan to do in order to show that you are truly waiting for the Imām ؑ? When do you plan to do them?

