The Twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (Al-Mahdi-Sahibuz Zaman) (as) (The hidden Imam who is expected to (return

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The world will not come to an end," said the Prophet Muhammad, " until a man from my family" (Ahlul Bayt) and of my name shall be master of the world, When you see a green ensign coming from the direction of Khorasan, then join them, for the Imam of God will be with the standards who will be called al-Mahdi."

"The Mahdi will be descended from me, he will be a man with an open countenance and a face with a high nose. He will fill the earth with equity and with justice, just as it has been filled with tyranny and oppression." (Biharul Anwar, Majlisi)

Imam Muhammad Abul Qasim (al Mahdi) (as) , the last in the line of the Twelve Ithna Ashari Imams was born on 15th Shaban 255 Hijri in Samarra, Iraq. His father was the Eleventh Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) and his mother was Nargis Khatoon, granddaughter of the Emperor of Rum.

It was 8th Rabiul Awwal 260 Hijri when our Twelfth Imam led the funeral prayer of his father Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) . He was only Five years old, yet the whole crowd of Muslims including the Abbasid caliph of that time Al-Mu'tamid followed the young Imam without question.

Once the prayers were over and the Imam went inside the house, that the Caliph realized the full implication and significance of the occasion and he immediately ordered his soldiers to enter the house and search for the young Imam.

They did not find any one inside the house. The Caliph was very angry at this incompetence of ministers and other officials who were unable to find a boy of five who had just led the prayers and had just disappeared. The caliph had no inkling of the secrets that God did not want to reveal. He went back to his palace and into the luxurious life of a playboy king while the world around him squeezed his empire into oblivion.

The Imam's period of lesser concealment began immediately after he led the funeral prayers and disappeared inside the house. This was in the year 260 Hijri.

The doctrine of 'Ghaiba' or concealment, declares simply that the Imam has been withdrawn by God from the eyes of people, that his life has been miraculously prolonged, that he has been seen from time to time, has been in correspondence with others, and has maintained a control

over the guidance of the followers and the believers and the safety of Islam from its enemies. In the following few pages we shall try to bring some evidence from the Qur'an and the authentic Hadith of the Prophet to prove the point to interested readers.

This is an essential belief that Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (as) Sahibuz zaman, is alive and guide's his followers whenever such need arises. This is based on the verses of the Holy Qur'an that express the idea of Divine Guidance through the Prophets and Imams.

"And among those whom we have created are a people who guide others with truth, and in accordance therewith act justly." (7:180)

"We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere" (2:155)

A great Hanafi scholar Muhammad ibn Muslim cites Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) explaining the meaning of the above Verse. Imam indicated that there would be signs indicating the coming (reappearance) of al-Mahdi (as) which are the means whereby God tests the faithful. "Something of fear" is a reference to masses perishing by contagious diseases; "hunger" is a reference to high prices of foodstuffs; "Some loss in goods" is a reference to scarcity and famines; "Lives" is a reference to mass destruction of human lives, probably global wars; "Fruits" is a reference to lengthy periods of draughts; so when all that happens, then give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere."

"This is its interpretation," continued the Imam , quoting Verse 7 of Sura 3, which indicates that "only those who are firmly grounded in knowledge are capable of interpreting the verses of the Holy Qur'an", adding, " We the Ahlul Bayt are the ones firmly grounded in knowledge".

In the book "Yanabi al Muaddah", the Hanafi scholar and Mufti of Istanbul during the Osmani Caliphate in Turkey writes on page 321, quoting Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) interpreting Verse 83, Sura III of the Holy Qur'an comments as follows:-

"When the Qa'im al-Mahdi reappears, there will be no land on earth where the Kalima is not said. "This could be a reference to the fact that by the time al-Mahdi reappears, all continents of the world will have Muslim populations. They already do now.

After presenting the above proofs from the Qur'an, the following are authentic traditions from the Prophet of God regarding Imam Mahdi (as) .

At the end of Vol.2 of Fara'idh al-simtain and on page 269 Ibn Khaldun's 'Mukaddimah' , it is related from Ibn Abbas, that the Holy Prophet said, " 'Ali is Imam of my nation and my successor therein after me, and among his offspring is the awaited Qa'im who shall fill the world with justice and equity as it was filled with injustice and oppression.

The Prophet further elaborates, " beware of doubting, for to doubt the order of God, the Mighty,

the Sublime, is apostasy (Kufr). Ibn Khaldun also states that " When imprisoned with his mother in the house, he entered a sort of well or pit in the house that his family occupies at Samarrah, Iraq, and there he disappeared, but he is to come forth at the end of the age to fill the earth with justice".

Allama Jalaluddin Suyuti quotes in his book Jalalul- Oyun Vol.6 page 50. " The Hour shall not come till Al-Mahdi takes charge on earth on my behalf," said the Messenger of God. Allama Suytu also quotes Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal that famous companion Abu Said Khadhri quoting the Messenger of God saying, "I bring you glad tidings of al-Mahdi, God shall send him to my nation, in a time different from your own, and after a series of earthquakes, and he shall fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled with injustice and oppression.

He shall distribute the wealth equitably among the inhabitants of the earth. In the manual in which he sets forth the many duties and privileges of pilgrims, Majlisi has given an accepted form for a short letter in Arabic, which anyone can write, and sent to his Imam of the age. It may be placed on the tomb of any of the Imams, or it may be fastened and sealed, and covered with clean earth and cast into the sea or river or a deep well. In any case it will reach the Hidden Imam and he will give his personal attention.

There is a famous saying of Imam Husayn (as) about the twelfth Imam. "The Ninth of my descendants is the Imam who will rise with the Truth. God will grant life to earth through him after its death. The true faith will supersede all religions through him.

His absence shall be lengthy during which many people will go astray. Only a few will remain on the Right Path. They shall suffer pains, people will put pressure on them, saying," let us know when this promise of the Return of the Mahdi is fulfilled". Those who will bear the pains and denials patiently will get the same rewards as those who accompanied the Prophet during his expeditions for Jihad."

Imam Zainul Abedeen (as) has said, " Of us one will be born whose birth will remain secret so much so that the people will say that he was not born at all."

Imam Muhammad al Baqir (as) is quoted by Kulaini in Al-Kafi, " Nine Imams after Husayn are destined, the last of them will be al-Qaim."

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) is quoted in Ilal al-shara'i saying, " The fifth of the descendants of my son Musa will be the Qa'im a descendant of the Prophet (S).

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (as) was asked once, " Are the Qa'im with the truth?" The Imam replied, " I also rise truthfully, but the real Qa'im is he who will remove the enemies of God from earth and will fill it with justice. He shall be my fifth descendant. His absence will be lengthy during which multitudes will turn away from the faith while only a few will uphold it".

Imam ‘Ali al-Ridha’ (as) in the above saying of Imam Husayn (as) that due to the excessive the length of the concealment of the 12th Imam many believers will have doubts about his existence. Many will question the very longevity of his life and the usefulness of his presence as an Imam. Ridha’ said, “O Da’bil, my son Muhammad (as) will come when I am gone. After him, his great grandson will be named Muhammad (as) who will be the Qa’im. He will be awaited during his absence. When he appears, the world shall bow down before him.”

Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) has said “ The Qa’im will be from amongst us the third of my descendants”.

Imam ‘Ali Naqi (as) said, “ My successor will be my son Hasan; but what will be your condition during the reign of Hasan’s successor”? Those who were present asked, “Why, what do you mean by that”?

Imam replied, “you will not have the chance to see him, later you will not be allowed to mention his name”. Then the Imam was asked as to how they should mention him. Imam replied, “ You may say that he is the last of Muhammad’s (infallible) descendants. “

Some people asked Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) , “ your forefathers have said that the earth would never be without knowing the sign of Allah (Hujjatullah) till Doomsday, and he who dies without knowing the Imam of his time will die the death of ignorance”. Imam replied, “ That was as true as the shining day.

They inquired as to who would be the Imam who would be the sign of the Mercy of God after his death, Imam replied, “ He will be my son, the namesake of the Holy Prophet (Muhammad Abul Qasim). He who died without knowing him will die the death of ignorance.

His absence will be so lengthy that the ignorant will wander puzzled and would surely stray from the Right Path. But the Righteous shall remain steadfast and pray for their Imam to appear within their life time”.

All these predictions were recorded since the time of the Holy Prophet who himself prophesied the advent of the Mahdi. (Read this Hadith in the story of the 5th Imam).

As in the above saying of Imam Husayn (as) that due to the excessive length of the concealment of the 12th Imam many believers will have doubts about his existence. Many will question the very longevity of his life and the usefulness of his presence as an Imam.

To the question of existence, we have seen above the many Verses from the Qur’an and Hadith of the Prophet and all the Eleven Imams. We have also read quotations from the Books of Ahlul Sunna wal Jama’a and many scholars and philosophers from the earliest times to the present.

As far as the longevity of his life, in Qur'anic terms it is not difficult to explain. Prophet Jesus is alive and will come out with the 12th Imam. Prophet Sheeth and Prophet Khidhr are still alive according to the Verdict of the Qur'an. If God keeps his guided ones alive for a certain purpose there should not be any doubt.

As for the usefulness of his concealed existence, there are numerous occasions when the Imam miraculously helped those who called him for help.

During the period of Ghaibate Sughra (the period of lesser concealment) from the time of the death of his father Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) in the year 260 Hijri, our 12th Imam was seen only by a few people who were appointed his ambassadors (Safeer) on his behalf to convey his teachings to the believers. These Four Ambassadors were as follows:

1. Abu Amr Uthman ibn Sa'id al Asadi. He was a deputy of 10th Imam 'Ali Naqi (as) and after his death, of the 11th Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) and after his death, of our 12th Imam. Having performed these duties of conveying the messages from the Imam to the believers and the teachings of Ahlul Bayt, he died in Baghdad and was buried there.

2. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Othman al Amri, the son of the first Ambassador was appointed the 2nd Safeer of our 12th Imam. He died in 305 Hijri (917 AD) .

3. Abul Qasim Husayn ibn Rauh Nawbakhti was appointed the Imam's 3rd Safeer. He was a top ranking scholar and Faqeeh, renowned for his knowledge of all Islamic sciences. He was also a very pious man. Under the directions of the 12th Imam, his 3rd Safeer Husayn ibn Rauh performed his duties as Safeer for the next 15 years. He died in the year 320 Hijri

4. Abul Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Samari. He was the last Safeer of the 12th Imam, succeeding Husayn ibn Rauh as directed by the Imam. He performed his duties for 9 years and died on the 15th Shabaan 329 Hijri (May 15, 941 AD) Having being asked on his deathbed as to who would succeed him, he replied: Providence now wishes to give the matter another shape the duration of which is known to God alone."

After Abul Hasan there was no Safeer. In this sorrowful year, i.e. 329 Hijri, many scholars such as 'Ali ibn Babwayh Qummi and Muhammad ibn Yaqub Kulaini, the learned compiler of al-Kafı also died. Besides these events, an extra ordinary phenomenon was also witnessed. In the sky so many stars did shoot that it seemed as if Doomsday had come.

That year was named as the year of the dispersal of stars. After this, followed a dark period because no saffeer was left to directly approach the Imam al Mahdi (as) . It is also related that Imam himself told his last Safeer that there will not be any more appointments of Sofara.

When asked what the believers would do, the Imam replied, "follow the Foqaha of our Deen,

those who have knowledge of Qur'an, who protect Deen and would not follow their own desires".

In answering those who question the usefulness of the Imam in concealment, there are numerous occasions mentioned in books of many Ulemas, such as Shaikh Mufid (d413 Hijri) Allama Hilli (d. 726) /shahid Thalith Noorullah Shoostry (d.1019). They have mentioned in their own period as to how the 12th Imam was approached and gave help. All these stories are mentioned in their own books.

Here in this book I would like to mention two such occurrences that happened to those who have told their experiences to me personally. Both of them are now dead and it is important for me to tell these happenings before my own death.

I lived in Najaf in the fifties and during my stay there I used to visit Karbala' nearly every week. In the town of Karbala' there was a Dispensary run by the Pakistan Government. The Pharmacist there was one Mr.Rizvi who not only distributed medicine to the poor of Karbala' but also looked after the patients and sometimes even prescribed medicine for them. There was no qualified doctor to attend to the patient. Mr.Rizvi used to go to Baghdad on Friday to get stocks from the Hospital there. On one such occasion when he was coming back by Minibus, the Bus driver stopped at Mehmudiya, half way Karbala'. It was late in the evening. The Bus Driver told the passenger's that there was something wrong with the Bus engine and he could not proceed until next morning.

The passengers would have to provide for their own Board and lodging themselves for the night. Mr.Rizvi was very upset. He had a box load of medicine with him and if he would not be in Karbala', the next morning his patients would be disappointed and some of them might have to go without any medicine. He was standing by the Road side, in this little town Mehmudiya, some 40 miles from Karbala'.

Night was getting darker. People were sitting in dark coffee houses drinking coffee or playing card games etc. As time passed his worries increased. He realized that if he does not move from there soon, some youngsters might come and vandalize his goods and stocks of medicine. So he prayed to God and the words uttered were "Ya Sahebuz Zaman Udrikny" O'Imam of the Time, help me.

Moments later, he saw a jeep car stopped right there where he was standing and a very good looking young Arab gentleman got out of the Jeep and told him, "Do you want to go to Karbala'"? He was astonished at this help and said yes, of course I want to go to Karbala'. He said, "put your box in the car and sit beside me".

The man drove the car and arrived in Karbala' an hour later. Without asking him the address of

his destination he took him straight to the door of the Dispensary and stopped. Mr.Rizvi got down, brought his box of medicine down and started to look for some money in his pocket to give something to the Driver of the Jeep.

When he turned to look for him, there was nothing there. There was no jeep car, no man, nothing. The road was completely empty. He bowed down on the dust of Karbala' to thank God for sending the help through the Imam of the Time. He told me this story personally and he had no doubt in his mind that the help came from the 12th Imam.

From that time onward his devotion towards helping the people of Karbala' had increased a hundred fold. He died some years later while still helping his patients in that little Dispensary in Karbala'.

My second story was from the lips of an Englishman, Col.Abdullah Baines. During the 2nd World War he was stationed at the Royal Air Force Base at Habbaniyah, a town some 22 miles south of Baghdad. During the height of the war there was some scare in Britain that Hitler might invade Iraq to grab oilfields.

It was 1942 that the Commander of the Base decided to evacuate families of the people living at the base. Col.Baines was given the task of leading the caravan of jeep cars full of women and children from Baghdad to Damascus. They had to pass through the Desert where there was no road and they had to find their way by looking at the stars as Captains of the ship sail in the sea and find their way to their destination.

Col.Baines was a Christian but he was well versed in Islamic history and especially the history concerning the lives of the Imams. He had read many books about the 12th Imam and was well aware of the stories of those faithful who believe who receive help from the Imam in their distress. They call the Imam and help comes to them. All the women and children with Col.Baines were all Christians and not Muslims.

Half way through their journey of this caravan of five jeeps through the desert, they lost their way in a desert storm. They were hopelessly lost, going round and round in the desert, not knowing where to go and how to find their way to Damascus. They decided to camp there. Made a circle of jeep cars and all travelers sat down on the ground to await a miracle to get them out of that endless desert. They did not know what to do.

One day and one night passed like that and when the next day's sun came scorching, all of them were in despair. Water stocks had gone and thirsty children began to demand for water. Col.Baines did not know what to do. Then he remembered that he read somewhere that if you are in such distress, call the Imam of the time for help.

He put up his hands in the shape of prayer, closed his eyes and asked in his heart for the Imam

to help. He said, “we are all Christians and we may be sinners, but these children with me are innocent , they do not deserve to die in this manner. O’Imam of the Time, help them get out of this desert”. His prayers had not even ended when he saw that two horsemen were coming right through the eye of the storm.

They came near the circle of jeep cars, approached Col.Baines, and asked, “ Do you all wish to go to Damascus”. He said “yes of course”. They said, “follow us”. The jeeps lined up and followed the horsemen. They had gone a few miles until the way became clear for them. Their guides told them to go straight to the West and they will reach Damascus.

In a few days they all reached Damascus and safety. Col.Baines realized that his prayers to the 12th Imam were heard and help arrived from the Imam.

Once the war was over, Col.Bains embraced Islam, changed his name to Abdullah Baines and after his retirement from the Army, settled in Kent. He has himself told me his story before his death in 1965. He also told me to publicize this as much as possible for this is the truth and people should not refrain from telling the truth.

There are numerous experiences of this kind of help given by the Imam to people in distress who call him for help. Ayatollah al-Jazaeri told us two such stories of his own experiences in Iran when help came from the Imam to people.

Although absent and unrepresented, Imam al-Mahdi (as) still guides people and defends the faith. Even though unseen, the Imam supervises the world affairs and guides it. This curtain will exist as long as Providence deems it necessary.

The time will come, which may be too late for many of us, but when the curtain of absence will be removed, Imam al-Mahdi (as) will reappear and as predicted by the Prophet, fill the world with justice and equity, discarding the prevailing injustices and oppressions. May God bring about his early reappearance and ease his coming.