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Al-Islam.org

Message of Thaqalayn Vol. 14, no. 4, Winter 2014

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Publisher(s):

Ahlul Bayt World Assembly [2]

This article outlines the importance of prophet Abraham, who played an outstanding role in establishing the monotheistic tradition, hence, he is considered to be the founder of all Abrahamic religions and furthermore demonstrates that by sacrificing himself, Imam Husayn preserved the path of the Prophets as articulated and illustrated by Abraham, and paved the way for establishing the ideal community which in turn would establish universal justice, equality, and dignity for all.

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Abstract

God, with His wise plan for His creation, does not create in vain or without purpose. It is not possible for us to perfectly understand everything about His plan. However, if we acknowledge the limits of our understanding, benefit from the Qur'an and Sunnah, and reflect on the history of mankind, we are able to understand some aspects of His plan and extract general lessons from historical events. This article outlines the historical role of Imam Husayn and the lessons derived from it.

The Ultimate End of the Creation of Mankind

According to the Qur'an, God has created mankind for their own happiness and this can only be achieved through remembering Him, that is, to turn towards Him and to prevent anything that distracts us from Him. God has also made everything in the skies and the earth manageable to us so that we can responsibly benefit from them for our self–development. Throughout history there have always been pious and virtuous role models even in the darkest ages of ignorance and under the most tyrannical and despotic governments. Lady Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, is a good example.

Thus, personal progress has always been an available option, but there are also positions available for mankind as a species or as a community that need preparation and other aspects to come together for

them to be achieved.

In other words, happiness, which has always been possible to attain, would not be possible for society at large unless other aspects are in place. In a just and supportive society, it is the masses, and not sole individuals, who can easily find their way to happiness. There are also are aspects of happiness that cannot be achieved unless there is a virtuous society in which people's relations are based on divine values and are free of egoism. Witnessing a virtuous society is far more attractive and effective than witnessing virtuous individuals.

Providing happiness to humanity as a whole with the complications of social life is no simple task. It requires a just system for fair distribution of good and opportunities, and a great deal of knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, God's second plan to provide humanity with maximum opportunities for happiness is through the establishment of an ideal society.

Prophet Abraham and establishing a monotheistic tradition by envisaging the foundations of a God-fearing society

Prophet Abraham plays a central role in history in implementing God's plan for humanity. It is not possible to imagine how the world would be if Prophet Abraham and his progeny were not there. For example, can you imagine what our world would look like without the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? If not, what helps us understand and relate to God today in a monotheistic way is due to Prophet Abraham.

Since he was a pure and wholeheartedly submissive servant, God communicated great part of the revealed messages and books after and through Abraham and his progeny. It is not accidental that more than half of the population of the world today is made up of the followers of Abraham.

Prophet Abraham managed to establish tawhid, or unity of God, on a number of levels. Firstly, he had to establish tawhid in himself, a position not easily achieved, as he underwent a series of tests and trials. An important trial was to act on the Divine command to slaughter his son, Isma'il, the son who was born after many years.[1]

Isma'il was also the son who helped him or was going to help him rebuild the Ka'bah, the one that would be the father of the progeny of Abraham. But Abraham had to be ready to sacrifice him. Despite the tests and challenges, Abraham remained steadfast and wholly obedient to God.

The Qur'an tells us that Prophet Abraham was chosen by God as His friend (khalil) (4:125). According to hadiths, one reason for this choice was that Abraham never asked anyone other than God for help. On the other hand, he never refused giving help to others[2].

This is opposite to those who lack faith, who when they are told to spend on the poor they question

doing so since they believe the poor should expect only God to give them (36:47). But when it comes to their own needs, they ask or demand everyone to help. Abraham was the opposite: he was helpful but would not accept help from anyone except God. Even when they wanted to put him in the fire and Gabriel offered to help, Prophet Abraham refused to ask him for help.[3] He was also known for his long prostrations to God.[4]

Prophet Abraham was also very hospitable. In a hadith from Prophet Muhammad, this has been introduced as one of the reasons why Abraham was chosen by God as His friend.[5] He very much liked to have guests at his home, and if he did not have guests, he would go out and find someone with whom he could share his meal with.
There is a story that illustrates Prophet Abraham's servitude and humbleness. Once he left home to find some guests. Upon returning to his house, he found someone like a man in his house. Abraham asked him, "Who gave you permission to enter this house?" That person repeated three times, "I entered by the permission of the Lord of this house." Abraham quickly understood that this individual was Gabriel, and he quickly praised God. Gabriel said, "A servant of God is chosen by Him as His friend (khalil) and I am here to announce this to him." Prophet Abraham was so humble that he did not think that it was he himself who was chosen. Instead he asked, "Please, let me know who the chosen one is so that I may serve him until I die." He was then told that it was him.[6]

In some sources, it is said that at this time he joyfully went to his wife and shared the news. To better appreciate Abraham's humbleness and love for God, compare this with the story of Satan when God asked him to prostrate (sajdah) once for His vicegerent on the earth and Satan refused to do so. He refused to listen to God with respect to one sajdah for His vicegerent, thinking that he was better, but Abraham volunteered to serve a friend of God until the end of his life. Abraham was a true believer, one who was submissive to God.

After establishing tawhid in himself, Prophet Abraham tried to establish tawhid in his community, starting with his uncle Azar (who raised Abraham like a father). Prophet Abraham spread his campaign for tawhid by inviting others to think seriously about it and then by destroying all the idols.

Another important role of Abraham was that he rebuilt the Ka'bah as the icon of tawhid. The Ka'bah had been built before though it was in ruins during that era. Prophet Abraham raised the foundations and erected the vaults of the Ka'bah. God says in the Qur'an:

"As Abraham raised the foundations of the House with Ishmael, [***they prayed***]***: 'Our Lord, accept it from us! Indeed You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing."*** (***2:127***)

Prophet Abraham rebuilt the Ka'bah, which is the house of God, the "First house set up for mankind" and ***"blessed and a guidance for all nations"*** (***3:96***) to be the source of light, guidance, inspiration, and a reminder of monotheism and unity of mankind until the end of this world. Imam Ali said in his final will:

Fear God and keep God in mind with respect to your Lord's house, the Ka'bah. Do not forsake it for as long as you live. If it is forsaken, you will not have any chance [to survive]. The least with which the one who has gone there for it returns with is forgiveness of his previous sins.[7]

We should always be concerned for the house of our Lord as it should never be left empty or half-attended. As long as people worship God there and show respect to it, Islam is dignified. If, God forbid, there came a time when people stopped praying and performing tawaf there, it would be a thorough darkness and loss for humanity.

Prophet Abraham built the Ka'bah with the help of his son, Isma'il. God asked Abraham to call people for hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca – after the Ka'bah was ready. It is interesting that the Khalil (friend) of God was the one who invited people to the house of God, as stated in the Qur'an:

When We settled for Abraham the site of the House** [**saying**]**, 'Do not ascribe any partners to Me, and purify My House for those who go around it, and those who stand** [**in it for prayer**]**, and those who bow and prostrate. And proclaim the hajj to people: they shall come to you on foot and on lean camels coming from distant places.'* (22:26-27***)

God made special plans for Abraham; one of them was this house and the tradition of performing the Hajj. If you look at the many rituals of Hajj, we retrace the steps of Abraham, and try to remember what he and his family – Hajar and Ismail – did since these events are to illustrate and remind us of Abraham's role.

In addition to fortifying the monotheistic tradition, Abraham took one step further and asked God for permission to build a society – a community of the faithful – around the Ka'bah, to make the land prosperous and secure. He asked God for he, Isma'il, and the nation of their progeny to be submissive to Him:

Our Lord, make us submissive to You, and** [**raise**] **from our progeny a nation submissive to You, and show us our rites** [**of worship**]**, and turn to us clemently. Indeed You are the All-clement, the All-merciful. Our Lord, raise amongst them an apostle from among them, who should recite to them Your signs, and teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All- wise. (***2:128 & 129***)

Thus, Abraham and his son asked God for two things: a) to send a messenger to their progeny, and b) to raise that messenger from among themselves. Abraham's ambitions were accomplished by the appointment of the final and seal of the Prophets from the progeny of Abraham: Prophet Muhammad. He would complete the message of Abraham by receiving the revelation, by providing the people with a perfect understanding of tawhid, and by showing them the beautiful values of obedience and submission. He brought all the teachings and guidelines together and acted as the perfect role model.

Thus, the historical role of Prophet Abraham is summarised as follows: Prophet Abraham rebuilt the

Ka'bah, the House of God, the "first house built for people" and ***"blessed and a guidance for all nations"*** (***3:96***), to be the centre of light, guidance, tawhid, and unity of mankind. This 'House' is the focal point for establishing the ideal community. God made Abraham an Imam for the people (2:124) so as to lead them in their efforts for establishing the ideal community and a just universal society.

Abraham knew this could not be achieved in his or Ismail's lifetime, and so he asked God whether He would also appoint the Imams for the people from his progeny to accomplish this task. God confirmed this by excluding those who were unjust (2:124) since it is clear that the unjust cannot lead people in establishing universal justice. The Imams must be free from any kind of injustice, whether it is personal or social; they must not have done injustice even to an insect.

Prophet Abraham also asked God to make among his progeny ***"a submissive nation"*** (2:128) who would be guided by ***"a messenger sent to them and from themselves"*** (2:129). Thus, a nation or community was going to be built around the House of God and the House of the people and to be guided by the Messenger of God, ***"a submissive nation"*** comprising of purified people who were taught ***"the Book and wisdom"*** (2:129 & 151; 3:164; 62:2).

Prophet Muhammad and reviving the monotheistic tradition and setting the ground for a God-fearing community

Prophet Muhammad started his mission by purifying and teaching the Book and wisdom to the people of Mecca and then the rest of the world:

Blessed is this Book which We have sent down, confirming what was [***revealed***] ***before it, so that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are watchful of their prayers.*** (***6:92***)

Thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'an that you may warn [***the people of***] ***the Mother of the Towns and those around it, and warn*** [***them***] ***of the Day of Gathering, in which there is no doubt,*** [***whereupon***] ***a part*** [***of mankind***] ***will be in paradise and a part will be in the Blaze.*** (***42:7***)

The Prophet had a universal mission for all mankind and for all the generations to come: Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant that he may be a warner to all the nations. (***25:1***)

However, he was to first begin with Mecca by establishing a unified and submissive community to God built around the Ka'bah. Three verses speak of the Messenger's ministry as that which will lead to the worldwide victory of the truth:

It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse. (***9:33*** & ***61:9***)

It is He who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it

prevail over all religions, and God suffices as witness. (***48:28***)

The main contrast is between truth and falsehood and between tawhid and shirk, not between Islam and other monotheistic religions. The Prophet's success in his universal mission depends on his ability to establish a community who can be witnesses for rest of humanity as he himself is a witness for the community:

Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people, and that the Apostle may be a witness to you... (***2:143***)

Elsewhere the Qur'an refers to the tasks of the Prophet and the way he was planned to establish that middle nation that could be a witness for other nations:

...those who follow the Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, whose mention they find written with them in the Torah and the Evangel, who bids them to do what is right and forbids them from what is wrong, makes lawful to them all the good things and forbids them from all vicious things, and relieves them of their burdens and the shackles that were upon them —those who believe in him, honour him, and help him and follow the light that has been sent down with him, they are the felicitous.' (***7:157***)

The language used in this verse to explain some of the Prophet's tasks easily appeals to all people, including just Muslims or believers in God. To enjoin ma'ruf (the good) and forbid munkar (evil), both of which can be understood through common sense; to permit *tayyibat* (that which is pleasant)[8] to prohibit *khaba'ith* (that which is disliked).[9]

Observing ma'ruf means refraining from murder, adultery, theft, and so forth and being kind, helpful, honest, generous, supportive, and respectful. These basic examples of ma'ruf and munkar can be understood by any person. Who could oppose a Prophet who commanded to perform good actions and avoid doing wrong? Only those who are vicious and insist on doing wrong would oppose such a call. Those who suffer from atheism, polytheism, or immoral habits and practices, without being arrogant or stubborn, would welcome such a prophet.

For example, Abu Dharr was a pagan though he was not a vicious person; he did not have a problem with doing ma'ruf and avoiding haram. When the Prophet brought the divine message, Abu Tharr accepted it wholeheartedly and soon became a close companion of the Prophet. However, there were people like Abu Sufyan, Abu Lahab, and Abu Jahl who had problems with ma'ruf, let alone the sharia; they had moral problems and a vested interest in doing munkar.

A major focus of Prophet Muhammad was to revive tawhid, to invite people to return to the tradition of Abraham. The Prophet used to say, "Say there is not god but God, and you will be saved [or you will prosper]."[10] Thousands of people in Mecca and Medina accepted the message of the Prophet, and if they had consistently followed the same route after the demise of the Prophet, we would have witnessed

an ideal society and would not have had to wait for hundreds or thousands of years to witness the ideal society in end of the time.

After the demise of the Prophet, there were many changes and complications. One significant problem was the division of the Ummah. The Prophet had emphasized on unity; he had called people to be united over the truth and the Word of God, and he had established a society united over tawhid. After the Prophet's demise, many people who were new to the religion lost their direction and did not know who to turn to.

And unfortunately within fifty years of the demise of the Prophet, the situation went so wrong that someone declared himself as the Caliph and successor of the Prophet who tried to give power to his son Yazid, a man whose values and beliefs were not on par with that of the Prophet or Abraham. At least it was undeniable that giving power to Yazid was a big mistake, as he did not observe any of the teachings of Islam. For the first time in the history of Islam, someone who was unashamed of sinning in public or pretending to be a practicing Muslim was going to rule. He drank, gambled, and publicly committed hideous acts.

His father, Mu'awiya, said that he rejoiced over Yazid as a child, yet as he grew, Yazid annoyed him so much that Mu'awiya told him he wished Yazid was never born. Mu'awiya said this, a man who himself has a history of rebelling against Imam Ali and killed thousands, including some of the companions of the Prophet. Moreover, but he was wise enough to tell Yazid not to force Imam Husayn to pay allegiance to him; he knew it is impossible for Imam Husayn to pay allegiance to someone like Yazid.

Imam Husayn and preserving the monotheistic tradition by translating it into a demand for justice and dignity

Had Imam Husayn paid allegiance to Yazid, the message of God would have been entirely lost. Husayn was the representative of the line of tawhid, purity, honesty, and obedience to God. If he paid allegiance, the people would have been completely confused and gone astray; there would have been no hope for guidance afterwards. However, Yazid was determined to have the allegiance of Husayn. He pressured Walid, the governor of Medina, to have Imam Husayn pledge allegiance (bay'at).

This facilitated the event of Karbala whose roots go back to the time of the demise of the Prophet, if not even earlier.

In response to Yazid's demand, Imam Husayn replied to the governor of Medina:

O governor! We are the People of the Prophet's House, and we are descendants of the Prophet. Yazid is a drunkard who murders without reason, and a person like me does not pay allegiance to a person like him.[11]

It is not a matter of personal battle, but rather a matter of two separate ideologies. How could Husayn give legitimacy to Yazid and become his follower? Allegiance would mean that Imam Husayn and his followers would become Yazid's followers. This means the end of Islam. The next morning, the governor's deputy found Imam Husayn at the grave of Prophet Muhammad and advised the Imam to pay allegiance because it was safer for his life. Imam Husayn replied, "We belong to God and to Him do we return. If Muslim nation is to be ruled by a leader like Yazid, say goodbye to Islam. I have heard from my grandfather, the Messenger of God, say, 'Caliphate is forbidden for the family of Abu Sufyan.'"[12]

Moreover, the destruction of Islam would have marked the end of the divine plan for establishing an ideal society, the facilitation of happiness and mankind's salvation as a whole since there were no prophets to come. The Imam was faced with the challenge of either accepting Yazid's request or resisting and willing to sacrifice his life. We all know that Husayn was not attached to the material world; neither did he have concern for his personal life. None of the Imams feared sacrificing themselves for God.

Husayn was the only one at that time who could save the Ummah. He was the only one to end the deviation, whether by accepting martyrdom or protecting his life if he could oppose Yazid without being killed. Due to the escalating situation, it became clear that he had no other choice but to give his life; by doing so, he was better able to serve Islam. Husayn's life was very productive, constructive, powerful, and inspirational for people. But sometimes there comes a day that a person like Husayn is killed to sacrifice his life to protect the religion of God. He said, "Don't you see that the truth is not followed and the falsehood is not refrained from? The situation is so severe that a believer wishes to meet God (i.e. to die). And today I do not see death but as a prosperity, and living with tyrants is nothing but disgrace."[13]

I humbly request everyone, whether a Shi'a, Sunni, or non-Muslim, to explore the reasons why Husayn reached this conclusion. He lost his life and many members of the community were killed, including some of the best companions of the Ahlul Bayt. The women and children endured much trouble and hardship. But there was one thing that was greater than all of these sacrifices: God's pleasure.

The Ahlul Bayt did their best to preserve and save the teachings of Islam. Islam is greater than Husayn. Islam is greater than the children of Husayn. All were ready to sacrifice themselves for Islam to safeguard the message of God for the establishment of an ideal society. If Husayn had not opposed Yazid and had not been martyred as a result, there would no trace of Islam today.

Yazid ruled for a little over three years and committed many crimes that included three major ones: he attacked Mecca, he attacked Medina, and he killed Imam Husayn and seventy-two of his companions. It was only through the sacrifice of Husayn that people were awakened to the real problem and the true colors of the ruler.

Imam Husayn had made his stance clear enough to remind us of the Prophet's mission. The Prophet strived to awaken the people's conscience and teach morality through observing tawhid. After the Prophet's demise, it was difficult for some people to know whom to follow, who was right and who was

wrong. Imam Husayn brought such clarity to the issue such that after him, this issue no longer existed.

No one could say that the incident of Karbala resulted from two groups of Muslims disagreeing with regards to the Islamic position and therefore each acted upon his own ijtihad, or personal scholarly opinion.

The situation became so clear that the battle was between those who had humanity and those who lacked it. It was between the people who were committed to Islam and its values and those who were egotistical. No one can say that what 'Umar ibn Sa'd – the commander of Yazid's army– did to the women and children was because of a mistake in ijtihad. It was clearly kufr (disobedience).

Imam Husayn managed to clearly show people the distinction between the truth and falsehood, between a virtuous and immoral life. Anyone who is familiar with the event of Karbala, regardless of the person's religious affiliation, cannot be indifferent to what happened in Karbala; he or she would certainly sympathize with Imam Husayn. Any rational person would believe the beauties exhibited in the camp of Imam Husayn to be appreciated, the mercilessness of the opposite camp to be condemned, and the capacity for people to become so brutal and be led astray needs to be acknowledged.

Imam Husayn 1) preserved the teachings of Islam, and 2) opened a channel for Islam to reach the people's hearts. As soon as people hear of the movement of Imam Husayn, they sympathize. They also realize that justice and dignity are the most important qualities. Who proved this better than Husayn? If you were to give your life for the sake of justice and dignity, you are victorious. And powerful, murderous, unjust oppressors will themselves be humiliated and will lose both this world and the hereafter.

Our response to Imam Husayn's call for help

Imam Husayn must be introduced to mankind and followed as a role model by all people, not merely by Muslims. Not much effort is needed; we simply need to ensure that people come to know the realities of Imam Husayn and the event of Karbala. Then he himself would do the rest. We should not keep the Imam for ourselves; we should find out how to share by using different arts, skills, and talents to represent the Imam's life to others.

Just as Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad played key roles, Imam Husayn also did so in preserving the path of the Prophets as articulated and illustrated by Abraham, and paved the way for establishing the ideal community which in turn would establish universal justice, equality, and dignity for all.

It is not by chance or accident that in his uprising, Imam Mahdi will make many references to Imam Husayn. Among all his fathers who too were Imams, Imam Mahdi has special affinity to Imam Husayn. For example, when Imam Mahdi starts his movement, he will make an address while standing between

the Rukn and Maqam of the Ka'bah.[14]

A great portion of this speech relates to Imam Husayn and his martyrdom. Why? The reason for the emphasis may be because Imam Mahdi cannot mobilise the masses to establish universal justice a dignified society without referring to Imam Husayn – without using the example and standards that Imam Husayn set up. Using Imam Husayn as an example before initiating any movement or revolution led by the Shi'a was common after the event of Karbala.

Thus, to pave the way for Imam Mahdi and help him in his universal mission we need to acquaint ourselves and people of the world with Imam Husayn. We should share his life and teaching through our words, actions, conduct, and character.

May God make the months of Muharram and Safar a great opportunity for us to increase our understanding of Imam Husayn's role. We ask God to help us to comprehend our role today to respond to Imam Husayn's call of **"Hal min naasirin yansurnaa (Is there anyone to help us)?"**

Husayn began the great mission of bringing the Ummah back to the right track, but this mission is still in need of our help given that the Ummah is divided with its divergences. God has planned this Ummah to be a balanced nation so that it can be a witness for humanity to enable the achievement of God's plan. We should respond to Imam Husayn by saying "Labbayk" and to help bring the Ummah to its original condition so that it can play the role of witness to humanity.

Conclusion

The divine plan for salvation includes the establishment of a moral and just society, in which opportunities are fairly distributed and people are treated with honour and dignity to better focus on their spiritual journey. God has sent His messengers with the Book and the Balance for people to establish the social justice (57:25).

Among the Messengers, Prophet Abraham played an outstanding role in establishing the monotheistic tradition, hence, he is considered to be the founder of all Abrahamic religions. He also envisaged and worked towards establishment of a just society centered on tawhid and built around the Ka'bah.

Prophet Muhammad was sent to accomplish the tasks of all the Messengers and laid the theoretical and practical foundations for establishing a submissive, balanced, united, and just nation.

In a very critical time, when the legacies of Messengers were endangered by Yazid's attempt to rule in the name of the Prophet's Caliph and possessing Imam Husayn's authorization to institutionalise injustice in the name of Islam, and falsehood in the name of truth, Imam Husayn knew that the only way to safeguard the divine plan for mankind and to preserve the tradition of Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad was to sacrifice his life.

This saved the divine path from loss at that time and paved the way for the future.

1. Another lesson we can learn from Ibrahim is that we must never lose hope in asking Allah for our requests even if we may think it has become too late, as Allah is always able to do what He wants.

For long time Ibrahim (a) did not have any child. Perhaps he never expected that indeed God was going to give him not only healthy children but also He is going to make all later Prophets and Imams through him. God forbid, if he was to complain about not having children, then he would have lost this opportunity.

Allah would not have honoured him the way He did. Allah allowed him to continue his legacy from both his children Ishaq and Isma'il. From Ishaq, he had Ya'qub, Yusuf, Musa, Isa, and Bani Israel, and from Isma'il, he had Muhammad and all the Imams.

2. Al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, vol. 2, p. 177.
3. For example, see Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 12, p. 31.
4. Tafsir Noor al-Thaqalayn, vol. 1, p. 554.
5. Ibid. p. 555.
6. Al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 40.
7. Al-Kafi, vol. 7, p. 51.
8. That is, what people find to be pleasant through instinct or after some training through receiving sufficient data
9. That is, what human beings instinctively or after some training dislike or find to be unpleasant and to liberate are understandable and appreciated by all human beings. If terms like wajib or haraam were used they could not appeal to non-Muslims or even to Muslims who are not religious.

This is not to suggest that there is anything wrong with such terms; rather, it is a matter of identifying the targeted audience and then deciding the most appropriate language and tone. Wajib and haraam are two terms for the people who follow shari'a and obviously the Prophet could not start or limit his mission by addressing only the religious Muslims by focusing on 'observing the wajib' and 'avoiding haram.'

10. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 18, p. 202.
11. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 324.
12. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 326.
13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 193.
14. For example, see Ilzam al-Nasib fi Ithbat al-Hujjah al-Gha'ib by Shaykh Ali Yazdi al-Ha'iri.

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