



# **The Nature and Function of the Column of Light for the Imam**

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## **Abstract**

Guidance is necessary for leadership and Imamate, and the guides, with divine care and attention, consciously and steadfastly fulfill their role in this position. What is certain is that the necessity of such guidance includes special knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the world and the characteristics of human beings. The title of the column of light is indicative of one of the foundations and methods of the impeccable Imam's knowledge of hidden and unseen matters. Understanding the truth of the column of light and explaining its function and the reasons for using this title by the institution of Imamate are the three main axes of the present study, which has been organized in an analytical method and library approach. The result of the insight into the transferred knowledge in this area is that the column of light is a reality that signifies the relationship of angels with the center of

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guidance to achieve the issue of the Imam's knowledge to the actions of the servants, and therefore the internal guidance of the believers by the Imam, alongside other forms of guidance. The two issues of the Holy Spirit and challenge (Taḥaddī) also play a complete role in shaping the third side of the triangle, namely the column of light, and in fact, on the one hand, it provides the Imam with the benefit of a pure and sacred spirit and creates the ground for the angels' communication with them, and on the other hand, it provides the spiritual vessel of the Imam as a channel for the spiritual evolution of the believers.

**Keywords:** Imam, Column of Light, Guidance, Holy Spirit, Angels, Servants' Deed.

## Introduction

One of the fundamental issues in the field of knowledge and cognition is the discussion of sources of knowledge. Sources of knowledge can be divided into religious and non-religious sources; religious sources can be further categorized into specific and general sources of knowledge. In other words, religious sources of knowledge can be divided into two groups from a religious perspective, and the criterion for this division is the reception of knowledge. Sometimes the channels of acquiring or receiving religious knowledge are examined based on the type of human being, and sometimes sources of religious knowledge are considered for selected individuals in human society, such as religious leaders and scholars. The criterion for this division is the acceptance of the possibility of distinguishing between the sources of religious knowledge for followers and leaders, and the realization of this distinction. Therefore, in order to achieve religious knowledge, in addition to common channels and sources such as senses, reason, intuition, revelation, memory, testimony, or narrative reasons, specific

sources such as inspiration, revelation, and religious experience are also mentioned in this area. It is necessary, after becoming aware of these sources, to recognize the scope of each of these sources and channels, especially the extent of specific sources. Revelation is one of the most important sources of religious knowledge, and this tool and gateway of knowledge is specific to a particular group of people called messengers and divine prophets, and it embodies the realization of scientific and religious authority and divine guidance in its various layers. However, specific sources also encompass a wider range, and a review of Quranic teachings reveals that the relationship between humans and the Creator and angels is not only realized for the prophets and divine messengers, and the scope of this connection extends geographically beyond the title of messenger and prophet. One of the paths of religious knowledge and cognition is "Taḥdīth," which means speaking about the means of awareness of the unseen, symbolized by angels with the impeccable Imams. This concept, within the framework of Shia thought and ideology, provides various avenues for the attainment of knowledge, including inspiration, to continue divine guidance and religious and scientific authority after the seal of the Prophet.

Therefore, the science of the Imam goes beyond ordinary science and has access to hidden and celestial sources and channels. In addition to fulfilling the role of giving perfection and fulfilling the continuation of divine guidance in the era of the seal of prophethood, the Imam also has the responsibility of specific guidance or Imamate, and this position and role of guidance requires appropriate science and

awareness. Titles such as bearing witness and presenting deeds to the Imam and daily reporting, which are emphasized in verses and narrations (cf. Shaker, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 155-176), are examples of this guidance and the role of the Imam in it. The sources of Imam's knowledge are extensive and diverse, which can be divided into sciences transmitted from the Prophet and knowledge derived from communication with angels. Titles such as complete exegesis of the Quran, *Alfu Bābin*, *al-Jāmi'ah* Book, *Fāṭimah's Muṣḥaf*, *Ṣuḥuf* and books of prophets, *Taḥdīth*, and column of light can be substituted under these two streams.

One of the titles that stand out for one of the sources of Imam's knowledge, mentioning its characteristics and consequences in some narrations, is column of light ('*Amūdi Nūr*). In a narration with a valid sanad in *Baṣā'ir* from Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS), which mentions the characteristics of the Imam, it is narrated by *Ishāq ibn 'Ammār*: "*Al-Imam Yasma'ul Ṣawta fī Baṭni Ummihī faidhā Saqaṭa ilal Arḍi Kutiba 'alā 'Aḍudihil Ayman "Wa Tammat Kalimatu Rabbika Ṣidqan wa 'Adlan lā Mubaddila li Kalimātihī wa Huwa al-Samī'ul 'Alīm"*" *faidhā Tara'ra'a Naṣaba lahū 'Amūdan min Nūrin min al-Samā' ilal Arḍi Yarā bihī A'mālul 'Ibādi.*" (*Ṣaffār*, 1984 AD/1404 AH: 431)

Similarly, in the collection of narrations of this group, similar titles such as "Minaret of Light" or "Lighthouse of Light" have been used. *Kulaynī* quotes a valid document, stating: "*Lā Tatakallamū fil Imam fainnal Imama Yasma'ul Kalāma wa huwa fī Baṭni Ummihī faidhā Waḍa'athu Katabal Malaku bayna 'Aynayhi wa Tammat Kalimatu Rabbika Ṣidqan wa 'Adlan lā Mubaddila li Kalimātihī wa huwa al-*

Samī‘ul ‘Alīm faidhā Qāma bil’amri Rufī‘a lahū fī Kulli Baldatin Manārun Yanḍuru minhu ilal A‘māli‘l ‘Ibādi." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 388)

The narrations that can be examined below these titles have a common point, which is the effect and consequence of this source. Although differences and variations in words and phrases of narrations are observed in the title, time, or expression of the word and verb used for what is related to column of light. The commonality among the narrations is the connection of the vertical or lighthouse or lamp of light with the actions of servants and creatures. In other words, it can be claimed that the narrations in this regard indicate the Imam's knowledge of human actions and deeds. This common issue will help the collector of hadiths to summarize and draw conclusions from this source of Imam's science.

The present study, after a brief look at the arrangement of column of light narrations in hadith books and semantics of the keywords of column of light narrations, namely column, minaret, and light, refers to the applications of these words in narrations and, more generally, in the words of predecessors. Then, it examines the historical and documental aspects and finally analyze its concepts.

## 1. Background

The following articles have been done on this subject: "The Essence of Column of Light" in the Works of Muhammad Taghi Shaker and Rasool Razavi; "An Analysis of Kohlberg's Method in Understanding the Visual Powers of the Imams with a Focus on the Fiqh al-Hadith of

the Imamiyah" by Mahyar Khani Moghadam. This work has made a significant effort and progress in this field using these sources.

## 2. Arrangement of Column of Light Narrations in the Hadith Books

The abundance of column of light narrations (about thirty-five narrations) and the difference in wording has led the late Şaffār to present these narrations under several chapters in his "Başā'ir al-Darajāt." Some of them refer to the time, some to the quality, some to the place, some to the realization, some to the consequences and results, and some to the reasons for having column of light (Şaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 431-443).

Kulaynī in "al-Kāfi" in a chapter titled "Mawālīd al-A'imma" presents eight narrations, five of which are about the issue of column of light, and most of them are expressed with words similar to "Minaret of Light." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 385-389) The occurrence of column of light narrations under this chapter in "al-Kāfi" shows that the issue of column of light has a close connection with the nature and creation of the Imams in the narrations.

The reporting of these narrations in "Biḥār" is dedicated to the book "al-Imāmah," and from this collection, most are under three chapters titled: "Aḥwālu Wilādatihim 'Alayhimussalām wa In'iqādi Nuṭafihim wa Aḥwālihikim fil Raḥimi wa 'indal Wilādati wa Barakāti Wilādatihim Şalawātullāhi 'alayhim wa fihi Ba'du Gharā'ibi 'Ulūmihim wa Shu'ūnihim," (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 25, 36) "Jāmi' fī Şifātil Imām wa Sharā'iṭ al-Imāmah," (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 25, 115)

"Annallāha Ta'ālā Yarfa'u lil Imām 'Amūdan Yanḍuru bihī ilā A'mā'il 'Ibād" (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 25, 132) that according to the content of the hadiths, Allamah has put forward some of them in accordance with the manner of Imam's birth, a group of them in line with the characteristics and conditions of the Imam, and some of them in the discussion of the Imam's awareness of human deeds and how this is done.

### 3. Terminology

In the narrations of column of light, the mind is more associated with three words: Column ('Amūd), minaret (Mīnārah) and light (Nūr).

1) Column: It is a wooden pole on which a tent or canopy is supported. The plural of it is "Umud (columns)" and "Amad" it is also used to refer to something made of iron or wood that a person holds onto while leaning on it (Farāhīdī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 2, 58). Ibn Athīr in the "al-Nihāyah" after explaining the meaning of column considers the essence of column to be strengthening and preserving, similar to a column (Ibn al-Athīr, 1985 AD/1364 SH: 3, 297). In fact, column is a support that holds and preserves what is leaned on it, which is why it is referred to as "Column" for the pillars of houses and tall buildings, most of which were cylindrical in shape and formed the structure's strength.

2) Minaret: Ibn Manzūr in Lisān al-'Arab considers Minaret to be a place of light and a signpost. He writes: Minaret, which is the plural of Manārah, means a sign placed between two boundaries. Minār al-Haram is a signpost that Ibrahim placed around the sanctuary to

distinguish the boundaries of the Ḥaram from the Ḥill (Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 5, 242). These signposts were made in a cylindrical and tall shape to be visible from a distance.

3) Light: In the definition of Nūr, this words and illumination are commonly used (Farāhīdī, 1989 AD/1410 SH: 8, 276). Rāghib in Mufradāt divides light into two groups: Worldly light and hereafter light, and worldly light into two types: Rational light and sensory light. He writes in the definition of rational light: Light that helps the eye of the heart and insight. Examples of Quranic rational light can be found in verses such as (al-Mā'idah: 15; al-Zumar: 22; al-Nūr: 35; al-An'ām: 122; al-Shurā: 52; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1990 AD/1412 AH: 4, 407- 406).

#### 4. Applications of the Term Column of Light

The applications of column of light in narrations can generally be divided into two categories.

**First Category:** Narrations in which a common theme cannot be found and the term "Column of Light" has been used in various and diverse issues. For example:

1) The issue of the events surrounding the creation of Ibrahim and the display of a vertical light in the middle of the earth to the horizons of the sky, which is known as the light of the Prophet (Masoudi, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 96);

2) In the 'Ilal al-Sharāyi', a narration is mentioned in which the term column of light is used in relation to the physical creation and the appearance of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt (Ibn Bābawayh, 2006



3) In a narration about the events of resurrection and paradise, the issue of the presence of the column of light in the hands of the angels is mentioned. "Biyadi Kulli Malakin 'Amūdun min Nūr ḥattā Yadkhulal Jannah" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 52);

4) In Tafsir Qumī, at the beginning of Surah "Ṣāffāt," about verse "Innā Zayyannā al-Samā'a al-Donyā bi Zīnatinil Kawākib," it is narrated from Imam Ali (AS): "Lihādhihil Nujūmi allatī fissamā'i Madā'ini allatī fil Arḍi Marbūṭatun Kulla Madīnatin bi 'Amūdin min Nūrin Ṭūlu Dhālikal 'Amūdi fissamā'i Masīratun Mi'atayni wa Khamsīna Sanatun" (Qumī, 1988 AD/1367 SH: 2, 219; 4, 591);

5) From Ibn Jurayḥ in the story of the food of the Children of Israel in the divine favors, it is mentioned: "Wa Kāna Yanzilu 'Alayhim fillayli minassamā'i 'Amūdun min Nūrin Yuḍī'u lahum Makānal Sirāji." (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 13, 167) In the Book of Exodus, there is also a reference to a pillar of fire that guided them: "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night ..." (Exodus: 13-21 and cf. Nehemiah: 9-19);

6) In Biḥār al-Anwār, Allamah Majlisī writes below verse 18 of Surah al-Ḥijr: "Illā man Istaraqa al-Sam'a fa Atba'ahū Shihābun Mubīn" writes: "Al-Shahābu 'Amūdun min Nūrin Yuḍī'u Dīyā' al-Nār la Shiddata Dīyā'ihī" (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 SH: 55, 68);

7) In relation to Imam Zamān and the quality of his appearance, the issue of "Column of Light" has been raised in these narrations. After the call of Imam to his followers, it is mentioned: "Faya'murullāhu 'Azza wa Jalla al-Nūra fa Yaṣīru 'Amūdan minal Arḍi ilā al-Samā'i fa Yastaḍī'u bihi

Kullu Mu'minin 'Alā Wajhil Arḍi" (Biḥār al-Anwār: 53, 7);

8) In a narration from Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh, the Prophet said, "God has a standard and a vertical pillar of light, which He created two thousand years before the creation of the heavens and the earth" (ibid: 26, 318; 27, 129);

9) In the story of Lot's departure, it is mentioned that when Gabriel asked him to leave his land, Lot asked how he could leave while people had gathered around his house. Gabriel placed a vertical pillar of light in front of him and said, "Follow this column so they cannot reach you" (ibid: 12, 158);

10) The Prophet has referred to the beneficiaries of the bright column under the Throne as only Ali and his followers, "Inna lillāhi 'Amūdan Taḥtal 'Arshi Yuḍī'u li Ahlil Jannati kamā Tuḍī'ul Shamsu li Ahliddunyā lā Yanāluhū illā 'Alīyyun wa Muḥibbūhu" (ibid: 39, 269);

11) Another usage of the term "Column of Light" is to express spiritual connection and ascension. For example, "Innal 'Abda idhā Sajada Imtadda min A'nāni al-Samā'i 'Amūdun min Nūr ilā Mawḍi'a Sujūdihī faidhā Rafa'a Aḥadukum Ra'sahū minal Sujūdi fal Yamsaḥ bi Yadihī Mawḍi'u Sujūdihī." (Mufīd, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 109) When a servant prostrates, a vertical column of light extends from the heavens to the place of his prostration. So, when one of you raises his head from prostration, let him wipe the place of his prostration with his hand. This narration indicates a truth that is realized in a specific state for a person, even if he cannot see this truth himself.

In conclusion, the usage of "Column of Light" in these narrations and other mentioned expressions is in a real sense, referring to

tangible light and brightness, symbolized by the term "Column of Light," signifying greatness and magnificence.

**Second Category:** The narrations that discuss the issue of the Imam's knowledge and awareness of the actions of his followers and the use of the term "Column of Light" to explain the Imam's knowledge of human deeds are significant. To further explain this matter, first, an examination of the historical and documentary evidence is conducted, followed by the categorization of the narrations of column of light, and then an analysis of the nature of column of light.

## **5. Historical and Documentary Examination of the Column of Light Narrations**

It has been stated that approximately thirty-five narrations regarding the issue of column of light have been transmitted. Among them, "Muḥammad ibn Marwān" transmits nine narrations, except for three narrations transmitted through Fuḍayl ibn Yasār, the rest are directly from the Imam. "Yūnus ibn Ḍibyān" is also considered a significant narrator in this field, transmitting eight narrations.

In the historical and general analysis of the issue of column of light, based on the documents and the paths of the narrations, it is clear that this issue was raised during the time of Imam Bāqir (AS) and reached its peak during the time of Imam Ṣādiq (AS). However, the narrations indicate that the issue of column of light, its essence, and a precise understanding of it, was a new issue and was being developed in the minds of the Imams' companions. It was during the time of Imam Riḍā (AS) that it was clearly explained, to the extent

that the explicit explanation of the truth of the column of light by Imam Riḍā (AS), brought the Shia community out of confusion about its explanation, as narrators such as Ibn Faḍḍāl, Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā, Yūnus ibn ‘Abdul Raḥmān, and consequently the Shia community, were rescued from the confusion regarding its explanation.

The phrase "Lā Tazālu Tajī’u bil Ḥadīthil Ḥaqq" (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 388) in the narration of Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā ibn ‘Ubayd indicates the existence of ambiguous, Mujmal, and even fabricated narrations in this field, to the extent that this has provided the ground for misunderstanding and mistakes, even among the great companions of the Imams.

Another point that is evident in the narrations of the column of light is the narration of this issue by some of the prominent jurists among the companions of the Imams. Fuḍayl ibn Yasār, with three narrations regarding the issue of the column of light, two of which are from Imam Bāqir (AS) (Şaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 436, 437) and one narration without the Imam's name (ibid: 435), is one of the individuals described as being knowledgeable in jurisprudence. Allamah Ḥillī, after verifying and honoring him, writes about him: "He is one of those whose verification has been agreed upon and is accepted by the great scholars in the field of jurisprudence." (Ḥillī, 1990 AD/1411 AH: 132) Kashshī, under the title "Fī Tasmīyatil Fuqahā’i min Aşḥābi Abī Ja‘far wa Abī ‘Abdillāh," writes: There is a consensus on the verification and knowledge of six individuals among the companions of Imam Bāqir (AS) and Imam Şādiq (AS), and among them, Fuḍayl ibn Yasār is mentioned (Kashshī, 1969 AD/1348 SH: 238).

Likewise, the behavior of Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Faḍḍāl in the authentic narration of Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā ibn ‘Ubayd, regarding the report of Yūnus ibn ‘Abdul Raḥmān from Imam Riḍā (AS), indicates another intellectual concern of the Imami jurists regarding this issue (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 388). Kashshī has considered him as one of the jurists among the companions of the Imams and the most prominent scholars (Najāshī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 120; Kashshī, 1969 AD/1348 SH: 345). Allamah Ḥillī introduces him as one of the specialists of Imam Riḍā (AS) (Ḥillī, 1990 AD/1411 AH: 37).

## **6. Different Type of the Column of Light Narration**

One of the issues that have been mentioned in various ways in the narrations of the column of light is the topic of the time or the point of the beginning of the bestowal of the column of light upon the Imam. If we want to use this as a criterion to divide the narrations, we can refer to six groups of hadiths:

1) The first category of narrations, which mentions the closest time after the formation of the sperm, are the narrations that introduce the receiving of the Imam's sperm as the recipient of the column of light from the Almighty God on the fortieth night after being in the womb (Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 439, 440);

2) Narrations that have focused on the time after the birth and coming into the world of the Imam (ibid: 433, 431, 434; ‘Ayyāshī, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 1, 374);

3) A narration that considers the time of the Imam's speaking as the

beginning. However, considering that some narrations have mentioned the time of the Imam's speaking after his birth with the recitation of verses from the Quran, this narration can be placed in the same group as the previous narrations. "Faidhā Hīya Waḍa'athu Saṭa'a lahā Nūrun Sāṭi'un ilassamā'i... faidhā Huwa Takallama Rafa'allāhu lahū 'Amūdan" (ibid: 431);

4) Narrations that mention a later time than the time of birth and speaking of the Imam, that is, the time of "Tara'ra' (growth)." "Tara'ra'," which is mentioned in this category of narrations, as Allamah Majlisī explains, is the time of the child's walking and growing. "Faidhā Tara'ra'a Nuṣiba lahū 'Amūdun min Nūrin minassamā'i ilal Arḍi Yarā bihī A'mālal 'Ibādi;" (ibid: 431, 434, 435)

5) Narrations that consider the time of the establishment of the column of light to be during the youth and to some extent the adolescence of the Imam (ibid: 433, 435, 437);

6) The last category of narrations introduces the time of this event as coinciding with the time of the Imamate: "Faidhā Maḍā Dhālikal Imām alladhī Qablahū Rafa'a lahū Manāran." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 387, 388; Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 434) In most of these narrations, the phrase "Faidhā Qāma bil Amri" has been used (Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 435, 436, and 437).

Furthermore, it is possible to add narrations in which one of the mentioned times in the previous categories is not mentioned, but by using the term "Imam" in an absolute sense, they have considered the Imam to be the recipient of the column of light. This can be added to the sixth category of narrations because using the term "Imam" in an

absolute sense and the lack of mention of a specific time for it implies the appearance and even the explicit mention of the time of the divine Imamate and leadership.

A recurring issue in the various categories of these narrations is the matter of hearing the voice or speech from the Imam in the womb of the mother and before birth (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 388; Şaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 435). However, the narrations have not considered this issue related to the column of light. Among the narrations, two of them refer to the vision of the Imam before birth, one of which considers it related to a column of light that is set for the Imam on the fortieth night after the transfer of the sperm. "Faidhā Istaqarrat fil Raḥimi Arba‘īna Laylatin Naşaballāh lahū ‘Amūdan min Nūrin fī Baṭni Ummihī Yanḍuru minhu Madda Başarihī: When He took residence in the womb for forty nights, God installs a vertical pillar of light for him in his mother's abdomen, allowing him to see and behold the world with that gaze." (Şaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 440) Another narration presents the issue of the vision of the Imam before birth in an absolute sense and considers it specific to him and a gift from the divine power (ibid: 438).

Regardless of the examination of the sources of the two mentioned narrations, it can be said that the discussion of the vision of the Imam before birth is the starting point for the stages and degrees of vision and the column of light after birth until the time of Imamate. Just as the narration explicitly states that the vision of the Imam before birth encompasses a specific measure and a limited place (Yanḍuru minhu Madda Başarihī), it seems that the content and effects of these two

stages of the column of light cannot be compared in terms of breadth and limitation. The statements about the reason for mentioning the hearing of the sound by the fetus can be considered as evidence of the claim of the difference between the two expressions of the column of light before and after birth. These statements have mentioned to the close ones and the companions about the type of speaking to the fetus, which implies that this hearing is also limited and, in fact, necessitates behavioral and verbal care for those who are in contact with the fetus.

## **7. The Target Society and the Challenge of Explaining Teaching**

One of the thought-provoking statements in examining the hadith and history of the period of the impeccable Imam presence was the creation of a collective reaction and sensitivity towards certain words or titles. To put it more clearly, sometimes a misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of a doctrine would lead to the closure of the path for expressing other doctrines, and in the event of presenting those doctrines, an attack on inappropriate relationships would be raised. For example, the issue of knowledge of the unseen and the interpretation that has been found in this title during the period of the Imam's presence can be mentioned (cf. Shaker, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 67-68).

At a certain point in time, the general interpretation, far from a correct understanding of the position of Imamate, was that with the end of prophethood and the passing of the Holy Prophet, the path of human communication with the unseen world and angels was also



closed.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, after the Prophet, the common ignorance of any knowledge of hidden affairs, due to being associated with angels or the unseen world, was considered unacceptable and contrary to the principles of religious foundations. Sometimes, among the believers in true Imamate, belief in such knowledge for the impeccable Imam was also mistakenly dismissed as exaggeration (cf. Shaker, 1394: 187-211).

One example of this discourse is the issue of presenting deeds, which is also found in the prophetic narrations and is familiar to the religious community. Analyzing the prophetic discourse in this area, considering the realization of divine revelation for the Prophet, is understandable and comprehensible for the audience. However, the nature and the result of the realization of presenting deeds, which the Quran has addressed, were facing doubt and denial in the continuity of prophethood, that is, the chain of Imamate. Therefore, explaining the superior layers of the teachings related to the institution of Imamate is necessary for creating the groundwork for accepting these teachings and establishing the position of Imamate for benefiting properly from this institution, because true knowledge and understanding are

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1. To acquire knowledge of the historical evidence supporting this discourse, one may refer to the extensive and valuable account by Nubakhtī regarding the Imamiyyah divergence on the means of acquiring awareness and the intellectual development of Imam Jawād at such a tender age. It is noteworthy that this matter, namely the Imamate of a young and tender-aged Imam, was a novel phenomenon, necessitating an evaluation of the Imam's knowledge in various fields, the intellectual foundation of his companions, and the quality of the Imam's knowledge in preceding eras based on established principles from the past (cf. Nubakhtī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 88-90).

necessary and the first step towards traversing the path and understanding the capability and ultimate goal. However, this matter faced challenges that required the adoption of certain methods. One of these methods included the use of various expressions, sometimes accompanied by similes (reasonable simile to the perceptible) and ironic phrases, which perhaps the interpretation of the "Column of Light" and similar terms such as "Mişbāḥ of Light" and "Minaret of Light" were used to consider the level of understanding of the audience.

## 8. Nature of the Column of Light

To understand the nature of the column of light, relevant hadiths can be divided into two general categories. This division, based on generality and detail or ambiguity and clarification in defining the column of light, includes a group of hadiths in explaining another group.

The first category includes hadiths that have focused more on the consequence, result, and effect of the column of light, rather than explaining the nature and elaborating on the subject of the column of light. These hadiths have used the title of the column of light or similar titles to convey the message that the Imam is a witness and observer of the deeds of God's servants, and no explanation is seen in them regarding the essence of the column of light.

The second category includes hadiths that, in addition to explaining the path of the column of light, have also explained the purpose of the column of light, although limitedly.

1) Expressions that refer to the granting of the column of light to the Imam. The content and tone of these expressions show that the column of light is not a separate matter from the Imam, but it is a feature and ability in the Imam that God has provided for him to protest against His creatures. For example, the second hadith in this category, which refers to the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit with the Imam, is another reason for this issue. Like the hadith that, after referring to the existence of the minaret of light, says, "Fabihādhā Yaḥtājallāhu ‘alā Khalqihī." In the following hadith, Māzandarānī refers the separate pronoun "Hādhā" to the Imam (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 387; Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 432; Māzandarānī, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 6, 360).

2) Narrations that introduce the column of light alongside the Holy Spirit and the specific Imam.

Shaykh Ṣadūq narrates from Ḥasan b. Jahm in "Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā" that in a gathering that Ma'mūn had arranged in the presence of Imam Riḍā (AS), various scholars and sects of Ahl al-Kalam were present. They asked the Imam 'How he could know the intentions and hearts of people?' The Imam, referring to a prophetic narration, "Ittaqū Firāsatal Mu'min fainnahū Yanḍuru bi Nūrillāh," explained that believers, according to their level of faith, insight, awareness, and knowledge, are endowed with divine light that reveals the truths to them. Then, the Imams, who are endowed with all that is distributed among believers, are introduced as a complete example of the verse,

"Inna fī Dhālika la Ayātun lil Mutiwassimīn."

The narrator of the hadith says that Ma'mūn looked at the Imam and asked him to elaborate on the unique characteristics of the Imams that God has given them more than anyone else. Imam Riḍā (AS), completing what he had said, added, "Innallāha 'Azza wa Jalla qad Ayyadanā bi Rūḥin minhu Muqaddasatin Muṭahharatin laysat bi Malikin lam Takun ma'a Aḥadin mimman Maḍā illā ma'a Rasūlillāh wa Hīya ma'al A'immati hunā Tusaddiduhum wa Tuwaffiqahum wa huwa 'Amūdun min Nūrin baynanā wa baynallāhi 'Azza wa Jalla." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 2, 200)

In this narration, after a preamble on faith, knowledge, insight, and complete possession of the Imams, the Imam attributes his success and guidance to a spiritual rank where only sanctity and purity exist. To dispel the misconception of being a ruler or having a connection with angels, he denies the concept of dominion and calls it a special and distinct spiritual rank for the Prophet and his pure family. In fact, this is the same spirit that, with the help of the column of light, gains awareness of the intentions and hearts of people.

The following narration, in light of the previous narration and the interpretation of the Imam regarding the concept of the column of light, can confirm the claim that the column of light is a means by which the Imam, due to possessing a special soul, has the ability to use it to see and witness the actions of all servants.

Shaykh Ṣadūq quotes Imam Riḍā (AS) as saying: "The Imam is supported by the Holy Spirit, and between him and Allah, there is a column of light in which the actions of the servants are seen, and

everything that is needed is indicated to him, and it is expanded for him so that he knows and understands, and then it is withdrawn so that he does not know." (Ibn Bābawayh, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 2, 528; Ibn Bābawayh, 1378: 1, 213)

Furthermore, the narration of Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar from Imam Ja‘far Ṣādiq, in addition to confirming the connection of the column of light with the Holy Spirit in the above narration, attributes knowledge and vision of the east and west of the world to the Holy Spirit, "Wa Rūḥul Qudus Thābitun Yarā bihī mā fī Sharqil Arḍi wa Gharbiḥā wa Barriḥā wa Baḥriḥā." (Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 454)

Similarly, the narration of Jābir from Imam Bāqir (AS) indicates this point where he says: "The Holy Spirit is from God ... The Holy Spirit does not have fun, change, or play and it is the Holy Spirit that is aware of everything." (ibid: 453)

There are also many other narrations that attribute the Imam's knowledge of the unseen or the Imam's knowledge to the absolute attribution of the Imam's soul (ibid: 455, 456, 458, and 459).

The conclusion of these narrations could be that the Imam, through the Holy Spirit which is a gift from God, gains knowledge of the actions of the servants by looking at the column of light.

3) Narrations that introduce light as the descended soul on the Night of Qadr: From Imam Bāqir, it is narrated in response to a question about Surah al-Qadr: "We have sent it down as a light to the prophets and the successors. They do not seek anything from the sky or the earth except to remember it. Therefore, that light is given to them."

(ibid: 280, 442) In this narration, the Imam attributes the divine abilities to the light that is with them, based on the Surah al-Qadr and the discussion of the soul and its being from God (min 'indī), which the Imam speaks of in the narration, the connection between light, Imam, and the Imam's soul becomes clear.

4) Some narrations have interpreted the issue of "Nuqir" in hearing as "Column." Ishāq Qumī quotes Imam Bāqir (AS) at the end of a long narration: "Another column of light is raised from Allah to the ear of the Imam to fulfill his further needs." (ibid: 442) Imam Ṣādiq (AS) says in this regard: "For Allah, it is a column of light that is hidden from the sight of His creatures, one end is with Allah and the other end is in the ear of the Imam. When Allah wills something, He reveals it to the ear of the Imam." (ibid: 439) From the collection of Taḥdīth narrations, it is understood that the indications of this are "Hearing" and "Inspiration" in the heart, which indicates that the executor of the realization of Taḥdīth for the Imam is an angel (Shaker, 2018 AD/1397 SH, 20-230).

Allamah Majlisī, in the context of the narrations about the column of light, despite the apparent differences, denies the contradiction between the narrations and suggests several possibilities for the title of the column of light:

- It may indeed refer to light, meaning that God creates a light for the Imam in which the actions of His servants become apparent to the Imam;
- The column of light may be a reference to the Holy Spirit;

- It could refer to an angel bringing news and awareness to the Imam;
- It could mean that God has placed the Imam as the place and source of divine inspirations and effusions (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 25, 40).

However, it seems that among the possibilities mentioned by the Allamah, there is a possibility of overlap, as the Holy Spirit is a spiritual rank that is a condition and prerequisite for the manifestation of the channels and sources of knowledge for the Imam (cf. Shaker, *The Nature of the Holy Spirit and Its Effects*).

The mentioned narrations also address the issue of the Holy Spirit and link it with the concept of the column of light, indicating that the Imam's knowledge of the actions of God's servants has its roots in the specific position and status of the Imam. According to the narration of Imam Riḍā (AS) and the narrations about the Holy Spirit, the pure and divine spirit of the Imam, which is a divine matter, benefits from the capacity and power to gain knowledge of the actions based on the divine will and desire and this same spirit provides the power and capability for the Imam's vision and knowledge. This matter is not only supported by narrations but is also entirely provable and confirmable with Quran verses.

Undoubtedly, this light will be a means for the Imam to utilize, and without the Holy Spirit, the existence of this light will be ineffective, just as a narration explicitly states that other people are deprived of seeing this light. In other words, all the knowledge and sciences of the Imam have their roots in his utilization of the Holy and Pure Spirit

that God bestows upon him. However, by accepting that the result of the Holy Spirit is knowledge and awareness, it must be said that, as a result of this Holy and Pure Spirit, two effects occur:

1) Knowledge and awareness that the Holy Spirit directly acquires and adorns, or in other words, along with the utilization of the Holy Spirit, this knowledge is also present for the recipient of the spirit;

2) The knowledge and awareness that may be possible to achieve and benefit from the Holy Spirit may have divine intermediaries, such as revelation through Gabriel, or other sciences that are fulfilled for the Imam through the Prophet (PBUH).

The narration of Imam Riḍā (AS) clearly responds to this issue. Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā narrates that we were sitting with Faḍḍāl when Yūnus ibn ‘Abdul Raḥmān came to us and said, "I have arrived in the presence of Ali ibn Mūsā and I mentioned to him that people talk a lot about the column! The Imam said to me, ‘What do you mean by the column, do you mean the iron column?’" Mullā Šāliḥ Māzandarānī writes about this statement of the Imam: "Dhikrul Ḥadīd ‘alā Sabīl al-Tamthīl wa illā faqad Yakūnul ‘Amūd min Khashab wa Naḥwihī" (Māzandarānī, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 6, 364) which is raised for your Imam. I said, "I don't know." The Imam said, "Rather, the column of light is an angel who is responsible for every city, and through him, God elevates and makes visible the actions of the inhabitants of that city." Ibn Faḍḍāl, upon hearing Yūnus's words, became very happy, kissed his head, and said, "Always bring the speech and words of truth, and so that God may create openings for us through it."



(Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 388)

Firstly, the beginning and the end of the narration clearly indicate that the issue of the column of light was a well-known and discussed topic among the people, and it was used with various interpretations and contradictions. In such a way that one of the prominent companions of the Imams was led to investigate the truth of it and question the confusion of the people about it.

In any case, the narration explicitly relates the column of light to the work and actions of the servants, meaning it can be claimed that the column of light is the result of the actions of humans, and the Imam, with the possession of the Holy Spirit and the observation of these columns, which radiate from every city and settlement, becomes aware of the actions of the servants (Raḍawī, 1964 AD/1343 SH: 261); and the narrations interpret it as Yarā, Yabşur, Yanzur, Yashruf, Ya‘lam, Naşb and Ya‘rif (Şaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 431-438).

As the narrations emphasize, all of these continuous and immense events are related to the elevated and holy spirit of the Imam, which provides the possibility of divine oversight and encompassment of the actions of the servants of God. Therefore, in the discussion of the observation of actions, emphasis is placed on their holy spirit, so as to explain the impossibility of simultaneous awareness of this extensive knowledge, considering the capacity and power granted by God to the Imam.

## **9. The Quranic Foundations of the Column of Light**

The subject of witnessing, as the Allamah has stated in al-Mīzān, is

one of the complex and intricate subjects of the Quran (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 12, 322). Witnessing in the Holy Quran can be divided into different categories, as mentioned by commentators, among the witnesses and testifiers mentioned in the Quran, it is necessary to refer to the testimony of the Prophet and the witnesses after him. The forty-fifth verse of Surah al-Aḥzāb and the eighth verse of Surah al-Faṭḥ indicate one of the missions of the Prophet as the issue of being a witness: "O Prophet! Indeed, We have sent you as a witness." But 'Do these witnesses exist after the end of prophethood, and do they testify to the actions of humans?'

Numerous narrations under the verses of witnessing that indicate its continuity have explained the instances of witnesses. For example, a narration from Imam Bāqir (AS) quotes verse 141 of Surah al-Baqarah: "We are the nation of moderation and we are the witnesses of God over His creation and His proof on His earth." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 191; Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 63-83; 'Ayyāshī, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 1, 62) Additionally, in other narrations, the Imams (AS) are introduced as examples of believers in the verse "Say, Work, for Allah will see your work, and His Messenger and the believers." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 220; Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 409)

It is also reported from the Samā'ah that Imam Ja'far Ṣādiq (AS) said in reference to the verse 'So how [will it be] when We bring from every nation a witness and We bring you, [O Muhammad], against these [people] as a witness?': "It was revealed specifically about the nation of Muhammad, and in every century, there is an Imam from us as a witness against them, and Muhammad is a witness against us."

(Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 1, 190)

It is also reported from Abū Ḥamzah Thumālī from Imam Bāqir (AS) that he said in reference to the same verse: "We are the witnesses over this nation." (Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 4, 179)

Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, based on the phrase "Min Anfusihim" in the verse "Wa Yawma Nab'athu fī Kulli Ummatin Shahīdan 'alayhim min Anfusihim wa Ji'nā bika Shahīdan 'alā Hā'ulā'," (al-Naḥl: 89) believes that the witness referred to is a human who has the capability of observation and impeccability; because if there is no observation, the phrase "from among themselves" would lose its significance, as the Prophet is not contemporaneous with every individual. The apparent restriction of "Min Anfusihim" implies that the testimony is not based on rational or intellectual evidence, but rather on observation and perception. Therefore, there must be a witness from among themselves for every nation. Otherwise, the testimony would not be valid, as a witness without observation is not a true witness. Furthermore, according to the verse related to the story of Jesus, a witness is someone who is alive and can see. Also, considering the verse "Wa Jī'a binnabīyyīna washshuhadā'i," it emphasizes the non-equivalence of being a witness and being a prophet (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 12, 466-467).

The concept of observation, perception, and presentation of deeds to the Prophet and the believers of the Islamic community is related to the issue of guidance, specifically post-guidance or the delivery of the desired outcome and the specific role of the Imam in this stage.

The issue of the "Column of Light," mentioned in narrations as a

form of awareness of the deeds of the servants of God, is completely consistent with the presentation of deeds as a Quranic doctrine. According to the narrations, the content and subject of this title are the deeds of the servants that are under the control of the Imam, and the subject and content of presenting the deeds are precisely the behavior and actions of the servants.

The consequence of the existence of the column of light for the Imam is, in general, the ability to observe and see the deeds of human beings. This concept is mentioned in similar phrases in all groups of hadiths related to the column of light. The emphasis on the column of light's significance is the Imam's awareness and knowledge of the behavior, actions, and reactions of human beings and God's servants. Expressions like "Yu'rafu bihī al-Ḍamīr," "Yushrafu bihī 'alā Ahlil ARḍ," "Kullu mā Iḥtajja ilayhi li Dilālati Aṭṭali'ū 'alayh," and "Lā Yasturu 'anhu minhā Shay'un" (Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 431-441) show that the illusion of mere observation without knowledge and awareness of the truth of deeds and intentions is invalid. Similarly, the difference in the interpretation of the Imam's knowledge and awareness with verbs such as Yarā, Yabṣur, Yanẓur, Yashruf, Ya'lam, and Ya'rif (ibid.) aims to elucidate the quality and method of the Imam's knowledge and awareness beyond the apparent actions, namely hearts and intentions. Of course, the most common verb used in hadiths is "Yarā," which is consistent with the Quranic doctrine of observing deeds, and other verbs should be considered as another expression of observation and its interpretation.

## 10. Some Functions of the Column of Light

162 It was clear that the foundation of the column of knowledge among

other ways of bestowing knowledge on the Imams, providing the Imam with awareness of the actions of God's servants on the path of guidance. By reviewing the narrations related to the Imams' supervision over the actions of God's servants, this issue becomes clearer, and the range of the column of light's meaning also expands. Some examples of such narrations are:

"The column of light is a helper and a bestowed of success that informs the impeccable Imam of the hidden faith and hypocrisy in people's hearts unless God Almighty, for the sake of their benefit, conceals knowledge from the Imam<sup>1</sup>. Through this light, the inner self becomes apparent to him without any veil. Therefore, Imam Riḍā (AS) wrote in a letter to some of his companions, "When we see people, we recognize their true faith or true hypocrisy." (‘Atārudī, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 1, 159-160) For someone who has taken the column of light from the tent of the natural world and is filled with it to the realm of the unseen, the hearts of God's servants are as clear as their bodies, without any veil.

Furthermore, the narration of Imam Bāqir (AS) also reveals the message of the column of light when a column of light appeared between the impeccable Imam and the Almighty God. He said, "Anyone who calls us Ahlul Bayt liars and lies to us is the most dishonest person compared to God and His Messenger; because when they deny us or lie to us, they actually call God and His Messenger

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1. As God almighty says about the Prophet: "Wa mimman Ḥawlakum minal A‘rābi Munāfiqūna wa min Ahlil Madīnati Maraduwwan ‘alannifāqi lā Ta‘lamuhum Naḥnu Na‘lamuhum." (al-Tawbah: 109)

liars, as we speak on behalf of the Almighty God and His Messenger." ('Atārudī, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 1, 160)

Therefore, the Imam does not need a narrator or transmitter to convey the news from the Messenger of Allah, as there is a luminous connection between the Imam and the Prophet. Also, when narrating something from Allah that is not related to practical laws and regulations, the narrator or storyteller is not needed.

This claim is supported by Shaykh Mufīd's narration from Sālim ibn Abī Ḥafsah: "When Imam Bāqir (AS) passed away, I told my friends to wait for me to go to Ja'far ibn Muḥammad and offer my condolences to him. When I went to his service and expressed my condolences for his father's passing, I said, "Innā lillāh wa innā ilayhi Rāji'ūn," I swear to God, someone has passed away who, when he said, "The Messenger of Allah said, he did not need to ask for an intermediary between him and the Messenger of Allah. I swear to God, he will never be seen again." Sālim says, "Abā 'Abdillāh remained silent for a moment. Then he said, "God Almighty says, "Some of my servants give charity with half a date, and I increase it for him as if he were raising his own horse until it becomes as big as Mount Uḥud." (Mufīd, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 354; Jawadi Amoli, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 59 and 60)

## Conclusion

The title "Column of Light" refers to a form of transcendent knowledge and awareness possessed by the Imam, which is found within the realm of intermediary sciences with the angelic intermediary.

The central and common theme in the narrations of the column of light links the knowledge derived from this source to the behavior of individuals and society. Based on this, the benefit of the Imam from the source of knowledge called the column of light enables the observation and ability to see the behavior and actions of humans. The reason for this is itself a significant and fundamental issue after proving and explaining the principle of this source and channel of knowledge. The reason for granting this source of knowledge to the Imam is expressed as "So that God may have an argument against His creatures."

Therefore, the Imam's possession of this source is in line with the oversight that God has established over the behavior of humans, and it serves as evidence for the behavior of individuals in the path of evolution chosen by each individual and group.

With the above clarification, the issue of the column of light, emphasizing the concept of observing actions, explains the method and means of the Imam's awareness of the actions of the servants as a Quranic doctrine. Hence, the origin of this doctrine can be counted as Quranic verses. In fact, the title "Column of Light" is a narrative title for the Quranic issue of awareness of the actions of the servants and the presentation of actions, to which attention is also given to the source and instrument of awareness.

The reason for the establishment of the term "Column of Light" returns to elements that necessitated the establishment and foundation of this title and the gradual explanation of its truth to prevent the challenging consequences of its nature.

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