



## Original Research Article

# A DISTINCTIVE APPROACH TO HADITH CRITICISM IN THE IMĀMĪ SCHOOL: THE THEORY OF IJMĀ' (CONSENSUS) AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

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**Abstract:** In the first article, we examined in detail what can be summarized as the existence of a Theory of *ijmā'* (Consensus) in the Imāmī (Twelver Shī'ī) school, according to which reports that contradict the 110 ancient *ijmā'* issues identified through the narrations of the students of the Infallible Imams are to be rejected. According to this theory, a mere *ijmā'* from which none of the Infallibles has participated has no religious value whatsoever. For, in the view of Imāmī scholars, any legal opinion (*fatwā*) that is not based on the Qur'an or the views of the Infallibles is devoid of religious proof. Likewise, in their view, the mere *ijmā'* of the 'āmmah (non-Shī'ī Muslims), which is based on evidences such as *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) rather than the Qur'an and the Sunnah, is insufficient to constitute a binding religious proof. Moreover, *ḥadīths* that are not found in, or that contradict, Shī'ī sources likewise lack probative force. Accordingly, the *ijmā'* reached by the Sunni schools, who consider the *ḥadīths* concerning wiping over *khuffayn* (leather socks) during ablution to be *mutawātir*, is also of no value. For, according to the *ijmā'* of the Imāmī school, wiping the bare feet is obligatory, whereas wiping over leather socks is an *bid'ah* (innovation). However, from the perspective of non-Shī'ī Muslims, the Imāmī school's theories of the Infallible Imam, the Occulted Imam, and *ijmā'* not only fail to conform to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, but also contain certain internal inconsistencies. For example, while the existence of the Twelfth Imam cannot be empirically proven, claiming that he participates in *ijmā'* appears highly utopian to the 'āmmah. Conversely, rejecting the *ijtihād* and *ijmā'* of scholars on contemporary legal issues does not accord with the realities of life. Furthermore, presuppositions such as equating the narrations of the Imams' students—who are referred to as *Aṣḥāb al-ijmā'*—with *mutawātir* reports or preferring the opinion of a minority over that of a majority, likewise entail internal contradictions. This article will focus on the ambiguities and inconsistencies inherent in the Theory of *ijmā'*.

**Keywords:** Shī'a, Imāmiyyah, Infallible Imams, *Aṣḥāb al-Ijmā'*, Theory of *Ijmā'*, *Ḥadīth*, Contradiction.

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars established a set of methodological criteria pertaining both to the *isnād* (chain of transmission) and the *matn* (content) in order to ascertain the authenticity of *ḥadīth*. Broad consensus was reached on those criteria that gained general acceptance. Among them were requirements such as the continuity of the *isnād*, the reliability and integrity of the transmitters (*ruwāt*), and the condition that each

transmitter should have directly received the report from his predecessor. In addition, the conformity of the *ḥadīth* with the Qur'an, with well-known Sunna, with reason ('*aql*), and with historical data was also counted among the criteria accepted by both Ahl al-Sunna and the Shī'a. In principle, all defects that contradicted the above-mentioned conditions were taken as causes for dismissal. The extent to which these conditions were satisfied determined the

classification of a ḥadīth as sound (ṣaḥīḥ) or weak (ḍa'if). In other words, a ḥadīth would either be admitted as authoritative evidence or rejected according to the degree to which it fulfilled the stipulated standards. In addition to these commonly accepted criteria, different sects and groups also developed distinctive criteria of their own. The present article focuses on one such principle specific to the Shī'a/Imāmiyya: the rejection of any ḥadīth deemed contrary to ijmā' (consensus).

Lexically, ijmā' signifies "to unite, to gather and organize, to accomplish with determination, to resolve, or to reach agreement on a matter." In the Qur'ān, derivatives of the root jama'a occur four times in this lexical sense. Within ḥadīth usage, however, the term often bears the meaning of "to intend" or "to resolve." In the terminology of uṣūl al-fiqh, ijmā' is defined as "the agreement of the mujtahidūn of the community of Muḥammad, after his death, on the ruling of a particular religious matter."

With the widespread recognition of ijmā' among Islamic sects, the Shī'a/Imāmiyya added "conformity with ijmā'" to the list of criteria for the acceptance of ḥadīth. Although this criterion had also been acknowledged in some Sunnī schools (e.g., Imām al-Shāfi'ī), the Shī'a rejected the ijmā' of the 'āmma (Muslims who are not Shī'ah) and based themselves instead on their own conception of ijmā'. This was inevitable, since to accept the ijmā' of the 'āmma would have meant denying their own legitimacy. Although they occasionally arrived at the same substantive positions as their Sunnī counterparts, this was not the result of employing the same methodological foundations. For this reason, a detailed comparison of the Sunnī and Shī'ī approaches is beyond the scope of this article.

According to Shī'ī claims, the mere ijmā' based on qiyās (analogy) or ijtihād (jurisprudence) as accepted by Ahl al-Sunna could never constitute valid evidence. For Shī'ī scholars, any ijmā' that did not include the participation of the al-Ma'sūm (the Imām) was inadmissible. The legitimacy of ijmā' was complete only when the Ma'sūm was part of it. In fact, according to the Imāmī jurists, ijmā' could serve as proof solely because it revealed the opinion of the Ma'sūm. By the third and fourth centuries A.H., this conception of ijmā' had been fully elaborated. On its basis, the reports transmitted by eighteen trustworthy and reliable disciples of the Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733 [?]), Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), and 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818) —known collectively as the Aṣḥāb al-ijmā'— were accepted as establishing consensus on approximately 110 issues. According to this theory, ijmā' was regarded as equivalent to tawātur not

because of the agreement of those scholars per se, but because it was taken to reveal the view of the Ma'sūm. Since the matters deemed subject to ijmā' rested on reports from the reliable students of the Imāms, they posed no difficulty of acceptance. For, if these reports were accepted as mutawātir, any opposing reports could at best amount to khabar al-wāḥid. As a general rule, reports contradicting tawātur had to be rejected. Moreover, based on the reports transmitted from the Imams, which were adopted by Shī'ī scholars, the principle "If two different opinions are reported that are both in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the one contrary to the general public ('āmma) is preferred" made it impossible to speak of a complete consensus even regarding fatwas that were in agreement with their opponents. Because the opponents considered even an ijmā' that did not include the Ma'sūm to be valid.

Some issues attributed to ijmā' in the Shī'ī tradition had no basis in either the Qur'ān or the Sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad. For such matters, Shī'ī scholars contented themselves with the statement "this is how ijmā' has been transmitted." Since the fatwās of the Ma'sūm Imāms were themselves considered part of the Sunna, no further questioning was deemed necessary. However, during the period of al-Ghayba (following the occultation of the Imam on 8 Rabī' al-Awwal 260 / 1 January 874), this theory came to focus on how the Imam—despite being in occultation—could participate in the ijmā'. During the minor occultation/al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā, communication was possible through designated representatives (nuwwāb). In the period of the major occultation/al-ghayba al-kubrā (after 15 Sha'bān 329 / 15 May 941), the Imam, according to what was conveyed by his representative, declared that he would no longer be in contact with anyone and that anyone claiming to have received communication from him was a liar. The ijmā' accepted by Shia scholars was only considered complete when the Infallible Imam (al-Imām al-Ma'sūm) participated in it. In other words, ijmā' could only be a valid proof (dalīl) because it represented the opinion of the Infallible, namely the Hidden Imam (al-Imām al-Ghaybī). However, while rejecting the consensus of the opponents (mukhālifīn) on the grounds that it did not rely on the Ma'sūms, claiming that the Hidden Imam, whose existence was not conclusively proven and with whom direct contact could not be established, had somehow participated in the Shia ijmā' introduced a different contradiction. The first period of Ghayba (al-Ghayba al-Suḡhra), lasting for a normal human lifetime, had passed, yet the Imam did not appear. This led some of the followers of the sect to distance themselves. During the second period of Ghayba (al-Ghayba al-Kubrā), many difficulties arose, but the Imam still did not appear. First and

foremost, an Imam who is unknown and with whom no contact can be established was contrary to the theory of Imamate (imāma) and divine wisdom (ḥikma). Among the Shia scholars, Sharīf al-Murtaẓā (d. 436/1044) and Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) found a way to overcome this situation: Although the Imam himself was not known, he continued to live as a true personality among his followers, issuing opinions on contentious matters as an undisclosed jurist (majhūl al-ḥāl) without public recognition. Sharīf al-Murtaẓā considered the inclusion of the Infallible (al-Ma'sūm) in the ijmā' to be a necessity, while his student, al-Ṭūsī, regarded it as a divine grace (luṭf). According to the later-developed understanding of ijmā', the Infallible Imam was definitely involved in one of the two opposing views on any disputed issue among Shia scholars. Therefore, identifying the valid ijmā' only meant identifying the consensus in which the Imam participated. In case of a dispute, if there was no evidence (dalīl) in the revealed texts (nass) — namely, the Qur'an and reports from the Infallibles — to prefer one of the opinions, the opinion in which an unknown scholar ('ālim makhṭū') was found should be chosen. This was because this unknown scholar was most likely the Infallible Imam, the 12th Imam, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-'Askarī. At the very least, they believed that divine grace should manifest in this manner. It was impossible for the Infallible Imam, whose existence they believed in, to abandon the Shia ijmā' and agree with the opponents (mukhālifīn). Since the Imam participated in the Shia scholars' ijmā', it was not necessary for them to follow the consensus of the 'amma. The Shia scholars believed that every detail discussed regarding ijmā' belonged entirely to the mukhālifīn (dissidents). According to them, there was no acceptable evidence (dalīl) for any of these.

In conclusion, according to the Shia/Imamiyyah scholars, ijmā' is not an independent proof (dalīl), but rather a form of general ittifāq (agreement) that reveals the opinion of the al-Ma'sūm in cases of disagreement, and serves as the basis for preference (tarjīh). The ijmā' (consensus) of those who are not accompanied by the Infallible (al-Ma'sūm) holds no binding authority in matters of religion. In this context, the reason why a mutawātir (mass-transmitted) khabar is considered 'ilm (knowledge) is not because the ummah (community) is protected from error, but because the report contains the opinion of the Infallible (al-Ma'sūm). This article examines the contradictions inherent in the Theory of Ijmā', with particular emphasis on the perceived necessity of rejecting hadiths that conflict with consensus in Imāmī (Twelver Shī'ī) thought.

### 1. Ambiguities and Inherent Contradictions in the Theory of Ijmā'

An examination of narrations transmitted in Imāmī Shī'ī sources indicates that the emergence of disagreements occurred after the time of the A'imma (the Imams) and cannot be attributed solely to the transmitters. In response to the apparent contradictions among the akhbār, Imāmī scholars developed numerous criteria of preference and evaluation, grounded in both the reliability of the 'ilm al-rijāl (transmitters) and the textual content of the reports, in an effort to reconcile these divergences. Although Imāmī doctrine maintains that the knowledge of the A'imma derives from a single, divinely inspired and immutable source, al-Ṭūsī asserts that the differences among the narrations attributed to the Imams exceed even those found between Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), and Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795). He further states that he composed his work al-Istibṣār fī mā ukhtulifa min al-akhbār precisely to address and resolve such discrepancies. Moreover, al-Ṭūsī seeks to pre-empt objections to his position by noting that he compiled approximately five thousand such conflicting narrations in this work (Ṭūsī, 1417, 1/137-138). Building upon this methodological framework, al-Murtaẓā articulated a cautious approach toward aḥādīths (khabar al-wāhid), contending that they did not constitute certain knowledge (yaqīn). Nevertheless, he did not entirely dismiss the authority of transmitted reports in religious matters; rather, in order to reconcile the contradictions arising from these narrations, he frequently accorded greater weight to reason ('aql) over tradition (naql). According to al-Murtaẓā, khabar al-wāhid could serve primarily for the purposes of exhortation (tanbīh) and admonition or warning (tahwīf), rather than as definitive proofs for legal or theological rulings (al-Murtaẓā, 11405, 1/34). In fact, with this view, he has accused many reports found in sources written by Kūleynī, Shaykh Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), and other important Shiite scholars of being strange, flawed, or fabricated. Al-Murtaẓā's student Ṭūsī, however, took a middle path between the Ahbārīs and the Usūlīs on the issue of hadith al-wahid and adopted a more reasonable approach; he accepted the authenticity of Khabar al-wāhid (a person's khabar) that possessed indications such as conformity with the Qur'an, the Sunnah, reason, and ijmā', and that acting upon narrations possessing these indications was obligatory. According to him, even if the evidence does not elevate the text of the report to the level of authenticity, it elevates its meaning. With this view, Ṭūsī introduced the concept of "Authentic hadith in terms of meaning" into Shiite hadith literature (Ṭūsī, 1417, 1/146).

### 2. The Existence of the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad Ibn Hasan al-Askari

The greatest problem of the Imamiyyah school of thought and, at the same time, the greatest impasse

of the Ijmā' Theory is whether Muhammad b. Hasan al-Askarī, believed to be the Hidden Imam, actually existed as a real person. The death of Hasan al-Askarī, who is said to have left no male heir to continue the imamate after him, created a great crisis among the Imamis and led to the emergence of more than ten sects. One of these sects claimed that Hasan al-Askarī did not die, but went into temporary "occultation" and would reappear as the Mahdi, while another accepted his death but claimed he would be resurrected as the Mahdi. However, over time, the belief that Hasan al-Askarī had a son named Muhammad al-Mahdi, born shortly before his death to a slave girl named Nercīs or Sakīl, who was of Roman or African descent, became widespread among the Imamis. Later, the other sects defending different beliefs disappeared completely. Muhammad al-Mahdi, whose birth was reportedly witnessed by al-Askari's aunt Hakima bint Javad, four of his followers, and several servants, died shortly thereafter. According to the Imami Shiites, however, he did not die but went into occultation, and they still await the appearance of this Muntazar Imam, in whose existence they believe ([islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hasan-el-askeri-hasan-b-ali](http://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/hasan-el-askeri-hasan-b-ali)).

The general views of Shiite groups regarding the last imam can be classified as follows:

1. Hasan al-Askarī died without leaving a successor, and the imamate ended.
2. Al-Askari did not die; he will return and continue his imamate as the Qā'im of the Prophet's family.
3. Hasan al-Askarī was not actually the imam; his father, Ali al-Naqi, appointed his other son, Muhammad ibn Ali, as imam.
4. After Hasan al-Askarī, the imamate passed to his younger brother, Ja'far ibn Ali.
5. Hasan al-Askarī left behind a male heir as his successor, and the imamate will continue with him (the 12th Imam). This final belief eventually replaced the others and became the official doctrine of the Imamiyyah.

According to the accounts accepted by the majority of the Imamiyyah, Muhammad ibn Hasan, the successor of Hasan al-Askarī, was born in Samarra on 15 Sha'ban 255 (July 29, 869). His mother, referred to in various sources by names such as Sakīl, Saykal, Sevsen, Reyhāne, and Hamt, was a descendant of the Byzantine emperor and her real name was Nercīs. Nercīs's life from the Byzantine court onwards, her dreams, her conversion to Islam, her capture by Muslims, and her becoming a slave to Hasan al-Askarī are recounted in a legendary style in works on the subject. According to the Imamiyyah Shi'a, Hasan al-Askarī concealed the birth of his son, who came into the world under extraordinary circumstances, due to the oppression of the Abbasid

state, and did not announce it to anyone except a very small number of close relatives. Furthermore, it was forbidden to mention his name due to concerns about its potential danger, and it was requested that he be referred to by titles such as Qā'im (القائم), el-Hujjah (الحجة), Sāhib (صاحب), Sāhib al-Zamān (الزمان صاحب), Mahdī al-Anām (الأم مهدي), and Khalīf (خلف). In fact, there are even reports attributed to Qā'im himself on this matter, such as, "Cursed are those who mention my name among people, and may Allah's curse be upon them." (Shaykh Ṣadūq, 2018, 2/443-444).

According to the Imamiyyah, there were five possible reasons for the Imam's disappearance:

1. Fear of being killed by his uncle, Ja'far ibn Ali.
  2. Occultation being a test for the Shi'a, a means of testing (the believers) by Allah.
  3. The possibility that it stemmed from a reason that could not be disclosed.
  4. People not following the path commanded by Allah. In this case, Allah becomes angry with His creatures, takes their imams away from them, and hides them from the people.
  5. According to a fifth and more mysterious yet profound possibility, which merits further examination, it was argued that, just as secret almsgiving is regarded as superior, obedience to the hidden Imam was considered superior to obedience to the manifest Imam under a government founded upon false principles, namely that of the Abbasids. This interpretation was later embraced by the Shi'a as a spiritual advantage in their favor. Shi'i scholars transmitted and attributed reports to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in support of nearly all of these explanations. In subsequent periods, any attempt to determine the time of the appearance of the Mahdi al-Muntazar was prohibited, and those who engaged in such speculation were declared liars. Nevertheless, narrations attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq also state that he would appear in Mecca in odd-numbered years. Shi'i sources, which provide extensive accounts of the signs of his emergence, mention approximately seventy signs, the majority of which remain ambiguous, while some are believed to have already been fulfilled ([islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mehdi-el-muntazar](http://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mehdi-el-muntazar)).
- According to the biographical information transmitted by al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) concerning the Imām al-Muntazar, both Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Abū Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) maintained that Ḥasan al-Askarī died without leaving any offspring. This position, however, was not accepted by the majority of the Imāmī Shi'a (often labelled as "Rāfiḍa" in Sunnī heresiographical sources). Among them, some held that he had a son who was concealed (mastūr), while others claimed that the child was born only after his father's death.

The woman identified as the child's mother—named in various reports as Narjis (Nercis), Sūsān, or, according to the more prevalent view, Ṣaqīl—declared that she had become pregnant following the death of al-'Askarī. On the basis of this claim, a share of the inheritance was preserved for the alleged child for approximately seven years. When the claim of pregnancy was eventually deemed invalid, the portion in question was distributed among the brothers of al-'Askarī.

As the disputes among the Shi'a regarding Ṣaqīl and her alleged son intensified, the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Mu'taḍid bi'llāh (d. 289/902) reportedly placed her under compulsory residence more than twenty years after the death of her husband, a situation that continued until the end of her life. Al-Dhahabī further reports that, according to some accounts, Muḥammad entered a cave at the age of nine, or at another unspecified age. Likewise, citing Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), he notes that there were also those who claimed that Muḥammad entered the cave in the year 275 or 265 AH, at the age of seventeen, and that he remains alive. Since he regarded this belief of the Shi'a as irrational, he continues with the following remarks: "We seek refuge in God from the loss of reason. Even if we were to assume that this situation would last for a thousand generations, is there anyone who has seen him? Upon whose testimony shall we rely concerning his existence, and who can provide us with any proof that he is infallible (protected from sin) and possesses complete knowledge? This is clearly an act of madness. May God protect both us and you from adducing the impossible and falsehood as evidence." (Dhahabī, 1993, 13/119-122).

In fact, the earliest attestations of the concept of occultation appear in statements regarding 'Alī and later his son Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 81/700). Among their followers, some believed that they did not truly die at the moment of their passing and that they would eventually return to the world. According to the Imamiyyah, occultation represents the prophetic example (sunnah) exemplified by Adam, Idris, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the Prophet Muḥammad (Kummī, 1987, 234-235; Shaykh Ṣadūq, 2018, 2/152.). Shi'ites who uphold the belief in the occultation of the Qā'im also held differing views regarding its underlying rationale. As noted above, some contended that it served as a precautionary measure to protect the Imam from being killed by his adversaries, whereas others, conversely, interpreted it as a divine test and even regarded it as a form of divine blessing (Shaykh Ṣadūq, 2018, 2/436-442).

The Imāmī Shī'ī understanding of occultation

(ghayba), which evolved into a matter of doctrinal belief, was not taken seriously by contemporary opponents and was often omitted from Sunni theological works as a subject worthy of debate. While the conviction that the Qā'im remained alive during the extended period of occultation helped preserve traditional authority within Imāmī communities, it did not entirely prevent the emergence of critical questions. Among these concerns were the argument that the prolonged absence of the Imām during centuries marked by social and individual challenges appeared to contradict divine wisdom, and that waiting for an Imām whose identity remained concealed offered no immediate benefit to society. In response, Imāmī scholars sought to address such criticisms. Drawing primarily upon reports attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, they highlighted precedents of prolonged lifespans in earlier prophetic and sacred figures—such as Adam, Nūḥ (Noah), Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Ismā'īl (Ishmael), Ishāq (Isaac), Ya'qūb (Jacob), Yūsuf (Joseph), Mūsā (Moses), Hārūn (Aaron), Sulaymān (Solomon), 'Uzayr (Ezra), and the Companions of the Cave—arguing that, by the same divine power, Allah is fully capable of preserving His Ḥujjah (الحجة) alive over extended periods (Shaykh Ṣadūq, 2018, 2/153-154; en-Nu'mānī, 2013, 239).

The commencement of the occultation (ghayba) has long been a matter of debate among the Ithnā 'Asharī (Twelver) Shī'a. While some argued that the occultation of the Qā'im began even before the death of Ḥasan al-'Askarī, potentially from the moment of his birth, the majority maintained that it was impermissible for the Imam to enter occultation prior to formally assuming the Imamate. According to this perspective, the Imam was required to appoint his representatives (nuwwāb) to maintain communication with the community during his concealment; without such an arrangement, the responsibilities of the Imamate could not be adequately discharged. On this basis, the occultation of the Qā'im is traditionally considered to have commenced on 8 Rabi' al-Awwal 260 AH (January 1, 874 CE), the date of the death of his father, Ḥasan al-'Askarī (İlhan, 1996, 13/411). During the period of occultation, only a select group of individuals had access to the Imam, and they were under a strict obligation not to disclose this situation. While it was asserted that the prolongation of the Imam's occultation did not cause harm to the believer, those who died while sincerely awaiting his emergence were regarded as martyrs.

The determination of the social and political conditions under which the Qā'im would appear was also a subject of disagreement among the Shi'a. Among the approximately seventy signs of his appearance transmitted in the sources, some of

which have already been realized, are the following: the conflict between the Umayyads and the Abbasids, the end of Umayyad rule, the emergence of twelve individuals from the Hashimite lineage claiming prophethood, the appearance of figures known as the Sufyānī, Kahtānī, Ḥasanī, Miṣrī, Khorasanī, and Yamānī, the submergence of Beydā and Jābiyya, the proliferation of sedition, corruption, disputes, and wars, the advance of the Turks to al-Jazīra and of the Byzantines to Ramla, famine, fear, increased murder and plague, the descent of 'Īsā, and the sun rising from the west.

Certain narrations attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir indicate, inconsistently, that the Occulted Imam would appear in single-digit years, on either the twenty-third Friday or Saturday of Ramadan, or on the Day of 'Āshūrā. Meanwhile, another narration from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq states that the Qā'im will appear on Nowruz. According to one account, the Occulted Imam will emerge in Mecca with fifty women and 313 followers coming from all parts of the world, and he will exercise dominion over the world and establish justice. The duration between the commencement of his rule and his death is reported as either nineteen years or nineteen years and several months.

In Islamic theology, for an issue to be considered a fundamental tenet of faith, its proof and evidentiary basis must rely on conclusive evidence. Given that fourteen different views emerged within the Ithnā 'Asharī Shi'a regarding the Imamate of the Occulted Imam Muḥammad al-Mahdī, it appears that despite claims of tawātur, one cannot speak meaningfully of a definitive proof on this matter. Likewise, interpreting the fact that a community may remain in a state of waiting for over a thousand years as a divine grace or test represents a highly apologetic approach. As is evident from some of the information mentioned here, the signs and timing of the emergence of the Occulted Imam are extremely complex, almost resembling a problem with multiple unknowns. His exercising dominion over the world with 313 followers and establishing justice does not align with divine laws or the political and military realities of worldly life. Furthermore, narrations concerning the duration between his emergence and his death are themselves contested. All of these factors indicate that the occultation and emergence of the Twelfth Imam do not rest on solid rational or transmitted proofs, and thus cannot constitute a foundational tenet of faith (İlhan, 1996, 13/ 410-412).

While the Shi'a affirm the necessity of an Imām to ensure the continuity of leadership (Imamate) from the Prophethood until the Day of Judgment, the evidence for the existence of the individual

recognized as Imām is largely based on rational inference, ta'wīl (interpretative) readings, narrations of contested authenticity, and reports found exclusively in Shi'i sources. In other words, this claim is not substantiated by any Qur'anic verse universally acknowledged among Muslims, nor by any hadith transmitted in accordance with the traditional conditions of authenticity. Moreover, the absence of any widely recognized son of Ḥasan al-'Askarī, coupled with the fact that the child occasionally mentioned in the sources was never directly observed by followers outside of reports of uncertain historical reliability, further complicates the acceptance of theories constructed around him. Additionally, adopting a methodology that presupposes the Imām's participation in the ijmā' of the Shi'a—despite profound disagreements and uncertainties regarding his existence, continued life, signs, and eventual emergence—poses considerable methodological challenges both for critics and adherents alike.

### 3. The Reliability of Narrations from the Ithnā 'Asharī Perspective

Shi'i scholars did not accept the Companions of the Prophet uncritically, often questioning the reliability of their reports. However, the individuals surrounding the Imāms were not subjected to the same level of scrutiny. Reports transmitted by those among the Imāms' associates who later deviated from the Imāmī path or espoused ghulāt (extremist) views are interpreted by Shi'i scholars as having been conveyed during periods when these transmitters were still on the correct path. Nevertheless, this claim cannot be fully substantiated.

Some of the Imāms' transmitters were non-Shi'i, namely Sunnīs. Reports transmitted through these individuals appear in foundational Shi'i sources, such as al-Uṣūl al-Arba'ūmiyah (الأربع مبادئ الأصول) and al-Kāfi of al-Kūlaynī. On the one hand, contradicting the views of the 'amma was adopted as a methodological principle, while on the other hand, their reports were still included in the principal sources. According to the hadith methodology developed by al-Murtazā, al-Ṭūsī, and al-Ḥillī, all of these factors coexist as a contradictory situation, highlighting the complex and nuanced nature of Shi'i transmission theory.

### 4. The Problem of Absolute Ijmā' and Its Conflict with the Qur'an and Sunnah

Shi'i-Imāmī scholars, while occasionally critiquing the ijmā' of the 'amma on the grounds that it relies on qiyās or abstract independent reasoning (mujarrad ijtiḥād), often employ interpretative strategies aimed at reconciliation when addressing instances in which their own ijmā' appears to contradict or lack grounding in naṣṣ. Reports transmitted by the group

known as the Ashābu'l-Ijmā', who are accepted as having received knowledge directly from the Imāms, are regarded as naṣṣ. Nevertheless, certain fatāwā are not based on any Qur'ānic verse or sunnah of the Prophet. Significant contradictions are observable even among the Imāms' own legal rulings, and contradictory rulings issued by the same Imām are frequently understood as manifestations of taqiyya, thus escaping critical scrutiny.

By contrast, within Sunni legal schools, such situations are generally addressed by distinguishing between a mujtahid's earlier and later opinions: as the scholar acquires new knowledge or refines their methodology, changes in rulings are considered normal and expected. The Shi'a theory of Imamate, however, renders such a process impossible, since the Imām is assumed to be Ma'ṣūm and all-knowing. Any change in the Imām's knowledge that results in a modification of his rulings could theoretically call his other opinions into question. Consequently, while the existence of the Twelfth Imām cannot be conclusively demonstrated using transmitted evidence (naqlī dalīl) sufficient to convince opponents, the presumption that he must have participated in every instance of ijmā' functions as a form of divine concession, allowing certain tensions and impasses within Shi'ī thought regarding faith and ijmā' to remain unresolved.

Among the 110 classical issues of consensus (ijmā') are the following rulings: instructing the deceased regarding the Imamate during the pre-burial talqīn, (al-Murtaẓā, 1405, 1/218) requiring the return of zakāt if it is given to someone who does not accept 'Alī's walāya, (al-Murtaẓā, 1405, 1/225) prescribing the execution of a slave who commits fornication for the second time and of an unmarried free person who commits it for the fourth time, (al-Murtaẓā, 1405, 1/250) and granting the eldest son a superior right over the deceased's sword, Qur'ān codex, and signet-ring as part of the estate. None of these rulings is supported by the Qur'ān or by mutawātir or mashhūr reports.

According to al-Murtaẓā, there exist certain well-known reports that appear to support the notion that the eldest son has a greater entitlement than the other heirs. (al-Murtaẓā, 1405, 1/257-258). However, prioritizing such evidence—which at most amounts to khabar al-wāḥid—over the general purport of the Qur'ān contradicts al-Murtaẓā's own stated position regarding the probative value of khabar al-wāḥids. Furthermore, the verse *حَظٌّ مِّثْلُ الذَّكَرِ أَوْلَادِكُمْ فِي اللَّهِ يُوصِيكُمُ اللَّهُ وَأَجَدَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ تَرَكَ مَا تَلْنَا فَلَهُنَّ اثْنَتَيْنِ فَوقَ نِسَاءِ كُلِّ فَإِنَّ الْأُنثَيْنِ فَلَهَا وَاحِدَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ تَرَكَ مَا تَلْنَا فَلَهُنَّ اثْنَتَيْنِ فَوقَ نِسَاءِ كُلِّ فَإِنَّ الْأُنثَيْنِ* /Allah instructs you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the share of two females. But if there are [only] daughters, two or more, for them is two thirds of one's estate. And if

there is only one, for her is half.” (an-Nisā 4/11.) contains an explicit ruling. The apparent meaning (ẓāhir) of this verse indicates the invalidity of restricting its general import ('umūm) through such a form of consensus.

al-Murtaẓā himself states: “In my view, it is the stronger position that the general rulings of the Book should not be restricted (takḥṣīs) by khabar al-wāḥid. The apparent meaning of the verse requires the invalidity of assigning these particular items exclusively to the eldest son.” (al-Murtaẓā, 1405, 1/257-258). According to al-Murtaẓā, the implication of this takḥṣīs is as follows: none of the transmitted reports explicitly enacts such a restriction, nor do they stipulate that the value of these items must be deducted from the eldest son's share of inheritance. Rather, the outward sense (ẓāhir) of the reports implies a preference (tafdīl) for the eldest son over the other heirs. If it is objected that no tafdīl exists when these items are deducted from his share, al-Murtaẓā's response is that even when granted on account of the eldest son's rightful portion, the fact that they are given to him rather than to the others constitutes tafdīl in all cases (al-Murtaẓā, 1405 1/258).

According to al-Murtaẓā, the ijmā' that the residence of the deceased man is not to be allotted to his widow—while the monetary value corresponding to her proportional share of the building and its appurtenances (binā' wa-mushtamalāt) must be given to her—is analogous to the case of the eldest son. This is because the Qur'ānic verse explicitly assigns the wife either one-quarter or one-eighth of the estate, depending on the circumstances, without excluding any particular component of the inheritance from this allocation (an-Nisā 4/12). The ruling of the verse cannot be assigned in any way except by definitive evidence. For this reason, the narration stating that a woman should be content with receiving her share of the house must be understood only by referring to ijmā' (consensus) (al-Murtaẓā, 1405, 1/259). This means abrogating or assigning the verse with a controversial narration. This is inconsistent with Al-Murtaẓā's views on the subject of a single narration and with the views of his student Tūsī on whether abrogation of the Qur'an by the Sunnah is permissible.

According to another consensus, six shares of khums are made, and three are assigned to the Imam who assumes the caliphate of the Prophet, which are the shares of Allah, the Prophet, and his relatives. Allah's share is actually included in the Prophet's share, and Allah's attribution of this share to Himself is for the better understanding and exaltation (tefhim and tazim) of the Prophet's status. The other three shares must also be allocated only to the orphans, the poor, and the travelers of the Prophet's family (Āl-i

Resul), not to others (al-Murtazā, 1405, 1/226-127). This ijmā' article also states, "If you believe in Allah and in what We have revealed to Our servant on the Day of Judgment, when the two groups met, know that one-fifth of everything you have captured as spoils belongs to Allah, the Prophet, the relatives, the orphans, the poor, and the travelers. Allah is capable of all things." (al-Anfāl 8/41). However, Al-Murtazā rejects the criticism that the general term "relatives" should not be limited (tahsis) to the Hashimites as follows: The generality of the meaning can be limited (tahsis) with definitive evidence. The Shi'a (al-Furqa al-Muhikka) have reached a consensus on a view that is unlikely to be contrary to the apparent meaning of the verse (al-Murtazā, 1405, 1/227-228). Here, the restriction of the khums to the Hashimites is based not on a definitive proof of its validity and meaning, but on pure consensus.

One of the matters established by consensus is that when performing ablution, the hands should be washed only twice, and washing should begin at the elbows. This is the Sunnah-compliant way to act. Although washing from the fingers to the elbows (as Sunni Muslims do) does not invalidate the ablution, it is makruh. The reports on this subject that are mentioned in this context are for the purpose of warning (taghliz and tashdid) and are intended to emphasize the severity of the disliked nature (al-Murtazā, 1405, 1/213-214). It cannot be said that this interpretation is consistent with the apparent meaning of the verse. The wording of the verse on ablution that commands washing is: "O you who believe! When you rise to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows..." (al-Māide 5/6) However, according to Al-Murtazā, this view is not contrary to the verse. He states, "Our evidence on this matter, as previously explained, is the consensus of the Imamiyyah school, which includes the opinion of the Imam." Again, according to him, the phrase "...with the merāfiqi/up to the elbows" (...المرافق) in the verse is not contrary (munaafi) to the ijmā' of the Imamiyyah. Because the preposition (إلى/ilā) is sometimes used to mean purpose and sometimes to mean accompaniment (مع/me'a) (al-Murtazā, 1405, 1/213-214).

The following are incompatible with the narrations of the hadith scholars: "It is not permissible to wash more than two limbs when performing ablution; a person who cannot reach the Arafat stand but reaches the Meş'ar-i Haram (Muzdalifah stand) on the day of Eid al-Adha is considered to have performed the hajj; it is not permissible to recite two surahs together or half of a surah after the Fatiha in the obligatory prayers; (al-Murtazā, 1405, 1/220) and the meat of birds whose wings flap less than they glide being haram" (al-Murtazā, 1405, 1/248) are also ijmā' items that are purely ijtihad, not based on

the Qur'an or reports narrated from the Prophet. Al-Murtazā's view that the consensus of the Shi'a on these matters is sufficient stems from his view of the Imams as the source of the Sunnah. However, it is contradictory to accept these purely jurisprudential consensus issues, which contradict the apparent meaning of the verses, as absolutely true without subjecting them to criticism and to equate them with the Qur'an. According to a report considered mutawatir by Hur al-Amili, when Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq was asked about the situation of having an opinion about something that is neither in Allah's book nor in the Sunnah, he replied, "If you are correct, you will not receive reward, and if you are wrong, you will have attributed falsehood to Allah." (al-'Āmili, n.d., 28). Again, Ja'far al-Sadiq rejects pure ijtihad, which is not based on a narration, with the following words: "Everything is judged according to the Book and the Sunnah. Any statement that is not in accordance with the Book of Allah is mere nonsense." (al-Kulaynī, 1388, 1, 69).

### Conclusion

Muslims who accept the Imamiyyah school of thought believe that during the occultation period, Masum, that is, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Askari, issued fatwas as an unknown scholar and was included in the ijmā. Again, according to them, it is not possible for Masum to abandon his followers and join the ijmā' of his opponents.

If there are different interpretations on a subject, it is examined; if there is an unknown scholar (mechulū'l-hal) among those defending a particular opinion, that opinion is preferred. This is because the unknown scholar is likely to be the Masum, namely Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Askari. This situation is considered one of Allah's blessings to the Shi'a. If there is no dissenting opinion on a matter of ijmā, or if there is no unknown scholar among those included in this ijmā, then it is accepted that the fatwa on the subject of ijmā' is correct and that the Imam did not intervene for this reason. This is a kind of tacit ijmā' or silent acceptance of the sunnah (as-sunnah at-taqiririية التقديرية السنية).

The Shiites, who have theories contrary to the Ahl al-Sunnah on ijmā, must respond to the criticisms of their opponents, not to mention their own internal contradictions. These contradictions are not simple enough to be ignored or glossed over. First and foremost, it is highly problematic that a proof such as ijmā, which is accepted as religious evidence (الإدلة الشرعية) and considered equivalent to mutawatir khabar, has gained legitimacy through the participation of a Masum whose existence cannot be proven. On the other hand, the fact that the imams, who are believed to have received revelation, fall into more contradictions than the Sunni sect imams, and

that some of these contradictions do not require taqiyya, raises serious questions about the knowledge of the imams or the validity of the narrations. Furthermore, the fact that the Hidden Imam, whose existence is considered obligatory by the Shiites, has not appeared despite so many problems and turbulent times is not in accordance with divine wisdom.

Shiite scholars state that when necessary, Umar would consult Ali's opinion. However, the permissibility of mut'ah marriage, the invalidity of divorce by three talaqs in one sitting, the bid'ah of performing tarawih prayers in congregation, and the requirement to say "Hayye alâ hayri'l-amel" instead of "es-Salâtu hayrun mine'n-nevm" in the morning adhan, appear to have been established as ijma' rulings in opposition to Caliph Umar. The basis for this is the methodology summarized as "whatever the public ('amma) says is wrong" and narrated from the imams regarding issues they disagreed on, which is also quite problematic. Shiite scholars accuse the Sunnis of accepting mere ijma, which is not based on the text, as evidence, and claim that their own ijma' is not like that. However, even though some of their own ijma' issues, which they consider equivalent to mutawatir, contradict the apparent meaning of the Qur'an, their insistence on using pure ijma' as evidence by stating, "Ijma' has been narrated in this way," and their disregard for the ijma' of Sunni Muslims, who constitute at least three-quarters of the Muslim ummah, represent serious contradictions that are incompatible with the meaning, purpose, and wisdom of ijma' as evidence.

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