

An Ethnographic Study of the Messianic Aspirations and Ethical Self-Fashioning of Twelver Shi'i Pilgrims in Iran

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy
University of Oxford
St Cross College
2024

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the pilgrimage of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims to the messianic Mosque of Jamkaran near the shrine city of Qom, the major locus of Iranian messianic anticipation. It examines how Shi'i messianism gained popularity after the Islamic Revolution – the belief in the imminent Advent of the Twelfth Imam, or Mahdi, at the End of Time – by providing an overview of the political and discursive reinterpretations that have led to messianic rhetoric's development, circulation, and management. It also explores the interconnection of messianic aspirations and pilgrimage and explains how this messianic journey helps them configure ethical self-fashioning. This thesis explores ethical self-fashioning and piety within the Mosque's context and outside its scope in daily life, providing insight into the multifaceted aspects of Muslim piety that go beyond Islamic discursive models. Based on the embodied and emotional experiences of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims during their pilgrimage and in daily life, this study outlines methods and techniques that can be used to shape and re-configure relationships with self and others. I argue that Jamkaran's messianic pilgrimage and its associated rituals assist my interlocutors in imagining novel relationships with themselves and others, including a personalised emotional relationship with the Hidden Imam. The Jamkaran messianic pilgrimage emphasises inner virtues as moral substance and promotes personalised affective relationships with the Hidden Imam. This inner connection and personalised relationship with the Hidden Imam enable my interlocutors to reformulate their relationships with him, themselves, and others in the present and future. Therefore, these ethical self-fashioning projects will animate hope and have a prospective temporal dimension. I attempt to examine the influence of the Jamkaran pilgrimage and its accompanying rituals on cultivating the moral spirit and self-refashioning methods of my interlocutors while also presenting the contradictions and challenges inherent in this self-refashioning through the examination of concepts like *entezār* (expectation for Mahdi's Advent), sin, repentance, and forgiveness during the pilgrimage, as well as in everyday life. By prioritising internal virtues and applying personal agency to redefining these concepts, pilgrims can sustain and cultivate their moral identity. Finally, I examine the persistence and continuity of pilgrimage experiences in everyday life, along with the instability, fluctuation, and ambivalence they exhibit. As a result, by addressing the moral failures of my interlocutors in their everyday lives, I

highlight the inadequacy of the pilgrimage experience as the only factor in moral self-fashioning and demonstrate the heterogeneous and fragmentary nature of the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience as a whole.

A Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, I use a simplified system of transliteration with a style recommended by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) for words and phrases in Arabic and Persian. The symbol (‘) is used for the letter ‘ayn and (ʾ) for the letter hamza. The text is written using fewer diacritics in an attempt to make it more reader-friendly. The only diacritic I have used is a macron, or bar, over vowels because Persian words have a large number of long vowels. I have used macrons (ā, ū, or ī) to indicate long vowels instead of utilising two vowels such as [aa], [uu], or [ii].

Acknowledgements

Life isn't fair sometimes. The PhD period in my life was probably one of the most painful periods in my life. I began it with the sudden death of my little brother, Mostafa, and ended it with my sister's cancer diagnosis. Despite all the hardships, from family and financial problems to the pandemic to the economic conditions of Iranian society, which were deteriorating daily, the endless support of my supervisors, family and friends helped me stay motivated and complete this thesis despite the obstacles.

My MPhil training in Cambridge, especially learning from the unfailing guidance of my teachers and mentors, whether in the form of participation in course seminars or numerous conversations in the office or over lunch and drinking coffee, played a profound role in my initial explorations and provided suitable context for the developed ideas of this thesis. My MPhil course at Cambridge University reflected these early explorations through small-field research. My initial draft, which subsequently contributed to this thesis, was greatly influenced by the constructive comments and practical guidance provided by Professor James Laidlaw at Cambridge. I thank James for his constructive comments on the first draft.

Moreover, I have benefited from Joel Robbins' Anthropology of Religion and Magic class at Cambridge and his advice about refining my ideas. In particular, I have benefited greatly from his fascinating monograph *Becoming Sinners*, which I cite frequently in this thesis.

In Oxford, Professor Morgan Clarke and Dr Zuzanna Olszewska were discerning supervisors and caring guides who helped me develop the initial plan that took shape at Cambridge. I am uncertain if I can repay them for their unfailing guidance, support, and faith. I cannot express how grateful I am for Morgan's comprehensive support of my project, who patiently understood all my personal issues and humbly improved all my scientific shortcomings. I would like to express my deepest respect for his warm generosity, both as a mentor and as a friend. I also owe Zuzanna a huge debt of gratitude for the knowledge, energy, insight, and scrutiny she provided to improve and strengthen my PhD thesis. Her constructive and wise advice has enabled me to gain insight into areas I might have overlooked by questioning many aspects of my writing, from broad arguments to specific concepts. I cannot express my gratitude in words for her support of me and my project.

I would also like to thank the Oxford Department of Anthropology and its dedicated staff, especially Mel Goodchild. Mel's efforts to resolve administrative issues and remove stressful obstacles so that I can move forward with peace of mind have inspired my deepest respect. In addition, I want to express my gratitude to the staff at St Cross College.

Last but not least, I cannot adequately describe my family's role in fulfilling this project. As a first step, I would like to thank my parents for everything they have taught me throughout my life. This project would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my parents and my lovely sisters, Mahdiah, Kosar, and Zahra. The unreserved support of my uncle Ali Mirrazi and his wife Fatemeh is also much appreciated.

I dedicate this thesis to Maman and Kosar, who dedicated the most effort to its completion. I would like to thank Maman, who nurtured the seed of hope in me and eagerly awaited the completion of my doctoral dissertation. In all my life crises, her loving arms have always been open to me. Through the years, Kosar has not only been my supporter but also my good friend and encouragement.

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Glossary

Āqā – gentleman, lord, used as a respectful form when referring to the Hidden Imam.

‘arizeh – Petition.

Chādor – veil worn by Iranian woman; all-covering veil worn over the state-prescribed hijab or modest clothing.

do‘ā – supplicatory prayers.

do‘āy-e faraj – the prayer for hastening the Hidden Imam’s Advent.

Entezār – it is a state of expectation, a belief in the possibility that the Hidden Imam will reappear at any moment.

Hadith (plural: ahādīth) – A collection of authoritative scriptures that contain a record of the Prophet's and Imam's actions and words.

Harām – forbidden by Islamic law.

Hidden Imam – For Twelver Shi‘i Muslims, the Hidden Imam is the twelfth and final divinely appointed successor of Prophet Muhammad through his grandson, Hussain. According to Twelver Shi‘ism, the Hidden Imam, known as the Mahdi, has been in occultation since 941 CE. In the End of Times, he will appear as a saviour to lead humanity and bring justice to earth, according to Twelver Shi‘ites.

Hukūmat-i Islāmī – Islamic Government.

Imam – In Shi‘i terms, the Imam is appointed by God as the nation's leader and is infallible. According to Shi‘i tradition, there are Twelve infallible Imams whom God has appointed to lead the nation.

Iman – Faith.

Mahdi – Shi‘i Messiah figure whose Advent is anticipated by Shi‘i Muslims; the Twelfth Imam.

Marja‘-i Taqlid – the source of emulation; the title confers a degree of authority on the highest rank of Twelver Shi‘i religious clerics, allowing them to make legal decisions within the bounds of Islamic law for followers and clerics below them.

Masjed – mosque.

Maqreb and ‘ishā’ namāz – evening prayers.

Menbar – stepped wooden pulpit on which a preacher sits.

Montazer – one who waits; in this context, someone who is waiting for the Advent of the Hidden Imam.

Namāz – obligatory prayer for Muslims performed five times a day.

Nazr – vow

Shabistān – a covered area of the mosque.

Shi'ites – the adherents of the Shi'i branch of Islam. They are supporters of 'Ali, Mohammad's son-in-law and cousin, as the legitimate successor of the Prophet Mohammad. I used this term to refer to the community of Shi'i believers.

Sūreh – Chapter of the *Quran*

'True montazer' (Persian: منتظر واقعی) – 'true expectant'; a person who follows the laws of *Shari'a* and cultivates a perfect model of piety and morality, strives to acquire virtuous personal preparation and paves the way for the Hidden Imam's Advent. The true *montazer* must prepare the Advent with individual and social actions.

'Ulamā – Islamic legal scholars.

Wali al-Faqih – guardian Jurist.

Wilāyat-i Faqīh – rule of the jurisconsult; mandate of the jurist; It refers to the governing of the religious and social affairs of Twelver Shi'i Muslim world by righteous Shi'i jurists, until the advent of the Hidden Imam.

Vo'āz (Singular: Vā'ez)– preachers.

Ziyārat – pilgrimage; visitation.

Zohūr – Mahdi's Advent

Introduction

This project provides an ethnographic account and analysis of the Twelver Shi'i¹ pilgrimage at Jamkaran Mosque in Qom, Iran. Since the Revolution of 1979, Iran has been gripped by a messianic euphoria greater than at any other time in its recent history, with speculations about the Advent of the promised Shi'i Messiah (Amanat, 2009). In this apocalyptic anticipation, it is alleged that the Mahdi may appear at any time, although the exact time and day of his Advent cannot be predicted. As a result, believers are put into a state of persistent suffering and are constantly alert to sins that may delay the Advent of the Mahdi. It is a long-held dream of many Shi'i Muslims that at one point, at the End of Time, a saviour will return to bring justice and peace to a world filled with injustice. As a result of such an apocalyptic vision, believers are compelled to stay forward-looking and alert to every moment, and as a result, they are expected to exhibit the discipline of continuous self-improvement (Fenn, 2006).

The most prominent site of the embodiment of widespread messianic expectations in Iran is the Jamkaran Mosque, situated on the outskirts of Qom, the centre of religious learning in Iran (see Figure 1), where, according to tradition, the Hidden Imam appeared to a pious man in a dream in the 11th century (AD) and instructed him to build a mosque there. Every Tuesday evening, thousands of pilgrims from across the country gather at the mosque to pray for the return of the Shi'i Messiah. The Jamkaran Mosque is thus a famous pilgrimage destination throughout the Shi'i world, but especially in Iran. For this reason, this ethnographic study of Iranian messianism and pilgrimage to Jamkaran can offer unique insights into contemporary Iranian society, as well as into the practice of Twelver Shi'i Islam and messianic religious and ethical projects more generally.

¹ The Twelvers are the followers of the twelve infallible Imams of the descendants of the Prophet of Islam, who are considered by them the only true successors of the Prophet. In this view, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (661-600 AD), Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, is considered the first Imam and Mohammad ibn al-Hasan (born 869 AD), who is also known as the Mahdi, is regarded as the Twelfth Imam whose Advent is predicted at the end of time. When I use the term "Shi'i", I refer to Twelver Shi'ites in this thesis. In Chapter One of this thesis, I will provide a detailed discussion of Twelver Shi'ism and the twelfth Imam (the Hidden Imam) in more detail.

Figure 1: Location of the Jamkaran Mosque



As I will discuss in Chapter Two, Jamkaran Mosque differs in two critical ways from other conventional Shi'i shrines. Firstly, the Mosque's sanctity is derived from stories, reports, and experiences about the Mahdi's apparition there. Secondly, the Mosque continues to be a place of miraculous experiences. As a place of pilgrimage, Jamkaran Mosque focuses primarily on the Messianic beliefs of the pilgrims so that they can perceive and internalise the sacred through their senses and through the rituals they perform.

My research shows the interconnections between messianic aspirations and pilgrimage, clarifying why Twelver Shi'ites make pilgrimage to this particular site and what happens during and after their journeys. To carry out this research, I conducted fieldwork (2017-18) on the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims in Qom and Tehran, the destination of most pilgrims when they return home.

The following questions guide this research project. First, compared to the recent past, particularly before the Islamic Revolution, why do messianic aspirations, expectations, and messianic journeys currently seem to be receiving such widespread attention in Iran? Second, given this new atmosphere of messianic hopes, why and how do pilgrims make the pilgrimage to Jamkaran messianic site every Tuesday evening, what happens during their journey, and what happens after they return home? I address the first question by describing the large-scale religious-political shifts that occurred after the Islamic Revolution to highlight how new meanings emerged or older meanings were reinterpreted. The second question I explored related to the conditions that shape the feelings, senses, places and performances of belief, i.e., the forms of religious practices embodied in those spaces and performances.

By scrutinising the widespread messianic aspirations and expectations of individual pilgrims, my project underscores the diverse modalities through which perspectives and forms of an optimistic future are imagined and constructed. The messianic expectations and hopes I have studied are not isolated from religious and political discourses; instead, they result from various hybrid forms of political-religious

knowledge, experience, and discourses that contribute to their flourishing. After the Islamic Revolution, such specific messianic practices - I contend - should be considered as part of a broader transformation of society as a whole, namely the extensive tensions and changes that have occurred after the Revolution of 1979 that established the Islamic Republic, which was accompanied by significant shifts in the religious and political context. I make this connection between these societal transformations and individual messianic aspirations and apocalyptic visions in two different ways: first, I examine how official messianic aspirations and apocalyptic visions have been reinterpreted after the Revolution, and second, I analyse how such messianic knowledge, narratives, stories, and visions are perceived, negotiated, and redefined by the individuals and how they help them to refashion themselves.

I combined ethnographic and archival methods to examine how apocalyptic visions and messianic hopes are disseminated and exchanged across public and private spaces. The Jamkaran Mosque was the primary field site for my research, but I also visited private homes, shops, offices and online discussion boards, and I observed and interviewed a diverse set of actors with diverse social statuses. In parallel, I viewed television programmes, read newspapers, viewed DVDs, and examined online material to determine how apocalyptic visions circulate throughout the public sphere. By explaining the discursive and political contexts of the spread of apocalyptic visions and messianic ideals, I attempt to contextualise the individual experiences in the face of such messianic knowledge and apocalyptic visions. It is these experiences of encountering messianic knowledge and apocalyptic visions that compile and shape pilgrims' subjectivities on their journeys to the Jamkaran Mosque.

My second research question examined messianic aspirations and expectations in the context of pilgrims' ideas, experiences, and concerns. The narratives and stories that pilgrims have shared with me and the sentiments of pleasure, anxiety, hope, aspirations and failure they have expressed, in terms of their own personal experiences, reflect their embodied subjectivities.

The ethnographic approach I used to explore why pilgrims conduct the pilgrimage to the Jamkaran Mosque every week, as well as what happens to them during and after the pilgrimage, is based on the notion of movement as embodied action. In my inquiry, I asked how movement and contact with sacred landscapes and people contribute to the meaning of the journey. To gain a deeper understanding of the reasons for pilgrims going on pilgrimage to the Jamkaran Mosque, I had the opportunity to engage in a

very practical way in some of the activities and practices that take place there. I tried to understand how this journey shape the pilgrims' subjective experiences and to what extent these experiences continue to influence their daily lives. I drew on anthropological approaches to ethical imagination and hope, as well as to the anthropology of millenarianism/messianism and pilgrimage. In addition, I have drawn on recent Iranian research on subjectivities and subject formation.

The primary reason for my interest in the Jamkaran Mosque stems from my high school years when I was heavily exposed to the hagiographies of the mystical figures of the Muslim faith. This interest prompted me to make pilgrimages to their tombs in cities such as Qazvin, Tehran, and Qom to improve myself as a pious devotee through the experience of the sacred. Once, while travelling to Qazvin to perform a *ziyārat* (local pilgrimage) to the tomb of a mystic, a friend who accompanied me focused my attention on the Hidden Imam. He said, "The Imam of the Age is the guardian of the world, and every mystic's torch is illuminated by his light." Then I heard my friend recite a hadith: "He who dies without knowing the Imam of his time will die in ignorance." Then he asked, "Why don't you visit Jamkaran?"

This was the first time that my attention was drawn to Jamkaran Mosque. On my first visit to Jamkaran Mosque, I encountered many pilgrims whose apocalyptic dreams and messianic hopes had been triggered during their pilgrimage. I gradually became aware of the public messianic discourse associated with pilgrimage to Jamkaran through these personal narratives and stories. There was a common theme in most of the reports that circulated in the public sphere, which was that Jamkaran was portrayed as a place that facilitated communication with the Hidden Imam and as a place that animated hopes and aspirations of the End of Time. As an example, one of the my relatives visited Jamkaran to communicate with the Hidden Imam through the well² behind the Mosque so that the Imam heal his child's illness. Another friend had travelled to Jamkaran every Tuesday evening for forty weeks to achieve his dream. Several pilgrimage tours were available to the public that facilitated the travel to Jamkaran. Reports of mystics meeting the Hidden Imam regularly appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines, and books and were represented as evidence of the imminent Advent of the Hidden Imam and authenticity of the Jamkaran Mosque. It was common for religious bookstores to sell stories of mystics and prominent religious

² There is a miraculous well behind the Mosque's main building through which pilgrims communicate with the Hidden Imam by throwing their petitions in it (see Chapter Two).

figures meeting the Hidden Imam and miracles, which included healing and taking care of the needs of believers due to the Jamkaran pilgrimage. This highlighted the miraculous power of the pilgrimage and its influence on the believers and their connection to the Hidden Imam. As part of state television's continuing efforts to evoke an apocalyptic sensibility among its viewers, on every Friday evening, Channel One played religious hymns with an apocalyptic undertone, with clips of the Jamkaran Mosque and crowds of pilgrims streaming into the Mosque in the background. It was these messianic representations, which have been expressed in the narratives and intimate tales of family and friends, in newspaper and media reports, as well as in religious and political discourses, that led me to focus this thesis on this topic.

The culture of piety in Jamkaran is not restricted to miracles. One of the most important messages that the experience of the Messianic pilgrimage to Jamkaran Mosque instils in the pilgrims is that ethical improvement is a prerequisite for the Advent of the Hidden Imam. This necessity for moral cultivation highlights people's sin as the greatest obstacle to the Advent of the Mahdi, and combines the pilgrimage experience with the virtuous act of *entezār* (expectation) for his Advent, which requires compliance with the religious and moral discipline required to become a true *montazer*³ for the Hidden Imam. As a result of the Jamkaran pilgrimage and the rituals associated with it, the pilgrims are encouraged to form a heart-felt connection with the Hidden Imam. The pilgrims also get familiar with issues such as the duties of true *montazers* in the End Times, ways to communicate with the Imam, and the discourse of Mahdism, through pilgrimage and its related rituals. These all are presented to the pilgrims to recover Mahdi's image from traditional and complex Shi'i messianic texts and to shape a virtuous self in accordance with the Islamic Revolution's principles and values. The Jamkaran pilgrimage targets the messianic and apocalyptic beliefs of the Shi'i pilgrims and tries to form a virtuous self free from sin. The pilgrimage and communication with the Hidden Imam are depicted as a means for moral purification, a means to preserve faith, and a means to hasten the impending Advent of the Mahdi. During the pilgrimage experience, by evoking the apocalyptic sensitivities of the pilgrims towards the imminent Advent of the Mahdi,

³ A person who follows the laws of *Shari'a* and cultivates a perfect model of piety and morality, strives to acquire virtuous personal preparation and paves the way for the Hidden Imam's Advent. The true *montazer* must prepare the Advent with individual and social actions.

the intention is to stimulate the internal motivation necessary for change within the pilgrims. Such continuous stimulation of the apocalyptic-messianic ideals has kept the messianic expectations of Shi'i pilgrims alive. Every Tuesday evening, Shi'i pilgrims attend the mosque and participate in various rituals, mainly sermons, that are held in the mosque. As a result of such attendance, pilgrims' vision of eschatology and a sense of anticipation begin to flourish, allowing them to improve. By attending sermons, reciting *namāz*, and writing petitions, pilgrims can improve ethically and get closer to the Hidden Imam.

Thus, I investigate the role of action and consequences of the Jamkaran pilgrimage during the pilgrimage as well as in daily life beyond the mosque in the formation, reinforcement, and transformation of pilgrims. I attempt to examine the influence of the Jamkaran pilgrimage and its accompanying rituals on cultivating the moral spirit and self-refashioning methods of my interlocutors while also presenting the contradictions and challenges inherent in this self-refashioning through the examination of concepts like *entezār* (expectation for Mahdi's Advent), true *montazer*, sin, repentance, and forgiveness during the pilgrimage, as well as in the context of daily life. Jamkaran messianic pilgrimage experiences encourage pilgrims to have a personalised affective inner relationship with the Hidden Imam and emphasise inner virtues as moral substance (see Chapters Five & Six). As a result of this inner connection and personalisation of the connection with the Hidden Imam, my interlocutors can reformulate their relationship with him, themselves, and others in the temporal dimensions of the present and future. Moreover, these ethical projects of self-fashioning will animate hope and have a prospective temporal dimension. Additionally, I will demonstrate how my informants reinterpret and redefine concepts such as sin, repentance, forgiveness, and the virtuous action of *entezār*. By prioritising internal virtues and applying personal agency to redefining the aforementioned concepts, pilgrims can maintain and cultivate a sense of moral self. Lastly, I examine the continuity and permanence of pilgrimage experiences in everyday life and highlight the instability, fluctuation, and ambivalence of internal and moral transformation after pilgrimage. Consequently, by addressing the experiences of moral failure of my interlocutors in the context of everyday life, I highlight the inadequacy of the pilgrimage experience as the only factor in moral self-fashioning and

depict the heterogeneous and fragmented nature of the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience as a whole.

Fieldwork Encounters and Positionality

During the summer of 2017, while I was preparing for my first visit to my field of study, my mother asked me about the destination of my trip. As soon as I informed her that I would be leaving for Jamkaran, she responded with great enthusiasm:

I hope that your pilgrimage will be accepted. I would like you to make a pilgrimage on my behalf.

On the way to the mosque on the bus, I was preoccupied with whether I was going to the mosque as a pilgrim or as a researcher as I left home. I was curious to know if I was able to perceive the phenomenon of pilgrimage and messianic orientation in the same way as my interlocutors do when they go to the mosque. Were there any barriers that would prevent me from achieving this goal? I kept thinking about these questions on the way. Upon first glance, it was evident that I was not a pilgrim because I was not going to the mosque with the intention of going on pilgrimage, but rather I was going to the mosque for the purpose of performing a preliminary field investigation. However, I was not a stranger to pilgrimage either, as I was native to the region I would be studying, and as a member of that culture, I had grown up with the Twelver Shi'ites. I was able, therefore, to find some common ground with the pilgrims' experiences as someone who belongs to this Shi'i culture. Nevertheless, I was also part of an outsider when I was interacting with pilgrims as part of my role as a researcher. Therefore, this continuous self-evaluation was always with me during the fieldwork, so that I constantly took advantage of the dual role that I had as both a pilgrim and a researcher, and I was constantly trying to evaluate myself to understand better the context of life and activities of the informants I am interviewing to be able to present a more accurate picture of the situation. I, therefore, tried to maintain value neutrality throughout the fieldwork and not add my own experiences and subjectivity while participating in and recording the experiences of those whose pilgrimage and daily life I was studying. While the emotions and reactions evoked during fieldwork are part of the ethnographic knowledge process, I have always been interested in controlling and becoming aware of these factors that highlighted my identity as an insider Muslim (Davis and Spencer, 2010: 1).

I used a mixture of ethnographic research and historical background to understand how pilgrims encountered the apocalyptic visions and messianic hopes embodied

during the Jamkaran pilgrimage. My primary method for collecting data and understanding people's lives was participant observation, especially in the context of pilgrims' lives. Participant observation allowed me to be as close as possible to my interlocutors in non-pilgrimage environments, such as private homes, workplaces, cafes, and public spaces, and to collect rich empirical data. In addition to conversations inside the mosque during the pilgrimage, I also engaged in informal exchanges with Twelver Shi'i pilgrims outside the mosque. Therefore, I tried to find my informants and collect my data through communication with pilgrims in the mosque and outside its scope, particularly on the bus when pilgrims were on the way out and on the way back, and in different contexts such as shops, cafes, conference halls and at their homes. As part of these conversations, I have also conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. I interviewed more than forty pilgrims personally and conducted countless informal conversations with other pilgrims on the way to and from the pilgrimage site. During the fieldwork, I established closer and deeper relationships with eight families living in Tehran and Qom to portray pilgrims' sacred and mundane experiences more genuinely and transparently. I initially contacted several pilgrimage tours in Tehran, explaining that I was doing research on pilgrimage and self-improvement, and some of these pilgrimage tours allowed me to volunteer in their groups, and they introduced me as a research student to these groups. Additionally, I participated as much as possible in the activities organized by these tours. As a member of a pilgrimage group, I also participated and cooperated in most of the activities in the mosque. I travelled with numerous pilgrimage tour groups from Tehran to Jamkaran, but I travelled more with two specific pilgrimage tour groups that my close informants belonged to. In addition to finding informants within the same pilgrimage tours and pilgrim groups that I was associated with, I also connected with other pilgrims outside these networks using snowball sampling. I attended the mosque almost every Tuesday evening and most Thursdays from the mid-summer of 2017 to early fall of 2018 when more pilgrims came to visit, and on other days of the week, I visited bookstores, libraries and institutions related to Mahdism based in Qom and read newspapers, watched TV shows and checked out DVDs and online content, and generally examined the apocalyptic visions and aspirations of the Twelver Shi'i population. For example, I joined several Telegram and WhatsApp channels and groups to keep track of the apocalyptic news and keep in touch with my informants. My field notes were in Farsi, which I documented on my mobile phone or personal notebook or in the form of audio

and video recordings (with the informant's permission), and then I translated them into English.

Jamkaran receives pilgrims from different parts of Iran and with a variety of backgrounds. Thus, my sampling was based on age, gender, education, and different classes of potential interlocutors. In selecting my informants, I carefully considered such factors to reflect the diversity of pilgrims and vividly represent pilgrims' hopes and desires. One of the factors that attracted my attention during the pilgrimage was the more significant number of female pilgrims than male pilgrims. This significant number of women compared to men who visit pilgrimage sites can be attributed partially to gender inequalities and restrictions in society that prevent traditional religious women from participating in a variety of social activities (Betteridge, 2002: 279). Among the majority of traditional/religious Iranian middle and lower-class families, women, especially young girls, are not as free to participate in social activities as men, and they are subjected to a network of restrictions that are imposed by law and custom. There is a requirement that women obtain permission from their families (i.e., their husbands, fathers, and brothers) to go out and spend time outside. A pilgrimage can be a good excuse for women to leave their homes and spend a night away from their families, especially for those coming from traditional/religious families. The pilgrimage is also a great opportunity for women to get away from their housework duties for some time and communicate with new people and situations (ibid). Visiting a pilgrimage place is commendable as a religious practice that men of the house would find difficult to oppose. Therefore, pilgrimages to Jamkaran enable women, to a certain extent, to free themselves from their social captivity. This space and discourse that pilgrimage creates for women has been described by Dubisch (1995) as a "poetics of womanhood" - a place where women can express and present their "being woman" during the pilgrimage to overcome the challenges caused by gender inequality and to express and negotiate problems that cannot be directly resolved in everyday life.

My research has also taken into account the ethical considerations I should consider as a researcher. To comply with the ethical requirements of the project, I always obtained consent from the volunteer participants in the interview and protected their confidentiality during the ethnography. I coded all the recorded interviews, changed all the participants' names, and used pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The

transcriptions of all the interviews were shared with each participant, along with my own insights from the field notes, and I reviewed them with each participant again until the quality of the findings, along with my analyses and additions, was clarified with the participant himself so that I could analyse and interpret the stories and narratives of the participants more accurately.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One examines how the concept of the apocalyptic saviour and his Advent, which is embodied in Shi'i theology in the concept of the Hidden Imam, has evolved into a political and revolutionary understanding as a result of conceptual transformation, leading to the integration of Shi'i messianism into Iranian politics. I will explain how such a messianic orientation emerged in post-revolutionary Iran and why it became a matter of widespread interest and public concern. The messianic ideology is examined within a "discursive tradition" that guides practitioners regarding religious and moral practice's suitable form and function. Taking a close look at this messianic ideology from the viewpoint of a discursive tradition enables us to understand how beliefs and practices are negotiated and interpreted with the involvement of moral subjects engaged with messianic discursive traditions. By explaining how the image of the Mahdi is repositioned and the re-conceptualisation of the ethics of *entezār* as a result of the reinterpretation of traditional Shi'i messianic narratives after the Islamic Revolution, I discuss how the re-conceptualisation of the ethics of *entezār* has proposed the idea of avoiding sin and attaining moral virtue as a prerequisite for the Advent of the Mahdi.

Chapter Two describes the formation, evolution, and popularity of the Jamkaran Mosque over the course of history. My purpose in this chapter is to explore the significance of the mosque as the primary field of my ethnography and explain how it became a site for embodying the messianic orientation and the apocalyptic anticipations described in the previous chapter.

Chapter Three examines the central concepts used in this thesis in the context of broader anthropological scholarship. Themes such as messianism, apocalypticism, ethics, pilgrimage, everyday experiences, and their relationship with self-fashioning will be examined anthropologically, highlighting their relevance to my research. I contend that the messianic ideal of millennial groups, especially the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims that take part in the Jamkaran pilgrimage, which contains a transformative

element that reveals the pilgrims' subjective experiences of the journey, can encourage my interlocutors to cultivate active responses that always require moral diligence. I also demonstrate how messianic ideals lead to changes in subjectification and a reorientation of the self in time. As a result, I portray hope as a motivating factor for my interlocutors. After a critical review of recent works on Islamic piety, notably Saba Mahmoud's celebrated monograph as an early reference work on piety, I explain how my work, in much the same vein as Mahmoud's, draws on Foucault's ethics, but my work departs from Mahmoud's exclusive focus on Islamic discursive tradition to illustrate how both agentive perception and intersecting discourses influence moral actions simultaneously. My work reflects everyday experiences of moral self-fashioning outside the confines of the mosque to highlight the complexities and ambivalences of subject formation and challenges homogenous and idealised approaches to pious self-fashioning which neglect the broader socio-economic context.

Throughout Chapter Four, I will examine the role of pilgrimage action and consequences of the Jamkaran pilgrimage in forming or transforming what my interlocutors call their *howīyat*, or sense of self-identity. My approach is to connect pilgrimage with the subjects' inner lives, particularly how they feel, respond, and experience. Specifically, I examine how pilgrims' perceptions of highly transformative pilgrimage experiences constitute, enrich, and transform their sense of self or identity as a result of their pilgrimage experiences.

In Chapter Five, I will examine the sermon as a ritual of the Jamkaran pilgrimage and illustrate how participating in such practices can cultivate a moral disposition. Participating in sermon rituals emphasises the importance of the pilgrim's internal and personalised affective relationship with the Hidden Imam and encourages pilgrims to reorient themselves by emphasising their reconfiguration as inextricably linked to the Imam in the immediate present. The sermon introduces sin as an obstacle to the Advent of the Hidden Imam and the feeling of the presence of the Hidden Imam in the heart as a moral state pilgrims should strive to achieve to put their willpower alongside the Imam's willpower. Consequently, improving inner quality overrides outward actions, and abandoning sin is a prerequisite for becoming a true *montazer* for the Hidden Imam and facilitating his Advent. Hence, participation in the sermon can be considered a mode of subjectification that encourages pilgrims to have a

personalised relationship with the Hidden Imam, prioritising inner virtues as a moral substance.

Chapter Six evaluates the performative act of petition writing, as well as its repetition by my interlocutors, as a technology of the self that allows them to reproduce hope within themselves. The ritual of petition serves as a means by which my interlocutors facilitate and fulfil their not-yet-fulfilled ethical project by personalising their relationship with the Imam. I portray the petition as a self-reflective confession of the subject's inner moral feelings, caught in a cycle of guilt and repentance, and show how my interlocutors are led to an understanding of self-fashioning in which the fulfilment of moral selves is dependent on the implementation of the Imam's agency. My sample petitions in this chapter clearly illustrate that reciprocal agency is necessary for the formation of the moral self among my interlocutors. As a result of this approach, my interlocutors do not necessarily point to their inability to fulfil their moral self as the sole reason for their failure, but they also involve the Imam as a part of this process because the Imam has not yet imparted to them the ability to grow into potentiality, worthiness, and success. In this chapter, I will also address the outside-in and inside-out models of pious practices, demonstrating how my interlocutors work on their not-yet-fulfilled moral project by prioritising inner virtues as the ethical substance focusing on their personalised affective relationship with the Imam through the use of the petition technique.

In Chapter Seven, I describe how my interlocutors understand and reinterpret themes such as sin, sense of guilt, repentance, and forgiveness through the ritual of *namāz* (Islamic prayer). As I highlight the pilgrims' experience of the Jamkaran ritual of *namāz*, also known as Imam Zaman's *namāz*, I show how it helps my interlocutors maintain and cultivate their moral sense. By exploring how they redefine and reinterpret sin, repentance, and forgiveness, I examine their different understandings of performing *namāz*.

Chapter Eight focuses on the moral self-fashioning of my interlocutors, who are waiting for the imminent Advent of the Mahdi, within the context of temporality and hope for the future. As I will demonstrate, the moral self-fashioning process of my interlocutors is also temporal, and this messianic temporality provides them with a model of time in which they are constantly placed in a state of messianic attention in which every action contributes to Mahdi's Advent. Using the responses of my interlocutors, I demonstrate that Shi'i messianic perceptions and actions resulting

from the Jamkaran pilgrimage create two temporal orientations that are interrelated and coexistent: the relationship between the self and the Hidden Imam in the present, as well as the imaginative processes by which my interlocutors can construct themselves by envisioning the near future temporal horizon (i.e. the Mahdi's Advent). Chapter Nine focuses on the persistence and permanence of pilgrimage experiences and their resulting transformations in pilgrims' daily lives. My argument is that the experience of inner and moral transformation in the aftermath of pilgrimage is impermanent, oscillating, and ambivalent. While my interlocutors' responses are filled with moral failures in light of the contradictions of everyday life that demonstrate their failure to internalise moral virtues adequately, I argue that despite these contradictions and ambivalences, pilgrims continue their journey towards moral cultivation. In this final chapter, I illustrate the methods and strategies my interlocutors use to cope with the ambiguities and conflicts of daily life to compensate for and even justify their moral failures. Additionally, I examine how my interlocutors negotiate different teleologies, which leads to the development of multiple modes of subjectification. In this way, I demonstrate the inadequacy of the pilgrimage experience alone in moral self-fashioning and underscore the heterogeneous and fragmented nature of Jamkaran's pilgrimage experience.

Chapter 1: Shi‘i Messianism from Theology to Political Ideology: Repositioning of the Mahdi’s Image and Re-conceptualisation of the Ethics of *Entezār*

1.1 Introduction

There is no doubt that after the Islamic Revolution, the eschatological understanding of the concept of the Mahdi and his Advent, which has been depicted in theological texts as being in some distant and unreachable future, has shifted towards a temporal dimension that seems imminent. This change in the discursive tradition is a result of combining Shi‘i messianism with politics and reinterpreting the concepts of expectation and eschatology so as to result in the emergence of a revolutionary understanding of the Mahdi and his Advent, in which the Mahdi’s Advent is always considered imminent and human agency has a significant role to play in instigating and facilitating his coming. It is evident from the change in temporality related to the concept of Mahdi and his Advent, resulting from political and ideological interpretations that emerged after the Revolution, that the reorientation of the figure of the Hidden Imam and re-conceptualizations of the ethics of *entezār* (expectation) are both flexible and capable of evolving and transforming towards a future whose coming is accelerated through the instigation of the human agency, along with the anticipation of an apocalypse that is awaiting its ending.

My purpose in this chapter is to describe how the concept of the Mahdi as a saviour and his Advent from a theological perspective evolved into a political and revolutionary understanding through the process of conceptual transformation and how this transformation led to the integration of messianism into Iranian politics. As a result of this transformation in the Revolutionary period, the concept of the Mahdi has benefited from an ideological and political standpoint. As a result of this revolutionary understanding of Shi‘i messianism, it is expected that the Mahdi will appear in the near future, and Shi‘i groups are preparing for his Advent.

In the following, I first focus on messianic ideology in Twelver Shi‘i doctrine, identifying the concept of Mahdi and the doctrine of *ghayba* (occultation) as a key element of Twelver Shi‘ism, which is currently the official position of the Islamic Republic. Taking into account the historical context, we can gain a deeper understanding of the epistemological foundations of Shi‘i messianic apocalyptic orientation in post-revolutionary Iran. This historical review will help us better

understand how the Islamic Republic has inherited messianism and how it incorporates eschatological concepts into its founding principles. After that, I will discuss how the figure of Mahdi has been repositioned, and the ethics of expectation reconceptualized, as a result of the re-interpretation of traditional Shi'i messianic narratives over the last decades. In the last part, I will discuss how the reconceptualisation of the ethics of expectation has raised the idea of abstaining from sin and attaining moral virtue as prerequisites for the Mahdi's Advent.

1.2 The Concept of Mahdi and the Occultation in Twelver Shi'i Doctrine

In Twelver Shi'ism, as one of the major and largest Shi'i branches, there is the belief that 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, inherited Mohammad's spiritual and political authority over the Muslim community (Newman, 2013: 1). Following Muhammad's death, the movement flourished with the formation of the Shi'a party led by 'Ali, Mohammad's son-in-law and cousin, which upheld 'Ali's right to succeed the Prophet Muhammad on the basis of the Prophet's will. Those who followed 'Ali became known as Shi'a (or the Shi'a party) as a result. As a consequence of this, the Shi'i community developed their own ideology after the death of the Prophet in which, to ensure the credibility of their interpretations of Islamic law and concept, the presence of a rightful and authoritative successor of the Prophet was required (Sachedina, 1980: 54-55). After 'Ali's assassination, they believe that "the succession lay with his male descendants, via his son al-Husayn" (Newman, 2013: 1). In this vein, they consider 'Ali and his two sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, as well as nine of the descendants of al-Husayn to be a divinely appointed, infallible group of individuals who are the legitimate Shi'i Imams, or leaders. This branch of Shi'ism is therefore referred to as the *Ithna 'Ashariyyah* (Twelvers), as opposed to other branches that recognise different groups and numbers of individuals. According to the Twelvers, an Imam is the sole authority in all matters of law and faith, regardless of whether he is in power or not. In the course of time, the concept of the Imamate developed from a simple notion of a leader who would bring Islamic justice to the oppressed to a highly sophisticated concept of an eschatological Hidden Imam. From the beginning, a charismatic leader was needed to save this community from misery and distress. There was a belief that one of the only ways one could fulfil such an expectation was through a relative of the Prophet. Following the death of the Prophet, the Umayyads, who were the first Islamic dynasty, marginalised the followers of 'Ali, known as the Shi'ites,

leading to a sense of messianism being cherished among the Shi'as (Sachedina, 1980: 9).

According to Shi'i tradition, after the eleventh Imam died in 874 A.D., his four-year-old son, the Mahdi, entered into a state of occultation and thus became invisible to the community of believers (Amir-Moezzi, 1994: 111). During this period, known as the Lesser Occultation that lasted for almost 70 years, Mahdi communicated with the Shi'i community through four *Na'ib* (Deputy, plural *Nuwwāb*). It is believed that after the end of this period in the year 941 A.D., Mahdi no longer appointed a deputy to be in contact with his followers, and so the period of Greater Occultation began with no agent of him on earth, a period ongoing to this day (ibid). It is believed that the Hidden Imam will remain in the state of occultation until God instructs him to return to establish his global government, distinguish good from evil, and prepare conditions for the resurrection (Smith, 1982: 239–240). According to Twelver Shi'ism, Muhammad is not only a prophet but also a manifestation of God on earth. Shi'ites believe that the earth could not be without proof of God – otherwise, it would crumble (Khalaji, 2008: 34). Therefore, the Twelve successor imams after him also are the manifestation of God on earth. This is also a justification for the presence of the Hidden Imam on earth because he is proof of God on earth, and without his presence, the earth would be destroyed. Despite the Greater Occultation, which lasts till this day, the Hidden Imam is not totally cut off from the Shi'i community, and he still controls the affairs of people and is the Lord of the Age (*Sāhib al-Zamān*), however, direct communication is no longer possible (Momen, 2008: 165). According to the Shi'i messianic traditions, the Shi'i Messiah's influence is manifested in various ways in the physical world during his occultation. Since the Greater Occultation began, a great deal of literature has been published about revelations, dreams, healings and visions which have been attributed to the Mahdi's personal intervention (Cook, 2011: 96).

As a result of this rapid proliferation of literature, there is now a vast amount of material available about the Mahdi's imminent Advent and its impact on the world. A great deal of detail is provided in these writings about the Mahdi's coming, including the ways and means by which he will overthrow the modern order and establish a just state, when and where he will appear, and his methods for vengeance against his enemies (ibid). Although Shi'i Islam has always had elaborate literature concerning the Mahdi, such literature has never been as extensive, publicly available, detailed, or socially explosive (in that it stresses the imminence of the Mahdi's return) as today's

(ibid). According to many, the Hidden Imam still occasionally manifests himself to the pious in the form of dreams or visions, as there are numerous accounts of people having experienced the Imam either in person, in dreams or in visions. Shi'ites liken the Hidden Imam's communication with his followers during occultation to a sun behind a cloud, which, although not visible, does not stop giving light and warmth to the earth. In Twelver Shi'ism, the doctrine of occultation⁴ is just a way to indicate that the Twelfth Imam has not died but has been hidden from the eyes of the people. His life has miraculously been extended until God allows him to manifest himself to the people through his Advent.

The essence of Twelver Shi'ism is the belief that Mahdi is alive and will return one day, and this is not just a hope but a main foundation of Shi'ism. According to Sachedina (1980), "While belief in the future coming of an Imam is a salient feature of all Shi'i sects, in Twelver Shi'ism, the belief in the messianic Imam becomes not only a basic tenet of the creed but also the foundation upon which the entire spiritual edifice of the Imamate religion rests. It is the acknowledgement of this Imam which can ensure salvation" (p. 9).

Since the early stages of the formation of Shi'ism, the idea of a Shi'i messianic saviour has been a vital part and parcel of Shi'i doctrine. According to Shi'i eschatology, a state of disorder will precede the 'Last Days', and a restorer is expected to emerge – the Mahdi – in a world that has become chaotic and full of dissent (*fitna*), as well as in a multipolar Muslim community replete with political strife, injustice, and oppression (Clarke, 1980: 313). In the event of the Mahdi's coming, the world will be restored to the path of true religion and will be filled with equity and justice after centuries of tyranny and oppression (ibid). There are many titles associated with the Hidden Imam, including the following: *Sāhib al-Zamān* (Lord of the Age), *Sāhib al-Amr* (Lord of Command), *al-Mahdi* (the Rightly-Guided One), *al-Qā'im* (He who will arise), *al-Imam al-Muntazar* (the Awaited Imam) and the *Baqiyat Allah* (Remnant of God) (Momen, 2008: 165).

From the beginning of the Greater Occultation period onwards, the Shi'i clergy has continually claimed to represent the Imam and guide a community of believers until the time of his Advent. Consequently, clerics introduced themselves as the Imam's

⁴ There are many aspects to the doctrine of occultation. For a more in-depth discussion of this Shi'i belief, see: Sachedina (1981); Hussain (1982); Arjomand (1984, 1996); Cook (2002); Amir-Moezzi (1994, 2011).

deputies during his occultation period by referring to certain hadiths (Shahi, 2012: 113-114). In their view, the first four deputies whom the Imam appointed in the lesser occultation period were special deputies (*Nuwwāb-i khās*), and during the period of the great occultation, clerics were considered to be the Imam's general deputies (Kasravi, 1996: 115).

In the following sections, I will show how a reinterpretation of traditional theological accounts of Shi'i messianism has transformed the image of the Mahdi from a passive apocalyptic saviour whose Advent was deemed distant in terms of time and space to an active Messiah whose Advent is imminent in the context of political and revolutionary exegesis. It was the Islamic Revolution that enabled such discursive and substantive transformations from passive emancipation (political quietism) to active emancipation (Rokhsefat, 2020: 9). It is evident that Shi'i messianism has clearly injected a more political orientation into Shi'i tradition over the course of the post-revolutionary phase, by asserting the religious obligations and duties of Shi'ites to play an important role in the imminent Advent of the Mahdi. I will describe the radically changed traditional attitude towards anticipating the Mahdi that occurred during the advent of Ayatollah Khomeini (Abrahamian, 1982: 473).

1.3 Shi'i Messianism in the Discourse of the Islamic Revolution

During the days leading up to the fall of the monarchy in Iran, the Shah's government announced that it would deal with any public gathering in a severe manner. In spite of the warnings from the Shāh's security guard, the masses, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, gathered in the streets and demonstrated against his rule. As a result of this situation, Ayatollah Tāleqani, a leading supporter of the Revolution, asked Khomeini to reconsider his decision for the sake of the safety of the people. However, Ayatollah Khomeini replied, "this is the command of Imam Zaman" (Shahi, 2012: 118). The early months of 1979 were influenced by millenarian expectations in Iranian society. There were posters on walls and billboards in many parts of Tehran proclaiming, "Twelfth Imam, we are waiting for You" above a depiction of a crowd brandishing rifles and machine guns (Rinehart, 1997: 141).

Since the beginning of the Revolution, one of the slogans that always seemed to echo among the people, especially after the speeches of revolutionary leaders, was the one requesting God to join the Islamic government of Iran with the Mahdi's universal government. During the years since the beginning of the victory of the Revolution to

the present day, the slogan “O God, O God, protect the movement of Khomeini until the Mahdi’s revolution” has become a common and official prayer recited before political speeches reflecting the hopeful eschatological anticipation and messianic content of the Islamic Republic since it was established. It is still common to see this slogan written across the streets almost four decades after Khomeini’s death (Arjomand, 2022: 188).

In one of his public speeches soon after the establishment of his government, Khomeini made it clear that the revolutionary movement he had initiated would link with the universal revolution of the Mahdi and would pave the way for the Mahdi’s return (Shahi, 2012: 118). Even though the Islamic Revolution was not spawned from a millennialist movement, it is worth noting that its leaders have remained adamant millennialists since (Amanat, 1998: 256). In the immediate aftermath of this proclamation, political actions were linked to the Mahdi’s support or surveillance. During the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian government attempted to portray the Mahdi’s support and blessing of the Iranian forces by creating military slogans and miraculous stories (Ramadannejad, 2006).

Soon after the victory of the Revolution, Khomeini proposed his theory of *Wilāyat-i Faqīh* (Guardianship of the Jurist), as a religio-political model for governing the country. The Wali-i Faqih, in the absence of the Hidden Imam, claims to serve as a guide for the faithful and as a governor for the Umma to perpetuate the Imamate and pave the way for the return of the Mahdi (Shahi, 2012: 116). In his famous work entitled *Wilāyat-i Faqīh*, also known as *Hukūmat-i Islāmī* (Islamic Government), he argued that an Islamic government should be established during the Hidden Imam’s occultation, even though this was not consistent with traditional Shi’ism (Amanat 2009: 65). According to Khomeini, an Islamic government administered by Shi’i *‘ulamā* (Islamic legal scholars) as the Imam’s deputies could accomplish the Imam’s tasks while he was occulted. By interpreting messianism through this lens, he rejected political passivity and actively urged the community of believers to take part in and support political activism (ibid). The Marxist theory of history – that humans must act to bring about utopia – has close parallels to Khomeini’s vision of religious government (Khalaji 2008: 5–6). Accordingly, the belief that believers are responsible for their duties during the absence of the Imam is in some way related to questions of political legitimacy, as well as clerical leadership on behalf of the Imam. The *Wilāyat-i Faqīh* theory that Khomeini devised was not only a political method for governance,

but it also caused a radical change in Shi'ism, replacing the traditional political passivity with a more active view in which Shi'ites should not passively await the return of the Mahdi, but should actively prepare the ground for his return (Savyon and Mansharof, 2007: 4).

In many of Khomeini's writings and speeches about the Mahdi, he often mentions that believers must be aware that the Hidden Imam is monitoring their actions. According to him, a report detailing each believer's actions is presented to the Hidden Imam twice a week. Therefore, he recommends that the community of believers avoid actions that may enrage the Hidden Imam (Yaluh, 2011: 8). To him, the Iranian people have achieved their first step toward an Islamic government, which brings them closer to the era of the Mahdi's Advent; the second step is to connect this Revolution to the universal revolution of the Mahdi through preparing the grounds. A few months before his death, Khomeini emphasised the Revolution's role in preparing the Hidden Imam's government. He believed that the current leaders of the Islamic Republic should know that the Revolution is the start of the Mahdi's global government, and his Advent is certain to occur in our lifetimes (ibid). Having insisted that the Islamic Republic fulfil the duty of preparing the Advent of the Hidden Imam, Ayatollah Khomeini paved the way for the emergence of a political and theological movement after his death that considered the Islamic Revolution to be such a project. Messianism, therefore, has two implications in the discourse of the Islamic Revolution: on the one hand, it aims to promote the culture of expectation and preparation. On the other hand, it is intended to prepare the Islamic Revolution for the global revolution of the Mahdi whose Advent is deemed to be imminent (Naderi and Haji Hassan, 2020: 669).

As a result of the manifestation of Mahdism in Khomeini's thought, his government aims to lay the foundation for a "universal Islamic government": "While the government of the Islamic republic must strive to govern the people well, it should not deter them from pursuing the goal of the Revolution, the establishment of a universal Islamic government" (Khomeini, 1387, vol. 21, p. 327). It is important to realize that Khomeini's death during the early years of the Revolution did not result in a separation of Shi'i messianism from the Iranian political scene in any way. The current Supreme Leader of the Revolution and Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, still carries on this line of thinking. The main objective of the Islamic Revolution, he believes, is primarily to prepare the ground for the Advent of the Promised Mahdi in the years to

come. In the statement of the second step of the Islamic Revolution, which he addressed to the nation in 2018, he targeted the youth in this manner:

The coming decades are your decades, so you, who must be experienced and motivated, are committing to safeguarding your Revolution and bringing it as close to its ideal as possible, which is the creation of a new Islamic civilisation and preparing for the Advent of the Mahdi; we must be brave and motivated (Raji and Khatami, 2019, p. 23).

In the process of preparing the way for the Advent of the Mahdi, the doctrine and culture of expectation are emphasised as an integral part of the process. Through the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, this culture of expectation should be institutionalised in the social behaviour of the people so that the Mahdi's Advent will be facilitated (Naderi and Haji Hassan, 2020: 670).

Since 1979, the belief in Shi'i apocalyptic messianism has almost been an inseparable part of the Iranian political landscape, and it has been common practice for many years to make reference to the Hidden Imam in everyday politics (Shahi, 2012: 116-118). In the wake of President Ahmadinejad's first term in office in 2005, however, Shi'i Messianic political fervour has grown significantly. In the eight years he spent in office as president of Iran, Ahmadinejad used almost all the national and international platforms available to him to express his apocalyptic and messianic tendencies. Despite the fact that the Advent of the Hidden Imam has been considered imminent by Shi'i clerics since the Islamic Revolution, Ahmadinejad was the first politician who not only perceived the Hidden Imam's Advent as imminent but also specified a date for his Advent. As one example, he announced to the Supreme Leader, during the inauguration ceremony of his first presidential term, that he would temporarily assume the powers of the presidency and would hand them over in the near future to the Hidden Imam (Naji, 2008: 92). In response to Khamenei's question as to what would happen if the Hidden Imam had not returned by that time, Ahmadinejad replied: "I assure you, I really believe this. He will come soon" (ibid). During his address to the foreign ministers of Islamic countries in 2005, he announced that the Hidden Imam would return in two years (ibid). He told his ministers when he met his cabinet for the first time: "We must transform Iran into a modern, divine nation that will serve as a model for all nations and also serve as the basis for the return of the Twelfth Imam" (ibid).

These messianic dispositions have also been followed by the current Supreme Leader of Iran. There have been repeated reports from the companions of Ayatollah

Khamenei, that he has a direct relationship with the Hidden Imam and governs the country under his watchful eye. As an example, Khamenei's adviser on international affairs, Hojjat al-Islam Abbas Ali Akhtari, said that "the dear leader is leading the Islamic Revolution through a close relationship with the Hidden Imam, and it has been observed many times that he went to the holy mosque at Jamkaran in Qom and made connections with the Hidden Imam through recitation of *namāz* and supplication, [and] he returned to Tehran with a heart full of faith and trust in God" (Khalaji, 2009: 396). In an interview conducted by the official website of the Supreme Leader with Mohammad Hassan Rahīmīyān, the official trustee of the Jamkaran Mosque, it was revealed that the Supreme Leader has taken a special interest in the Jamkaran Mosque and makes frequent pilgrimages there. As the official trustee of the Jamkaran Mosque appointed by Khamenei in 2013, Rahīmīyān outlined these visits his commitment to the associated rituals thus:

Whenever he feels tired, he visits the holy mosque of Jamkaran. In the course of my service, I witnessed, he sometimes visits Jamkaran at very short intervals of time - two or three weeks apart - and sometimes he visits after a longer period of time. He also brings several of his grandchildren and several members of his family each time he visits the Mosque. He usually comes here when the place is quiet and there aren't a lot of people there. Because the days are long in summer, he ends his pilgrimage with an evening prayer. During the winter, when the days are shorter, he comes at the time of Maghrib prayer. After reaching the mosque, he recites *maqreb* and '*ishā*' *namāz* and then performs the *namāz* of salutation to the mosque and the special *namāz* of Imam Zaman.⁵

The Hidden Imam's role in solving the country's problems is discussed in a book titled *Mahdaviat and Complete Peace: Quotations from Dr Ahmadinejad regarding the Mahdi* (2008). Part of this book consists of a recollection of Hezbollah's leader, Sayyid Hassan Nasrollah, explaining to Khamenei the problems Hezbollah is experiencing in Lebanon. During the meeting, the Supreme Leader said the following:

It is sometimes difficult for me to resolve issues in running affairs of the country, and there is no other way. I tell my friends, my staff, and my entourage: Get ready, we are going to Jamkaran Mosque in Qom. Upon praying to the Mahdi and speaking to him, I would feel that a hand from the hidden world led me, and I reach a decision there,

⁵ A full transcript of the interview can be found on the official website of the Supreme Leader of Iran: <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/7482/The-three-places-Imam-Khamenei-visits-when-he-is-sad>

thus solving the problem and implementing the decision” (Mahdaviat and Complete Peace, 2008: 51 quoted in Peterson, 2010: 354).

The subject of the imminent Advent of the Mahdi is not only promoted within Iran’s political arena, but several high-ranking clerics also make the promise in public speeches that the Mahdi will return in the near future. The most famous of these prophecies belong to Grand Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Bahjat, a prominent *Marja’-i Taqlid* (source of emulation) known as one of the greatest mystics after the Revolution. In September 2008, Ayatollah Naseri recounted in public preaching the conversation between Ayatollah Bahjat and a sixty-two-year-old friend who was said to be in contact with the Hidden Imam.⁶ Following the evidence Ayatollah Bahjat’s friend presented to him, Ayatollah Bahjat claimed that the Imam was close to arriving. According to what the Imam had told the friend, it is not only that he would be able to witness the Imam’s Advent, but people even older than Ayatollah Bahjat and his friend would see it as well. In a short time, the video clip of this prophecy, delivered in a public sermon, began to be circulated in the virtual world. It seems that such quotations, which contain information about the nearness of the Advent of the Hidden Imam, as well as the stories of pious people who have met the Hidden Imam and who are the bearers of his advice, are constantly echoed by clerics in speeches to the public and the media to convey the impression that the Advent is quite close.

Parallel to the political proclamation of messianism and circulation of clerical prophecies, apocalyptic messianic literature began to flourish. In the literature of the end times, the Revolution is often viewed as a turning point that signals the start of the period of transition leading up to the Advent of the Mahdi and his universal government. In the days that followed the victory of the Revolution, many apocalyptic writers interpreted the Revolution as an important sign that the end of the world was just around the corner. There are a number of important works in this vein, such as Asad Shahidi’s (2001) *The Founders of the Universal Revolution of the Mahdi*, which was first published in 1985 and has proved to be one of the most important in this field. A major focus of the book is on Iranians’ role in the events before the Advent, as discussed in detail in the second part of the book. In order to prove that the Islamic Revolution and its leaders were predicted in Shi’i eschatological narratives, the author attempted to provide evidence from within the apocalyptic literature known as the

⁶ The video clip can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWp1ff_4NnQ

Signs of the End of Time/the Advent⁷. In these texts, Qom is often referred to as the foundation of the Revolution and even the establishment of the Qom seminary as a fulfilment of a Shi'i prophecy. They also describe in detail the events that took place during the twentieth century in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Israel, and Iran, which, according to this literature, all occurred as predicted by the End-Time narratives. The purpose of all of these published materials is to promote the notion that the Islamic Revolution naturally lays the foundations for the universal revolution of the Mahdi and his government to come.

It is no secret that the public arena has been filled with prophecies, narratives, dreams and stories about meeting with the Hidden Imam and his imminent Advent ever since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The Mahdi has been the subject of numerous books, pamphlets, social media channels and chat rooms speculating about the signs of apocalyptic events and the time of his Advent.⁸ Over the past few decades, dozens of apocalyptic/messianic magazines have been published in Iran and dozens of foundations and institutions related to Mahdism have been founded.⁹ A large budget is spent every year by the government and various related non-governmental institutions to promote and advertise the authentic and apocalyptic teachings of the Mahdi. The government is usually thought of as a major contributor to apocalyptic literature and institutions. However, not all of it is directed by the government.

It is worth noting that during the past decade, in addition to the published works, TV and radio talks and speeches on the topic of Shi'i apocalyptic messianism and the Advent of the Mahdi, there has also been a series of documentaries about the signs of the Mahdi's Advent and the End of Time based on the analysis of events in the region and around the world that attempt to show the Mahdi's imminent Advent. Among the

⁷ The Signs of the Advent are the events that will occur at the End of Time on the eve of the Hidden Imam's Advent, according to Shi'i eschatological tradition.

⁸ In the years since the Revolution, hundreds of books have been published about meetings with Imam Zaman. As an example, the Jamkaran Mosque has published a book called "Meeting with Imam Zaman in the Jamkaran Mosque", which has been published in 34 different editions over the past few years. In addition to this, a large number of quotes, dreams, and stories about meeting the Hidden Imam and Signs of his Advent, in the form of video clips, speeches, blogs, websites, and social media channels, are being circulated in the virtual space.

⁹ After the Revolution there have arisen a multitude of institutions and magazines dealing with Mahdism and messianism which provide research, create cultural content, publish audio-visual products, hold specialized conferences and meetings, as well as publish books dealing with Mahdism and messianism. For example, see (<https://www.intizar.ir> , <https://bonyademahdi.ir/>, <http://mahdaviat.ir/>, www.mouood.org, <http://www.entizar.ir>). Under the supervision of the Supreme Council of Qom Seminary, these institutions and publications use government funds in order to expand and promote Mahdism culture and train missionaries, researchers, and teachers in matters related to Mahdism.

earliest and most well-known documentary films in this field was the documentary titled *The Advent is Near* (2010)¹⁰ which was widely distributed throughout the country and has been viewed by millions of people. This documentary aims to illustrate that Iran is the epicentre of the messianic movement sweeping over the Middle East and all over the world, as well as revealing the important role that the Iranian people will play in accelerating the return of the Mahdi in the near future (Kaussler, 2012: 78-79). Various clips from this film present the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the Arab uprisings, the US attack on Iraq, and the tensions in the Middle East as signs that the Mahdi is on the way. In addition, it portrays some of the political figures in Iran and the region as being apocalyptic figures who have been prophesied in apocalyptic Shi'i narratives regarding the Signs of the Advent. For example, the leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrollah have been described as key figures in the movement to accelerate the return of the Hidden Imam.

Although there were many clerics in the country who strongly criticized the release of this documentary, the process of producing such documentaries has not been stopped since then, despite the criticism. Within a short period of time after the release of this documentary, its director began to release two more films that dealt with the Signs of Advent, titled "The Advent is Very Close" and "The Moment of Meeting". There have been several documentaries released in the virtual space since then, with titles such as "The Signs of Advent", "The Age of Advent", "The Advent is Near", as well as "Prophecies of the End of Time", and "Apocalyptic Battles". Aside from highlighting the signs of the Advent of the Mahdi and demonstrating that Shi'i traditions are compatible with current world events, which they call the End of Time, there is an emphasis on the importance of the people's beliefs and readiness as a key precondition to the Advent of the Mahdi's Advent.

Although messianic euphorias have become more prominent during certain periods of Iranian politics, it is worth mentioning that the belief in the Mahdi, together with Shi'i messianic dispositions, have always had their place in different layers of society. It is true that with the arrival of Ahmadinejad, considerable political energy was devoted to the issue of Shi'i apocalyptic messianism, as well as to the Advent of the Hidden Imam in the political sphere along with the significant expansion of the Jamkaran

¹⁰ The documentary can be seen through this link: <https://www.aparat.com/v/Xb96l>

Mosque. However, these messianic orientations did not stop after Ahmadinejad's departure and indeed have continued to grow.

1.4 Ethics of *Entezār* and Mahdi's Advent: From Divine Intervention to Human Agency

In Shi'i messianic narratives, particularly those that relate to the End of Time and the Advent of the Mahdi, most of the narratives focus on the events before the Mahdi's Advent and on what the Mahdi will do when he appears. A majority of these narrations are descriptive in nature and do not necessarily encourage believers to do anything to hasten the return of the Mahdi. According to Shi'i tradition, the Mahdi will appear spontaneously and without prior notice and at exactly that time and place when hope has long since faded away. Therefore, the main duty of Shi'i believers during the occultation, according to the traditional Shi'i apocalyptic tradition, is to pray for the return of the Hidden Imam and his health and to pray for the community of believers so they can recognise the time of Mahdi's Advent and do their bit to help him (Khalaji, 2008: 5). The uncertainty of the believers about the time of Mahdi's Advent does not influence their belief regarding the existence of the Twelfth Imam and their performance of their duties. While the Shi'i community needs to prepare itself for the Advent of the Imam, according to this tradition, it should also be aware that it should never believe that preparation or the performance of religious duties will hasten the Advent of the Imam, nor should it believe that unpreparedness and postponement of moral or religious duties will result in a delay in his Advent.

Belief in the Mahdi as the apocalyptic saviour who will eventually save humanity one day with his Advent has always been an assured notion in the belief structure of Shi'ites. The Mahdi, however, was portrayed mostly as a distant figure within Shi'i apocalyptic literature before the Islamic Revolution, where attitudes towards him and his Advent rarely demonstrated any urgency or expectation that the non-fulfilment of believers' responsibilities might affect his Advent. Therefore, Mahdi's image did not have an obviously purposeful quality. In her historical study, *Modern Islamic Messianism: Eschatology to Teleology*, Rokhsefat (2020) argues that the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution has had a direct impact on the shift that Mahdist discourse has made, moving from the position of eschatology towards a teleological orientation. Through focusing on the discursive evolution of the concept of Mahdi from the early 1900s to the late 1970s, Rokhsefat shows how the figure of Mahdi as an apocalyptic saviour, whose Advent in Shi'i eschatological texts was considered distant, has been

re-oriented from eschatology to what she calls the “teleological orientation” in which the role of human agency in hastening the Advent of the Mahdi, which is considered imminent, is emphasised. With his teleological perspective, the Mahdi stops being a symbol of the End of Time and instead becomes a symbol of an End of Time that is purposeful, intentional, and fulfilling (p.213). Before the Islamic Revolution, Shi‘ites believed that the Mahdi’s Advent would occur only through divine intervention, and individuals’ willpower did not have any part in or ability to bring the Mahdi’s Advent to reality. The notion of Advent was envisioned in a distant future, and, as a result, it could never be facilitated, estimated, or measured (ibid: 7).

However, in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, religious leaders and ideologues re-interpreted the doctrine of *entezār* (expectation) and prescribed a series of guidelines for believers to follow to hasten the Advent of the Hidden Imam. As a result, the Mahdi will not appear spontaneously; believers must intervene to allow him to appear. The doctrine of *entezār* (expectation for the return of the Hidden Imam) occupies a great deal of space in Shi‘i apocalyptic theology, but within these traditional apocalyptic texts, believers are not given any specific requirements to fulfil as they await the Advent of the Mahdi. Even if one fulfils all his or her duties as an anticipator of Mahdi, this does not guarantee that the Mahdi’s Advent will happen for the anticipator of Mahdi (ibid).

A number of well-known ideologues of the Islamic Revolution, including Mehdi Bāzargān, Ayatollah Morteza Motahari and Ali Shari‘ati, all played an important role in providing an “active” interpretation of the Shi‘i messianic ideology during the 1960s and 70s. As an Islamist in the early 1960s, Bāzargān believed that waiting for the Hidden Imam should not be limited to passively waiting for him but requires action. To him, Mahdi’s Advent will not be a totally spontaneous and unprepared event without any precedence or preparation. Hence, he believed believers needed to do righteous deeds and words as much as possible to counteract the actions of the evil front. The result of this is, according to him, that justice slightly triumphs over oppression and partial redemption is provided, which he sees as pivotal for preparing the ground for the coming of the Hidden Imam (Bāzargān, 1961: 118-120).

From the perspective of the philosophy of history, Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, a philosopher and influential ideologue of the Islamic Revolution, advocated the concept of “partial salvation”, in which gradual reform was advocated as a means to expedite the final redemption, which would result in the ultimate victory of justice over evil

(Motahari, 2008: 43). Against passive approaches to messianism, Motahari expresses the opinion that the only right way for Muslims to look forward to the Mahdi's return in accordance with the Qur'an and traditions is the active way, in which they actively prepare themselves to receive the final salvation (ibid: 59)

In a similar fashion, Shari'ati reinterpreted the idea of the return of the Mahdi as an allegory of the imminent revolution of oppressed masses in the Third World (Arjomand, 2022: 189). He introduces the anticipation for the Mahdi (*entezār*) as *mazhab-i i'terāz* (the religion of protest) to highlight the social and political aspects of anticipation and provide a pragmatic approach toward it. In this sense, belief in the return of the Hidden Imam is not enough alone; understanding the responsibility entailed by this belief during the era of occultation and acting upon it is necessary. (ibid: 191). The current supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, also views expectation as pragmatic: "Waiting is an action to facilitate readiness, happiness, to strengthen motivation within the heart and soul, to increase vitality and dynamism across all aspects of life" (Naderi and Haji Hassan, 2020: 670). In fact, this definition of expectation treats it as an individual-social self-constitution process.

As a result of such re-interpretation, two major approaches to Shi'i messianism after the revolution emerged that can be distinguished as passive and active messianism, through which passive and active types of *entezār* (expectation) for the Advent of the Mahdi are also differentiated. A passive messianism would be based on the traditional orthodox tendencies within Shi'ism, which did not encourage human actions in social and political arenas before the Advent of the Mahdi. As a result of this approach, salvation occurs only through divine intervention, and human agency and intervention are not recommended to accelerate the Advent of the Mahdi (Ahoui, 2012: 115). In this respect, a passive expectation regards the Advent of the Hidden Imam as an event in which true salvation and justice will only be achieved with the manifestation of the Hidden Imam and considers the current corruption and injustice to be necessary historical requirements that are unavoidable (Bayat, 1980: 161). By contrast, active messianism advocates, indeed encourages political action before the coming of the Mahdi to hasten his Advent as soon as possible (Ahoui, 2012: 116). A positive expectation in this respect encourages people to participate in the Imam's work of overthrowing oppression and implementing universal justice to bring about his ultimate return and revolution (Varzi 2006: 37). Such messianic expectation,

therefore, is opposed to conservatism, rationalism, and traditionalism, and has a progressive, future-oriented perspective (Bayat 1980: 161).

By taking this approach to Shi'i messianism, the leaders and ideologues of the Islamic Revolution were involved in promoting active messianism, which led to the reinterpretation of the doctrine of expectation for the Mahdi. A reinterpretation of the doctrine of *entezār* from traditional terminology to a revolutionary ideological framework aimed at convincing the community of believers to improve themselves and prepare for the return of the Imam, since in this perspective, the Imam's Advent would be dependent on its believers' active involvement (Maloney 2002: 99; Varzi 2006: 37). It is important to clarify that the meaning of active *entezār* is not that Shi'ites should give up on their religious duties and obligations in the period of occultation in the hope that the Mahdi will come and solve all the problems by himself (Salīmīyān, 2010: 213). Rather, the believers must follow the orders of Islam so that they can identify the religion in the right way to pave the way for the return of their Messiah. As a matter of fact, waiting for the Advent of the Messiah does not invalidate religious duty, nor does it give the believers an excuse to procrastinate on fulfilling their religious obligations. The act of indifference or laxity in regard to the duties of religion must be avoided at all costs as it will cause a delay in Mahdi's Advent.

In the post-revolutionary messianic literature, this type of expectation has been identified as mobilizing, active, positive, and true expectation in order to create a strong motivation in believers, which is manifested in the phenomenon of what is known as hope for the future (*omid be āyandeh*) (ibid). Through a positive vision of the future, which is far more excellent, more beautiful, and better than the one they have today, through the lens of hope, they can give meaning to the self by considering a better and more fulfilling future.

There are many benefits associated with the practice of such a mobilising and active form of expectation, one of which is the feeling that one is in the presence of the Hidden Imam in one's life as one lives it. Nothing is more effective in correcting and improving a true *montazer's* behaviour than being reminded that all his or her actions and behaviour are always under the supervision of the Hidden Imam. As a result of this continuous surveillance, not only do individuals gradually improve, but also the overall morale of society begins to improve (ibid).

1.5 Abstaining from Sin and Obtaining Moral Virtue: a Prerequisite for the Mahdi's Advent

The Advent of the Hidden Imam can be considered a rupture between the End of Time and the Day of Resurrection within Shi'i eschatology. According to the eschatological faith, all the actions and duties that the believers take in their everyday lives will be evaluated on the Day of Judgment (Loureiro, 2010: 79). Nevertheless, the idea that the Mahdi will appear plays a part in reminding the believers that the Mahdi is monitoring their actions before the day of judgement. It is important to note that this monitoring is not one-sided. This means that the Mahdi reacts to the actions of his followers. He becomes happy or sad over the actions of his followers under this constant surveillance. Moreover, the implication of the believers' actions is not only limited to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the Hidden Imam but is also emphasised as an important factor affecting the speed or delay of the Advent of the Mahdi. For example, the aforementioned Grand Ayatollāh Bahjat (d. 2009), advised those interested in meeting the Mahdi to 'send a large number of blessings to the Hidden Imam simultaneously with the recitation of *do'a-ye faraj* (the prayer hastening his Advent) and regularly visit the Jamkaran Mosque to perform the necessary prayers' (Rahnema, 2011: 51). The Imam and believers are mutually dependent, according to him, which means that people ought to pray for the return of the Imam, and until they strengthen their relationship with the Hidden Imam, they will not be able to see improvements in their circumstances (ibid).

Repentance from sin is one of the most crucial things believers must do to hasten the return of the Hidden Imam. This attitude towards the anticipation of the Hidden Imam is primarily adopted by *vo'āz* (preachers), because preachers have a very strong social power base in their communities and have a large following of mosque-goers and non-intellectual Shi'i worshippers (Khalaji 2008:12). The Imam is viewed as the centre of Shi'i piety in such an interpretation, which is similar to what historians call "pre-millennialist" discourse, based on the belief that spiritual improvements must be made to prepare the world for the saviour's advent (Fenn 2006: 23). Furthermore, the situation can be compared to what is known as "any-moment" coming in Christianity, which demands that the believer relentlessly expects every moment to be better than the last, as well as a continuous discipline of self-improvement (ibid).

There has been an increasing number of books published after the revolution that encourage people to prepare for the return of the Imam by focusing on self-

improvement. The stories of pious people who have managed to meet the Twelfth Imam have been published in many books and pamphlets since the Islamic Revolution to demonstrate that it is possible to visit him during occultation, and it is even possible to establish close contact with him during occultation. Two years after Ahmadinejad was elected president in 2007, Morteza Aqa Tehrani,¹¹ a well-known cleric and close assistant of Mesbah Yazdi,¹² published a book about the Hidden Imam titled *The Desire to See the Friend's Face (Sudā-ye Rū-ye Dūst)*. His book details the encounters of those who have seen the Hidden Imam during his occultation. There are a number of obligations and duties listed in his book that would guarantee the opportunity to meet the Imam. Among the duties contained in this list are: "the supplication and zikr that need to be recited and their specific number; the rituals that must be enacted; the holy shrines to be visited, including the Jamkaran Mosque; and the format and content of writing the petition to the Hidden Imam" (Rahnema, 2011:54-55). Aqa Tehrani owes a great debt to his teacher, Mesbah Yazdi, for highlighting the possibility of having a face-to-face meeting with the Twelfth Imam. Mesbah Yazdi claimed there is no prohibition against contacting the Mahdi and people may benefit from his support while he is occulted (ibid). He believes that when believers establish a covenant with the Hidden Imam, they will receive his support and help, and only when they commit to behaving in a way acceptable to him will they be able to gain his attention (ibid). Aqa Tehrani's book is one of the many books and pamphlets which inspire Shi'i believers to meet the Hidden Imam in order to hasten the return of the Imam from occultation. A significant political outcome of such books, as Ali Rahnema argues (2011), is to cause the common folk to forget about their material needs until they encounter the Hidden Imam in this world (ibid: 56). In light of the emphasis placed on the Mahdi's imminent return and the call for believers to take active steps to expedite his Advent, believers have been put in a mental state of limbo as all worldly concerns become insignificant in comparison to the magnitude and significance of the awaited Imam's return (ibid: 74). For a while, the expectation of the Mahdi's Advent detaches them from material futures and mundane affairs and creates a space in which they can simultaneously envision a future and themselves within it.

¹¹ He was regarded as Ahmadinejad's moral advisor and ethics mentor. He is a hardliner Iranian Shi'i cleric and politician.

¹² He was a member of the Assembly of Experts, which selects the Supreme Leader. He was considered Iran's most conservative and powerful clerical oligarch in the city of Qom.

Since the Revolution, apart from the widespread circulation of numerous published materials about the Hidden Imam and what the duties of those who await are, there has always been a trend in the public space for revolutionary ideologues to promote messianic fervour. With their emphasis on the issue of abandoning sin and piety, these famous speakers used the political aspect as a complementary factor to the issue of the Mahdi's Advent.

Alireza Panāhīān, a conservative cleric who is the Supreme Leader's representative in universities, is one of the prominent religious speakers who, over the past two decades, have constantly discussed the Hidden Imam, the signs of his Advent and the duty of those who anticipate him during his occultation, from various university platforms as well as various television and radio programs.¹³ It is likely that he was one of the few conservative clerics over the last decade who has captured the attention of young people in the Shi'i community, perhaps more than anyone else, with over one million followers on Instagram. The wide dissemination of clips of his preaching and his books in the field of Mahdism, public piety, the duties of those who await in the period of occultation, the solution to abandon sin and the techniques for the performance of rituals and religious lifestyle, plays an important role in drawing attention to the Hidden Imam and his eventual Advent.¹⁴

A cleric close to the leader of Iran, he has always linked the Mahdi's Advent with the Iranian revolution. There is no doubt that Panāhīān considers the issue of the Mahdi's Advent to be a political issue, which means that it is insufficient to abandon personal sin to accelerate the Mahdi's Advent. In addition to abandoning sin, believers must also accelerate the Advent of the Mahdi by establishing a collective life based on piety and moral virtues under the political leadership of the Islamic Revolution. In other words, besides personal piety, political piety (which implies the practice of participating in the fundamental values and principles of the Islamic Revolution) is also emphasized as a duty for those who wait for the Advent of the Hidden Imam and as a prerequisite for his Advent as well.

In his opinion, the most important characteristic and concern of a true *montazer* should be the feeling of anticipating the imminent Advent of the Hidden Imam. A true *montazer*, when he sees that Advent is imminent, is focused on building an exemplary

¹³ A large number of video clips of his speeches about Mahdi and the End of Time are available on his personal website: (<http://panahian.ir/category/بیان-ها/سخنرانی/مهدویت-و-آخرالزمان>)

¹⁴ The books he has written are available through this link. Translations of his book, 'Waiting for the Saviour,' have been published in both English and French. (<http://panahian.ir/category/کتابخانه/تالیفات>)

society that can serve as a precursor to its Advent and demonstrate its qualities to the world. From his perspective, therefore, the most important concern of a true *montazer* should be stabilising, growing, and strengthening the Islamic Republic system as the foundational government which will bring about the Advent of the Mahdi in the future. Similarly, as a lay ideologue and a prominent proponent of Mahdism, trying to attach the Islamic Revolution to the concept of Mahdism, Ali Akbar Ra'efipour,¹⁵ a pro-regime public speaker and conspiracy theorist with a huge following among young hardliners, has been a regular guest of the university student unions and at mosques and cultural centres delivering public lectures and television programs on a wide range of religious, political and economic issues over the past decade. One of the most important and frequent topics that he has constantly lectured on since the last decade has been the End of Time, the Signs of the Advent, as well as the duties of those waiting during the occultation. His speeches have always attracted a great deal of attention from his listeners, and clips of his speeches have been widely disseminated digitally as well. By using simple and easy-to-understand language for the public, he frequently presents an apocalyptic image in almost every speech he gives, citing Shi'i traditional narratives as well as quoting from the Torah and Bible, in order to encourage messianic euphoria among the followers and emphasising the imminent Advent of the Mahdi. In all of his analyses, he always places the Islamic Republic as the foundation for the Advent of the Hidden Imam and the enemies of this system, like America, Israel, and the West, as the Antichrist currents and enemies of the Hidden Imam. In a similar manner to the approach of Panāhīān, he also believes that the delay in the Advent may be due to the lack of a collective gathering of the hearts of the believers during the occultation period. Thus, the Mahdi's Advent is not only grounded in personal piety but also based on political grounding and the defence of the ideals of the Islamic

¹⁵ Ra'efipour is known for his conspiracy theories based on Shi'i eschatology and the coming of Mahdi. He is also the founder of the Masāf Institute (<https://masaf.ir>) in which he aims to clarify the seditions of the apocalypse and familiarize the society with Shi'i messianic topics and teachings. By making use of Masāf, Ra'efipour has invented and implemented many new methods of propaganda to propose cultural products with messianic and apocalyptic parlance. Masāf's output includes Video clips, Music, Games, digital graphics and illustrations, special software for mobile phones and computers and documentaries to promote and propagate the Shi'i apocalyptic messianism at the national and international level. Over the past decade, Masāf Institute has been actively involved in organizing numerous conferences in the field of Mahdism as well. In 2014, a conference was held under the initiative of this institution in collaboration with the Promised Mahdi Cultural Foundation, which was formed in 2000 with the support of Iran's leader, under the title of the International Conference on the Doctrine of Mahdism, to honour those individuals who have promoted Mahdism in various cultural, artistic and social contexts through the use of the honorary term *Mahdi Yāvarān* (Mahdi Helpers). Also in 2018, this institute held a conference on 'Mahdism and Islamic Revolution' in collaboration with seminaries, aiming to establish a link between Islamic Revolution and Shi'i messianism.

Revolution, which have a significant effect on accelerating Mahdi's Advent. This linkage between Shi'i messianism and the principles and values of the Islamic Revolution should be taken into account as an effort to position the Islamic Republic against the established world order: an order, which, according to Shi'i messianism, must be subverted by the Hidden Imam in due course.

As a result of the apocalyptic anticipation and vision that has arisen in the wake of the imminence of the Mahdi's Advent and which has become widespread in the form of messianic discourse in the wake of the Revolution, I argue that messianic perceptions influence their process of moral self-fashioning. There is a profound impact of these apocalyptic and messianic sensibilities on the self-fashioning processes of my interlocutors, in which the apocalyptic future, as well as the imminent Advent of the Shi'i Messiah, creates a rupture in the continuity of the present, and creates feelings and attitudes influenced by it. It is clear that these messianic dispositions are embodied and have a profound impact on the affective perceptions of believers and played an important role in shaping the religious piety and moral regeneration of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims. Therefore, I will be demonstrating in my subsequent ethnographic chapters that many of the virtues and practices promoted by the Islamic Republic under revolutionary messianic rhetoric do not necessarily contribute to ideological mobilisation and that my interlocutors cannot be understood adequately as revolutionary subjects that adhere to the original principles of the Islamic Revolution. These messianic discourses are being negotiated, re-interpreted, and redefined by the practitioners and can be understood within the dynamics of ethical and pious self-formation. In the next chapter, I show how this active and revolutionary understanding of Shi'i messianism, which sees the Mahdi's Advent as imminent and promotes messianic fervour among Twelver Shi'i groups to prepare for the Mahdi's Advent, is manifested in Jamkaran Mosque as the leading site for the practice and embodiment of these messianic anticipations.

1.6 Conclusion

In an attempt to play on popular frustration with revolutionary Islamic slogans, the Iranian state has adopted a deliberate policy of appropriating messianic aspirations to manipulate public opinion. It is through recourse to traditional faith like Mahdism that the state, and more particularly the conservative ayatollahs, hope to maintain their support base when old revolutionary rhetoric can no longer inspire grassroots

loyalty (Amanat, 2009:245). With the use of messianic revolutionary rhetoric, the government hopes to capture the attention of the public and form revolutionary subjects who are faithful to the principles of the Islamic Revolution. As a means of capturing the public's imagination and encouraging them to pursue what they portrayed as a return to the original principles of the Islamic Revolution (Kaussler, 2012: 73–4), the use of messianic rhetoric is primarily aimed at organising and encouraging revolutionary forces such as maddahs and preachers, as well as establishing and validating the clerical class as the legitimate representative of the Mahdi.

Therefore, the political messianism of the Islamic Republic attempts to promote the Shi'i messianism, which is based on the formation of hoping subjects who wait and obey the hidden Imam to strengthen the presence and role of people in interaction with the leaders of the Islamic Republic as the right successors to the Hidden Imam and to give legitimacy to them in the time of his absence. However, this version of political messianism that the Islamic republic follow which aim at revitalizing the revolutionary principles and values to create revolutionary subjects does not necessarily lead to political participation. The explanations of my interlocutors in the ethnographic chapters show that the Islamic government has yet to be able to monopolise messianism to serve the interest of the Islamic Revolution as a whole. These messianic discourses and rhetoric promoted by the Islamic Republic, I contend, are negotiated, re-interpreted, and redefined by the practitioners and can be understood within the dynamics of ethical and pious self-fashioning. Due to the revolutionary messianic rhetoric that the leaders of Revolution adopted in the course of the Revolution, the abstract figure of the Mahdi became more of an impending and practical focus rather than a future-oriented one, as traditional accounts of messianism often implied.

Chapter 2: The Jamkaran Mosque: Formation, Evolution and Popularity

2.1 Introduction

Located on the outskirts of the city of Qom, the Jamkaran Mosque is considered to be the most important messianic pilgrimage site among Shi'is devoted to the Hidden Imam. It is estimated that every year, over 20 million pilgrims visit this messianic Mosque, from all over the world, according to the statistics published by the Mosque.¹⁶ In this chapter, I aim to describe the formation, evolution, and popularity of the Jamkaran Mosque over time. This section examines the Mosque's significance and shows how it fits within my larger research project. As the major locus of messianic anticipation in Iran, the Jamkaran Mosque plays an integral part in the manifestation of the messianic trends I am particularly interested in. In what follows, I demonstrate how a modest Mosque and an obscure pilgrimage site have been transformed after the Islamic Revolution into a sacred place of worship and pilgrimage that draws millions of pilgrims annually.

2.2 Jamkaran Between Myth and History: From Inspiration to Installation

Located in the heart of the Islamic Republic, the city of Qom is home to a number of important pilgrimage sites, such as the shrine of Ma'soumeh, sister of the Shi'i eighth Imam and a number of seminaries that constitute the core of the clerical establishment within the country. Just a few minutes' drive from the centre of Qom is Jamkaran Mosque. Until the Islamic Revolution, Jamkaran was largely hidden from the general public except for religious orthodox in the region of Qom and their devoted followers. The Jamkaran Mosque is named after the village of Jamkaran, in whose vicinity it is situated, about six miles to the west of the city of Qom (see Figure 2). The Mosque has also been called the Mosque of the Lord of the Age (Masjid-i Šāhib-al-Zamān) due to its connection to the Hidden Imam (Mir-Azīmī, 2012: 46).

¹⁶ See: <https://jamkaran.ir/history/>

Figure 2: Location of the Mosque



The most famous narrative of how the current Mosque in Jamkaran was constructed is based upon a story that Mirza Hossein Nouri (1838-1902), a leading Shi'i cleric, has narrated in a number of his books, including *Al-Najm al-thāqib fī ahwāl al-Imām al-ghā'ib* (*The star of piercing brightness concerning the circumstances of the Hidden Imam*, commonly referred to as *Al-Najm-i thāqib*), where he refers to sources such as *Tāriḫ-e Qom* (history of Qom) and a lost work authored by Shaykh Sadouq¹⁷ (d. 381 A.H. /991 A.D.). The story is presented in the form of a first-person narrative that is told by a devout Muslim named Hasan bin Muthlih Jamkarāni.¹⁸ This can be summarised in the following way:

Shaykh Hasan ibn Muthlih Jamkarāni says: I was sleeping in my home in the village of Jamkaran on Tuesday night, the 17th of the month of Ramadan in the year 393 A.H. It was after midnight that a group of people came to my house and woke me up and said, 'get up and answer the call of your Master, Imam Mahdi who has summoned you!'(...)Hasan continued: when I came out of the house, I saw a group of noble people and offered them my greetings. They took me to the place - where the present location of Jamkaran Mosque is - while I was looking carefully around, I saw a couch surrounded by fine carpets and pillows. A young man who looked to be around 30 years old, was reclining on the couch, resting himself against the pillows. An old man was sitting beside him reading a book for him, while more than 60 men were around them - some of them dressed in white and others in green - offering their salat. The old man, whom I later realized was Prophet Khizr¹⁹, asked me to be seated. At that time, the Imam, who was sitting next to Prophet Khizr, called me by name and said: 'You must go to Hasan bin Muslim and give him a message: for the past five years, you have

¹⁷ He is one of the most famous Shi'i hadith scholars and jurists in the 4th century AH and the author of some of the most important hadith sources of Shi'i jurisprudence.

¹⁸ For an overview of the early history of Jamkaran, see, for example, *Tāriḫchih-yi Masjid-i Muqaddas-i Jamkarān* published by Masjid Jamkaran (Qom, n.d.) and H. Karim Qumi, *Ā'inih-yi Asrār*, chap. 1 (online publication: <http://jamkaran.info/fa/library/asrar.htm>).

¹⁹In Muslim literature, he is known as a prophet with eternal life. For more information see: "al-Khidr." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 10, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Khidr>.)

been farming on this land, planting, and growing many things, but whatever you grow, we are destroying. This land is sacred, and Allah the All-Mighty has chosen this land above all others and bestowed distinction and honour to it. Even this year, you have intended to plough and cultivate this land, though you neither have the right or authorization to do so. Thus, whatever financial earnings you have earned from this land must be returned so that the Masjid can be built on this spot. Since you have taken this land, which does not belong to you, Allah the Glorious and Powerful has taken two of your young children away from you, but still, you have not realized the wrong you are doing. If you continue in this way, the punishment of Allah, which is beyond your imagination, will strike you.' I said, 'O my Master, I must have some unique and convincing signs, since without this the people will not believe me. The Imam said, 'I will show you the signs at this spot so that your statement will prove to be truthful. You simply go and convey the message to the people. Go and see Sayyid Abu al-Hasan in Qom and tell him to come with you to visit Hassan and collect from him the earnings of the farmland for the past few years, and with this money, lay the foundation for the Masjid...(English translation quoted in Bhimji, 2000: 7-8).

Even though the standard narrative is loaded with symbolic details at every stage, the early history of the Mosque remains obscure in the current sources (Calmard, 2020). As a small building before the Islamic Revolution (see Figures 3 and 4), Jamkaran Mosque was renovated a handful of times throughout its history. This mosque was renovated for the first time in 1788 by Mirza Ali Akbar Jamkarani, and in that period, the mosque building's dimensions were 5 x 17 meters and on the south side, a courtyard of 13 x 17 meters was constructed (Feyz Qomi, 1971: 667). After some time, an individual named Ali Qoli Jamkarāni started building the courtyard of the Mosque from one side, and the rest of the work was not completed until Ali Asqar Khān Atābek was put in charge of completing the project during the Qajar period (Nāser-al-Shari'a, 2004: 233). Seven decades later, in 1968, the Pahlavi family provided a grant for basic renovations after determining that the Mosque's modest endowment was insufficient to meet the needs of its restoration (Amanat, 2009: 229).

Figure 3: An old view of Jamkaran Mosque, reservoir, and garden before the Revolution (Taken almost 50 years ago)



Figure 4: The entrance to the old Mosque before the Revolution



Until the 1970s, Jamkaran was a small and modest village, preserving a secluded aura in a serene environment conducive to prayer (ibid). As reported in the book entitled '*Ā'inih-yi Asrār*' (Mirror of Secrets: Investigating the Hadith of the Construction of the Holy Mosque of Jamkaran and Meeting with Imam Zamān), by Hossein Karimi, according to his observations, the mosque was in the following state in the lunar year 1390/1971:

About thirty years ago, the author recalls that there was a small area around which the Jamkaran Mosque was located, and a few rooms had been constructed for pilgrims to stay in. A few pious and distressed people often used to go there on Friday nights and special nights, but no one ever saw anyone else there on other nights. During one of

the blessed nights of the month of Rajab, the author and some friends took a stroll to the Mosque by foot and spent the entire night awake and preparing food that would be consumed during the fast on the following day. There was no one else there that night except for us. In the vicinity of the Mosque, there was a small reservoir with water that was not very clear. As I recall, in the area, there was a dried hole called Chāh-i Sāhib al-Zamān, which was covered with an iron window, and through the cracks of this window, people would drop petitions into the well. The road to it was dirt, and most people used to go there on foot since it was on a dirt road. There were not many people going to this mosque except special Shi'i pious devotees because the mosque wasn't very prosperous. Nevertheless, there were a few Shi'i pious believers who were bound to maintain a close relationship with this sacred place at the same time. I think that this expansion and the recent growth of the mass of people who flock there from all over the country on Tuesdays and Friday nights is directly related to the last 30 years. (Karimi, 1379: 43-44)

A cleric named Mohammad Taqi Bāfqī, who prayed at Jamkaran Mosque every Tuesday night for years, brought attention to the Mosque (Faqihi, 1999: 273-274). Bāfqī used to go to the Mosque on Tuesday nights with a group of seminary students, and he would perform the *Maqrib* and *I'sha* prayers there as well as worship there until the next morning (ibid). At the time, the Mosque was not prominent due to the limited number of clerics who travelled there, so it wasn't a place of importance in the minds of many people.

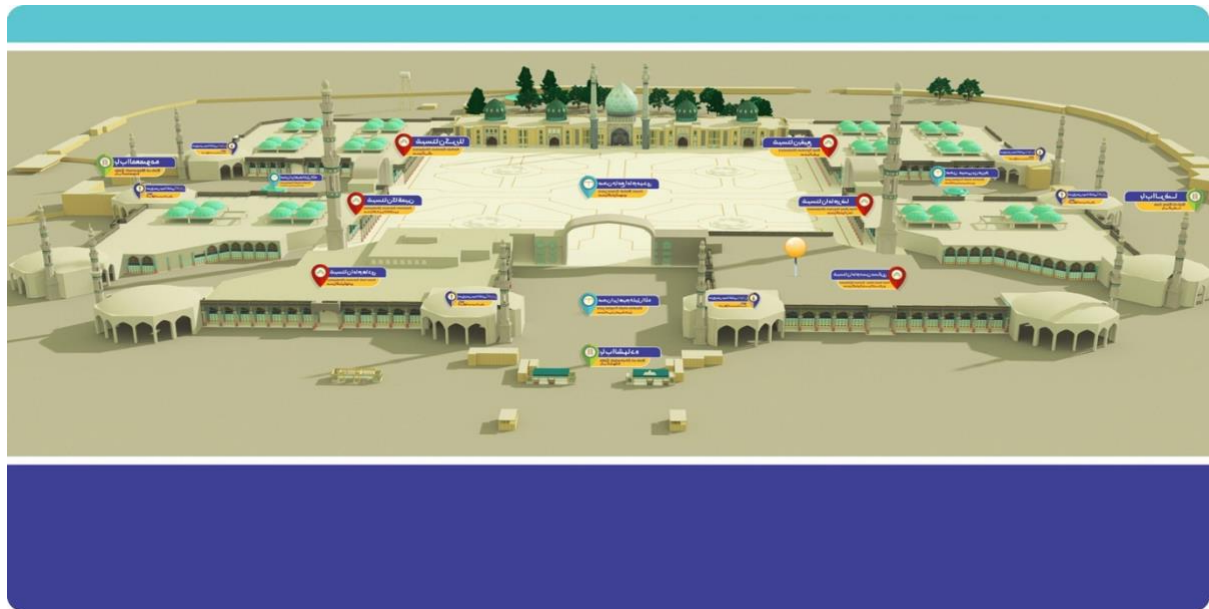
Under the Islamic Republic, messianic ideas gained popularity and as a result, many pilgrims began to visit the Mosque as its reputation grew. In 1995 due to state sponsorship, the sanctuary had been enlarged, hotels and restaurants built, and there was a direct motorway connecting Tehran with the city (Amir-Moezzi, 1996a: 161). In 2005, under the guidance of generous government grants, the facility began to expand and, since then, has evolved into an impressive and modern structure that serves the pilgrims and visitors well. Thousands of pilgrims now congregate there, primarily young people, especially on Tuesday evenings, which is said to have been the day of the apparition of the Imam at the site.

2.3 Jamkaran after the Islamic Revolution: Renovation to a Mega Mosque

During the Islamic Revolution, especially when Ahmadinejad, the president endorsed by the leader of the Islamic Republic, began spreading the idea of the return of the Mahdi, Jamkaran evolved into what can only be described as a mega- mosque after the

For the first phase of this project, a total of 2.8 million square meters of land were acquired. A second phase of this project is to be built on a land area of 6.2 million square meters, bringing the total area covered by the Jamkaran Mosque Master Plan to more than 9 million square meters (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: the Mosque's 3D map



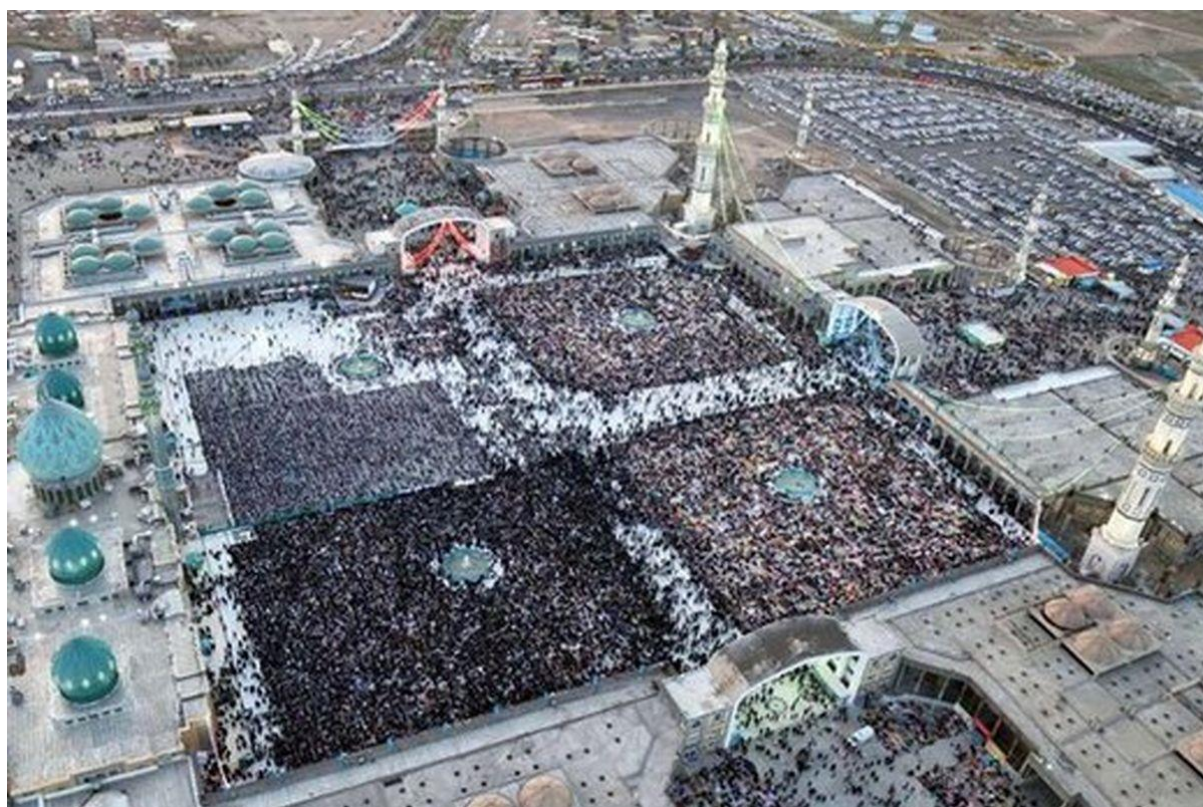
The first phase of this plan concerns the construction of the Mosque itself and its surroundings, and the second phase will be concerned with the construction of educational and cultural space in and around the Mosque, as well as a green space that will support the Mosque's environment. The construction of the Maqam Mosque inside the central courtyard and its four *shabistāns* (the covered part of a mosque) under four blue domes is now complete, resulting in the addition of 24,000 square meters to the building's space. As a result of the completion of the first phase of the master plan, more than 1.2 million pilgrims will be able to attend the Mosque and worship simultaneously. In addition to these four *shabistāns*, the construction of seven additional *shabistāns* is underway to be used during mourning days, holidays, and various types of ceremonies that occur throughout the year. The construction of five domes and fourteen minarets is anticipated as part of the project, and to date, five domes and eight minarets have already been completed (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: the view of the Mosque from above



A process of reconstruction and development of the simple Mosque of Jamkaran has been carried out through the expenditure of millions of dollars by the Islamic government in the aftermath of the Revolution. The allocation of large funds for the reconstruction and development of the Mosque provided the Mosque with the opportunity to establish its own bureaucracy as a Mosque that competed in size and budget with the shrine of Ma'soumeh in Qom and was probably the second-largest mosque in the country after the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad (see Figure 8). For example, a number of laws were established by President Ahmadinejad during his first months as president, such as the application of approximately \$20 million to the Mosque's development project, with the belief that within two years, the Hidden Imam would reveal himself (Amanat, 2009: 241). This resulted in the creation of an enormous shrine with various components, including exhibition spaces and a bookstore, as well as a centre for research and publishing, which is primarily concerned with messianic matters, including assessing reports of encounters with the Hidden Imam, miraculous healing cases and so forth.

Figure 8: The density of pilgrims in the Mosque



Founded in 1994, Jamkaran Mosque Publications aims to serve the pilgrims and followers of the Hidden Imam through the publication and spread of religious and Shi'i messianic knowledge. In the early 2000s, the publication steadily grew in circulation and titles and it became one of the most prominent publications in the field of Shi'i messianism. Publications in the first period were considered most important in reviving tradition and answering doubts about the Jamkaran site and Mahdism.²¹

A significant leap in the development of this centre was made in early 2011 with the change in management and policies (and the change in title to Jamkaran Book Publishing). One of the most crucial policy changes was completing the existing programme by entering the fields of Shi'i messianic fiction, children's books, and teen literature. Over the course of its existence, Jamkaran Publishing House has published more than 800 titles in these various genres.²²

In the past few years, the Mosque has been printing a large amount of literature concerning the Mahdi and the events of the End Times. As a result of their prevalence and the content of these publications, it is possible to see how the expectations of the Shi'i messianic pilgrims regarding the Shi'i Messiah have transformed profoundly in

²¹ See <https://ketabejamkaran.ir/دریاردما/>

²² A list of Jamkaran publications can be found here: <https://ketabejamkaran.ir>

recent years. During this transformation, widespread expectations have moved away from the traditional, narrative forms of messianism that focus more on the distant future and more speculative aspects into a more immediate and pragmatic one. Accordingly, modern messianic exegesis attempts to relate to world events in the present rather than just relying on tradition and classical sources as the basis for its interpretation. Among those publications, there are popular reports similar to those that were found in classical sources, in which the Mahdi miraculously heals ordinary people during his personal visits to them. Additionally, they provide religious interpretations of current events such as the Iraq War and Hezbollah's struggle with Israel, as well as the imminent return of the Mahdi and the looming advent of the messianic state that is supposedly on its way.

In 2016, Jamkaran Publications received the title of “Chosen Publisher of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, won the support of cultural centres as well as non-Iranian publishers and was able to host prominent national authors and widely circulated works. One of the many recent successes of Jamkaran Publications includes the jump in its media presence as well as the wide coverage of the books it publishes on radio and television. In recent years the Mosque's publication centre have been extended to "Research and Publication Institute", which means that the scope of the institution's goals and missions will be expanded to be a more effective publisher of the culture of Mahdism and its social values.

Among the different departments at the Mosque, there is a department of public relations, an active Internet department, two departments of cultural assistance for men and women who have religious questions or concerns regarding the Mahdi, a department for honorary servants, volunteers, an audio-visual department which provides service to several large screen displays throughout the site as well as guards and security personnel. Furthermore, there is a counselling service which is free of charge and can be used by anyone in order to deal with family, marriage, and legal problems. Besides providing religious inquiries, the clerics also provide counselling services to the people. Under the turquoise dome of the main building, where pilgrims supplicate and recite *namāz*, a cleric sits behind a table which is known as the section for recording miracles and memories for pilgrims (*sabt-i-kerāmāt-va-khāterāt*). The cleric is tasked with making sure that those cases of miraculous cures and other achievements that occur in Jamkaran are verified as being legitimate or false based on the testimony of these individuals. It is worth mentioning that Jamkaran not only has

its own farms but also has a sheep farm that produces meat, a slaughterhouse nearby, as well as a massive soup kitchen which serves free meals to the pilgrims in some religious events (Amanat, 2009: 231).

Jamkaran Mosque is distinguished from other Shi'i shrines by two distinctive features. First of all, the Mosque, due to the presence of a marble stone in the middle of which there is a footprint, is known as the 'Footsteps of the Hidden Imam'. A second feature of the Mosque is that there is a well adjoining its main building, which is called the *Šāheb-al-Zamān* Well, which acts as a way for the pilgrims to communicate with the Hidden Imam. It is important to note that the notion of petitioning the Twelfth Imam for favours and ensuring that they will be fulfilled constitutes one of the major aspects of the supernatural concept that the Hidden Imam intervenes in the affairs of the material world, resolving the problems of those petitioning him and relieving their pains (Rahnema, 2011: 67). The idea that if the Imam is petitioned in accordance with proper rituals, then satisfaction would almost automatically be obtained is attributed by many to the works of Mohammad-Bāqer Majlesi (1627-1699), a top Shi'i cleric. For a petition to reach the Hidden Imam, Majlesi provides an account of how the petition should be written, sealed, wrapped, and left in a stream or thrown into a well for it to be found by the Hidden Imam (ibid). The belief holds that the Hidden Imam will respond to the petition once he receives it. In almost every book that has been published over the past few years, which deals with the topic of communicating with the Twelfth Imam, you will find the directives of Majlesi (ibid).

It is possible that the popularity of Jamkaran Mosque and the rituals connected with it can be attributed to the miraculous nature of the Mosque in people's minds. A typical representation of the Jamkaran Mosque in the media is that it is a miraculous place that has the power to relieve everyday anxieties, heal illnesses and disabilities, and provide solutions to financial problems and general despair. The Mosque's website had a page in which it documented a list of problems (such as financial difficulties and family issues) and diseases (from cancer and infertility to the healing of the disabled) which the members of the community have been able to resolve and be cured after visiting the Mosque. Even though this section has been removed from the new website version, many of these reports have been published as books²³. Furthermore, the list

²³ See for example: Yusefi, M. *Shafā yāftegāne Imam Zaman dar Masjed Jamkaran* (Qom, 1389/2010), English trans. *Healed people by the Imam of the Age in Jamkaran Mosque*; See also: <https://ketabejamkaran.ir>

of publications of the Mosque also includes many books with titles ranging from the story of the healed to the stories of meeting with the Hidden Imam, as well as the stories of the miracles that the Imam performed in this Mosque.

In this sense, the representation of miracles is proof of this truth, which demonstrates that sincere communication with the Hidden Imam, in conjunction with moral purity, makes the pilgrim worthy of the care and attention of the Imam. In the midst of all of these miracle-oriented discourses, which are replicated throughout the media related to the Mosque, whether they are in the form of books or published in the virtual space, as well as during sermons within the Mosque, a common theme is that there is a general state of sinfulness and lack of moral rectitude that is the main reason for the occultation of the Imam. A similar theme can also be found throughout the posters that are displayed inside the Mosque.

However, miracles are not the only aspect of the Jamkaran piety culture. Following the Revolution and exclusively through the Jamkaran Mosque, messianic literature has always stressed moral purification and a complete abandonment of sin as a precondition for making the Mahdi's Advent as soon as possible. The list of book titles of Jamkaran Publications, which includes about 800 titles, includes many different types of books that cover a wide range of topics, including the guide to writing a petition to the Imam, the letters sent to the Imam by pilgrims, the discourse of Mahdism, the concept of expectation, as well as Shi'ites' moral, social and political duties in the age of occultation. Moreover, it also includes areas such as the signs of the coming of the Mahdi as well as answers to the doubts over his life and Advent, proving Jamkaran's legitimacy and the methods of communicating with the Hidden Imam as well as meeting him in person.

The Mosque not only offers cultural products for sale within its shops as well as at other locations throughout the city, but it also offers these items for sale through its website. Generally, these sources use a combination of Shi'i theological terminology, coupled with an emotional and melodramatic tone, to update the traditional Shi'i texts regarding the apocalyptic image of the Hidden Imam in such a way that they are easily understood by a range of people from all social strata, from men and women to children and teenagers. All possible tools are used to update this messianic and apocalyptic message, from poetry and prose to animation, motion graphics, and contests for paintings, photo exhibitions, and downloadable posters for mobile devices and desktop computers that are decorated with Jamkaran's image as well as

calligraphy with messianic and apocalyptic themes, all of which are aimed at promoting hope for a pious future.

2.4 Jamkaran Mosque: Viewing Together

In the bus, as the journey continued, the noise diminished little by little, and it seemed as if everyone was gradually becoming silent as if all eyes had latched onto the turquoise dome that we were slowly approaching (see Figure 9). The closer we got, the more enthusiastic the anticipation in our hearts became until we finally reached the destination. When the pilgrims got off the bus, they made their way to the main entrance of the mosque. The main entrance starts with an iron gate, which is topped with a decorative plate with the name of the Hidden Imam engraved on it. The sun seemed to be brighter here, but no one seemed to feel the heat of the air. This area was extremely crowded, and there was a wide range of people of all ages, young and old, male, and female.

Figure 9: Approaching the Mosque when the turquoise dome becomes visible



A wide variety of pilgrims from different places come to Jamkaran to participate in the pilgrimage. Some pilgrims come to the Mosque in their private cars, others take pilgrimage tours available in their local neighbourhoods, some take buses from passenger terminals, some take taxis, and even walk, some walk to the Mosque. Pilgrims are usually dropped off by tours at a car park adjacent to the Mosque on the

day of their pilgrimage. It is also possible for those who come to the mosque by private car to use the dedicated parking spaces near the Mosque. People who travel by bus or taxi through the passenger terminals usually get off at a square named *72 Tan*, which is the entrance square to Qom City, and then travel almost 14 kilometres to reach the Mosque from there.

Even though the Mosque is located in a desert area at the base of Dobaradaran mountain, pilgrims can easily access its facilities. Many stores and restaurants surround the Mosque, in addition to a large mall with many different stores selling everything from clothes to books to souvenirs. A medical centre also provides medical services for pilgrims. A mixture of ritual activities and joyful leisure characterises the activities that pilgrims perform within the Mosque. It is common to see Muslim women in a black *chādor* (all-covering veil worn over the state-prescribed hijab or modest clothing) cooking on outdoor stoves (picnicking) while others pray and cry in front of the Mosque's blue dome with sincere tears in their eyes. Several pilgrims have fallen asleep there during the night. Others are eating and talking at the same time. Children are playing. The immense space of the shrine has also enabled them to interact with one another. In general, it is like a community in which a wide variety of activities are taking place all at the same time.

There are six doors leading into and out of the Mosque (see Figure 10). Located in *Entezār* Square, Door No. 1 is considered the main entrance because it is near important centres such as the Museum of *Dīn o Dunyā* (Religion and the World), the Jamkaran Bookstore and car park No. 1. At the entrances to all the doors, there are separate entrances for men and women to segregate them from each other. Upon arrival, the clothing and appearance of women are checked to ensure that their clothing matches the criteria that have been set out for them. Women are prohibited from entering the Mosque unless they wear a *chādor*. Nevertheless, there is no gender segregation in the Mosque apart from in the *shabistān* (covered area of the mosque). Security guards and volunteers are present at each gate to assist the pilgrims and guide them. In the yard of the Mosque, some transportation vehicles are available for disabled and elderly pilgrims to use to reach different parts of the Mosque. To spend the night in the courtyard, some families have brought stoves, dishes, cutlery, and vessels to cook and heat food.

Figure 10: Three-dimensional map of the Mosque



The Mosque's main entrance is decorated with an archway shaped in a flattened style. As one approaches the entrance, one notices two large, detached concrete minarets of 85 meters with square bases and octagonal shafts on either side (see Figure 11). The vastness and openness of the courtyard bring about a unique view for a visitor. It consists of three sides with low arcaded walkways dotted with arched gates, and two secondary entrances parallel to the main one. In front of these entrances stand two smaller minarets. A beautiful turquoise dome stands in front of the main entrance, which is surrounded by two minarets and an ornately tiled main entrance. The four secondary portals are surrounded by smaller domes painted green behind each portal (see Figure 12). In large yellow-gold Kufic calligraphy, the sizeable turquoise dome is decorated with geometric and calligraphic motifs. Printed behind each letter is the standard Shi'i declaration of belief. Inscribed on the main entrance of the Mosque are eight white marble decorations framed by eight intricate mosaic tiles, which depict the names and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad's family and descendants. The arch's apex is crowned with an imposing circular painting, enjoining the pilgrims to enter in peace and safety at the heart of the arch. In some ways, the prayers that are expressed in these circular paintings are similar to the ones that pilgrims utter as they reach different stages in their pilgrimage, evoking the names of the holy ones.

Figure 11: The main entrance archway with two large minarets standing on either side



Figure 12: The turquoise dome and four green domes



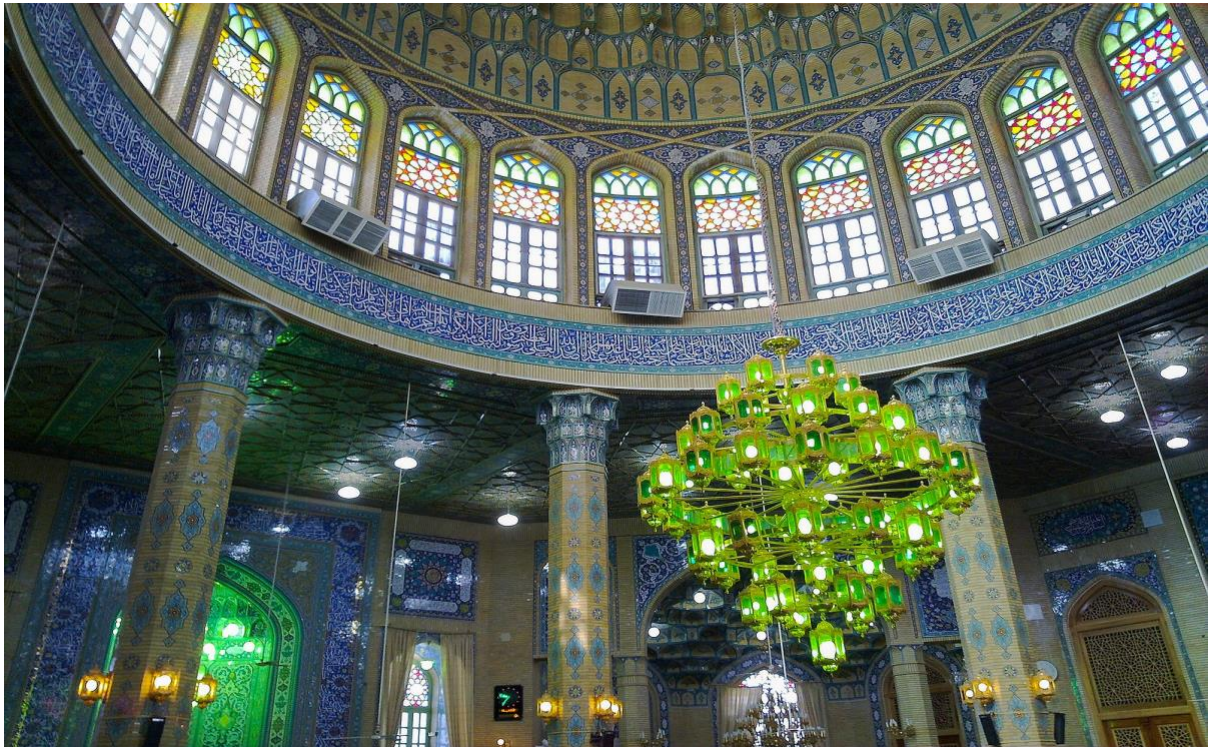
As part of the decorative scheme within the Mosque, glazed tiles alternate with plain ones to create complex geometric and floral patterns that create a rich and detailed interior (see Figure 13). In the Mosque's centre, you will find the main mihrab, which is placed right under the main dome and supported by eight fluted columns.

Calligraphic lozenges adorn the dome's roof, which is divided into twelve sections in an alternation of beige and brown hues; inside each one, blessings and the names of the Imams are inscribed in a calligraphic script (see Figure 13). The most clearly legible inscription on the top of the dome is in white script on a dark blue background where the visible Qur'anic verses are written (see Figure 14). The eschatological verses from Sūreh al-Ādiyāt, which are written on the dome, depict the popular belief that the Advent of Mahdi is imminent. As well as the multiple calligraphic inscriptions scattered throughout the Mosque, where the names of the Imams along with Quranic verses and hadith are repeated frequently, the messianism of the Mosque is recapitulated within its walls, as well as its façade and domes, where the messianic perceptions are repeated and disseminated.

Figure 13: Inside the Maqām Mosque



Figure 14: Under the turquoise dome



The Mosque's main building has an area of approximately 1,100 square meters and is referred to as the Maqām Mosque. This Mosque has an octagonal shape; next to it is another Mosque known as the *Marmar* Mosque (Marble Mosque). This Mosque has been decorated with various types of tiling, stonework, brickwork, muqarnas work (a form of ornamented vaulting in Islamic architecture), and plastering, which shows the unique, spectacular, and beautiful combination of Islamic architectural art and culture. Prior to entering the main *shabistān*, it is customary for pilgrims to take off their shoes and leave them in the giant shoe racks. There are instructions written on the wall about how to recite *namāz* (salat/Islamic prayer), and pilgrims read these instructions and try to remember them as they go to the Mosque (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Instruction on how to recite the namāz of the Hidden Imam inside the Maqām mosque.



When the pilgrims enter the main *shabistān*, they look as though they have entered a state of mystical enchantment. The green lights combined with the decoration of the area, which gives a sense of what is sacred, along with the scent of *golāb* (rose water) which perfumes the atmosphere, all work at triggering the emotions of spiritual feelings in pilgrims. Everyone sits in a corner of the Mosque and recites prayers or supplications to the Imam, asking for his help and blessings. Those who have just arrived at the Mosque prepare themselves to pray as soon as they arrive. The scent of *golāb* permeates the Mosque's entire interior; even the walls are full of the scent of *golāb*.

In the middle of the Mosque, eight large octagonal pillars support the dome (see Figures 13 and 14). The combination of tiles and bricks has given the Mosque a unique look that makes it an attractive place to visit. Although it seems to be a very congenial

pilgrimage destination, the Mosque is not transparent in its purpose because it is both a pilgrimage site where individuals engage in ritual practices and, at the same time, its size and luxuriousness indicate a much broader vision - the government's conspicuous rhetoric stressing Mahdism and its overt messianic posture (Rizvi, 2015: 131-132).

There is also something quite unusual about the vast and magnificent courtyard with the main dome compared to the four sub-domes along one facade in terms of size and proportion. The traditional architecture of Iran has a bipolar symmetry with four *īwāns* (a vaulted portal opening onto a courtyard) in which the primary qibla *īwān* is usually the largest of the four (ibid). However, this large courtyard in such large dimensions seems unnecessary due to the presence of Ma'soumeh's shrine and musallā mosque in Qom, which are close by. Therefore, it is undoubtedly true that the Mosque represents a hybrid structure as a result of political ideology, as well as a response to the network of pilgrimage in Iran. (ibid: 133).

Once the pilgrims enter the Mosque, they are immediately captivated by walls covered with writings and posters that adorn the Mosque. Placards and wall writings of this type usually contain hadiths from Shi'i Imams about the right way to live morally, the history of the Jamkaran Mosque, opinions of ulama regarding the Mosque, as well as phrases and poems about the necessity of abandoning sin and women maintaining the hijab (see Figures 16 and 17). Almost every part of the Mosque is adorned with posters relating to the history and ritual practices of the Mosque.

Figure 16: Example of a placard standing in the courtyard including instruction on how to recite *namāz* and the brief history of the Mosque.



Figure 17: Example of a placard standing in the courtyard containing Qur'anic verses to motivate women to keep their hijab and instruction on how to recite *namāz*



On the walls around the entrance doors of Jamkaran Mosque, you can often find placards attached to the walls that provide the opinions of *marāji'* (sources of emulation) regarding the importance of the Jamkaran Mosque and pilgrimage to it (as an example, see Figures 18 and 19).

Figure 18: A quote from Ayatollāh Behjat, a famous Marja'-i Taqlid (source of emulation), about the Jamkaran pilgrimage: *“The Mosque itself guides people, and those who go there are guided by it. Our belief is that this blessed site and mosques like Jamkaran Mosque need no introduction. Someone who says we went there without seeing anything should be told that they did not go with a correct belief, or they went out of curiosity. The best representative of these places is the place itself.”*



Figure 19: A quote from Ayatollāh Sāfi Golpāyegānī, a famous Marja'-i Taqlid (source of emulation), about the Jamkaran pilgrimage: “The Jamkaran Holy Mosque was built on the order of Imam Zamān. ‘Ulama have always revered this Mosque because of the authenticity of the place and because of the miracles that have happened there as a result of intercession from the Imam, and reciting namāz in it has many benefits.”



The main courtyard, as well as the back and side yards, are always adorned with placards and posters that convey moral messages. The following writings can be seen on the wall, for example: “Due to the veil of rebellion covering my eyes so much, I am unable to see you, even though you are beside me”; or, “One night, I asked the Mahdi for his blessing. In exchange, he said, I would like you to give up sin” (see Figure 20); Or, “I intend to knock on your door each and every night as it is the salvation portal for all the people of the world, O Mahdi” (see Figure 21). These ethical phrases are constantly changing.

Figure 20

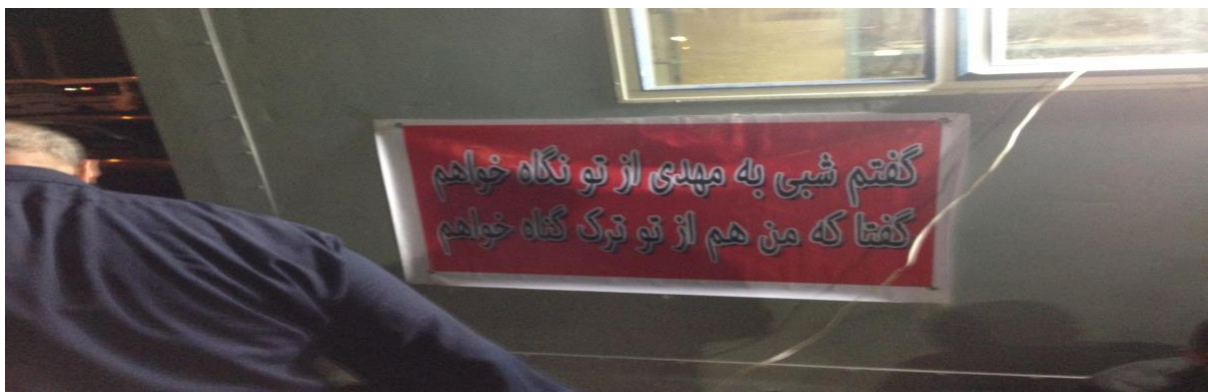


Figure 21



Inside the Mosque, there is a variety of different sectors. There is a section designed for pilgrims to donate gifts and offerings to the Mosque (see Figure 22). Additionally, there are posters located around the courtyards of the Mosque that contain Jamkaran Mosque's account details and the QR code that can be scanned to pay for the reconstruction and expansion of the Mosque (see Figure 23).

Figure 22: Central office for gifts and donations



Figure 23: The account information and QR code for donations



Within the Mosque, there are two bookshops that, in addition to the books published by Jamkaran Mosque, also offer books about Mahdism, the Advent of the Twelfth Imam and Islamic ethics as outlined by the family of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt) and in Islam more generally (see Figures 24 and 25).

Figure 24: The Jamkaran bookshop within the main courtyard



Figure 25: Exhibition and store of cultural products and books in the courtyard near the main entrance



Besides these facilities, there are also sections that answer religious questions, as well as giving family and legal advice that pilgrims may need (see Figures 26 and 27).

Figure 26: Centre for answering religious questions. In addition to this centre, there are lots of small sections around the Mosque for answering *Shari'a* questions



Figure 27: Pilgrims asking a cleric a religious question inside the Maqām mosque



There are some new parts of the Mosque which are still under construction on the north side of the building. The roofs of the new porches are similar to the movable roofs on the Masjid al-Nabi in Medina. There are still many parts of these areas that have not been fully exploited. There are several construction projects that are being carried out by the relevant trustees for the building of transportation routes to this Mosque in addition to the parts under construction within the Mosque. Such projects include subways or the Shrine-to-Shrine monorail (i.e. from the Ma'soumeh shrine in Qom to the Jamkaran Mosque), which has made access to the Mosque much easier.

This southern courtyard is characterised by a covered area with an approximate distance of 15 to 10 meters between the women's entrance and the main *shabistān*. This covered area is encircled by a retaining wall that divides it into two parts. In this area, there is a well where pilgrims can write their petitions on paper and toss them into the well as they pray (see Figure 28). A marble wall of one meter height surrounds the mouth of the well. The structure consists of an iron structure that rises to a height of 30 to 40 cm (see Figures 29, 30, and 31). The well's opening was built in the form of a gridded cube, through which petition sheets can be thrown from all sides to reach the well. Printed petition sheets are available for purchase in kiosks located near the well area (see Figure 32). At the top of the petition sheet is the text: "This petition is in honour of Hazrat Baqiyat-Allah, the Imam of the time". There is some text in Arabic at the beginning, which can roughly be summarised as follows: 'My Lord, I am writing this text to express my grief and my sorrow. Concerning the problem that has been occupying my mind and heart. As far as I am concerned, I am powerless to solve this problem. I would appreciate it if you could intercede for me in relation to my work before God'. Beneath this is an empty space to write one's petition, and further along, there is another Arabic text asking God to resolve pilgrims' problems and wishes. The pilgrim is also told at the bottom of the petition sheet that the petition should be thrown into a stream of water or into a well.

Apparently, according to the Jamkaran Mosque official trustee, the petitions that are thrown into the well are drained and pulped on a periodic basis. Considering that pilgrims often write petitions as an act of faith and present their personal wishes to the Hidden Imam in this way, the Mosque trustees empty the well only if necessary, but they are not allowed to read the petitions.

Figure 28: The petition well (men's section)



Figure 29: The petition well (women's section)



Figure 30: The petition well (men's section)



Figure 31: The petition well (women's section)



Figure 32: The kiosk selling petition sheets



2.5 Religious Rituals of Jamkaran Mosque

On entering the Mosque, pilgrims are usually required to perform a series of rituals as part of their pilgrimage. Among them, I can mention the *namāz* of Imam Zaman and the *namāz* of salutation to the Mosque offered at the Jamkaran Mosque. To perform the *namāz* for salutation of the Mosque, pilgrims follow these steps: the *namāz* for salutation of the Mosque is two *rak'ats* long. Each *rak'at* consists of the reading of *sūra al-Hamd* once, *sūra al-Ikhlās* seven times, and the dhikr of bowing and prostration is repeated seven times over during the *rak'at*. As for the other *namāz*, it is also two *rak'ats* long, and it is called the *namāz* of Imam Zaman. The performance of this *namāz* could be described in this way: while reciting *sūra al-Hamd*, after the reciter reaches the verses of 'We only worship you and we only ask help from you', the reciter recites it a hundred times and then he or she reads *sūra al-Fatiha* until the end. In the second *rak'at*, the same procedure is followed, and the dhikr of bowing and prostration will be repeated seven times to complete the prayer. Another ritual carried out by pilgrims is the writing of a petition and throwing it down the well. As well as that, every Tuesday and Friday night, the trustees of the Mosque conduct preaching sessions in which pilgrims are encouraged to take part.

Besides these regular programs, special programs related to Shi'i occasions, such as the birth and death of Shi'i Imams, are also held on a regular basis. The Mosque holds special programs, especially on the day of the birthday of Imam Zaman, to commemorate his life. There is usually a series of sermons during these events as well as the recitation of Shi'i prayer supplications such as *do'a -ye Tavassol* (The supplication of resort) and a lament for the tragedy of Karbala.

2.6 The Pilgrim

On all days of the week, Jamkaran Mosque is visited by a large number of pilgrims and visitors. It has been estimated that nearly 20 million pilgrims visit this Mosque annually based on information provided by the Mosque's official database. The order to construct the Mosque is believed to have been given by the Hidden Imam on a Tuesday night. There is, therefore, a higher number of pilgrims who come to this Mosque on Tuesdays. Friday is also more important than other days of the week for Shi'ites to go to Jamkaran because the Hidden Imam is supposed to appear on Friday. During religious holidays and other special occasions, the Mosque receives a greater number of pilgrims. It is not only possible to identify different social strata and classes

among pilgrims in Jamkaran, but I also met pilgrims from other countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Iraq and other countries as well. There is a variety of ways by which pilgrims travel and visit the Mosque, and many of them attend the Mosque in accordance with their own family plans. The Mosque is also visited by pilgrims who come in pilgrimage groups or on tours.

The pilgrimage groups, which consist of pilgrims from different parts of cities near or far from Jamkaran, bring members of the community who are interested in this Mosque together in pilgrimage caravans. These sorts of groups, which are very common in Tehran, operate mainly under the supervision of individuals within local neighbourhoods and provide many services. The pilgrims pay a small fee to the groups to travel the few hours from Tehran. It is important to note that the services offered by each tour differ slightly depending on the amount of the fees. These pilgrimage tours include a visit to Hazrat Ma'soumeh's shrine in Qom, as well as a visit to the Jamkaran Mosque. For an additional fee, some groups offer dinner and receptions as part of their package. It is often the case that different programs will be held during the journey from Tehran to Qom, which takes about two and a half to three and a half hours by bus, such as reciting prayers for the pilgrimage along with *rouzakhāni* (lamentation of the Karbala tragedy). In addition to those pilgrims who come to the Mosque in the form of pilgrimage groups and caravans, there is also a significant portion of the pilgrims who are organised through private and public organisations. These institutions usually organise the trips as recreational pilgrimage camps and are usually connected to religious occasions.

As soon as the pilgrims arrive at the Mosque, they begin participating in Jamkaran ritual practices such as attending sermons, performing the *namāz* of the Hidden Imam, and writing petitions to purify themselves and the one they call their 'master,' who is constantly watching over their actions. Many of these pilgrims complain about their material and spiritual problems and the prolonged period of occultation they must endure. The pilgrims who have a deeper understanding will stop concentrating on all their personal needs and all the problems in life when visiting the Mosque and only pray for the "Advent of the Saviour" as they believe that if this need is fulfilled, there will be no more problems, and if this need is not fulfilled, then solving other problems will not solve the basic problem.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted a brief history of the field site I studied in this thesis and its unique features to understand the ethnographic chapters better. The growth and development of the Jamkaran Mosque after the Islamic Revolution, along with its luxury and size, can be seen as the result of the integration of Shi'i messianism with the politics and obvious efforts of the Islamic government to appropriate Messianic beliefs and spread symbols of public piety.

Therefore, Jamkaran Mosque can be considered a place for the manifestation and practice of messianic beliefs and eschatological concepts, which are linked with the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution. In the next chapter, in terms of ethnography, I will highlight the impact of the action and consequences of this messianic pilgrimage in the formation or transformation of the sense of identity of my interlocutors, and then in the following ethnographic chapters, I will focus on the specific rituals of the Mosque and its effect on the moral self-fashioning of my interlocutors.

Chapter 3: Pilgrimage, Messianism and Ethical Self-Fashioning in Anthropology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to take a closer look at the theoretical literature within anthropology that has developed around the key concepts that I employ in this thesis. My main focuses are on the themes of messianism and apocalypticism, pilgrimage, and everyday experience and its relationship to projects of ethical self-fashioning. As I review the anthropological scholarship on these notions, I illustrate how my work draws inspiration from these bodies of literature to provide the reader with a better understanding of the impact of the performative practice of pilgrimage and messianic ideas on how my interlocutors shape and improve themselves ethically. I start with the pilgrimage itself.

3.2 Pilgrimage, Ritual Practices and Subjectivity

Besides Mecca and Medina, which are both holy places of pilgrimage for all Muslims, Shi'i Muslims also frequently visit the tombs and shrines of Shi'i Imams and their descendants, referred to as *Imām-zādeh*²⁴. The shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth Shi'i Imam, in Mashhad, the shrines of Ma'soumeh, the sister of Imam Reza, in Qom, the shrines of Shāh Cherāgh, the brother of Imam Reza, in Shiraz, and the Jamkaran Mosque are the most famous and frequently visited places of pilgrimage in Iran. There are other pilgrimage sites in Iran, such as sacred trees, wells, and footprints identified with a holy person who may have visited or otherwise influenced the site (Betteridge, 2002: 194). However, Shi'i pilgrims prioritise visiting the shrines of Shi'i Imams and their descendants. The purpose of pilgrimages to these places is to assist pilgrims in getting closer to the transcendent. The pilgrimage experience, however, not only consists of the spiritual contact of visiting pilgrimage sites, but it is also embodied through the experience of senses and emotions the subjects experience during the visit (Honarpisheh, 2012: 385).

Pilgrimage, in its simplest form, can be defined as a physical and spiritual journey with religious or secular motivations or a combination of both (Glazier 1992; Barber 1993; Cohen 1979; Digance 2006; Olsen and Timothy 2006). The word "pilgrimage" in the Islamic tradition is translated as *zīyāra* in Arabic (*zīyārat* in Persian). The word

²⁴ *Imām-zādeh* means descendant of an Imam. There are thousands of shrines in Iran dedicated to a descendant of an Imam visited by local pilgrims.

zīyārat comes from the Arabic word *zāra*, which means to visit. *Zīyārat* thus means “visitation”. In the Islamic tradition, *zīyārat* refers to “a variety of activities, including not only pilgrimage itself, but also an integral part of devotional practices, specifically pilgrimage and saint veneration” (Khosronjad, 2012: 13). In Islamic tradition, Hajj as an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia has been considered to be a mandatory form of pilgrimage with formative and prescribed rites, while *zīyārat* is viewed as an alternative form of pilgrimage that is performed in a variety of different ways depending upon the culture (Ebadi, 2016: 71). According to Bhardwaj (1998), *zīyārat* as an element of local Islamic culture, which represents the culture of a specific area, could be described as a “non-Hajj pilgrimage”. Bhardwaj believes that *zīyārat* is a subsystem that has flourished in different cultural contexts, each of which shares the universal characteristics of Islam while at the same time presenting its cultural distinctiveness (Bhardwaj, 1998: 72-79).

From the late 1970s to the present, anthropologists have devoted a great deal of attention to the phenomenon of pilgrimage. By analysing the phenomenon of pilgrimage in the Christian context of Europe and America and presenting two prominent concepts of “liminality” and “communitas”, Victor and Edith Turner were among the first anthropologists to frame pilgrimage in a theoretically-based fashion (Turner and Turner, 1978). By portraying pilgrimage as an experience of liminality which creates a threshold state where pilgrims are “between and betwixt” two social worlds (Turner, 1969: 95), they highlight the potential of pilgrimage as a liminal experience to create a sense of communitas as “a relational quality of full unmediated communication, which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship” (Turner and Turner, 1978: 250).

The dominance of the communitas model over the anthropological scholarship of pilgrimage did not, however, last very long and has been called into question by studies that have reflected plurality and diversity instead of a sense of unity in pilgrimage (Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Pfaffenberger, 1979). Michael Sallnow and John Eade’s anthropological studies on pilgrimage should be considered prominent examples of criticism and opposition to Turner’s communitas thesis in Christian contexts. During his study of a remote Peruvian rural community, Michael Sallnow (1987) suggested that Andean pilgrimage rites represent a complex set of simultaneous contradictions and conflicts (Sallnow, 1987: 9). This conflicting and multiple experience embodied in the experience of pilgrimage found a stronger theoretical coherence in the comparative

study that Sallnow and Eade conducted together regarding Christian pilgrimage as a result of their joint research. By criticising Turner's model and describing it as an example of a specific discourse that does not represent all aspects of the pilgrimage experience, they pointed out the notion that pilgrimage is not just a space of social relations but is a space in which competing discourses exist as well (Eade and Sallnow, 1991: 5). This means that, in addition to creating a sense of *communitas* among pilgrims, the pilgrimage experience also involves discord and division (ibid: 2-3). According to them, various discourses with their multiple meanings and interpretations, which are brought to pilgrimage sites by different groups of pilgrims, residents, and religious experts, constitute the pilgrimage experience, and each category of pilgrims makes and understands the significance of pilgrimage experiences differently (ibid: 5). In their approach, they challenge any a priori assumptions or all-inclusive and homogenous generalisation about pilgrimage and focus on the individual and context-oriented aspects of pilgrimage. They analyse the power of pilgrimage places in the sense of their function as religious voids (or “empty vessels”) or ritual spaces and their potential to incorporate different meanings and actions for different kinds of clients (ibid: 15).

Taking up their approach, several anthropological studies and scholarship within other disciplines have reflected this diversity in the perception and experience of pilgrimage (Reader, 2006; Reader and Walter 1993; Bowman 1993; Ivakhiv 2001; Digance 2003; Margry 2008; Hermkens et al 2009; Jansen & Notermans, 2012; Fedele, 2013; Badone, 2014).

There has been a long-standing debate in anthropological pilgrimage studies regarding the binary opposition of *communitas* and contestation. Many studies of pilgrimage conducted in Islamic contexts also take up these theoretical frameworks, which were initially conceptualised concerning Christian experiences. A number of ethnographic studies in the field of Islam have thus studied the Hajj pilgrimage through the lenses of Van Gennep's rites of passage and Turner's *communitas* model of pilgrimage (Coleman and Elsner, 1995; Clingingsmith et al., 2009; Haq and Jackson 2009). In the context of Islamic pilgrimage, the application of the contestation model has been observed in studies focused on local *zīyārat* to shrines or tombs of saints (Tapper, 1990; Flakerud & Natvig, 2018; Fox 1989).

Based on the extensive cross-cultural review they conducted on pilgrimage practices in different contexts, Coleman and Elsner propose the notion of coexistence between

these two paradigms to highlight their compatibility (Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 208). The focus on contestation does not, according to them, capture the ways in which competing religious discourses can be accommodated or reconciled in pilgrimage sites. Thus, the perspective of anthropological studies of pilgrimage should shift away from focusing on the dual nature of the *communitas* versus contestation models to include pilgrimage as a case study as well as a limited category (not as an institution) for understanding human behaviour (Coleman, 2002: 363). In his study, "Pilgrimage to England's Nazareth: Landscapes of Myth and Memory at Walsingham in Norfolk, England", Coleman (2004) shows that two models coexist in a pilgrimage centre. For many visitors, like the parish pilgrim, the Marian shrine in Walsingham reinforces their Roman-Catholic identity and creates a connection with a larger historical and religious context than their local town (Coleman, 2004: 52-67). Even though the pilgrimage place is a place of contestation, it is also a place of experiencing *communitas*. He demonstrates that pilgrims in Walsingham experience a sense of belonging to a deeply rooted religious tradition that reveals a sense of *communitas* that arises from that sense of belonging (ibid: 52-67).

In a similar manner, Jill Dubisch (1995), in her study of the Greek Orthodox shrine on the Island of Tinos, emphasises the "variable, situational and fluctuating" nature of the sense of *communitas* in the pilgrimage experience and stresses the individual aspect in experiencing pilgrimage (p. 97). By modifying Turner's paradigm, which she conceptualises as a flexible approach, Dubisch can convey the concepts of liminality and *communitas* in relation to specific ethnographic contexts while avoiding generalising these ideas to all pilgrimage experiences. Moreover, she emphasises the importance of paying attention to social, political, and economic contexts outside the space and place of pilgrimage to shape the behaviours and meanings that subjects practice and perceive. Thus, she argues, "what goes on at sites and in pilgrimages occurs within a particular local context, but also within the context of a national-and international-religious tradition, and in a political environment that is both reflected in and shaped by events that occur at the place of pilgrimage" (ibid: 7).

By proposing "movement" as a central process in pilgrimage studies, Coleman and Elsner (1995) were attempting to change the focus from place-oriented approaches that were heavily influenced by contestation and *communitas* models, to get a better understanding of the pilgrimage experience. By conceptualising the term "kinetic rituals", Coleman and Eade (2004) acknowledge that it is necessary to consider this

phenomenon in the broader framework of mobility, not to limit the horizon of our research to events within a particular place. During the analysis of pilgrimage in the context of mobility, different types of movements are considered, such as performative action, embodied action, pilgrimage as a semantic field and as a metaphor for the journey of the soul. I will also use the mobility approach to analyse pilgrimages to extend my understanding beyond a particular pilgrimage place. In her study of British Mormon travel, Hildi Mitchel (2004), for example, emphasises the importance of movement in understanding pilgrimage. She demonstrates that the experiences of Mormon travellers regarding their religious-historical sites are deeply embedded and informed in their physical memories (p. 19). As she suggests, pilgrimage is one of the ways that Mormon theology can be experienced through embodied action rather than disembodied belief. Mormons' embodied memories of their everyday religiosity play an essential role in understanding their religious journey, as Mitchel shows in her ethnography.

Nancy Frey's (1998) ethnographic research on the walking pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella illustrates the extent to which pilgrimage experiences are incorporated into participants' everyday lives after completing the pilgrimage. She examines the experience of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago and what happens to them when they return home. According to Frey, pilgrimages on the Camino can be viewed as metaphors in the lives of pilgrims, as many of them repeat the route over and over, join Friends of the Camino Associations to keep their experience alive at home, and perceive pilgrimage as a way of transforming oneself. Employing a movement approach, Frey focuses on pilgrims on their journey to pilgrimage sites, on their arrival, and on how the pilgrimage impacted their subsequent lives. Her work is innovative in that she depicts the effect the pilgrimage had on the pilgrims' daily lives. In this regard, a pilgrimage is a form of human mobility that can have a dramatic impact both on an individual and on social relations.

The traditional objective approaches to pilgrimage, due to their place-oriented nature (i.e. focusing more attention on the pilgrimage site and the local community, than on the pilgrims' movement) and the focus on the ontological power or spiritual magnetism of pilgrimages, have failed to portray the pilgrims' stories, and more importantly, what effect the pilgrimage experience had on the pilgrims themselves and on their subjective experiences (Smith, 1992; Dora, 2012). Over the past two decades, pilgrimage studies have shifted from concentrating on pilgrimage as a general and

comprehensive phenomenon to researching individual “inner experiences” as part of a more pluralistic approach to examining pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2010: 447). Collins-Kreiner, in her study, argues that place-oriented approaches to pilgrimage are inadequate and emphasises the importance of the pilgrim's own experience and perception of pilgrimage as the main constitutive component of pilgrimage (ibid: 448). To explore the subjective meaning of pilgrimage in anthropology, recent ethnographic studies have been carried out to find out what pilgrimage means to the participants (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Ebron, 1999; Frey, 1998; Reader & Walter, 1993). As Collins-Kreiner points out: “as a result of this perception, it is now clear that each person may interpret his or her own experience differently, and that it is no longer sufficient to focus solely on the experience offered by the objective [...] in this way, current pilgrimage research emphasises subjectivity” (2010: 448). Therefore, she believes that we should focus on how pilgrims are affected by their pilgrimage experience, both before and during the pilgrimage, and most importantly, “how much they feel affected when they return home” (Ibid: 451). Highlighting individual space through movement and action should be considered a characteristic of pilgrimage studies in contemporary times (Dora, 2012).

In line with Frey (1998), I consider pilgrimage to be a form of human mobility that can be expressed and analysed based on the quality of meaningful human action, which functions as a mechanism for maintaining values, beliefs, and socio-cultural and moral-religious practices as well as being able to affect them. I also use Dubisch's approach to examine how pilgrimage in Jamkaran takes place not only within a particular local context but also within a religious and political environment that is shaped and reflected by events that occur at Jamkaran as a pilgrimage site. Similar to Coleman and Elsner, I am also focused on the perceptions of my interlocutors, their ritual practices and devotional actions, or in other words, the “lived religion” of these individuals. Additionally, following Coleman's view, I approach pilgrimage primarily as a case study for understanding human behaviour rather than focusing on it as an institution or firmly bounded category of action (Coleman, 2002: 365). I aim to reflect the motivations and desires of my interlocutors to undertake the Jamkaran pilgrimage, as well as the spiritual and affective dispositions that the pilgrimage experience cultivates and the impact these transformative experiences have on their daily lives after the pilgrimage. I consider pilgrimage to be a movement in which the pilgrims notice a change or an effect on themselves, and I try to depict the

transformative experiences of pilgrimage of my interlocutors while they are re-fashioning and reconfiguring themselves. My project focuses on the factors that influence the formation of the subjective meaning of the experience for the pilgrims when they visit the Jamkaran Mosque. As well as offering a framework about how to view pilgrimage both as an individual event and as a collective structure, Alan Morinis also stresses the significance of transformation as the purpose of pilgrimage and as a means to make sense of the world (Morinis, 1992: 8). I employ Morinis' (1992) definition of pilgrimage as "any journey undertaken by a person in search of a place or state that he believes embodies a valued ideal" (p. 4). Highlighting valued ideals embodied in pilgrimage, I conceptualise pilgrimage as a subjective experience and a mechanism for searching for inward meaning and spirituality as well as new modes of being (Dora, 2012; Digance, 2003; Smith, 1992; Fleischer, 2000; Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell, 2006).

Jamkaran pilgrimage allows my interlocutors to detach themselves from routine life, positions them in a liminal state, and provides them with the opportunity to reconfigure themselves. Pilgrimage, I discuss, facilitates the process of sensing the self, allowing pilgrims to attach meaning to their pilgrimage experience and bring about personal development (Keddell, 2009).

By dealing with rituals pertaining to the Jamkaran Mosque, such as reciting *namāz*, I aim to portray these multiple inner experiences and how they shape my interlocutors. For the analysis of *namāz*, for instance, I draw on Simon's (2009) work on Minangkabau, Indonesia. His emphasis on the importance of paying attention to individual experiences in *salat* (*namāz* in Persian) highlights how people understand *salat* differently. For some of his interlocutors, *salat* serves as an opportunity where a coherent moral self can be formed beyond daily tensions, but for others, it "overflows its socially accepted significance, refusing to fit within prescribed discourses of moral selfhood" (p. 270). As a result of this emphasis on individuality, the concept of moral self is challenged and shown to be based on individual conflicts and tensions that the subject finds embodied engagement with through the performance of *namāz* (p. 271). In Niloofar Haeri's (2020) study about middle-class women's *namāz* practices in Tehran as an act of self-transformation, *namāz* is also viewed in terms of plurality of individual experiences. In the same way, she argues that what is defined as belonging to the realm of religion is something that the believers think, imagine, and reinterpret in their own way. In that process, actions, rituals, ideas, and beliefs are not left

untouched, unchanged, or unchallenged; instead, they are transformed in the hands and minds of practitioners. All of these factors are modified depending on the experiences and interactions of the believers with their surroundings. In this way, she portrays the *namāz* as a way for people to practice different methods of self-perception.

Like Simon and Haeri, I also argue that the Jamkaran pilgrimage and the rituals associated with it, especially the *namāz*, serve as a reflection of pilgrims' simultaneous emotions and commitments for self-fashioning, which sometimes conflict with each other. Performing the *namāz* of Imam Zaman is used as a method of self-fashioning and as a way of communicating with the Hidden Imam and cleansing oneself from sins. My interlocutors employ this ritual as a way of self-fashioning their moral character and managing their feelings of guilt and moral failures in general. In Chapter Seven, I describe the various ways in which my interlocutors perform the Jamkaran ritual of *namāz* for the purpose of repentance and forgiveness of sins, as well as the contradictions and tensions that are embodied within their *namāz* to maintain their sense of moral self.

3.3 Anthropology, Messianism and Ethics

Messianic, apocalyptic, and millennialist are terms commonly used to describe future-oriented tendencies of religious groups. In general, messianic groups are waiting for the imminent advent of a saviour at the End of Time to create a golden age on earth, while the apocalyptic label is used to describe a group that is concerned with the end of the world with a significant transformation (Momen, 2008: 60). In contrast, millenarian groups focus not only on the fundamental religious, political and social transformation of society but also on the imminent emergence of the golden era of peace that will occur either after the apocalyptic transformation or before the end of the world (ibid). In the words of Norman Cohn, millennial groups promote a belief that salvation will occur on earth in a collective, immediate, total, this-worldly, and miraculous manner (Cohn, 1970: 13).

These three terms are combined in Shi'i Islam, the religion on which my research concentrates. There is a strong expectation in Twelver Shi'ism that the saviour (the Hidden Imam as a messianic figure) will return in the imminent future, highlighting its messianic features among the Twelver Shi'i communities. In addition to the messianic aspect, Twelver Shi'ites anticipate the Advent of the Saviour to occur during

the time of the apocalypse, which they believe has already begun and is accompanied by global war and corruption. It is also important to note that this messianic expectation that the apocalyptic saviour will return also has millennialist consequences, as it looks forward to a universal government based on the justice of the apocalyptic saviour, in which real salvation will be achieved by defeating the forces of evil. A utopian and heavenly world with justice on earth created by the messiah or saviour that believers await is also the foundation of Judeo-Christian doctrine (Rinehart, 1997: 17). This Messiah in the Islamic context is an eschatological figure known as the Mahdi, who will rise at the End of Time to bring the entire world into a state of justice and salvation. The apocalypse is linked to the fundamental teaching of the resurrection in Islamic thought, but in a broader context, it includes events leading up to the resurrection, such as the Advent of the Mahdi, who is a symbolic representation of the holy past, and the final victory of the forces of Islam over unbelief (Amanat, 2009: 41). As a result of this apocalyptic Shi'i viewpoint, which has been associated with messianic and utopian ideals, it is expected that normative Islam and the existing political order will be replaced with the revival of faith and the attainment of salvation that will follow the divine command to start a new era (ibid).

Most of the theoretical literature on millenarian movements works from a perspective of deprivation: millenarianism is conceived as a tool to eliminate political powerlessness and economic deprivation through religion. In anthropology, the deprivation of marginal groups is often cited as the origin and cause of millenarianism (Cook, 1995: 9). It is fair to say that Ralph Linton was the first anthropologist to examine millenarianism from the perspective of deprived people. Linton views millenarian movements as the result of the threat to the cultural integrity of dominated cultures during the period of cultural contact with the dominant cultures (Linton, 1943: 233). The same explanation of millenarianism being the consequence of deprivation is used in the works of other scholars (Firth, 1951; Wallace, 1956; Worsley, 1957; Cohn, 1970). David Aberle (1962), along with pointing to deprivation as a defining element in the analysis of millennial movements, proposed a modified concept of "relative deprivation" in his study based on the idea that people's perception of their current situation varies depending on their expectations. In his opinion, material wealth is in no way the only aspect of relative deprivation; factors such as behaviour, status, and value also play a significant role in this category (Aberle, 1962: 209).

Despite the subtlety of this approach, some aspects of it appear not to be comprehensive. On the one hand, there are groups with apocalyptic tendencies worldwide, such as the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims I discuss, to whom the labels of marginalisation, isolation and material deprivation cannot necessarily be attached. Although the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims share common features in their millenarian beliefs, they are highly diverse in terms of the level of economic and social wealth they possess, as well as their social classes. As a result, they cannot be considered to be a collective group of deprived people. On the other hand, this perspective is unable to explain why millenarian reactions are prioritised over other revolutionary actions in the face of relative deprivation. The reasons why people choose millennial beliefs instead of any other cognitive strategy in the face of hardship and deprivation have not yet been addressed (Dein, 2011: 4-5). Such studies of millenarianism and cargo cults have mainly been focused on local deviations from social norms among specific peoples, often "exotic" ones, and have largely neglected the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions as millenarian movements; nor have they taken into account capitalism and the bourgeoisie that created the conditions whereby other millenarian movements could emerge locally (Huizer, 1992: 114).

In my study, I am primarily focused on the relationship between messianism and ethics. In this thesis, I illustrate the fact that messianic groups also require moral regeneration (Burridge, 1969: 79), highlighting their mechanism for creating a desire for self-discipline and self-expression in the individual. As Wilson argues (1982: 86), messianic groups attempt to develop practical plans for action to hasten the apocalyptic saviour's return. A passive and active response is included in this practical program. While a passive plan stipulates how group life should be organised, an active plan provides a set of steps that help create, or at least prepare, for the eschaton (Cook 1995: 31). Different active responses have been described in different contexts: for example, in their cargo cults, Melanesians have built wharves, airships and storage buildings in preparation for receiving cargo from their ancestors in the future (Worsley, 1957: 115-151-178-242). Another active response is the performance of certain rituals, which may include the construction of temples or objects of cults (Worsley, 1957: 84; Burridge, 1969: 17).

Joel Robbins' study of Urapmin Christianity offers an example of such active responses to millennialism, one which also relates to moral regulations. Throughout his ethnography *Becoming Sinners*, Robbins (2004) depicts how the Urapmin, an ethnic

group in Papua New Guinea, experience a charismatic revival by abandoning their traditional religions and converting to Christianity, which is a result of a robust Christian revival that focused on the sinfulness of his interlocutors. This results in an ecstatic spiritual experience and millenarian expectations, leading them to consider themselves sinners and struggle over the moral problem of how to live as good people. By introducing the concept of “everyday millenarianism,” Robbins helps us to understand better how people construct ideas of time, how they conceptualise change, and how they develop hope within themselves through the process of living well. According to him, Urapmin Christians are continuously mindful of the coming apocalypse and their daily lives simultaneously. The narrative mechanism is one of the most appealing among them because it provides a model of time that is always unpredictable and incomplete and, therefore, is difficult to forecast accurately. Their narratives includes sacred stories that are concealed and are gradually revealed throughout their lives.

Thus, it is impossible for them to receive complete information about the stories they are told, so they are always ready to revise their understanding of the stories as future episodes are revealed. In this sense, they are always uncertain regarding their social lives in the present because they do not know what will happen in the future. Then Robbins suggests that the discontinuous temporality produced by this narrative structure of secrecy is complemented by the linear narratives found in people's everyday lives. Since their concept of time represents a break between the present and the future, they have developed ways to create linear narratives that will guide living in the present until the next advent. The narratives they are told at each stage of the process may not be complete, but they treat them as if they were complete and use them to construct a sense of what is happening right now. According to Robbins, Urapmin Christianity greatly emphasises moral self-regulated behaviour. Most people believe that a second coming is imminent, and only those who are morally right will be saved (Robbins, 2004: xx).

The kind of messianism practised at my field site is similar to Robbins' ethnography in many ways. Similarly to Urapmin, my interlocutors, under the influence of the Shi'i messianic tradition that emphasises believers' sins as one of the most significant obstacles to the Advent of the Mahdi, consider themselves sinners and practice moral self-fashioning to become true *montazers* ('true expectants'; see Chapter Five) to pave the way for the Mahdi's Advent. The Shi'i messianic tradition, which has been

politically reinterpreted and redefined after the Revolution (see Chapter One), argues that the main causes of the occultation of the Hidden Imam are the lack of moral virtue on the part of those who are waiting for the Imam. By focusing on the imminent Advent of the Mahdi, the Islamic government has continually stimulated the messianic aspirations of Shi'i pilgrims. Taking Robbins' approach into account, I will attempt in Chapter Eight to demonstrate a Shi'i model of time, which is based on discontinuity, as well as to show that these messianic expectations can acquire temporal dimensions, allowing my interlocutors to practice moral self-fashioning in future-oriented temporal dimensions. As part of this Shi'i apocalyptic messianism, emphasis is placed on the future and on the imminent End of Time. A sense of the impending End of Time, as embodied in the Advent of the Mahdi, Bromley claims, "reduces the present to a gateway moment to the future" (Bromley, 1997: 36). As a result, apocalyptic fervour builds up through predictions that are "imminent but indeterminate", which mandates a constant state of readiness (ibid). In such a condition, Bromley argues, the present ends while the future is yet to start, resulting in a temporal limitation. Such a temporal limitation produces individuals who "feel as if they are poised on the brink of time" (ibid). My interlocutors always keep in mind that the Hidden Imam might appear at any time, which provides them with an imaginary horizon through which every aspect of their thoughts, feelings, and actions can be evaluated. Therefore, they view their lives through the lens of the imminent Advent of the Mahdi. The future plays a more significant role in creating meaning for them than the past and present. The temporality of the present provides a platform through which they can prepare themselves for the Advent that is depicted in the near future by living the good Shi'i life that the Hidden Imam recommends to them.

As Stephen O'Leary (1994) points out in his celebrated book *Arguing the Apocalypse*, millennialism is a form of rhetoric that needs to be understood in terms of how its arguments are formulated, circulated, and organised rather than through a speculative interpretation of the attitudes represented by it. My analysis, however, goes beyond text and involves an ethnographic analysis of the impact of messianic perceptions, as embodied in the form of pilgrimage, in the moral self-fashioning of the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims. By focusing on how subjects feel and understand these apocalyptic and messianic beliefs rather than the discursive elaboration of the end of the world itself, I can reveal how these subjects redefine and reorient themselves in reaction to these beliefs.

3.4 Anthropology and Moral Self-Fashioning

This section aims to discuss the recent research in anthropology about moral self-fashioning, its role in forming and orienting religious and moral sensibilities, and the platforms by which my interlocutors use a particular kind of subjectification in their interactions with the Shi'i messianic discursive tradition.

Anthropological approaches to morality and ethics have generally followed one of two basic paradigms. The first paradigm, referred to as deontological ethics, is based on Durkheim's observation that "all morality appears to us as a system of rules of conduct...and moral rules are invested with a special authority by virtue of which they are obeyed simply because they command" (Durkheim 1974: 35–6). Thus, the field of ethics can be understood in the context of the social rules approved by society, and a particular action is judged by its conformity with those rules or principles to which it can be compared. Based on Foucault's ideas, the second paradigm is strongly affiliated with Aristotelian thought; by emphasising virtue ethics, it considers the field of ethics to be broader than rules.

It is important to emphasise that most recent anthropological research on the subject of ethics and morality has relied heavily on Foucault's understanding of ethics rather than merely explaining them as socially sanctioned rules.²⁵ According to this approach, the formation of the ethical subject is based on the use of methods that involve evaluating an act according to its "function as part of the virtuous disposition that underlies the appropriate psychology of the agent" (Fassin, 2012: 7-8). As Foucault puts it, the ethical can be understood as "the relation of the self to itself that constitutes the human being as an ethical subject", which manifests itself as a "considered practice of freedom" (Foucault, 1997: 200, 284) in this instance. It is through this concept of "subjectification" that he illustrates how subjects are configured in power relations as well as how the self is formed. Laidlaw suggests that the term "subjectification" refers to active processes of reflexive self-formation rather than a mechanical interpellation of the structures proposed by Althusserian Marxists (Laidlaw 2014: 102). Foucault introduced the following practices as "technologies of the self", which,

²⁵ A Foucauldian ethical approach was employed by Laidlaw (1995) in his study of Jainism, Zigon (2007) in his study of a Muscovite woman's moral breakdown, Faubion (2011) in his study of the Branch Davidian complex in Waco, and Robbins (2004) in his ethnography of Urapmin Christian morality.

“permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct and this in [a] manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power” (Foucault, 1997: 177, 255).

Subjectification entails a series of procedures that are designed to conform to the model(s) that the subject finds in his or her culture and are either proposed, suggested, or imposed upon him or her by the culture, the society, the social group in which he or she lives (ibid.: 291). As Laidlaw notes in his analysis of Foucault (2014b: 102), the possibility of the freedom of moral self-fashioning and one’s ability to make moral choices is an integral part of Foucault’s realistic notion of reflective thought that:

“allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions and its goal. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem” (Foucault, 1997: 117).

In this sense, freedom is not something that is achieved by removing constraints or power relations completely, but rather, it is exercised in relation to the moral code that a subject lives with, and such efforts in the context of power relations enable subjects to use different techniques of self to make them a certain type of subject (Laidlaw, 2014b: 105). The self-fashioning techniques that Foucault describes consist of four main ethical components. The “moral substance” encompasses the part of the self that pertains to moral behaviour (Foucault 1990: 26). This component focuses primarily on specific types of actions, desires, feelings, spirits or even behaviour alone. The second component of the moral system that Foucault introduces is the “mode of subjectification,” which concerns the way subjects understand their moral obligations according to God’s command, religious tradition, or reason (Foucault, 1997: 264; 1990: 27). In the third element, Foucault discusses the moral duties which a subject must perform to be a proper subject of morality (Foucault, 1990: 27). The purpose of this section is to provide subjects with techniques and activities they can use to fashion themselves in various ways. Foucault refers to these techniques as “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1997: 265, 223). These technologies include “ritual forms of meditation, self-examination, confession, fasting and other austerities, physical exercises, diaries and other forms of writing, or Interpreting dreams and sometimes

other forms of life, in work or other everyday affairs or decisions about clothing, food, sleep, exercise or sex” (Laidlaw 2014: 103-4). A moral system is completed by what he calls the “telos”, that is, what one aspires to achieve by being moral (Foucault, 1990: 27–8; Foucault, 1997: 265).

Through adopting such a Foucauldian approach, I will illustrate how the subject is formed as a result of norms and structures, thereby avoiding the notion that the self is a concept that exists a priori. It is important to note that through the actions that the subjects relate to, as well as the contexts in which they are acquired and utilised, I will highlight the processes that link the understanding of morality to the perception of the subject (Laidlaw 2014: 47). Nonetheless, I am not the only one to point out that moral self-fashioning is a conscious process. In a number of ethnographies motivated by Foucault’s concept of the technologies of the self, this conscious process of self-fashioning through the application of Islamic religious practices has been analysed. There are several examples of this approach, such as Saba Mahmood (2005), Hirschkind (2006), Hafez (2011) and Marsden (2005).

Mahmood’s celebrated monograph, *The Politics of Piety* (2005), is one of the key reference works in the anthropology of Islam to emphasise the subjectivity of Muslims and how they mould their moral self through exploring the piety movement (*da’wa*) among women in Cairo.²⁶ A primary focus of her monograph is on explaining embodied religious practices capable of realising Islamic virtues and shaping a pious self, which is achieved by reforming one’s relationship with God. Relying on Foucault, she refers to different modes of agency through which emotions and sensibilities arise and thus portrays the self as an a posteriori concept that is shaped by power relations in relationship to norms and structures. As a way to explain and understand the desire of pious women to submit to power structures, Mahmood separates the concept of agency from progressive politics, thus paving the way for understanding religious sensibilities outside the liberal secular framework. A particular emphasis is placed on pedagogical processes and their role in the self-fashioning of moral identity through the analysis of the interaction between the external actions and the internal dispositions of her interlocutors. In her opinion, ritual behaviour is an instrument to cultivate moral dispositions and practise and inculcate virtues that contribute to piety. When her interlocutors participate in the mosque movement, they internalise the right

²⁶ There are numerous works on anthropology of Islam inspired by Mahmood’s approach to the Muslim subject (Deeb, 2011; Haniffa, 2008; Jacobsen 2011a, 2011b; Jouili, 2008; 2009).

attitude towards learning and teaching in the process, and through the ritual behaviour that instils the virtuous emotions of fear, they can reorient their feelings, which Mahmood believes is one of the most essential components of pious behaviour. These religious pedagogies circulated through the mosque movement have been intended primarily to create feelings naturally, along with the desire to perform rituals accompanied by bodily movements to achieve piety and attain the necessary attributes of self. Therefore, Mahmood argues that internal dispositions are created by external actions, and a harmonious relationship must be established between internal dispositions and external actions so that moral virtue can be cultivated.

A significant focus of Mahmood's ethnography is how these four ethical components, which I discussed above, apply to the virtuous behaviour of her interlocutors. She analyses the moral substance as an external expression of religion and divine law as a method of subjectification, in line with techniques of the self, such as prayer, which requires a balance between internal and external behaviour. It is through this harmony between the inside and outside that Mahmood identifies the relevant telos as a perfect model of piety based on submission to God (Mahmood, 2005: 28-29).

The methods and techniques that my interlocutors use to embody pious dispositions and become a true *montazer* through reliance on the Shi'i messianic tradition that is embodied in the form of pilgrimage are to some extent similar to the approach that Mahmood has taken towards Islamic pedagogical projects based on moral self-fashioning, in the sense that it is based on assumptions rooted in the Islamic discursive tradition. This similarity, as I will show, is evident from the way the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims' devotion to the Messianic Shi'i tradition embodied in the pilgrimage is revealed in ways that emphasise the significance of acting to please the Hidden Imam or being submissive to the Hidden Imam. However, I think Mahmood's description of moral self-fashioning, where the subject is explained to be fashioning himself or herself under the influence of ideal ways of valuing certain discursive traditions, is insufficient to describe the subjective complexities of the individuals I have interacted with. Mahmood seems to have ignored the broader social contexts in which moral self-fashioning can occur by emphasising the Islamic tradition as the dominant discourse and relying on the mosque movement as the social environment in which her interlocutors are involved in moral self-fashioning. In addition, by emphasising the role of discursive tradition in the process of self-fashioning, she forgets the lived experience that the subjects have of understanding piety and cultivating ethics, as well

as the ways in which the process of self-fashioning can intersect with other models of self-formation. In addition to highlighting the processes of self-fashioning that are influenced by the Shi'i messianic tradition, I also present a discussion of the ways in which Twelver Shi'i pilgrims construct moral substance, modes of subjectification, or techniques by constructing moral projects outside of the mosque environment and in relation to discourses and intersecting models.

Even though my project draws inspiration from Mahmood, it relies heavily on recent critiques of the literature of piety. In Mahmood's work, self-discipline patterns are depicted in a homogeneous, ideal Islamic environment where the heterogeneous contradictions and dualities related to daily life are not reflected (Jouili, 2009: 456). Mahmood, however, has been unable to examine her subjects' actions in the broader context of social life by ignoring the socio-economic context of her interlocutors outside the mosque, and this has prevented her from connecting these actions to the broader social and political spheres of society (Bangstad, 2011). In her study, Jouili (2011) examines the discourses of her interlocutors in a broader and more extensive range of discursive fields about gender and Islam as part of her study, and attempts to explain the coexistence of the pious virtues and the liberal values of women who articulate their gender norms in accordance with both of these approaches. By drawing on Foucault's ethical theory in her study of young Muslims in Norway, Jacobsen (2011b) also shows that the "shaping and moulding of subjectivities takes place at the intersection of several internally heterogeneous and contested discursive traditions" (p.76). As she explains, the hijab is an act that represents the subject's submission to God's will while simultaneously manifesting individual autonomy through its interpretation, in order to emphasise that the liberal understanding of autonomy as a method of subjectification is intertwined and coexists with religious concerns on a deep level. Rather than conceiving piety as a phenomenon in opposition to liberal ethics, Jacobsen believes that the focus should be on the convergences and tensions between subjects' relationships with these moral norms rather than conceptualising it as an opposing phenomenon (ibid.).

3.5 Everyday Experiences and Moral Self-Fashioning: Outside the Scope of the Mosque

The focus of this thesis is to examine the messianic practices and discourses involved in pilgrimage as techniques of self-fashioning, as acts that my interlocutors employ to transform themselves; this theme is explored in more depth in my ethnographic

chapters. In addition to highlighting the experiences of the subjects in the space of the mosque, my ethnography tries to depict the discourses and embodied affective experiences of practising messianic belief in their everyday experiences of applying piety and cultivating ethics in a variety of different settings outside the mosque. As I focus on the intimate conversations and practices of my interlocutors in different daily settings, I depart from analyses that assume that the phenomenon of pious self-fashioning is a homogenous thing. Several recent anthropological studies in Islam have highlighted the heterogeneous nature of pious self-fashioning in relation to everyday contradictions and complexities, and those works have influenced my research. Using the anthropological literature on the everyday practice of Islam (Schielke, 2010, 2009; Marsden, 2010; Soares & Osella, 2010; Liberatore, 2013), I examine how my interlocutors seek to cultivate and retain a sense of morality while also balancing conflicting ideals which reflect a complex and ambivalent experience of everyday life.

Through my interlocutors' daily experiences, I depict the ambivalences and complexities they experience when trying to integrate the pilgrimage experience into their daily lives, as well as the techniques and mechanisms they use to deal with their moral failures and how they deal with the various teleologies of the subject and the multiple forms of subjectification they experience. By drawing on Foucault, I examine the different dimensions that influence the way in which my interlocutors use different teleologies of the subject (exerting autonomy and trying to become a true *montazer*) and modes of subjectification (autonomy, acting to please the Hidden Imam and draw his attention and care) in their relationship with themselves and others. It enables me to demonstrate the practices within and outside the mosque, allowing me to explain how my interlocutors interpret and coexist in different subject positions in which they attempt to transform themselves differently in relation to messianic ideas, religious practices, and inner beliefs (Liberatore, 2013). I believe that these messianic ideals, along with pilgrimage practices and the negotiating with intersecting discourses that constantly influence my interlocutors, play an essential role in their process of fashioning themselves. By examining how my interlocutors encounter the experience of pilgrimage and engage in abstinence from sin to become a true *montazer*, I aim to show how these different teleologies are managed and negotiated by my interlocutors. In a similar fashion, Schielke (2009; 2010), Marsden (2010), and Soares and Osella (2010) emphasise the contradictions and the ambivalences of everyday life, and the

complexity of subjects' engagements in shaping the virtuous self in this context. Schielke (2009; 2010) presents in his study the diverse choices that are made by his subjects in everyday contexts as examples of ambivalent, contradictory, and even immoral views and experiences held by individuals in everyday life, which, according to him, should be analysed and examined while taking into account the moral subjectivity of individuals. He asserts that participating in different social and cultural activities, as well as performing religious practices, constitute different ethical teleologies that exist simultaneously in the self-fashioning process of the subject (Schielke, 2009: 29-30).

Soares and Osella (2010) employ a similar approach in their collection of essays, examining, for example, negotiation methods as well as the combination of reformist ethics and commitment of the elite entrepreneurs in Kerala and their involvement in neoliberalism. Rather than focus on Islam itself, these researchers have focused their attention on the real world lived by Muslims to prevent the analysis of Muslims from being reduced to Islamic tradition or the influence of formal and informal power on fashioning the moral self (Soares & Osella 2010: 12). A similar argument can be found in Schielke (2010), who believes that these approaches highlight the subject's ability to manoeuvre between multiple and contradictory self-perceptions that are constantly changing and tangled between conflicting ideals, while at the same time pointing out the subject's attempt to present a coherent self. Therefore, Schielke (2010) emphasises the importance of being aware of ambivalence when studying moral subjectivity and ethical issues (see also Marsden, 2007). As a result of this approach, we can see the different processes through which methods of subjectification are implemented, and we are not trapped by conceiving piety as a homogeneous concept or thinking of subjectivity through the lens of a coherent and straightforward concept (Liberatore, 2013).

A significant body of anthropological scholarship in the Iranian context also highlights tensions and contradictions, while simultaneously reflecting the ways the subjects negotiate with different discourses that lead to different modes of subjectification. In addition to highlighting the processes through which the subject is affected by the power relations, discourses, and systems of representation that surround it, this scholarship reflects how the subject is redefined by responding to these processes in order to reflect how it is affected by them. These studies have allowed me to enhance my explanations of Iranian subjectivities in their local context. In her study of women's

status in Iran, Minoo Moallem (2005) explains the way in which a gendered Islamic subject was formed during the time of Revolution by examining the cultural meanings engrained in images, signifiers, and narratives, which are the main sources of social knowledge. Through a combination of the Foucauldian notion of discursive formation and the systems of representation found in cultural studies, Moallem explores the processes by which meanings and knowledge are generated. According to her, the subject positions created by Iranian modernity should not be viewed as the final and absolute stage of understanding the subject; rather, she believes that the process that needs to be investigated is how "visual images of bodies are framed and coded by gender and race against the backdrop of institutional practices across various domains, including the family, the state, political and religious organizations" (Moallem, 2005: 25). Discourses, visual images, film narratives, and civic performances allow individuals to identify themselves in relation to others by providing an analysis of subject positions (ibid: 25-26).

The discursive "practice of rights talk" which Arzoo Osanloo (2009) studies is in a similar manner related to the form of post-revolutionary Iranian society and its effect on women's subjectivity (Osanloo, 2009:203). She explores how Iranian codified marriage and family laws and the courts contribute to producing new heterogeneous subjects who speak in the language of rights as part of the politics of hybrid state formation. While Osanloo shows that women's involvement in the legal process and their use of the language of rights give state institutions a crucial mirror of legitimacy; such involvement also allows the subject to exert his or her autonomous agency and results in different modes of subjectification. My project is inspired by Moallem and Osanloo's projects because they capture how ascribed subject positions are being negotiated and redefined along with narratives, knowledge, stories, and visions.

The theme of heterogeneity in the modes of subjectification resulting from the complexities of everyday life also echoes in several other works. For example, Kamalkhani (1993), Kalinock (2004), and Sadeghi (2009), who examined pious women, also demonstrate how people are able to engage with both established cultural models and with other versions of their experience at the same time, indicating the simultaneous process of resistance as well as collaboration. The similar approaches taken by Khosravi (2008), Varzi (2006), and Mahdavi (2009), examine the subjectivity imposed from above on the subject and the way the subject resists, responds, and interprets it.

This body of ethnographic scholarship similarly critiques the notion of subjectivities as homogeneous entities, but rather highlights a complex and diverse phenomenon that generates heterogeneous subjectivities. In understanding the dynamics of subject formation as a complex and diverse process, these studies broaden my understanding. Focusing on the environment inside and outside the mosque, I depict my interlocutors' moral failures in dealing with the contradictions of daily life and their struggles to internalise the moral dispositions cultivated during the pilgrimage. This narrative of failure and the challenges of daily life questions the role of pilgrimage as an exclusive factor for moral self-fashioning. While pilgrims face contradictions and dualities, they do not give up on their journey to moral cultivation. My interlocutors invent methods and strategies when they return to everyday life to cope with and even justify their moral failures and internal tensions. These strategies to overcome moral failure, in my opinion, are part of the pilgrim's techniques of self-fashioning (Foucault, 1997) that allows them to maintain a moral sense and stay on the path to progress. Beekers and Kloos (2017) inspired me to analyse my interlocutors' narratives of moral failure. In their edited volume, *Straying from the Straight Path: How Senses of Failure Invigorate Lived Religion*, the authors examine the tensions and contradictions subjects face daily and believe these tensions and contradictions lead to constructive paths to moral self-fashioning. Consequently, it is imperative to understand the formation and orientation of the subjects by paying attention to and analysing their failures and moral and spiritual experiences. Moreover, I will discuss the different negotiation methods used by my interlocutors to confront various teleologies, which lead to the development of multiple modes of subjectification in the end (Liberatore, 2013).

I can describe these moral failures, which are understood as sinning by my interlocutors, as an "ethical moment," according to Jarrett Zigon, which creates the conditions for moral breakdown in the subject and forces the subject to reflect on his self and his moral mode of being in the world (Zigon, 2009: 82). It is at this moment of moral breakdown that the subject is supplied with a creative moment, a moment that encourages him to design new moral worlds and new ways of working on himself. The moment of moral breakdown is described by Zigon in the same way that Foucault describes "problematization". His work portrays the moment of moral breakdown as a reflexive process that creates a degree of relative freedom for the subject in terms of making decisions and choosing a new moral direction on their own.

Like Zigon, I emphasise the challenges and contradictions that lead to the commission of sin as embodied ethical moments that activate the awareness of the subject's moral breakdown and prompt him or her to learn how to improve him- or herself through the use of both individual and cultural moral techniques. However, I believe that Zigon's explanation, which conceptualises the ethical moment exclusively within the framework of the moral breakdown, does not fully reflect the whole reality of the moral behaviour of my interlocutors. As part of my ethnographic chapters, I draw attention to some of the narratives of my interlocutors in which they affirm that their moral decisions do not necessarily derive from a moment of moral breakdown but are the result of pious dispositions.

3.6 Hope, Messianic Envisioning, and Ethics

During my fieldwork, I found that the messianic aspirations and expectations embodied in the spiritual experiences of Shi'i pilgrims due to their affective personalised relationship with the Hidden Imam have a temporal quality. By visualising the Advent as an event in the near future, pilgrims reorient themselves forward in time, reconfiguring their moral self-fashioning projects. There is no doubt that hope plays a fundamental role in energising the efforts of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims to change themselves in light of the future temporal horizons. Therefore, I will engage with recent anthropological literature that has placed particular emphasis on the temporality of hope by emphasising that hope can be viewed as being a form of orientation toward a possible future.

The Shi'i messianic tradition embodied in the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience, in addition to encouraging the pilgrims to become true *montazers* for the Advent of the Mahdi as well as to establish a relationship of the heart with him, causes hope to flourish in their hearts and attaches a temporal element to the self-fashioning process that they are engaged in. My interlocutors' attitude is enlightened by Jamkaran rituals and the messianic knowledge associated with them. The hope of getting morally better and speeding up the Advent of the Mahdi, the love for the Hidden Imam, and the fear of delaying the Advent of the Mahdi because of their sins are all feelings that they cultivate as methods and motivations for their activities. My analysis of hope is based on Bloch and Miyazaki's analysis of hope as a forward-looking attitude with a temporal character grounded in anticipation of what will occur in the future. The Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1996) describes hope in terms of anticipating a future that

has not yet been realised and a possibility that has not yet been actualised (p. 7). As such, he examines the concept of hope in relation to the concept of “not-yet” consciousness as a forward-looking fantasy with a temporal character to emphasise the intersection between the idea of hope as affect and the concept of expectation as action. As Bloch suggests, this sense of expectation and hope is both performative and agentive. Based on Bloch’s conceptualisation of the “not-yet”, Miyazaki (2004) examines hope in the endless cycle of petitions that people send to the government to reclaim their ancestral lands in his ethnography of the Suvavou people of Fiji. This repetitive and continuous cycle of petitions maintains hope in the oscillation between openness and closure and gives hope a prospective quality. He studies hope as a method that has a temporal component. Miyazaki conceptualises hope as a “radical temporal reorientation of knowledge” towards the future (Miyazaki, 2004: 5).

On the basis of Miyazaki’s framework, Henrietta Moore (2011) analyses hope as “a series of different affective and evaluative dispositions and/or orientations that animate the ethical imagination as well as resulting forms of agency, both conscious and unconscious”, on a temporal scale (p. 23). Based on Foucault’s work, Moore proposes the concept of “ethical imagination” as forms and means by which the subjects imagine relationships with themselves and others (ibid: 15). This ethical imagination allows for the reconfiguration of self-other relations, although it is implicated with norms and distributions of power, it cannot fully connect the subjects to their particular identities, forms of self, or to external powers as such (ibid: 16). Instead, she believes that subjects’ perception and evaluation of change is shaped by their thinking, feeling, and acting about things, others, and themselves, which engages them in temporal dimensions. In Moore’s view, fantasy and imagination are partially the product of conscious thinking, but they are also affectively embodied and play a vital role in creating and maintaining subjectification and identification, as well as in understanding relationships between self and other (ibid: 17). The ethical imagination, with the reconfiguration of the fantasy, ties human agency to various forms of subjectification and reshaping of the relationship between self and other forward in time (ibid: 18). The occurrence of moral problems, in Moore’s views, allows for the occurrence of self-problematization in people and enables them to engage with their hopes, desires and satisfactions to bring value and meaning to their lives in relation to themselves and to the others. It is important to emphasise that these hopes and aspirations are embodied in the context of anticipating change in the future and this

enables human agency to produce meaning and new modes of being (ibid: 19-21-22). The ethical conceptualisation of hope and imagination by Moore is also a framework I use to help me understand how these technologies can lead to new forms of subjectification and imaginary relationships with the self and others.

Based on the works of Miyazaki and Moore, Giulia Liberatore (2013), in a chapter of her ethnographic study titled *Transforming the Self: An Ethnography of Ethical Change amongst Young Somali Muslim Women in London*, explores hope as a prospective orientation and an instrument to understand the world. Liberatore analyses hope as a force that stimulates her interlocutors' engagement with new forms of knowledge and transforms their relationships with one another. In her discussion of the experiential dimensions of changing temporal orientations of Somali women of the second generation, she highlights that developing this orientation requires an emotional experience of potential, intensity, euphoria, and excitement (p.39).

Considering Miyazaki's approach and relying on Moore's conceptual framework, I demonstrate that my interlocutors, while waiting for the Advent of the Mahdi, envision themselves in the future temporal horizons in their self-fashioning projects. A horizon of expectation here must comprise two elements: a forward-looking attitude and using the first result to take action (Poli, 2017: 1). The most essential element of strengthening my interlocutors' efforts to change themselves is cultivating hope in their hearts. By doing so, they are encouraged to improve their internal quality and develop a personal relationship with the Hidden Imam simultaneously in the immediate present and the imaginary future temporal horizon. Therefore, my interlocutors face two different yet coexisting temporal horizons: focused on the self-Imam relationship in the present and imagining self-fashioning in the near future (the Advent). Taking a similar approach to Liberatore's, I will examine my interlocutors' affective experiences through their engagement with the Shi'i messianic discursive tradition embodied in the pilgrimage experience, demonstrating how they reconfigure their relationship with themselves, with the Hidden Imam, and with others through reorienting themselves forward in time.

In accordance with Bloch and Miyazaki, in Chapter Six of my thesis, I evaluate the performative act of petition writing, as well as its repetition by my interlocutors, as a technology of the self that allows them to reproduce hope within themselves through the act of petition writing. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the project of writing a petition, as well as the motivation for furthering it, as a performative act, is closely

related to a person's hope and commitment to the fulfilment of not-yet-fulfilled moral projects. This consequently animates hope in them and energises them to manage their moral failure as well as to work on their not-yet-fulfilled moral projects bilaterally with the Imam as a result. Moreover, in the eighth chapter, utilising the theology of hope and the idea of moral imagination, I will illustrate how hope for the Advent of the Hidden Imam gains a temporal quality and leads to the reorientation of my interlocutors forward in time in order to form and reconfigure their relationships with themselves, the Hidden Imam, and others. There, I will provide a more detailed discussion of the temporal dimension of hope.

3.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the central concepts that will be addressed in this thesis, based on anthropological studies of pilgrimage, messianism, and ethics. In all parts of this chapter, there is one point that has been consistently made, and that is the focus on the "subject", as well as the methods and techniques involved in the shaping and reconfiguring of the self. I have demonstrated that pilgrimage as a movement involves a transformative element that reveals the subjective experience of pilgrims within the journey. Through describing some of the most influential theoretical and ethnographic studies, I have demonstrated how the messianic Shi'i discursive tradition can be effective during and after pilgrimage. I argued that the messianic ideal induces millennial groups, especially Twelver Shi'i pilgrims, to cultivate active rather than passive responses and that the active responses also entail ethical diligence. I showed that the messianic ideal internalised by my interlocutors involves changes in subjectification that lead to a reorientation of the self forward in time. Therefore, I conceptualised hope as being a significant factor triggering my interlocutors' efforts to transform. By explaining Saba Mahmood as a primary reference work on piety, I discussed how my work, like Mahmood's, draws on Foucault's ethics, but departs from Mahmood's exclusive focus on Islamic discursive tradition, to illustrate how ethical practices are influenced simultaneously by both the subject's agential perception and other intersecting discourses. Using a recent critique of piety literature and highlighting the approaches to the lived experience of the subject, I explained how my work reflects the everyday experiences of moral self-fashioning, outside of the confines of the mosque. As part of this chapter, I attempted to analyse some of the recent anthropological scholarship on Islam that emphasises

the inseparable connections between piety discourses and other contemporary discourses, practices and attitudes, as a way to replace the overemphasis on the influence of the piety discourse.

I should mention here that people plan pilgrimages with different motivations. Some go to pilgrimage as pious believers to transform, strengthen faith, and collect rewards, some for spiritual purposes, some to find new connections, some for seeking healing, some for asking for help, intercession, or good prayers, and some for tourist purposes, and some as a curiosity, pleasure and entertainment visit places of pilgrimage. In addition, people can have one or all of these motivations for pilgrimage. Depending on the motivation of pilgrimage, pilgrims interpret the journey from different windows such as miracle, euphoria, happy memory, peace, perception of spiritual emotions and self-transformation. According to the diverse motivations that underlie the performance of the pilgrimage, the identity of the traveler is also defined differently, such as a pilgrim, a tourist, a religious tourist/pilgrim, or a secular tourist/pilgrim. In the pilgrimage studies literature, there are even cases where these identities merge in such a way that a pilgrim may at the same time be a semi-tourist and vice versa (Cohen, 1992, 1998; Collins-Kreiner & Klot, 2000; Digance, 2003, 2006; Frey, 1998; Graburn, 1977; MacCannell, 1973; Nash, 2005; 1973; Smith, 1992; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Turner & Turner, 1978). However, my thesis focuses more on the experiences of people who were comfortable with their identity as pilgrims and understood the importance of this experience with a greater sense of self.

Chapter 4: Pilgrimage to Jamkaran: Affective Sensibility, Subjective Transformation and Sense of the Self

4.1 Introduction

As a movement undertaken for the completion of rituals, pilgrimage is often objectified as a transformative experience due to its ability to detach a person from routine life and to allow him or her to uncover new aspects of one's self that may have been concealed previously (Edensor, 2001; Bell, 1997). By means of pilgrimage, one can express an identity or a different aspect of oneself through the embodiment of the moral and religious beliefs that the pilgrim is looking to fulfil in this journey, which are normally forgotten or dimmed as a result of the routine of daily life. There are many reasons for which pilgrims decide to leave home, including transformation, strengthening faith, collecting rewards, seeking healing, asking for needs, intercession, asking for blessings and for adventure and curiosity. Depending on the motivation of the pilgrimage, pilgrims interpret the journey through various concepts such as miracle, euphoria, delighted memory, tranquillity, perception of spiritual emotions, and self-transformation.

By understanding the reasons for pilgrims to temporarily leave their normal lives and examining the experiences they gain during a pilgrimage, we are able to gain deeper insights into the processes through which a pilgrim exposes himself to a kind of affective influence from the place that leads to a deeper connection with himself. Due to the variety of motives underlying pilgrimage performance, the traveller's identity is also defined differently, such as a pilgrim, tourist, religious tourist/pilgrim, or secular tourist/pilgrim. In the literature on pilgrimage studies, there are even instances where these identities are merged in such a way that a pilgrim may be a half-tourist at the same time, and vice versa (Cohen, 1992, 1998; Collins-Kreiner & Klot, 2000; Digance, 2003, 2006; Frey, 1998; Graburn, 1977; MacCannell, 1973; Nash, 2005; 1973; Smith, 1992; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Turner & Turner, 1978). This chapter, however, focuses on the experiences of individuals who were comfortable with their identity as pilgrims and understood the significance of this experience with a greater sense of self.

There are a number of reasons why pilgrims feel attached to Jamkaran Mosque, many of which relate to their religious beliefs as well as the role that such a holy site plays in their identities. The ethnographic account that I present in this chapter shows the

transformative affective complexities that pilgrims experience during the Jamkaran pilgrimage and its accompanying rituals. I use the term “affect” to refer to the elements of embodied emotions that are perceived through the body, such as feelings, sensations, and perceptions, which can be stimulated and transmitted in interaction with spaces, places and social circles (Csordas, 1994: 38; Brennan, 2004: 15). These affective sensibilities, which enter or resonate within the body and generate enhancing energies, are also beneficial to take into consideration with regard to the pilgrimage, as an experience that involves social actors entering a space and participating in a “feeling, possessing, and transmitting of affect” (Honaripisheh, 2013: 390). In most cases, these affective experiences have the ability to transform a pilgrim from the settled feelings of despair, sadness, grief, anger, and suffering that he or she endures throughout everyday life to lead him or her into a place of tranquillity, consolation, fulfilment, acceptance, empowerment and hope.

My focus in this chapter is on the role of pilgrimage, its actions and consequences in the formation or transformation of what my interlocutors called their *howīyat*, or sense of self-identity. In this chapter, I explore how the transformative experience of pilgrimage affected the processes about which my interlocutors often speak: *khodshenāsi* (self-understanding), *tahawwol* and *awaz-shodan* (transformation or change) of the self. My interlocutors’ responses to the interviews that follow illustrate how much importance they place on pilgrimage as a means of obtaining a sense of self or constructing identity. Specifically, I explore the impact the pilgrims’ perception of potentially transformative pilgrimage experiences has on constituting, enriching, and transforming the pilgrims’ sense of self or identity as a result of their pilgrimage experiences.

As a result of the Jamkaran pilgrimage, a particular affective sense is generated in the heart of the pilgrim, which allows the pilgrim to make sense of their experiences and to cultivate their connection to themselves, to others, and to the outside world. Relying on Morinis (1992) and Dubisch (1995), I highlight the individualistic experience of pilgrimage, in contrast to Turner’s notion of a community-wide experience (*communitas*), in which one attempts to enter directly into a relationship with the sacred, as diversely reflected in the personal experiences of the pilgrim during their pilgrimage. Taking this approach, one can view the pilgrimage as a movement “from the fixed place of home to the fixed place of ideality” (Morinis, 1992: 26). As Morinis explains, during a pilgrimage, there is a collapse of the usual cycles of time and space,

which make ideals and improvement available to the pilgrim and pave the way for his or her attainment of salvation, which is the ultimate goal of the pilgrim. As a result of this attainment, salvation may manifest in different forms, such as a transformation or transcendence into ideals or by acquiring “earthly solutions to the powerlessness, discomfort, and weakness of an afflicted life” (p. 27).

Three dimensions can be distinguished when it comes to the study of pilgrimage. The ritual aspect relates to the way in which the pilgrimage is performed (or its practical aspect); the belief aspect relates to the epistemological aspect of pilgrimage and its specific actions; and the individual dimension related to the perception of the subject (pilgrim) of the act of pilgrimage. My argument is to draw a connection between pilgrimage and anthropological traditions, which discuss the shared inner life of subjects, the ways in which they feel, respond, and experience (Luhmann, 2006: 345). To illustrate the way in which pilgrimage can help pilgrims to re-evaluate their identity, I will show how pilgrimage contributes to their reconstruction and re-defining of the sense of the self. Attention has been directed towards subjectivities because they convey the subject’s emotional experience and provide a more transparent picture of actors’ “thoughts, sentiments and embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their sense of self and self-world relations” (Holland and Leander, 2004: 127). I assume that identities and sense of the self are not exclusive and rigid but can be multiple and fluid in response to different circumstances and environments (Burke and Stets, 2009).

4.2 ‘*Īmān* Boost’ and Intensification of Devotional Attachment

After the bus has exited the last underpass and is on its way down into the Jamkaran area, we excitedly get up from our seats and look out through the windows in a bid to catch a glimpse of what is around us. It is the view from this height that is perhaps one of the greatest attractions of the trip. There are rocky hills, flat sands, distant mountains, and homes visible from the window. It is evident that the closer we get to this complex, the more thrilled we become with its massive expanse as well as the magnificent architecture that truly draws pilgrims’ attention from the bus. Following a brief look around, I continued talking with the woman who had been seated next to me ever since we left Tehran. Since joining a particular religious group in Tehran where the attendees pray for the return of Mahdi and train people how to live during

the occultation period (Dowrān-e Gheybat), she visits the Mosque at least once each month.

As a devout Shi'i pilgrim who is proud of her religion, Fatemeh²⁷ felt that her visit to Jamkaran had a great impact on boosting her *īmān* (faith) as a Shi'i pilgrim. Fatemeh was a married housewife in her late thirties, whose faith in the Hidden Imam and the role the Jamkaran pilgrimage played in the growth and boosting of this *īmān* encouraged her to repeat the pilgrimage. There was an immediate feeling of mental safety and a sense of obtaining refuge that Fatemeh felt as soon as she stepped inside the Mosque. She stated the following in the course of describing her pilgrimage to Jamkaran as well as reflecting on the emotional effects this experience had on both her and her family after her pilgrimage:

I feel the presence of the Imam whenever I am in the Mosque. This feels like you are seeing the Imam telling you that you are under his refuge in a way that you can actually feel. It is the feeling of support and protection that is embodied in my heart when I am in the Mosque because of the Imam.

In fact, Fatemeh's faith was even boosted when she realized that many of her family members who accompanied her on the pilgrimage had experienced the same feelings as she had during the pilgrimage. This affirmed the faith that Fatemeh believed in and affirmed her unwavering and firm belief in the Hidden Imam.

Quite honestly, I am unsure if this is due to the power of my belief and *īmān*, or whether it is due to the effect of the Imam's attention and support. However, I am confident that Mahdi is here (i.e. Jamkaran). I feel his presence. I perceive his blessing. There is something about this feeling that I have never experienced before. My only knowledge is that one must have faith in him and believe that he is here. If there is no faith, nothing will happen to you. You must feel him in your heart and believe that he is with you. As a result of this inner belief, you are connected to him from within, and he can transform and heal you from the inside out.

Fatemeh's motivation for embarking on a pilgrimage was her faith. The long distance she travelled to reach Jamkaran, along with the time she spent there, all played an important role in boosting her *īmān* and her belief in the Mahdi. She also considered the power of inner healing due to her genuine devotion and the sense of protection and support that she felt immediately after entering the Jamkaran Mosque. For Fatemeh,

²⁷ With the exception of well-known politicians and public figures, all names are pseudonyms.

the reason she repeated her regular pilgrimages to the Jamkaran Mosque was to be able to manage her inner feelings to become a better version of herself:

It is true that this pilgrimage journey is long. But I experience a sense of happiness, peace, confidence, and a deep and heartfelt sense of connection with the Imam when I am here. In my neighbourhood mosque in Tehran, I do not experience the same sense of connection and feeling as I do at this Mosque. There is, however, something special about this place. The Imam himself ordered the building of the Mosque. So it is authentic. The Imam is aware of the place, and he has his mercy towards it. A great majority of Shi'i ulama have ordered pilgrimages to this holy place. This authenticity and credibility of the Mosque, my ability to perceive these unique emotions and feeling the presence of the Imam, all help me to be able to perform better in all aspects of my life.

The authenticity of the pilgrimage site, along with the opportunity to communicate with the Hidden Imam, not only inspired Fatemeh to repeat the pilgrimage and boost her *īmān* in the Hidden Imam, but also helped her to discover herself and live a better life. Fatemeh was able to feel the difference in her own life with every visit to Jamkaran compared to the last. Her wish was that she could go to Jamkaran Mosque on a daily basis because the energy she received from this space had a powerful effect on her:

As soon as I get to that place and pray, I feel like I am a different person. I feel as if all of my worries and anxieties have disappeared. Even if this disappearance is temporary, I have always been able to find inner peace and happiness during my pilgrimage.

It is clear from Fatemeh's narrative that the connection between faith and pilgrimage provides her with a positive experience that she is unable to find at home. On the one hand, her frequent visits boosted her *īmān*, and on the other hand, every time she visited the Mosque, she felt the presence of the Mahdi's support and attention, which both reaffirmed and boosted her true faith at the same time.

One of my interlocutors, Zahra, who was a medical doctor in her early thirties, and who had lived away from Iran for quite some time, described her experience of visiting Jamkaran and communicating with a Hidden Imam as a way to reconnect with her religious heritage. Born in Iran, Zahra migrated with her family to a Western European country with her parents when she was a young child, and she established a new life there. In spite of the fact that Zahra was brought up under an Iranian religious upbringing, she was also influenced by the cultural and social elements of the society in which she lived. Hence, she was faced with a cultural duality that was caused by her

religious upbringing, on the one hand, and by the values of the community in which she lived, on the other hand.

As a result of Zahra's acquaintance with a European man of a completely different culture and religion than what Zahra had been brought up with by her parents, she began to feel a deep gap between her and them. Having connected with the man she was interested in filled a void of deep loneliness that Zahra was experiencing as a result of her individualistic lifestyle in the West, while on the other hand, the religious beliefs that she was brought up with created a deep sense of religious and cultural rupture between her and the man with whom she was in a relationship. This forced her to confront herself, her parents, and the man she was in a relationship with in a way that was deeply challenging.

In the midst of these tensions and obstacles, Zahra left Europe with her family to attend a close relative's wedding in Tehran. Zahra met Zainab during the wedding, after which she followed up with her for a religious session in the north of Tehran, which Zainab organizes for women. As a result of attending the session, Zahra described the following:

The experience of attending that meeting was truly transformative for me. Though I was familiar with Imam Zaman prior to that meeting, I had never realized the significance of his presence and role in our present-day lives as much as I did in that meeting. As a result of participating in that meeting, my feelings towards the Imam completely changed. In my mind, the whole religious education that I received from my parents in Europe did not have any dynamic influence at all on me. I was impressed with the way the Hidden Imam was introduced to me during the meeting, and I began to realize that I was not alone in this world for the first time.

During her visit to Qom to see a close relative, Zahra decided to visit Jamkaran Mosque, which had been mentioned in the meeting. In the summer of 2016, she had the opportunity to visit the site for the first time. While she was aware of the history attached to the Mosque, she described the effect of pilgrimage on herself in the following manner:

There was a deep sense of happiness and peace that I felt when I arrived at the place. Perhaps it was the first time after a long time that the anxiety and tension that had been affecting my life for a long time had been replaced by a profound sense of peace. I have received many blessings from this visit. It was through these pilgrimages that I met religious people and gained a new worldview, which over time, changed my perspective on life. The pilgrimage made me feel closer to him [the Imam Mahdi] and

helped me to move everything in my life to a path that he, the Imam, would approve of. I began to realize that I was in the process of a transformation as soon as I tried to satisfy him with my behaviour and actions.

In addition to gaining a sense of peace while visiting Jamkaran, Zahra also had the opportunity to interact with other devoted pilgrims dedicated to this place of pilgrimage, which made her feel particularly connected to her religious heritage. As a result of repeating this pilgrimage with her friends and having the opportunity to share similar experiences and worldviews with them, Zahra began to realize that she wanted to be with someone from the culture that she belongs to. At first, Zahra told me, she didn't intend to make a difference through the Jamkaran pilgrimage, but as the pilgrimage progressed, she realized its impact on her. As she put it:

After visiting Jamkaran, I felt that a stronger connection had developed between me and my Hidden Imam and my religion, and I had gained a better understanding of myself. Over the course of time, this sense of belonging to my religious heritage made me realize that I had a deep desire to be with someone with whom I could share my religious affiliation.

The affective senses that pilgrims feel when they enter the place of pilgrimage are intensified. In all of their intensity, these emotions are embodied and have a profound effect on the heart of the pilgrim. According to most of my informants, the experience of pilgrimage and participation in the rituals associated with it had caused their hearts to tremble and affected their feelings. It would seem that pilgrimage sites serve as a kind of threshold. Taking into account Victor Turner's work, Ann Betteridge (1992), who has studied the pilgrimage in some shrines in Shiraz, would suggest that shrines are places where "conventional relations of cause and effect are suspended: supernatural powers may be brought to bear on problems that do not yield to conventional forms of redress or where conventional means are not within reach of troubled individuals" (p. 190). As one of the main reasons why pilgrims are motivated to make the pilgrimage, she describes a number of factors that are considered, such as receiving divine assistance and experiencing the "heart-opening" nature of pilgrimage, which is tangible as well as soothing, as factors that are important to pilgrims (p. 195). I will grapple with the theme of the affective heart in more detail in the chapters below on Sermons and Writing Petitions.

4.3 Routine Re-appraisal and Re-formulation of the Self

My first encounter with Morteza, a pilgrim in his late forties whom I met while on the tour that I registered with in Tehran, was when he was a factory worker in Tehran. In the months before his trip to Jamkaran, Morteza found himself in a monotonous and spiritually destructive routine that was not enlightening, unsatisfied with his life and working in an unfriendly environment. He accepted his friend's offer on one of his awful days and agreed to go to a mosque in his neighbourhood with him. He was suggested to explain his bad mood and energy to the cleric in the mosque so that he might be able to help him change his spiritual condition and live a better life. He followed his friend's advice and approached the cleric after performing the prayer (*namāz*) and told him about the difficult situation he was in, and asked him for his help. As soon as the cleric heard Morteza's explanation of his difficulties, he directed Morteza's attention to the context of the apocalypse. This is how Morteza summarized what the cleric had told him in his own words:

You are not the only one who has to deal with this issue. We have the same problem as you. We are living in an era of apocalypse, so darkness, poverty, corruption, as well as spiritual disease, are a result of the times we live in. There is only one solution to this problem. There is no other solution than Him [the Hidden Imam]. Don't hesitate to ask Him! You need to connect with him and tell him what your problem is. There is only one way to salvation, and that is through Him. There is only one true healer, and that is the Hidden Imam. The closer your relationship is to Him, the more likely you are to have solutions to your internal as well as external problems. In the absence of this treatment, you will experience problems for the rest of your life, even if you visit all the doctors in the world.

Then Morteza asked him to show him how to do it. Aside from introducing books and audio-visual sermon lectures about the Hidden Imam to Morteza and encouraging him to attend the religious meetings held by the mosque, which included reciting the Quran and praying to improve Morteza's mood and change his daily routine, the cleric also urged him to embark on a pilgrimage to Jamkaran in order to connect with the Hidden Imam. In the course of his Jamkaran pilgrimage, he was able to reassess not only where he was in life, but also where he wanted to be in the future. The suggestions made by the cleric to Morteza seemed worth a try, given that he was under tremendous work pressure, receiving a lot of negative energy from his surroundings, as well as living a destructive routine that had affected his soul. In his description:

My work schedule at that factory required me to work long hours every single week, and I felt depressed in the midst of each and every one of my bad moods. I had no idea what I wanted out of life or what I wanted to do. The most I used to do when I went home was to try to forget all my bad feelings by engaging myself with other things. As a way of occupying myself, I would watch movies and play games, sometimes drink and even flirt with girls. I needed some kind of inspiration or miracle in order to pull me out of this dreadful routine that I had fallen into.

It is evident that Morteza's attendance at religious meetings, coupled with a repetition of pilgrimage to Jamkaran, had evoked spiritual feelings in him. While Morteza's daring experience was at first a personal search for self-healing, it soon converted to a collective experience when he participated in the religious meetings of the mosque, along with the repetition of his pilgrimage experience. Being able to meet a large number of individuals with similar attitudes in religious meetings and during a pilgrimage, played a crucial role in him being able to separate from the previous noxious habits and entering new areas in his life that enabled him to redefine his personality. According to him:

My pilgrimage experience and participation in religious meetings introduced me to a new group of people whose communication completely reshaped the way I think and feel inside, as well as my inner energy. In Jamkaran, I was able to make good friends with whom I could communicate in Tehran as well.

Finding a new group of friends and receiving support from them, which was the result of visiting Jamkaran and participating in religious meetings, was the beginning of a journey of self-fulfilment. The religious meeting he chose to attend had a routine, which meant he had enough time to learn and practice religious knowledge while visiting Jamkaran. Taking part in a pilgrimage to Jamkaran was a truly unique experience for him because, in addition to repenting of his sins, it was also an opportunity to purify his heart. The pilgrimage led Morteza to incorporate the religious teachings and practices he had been exposed to during the pilgrimage into his daily routine when he returned home. His pilgrimage and his participation in religious activities not only allowed him to connect to the Imam but also provided insight into who he was, and to gain a greater understanding of himself. While Morteza told me he had been to other traditional Shi'i shrines before, this was the first time he had made the pilgrimage for his own personal growth. As he puts it:

I was not going on a pilgrimage to have fun or go on an adventure, rather it was a way for me to focus and work on myself.

As well as self-realization and self-discipline, Morteza's pilgrimage experience also led to external dynamic manifestations in his life that were linked to his pilgrimage experience. Changing Morteza's professional trajectory and connecting with a new social network was perhaps the biggest change he had experienced in his life to date. He found a job opportunity at that time that allowed him to enjoy a good atmosphere during his working hours. In his opinion, being part of the new communication circle has led to many new relationships being made in his life, which have given him a positive sense of self. Despite the fact that Morteza was looking for a general sense of growth, his narrative reveals that as a result of the Jamkaran pilgrimage, he underwent unexpected changes in himself that transformed him into a completely different person. By distancing himself from his previous noxious habits, he was given the opportunity to enter a consolidated setting surrounded by supportive and compatible persons, providing him with the evidence he needed to confirm that a favourable social milieu and professional trajectories exist. Through the pilgrimage, Morteza was able to discover and lay the foundations for new orientations that led to a life of greater meaning and fulfilment, which primarily started with his self-realization.

In the same way as Morteza, other members of these religious meetings who attended the circle and embarked on pilgrimage followed the same direction. In such meetings, I found that most of my interlocutors began to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, in part due to being around compatible individuals with similar intent. By making pilgrimages and participating in religious training, they were able to gain insight into themselves and their beliefs in a way that helped them to focus on themselves and guided them toward self-discovery. Throughout these experiences, they realized that they could be a direct reflection of those people around them who were going through similar experiences.

In a similar manner, another of my interlocutors, Ziba, aged thirty and a student of architecture, also informed me that the experience of the Jamkaran pilgrimage, as well as the connection with the Hidden Imam, had been a turning point in her personal life. The main reason for Ziba joining the pilgrimage group was to unload the affliction she had been experiencing as a result of her 'deviant' way of life. As she put it:

I had no idea what I was doing, and I had no idea where I was going. As a result, life had become completely meaningless to me. Almost every week, I would go to a mixed-gender party. It wasn't uncommon for me to date different boys at different times. There was nothing left for me to do, I was killing myself, and life had lost its meaning

for me. I was trying my best to entertain myself by going to the parties and hanging out with the boys.

During the course of this session, she observed a profound transformation in the way she lived her life from drinking alcohol and interacting with boys to living what she felt was a more meaningful life. During the pilgrimage with this particular group, she felt the following outcomes:

My life changed after I was introduced to Mahdi, and the supplications and moral discipline that came with it helped me bring out things within myself that I could not bring out on my own. I started going through a mental change, and surrendering myself to the Hidden Imam in my life made it possible to bring this about. As my trips to Jamkaran with the group were going on, I realized how much of a difference I had made. It was the experience of Jamkaran that made me realize that there is still a supernatural world out there. As a result, I was provided with an opportunity to connect to something I had never experienced before that was beyond the material world. The pilgrimage itself was a way for me to rethink my perception of spirituality and my true self in a way.

Ziba's pilgrimage experience was accompanied by an emotional collapse as well. This emotional collapse also contributed significantly to Ziba's self-awareness and provided her with a new way to interact and communicate with the outside world, as well as a greater understanding of herself. Having lost her mother, Ziba had felt a deep void in her life, and for years, she had been unable to find a replacement for this feeling of emptiness and longing. Her mother's death left her without anyone who could truly understand her and connect with her. As she made her way through the pilgrimage, she was able to sense that there was someone deeper inside her who had the ability to connect with her. According to her:

In order to fulfil the need for a deeper connection [with the Hidden Imam], I need to understand that He is within me, to find ways to dig deep into my soul and spirit in order to find it.

She said that the pilgrimage had an impact on her mental conditions and prosperity and helped her to better cope with the outside world in a better manner. As she explained:

Taking part in the Jamkaran pilgrimage and communicating with the Hidden Imam replaces misfortune with a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. Having this replacement has helped me to not suffer too much from my inner misery and I have been able to cope with it. It is a fact that when you communicate with the Imam, he puts you in a state of cultivation. You are given the opportunity to fertilize the hidden

capacities that lie within you. In the course of my journey, as well as during the communication with the Imam, I was able to scrutinize my past and understand my inner self, and I was able to know all the factors that had influenced my current suffering and found the strength to forget my misfortune and an ability to release it. There was a very powerful effect of pilgrimage and the connection of my heart with the Imam, which enabled me to release unfortunate things and abandon the deviant lifestyle that I used to live. The more I was able to release the contaminations and sufferings, the closer I could get to being in balance, and the better I was able to plan for the future once again. As a result of my pilgrimage, I have come to understand who I am and how I can improve myself.

Ziba's pilgrimage to Jamkaran marked the beginning of her path to self-fulfilment and served as a "ritual of affliction" (Turner & Turner, 1978: 11) to remove upset, despair, misfortune, and even experience of loss, which manifested in the transformative salvific nature of pilgrimage experience (Higgins and Hamilton, 2016: 26). As she explained to me, one of the main reasons why her way of life in the past was 'deviant' was because she did not have a dynamic faith in the future. A part of her thought process was that her seemingly meaningless life might be the consequence of future worthlessness in her life. According to Ziba, her belief in the Hidden Imam, along with her waiting for the Advent of the Imam, created a sense of hope for the future in her life and motivated her to move away from the deviant materialistic routine she had been trapped in up to that point.

It is important to mention that the performative aspects associated with pilgrimage also need to be considered when determining the extent to which pilgrims are transformed as a result of their pilgrimage. In other words, the pilgrim's transformation is not just the result of them detaching themselves from their daily life, but it is also the result of the performative milieu they are immersed in during the pilgrimage in which they engage and execute their agency. It is important to remember that in the process of developing a sense of self and discovering a new aspect of their identity, there are many opportunities for interaction with others and participation in rituals, which provide the perfect setting for developing these qualities.

4.4 Life-Cycle Transitions and Reformulation of Self-Identity

As a woman divorced from her husband and separated from her only child, Mansoureh had a lot of doubts about the kind of trajectory she would lead as a housewife in her mid-thirties. Despite the fact that Mansoureh was working as a salesperson following

her divorce, she was worried about the dull and futile daily life that she had been trapped in. After her daughter and ex-husband moved abroad, Mansoureh was fearful and anxious about getting entangled in meaningless routines in life. In her own words:

Thinking about what I would do after my marriage ended and what life would be like for me after my divorce wasn't easy for me. It felt as if I was lost somewhere in time. My daughter, as well as my ex-husband, had left Iran a few months ago, and I had no meaningful prospects ahead of me that would give me a sense of comfort, and I was feeling very discouraged.

It is clear from Mansoureh's statements that her sense of anxiety and depression is exacerbated even more by the fact that she is now not in a position to rely on her old identities as a wife and mother. Since her daughter has moved out and is spending more time at home by herself, her responsibilities to others, to whom she had dedicated her entire life, are no longer there for her to fulfil. This story illustrates Mansoureh's point in trying to constitute a new form of self-identity:

There was nothing on my divorce papers aside from my personal information and my status as a divorced woman when I received it. It was extremely difficult for me to tolerate it. There was a sense that my entire identity was entwined with that piece of paper. The only way I had defined myself before this was through my marriage and my child. I felt as though I was benefiting from their success and position before this, but after the divorce, I no longer had all of that to look forward to, and I felt a deep emptiness and void in myself that I could not fill with anything.

In the face of concerns about her future trajectory and the desire to achieve self-fulfilment, Mansoureh decided to travel for self-transformation. To do this, she started off with an organized pilgrimage tour in Tehran and then went to Jamkaran with a pilgrimage group. She described the decision to go on a pilgrimage as follows:

In a way, it's like driving a car that has been in a corner of the parking lot without fuel for a long time, and then filling it up with fuel and driving it.

After asking her how she heard about Jamkaran Mosque and what made her decide to visit this special place, she responded:

It was through watching the daily television program "*Samt-e Khodā*" [Towards God] that I became aware of the Jamkaran Mosque for the first time.

Mansoureh first heard about the Jamkaran Mosque through watching a television program known as *Samt-e Khodā*, which airs on Channel 3 every day in the afternoons and covers issues connected to religion, morality, and social issues. The program began broadcasting in 2008, and it is one of the most-watched religious programs on

Islamic Republic TV. In the course of one program, the preacher drew her attention to the Hidden Imam. The preacher stated that the identity of a true believer in the current era is defined by his/her relationship with the Hidden Imam. He then continued by introducing *zīyārat* (visitation) as a way through which one could improve oneself and locate one's own identity. After this, the Jamkaran Mosque was introduced as a sacred place whereby one can strengthen one's relationship with the Hidden Imam, who is the guardian of the believers. As part of his preaching, the preacher also introduced a book on air titled "*Irtibāt bā Imam-e Zamān*" (Connection with the Lord of the Age), in which ordinary people narrate how their connection with the Mahdi has changed the way they live their daily routine lives. Having been influenced by this program, Mansoureh purchased this book and began to study Jamkaran Mosque. She then decided to make a pilgrimage to this site. This pilgrimage has provided Mansoureh with a set of personal intuitions and collective experiences, which are not only different but also enlightening in comparison to the personal suffering she experienced in her previous state of daily life. A significant difference following her experience of the Jamkaran pilgrimage is the feeling of detachment from the vacuum state of her previous routine and of trying to explore a new understanding of herself as she moves forward in the pilgrimage. A new sense of identity emerged during Mansoureh's pilgrimage, which she described:

The first time I visited this place, I was more curious and just wanted to explore. The moment I visited the site, I felt as if I wanted to come back here again. I don't know how to describe it. It was as if everything was dynamic and alive. I was visiting an Imam who was alive. This was not a visit to a dead person, but rather a visit to a living Saviour whom I was seeking to connect with. My feelings of closeness to the Imam are much stronger here, and I know that he can listen to my problems and desires. The atmosphere here is one of a kind, and I have a very special feeling about it. Since I came here, I felt like I was discovering new things about myself that I had never realized before in my life. I feel that my lifestyle has changed a lot. I feel more motivated to live a fulfilling life now. I attend the sermon, and I find it to be inspirational. The other pilgrims within my group, as well as those in the Mosque, are a source of learning for me. As a result, I have made new friends. The Mosque is a place where I participate in a wide range of religious activities. These have given me new roles and responsibilities. As a member of the pilgrimage group and in charge of its charity department, I oversee the group's charitable activities. It seems like everything here is different from what

I'm used to at home. Since I started the pilgrimage, I feel that I am no longer the same Mansoureh I used to be.

As a result of the pilgrimage, she finds the ability to change the context within which she builds her identity. Rather than focusing on her family situation, she uses pilgrimage to describe a new identity that she perceives to be more meaningful. Having redefined the contexts within which her selfhood exists, she departs from the domestic identity that she had long had and uses the relatively different experiences provided by the pilgrimage to narrate a new identity for herself. It is through pilgrimage that her tensions are converted into an opportunity, whereby she can take advantage of the pilgrimage so that she can release some of the constraints imposed on her by her previous identity and construct a new sense of self for the future.

Another of my interlocutors, Elnaz, shared the same expectations and concerns as Mansoureh regarding the next stage of her life. She used the pilgrimage experience as a vehicle to build a new identity for herself. As a result of the sudden loss of her son, along with the psychological pressures that began to plague her after that loss, Elnaz realised she was no longer able to identify herself as a mother and that this tragic event served to prompt her to seek out a new identity for herself. A more detailed explanation of Elnaz's journey will be provided in the chapters on temporality and *namāz* later in this thesis, but for now, we can say that, after losing her son, she went through a period of profound change in her life. Sometime after this loss, Elnaz went on a pilgrimage together with some of her friends to find some peace. As Elnaz's mental condition continued to deteriorate, these pilgrimage trips were being made in hopes of improving it. In the course of these pilgrimages (most of them to Mashhad, home to the tomb and shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam) Elnaz received advice from a cleric about how to improve and strengthen her relationship with the Hidden Imam. As she put it in her own words:

During one of the pilgrimages to Mashhad, a cleric of the caravan recommended me, "Why do you not communicate with the Hidden Imam? Try asking him for help since he is alive and present. It is true that visiting Imam Reza is a recommended and rewarding experience, but whatever you want from Imam Reza, he will tell the Hidden Imam who is alive in this world, and your wish will be fulfilled through him. An Imam is available to us. A master has been assigned to us. I would suggest that you connect with him and ask him to help you find the right path, I assure you everything will be fine." As I asked him where and how I could connect with him, the cleric replied: "You should make a pilgrimage to Jamkaran and connect with him with your heart."

With this advice in mind, Elnaz prepared for her first pilgrimage to Jamkaran as soon as possible. As part of a pilgrimage tour, she spent a week at the site, participating in various rituals at the Mosque as well as learning about the history of the Mosque, the Hidden Imam, and the religious issues that surround it. Elnaz described the impact of the Jamkaran pilgrimage in the following words:

In the wake of the loss of my son, I had been challenged as to who I was and what the meaning of life was to me for a very long time. I took a lot of actions, but they weren't that beneficial for me. In addition to going on many trips, I also went to see a counsellor on a regular basis. Momentarily, the actions were able to tranquillize me. But after a short time, I was back to the starting point again. Almost instantly after my son died, I felt like the meaning of my life and my identity had been emptied from the inside out. However, Jamkaran opened up to me a whole new perspective on life. It released me from the past and from belonging to what I was clinging to and revealed to me new areas of myself and the future that I had previously been unaware of. Until I visited Jamkaran and was able to have a heart connection with the Imam, I was constantly drifting backwards in time, but now it is allowing me to move forwards in the future. In the past, I used to feel like a grieving mother, but now I feel like a hopeful expectant who is looking forward to the future. In the meantime, my whole life consists of waiting and paving the way for the Advent of the Imam in the near future, an event which is fast approaching and is going to cause a great deal of change in our world.

In a similar manner to how her position within her family had defined Mansoureh's experiences and identity, Elnaz's past experiences and identity had been defined by her position within the family, and she felt as though a distinct identity within her was waiting to be revealed. In Elnaz's mind, going on a pilgrimage is an appropriate way of investing a certain amount of time and energy in exploring new areas of her life that she now believes lie in the future rather than in the past. The frustrations she experienced after losing her son can be summed up as a static experience of constantly grieving in a corner of the house instead of exploring a new self in a new place. The loss of her son, combined with the experience of the Jamkaran pilgrimage that was enlightening and transformative, makes the possibility of Elnaz developing and creating a new identity a reality to her. Several of Elnaz's statements make it clear that she has invested a great deal of time and energy into pilgrimage. In the same way that Mansoureh used the pilgrimage experience as a tool for responding to a situation in which past identities have been questioned and lost their significance, Elnaz also uses the pilgrimage experience as a way of coping with her depression and self-identity

tensions, turning them into a chance for her to come to terms with a new version of herself.

4.5 Devotional Emotions and Instrumental Rationality

In general, pilgrims choose to visit Jamkaran Mosque for a variety of reasons, some of which have already been discussed in the preceding sections. A pilgrimage does not only help one improve his or her spiritual self-improvement, but some pilgrims also utilize the opportunity of their pilgrimage experience to improve their life and their environment back home. It seems that searching for spiritual self-improvement sometimes is only the first move, but it is not limited to it. As I will demonstrate in Mina's story, spiritual self-transformation achieved as a result of affective responses through performing the Jamkaran pilgrimage is not only a means to altering one's spiritual self, but it is also a method that a person can use as a way to implement her instrumental rationality to improve one's daily life in an overall way. A pilgrimage, in this case, refers to the different spiritual experiences that my interlocutors encounter while on pilgrimage in Jamkaran, which help them in their journey back home and enable them to be not only a better but more constructive and efficient subject in their quotidian life. A thorough understanding of the story of Mina helps us to understand the fact that spiritual experiences in the process of self-formation at Jamkaran Mosque are not restricted only to the pursuit of spiritual self-improvement, but rather also illustrate the fact that worldly factors play a significant role in pushing the subject for self-improvement as well. As a result, Mina's pilgrimage can be viewed from two different perspectives at once. In the first place, instrumental rationality likely played a significant role in her decision to visit Jamkaran regularly to strengthen her spirituality and, consequently, to improve her prospects in the afterlife as well as her worldly life as a woman who worked as a deputy headmistress. In this sense, my interlocutors, in some cases, employ their calculative agency to obtain worldly success in conducting religious rituals.

A married woman, in her early forties, Mina is a deputy headmistress at a public school located in Tehran where, according to her, she deals with a large number of students every day. As a religious woman who adhered to religious practices, Mina was very concerned about the treatment that she was giving to her students at school:

Due to the high pressure of work, sometimes I was forced to yell at students in order to be able to control them, and sometimes I had to punish them in order to keep them on task. I felt that there was a negative atmosphere in the school. I had a nervous and

angry feeling every time I got home from work. My religious practices were even affected as a result of it. My feeling for a while was that I was being mechanical with all the actions I was performing.

Mina's transformative pilgrimage experience began with the school organizing a pilgrimage trip to the city of Qom. Mina, as one of the school's representatives, went with the students. Mina described her first visit to Jamkaran along with her experience of spiritual emotion in the following way:

For the first time in my life, I was experiencing a feeling of security and peace that I had never experienced before. As we walked into the Mosque, we all felt a distinct mood. We felt as if the energy of the environment had an effect on us in some way. I felt my heart being affected when I recited *namāz* in the *shabistān*. It was completely different from my home-recited *namāz*. The atmosphere made me feel energetic, and I think that was because of it. At that moment, I didn't want to leave the place. It seemed that all the bad energy related to my worldly life as well as all the negative thoughts that were usually occupying my mind, had disappeared. I had the impression that the Imam had noticed me as well.

According to Mina, Jamkaran's pilgrimage experience had been the source of two achievements for her. On the one hand, as a result of her experience in Jamkaran, she has been able to experience spiritual emotions that she does not normally experience at home in her daily life. For instance, the effect of the affective heart impressed her during the performance of *namāz* in the Mosque, which was not mechanical as it was at home, but rather dynamic and unique, which allowed Mina to experience the feeling of spiritual self-improvement that was a part of her spiritual development. The other aspect of her pilgrimage has been her energy and sense of self-fulfilment, which she believed had been effective in improving her behaviour in the classroom with students as well as her career development within the school environment. A short while after completing the pilgrimage planned by her school, Mina decided to repeat the pilgrimage on her own in order to reexperience the spiritual emotions that were not available to her back home. It is important to note that the repetition of these pilgrimages is not limited to Mina's desire to improve her spiritual and religious state (i.e. it is not just for God's or Imam's satisfaction), but that the positive incidents and experiences that happened to her at work also inspired her to repeat the pilgrimage experience constantly. Mina's decision to duplicate pilgrimage does not just stem from pure spiritual feelings for the development of personal piety but also results from a

combination of calculation and rationality, which lies in her intention to find new identity in her worldly life as well.

According to Mina, when she began the pilgrimage, she was the deputy for the sixth grade at the school, which included sixth, seventh and eighth graders. Until the pilgrimage experience, which Mina described as transformative, she did not behave properly with the students. In her own words:

On more than one occasion, I noticed that the parents of one or more of our students would come and complain to the principal, and I would receive a warning from the principal each time they did this. Moreover, even my performance review, which reflects the opinion of students about my performance, was average in nature.

As Mina explained to me, the spiritual emotions she experiences throughout the pilgrimage are part of the process of improving herself in her quotidian life. There can be no separation between Mina's developing spiritual self-improvement and the effects that it has on her everyday life, and as I explain in the following, these effects help her to become more efficient in her daily routine as well. In Mina's opinion, the spiritual emotions she experienced as a result of the Jamkaran pilgrimage are not available to her at home, but she has observed that the emotional and spiritual experiences that she had during the pilgrimage have greatly improved how she behaves with students, as well as her overall behaviour at work. In her words:

In my opinion, I felt as if I had become kinder as a result. When I was dealing with the students, I tried to be kind to them. My heart was affected during the recitation of the *namāz*, and that lightened my heart. The spiritual emotions I experienced were not repeated for me at home, but I was on a spiritual high and my heart was affected when I was there.

After she said this, I asked her why she repeats the pilgrimage experience even though all the spiritual emotions she experiences at the pilgrimage do not occur to her when she is at home. The purpose of my inquiry was to determine whether it was only a matter of spiritual emotions and the perception of growing personal piety that was effective in motivating her to repeat the pilgrimage. The answer she provided demonstrates the role that calculative reasoning plays in repeating the pilgrimage and highlights the connection between spiritual improvement and worldly efficiency to some extent.

I have to say that my heart is not always affected during the pilgrimage, but after all, there is a reward in this act of pilgrimage, and I will be able to benefit from it in the afterlife if I live to see the end of it. Secondly, whenever I return from the pilgrimage, I

feel that I am a different person than I was before I went on the pilgrimage. There are many benefits that the Jamkaran pilgrimage has helped me to achieve, including changing my behaviour with students, improving my performance in school and being able to demonstrate better performance of myself in subsequent evaluations. Imagine that I was just a few steps away from losing my position as deputy and that if I lost it, my salary would also be reduced. In spite of this, due to the blessings of the pilgrimage and the mercy of the Imam, not only did I not lose, but I was also recently entrusted with the responsibility of the seventh grade. As a result of the blessings of the Jamkaran pilgrimage, I have been promoted to this new position.

This temporary nature of spiritual emotions, which were unique to the experience of pilgrimage, as well as the difficulty of regenerating these spiritual emotions in daily practices at home, caused Mina to use a different approach so that the spiritual energy absorbed during the pilgrimage would be directed toward improving her personal identity in her profession. The fact that she could not re-enact those spiritual emotions for the benefit of her daily religious practices back home made her attempt to interact with her work environment and communicate with students as a form of spiritual devotion.

It is possible to examine Mina's point of view from two different perspectives. On the one side, there is the impression that Jamkaran's pilgrimage experience can be viewed as a liminal stage in which pilgrims are transitioning between the social and spiritual stages in the course of their journey (Turner, 1969). In addition to its role as a distinctive transitory stage, the Jamkaran pilgrimage is able to have a major impact on the pilgrim's spiritual emotions during the pilgrimage as well as on the pilgrim's personal and social development. Such liminal stages play an important role in the production of a sense of particularity and commitment as well as the escalation of the spiritual and emotional experience that is evident in the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience.

A similar phenomenon is described in Kyrgyzstan in Pelkmans's (2017) study *Fragile Convictions*, on the *dawat* or proselytizing tours of the Tablīghī Jamā'at group, which he describes as a liminal state. By applying Turner's liminality vocabulary, Pelkmans focuses on a group of conservative, devout Muslim men belonging to the Tablighi group, a movement that is aware of the pulsating nature of faith and is devising its own strategies to combat the dissipation of conviction. The Tablīghīs are expected to travel to a mosque or a shrine, often in a rural area, for three consecutive days every month, which is the most common form of *dawat* in Kyrgyzstan. As a result of these *dawats*,

the three aspects of travelling, male bonding, and storytelling are merged in a way that produces an effect of spiritual intensification. This allows access to levels of experience that tend to be ignored in everyday life. In order to perform the *dawat* ritual effectively, the men should be prohibited from leaving the mosque and its courtyard during the three days of *dawat*, except when they are authorized to do so by the *amir*. Life's rhythm and pace are altered, and the only thing to remain the same are the times for praying. This three-day experience of travel separates people from daily life and evokes a temporary migration from worldly pursuits to religious concerns (p. 111). Through *dawat*, travellers have the opportunity to translate loosely held ideas into an Islamic vocabulary and consolidate their understanding by putting them into daily practice (p. 104).

Pilgrimage to Jamkaran is similar to *dawat* in that it provides a place for a pilgrim to withdraw from everyday problems and a space in which he or she can experience intense spiritual emotions, offering an opportunity for the pilgrim to be on the course of improvement. The case of Mina can be considered as exemplary of the wider experience of Jamkaran pilgrims who, even though the intensity of their spiritual feelings at the place of pilgrimage is temporary and not necessarily embodied or re-enacted at home as a form of personal piety or as an improvement in daily actions, often find that the act of pilgrimage has a profound impact on their wider social life, as it did for Mina.

I want to suggest that the perception of intense spiritual feelings coupled with a search for meaning to allow one to improve oneself is only the initial impetus to performing the pilgrimage, but the motivations for performing the pilgrimage and repeating it are not only limited to these factors. Mina's story illustrates the fact that the desire for spiritual self-transformation can be viewed as a motivation to improve the conditions of the worldly life of a person, even in the case when he or she has not achieved a level of practical pious personal advancement. As part of my efforts to clarify motives that go beyond the transformation of personal piety associated with Mina's pilgrimage, to include her use of calculative reasoning, I would like to refer to studies that have found spiritual emotions, as well as subjective transformation and identity construction, to be influenced by capitalist instrumental logic as a form of neoliberal piety.

In his ethnographic study of the movement known as "Emotional and Spiritual Quotient" (ESQ) in Indonesia, Daromir Rudnyckyj (2009, 2010) shows how spiritual reformers, by way of motivational lectures about economic progress, combine Islamic

ethics and beliefs with management principles, in order to improve the level of competition among employees of the public sector so that they may be aware that adherence to moral principles and Islamic beliefs in the workplace is crucial to increasing their chances of success in the world. By combining Islamic ethics with the principles of management knowledge in the work environment, he suggests the concept of “spiritual economies,” which is based on the concept that work should be seen as a form of worship and religious duty, the idea that one should instil the ethics of responsibility in oneself and that spirituality should be treated as a part of the management process (2009: 105). In a similar vein, Sarah Tobin (2016) has shown how Muslim participation in the calculation of identity construction around the idea of “real Islam” takes place in her ethnographic study of the neoliberal piety of middle-class Jordanians. In her opinion, the capitalist calculative agencies have managed to penetrate the market successfully and have given credibility to pious practices. The Muslim piety studied by her is influenced by a neoliberal orientation that calculates a Muslim's future in terms of both their worldly and hereafter prospects through rational, calculative reasoning. Throughout their everyday mundane actions, they reveal how complex calculations are used to Islamicize their economic selves and to economize their Islamic selves in the public sphere by justifying and demonstrating their “everyday piety” through complex constructions of authentic Islamic piety that define both their professional lives and their personal lives (p. 21).

Akin to Rudnyckyj's orientation and Tobin's approach, I consider Mina's pilgrimage experience to be a good example of how the calculating intellect, which is the foundation of a capitalist economy, can be a motivation for spiritual self-transformation as well as for the development of a more dynamic and constructive role in society, leading to success in an individual's material world. A part of Mina's calculative agency can be seen in her choice of replicating the experience of pilgrimage to Jamkaran Mosque on a constant basis, as her spiritual self-improvement and revitalizing of her devotional emotions can only be enhanced in Jamkaran. Mina's choice to collect eternal rewards for the improvement of her situation in the hereafter is also another example of this use of calculating intellect which dominates her decision to perform pilgrimage regularly when her effort to achieve spiritual improvement in the mosque also fails on some occasions. The growth and progress Mina has experienced in her work life, which she considers to have been influenced by

her pilgrimage experience, should also be seen as a major force in motivating her to continue to perform pilgrimages on a regular basis. Obviously, this worldly progress has also contributed to Mina's choice and motivation to experience devotional emotions during the Jamkaran pilgrimage and has urged her to take advantage of her calculative agency to repeat the pilgrimage frequently.

4.6 Conclusion

A major focus of this chapter was on the relationship between pilgrimage and self-identity, suggesting that pilgrimage provides answers to questions raised by my interlocutors about their identities, their self-fulfilment, and their lifestyles at the inflexion points in their lives. As part of the pilgrimage process, one may be able to re-evaluate oneself and create a new identity. Through pilgrimage, pilgrims can reconstruct a common meaning for their collective and individual experiences, which can be extremely useful when redefining one's identity as well as fostering a sense of spirituality, productivity, commitment, acceptance and tranquillity in oneself.

Liminality should be considered a crucial concept for understanding the inner transformations of my interlocutors. The narratives of my informants reaffirm the statements of Turner and Turner (1978) and Van Gennep (1960) that pilgrims want to subject themselves to liminal stages, which are made up of individuals, experiences, and new environments that enable them to undertake a process of self-transformation. It would also seem that the statements of my interlocutors are in accordance with Morinis' (1992), Dubisch's (1995) Graburn's (2010) and Coleman's (2002) ritual theory of pilgrimage/tourism, which states that pilgrimage/tourism is an act of searching for a change that may not be available in the pilgrim's local environment and the fact that a pilgrim's participation in the act of worship is performed both individually and collectively and is the result of the pilgrim's participation in a large group of other pilgrims who may be performing their rituals at the same time, but separately from one another. My discussions demonstrate that liminality played a significant role in the journeys of my informants, as it detached them from everyday routine and provided them with the performative social space to implement their agency through interacting and learning from the experiences of others during the pilgrimage, influencing how their thoughts and perspectives changed as a result. In their view, the time they spent at the place of pilgrimage, participating in the rituals associated with the Mosque, and interacting with pilgrims with similar attitudes have

all contributed to their transformational experience through the time spent there. In line with Frey (1998) and Reader (2006), I would suggest that there is no doubt that the continual repetition of the pilgrimage experience by the pilgrims is a strategy that may serve to keep alive in the home the transformative nature of the pilgrimage experience.

It is important to take into account that the explanations I gave regarding the transformation of the inner self and identification of the informants in this chapter were derived from interviews I conducted with them at the pilgrimage site or on the pilgrimage route. I have therefore devoted all of my efforts to echo the experiences of their pilgrimage and the impact they received from the act of pilgrimage. This chapter is not meant to assert to what extent the inner transformations, self-identification, and understanding of positive feelings brought about by pilgrimage are persistent in their daily lives in the long run. In the chapter below on post-pilgrimage, however, I try to explore the inconsistencies and ambivalences associated with the pilgrimage experience in relation to the rhythms of everyday life and the challenges that pilgrims face when adapting the spiritual experiences they have acquired during their pilgrimage to their everyday lives.

Those pilgrims who are more emotionally influenced are more likely to be exposed to self-transformations at the end of their pilgrimage. The transformations that occur as a result of these affective stimulations may, in turn, have consequences not only on the pilgrim's self-identification but also on the local environment that the pilgrim takes part in, as well as the society in which he or she lives. My interlocutors' accounts reveal the fact that the reinvigoration of their spiritual emotions resulting from the pilgrims' personal experiences in the Mosque, as well as through the relationship they have with the Hidden Imam, have an effect on both their relationship with the Hidden Imam and their interpersonal relationships. The emotional experience, combined with the spiritual developments the pilgrims have achieved in the course of their pilgrimage, can ultimately help them to identify new aspects of themselves and assist them in their quotidian life to be more efficient.

These emotional experiences, along with spiritual development, affect women more than men. Of course, this should be attributed to the high percentage of women participating in pilgrimage compared to men. As I mentioned earlier, the number of women participating in pilgrimage is relatively higher than men. This can have several reasons. One of the most important reasons for the more striking presence of women

in the pilgrimage compared to men can be attributed to the informal and less structured nature of the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience as a religious activity in which women's participation is not limited by their gender (for example, many formal religious activities partially limit women's participation by gender-related laws).

Pilgrimage, by providing more and wider space for religious expression, allows women to freely and fully participate in the rituals, to remove themselves from the official and patriarchal religious structures that marginalise them outside the place of pilgrimage. Among these activities, for example, women can establish strong social relations with other groups of women and participate in social-religious activities related to pilgrimage, such as participating in training classes, preparing and serving ritual food, and participating in sermons read by women and for women. In these cases, women experience a sense of community and a sense of belonging, and they are not relegated to marginal positions and passive roles. Unlike mosques, the structure of shrines and how they are used encourages informal religious activities and gives women more freedom of movement (Betteridge, 2002: 278). Especially during the hours of the day when men are at work, shrines can become popular places for women to gather and perform their religious activities, from prayers to Qur'an reading classes (ibid).

In the meantime, pilgrimage as a suitable excuse to leave the house for women who are limited in a religious and patriarchal society should not be underestimated. Pilgrimage allows women to escape from their domestic responsibilities for a limited time and connect with new people and situations. Since the act of pilgrimage is always a praiseworthy religious act, it is less opposed by men or families. In addition to utilising the pilgrimage as the obvious opportunity to leave the house, women go to shrines for various types of religious, social and personal activities. Participation in regular religious programs and prayer meetings is often arranged exclusively for women. Participating in these group meetings that are facilitated through pilgrimage all play a role in creating a supportive atmosphere (Betteridge, 2002). Women who visit the shrine share their faith and sympathy. For example, I often saw women who told each other about the bitter experiences and pressure caused by life problems and illnesses of their children and relatives and consoled each other. They often received comfort and support from each other that they could not achieve alone in their personal lives. These collective supports, along with establishing a spiritual connection with the place of pilgrimage, allow women to try to gain control over parts of their lives. For example, problems such as barrenness, difficulties in married life, and

emotional problems may cause more women to visit shrines. Ann Betteridge, an anthropologist of pilgrimage believes, “There is so much for women to do on a local pilgrimage. On a religious level, it allows them to play a central role in rituals. On a social level, it provides women with the opportunity to meet in an approved environment and meet each other. On a personal level, it offers women a place to experience contact with the divine and strive to take control of their lives in ways that are meaningful to them as individuals” (Betteridge, 2002: 281).

Chapter 5: Sermons, the “Affective” Heart and Becoming a True *Montazer*

5.1 Introduction

Among the most important messages to be understood from the messianic Mosque of Jamkaran is the call for moral improvement at a societal level as a pre-requisite to the coming of the Hidden Imam (Amanat, 2009). As I already discussed in detail in Chapters One and Two, it is evident that the publications, posters, and placards that circulated physically and virtually within and without the Mosque emphasise the importance of moral improvement as well as the fact that the sins of people are the greatest obstacles to the Advent of Mahdi. In addition to these, within the Mosque, the preachers urge pilgrims to practice self-purification in anticipation of Mahdi's Advent. The preachers attempt to target the pilgrim's heart to persuade them to prepare for the return of the Mahdi. During the sermon, which is usually held almost every Tuesday and Thursday after *namāz-e-maghrib*, preachers make use of moral demands to persuade pilgrims to purify themselves. Redeeming believers from sin is a strategy for ethical purification that is achieved through maintaining and reinforcing the pilgrims' inner relationship with the Hidden Imam and obtaining knowledge of him. This chapter aims to show how participation in the sermon affects the pilgrims' hearts and encourage them to develop an inner relationship with the Hidden Imam to become a true *montazer*.

Examining the sermon and highlighting elements of it, I will show how attending such practices is one way of cultivating a moral disposition. As pilgrims strive to become pious, they recognise the importance of their internal, embodied, and affective relationship with the Hidden Imam. A great deal of emphasis is placed in the sermon on reconfiguring oneself as inextricably linked to the Imam in the immediate present, which allows one to reorient oneself. The preachers emphasise the inward quality as an ethical substance by encouraging pilgrims to engage in pilgrimage practices such as reciting *namāz*, petition writing, and seeking the knowledge of the Imam by listening to sermons, stressing the importance of pledging or submitting to the Hidden Imam and the significance of “pleasing the Hidden Imam” that should be considered as modes of subjectification.

5.2 Becoming a True *Montazer*

During the more than twelve months that I spent with Twelver Shi'i pilgrims (from late August 2017 to early December 2018), I noticed that almost none of my interlocutors, regardless of their level of moral virtue, identified themselves as a good person. They rather present themselves as bad, *ālūdeh* (polluted), *rū-sīyāh* (black in the face), *khatākār* (guilty), *kharāb* (internally corrupt), morally weak, in need of reformation and purification, and generally sinners. Although the theme of sinfulness and fighting moral vices was visible when digging into their individual experiences, they were all striving to be good Shi'ites and to be true *montazer* to the Hidden Imam so that they might receive his miraculous mercy and attention. There is always an expectation of the imminent return of the Mahdi among Twelver Shi'i pilgrims. Their participation in the sermon ritual and their presence in the Mosque intensify the feeling that the Advent is approaching. A sermon is usually full of reports and signs of the Advent of the Hidden Imam to show that the apocalypse has already begun and that the *montazerān* (those who are waiting) should be on the lookout for the Advent of the Hidden Imam at all times. With such a constant flow of signs of the Advent, the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims are awakening their expectation of the Advent of the Messiah. Therefore, the impending Advent of the Mahdi and the "The End of Time" were the common phrases they used in their daily conversations every day, and the problems they faced as a result of living in this period were all linked to this phrase. The intense fear felt in the community as a result of the apocalypse fuelled their desire for improvement and their hope for redemption.

The sermon should be seen as a stage on which messianic emotions and visions of eschatology intensify, which affect my interlocutors' hearts in the most profound way. In Chapter One, I mentioned that the Shi'i messianic interpretation holds that the Mahdi may return at any moment, and thus the people have to be morally ready for his Advent at any time. Throughout the sermon, pilgrims are constantly reminded that since the exact time of the Advent of the Saviour is not known, those who are waiting for him must control their sinful tendencies and work to strengthen one another's faith to hasten the Advent. As a result, the pilgrims who are caught in sin, or those who have sins that they have not yet been able to cleanse themselves from, will delay the return of Mahdi and keep them in the corrupt and difficult situation of the

End of Time in which they have to endure (cf. Robbins, 2004). It should be noted that such a messianic discourse introduces a form of salvation that is based primarily on the regulation of the individual's moral behaviour. As the audience listens to the sermon, they come to realize that when they are talking about the Mahdi, they should really be talking about themselves. They realize that it is their own selves who will be able to put an end to the occult period and not anything else. A major obstacle to the Advent that is introduced in these sermons is the defects and weaknesses that originate inside the pilgrims themselves, which must be corrected before the Advent can occur. It is demonstrated in these sermons that there is something more important than drinking wine, adultery, and stealing, all of which are considered sins, and that is having true faith that originates from within the pilgrims' hearts (Robbins, 2004). Therefore, becoming a true *montazer* requires the correction of inward capacities through a "connection of the heart" with the Hidden Imam.

In other words, virtuous and pietistic acts have no meaning unless they are derived from the heart. A moral code like the one proposed in the Shi'i messianic discourse embodied in the sermon for the pilgrim to adopt for themselves seems difficult for them to do because not only does it forbid external sinful actions (such as theft, physical violence, drinking alcohol etc.), but it forbids intense emotions like anger, violence, jealousy, bad intentions etc, as well as stressing the importance of inner capacity and emotions (cf. Robbins, 2004). It is understandable that most of my interlocutors constantly monitor their hearts, keeping careful records of all the immoral conduct they commit because of this emphasis on moral and emotional inner regulation. The following discussion demonstrates the impact of active listening to the sermon on pilgrims in terms of creating a sense of fear, regret, repentance, and peacefulness within them, which ultimately assists them in transforming their moral behaviours. Hence, to understand how pilgrims engage with their moral substance (in Foucauldian sense, see Chapter Three) to transform themselves in relation to the structure, I will describe in the next chapters the technologies of the self that they employ to accomplish this transformation.

5.3 The Sermon and Affecting the Neglectful Hearts

There is no doubt that the sermon should be considered an important aspect of the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience, given that it is a method by which the preachers try to awaken the heedless and sinful hearts of the pilgrims, encouraging them to seek the

knowledge of the Hidden Imam. By trying to put the knowledge of the Imam into the heart of the listener, the preachers aim to create motivation and sincere intentions within them as well as prepare and widen the capacity of their hearts. Additionally, the sermon not only informs the pilgrims about their moral duties and obligations, but it also warns them about the consequences of their actions, which can delay or accelerate the Advent of Mahdi. In this chapter, I argue that the sermon affects the heart of my interlocutors, where emotions invoked during the preaching can increase self-discipline in ethical matters (Hirschkind, 2001; Mahmood, 2009; Deeb, 2011; Liberatore, 2013). A great deal of effort is exerted by my interlocutors to cultivate hope, love, and awareness of the Hidden Imam as modalities and motives for action according to the messianic knowledge proposed to them. As a consequence of this, Twelver Shi'i pilgrims capture and represent their affective experiences. There is a strong sense in which the sermon commits my interlocutors to their messianic beliefs due to the transmission of the messianic emotion as well as the use of fear and hope vocabularies: affect is an important element of stimulating this messianic enthusiasm in my opinion (cf. Liberatore, 2013). There is a need for the improvement of inward qualities and the sense of affect they experience as a result of listening to the preaching as a resource of messianic knowledge that encourages my interlocutors to take the path of moral improvement.

Sermons are generally delivered every week on Tuesday and Thursday nights in the Mosque, when a large number of pilgrims attend. In terms of the content, the sermons usually follow a similar pattern where the preachers focus primarily on the moral actions pilgrims need to internalize to accelerate the coming of the Mahdi and be prepared for that moment of bliss. The sermon is one of the most crucial components of building the epistemological world of morality within which my interlocutors are influenced to improve themselves. The preachers always use a lot of Quranic, Islamic hadith and narrative materials from different sources in their speeches to inculcate awareness of the imminence of the Mahdi's Advent and to highlight the characteristics of true *montazers* and their duties during this period. The content presented in the sermon has a profound effect on the cognitive world of my interlocutors and forms the basis for their moral dispositions. This constructed moral disposition, however, is later negotiated and redefined by the pilgrim, according to their own beliefs and values.

In the following, I will be discussing an example of one of the sermons that were delivered in Jamkaran Mosque, one that reflects the epistemological content of the

sermon and its context. The preacher whose sermon is being examined, like all other preachers in Jamkaran, is widely accepted as a legitimate preacher in the community whose sermon content represents the Jamkaran preaching tradition. The below transcript indicates the start and end of the sermons, but it does not cover every single word from start to finish. In most cases, the sermons take more than an hour to deliver. As a result, I have transcribed only those parts that would have the greatest impact on pilgrims. The following sentences are taken verbatim from each part of his sermon. Parentheses are used to indicate my explanatory additions in the transcript.

The routine of the sermon ritual is usually completed within an hour and a half to two hours. Essentially, the sermon in its simplest form begins with the Imam of the congregation reciting *Maghrib* and '*Isha*' *namāz*. Immediately after the two *namāz* have been completed, the sermon begins with a prayer dedicated to the health of the Hidden Imam. Many pilgrims take notes during the sermon, and there are some pilgrims who record the sermon on their mobile devices. Pilgrims' presence in the Mosque, especially their participation in the sermon, which the preachers name *Towfiq* (success) given by the Imam, confirms their commitment to the purpose of the ritual. They are attributed to the invitation and exertion of the Imam's "will". In this way, the pilgrim's spiritual feelings are intensified, and the feelings of devotion and commitment to performing the rituals in the Mosque are reinforced within them. In addition, finding the chance to visit Jamkaran and participating in the ritual associated with it is portrayed by the preachers as a testimony of conquering the sinful ego of pilgrims and overcoming their weak will (it is depicted as the Imam's attention). With this representation of the Imam's intervention, the pilgrims are instilled with the feeling that they have entered into a field where they are able to make progress in the process of moral self-improvement through the Imam's intervention (see Chapter Six). In the following section, I will discuss in detail the contents of a Jamkaran Tuesday evening sermon recorded during my fieldwork. In the pilgrims' engagement with what they perceive to be the Imam's recognition and knowledge (*ma'refat-e-Imam*) presented in the sermons, "affect" plays an important role.

5.4 Seeking the Knowledge and Recognition of the Imam and Feeling His Presence in the Heart

On a Tuesday evening in December 2017, I am in the Mosque parking lot getting off the bus with the group I had started my pilgrimage trip with from Tehran. The parking lot is crowded with cars. There are a lot of cars in line waiting to enter the parking area

so that they can find a spot for their cars. It is quite a distance from our bus stop to the main entrance of the building. In the middle of the afternoon, it is almost 4 p.m., and a large crowd is at the main entrance. In a long line behind the gate, men and women are standing in a separate queue so that they can pass the security gate and enter the main courtyard of the building separately. In the corner of the main gate, the transport taxis are waiting to pick up disabled pilgrims who need to be carried inside the Mosque. Since evening prayer is approaching, everyone loses no time in doing the ablution (*vuzu*)²⁸ to purify themselves for the congregational evening prayer (*namāz-e-maghrib*).

At the same time that the sound of *Azān* (call to prayer) is emanating from Mosque's speakers, the servants prepare the courtyard for the prayer by cleaning the enclosure and spreading the carpet over the ground. As the time passes and the time of prayer is approaching, the servants also remind the pilgrims to form the prayer rows (*saf-hā-ye-namāz*) before the time of prayer. While waiting for the Imam of the congregation to begin the evening prayer, the pilgrims are standing beside each other, spreading their prayer mats in anticipation of the evening prayer being called. The moment the prayer begins, the voice of the Imam of the congregation is heard, who recites the Quranic verses in a quiet manner, and all pilgrims are in a state of concentration as the *namāz* begins. Following the first *namāz*, pilgrims immediately begin reciting *Salawāt*²⁹. The *Salawāt* recitation is often considered to be a source of grace, blessing and intercession for the pilgrims. Afterwards, each pilgrim seems to recite a specific *zīkr* and *do'ā* for himself. It takes almost ten minutes before the Imam of the congregation begins to recite the second *namāz* (the '*Isha*' *namāz*). Once the second prayer has been completed, a *zākir*³⁰ takes the microphone and says, "As we all pray together for the health of our Imam of the age." At that point, he recites the famous prayer called *Do'ā-ye Salāmatī-ye-Imām-Zamān* (the prayer for the health of the Imam), and the pilgrims join in the prayer, raising their hands to the sky along with the singer. In response to the *maddāh*, pilgrims recited the following prayer:

²⁸ A ritual performed by Muslim to wash the face and some part of hands and legs before prayer.

²⁹ *Salawāt* means 'O God! Bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad!'; It is a translation of: "*Allāhumma ṣalli 'alā Muḥammad Wa 'al-i Muḥammad*"

³⁰ In Arabic, the word *Zākir* is derived from the word *zīkr*, which means recitation, remembrance or narration. In this context, the word *zākir* refers to someone who recites and sings for the believers. There is also another meaning to this word, which is *maddah*, which literally translates as eulogist, in Arabic. Both of these words are used to describe religious singers.

“O’ Allāh, be for your deputy, *Al-Hujjah ibn al-Hassan*, may your blessings be upon him and his ancestors, now and at all times, master and protector and guide and helper and proof and guard until he resides peacefully on your earth and let him enjoy for a long time.” (Bhimji, 2000: 79)

At the same time that the pilgrims are reciting the supplication with the maddah, the microphone and amplifier are being set up in front of a wooden *menbar* (pulpit) so that the preacher can begin his sermon after the recitation is complete. As the sermon session is being recorded by the camera, it is being streamed on the big screen in the courtyard of the Mosque at the same time. As soon as the preacher reaches the top of the stairs of the *menbar*, he sits down. In order to speak, the servant places the microphone right in front of his mouth. It is almost time for the sermon to begin. While the preacher is preparing himself for the sermon, one of the pilgrims loudly asks the others to send *Salawāt* for the health of the Imam of the time, which serves as an introduction to what the preacher will be saying. It is now the preacher's turn to give his speech. This sermon, which I am sharing here, was delivered by a cleric, *Hojatoleslām*³¹ Hosseini, on a Tuesday evening, December 2017.

To begin his talk, he recites a piece of Qur’anic verses along with some Arabic sentences which are meant to praise God, the Prophet, and his family. Generally, the first part of a sermon consists of a general discourse on the *fazā’il* (virtues) of one or more of the Shi’i Imams, and in most cases, it is the Hidden Imam. The preaching consists mainly of a few brief explanations of the virtues attributed to the Shi’i Imams by means of a combination of verses included in the Qur’an and Islamic hadiths. The rest of the sermon is almost entirely directed at pilgrims, and it attempts to bridge the gap between the virtues already mentioned in the first part, and the current sensitive conditions, and the positionality of the Hidden Imam in the lives of pilgrims. The preachers often include in their sermons a general point about how important it is to seek knowledge and recognition of the Imam of the Age (*ma’refat-e-Imām-e-‘Asr*), which is a common theme in their sermons. Essentially, it means that the recognition of the Hidden Imam is a major task for every Shi’i follower of the Hidden Imam. As I will discuss below, this messianic knowledge is inextricably bound up with faith and action to give the pilgrim the greatest benefit. As part of the Shi’i messianic discursive tradition, pilgrims are continually required to increase their knowledge of the Imam of the time into their hearts as part of cultivating a messianic morality (*akhlāq-e-*

³¹ A title given to a middle ranking Shi’i cleric.

mahdavi). “seeking the knowledge and recognition of the Hidden Imam” is often referred to as a significant stage in the lives of my interlocutors. Having no knowledge or recognition of the Hidden Imam is regarded as a death in the age of ignorance, that is, death in a state of disbelief and polytheism. As a result, if the pilgrims do not seek the knowledge and recognition of the Imam of their time and do not cultivate this knowledge in their hearts, then their external actions will not be accepted and will not lead to the development of their moral and spiritual values. Thus, every individual should strive to reach an acceptable level of knowledge and understanding of the Imam and try to convert their general knowledge into a detailed knowledge of him. As the phrase suggests, seeking the knowledge of the Imam of the Age refers to a variety of practices, such as reading messianic sources, listening to sermons and lectures, and taking part in the rituals of the Jamkaran Mosque and in general purification of the heart of the pilgrim. The pilgrim is given the opportunity to cultivate within themselves the knowledge of the Imam through all of these aspects.

The necessity of seeking knowledge of the Hidden Imam (*lozūm-e-maʿrefat-e-Imām-e-zamān*), which is promoted by preachers as well as echoed in publications and media, entails cultivating knowledge and recognition of the Hidden Imam. If the knowledge of the Hidden Imam is applied correctly, as preachers state, it would facilitate the individual’s connection with the Hidden Imam and provide them with a good source of nutrition for their hearts. Moreover, seeking the knowledge of the Hidden Imam may help the pilgrims propel themselves into the future, through which they better cope with life’s difficulties (see Chapter Eight). Therefore, all believers must strive to gain knowledge about the Imam at an acceptable level to become closer to him.

That evening, the preacher began:

- Today I’m going to discuss the duties [*vazāyef*] of Shiʿites during times of occultation. Have we ever considered what we must do during this sensitive time? Are we left on our own? Or are we under the guardianship of a guardian? As long as we think we are alone in this world, we may be able to do whatever we want. Nevertheless, if we think we have an Imam, then our actions and beliefs should be oriented towards his satisfaction. We all know that we have a living Imam. As our dear Imam is in occultation, we are deprived of his presence. Have we ever wondered why his occultation has been so long?

Afterwards, the preacher tries to explain why the Hidden Imam's Advent has been delayed by using a famous quote from *Khwājah Nasir Al-Tūsi*, the prominent Shi'i theologian of the 7th century AH.

- Tūsi has three famous phrases about the Imam-e-Zaman in one of his works: 'His existence is a grace, and his possession of the world [*Tasarrof*] is another favour, and his occultation is due to us'. Three favours are discussed here, one related to God, one related to Imam Zaman, and the third related to us as Shi'i followers. A grace attributed to God is to create an Imam for the world, a comprehensive and perfect human being to which he made this favour obligatory for himself. The second favour is related to the Imam of the Time, who must take possession of the inner heart [*Tasarrof-dar-qalbhā*], and in the material and meaning world which performs his work very well. The third of these favours pertains to the Shi'ites, and is related to their acceptance of the Imam and following his commands, to love whatever he likes and to be enemies to whatever he hates, to do whatever pleases him and to avoid whatever makes him sad. The Shi'ites failed to do this, and we haven't done our third favour so far either. Thus, we were not ready to receive and accept the Advent of Imam Zaman.

The preacher tries to emphasize the role of Shi'ites in the Advent of the Mahdi by condemning the static expectation as the main reason for the delay in the Advent of the Mahdi by challenging them to take action to pave the way for it. The preacher states that verbal prayer alone is insufficient to facilitate the Mahdi's Advent, but individual and collective action is also imperative. By referring to the verses of the Qur'an and the Shi'i tradition, he points out the imminence and suddenness of the Advent of the Mahdi to encourage pilgrims not to procrastinate in their repentance and to purify themselves as quickly as possible. Therefore, not only does it encourage pilgrims to be aware of the Signs of Advent, but it also encourages them to prepare themselves for the conditions and contexts of Advent. The Mahdi's Advent is described as an individual and a social phenomenon in which the willpower of the nation plays a crucial role in its fulfilment. According to the preacher, the first step to facilitating these conditions and preparing the ground for his Advent is the purification of the heart and the abstinence from sin to prepare the way for his Advent. Sins are described as deadly to the heart by the preacher. According to him, the dead heart would not be able to establish a relationship with the Imam, and it cannot incorporate the light of the Imam within.

- As a result, we have failed to fulfil our duties. We have failed because we did not devote our hearts to our Imam. In response to a question about the authenticity of the *Jazīreh-ye-Khazrā* (Green Island)³² as the location where Imam Zaman lives, Ayatollāh Bahjat's response was, "Wherever the Imam is, there is *Khazrā*. A pious believer's heart is a *Khazrā* island, and wherever the Imam is, he steps into that. A lack of faith and the light of knowledge has made the hearts dry. We need a pure heart in faith and remembrance of God to be able to prove to you that the Imam of the Time is there." In one of the texts of supplication dedicated to the Imam [there are varieties of supplication known as supplication of *zīyārat* within Shi'i culture through which the texts are recited with the intention of visiting one of the Imams] Imam Zaman was introduced as "*Rabī' al-Anām*" (the spring of the people). The Spring is the season of moderation. The spring is not hot like the summer. There is no coldness like in winter. The death of autumn does not exist in spring. Humans also have four seasons in their hearts. Whenever a heart gets caught up in lust, whether in words, food, or the world, it should be considered as a summer heart since it cannot help the Imam of the Time. Some hearts are always cloudy, thundery, and cold, like winter. Likewise, this heart is an infertile ground and, as such, is a dead heart. No use is made of this heart. As a withered plant without love, the autumn heart is as useless as the rest. Only a spring heart, free from pollution and moral vices, is valuable because it can save itself from death. Are you familiar with the concept of spring? When does it bloom? When do buds and flowers appear? The moment Imam Zaman enters this heart. "The spring of the people" means that the presence of the Imam Zaman is felt from within.

آن دل که به یاد تو نباشد دل نیست
 قلبی که به عشقت نتپد ، جز گل نیست
 آن کس که ندارد به سر کوی تو راه
 از زندگی بی ثمرش حاصل نیست.

A heart that does not remember you is not a real heart.

A heart that does not beat for your love is nothing but clay.

The one who has no way to your path.

His or her fruitless life has no result.

³² According to a story that was cited in some sources, it is supposed to be the island where the Twelfth Imam and his family lived during the Major Occultation. There have been serious doubts about the truthfulness of the story. Many Shi'i scholars have published works in an attempt to criticize the story in its entirety.

By emphasising the inward quality, the preacher introduces the feeling of the presence of the Imam within the heart as one of the results of real anticipation. Having the firm belief that one's actions are constantly being scrutinised and watched over by the Imam, a true *montazer* is always aware of the relationship between himself and his Imam in the immediate present and anywhere he is, he knows that he is under the surveillance of the Imam. As a result, he always tries to submit to the command and obey the order of the Imam as much as possible. The preacher views real anticipation as the main driving force that is driving the true *montazer* to do everything in his power to meet the Imam's satisfaction. To achieve this goal, the pilgrim must not only do his utmost to fulfil his religious and moral obligations but also avoid any sins and negligence that might cause the Mahdi's Advent to be delayed. The preacher portrays the heart of the pilgrims as the potential house in which Imam Zaman, like God, can live. As a result, the Imam also reflects all of the attributes of God, which the pilgrim should pay attention to through their heart. The true *montazer*, therefore, understands that nothing is hidden from the Imam's observation, and it is in these situations that *ehsās-e-hozūr* (feeling the presence of the Imam), begins to flourish within the heart.

- Our hearts must be worthy of his presence. If we give our hearts to strangers, we will never be able to experience that sense of assurance and peace because of their limitations and darkness. The reason is that they themselves are dependent on someone else to fulfil their needs. Darkness always entails fear, anxiety, and confusion, but if we remember the Imam and feel his presence in our hearts, we can be calm and free from confusion. As a dead heart cannot establish a relationship with the silent Qur'an [he refers to the published Qur'an], so too cannot a dead heart establish a relationship with the speaking Qur'an - the Mahdi [Shi'ites believe that the Imam is a speaking Qur'an, because he knows the true interpretation of the Qur'an]. Establishing a relationship with the Imam requires purity. When the heart is not pure, how can it be the place of an Imam? Is it possible to be the place of knowledge? Until the heart and mind are pure, communication cannot take place.

In accordance with the Shi'i messianic discursive tradition, according to which emotions, virtues, and actions are intertwined (cf. Mahmood 2005: 140), the preacher aims to affect his audience's heart and prepare their hearts through cultivating the knowledge and recognition of the Hidden Imam:

- You may ask me about the characteristics of the heart that becomes the home of the Hidden Imam. A pure heart is a gateway to the knowledge of the Imam. An

important indication of a pure and “affected” heart is that it begins to tremble when presented with the Imam’s knowledge. This knowledge can create tears in the eyes of a true *montazer* as the love and devotion that is felt for the Imam are inspired inside of them along with hope for the future. As a result, the knowledge of the Imam of the Time must be received from the inside of the heart, and teary eyes are a clear indication of this inner orientation. Once you reach this state, your good deeds become meaningful. The time we have on this planet is limited, and there is much that needs to be achieved! The Advent is imminent! Please do not postpone your religious activities or delay your repentance for even one second! When the Imam appears, he will separate good from evil. Avoid joining the forces of evil. If you become a true *montazer*, don’t worry about your death before his Advent, as you will return to earth again to help him. However, you will ruin your afterlife if you don’t recognise and obey him, and God will punish you both here and in the afterlife. Allah personally punishes those who refuse to obey His Messengers. If you stay away from the memory of the Imam, you will lead a narrow life. It is impossible to live a fulfilling life if you do not keep the remembrance and presence of the Imam in your life. You should not be inclined to Mahdi based on a temporary and discrete relationship at a specific time or place, such as Friday or Tuesday night. All aspects of our lives, however, must exhibit this tendency permanently. According to our Shi’i hadith, we must wait for his Advent every morning and evening. Accordingly, the hadith that instructs us to practice expectation does not have a time or place limitation but is absolute and encompasses all times and places.

Several times during the sermon, the preacher repeatedly mentions the imminent Advent of the Mahdi. The preacher states that a person who truly believes in the Advent of the Imam must also be convinced that the Imam’s Advent is imminent in the near future. The more eager the *montazer* is to see the Imam appear, the more he performs the practice of waiting in anticipation of his Advent. A major reason why the preacher places such a high focus on the impending Advent of the Mahdi is that to fulfil real expectations and moral awareness, one needs to have a clear picture of the Advent of the Mahdi. In other words, pilgrims who enter the field of real expectation must count the moments before the Mahdi’s Advent. In the midst of this counting moments for the Advent of Mahdi, the expectant is encouraged to maintain a high standard of moral and religious discipline by self-monitoring.

Another reason for emphasising the imminent Advent is to create tensions within the heart of the pilgrim. The preacher is always talking in an enchanting manner about the imminence of the Mahdi’s Advent, the signs of His Advent, the hereafter, and the

rewards and punishments associated with it, in a way that arouses the listeners' emotions. In the preacher's view, the only way to achieve redemption is through seeking the knowledge and recognition of the Hidden Imam and feeling his presence inside the heart. He creates a sense of tension amongst his listeners by the tone, the content he chooses, and his body language throughout the speech. Apparently, it ignites the feeling of fear and hope within them, and it also seems to affect their hearts. In some of his sentences, he refers to the characteristics of sinners whose repentance is not accepted at the moment of the Advent or evokes the listeners' feelings as he describes the torment of Hell. While speaking about these topics, the preacher's tone sharpens gradually, his eyes open wider, and the level of his agitation becomes more apparent as he proceeds. During his speech, he uses his hands to emphasise points, he thumps his hand against the *menbar* at points he feels are important, and sometimes he leans forward and backwards as well. It is possible to see the effect of the preacher's tone of voice and body language on the audience by looking at their faces and postures. As a result, some pilgrims cry. Some shift their seated position. Some shake their heads in regret. There is something about using this language of fear and hope that seems to "tremble the hearts" of those listening to it.

As the sermon nears its end, the preacher adopts a different tone of voice and begins to mourn for the misfortunes of the *Ahl-e-Beyt* (descendants of the prophet). As soon as he starts mourning, the pilgrims begin to weep over the mourning sentences recited by the preachers. As they shed tears, the preacher asks the pilgrims to speak with their Imam through their hearts. The preacher convinces the pilgrims that this is the perfect moment for them to connect their hearts to that of their Imam. He assures the pilgrims that the Imam himself is present here and that he is carefully looking into the heart of his own pilgrim. He then asks the pilgrims to raise their hands up to the sky and call the Imam by his name. A loud call is then made by all pilgrims to their Imam of the time by saying *Yā-Sāheb-al-Zamān* out loud. It is in this emotional state that the preacher descends from the *menbar* and the servant provides the maddah with a microphone so that the eulogy can continue. With the chanting of *nowheh* (lamentation), the Maddah continues to lament the hardships endured by the *Ahl-e-Beyt*, particularly Imam Hussain. As part of this process, pilgrims beat their breasts rhythmically with their arms flailing in the air. When the mourning session has concluded, the maddah asks the pilgrims to recite with him the famous *Do'ā-ye-faraj* (deliverance supplication). For the pilgrims, the final part of the sermon ritual is a

crucial point in their pilgrimage. The sermon provokes their messianic sensibility and the tears they shed during the mourning session make their hearts ethereal as a result. Taking notice of the sensitivity of the pilgrims' hearts, the maddah seems to take advantage of the pilgrims' spiritual condition by asking them to stand before the blue dome and pray from the depths of their hearts for the Advent of Mahdi. Thousands of pilgrims weep in grief and cry out from the depths of their hearts to the Hidden Imam to return from the occult. All of them begin to recite together the famous *Do'ā-ye-faraj* at once in this context:

“My God! The tribulation has become agonizing. The cover was taken off, and the secret was revealed. The hope was cut off, the earth was narrow, and the sky was forbidden. You are the one to whom help is requested. You are the one to whom grievances are brought. It is you who are relied upon in times of both severity and prosperity. Oh! God bless Mohammad and members of his family who are the rightful leaders. We must obey them because you made it mandatory. It is through this obedience that you have made us aware of their true status. So, please! For their sake, please provide us with swift and prompt relief. In a blink of an eye or even faster. Oh! Mohammad! Oh! Ali! Protect me, as you two are truly capable of doing so! help me, as you two are truly capable of helping me! Oh! our master! The Lord of the Age! help me! Help me! Help me! Save me! Save me! Save me! At this moment! At this moment! At this moment! Hurry up! Hurry up! Hurry up!”

After the Faraj supplication is completed, the sermon session will be concluded. It is now time for the pilgrims to separate and move off. When the sermon is over, the pilgrims gather their belongings and leave in silence, seemingly affected by the preacher's words. As I was leaving the place where the sermon was delivered, two of my interlocutors accompanied me. Shahab told me that he was very impressed with and inspired by the preacher's words.

This preaching made me realize that I am a very bad person, and I am very far from the descriptions that he portrayed of a true *montazer*. Nevertheless, it was a good experience in one sense. It was exactly what I needed to get me going. After hearing his words, I was roused from my sleep, and I realized that I had to take action right away.

I want to appeal to the Imam and ask him to help me.

My other interlocutor, Hessam, while evidently regretful, shook his head in agreement with Shahab and said,

I think it was very inspiring, I kept imagining the Advent and asked myself what I would be doing if the Imam came right now. Will I be one of his companions, or will I be standing in front of him?

As we sat on the steps, another interlocutor, Leila, stated:

I am so scared. I do not feel that I am at all prepared for the Advent of the Imam. During the sermon, I kept thinking about my sins and my bad deeds. I am certain that if I die now, I will go to hell and I will be tormented forever. I have to admit that becoming a true *montazer* is a very difficult task.

The words of the preacher, as intended, have affected the neglectful hearts of my interlocutors to the extent that fear and hope for Mahdi's Advent began to emerge in them and shake their hearts. There are two reasons for my interlocutors' fear of the Advent. In part, this fear is a result of the fact that if the Twelver Shi'ites fail to prepare themselves for the Advent of the Hidden Imam by cleansing their hearts of sin through true repentance, the door to repentance will be shut upon the Advent of Mahdi, and so they will be in hellfire when he appears. Also, my interlocutors fear the Last Day, in the sense that if the Mahdi doesn't appear during their lifetimes and they die without repenting of their sins and acquiring knowledge of the Imam of the Age, they will still be in hell fire based on what they were taught in preaching sessions.

This claim is based on a famous hadith that has constantly been reported to my interlocutors. This hadith says that those who do not strive to recognize the Imam of their Time will die of ignorance. Since they will die of ignorance, regardless of how many good deeds they perform, they will be condemned to hellfire if they do not attain this knowledge and recognition. The phrase "death as a result of ignorance" means that when a person passes away without gaining the knowledge and the recognition of the Imam of his time, it is as if he has not been able to escape the age of ignorance (accompanied by polytheism and idolatry) and passed away from ignorance. Consequently, a person will not be able to reap any benefit from knowing God and His Prophet unless they also recognise the Imam of the Time, and they cannot achieve salvation.

Jamkaran preaching for pilgrims is typically aimed at cultivating apocalyptic and eschatological sensitivities among the listeners, as well as evoking emotions and virtues such as regret, fear, sadness, and hope. Hirschkind (2006), in his study of cassette sermons in Cairo, describes how members of the Islamic revival are cultivating an awareness of death through the use of techniques and practices known as "death remembrance". Listeners are encouraged to strive to feel the persistent presence of death in their everyday lives by preachers who emphasise learning about and contemplating death. As a result of focusing on the constant remembrance of

death, one is able to develop a mental, emotional and embodied understanding of death (as a “tasting” of death), as an integral part of everyday life. Hirschkind argues that this re-fashioning of sensory experience and orienting of sensitivities towards death involves stimulating emotions such as fear, regret and hope in a style that is conducive to opening the heart of the subject to God. In a similar way to Hirschkind’s (2006: 188-192) account, the preaching materials that were recommended to my interlocutors in Jamkaran highlight eschatological and apocalyptic aspects that evoke sensitivity to death and the actions of individuals. The sermon targets eschatological and apocalyptic sensibilities by focusing on the characteristics of the true *montazer* as well as explaining the signs that predict the Advent of the Mahdi in the coming days. By bringing attention to the imminence of the Mahdi's Advent, my interlocutors are constantly reminded that time is running out and the opportunity for self-fashioning may be lost. There are, therefore, many warnings that are given to pilgrims who do not repent, reminding them of the potential punishment that awaits them, whether it comes in the form of the Mahdi’s Advent or the death that precedes his Advent. It is at this stage that the preachers emphasize the sinfulness of their listeners and remind them that they should direct their hearts towards the Imam to do good deeds and avoid hellfire.

Hesam, who sat next to me during the sermon session and accompanied me along with Shahab, towards the *shabistān* after the sermon session, told me that in every pilgrimage trip he made to Jamkaran, he spent a lot of time searching for books and publications of the Mosque. As a result of reading several books concerning the knowledge of the Imam of the Age and the Signs of the Advent, and as well as participating in sermons, Hessam explained that he was constantly visualising the Advent as well as the events that would take place after that in his mind and trying to envision himself in that abstract future. As he puts it:

I imagine the Advent of the Imam as a single-edged sword with one side that is sharp, and the other side that is blunt. On the one hand, it gives me great pleasure to see his luminous face when he arrives. I will be truly honoured to be given this opportunity. From the other side, the Imam might come, but we still are in the middle of a sea of sin. As of yet, we have not repented! I find it really frightening. The Advent is always what I envision in my mind. As far as I can tell if we don't prepare for the Advent of the Imam, we won't be able to enjoy the afterlife as well. Our fate will be to go straight to hell.

During our conversation, I questioned Hessam why he spends quite a bit of time contemplating and envisioning the coming of the Hidden Imam. He replied:

I am interested in learning more about it. For me, it is very important that I prepare myself for the Advent in case it happens so that I will not be surprised. There is a great deal of fear in me because I do not know what will happen to me - what the Imam will do to me. My mind is constantly occupied with it. The more I read about it, the more terrified I am and the more I want to prepare myself for what is ahead. As much as it scares me, it is a good thing at the same time. Even so, it gives me hope that I can do something to change my future.

To manage his intensified eschatological and apocalyptic fears and hopes, which have arisen as a result of participating in the sermon ritual, Hessam plans to improve himself. In Mahmood's view, these virtues and emotions arise spontaneously, and they could, therefore, be seen not as merely motivational devices but as integral factors within the process of pious action itself (Mahmood, 2005: 140). Hence, it is these strong inner virtues and emotions that connect a pilgrim's heart to the Imam and contribute to the process of seeking knowledge and recognition of the Hidden Imam. I discussed above that the preachers encourage the listeners to seek the knowledge of the Hidden Imam. The preachers' constant emphasis on establishing a heart connection between the pilgrims and the Hidden Imam also shows that the knowledge of the Hidden Imam does not depend solely on the use of human intellect to gather information about the Hidden Imam (i.e. the knowledge of the Hidden Imam cannot be acquired simply through intellectual research alone). The achievement of this knowledge and recognition, however, requires the cultivation of emotions along with virtuous dispositions such as hope, fear, longing, and love, which are able to open the practitioner's heart to the Hidden Imam (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). The purpose of this is to ensure that the mind and the heart are working together for the same reason. Through this kind of cooperation, a relationship with the Imam is established, and as a result of this, the person is placed on the path of religious and moral growth.

A pilgrim is supposed to equip himself or herself with the knowledge of the Imam so that he or she can combat the evil forces that exist within the heart, which encourage the pilgrim to commit sins. It is argued in the sermon that true piety can be realized as a result of purifying the heart from sins and replacing them with love and affection that are the result of knowledge of the Imam. As soon as the Imam's love and knowledge enters the *montazer's* heart, the external actions will follow as a result of

that. In addition to relying purely on the limited abilities of the intellect to know the Imam, these many references to the importance of the heart by the preachers, cause the pilgrims' relationship with the Hidden Imam to be individualized. There are some phrases that are often repeated by pilgrims that reflect this personalization of their relationship with the Imam, such as "I feel His presence," "I see His light," or "I receive His love and attention." These phrases reflect the listeners' dispositions, motivations, commitments, and inspirations while simultaneously enabling them to personalize their relationship with the Hidden Imam. There is no doubt that this personalization of the relationship with the Imam causes a change in the modes of subjectification, as I shall argue in the following chapters. Hessam states the following as a description of his experience of affect achieved while listening to the sermon:

In a way, the preacher's words are really inspirational. It intensifies my sense of understanding the Imam's presence within me; it is true that it terrifies me, but at the same time, it gives me hope that all will be well in the end. During his talks, I was able to sense the presence of the Imam and to gain a deeper understanding of his love and light. The feeling of the Imam's presence illuminates my inner self, and the idea that I feel the Imam is in contact with me encourages me to pursue certain tasks or goals in life.

As Hessam makes clear in his opinion, attending a sermon plays an important role in transmitting and creating a positive affective experience for pilgrims. In Hessam's opinion, attending a sermon in its simplest form is inspirational for pilgrims. In spite of the fact that this feeling of Imam's presence and the understanding of his knowledge is aroused and intensified during a sermon, it is not limited to and is not necessarily loyal to the formal values of the sermon as part of Shi'i discursive tradition. My interlocutors understand this sense of Imam's presence and heart connection individually. This individualisation of the feeling of the Imam's presence and the personalisation of communication with the Hidden Imam involves personal interpretations and individual understanding of the subjects and does not necessarily keep them faithful to the discourse tradition of the sermon. One of the most striking features of the sermon is its ability to create in the pilgrim virtuous emotions such as feelings of hope, love, excitement, fear, and euphoria to communicate with the Imam (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2006). These feelings were described by my informants as being exciting and potent. As the sermon unfolds, it evokes the messianic perception of affect, a feeling that has often been identified as the "presence of the Imam" or "the

light of the Imam” or “attention of the Imam” residing in the hearts of the pilgrims, which depicts the pilgrims’ paths of self-fashioning along with their newly formed bonds both with themselves and with the Imam. Participating in the sermon while flourishing the feeling of the Imam’s presence in the heart is an added benefit of seeking the Imam’s knowledge. The fact that my interlocutors are committed to attending the Jamkaran pilgrimage rituals, especially the sermon, is very important for them as a means of engaging with the knowledge of the Hidden Imam. The reason they continue to seek messianic knowledge is because it enables them to simultaneously think about themselves and their relationship to the Hidden Imam, which in turn facilitates their personal transformation. But it is still important to note that how the relationship between the Hidden Imam and the pilgrim is understood and justified depends on the personalised affective experience of the pilgrim. These personalised and intimate emotions and feelings in the process of shaping one’s self and relating to the Hidden Imam are not necessarily dependent on dominant discursive traditions, but they are understood and directed in a way that is genuinely personal. It is these inspirations and personalised affective experiences that sometimes motivate my interlocutors to redirect themselves forward in time (Miyazaki, 2004). My interlocutors have the ability to envision the Advent with a future temporal horizon in order to pursue their moral self-fashioning project within that future temporal horizon (see Chapter Eight). Therefore, as a result of these personalised affective experiences, we need to pay more attention to the lived experiences of the subjects rather than only relying on the norms provided by the discursive tradition. Nevertheless, most of the interlocutors I have spoken with have found it difficult to maintain for a long term the excitement and emotions participating in the preaching session evokes within them. In this sense, one should realize that the analysis and the understanding of the Imam’s knowledge as well as the degree of its strength in the heart vary according to the time and place as well as the personal experience of each pilgrim. In Chapter Nine, I will talk more about the level of stability and strength of the pilgrim’s spiritual emotions as a result of their encounter with daily contradictions and ambivalences resulting from their pilgrimage experience.

5.5 Conclusion

There is no doubt that sermons shape the epistemological world of their listeners, which in turn helps preachers to motivate their audiences to live ethically, with

reminders of their religious and moral obligations and encouragements to live their lives according to those principles. The ideas the preachers introduce during the sermon ritual should be considered the core notions of the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims' ethical thinking. The sermon introduces the idea of the feeling of the Hidden Imam's presence in the heart as the ideal state of moral conduct that a person should strive to achieve in their heart. The foundation of the sermon rituals presented in the Jamkaran Mosque embodies a value of purity of heart as a significant prerequisite for becoming a true *montazer* of the Hidden Imam and facilitating his Advent. By placing the light of the Mahdi inside the pilgrim's heart and by commencing to feel his presence, the pilgrim will acquire a positive state of the heart that will help him or her improve morally and spiritually. The sermon thus argues that to lead a good Shi'i messianic life, it's necessary to cultivate the inner quality as a moral substance. As a mode of subjectification, one must become a true *montazer* of the Hidden Imam and submit himself to the authority of Shi'i Islam as a divine tradition. As part of the pilgrim's ethical work in accordance with the given regulation, the pilgrim is encouraged to seek the knowledge of the Hidden Imam and engage in ritual worship, reciting *namāz*, writing petitions, and listening to sermons that should lead to piety. The telos here is the model of the true *montazer*, which is regarded by the Mahdi as worthy of attention.

The list of virtues portrayed in the sermon emphasises the importance of inward qualities as the primary factor for cultivating morality and achieving piety. Considering this context, the pilgrims' religious practices and moral obligations cannot help them enact a pious disposition if their inward qualities have not been regulated to the fullest extent. In other words, external practices such as reciting *namāz* will not be enough to cultivate ethical dispositions in my interlocutors if they have not already internalised the *ma'refat-e-Imam-e-zamān* (which means they have a dead heart, as described in the sermon text). As a result, if someone is entirely inattentive to the Hidden Imam from the bottom of their hearts (having a dead heart), they are much like an infertile ground in which no matter how many ritual activities they perform, they will not be able to improve their moral condition. Thus, a person's pious disposition and moral improvement begin to flourish when they incorporate the knowledge and presence of the Hidden Imam into their hearts.

Moreover, the sermon provides insight into another aspect of the Twelver Shi'i messianic tradition's moral thought. There is always a strong emphasis placed by the preachers on the fact that the Hidden Imam is the source of goodness in the hearts of

the pilgrims and their deeds. As a result of the pilgrims' actions, the Imam can either be sad or happy. It is also emphasised that the pilgrims must also have an inward connection with the Imam, a connection that allows them to establish a personal and individual relationship with the Imam on the way to reaching the attention of the Imam and feeling his presence. As a result of this personal relationship, the pilgrims sense that the Imam is constantly exercising his supervision over them at all times and can exert his agency over their improvement. A key element of Shi'i messianic moral thought presented in the sermon is the belief that a pilgrim can only advance morally if he or she has the assistance of the Hidden Imam; otherwise, without the care and attention of the Imam, personal action and individual willpower are doomed to failure. In addition to emphasising that the pilgrims must achieve an inward quality, the preachers also address the issue of their willpower. During the sermons, the preachers request the pilgrims place the presence and the light of the Hidden Imam inside their hearts to gain his blessings. Immediately after the light of the Hidden Imam enters the pilgrim's heart, as preachers state, the pilgrim's willpower is under the command of the Hidden Imam; the Hidden Imam guides the pilgrim's willpower from that point on. As a result, the Hidden Imam would not be able to enter one's heart until one was willing to let go of one's own willpower and place it along the Imam's willpower to allow the Imam to guide one's inward. As such, pilgrims who are submitted to their own thoughts and emotions can't feel the presence of the Hidden Imam in their hearts because they are subordinate to their own wills. Therefore, moral self-fashioning largely depends on the pilgrim's ability to direct their willpower to the Imam to improve. Therefore, pilgrims tend to involve the Hidden Imam in their moral self-fashioning process, and they often ask him for guidance and support in the process. By communicating personally with the Hidden Imam, the pilgrims are in a position to activate the internal capacity of their hearts. As I discuss the performative act of petition writing in the next chapter, I will illustrate how my interlocutors incorporate the Imam's will and agency in their work of moral self-fashioning to cultivate their inward qualities.

Throughout this chapter, I have used the methods Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) used to explore how moral dispositions are formed. There are, however, some aspects of my argument that differ from Mahmood's in some ways. Her work is based on the idea that piety is cultivated through external actions, which gradually become qualities of the self as a result. Mahmood suggests that external actions generate and

strengthen internal dispositions and that practitioners can achieve moral virtue by harmonising their external and internal dimensions. In Jamkaran's sermons, the pilgrim's inward qualities are prioritised over outward actions. Therefore, external actions are ineffective until the heart is purified and inner virtue is cultivated. In other words, until the presence and light of the Hidden Imam manifest in their hearts and until repentance from their sins is not on their agenda, the embodiment of piety will not be visible in their external actions. This inner state channels through the heart to the rest of the body and reflects itself in the individual's actions. I will address the outside-in and inside-out models of pious practices in the next chapter, demonstrating how my interlocutors work on their moral not-yet-fulfilled moral project by prioritising inner virtues as the ethical substance focusing on their personalised affective relationship with the Imam through the use of the petition technique.

Moreover, although attending sermons provides the pilgrims with much of the messianic knowledge, my interlocutors' messianic perceptions are also being redefined and rethought when negotiated with others and when intersecting discourses are being encountered. Attending the sermon and delving into other sources of messianic knowledge is greatly beneficial to my interlocutors as they can share their knowledge with other pilgrims while interacting with them. On the way to and from Jamkaran Mosque, the pilgrims can exchange their opinions and experiences about a sermon they heard and about the pilgrimage in general, allowing them to share their personal messianic perceptions with each other. As a result, my interlocutors usually evaluate their pilgrimage experience together. Despite the fact that these small circles are started in the Mosque, they do not end only within the Mosque.

Chapter 6: Sin, Writing Petitions and Cultivation of the Ethical Self: Self-Fashioning as a Mutual Project

6.1 Introduction

On one of the nights of Ramadan, known as *shabe-qadr*, which Muslims believe is the night when the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet by an angel of revelation, I was in Jamkaran Mosque. A large number of pilgrims had been gathered in the Mosque on this holy night from all parts of the country in order to pray for the forgiveness of their sins and receive the blessing of the Hidden Imam. In general, the 19th, 21st and 23rd nights of Ramadan are known among Shi'ites as *qadr* nights, when they spend each night in vigilance and repentance for the sins of the previous year they committed. In the belief of the Shi'ites, every year on this night, the fate of the next year of every human being is destined, including whether the person will live or die, have good fortune or suffer hardship in the coming year. They believe that on this night, the angels place the files of human actions into the hands of the Hidden Imam as God's representative on earth, and it is after monitoring and evaluating each file that the Hidden Imam confirms the one-year fate of each individual with his signature. The believers are encouraged to stay awake during this night in order to correct their future since it is a night during which sins are forgiven, prayers are accepted, and a person's annual fate is determined in it. This night is supposed to be the time in which their coming future will be determined by their supplication and intercession to the Hidden Imam.

As I was walking through the crowd of pilgrims, I unexpectedly saw one of my interlocutors named Sadra, whom I had met in the Mosque before, while he was spreading a paper on the ground in the corner of the wall and taking pictures of it. After the greetings, I realized he was taking a picture of the sheet of the petition that he had written earlier. Having come that night, he was going to take advantage of the holiness of the night and, with a sense of intimacy with the Imam, which was strengthened by his presence in Jamkaran, he made an effort to ask for forgiveness and to intervene in his annual destiny that was supposed to take place that night. During our conversation that night, I realized that Sadra was attempting to keep a copy of the petition he had written by taking a photo of it before throwing it into the well. Sadra never shared the contents of his petitions with me. The contents of his petition were only shared with me in general terms, such as asking for forgiveness, asking for

spiritual and moral improvement in his personal life, and taking into consideration worldly needs as well.

Sadra kept his petitions as a record of what he requested and whether the Imam fulfilled his request. According to him, one of the reasons for him keeping a copy of these petitions is to be able to see which of them have been fulfilled as time goes on. However, this isn't the only reason why he kept copies of his petitions in his possession, since he considered them as evidence of his motivation and dedication to living a pious life and wanted them to be buried with him after he passed away. Those petitions were, in his opinion, a testimony to the motivations and efforts he had put into improving, which, in his opinion, probably could not have been achieved solely by his personal efforts. His view of archiving his petitions seems to be a part of a process by which the Imam's attention and care have been attributed to the moral and spiritual progress in his life so that if after his death (in the court of divine justice) he is asked about the moral failures that he has committed, he could present these petitions as evidence to prove his efforts and motivation to improve and point out that his failure to cultivate moral self was because of the Imam's lack of care and attention in achieving such a position.

Several other interlocutors also raised Sadra's view that moral self-improvement should be regarded as a mutual project in which the subject leaves part of his self-fashioning process to the Imam. They do not regard the actual process of moral self-fashioning and abandoning sin as being solely their responsibility, but they believe that the Imam should entrust success in moral self-cultivation to them. In this sense, the Imam is the only one who can bring his followers to a high level of spirituality and morality, and that means they are not able to reach this high level on their own. It is for this reason that my informants constantly present themselves as bad, dirty, *ru-sīyāh* (*disgraceful, black-faced*), *kharāb* (innerly spoiled) and generally sinners, who request the Imam to pay attention to their neglectful hearts, or to take a look at their heart or to buy them for himself. There is no way for them to achieve the status of a true *montazer*, or a position of a real pious Shi'i, solely by their own efforts and actions, but the miraculous agency of the Imam is required (to look at them, to consider them, to give them the potentiality) in order to achieve their goal of becoming a true *montazer* and a pious subject in the eyes of the Imam. As a result, they do not improve solely by their own actions and efforts, but instead, they are brought to a spiritual level

of growth and progress by the Imam's care and attention. I believe that through this reliance on and appeal to the Imam for moral cultivation, embodied in petitions, the process of self-fashioning can be seen as a mutual project, where both the subject and the Imam work together, exerting their agencies to fulfil the moral self. This mutual self-fashioning project embodied in petitions directs my interlocutors to develop an affective, personal and intimate relationship with the Hidden Imam in the immediate present, causing them to prioritize their inward qualities over their outward dispositions as an ethical substance as well as exercising their autonomy in the way they refashion themselves. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of pleasing the Hidden imam (putting their will along with his will) as a mode of subjectification. Autonomy is implemented by surrendering to the Hidden Imam's will and an inner connection to him.

6.2 “Not-yet-Fulfilled” Moral Self and the Act of “Petitioning” as Materializing Hope for Mutual Self-Fashioning

The technology of the self I intend to discuss here is “*Arīzeh-nevīsī*” (petition-writing) as a self-reflecting moral action. Taking a closer look at this technology of the self, we can get a better sense of how Twelver Shi'i pilgrims relate to the Hidden Imam and to themselves as ethical subjects. In constructing themselves as ethical subjects, my interlocutors employ a wide variety of technologies of the self. It is also important to note that all rituals performed by the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims within Jamkaran Mosque serve as essential techniques of the self since they all aim to produce or restore the ethical self within them. Among the technologies of the self, I regard weeping, reciting *do'ā* (supplication), reciting *namāz*, writing a petition, fasting, *nazr*³³ (which is a vow or commitment to fulfil an act), as technologies used by pilgrims for transformation. Here, I am specifically focusing on the cognitive aspects of my interlocutors' ethical work, mostly on the processes and technologies of the self they use to identify their sins.

I mentioned earlier that my interlocutors always refer to themselves as sinners who need to work on improving themselves. It would be possible to obtain a list of the sins anyone has committed since the last time they reflected themselves through writing a petition. Having been influenced by the sermon, my interlocutors begin to believe that all of the problems they face in their lives are the result of the sins they have

³³ In Islam, *nazr* means committing oneself to perform an act so that God fulfils one's wishes.

committed. Their sinfulness is being portrayed as the major obstacle in obtaining the spiritual impact of their pilgrimage trip to Jamkaran. Self-monitoring is always introduced to the pilgrims by the preachers as a technique to keep a record of their sins and repent from them every night. Thus, the matter of reflecting on their inner dispositions and external actions to identify their sins is quite common among the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims. However, this self-reflection which is embodied in the form of a written list, is always personal as the pilgrim keeps a record of their sin either in their heart or in the written form of their personal notebook. When they engage in a ritual of writing petitions, they write their petitions on a piece of paper and drop it into the well adjacent to the back of the Mosque. Self-reflection, by its very nature, is difficult to be ethnographically documented unless people speak about it. The most obvious form of self-reflection can be found within the Christian culture, in which the practice of confession is considered to be part of a religious tradition. Throughout his study of Urapmin, Joel Robbins (2004), explains that through confession, Urapmin are able to reflect on their sin. In this chapter, I will treat the petition-writing in a similar way to the Urapmin's confession as a form of self-reflection.

However, within the Shi'i context, there is no confession tradition in the same way as the Christian tradition. Yet, I believe the ritual of writing a petition takes a form of moral reflection which can be considered as a technology of the self. My interlocutors' confession was embodied in the shape of either oral addressing or writing a petition to the Hidden Imam. Petition writing is a personal activity. No one is willing to reveal what he or she has written for the Hidden Imam. During my participant observation in the Mosque, I managed to speak with a variety of pilgrims who engaged in the ritual of writing petitions. Some of them shared with me what they wrote on their petition, and some others just said generalities. Some of the transcripts I provide in this section are the petitions written by some of my interlocutors, who share their notes with me to use as my research evidence. However, they asked me not to publish their names and the original copy of the petition in my research. Thus, my goal is to maintain the anonymity of the pilgrim whose petition I am using to report the findings of my research. It should be taken into consideration that the matter of self-reflection, which is embodied in the form of writing a petition, is always flowing in the pilgrim's heart as well as a significant part of the way my interlocutors relate to themselves.

Twelver Shi'i pilgrims utilize the petition as a means of communicating with the Hidden Imam so as to personalize their relationship with him in order to receive his

help in removing their sins and purifying their hearts. Moreover, by writing their petitions down on a piece of paper, my interlocutors are also able to release the pressure of the sin over which their minds have been occupied and, in the process, surrender their will to the Hidden Imam so that he gives them the potentiality to cultivate moral virtues. After the letter has been dropped into the well, the pilgrims begin to experience a sense of tranquillity in their hearts, and they also begin to expect the Imam's care and attention to help rectify the part of their sinful hearts that they are not able to correct by themselves. Therefore, in this sense, they do not only recognize themselves as sinners, but at the same time, they identify their inner capacity for cultivating moral virtue as insufficient for them to grow. For this reason, the Imam's care and attention are required in order for the devoted pilgrim to purify themselves from the inside out. In fact, they consider the process of moral self-fashioning as a mutual project in which their failure to cultivate moral virtue is attributed to the Imam's unwillingness to implement his agency in giving them the opportunity to succeed, in holding their hand in the path of improvement, in not giving them the power and potentiality to avoid sin, in not identifying them as qualified for his attention and care.

Relying on the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1996), I am inspired by the way in which he conceptualizes hope and how it can connect to the performative act of writing petitions. In Bloch's portrayal of hope, it is seen in the context of awaiting a future that has yet to be realized, and a possibility that has yet to be actualized (p. 7). He analyses the concept of hope in relation to the concept of "not-yet" consciousness as being a forward-looking dream with a temporal character that is based on the anticipation of what is still going to occur in the future. He uses a "not-yet" approach in order to emphasize the intersection between hope as an affect and expectation as an action. My interlocutors, through the performative act of writing, are brought into the realm of hope. In the aftermath of submitting the petition, they begin to wait hopefully for the Hidden Imam to pay attention to their request and fulfil it. This feeling of hope and expectation, as Bloch argues, is both agentive and performative. The repetition of the act of writing a petition, I believe, is keeping the hope of improvement alive in my interlocutors' hearts.

Building on Bloch, Miyazaki (2004), in his ethnography about the Fijian Suvavou people, examines hope in terms of its repetition and replication in the endless cycle of petitions filed by people to the government to reclaim their ancestral lands. He studies

hope as a method that possesses a temporal quality. Like Miyazaki's approach, I also emphasize that petition writing is a performative act that has a visible effect on the reproduction of hope among my interlocutors as a result of its execution and repetition. Similar to the continuous and repeated petitions of the Fijians claiming their rights, my interlocutors' petitions embody the relationship between the Imam and the subject and should be considered in line with their hopeful efforts to cultivate a moral self that relies heavily on the care and attention of the Imam for internal transformation. By materializing hope, these petitions re-orient the subject's inner dispositions to facilitate and complete the not-yet-fulfilled project of moral self through personalizing the relationship with the Hidden Imam. In line with Miyazaki, I evaluate the performative act of writing a petition, as well as its repetition by my interlocutors, as a technique to reproduce hope in their existence. As a result, one can say that the act of writing a petition plays an essential role in reproducing the hope for forgiveness, the hope to become better, and the hope to receive the Imam's attention and care for their moral self-fashioning as a mutual project. As a performative act, petition writing, as well as the pull motivations to continue it, are related to maintaining and strengthening one's hope and commitment to completing projects of moral self-fashioning that have not yet been fulfilled. As a result, this can give new energy to the unfulfilled hopes of my interlocutors, who have experienced failures in cultivating the moral self and try to perceive the moral self-fashioning through this performative act as a mutual project. The mutual project in which simultaneously the Imam and the subject should implement their agency to fulfil the moral self-fashioning project. In Chapter Eight, I will demonstrate how the personal and intimate relationship my interlocutors make with the Imam influences their envisioning and future-oriented hopes in the temporal domain. There, I will discuss more about the temporal dimension of hope in more detail.

A miraculous well adjacent to the back of the Mosque is used as a platform for pilgrims to deliver petitions to the Hidden Imam, believing that the Mahdi will read their petition after their notes are dropped. A kiosk located near the well sells petition sheets to those who wish to communicate with him through the miraculous well. In front of the kiosk where petition papers can be bought, there is always a long queue of people waiting to buy them. The kiosk sells the sheets with the title "Petition Sheet", in which special prayers for the petition to the Hidden Imam are written in Arabic, and a part is left blank for the pilgrims to write. The pilgrims usually use the papers that are sold

as “petition sheets” at the entrance of the well enclosure, but some individuals have already written their petitions on ordinary papers or some of them use their own paper to write. According to the person in charge of selling petitions, on average, between six and eight thousand petition sheets are sold to pilgrims on Tuesday nights.

Some of the pilgrims go to a corner of the well area and start writing petitions, while some other pilgrims have already written their petitions and drop their petitions into the well. In general, pilgrims try to keep away from the eyes of others when they are busy writing their petitions, and they usually do this task in private. Therefore, while they are writing petitions, they do not allow others to approach them. The typology of the pilgrims who come to write a petition is different and varied in terms of socio-cultural class. Some of them are uneducated, some of them educated, some with the appearance of a rural person, some with the appearance of an urban and modern person wearing a suit, some women in different styles of hijabs; some of them are completely covered in a black *chādor*, while others have their hair and makeup on display. In some cases, petitions were written with intense emotion and attention, even accompanied by tears as they wrote, investing their hope in the Hidden Imam being able to meet their wishes. Some others were not willing to express their feelings and emotions while writing their petitions. Some of those in attendance seem to be looking around out of curiosity, and they do not seem to believe in writing petitions and consider them to be something of a superstition.

Despite this, I believe that there is one thing that all those who come to the back of the Mosque to drop their petitions into the well have in common. This was the notion that they believed in the existence of the Hidden Imam, that they considered him a watcher over their actions, and that they were hopeful of receiving the Imam’s attention and care. In the next section, I will discuss this bilateral agency in greater detail, as well as its role in facilitating and completing the unfulfilled ethical projects of my interlocutors.

6.3 Moral self-fashioning as a Mutual Project: Self-Imam Relationship and Reciprocal agency

Throughout the following pages, I describe the petitions written by some of my interlocutors, in which they try to facilitate and complete their not-yet-fulfilled moral project by personalizing their relationship with the Imam. In a way, they seem to be going through a cycle of guilt and repentance, where they constantly review the actions, they have taken and have an internal moral dialogue with the Hidden Imam

in order to make amends for them. This inner moral dialogue manifests itself as a self-reflective confession through petition writing. My interlocutors' narratives reveal an effort on their part to stay away from sinful behaviour and to connect their hearts with the Hidden Imam through the performative act of petition in order to retain and strengthen their not-yet-fulfilled moral project. In addition to this, these narratives also show that the journey in this direction is not always an easy one. The performative act of writing a petition embodies and reflects the inner moral sentiment of the subject that is kept within. The inner sentiment that is disclosed through petitions takes us into the realm of their dialogue with the Hidden Imam as well as with themselves, where the conversation about sins transforms into a form of confession and reflection of the self.

In the previous chapter, I explained that during the sermon, the preachers instruct the pilgrims to put their will alongside the Imam's will through a genuine heartfelt connection with the Imam. Upon entering the Imam's remembrance and feeling his presence in the pilgrim's heart, according to the preachers, the pilgrim's "willpower" is placed under the control of the Hidden Imam, thus allowing the Hidden Imam to guide the pilgrim's "willpower". As a result, relying solely on their own "willpower" will lead them to sin's valley. Consequently, they must place the Imam's will ahead of their own, i.e. become submissive to him. It is important that they move behind the Imam and obey him seriously and diligently. Having been persuaded to establish a heart connection with the Hidden Imam to control their "willpower" and entrust its direction to the Hidden Imam to create a moral self, my interlocutors have been led to an understanding of self-fashioning in which the fulfilment of moral selves is dependent on the implementation of the Imam's agency. In the sample petitions that I have included below, it can be seen evidently that there is a need for two-way agency in the fulfilment of the formation of the moral self among my interlocutors. As a result of this approach, my interlocutors do not necessarily point to their inability to fulfil their moral self as the sole reason for their failure, but they also involve the Imam as a part of this process since the Imam has not yet imparted to them the ability to grow into potentiality, worthiness, and success.

Dorsa, Farzin and Sherwin were three of my interlocutors who agreed to share one of their petitions with me. I will also examine the petition of another interlocutor named Pooran in the next section of this chapter. In this section, however, I will be focusing on the petitions submitted by each of these three interlocutors. Dorsa considered the

Mahdi's Advent as being close, but at the same time, she was terrified of its coming. As a result of her sins, she was afraid that when the Imam arrived, she would not be able to help the Imam. To reduce the stress and fear she experienced due to her sins, she took advantage of the opportunity to participate in Jamkaran and its rituals. Farzin, another interlocutor, believed that he must ask the Imam for everything, and interpreted the Imam's relationship with himself in the same way as a mother's relationship with her child. As he described the Imam, he contrasted him with a mother who, no matter how bad her child is, still accepts him and doesn't throw him out of her house. The Imam, in his view, was responsible to his followers. However, Sherwin believed that one should try to gain the Imam's attention, so much effort should be put forth to gain the Imam's attention to be able to grow. The Imam's attention, according to Sherwin, could have the potential to change everything.

Almost all of these interlocutors believed that by attending Jamkaran and writing a petition, they would have the chance to build a closer relationship with the Hidden imam, thus enabling them to negotiate with the Hidden Imam for their sins which they have committed and to get a better chance of becoming a better person in the future. By writing a petition, they had an opportunity to share with the Imam their immoral qualities and ask the Imam to remove the immoral qualities from their lives. When I asked them once why they were writing the petition, they replied to my question in the following manner:

Dorsa: I am writing to ask Imam for assistance. My request to the Imam is that he give me the potential and worthiness to become a good human being. Someone whose inside and outside do not contradict each other.

Farzin: The Imam is responsible for me. In order to correct my insides, I ask him to do so. I'll try my best, but the Imam's blessing and grace are also required.

Sherwin: My petition to the Imam is a document between us. As I write, I wait. I am included in his grace, eventually.

In addition to that, I asked them how they distinguish the help and grant of potential and worthiness that the Imam is supposed to impart to them.

Dorsa: When I stay good and do not commit sins or bad behaviour.

Farzin: It will be determined over a period of time. I hope that the Imam will correct me from within when I write and throw it into the well. I try not to be disappointed, and I look for its effects every day. The only thing I know is that despair is the devil.

Sherwin: If you fail and commit a sin, it means that the Imam has not yet given you success and the potentiality to abandon sin completely.

According to these narratives that I have mentioned above, individual actions will not suffice as the sole factor that will shape one's moral self-fashioning. These inadequacies and impotencies in the process of moral self-fashioning can be clearly seen in the samples of petitions that I share with you further below. The text of these petitions reflects the inward qualities of my interlocutors and also highlights the contribution of the Imam's agency in facilitating and completing their moral projects, which would have been embodied in the form of a petition and were thrown into the well.

Dorsa's Petition:

Hello, *āqā Jān* (my dear sir)

Once in a while, I promise you that it's over, and I will no longer break your heart, and I won't be deceived by the devil, but a few days later, it's all over. I see that I broke all my promises, and I have surrendered to the devil again. I even realise that I have forgotten about all the promises I made to you. It is you, my lord, who always forgave me when I was guilty and always protected me when I was in need. In the evening on Thursday, I will be very happy, and I will lay my head on the pillow in the hopes that when I open my eyes on Friday morning, I will see your luminous face. But when I wake up on Friday morning and at the end of the day on Friday, and I see that you still haven't arrived, I get a bit disappointed. I say to myself that this Friday also passed and you did not come. I know very well that my sins have caused a delay in your Advent. But what can I do, since I am unable to resist? I am in need of your attention, my Lord. My wish is that I will be worthy enough for you to buy me for yourself. Could you please give me the worthiness and the opportunity to leave my sins behind? My dear sir, please help us all to plant good seeds in our hearts to be able to be one of your soldiers when you come to destroy corruption in this world.

Farzin's Petition:

Hello Imam Zaman

I am aware of the fact that I am full of sins, sir, that I am *ru-sīyāh* (disgraceful), but I am trying to be on the right path, to be good, to be worthy of your attention and care as my Imam. It's been a few weeks, I've been working on myself, trying to recognize you, and trying to make your heart satisfied with me. The people around me did not help me to recognize you even after I asked for help from them. As I mentioned my desire to recognize you to some of my friends, they laughed at me. I was left alone by some of them, but I know that you won't leave

me alone. Although I know that I am guilty, I still hope in you. I want you to look at me and help me in any way you can. As long as I can feel empowered by your look, then any sarcasm, laughter or words from the another person won't be able to bother me. Sir, I have heard that you help the pilgrims who feel ashamed and regretful. Is this true? Could you help me become a good person? My apologies for saying that I will be a good person; however, every time, I fail to do that, and I commit a sin again. Sir, I would appreciate it if you could help me and give me the worthiness to make my plans come true. I beg you to take my hand for the sake of God.

Sherwin's petition:

Hello *Mowlā!* (lord)

I wish I could know where you are at the moment. Are you here, or in Mecca, or in Iraq? I have no idea. Nevertheless, please do not forget to come to visit my neglectful heart wherever you go as well. I am hoping that you receive my letter. I would like to share with you my difficulties. I am ashamed of myself and of you that I have not been able to pass the divine test. The thing is, once again, I came to you with more internal poverty and empty hands than I had ever before to ask for your forgiveness. As long as you ask God to forgive me, I know that the God almighty will not turn his back on you as his representative on Earth. It is very difficult for me to carry the burden of my sins. I feel heavy burdened by the weight of my sins. Please lift this burden from my shoulders for the sake of God. Please give me the *towfiq* (chance) to become your good Shi'a. While I understand that I am unqualified to be your companion, I do hope that you will grant me the *towfiq* (success) and *līyāqat* (worthiness) of becoming a good person in my life. Would it be possible for you to give me a glance, my lord? Having a glance at me would also heal my polluted heart. I pray that God's blessings and salutations will be upon you, and I hope that I will soon be given the opportunity to see your luminous face in person.

These are instances of a typical petition that my interlocutors drop into the well behind the Mosque. According to the above petitions, not only do my interlocutors recognize themselves as sinners, but they also fail to find enough worthiness, success, and power within themselves so as to be able to fulfil their moral selves. Through the performative act of petitioning, they engage in negotiations with the Imam as a means to receive assistance and attention. By doing this, they are telling us that they do not consider their own internal capacities to be sufficient for them to fulfil their moral selves, and as a result, they are attempting to compensate and justify their moral failures and their

not-yet-fulfilled moral selves by involving the agency of the Imam. It is in this type of approach that the “will” is depicted in a mutual way, implying that the individual’s “will” is no longer enough for the process of moral self-realization to take place, and that the “will” of the Imam must also be exerted to achieve the results of that project. A further aspect that highlights the importance of the Imam’s agency in the realization of moral self-fashioning among my interlocutors is the issue of internal and external dispositions.

Their emphasis is more on the inner aspects of being a good person than on merely carrying out external acts of righteousness. As a consequence, merely performing external actions alone does not suffice to make my interlocutors succeed in abandoning sin and realizing the moral self, as they also need to modify their internal capacities in order to make external actions meaningful. The inability of my interlocutors to reform their inner selves as a spirit and the meaning of their external actions makes them retain the hope that the Imam will act on their behalf in reforming their inner capacities and realizing their moral selves. As a consequence of the subject’s expectation and hope for the Imam’s agency, failures are justified, and, at the same time, a mechanism of compensation and hope is maintained within the subject, and as a result, he remains stable on the path of maintaining his moral self. In the following section, I will be discussing the subject of inside and outside in more detail by explaining Pooran’s story.

6.4 Petition Writing and Prioritizing the Inside-Out Model of Moral Self-Fashioning

To give a better understanding of the petition sample, I would like to begin by telling the story of one of my interlocutors, named Pooran. She was in her mid-twenties when I met her for the first time on the bus when we were heading towards the Jamkaran Mosque. She was working part-time as a gym trainer in the neighbourhood where she lived. As a divorcee, she lived in a small apartment in Tehran with her parents and two younger siblings. Originally from the city of Shiraz, she had moved to Tehran with her family due to her father’s job, who was a bus driver at the time. When we were on our pilgrimage trip to Jamkaran, she shared the story of her first mandatory trip to Qom and the way it has changed her life. Pooran’s story is as follows:

My father owns a bus, and he transports passengers and caravans between cities. As part of some of these trips, my mother and I also accompany him. Once, my father

suggested to me that I go on a trip with him, as he was planning on taking a group of girls from our neighbourhood who were members of the local mosque on a pilgrimage to one of the holy sites. He said, “They are a good caravan going to a good place. Would you be interested in coming along?” I asked him again: Where do they go? He replied, “They are going to Qom.” I took them there on a number of occasions. “They’re very fine girls, and they wear hijab.” I said to him: O God, Do I need to wear a *chādor* too, since everyone else is wearing one? There’s no way I feel like wearing a *chādor*! There was no desire in my heart to wear a *chādor* and I wore it only when it was necessary, such as when I entered places of pilgrimage. I have not been very attached to religious practices, for example, I used to recite *namāz*, but I did not do it regularly, and I conducted religious practices mostly for the sake of my inner peace. Anyway, although I didn’t really want to go, at the insistence of my mother, I reluctantly went along with them.

The interactions between the girls on the bus caught my attention. In spite of the fact that I did not have a very positive attitude toward *chādori* women because I felt that they judged others based on their appearance, I envied the warm and friendly relationship between them. At some point during the trip, there were some interactions between me and them, which, to some extent, made me want to communicate with them. Probably for the first time in my life, I wasn’t judged by anyone because of my appearance. As soon as we reached Qom, we dropped them off at their destination [Jamkaran]. I became interested in joining their pilgrimage group after communicating with them along the way. However, being a divorced girl, I was never allowed to spend a night alone away from my parents on my own. Despite this, I hesitantly said, “Dad, let me stay with them as well.” When the leader of the group insisted that I stay in the Mosque with them, my father agreed, and I spent the night with the group. As soon as we entered the Mosque, we settled in one of the *shabistān* areas. Following that, Mrs. Mousavi, the religious teacher of the group, began speaking about the importance of respecting parents. The words she spoke deeply touched my heart. As I reflected on the way I had spoken to my mother that day and the way I had argued with her, I felt guilty for how rude I had been to her, and I regretted that I had been so rude. Despite the fact that my hijab was different from the hijab they wore, I felt that my heart was with them and I did not at all dislike them because of it. Ms. Mousavi ended her speech by speaking about Imam Zaman. I listened to her with my whole heart as she spoke. Even though most of the girls were crying, I was not in a special spiritual mood, so I did not cry. My mind had been occupied by the words of Mrs. Mousavi for some time.

As part of her speech, she said: "Today is Tuesday. Let us imagine for a moment that Imam Zaman is going to appear tomorrow. What do you have in hand to welcome him and serve him in the best way possible?" For me, this was a very special moment. I only knew one thing about serving the Imam: that it requires a great deal of virtue. In the same way as everyone else, I was a fan of Imam Zaman. My hands were empty, however. As I was thinking to myself, I said, "Pooran!. If you want to be in the Imam's service and accompany him, you must ask yourself what is inside of you that can convince the Imam that you should be in his service?" As a result, this was a painful part of the story for me, just as I could not find anything valuable within myself, no matter how hard I searched. The way I was acting with others was not in accordance with a moral code of conduct. I did not respect my parents. It is important for a girl to have good inner qualities regardless of the appearance that she has. Then, I came to believe that Imam Zaman should be upset with me. My sadness was overwhelming, but I was unable to cry in spite of it. I only remember when Mrs. Mousavi cried near the end of her speech and said, "Oh Mahdi! I am guilty. Please forgive my sin!" I felt my heart tremble as tears ran down my cheeks. In that moment, I could not think about anything, all I could think of was, "Oh Mahdi! I also made a mistake. please forgive my sins! In the end, I was unable to control myself and I started to cry as a result. That night, I shed a lot of tears.

When I returned home, I made no promises to myself or to the Imam that I would change. In spite of this, when I looked in the mirror the next day, I noticed that my mood had changed. It was then that I asked myself: Pooran, are you willing to be in the Imam's service tomorrow? [If yes] Why don't you give it a try? Isn't it better to act on the basis of your pure heart? Isn't it better that your intentions and actions are compatible? After that, I started to work on myself and try to get to know myself better. My appearance changed a bit, but I tried to invest more time and energy into my inner self. I tried to listen to my heart.

Pooran had got married when she was twenty-two. Her marriage didn't last long, though, and after one year of being married, she had to get a divorce. When Pooran got divorced, she had to move back to her parent's house and live with her family. She had experienced a tough life following her divorce, but she was still trying to cope with the difficulties that she had encountered. When we first met, she was enrolled in a master's degree program in physical education. When Pooran first experienced the Jamkaran pilgrimage, she was eager to join the religious gathering and accompany them on their pilgrimage to Jamkaran after her first experience.

I had the opportunity to meet Pooran several more times after our first encounter on the bus. It was during one of our pilgrimages to Jamkaran that she showed me her notebook, which she called “*del-neveshteh-hā*” (writings of the heart). According to what she told me, the notebook that she kept was one of the ways in which she could disclose what she had inside her heart with the Imam (dard-e-del). The notebook was a manifestation of Pooran’s inner heart, as she believed, and it was a way for her to monitor herself and the state of her heart. As she said to me, “*I write down what happens in my heart in this notebook in order to be able to share it with the Imam of the time*”. As to my question concerning why she continues to make the pilgrimage to Jamkaran in spite of the difficulty of her life, she replied that it was because of the inward quality that needed to be altered:

The pilgrimage to Jamkaran keeps his memory alive in my heart and makes me feel his blessing and favour. If I don't renew my pilgrimage for some time, I feel the impact. A lack of ability to make it means that my sin burden has grown heavier. My pilgrimage is an invitation from the Imam; an invitation to come by and purify myself. A feeling of worthiness arises in me when I am invited to the Mosque by the Imam. He seems to be saying, “I am eager to appear, but your sin prevents me from doing so.” The feeling of visiting here is very special. Being immersed in the memory of the Imam is a very good feeling. It's a good opportunity to let him clean your heart. Our hearts need to be prepared for his Advent in advance. There will be no life on Earth if the sun disappears. There will be a lot of darkness and cold. The Imam Zaman is like the sun hidden behind the clouds. His kindness, his favour, and his grace are being disseminated, even though he stands behind clouds. However, because of our spoiled inner quality, we cannot benefit from him.

After that, I asked her, how do you know that you have been forgiven for your sins?

In response, she said:

As soon as my heart begins to tremble and my tears begin to flow, I know that I have been noticed. It is at this moment that I realize that Imam is watching over me and has entered my heart. It is for this reason that my affective heart and tears are an important sign for me. I know myself very well. My strengths and weaknesses are almost known to me. It is in those moments that I ask Imam to remove my weaknesses from me. I have also seen its effects. It feels as if my soul has grown. As a result, I have become more kind. Forgiveness and letting go are easier for me.

Prior to disclosing Pooran’s petition, I want to explain a bit more about the self-monitoring issue raised by Pooran. The issue of self-monitoring has been brought up by a number of other interlocutors as well. I have already discussed in more detail in

Chapter One, how the messianic interpretation of Shi'ism holds strong convictions in the belief that the Mahdi might return at any moment, and thus people have to be morally ready for his Advent at any time. I also discussed in Chapter Five that my interlocutors are reminded that since no one knows when or where the Mahdi's second coming will occur, people need to control their sinful tendencies.

It would therefore mean that to remain in a state of sin, or to be still carrying sins around with them that have not been cleansed out of them, would mean that Mahdi would be delayed in returning, leaving them in the corrupted and difficult conditions they have been in during his occultation (cf. Robbins, 2004). A sinful life does not only refer to indulging in alcohol, adultery, stealing and other similar activities, but rather it is about not having a real faith that comes from within one's heart. If people's inner hearts aren't in sync with their virtuous and pietistic actions, then all their virtuous and pietistic actions are nothing but a mirage. The kind of salvation mentioned in messianic discourse is mostly determined by the ability to self-regulate morally. Sin should be avoided as much as possible by people, and they should be compensated by ritual cleansing to make up for any sins committed (ibid). It is important to remember that my interlocutors were trained that if they want to discuss the Mahdi, they must really reflect on themselves as agents who would end the period of occultation. As I mentioned earlier, the moral code that is proposed in such a messianic discourse based on Shi'i belief is extremely difficult to follow since it forbids not only sinful acts such as physical violence or theft, but also all intense desires and strong emotions, including anger, violence, backbiting, and jealousy, and places an incredibly high level of importance on issues pertaining to the inner self as well as to emotions (cf. Robbins, 2004). Because of this moral emphasis on emotional regulation, it is only logical that most of my interlocutors constantly monitor their "hearts" and keep careful track of all of the moral lapses that they commit. To maintain a record of their inner ethical characteristics, my interlocutors have to keep a constant self-monitoring process in order to continue to improve their personal strengths.

Now I provide an example of a petition written by a woman in early 2018 in Jamkaran Mosque. By presenting a sample petition, I provide the reader with a sense of the range of things my interlocutors attend to from their inner state of the heart and keep watch on their actions. The petition I present here almost echoes many of the dominant themes expressed by the pilgrims in the Mosque. I have changed the real name in the text and removed those parts that might reveal the identity of the person involved.

Pooran's petition

My lord and master

Hello

I am ashamed to admit that, despite all the blessings and mercy that I have received from you, my heart still contains a multitude of sins. To myself, I say: Shame on you! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, and your Imam? I am ashamed to admit that forgetfulness is taking over me. I am under the sun of your existence, and I have forgotten everything once again. It is shameful. My dear Imam! I must admit that I am a captive, and as such, you should not expect help from a captive. I am a prisoner of sins that have bound me up with chains. Also, I am a captive of Satan, who has laid temptation traps everywhere for me in order to entice me to sin. I certainly do not deserve to be with you when I have such a strong sense of inner turmoil and a feeling of helplessness. Sir, I beg you, please take my hand. There is no doubt in my mind that you already know the content of this letter because I know that you are present in my heart. The reason I am writing this is that I intend it to be a document between us both. My aim is to wait patiently for your grace and attention and to make sure that I have said all that I wanted to say. Even though I have felt your presence many times, pride and captivity in my sins are the things that bring me back to the place of neglect.

Āqā Jān (dear sir), I am ashamed to tell you about some of the sins that existed within my heart. I am really annoyed by two things. Your help is needed for me to overcome them. My jealousy sometimes flares up when I meet Negar [a friend of Pooran]. It's a feeling I no longer want to experience. I ask for your forgiveness for my envious desire and your attention to empower me to manage it. My heart is also heavy due to some sinful thoughts that enter my mind from time to time. There is nothing worse than having my mind filled with tempting desires, causing my heart to become heavy. It is really a shame for me to have such tempting intentions in my heart. It is true that I am guilty, but I need your assistance in reinforcing my weak will to overcome such bad feelings. You must give me your grace if I am to succeed.

Yā Sāhib al-zamān (O! the Lord of the Age)! I ask you to help me to correct my behaviour with my parents. Although I try to be kind to them, sometimes, I have to confront them with anger about some things they have said to me. It is difficult for me to control my anger towards my parents. However, I immediately regret and repent and ask for your forgiveness. Earlier today, I had a dispute with my father about some matters. As a result, I got very aggressive toward him and had to yell at him quite a bit. My father always blames me for my divorce and judges me as a divorcee. I have always been compared to successful girls by him, and this has really harmed my self-confidence because I always feel inferior to them. In spite of that, I know that they are

my parents, and I must respect them for that reason. If I do not respect them, I can instantly feel your dissatisfaction about my immoral behaviour in my heart. I know that due to my anger toward my parents, I committed a major sin against them. Please accept my apology, I am ashamed of myself for making you sad for my sins; please forgive me for making and breaking promises; please forgive me for delaying your Advent as a result of my sins.

Pooran had written this petition that you have read above in her room before she came to the Mosque. The moment she dropped the petition into the well, the feeling of happiness and peace, as well as a sense of determination, began to flourish in her heart. This sense of determination was brought to my attention when she was talking on the phone to her parents, expressing her regret due to her bad temper. In her notebook, she also began to jot down a new plan for after the submission. Moreover, she also promised herself to fulfil some specific vows (*nazr*) to perpetuate the impact of her petition. As well as reciting her daily *namāz* in time, she decided to distribute food to poor people. It should be noted that she performed these external actions not necessarily to strengthen her personal piety but to attract the Imam's attention to improve her inner capacity. My question to her after she submitted her petition was whether or not she regretted anything in her past and whether there was anything in her life she would like to change, and she replied, *"I regret more the things I ignored in the past."*

In addition to her deep regret regarding her bad temper, Pooran was worried about the damage that she feared caused by these bad tempers to herself, her parents, and most importantly, to her heart, which was the location of the Imam's position. Thus, as a result of this regret and fear, she was motivated to change her way of living and the way she interacted with the people around her. Pooran used to get angry too frequently and for too little reason. As a result, she decided that unless she actively limited her movements, her condition would only continue to worsen. In the course of the conversation, this active limiting of her movement became more apparent to me as I began to understand why Pooran did not want to spend more time at home with her family, or why she felt less inclined to socialize with them. As she put it:

The more time I spend with my parents, the more frustrated I become with them. There may be things that they say about my divorce to which I might react, and then my parents may get angry, and I might also get angry. For this reason, I am being very careful now. The problem is that I used to get angry with my parents in the past, and I struggled to control my anger towards them. At the moment, I am working on myself

in an effort to improve myself. It is my desire to remove the sense of anger from my heart as soon as possible. I have requested the Imam to help me correct my inside. I cannot be a good person if I am not able to get rid of this.

By writing her petition, Pooran had been able to reflect upon herself and had developed an attitude toward self-control and self-monitoring which has helped her in her journey towards self-improvement. She tried to patiently wait for the impact of the demands she had requested from the Imam in her written petition, and this hopeful expectation, along with the small and sometimes transitory effects she embodied in her personal life, kept her steady in repeating this performative act. Having a difficult relationship with her parents seemed to be the focal point of Pooran's emotional turmoil, marked by anger, guilt, and despair. Due to her being judged as a divorcee, her anger was a result of the difficult experience of life after divorce in a society where the dominant religious values did not allow her to experience an independent and individualistic life. There was a taboo surrounding divorce in the middle-class religious family in which Pooran grew up.

Thus, Pooran had difficulty identifying herself, since women are identified and privileged only in the roles they play within the family institution, i.e. mother and wife, and Pooran was unable to achieve the independence and position she deserved because she was unable to redefine herself outside of this institution. As a result of the dominance of the traditional stereotypes in society about divorcees, which were reproduced by her parents at home, Pooran felt insecure, inadequate, and defeated, which intensified the tension between her and her family. I once asked her, in addition to asking for forgiveness for yourself, do you also ask for forgiveness for the misbehaviour of your parents as well? She answered the question in the following manner:

In the same way as I seek forgiveness for myself, I also seek forgiveness for them. There is no doubt that what they did was wrong, but I am also responsible for this sin as well. When you get angry with your parents, according to Islamic teachings, you have committed a great sin. After hearing the preacher's words about the need for repentance in the Mosque and for internal reform, I regretted my misbehaviour even more. Because I did not know that I had a chance to be forgiven and become a better person. The things I said to my parents in that conversation were a big sin and I am sorry for what I said. Only now have I become conscious of what I have done.

I have no doubt that Pooran understands the anger she has towards her parents as her own sin which she is responsible for. Clearly, she explains that her parents behave

badly towards her in a very negative manner and does not attempt to suggest that they are innocent in their behaviour towards her. Even though Pooran's anger towards her parents may seem somewhat justifiable to us, it actually creates problems with her own relationship with the Hidden Imam, which ultimately hinders her progress in the process of improvement. The Shi'i messianic ethical structure here indicates the intensity with which it is dedicated to capturing the inward quality of the subject and how working on the inner life will be able to assist my interlocutors in cultivating ethical dispositions.

The most important aspect of Pooran's petition is the way in which she judges her anger in such a way that the difficulties she is experiencing with her parents are treated solely as her own problems. It is true that she may find some comfort in the fact that even her parents have sinned from time to time, but ultimately, she knows that it is her responsibility to control how she responds to the misbehaviour of her parents. As she determines the evilness of her own anger, she does not consider the guilt of others. The tendency to self-blame for anger often leads Pooran and my other interlocutors to avoid pressing any legitimate claims because they fear that such a course of action will result in heated arguments, and this could ultimately lead to more sin being committed (Robbins, 2004: 237). The decision to ignore the problem and remain peaceful is a far better choice than engaging in the situation and risking anger (ibid). Thus, it is evident that the moral code of the messianic ethics I am discussing here does not provide much scope for the expression of legitimate anger in any way. Pooran's petition is one of the many petitions written by my interlocutors, which illustrates my interlocutors' perspective on sin, which is based largely on one single theme: that the inward quality determines the bad feelings and immoral actions of a subject. The "will" is directly responsible for connecting all these inner states. The Hidden Imam can guide the heart to eliminate all bad feelings such as jealousy, temptations, and anger if one transfers their directing of "will" to him. In this way, one can control and orient his or her "will" properly. Pooran, like Dorsa, Farzin, and Sherwin, awaited and hoped for the implementation of the Imam's "will" in the transformation of her inner capacities. It is by stating her inability to control her will that she attempted to draw the Imam's attention and care to the development of her moral self-fashioning by utilizing the petition technique. To put it another way, making an effort to fulfil a moral project through personal will is insufficient, which is why the Imam's "will" must also be applied to the project in order to facilitate and realize it.

Another important issue that arose during my fieldwork in the Mosque was the interaction and relationship between inside and outside piety. The way piety flourishes in the behaviour of my interlocutors is the manner in which the inward qualities energize the outward pious disposition of the subject. A good example of this is Pooran, who believed that the model of piety she was practising was completely different from the one her mother was promoting. She believed that her mother's version of piety failed to focus on the internal transformation and the development of her spirituality. She compared her approach to piety with her mother in the following manner:

The religious discipline in my mother's life is evident in many ways. She recites the Qur'an every morning, and fasts on special days, recites different supplications and *zikrs*, and attends many religious gatherings throughout the year. There is no way I can do the same on a regular basis. It is obvious that she has a higher level of faith and commitment to doing her religious duties than I do, but it should also be noted that we are very different individuals as well. She places a greater emphasis on reciting *namāz*, wearing hijab, attending religious practices and gatherings, and focusing on what is halal and what is haram. However, she is not attending to her heart, and I believe that is the case. Thus, in my opinion, she does not have the inner quality to support her pious practices. It seems as if she is a robot. It is evident that she practices obedience to God, and that she is looking forward to receiving her reward in the afterlife. However, as I see it, her pious practices are not manifested in her moral behaviour because I believe that they have not been initiated from within.

In Pooran's view, the outside-in model of her mother's piety does not necessarily lead to virtuous behaviour, even if it is a highly praised one. She preferred the inside-out model over the outside-in model, and she firmly believed that a person should be good from the inside out. According to her, external behaviour does not necessarily result in internal purity. Her opinion goes as follows:

I have seen many people who pray and perform religious duties but do not act in a moral manner. Of course, I have seen the opposite a lot.

Pooran's challenges with her parents have not only caused her to correct her inner anger but have also encouraged Pooran to rethink the defects of her parents' model of religiosity and define her own version of it based on her own values. As a result of arguing with her parents and being judged by them, Pooran not only became displeased with her parents' pious lifestyle, but she began to rethink many of the teachings that she had accepted without questioning them. Her tendency to rethink

the normative religious values is visible in her emphasis on internal virtues and values over external actions, which can be seen in the following comment she makes:

The majority of people I meet in society are Muslims from the outside, but they are not Muslims from the inside. Due to the fact that society has now become such that everyone judges a person based on his or her appearance. As soon as you recite *namāz*, recite the Qur'an, fast, wear a full hijab, and participate in religious gatherings, it is as if this is enough. Honestly, I know a lot of people who do all these things, but they also lie, gossip, are jealous, and do thousands of other things that are immoral without feeling guilty. Since they think that doing external duties is enough and they don't consider the inward, it shows that no matter how much you do religious acts, your heart will not necessarily be purified. Therefore, one must first make sure that he or she has a clean heart.

Pooran then told me a familiar anecdote from a devoted Shi'i man from Basra who was trying to meet the Hidden Imam known as a "*mard-e-sābūnī*" (soap-seller man), which she had heard in a Jamkaran's sermon a short while ago. Throughout this story, Pooran aims to draw a distinction between inside-out and outside-in versions of pious acts, emphasizing the inside-out interpretation of piety as a way in which moral behaviour can reflect in pious behaviour. In her words:

The story of the soap-seller man really changed my outlook on life. No matter how many deeds a person does, if her heart is not with the Lord and her inner capacity has not been purified, the external actions have no effect on her life. The story of the soap-seller man shows exactly this point. I heard this story in one of the preaching sessions inside the Mosque. Of course, later, I went and read the whole story in the book. The story is that one of the pious Shi'i believers in Basra, Iraq, who had an '*attāri* [herbalist], made a lot of vows and supplications to meet the Hidden Imam. One day, two of Imam's companions came to his shop to take him to see the Imam. While walking to visit the Imam, it starts to rain heavily. For a moment, this man also remembers the soaps he had made and put on the roof under the sun to dry and starts to freak out they will get wet in the rain and cannot be sold. As soon as this thought entered his heart, the companions of the Hidden Imam stopped taking him to the Imam and changed the route towards his home. When he asks for the reason, they say that your heart is not with your master but with your soaps. You have not yet emptied your heart of worldly attachments to accommodate the true love of your beloved, and you are not worthy of companionship with the Imam.

Having told me the above story, Pooran came to the following conclusion:

As long as the mirror of the heart is polluted with worldly darkness, our external actions cannot benefit us and reflect our inner virtues. To be noticed by the Imam, a person must be beautiful from the inside. Otherwise, all these people are beautiful from the outside.

Pooran then talked about the difficulties and challenges she had faced as a divorcee to emphasize her own version of inside-out piety and reveal the defects of the outside-in model she encountered in her everyday life:

Throughout my life, I have been prejudged a lot, both by my parents and by society. The way I look, the way I dress, and the way I live are being prejudged. Basically, everyone is judging people by their appearance, and they have no idea what's going on in the heart of the individual. This, in my opinion, is a violation of *Shari'a* law and is immoral as well. It is more important for a girl to be modest and chaste than to wear a rigid hijab, in my opinion. There are many people I know who wear hijab but do not have any sense of modesty and shame and chastity inside. I also know some women who wear hijabs, but they are unkind to each other [she is pointing to kindness as an inner virtue]. Thus, having a full hijab does not make your heart pure, but it is the feeling of modesty as a virtue that purifies your heart. To put it simply, the inside of a person must be in good shape.

Petition-writing and a sense of personal and intimate connection with the Imam allow Pooran to discredit the judgments of others and feel comfortable by focusing on the intimate relationship that she has with her Imam. A personal experience of affect embodied in the form of a petition is what is enabling Pooran to rebuild her self-confidence and self-perception. Despite Pooran's worry and fear of being judged by her parents and the society around her, ultimately, she was able to overcome these fears by strengthening the personal and intimate relationship she had with the Imam through the petition technique. The one thing my interlocutors have in common in writing the petition is their "personalised experience of the affect" they have experienced through connecting with the Imam and how it helps them to work on the transformation that they want to go through (Liberatore, 2013: 124). This prioritization of interiority over exteriority is similarly portrayed in Giulia Liberatore's (2013) ethnography of young Somali Muslim women in London. Liberatore describes the ways in which second-generation Somali women negotiate their relationship with their first-generation by re-evaluating the two moral substances: internal dimensions and external practices. She demonstrates that her interlocutors are using the

heterogeneity of intersectional discourses to shape themselves as religious subjects. To address the challenge between inside and outside, they use both an Islamic discursive tradition and a liberal ethic of autonomy to be able to shape their own self-fashioning project. Putting forward a problematization of the relationship between interiority and exteriority, she shows that second-generation Somali women choose a middle way by emphasizing interiority rather than exteriority.

Based on the work of Fadil (2008), Liberatore argues that young Muslims use liberal ethics to shape their interpersonal relationships in order to find independence from others, including their kin (Liberatore, 2013: 127). On the other hand, in their relationship with God, they apply both the liberal discourse of autonomy as well as Islamic ethics simultaneously based on their understanding of Islam. As Fadil (2008) points out in her work, two traditions co-exist in a “non-contradictory” manner, and the autonomy experienced by her interlocutors can be understood as a result of obedience to God (Fadil, 2008: 250). Therefore, the discourse of freedom and autonomy is not necessarily “opposed to the concept of submission to God, but is achieved through it” (ibid: 2008: 251). Pooran is a good example of the argument made by both Fadil (2008) and Liberatore (2013) that implies the simultaneous use of autonomy and choice in rethinking the relationship between inside and outside, while at the same time personalizing the relationship and submitting to the Hidden Imam. This mutually constructive relation between external and internal dimensions ought to be recognized as a technology of the self, in which external acts of worship (for instance, the hijab) must be drawn from and cultivated through virtuous dispositions, intentions, and emotions (Mahmood, 2005). Among my interlocutors, Pooran was not the only one who prioritized inner quality over outward dimensions; indeed, this was a theme that was also emphasized by many other interlocutors whom I interacted with. By prioritizing inner virtues as the ethical substance focusing on their affective and internal relationship with the Imam and surrendering their will to him through the use of the petition technique, they are able to reformulate their values and self-perception as well as the relationship between the inside and the outside (Jacobsen, 2011b). When they question and discredit the external dimensions of self-fashioning as the sole factor that determines pious self-fashioning, they begin to correct their understanding of traditional religious discourse and emphasize the reciprocal and constructive relationship that exists between the internal and external processes that

contribute to the formation of a pious Muslim subject (Mahmood, 2005; Liberatore, 2013).

Through their efforts to embody their moral selves by writing petitions, my interlocutors begin to emphasize the importance of an emotional and embodied relationship with the Hidden Imam, and by doing so they begin to engage with pleasing the Hidden Imam, drawing his attention, as well as surrendering one's will to him (to be submissive) as a mode of subjectification. As they personalize their relationship with the Imam, they separate themselves from their family, friends, and other people in order to re-formulate their relationship with themselves, the Imam, and others, as well as to negotiate their unfulfilled moral project with the Hidden Imam. This personalization of communication with the Hidden Imam also helps them in implementing their own autonomy and shift in the modes of subjectification.

6.5 Conclusion

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Jamkaran sermon rituals do an excellent of conveying the importance that messianic Shi'i ethics place upon the pilgrims' inward qualities, or to put it another way, their "moral substance" as Foucault called it, and in particular the importance of placing the pilgrim's will alongside the Hidden Imam's will. In addition to discussing the ethical substance (outward actions and inward qualities) and the modes of subjectification (submission of one's will to the Hidden Imam, the execution of both the Imam's and the subject's agency), I examined the ways by which my interlocutors use petition writing as a technology of the self, enabling them to transform that substance into positive experiences by letting go of their will and cultivating a peaceful heart, which in turn will allow them to cultivate their moral selves with ease. My interlocutors employ the petition as a technique to facilitate and realize this not-yet-fulfilled moral self, which they consider to be coming from the inside out. As they do not believe their internal capacities and individual capabilities are sufficient to fulfil their moral project, they use the petition as a strategy to negotiate with the Imam about their moral failures, and to be able to obtain his miraculous attention and care. As they search for the possibility of transcending their insufficient internal capacities, they simultaneously begin to wait hopefully for the Imam's agency to be exerted to help them transform their inner capacities and find the opportunity, worthiness, potentiality, and capacity necessary to realize their not-yet-fulfilled moral selves. For my interlocutors, what is important is that they feel an internal, intimate,

and personal relationship with the Hidden Imam. Through this process of forming a personal relationship with the Imam and attracting his attention, they have the opportunity to reformulate the way that internal values and external actions interact, to reconstruct their self-perception through expressing their autonomy and shifting their modes of subjectification.

Chapter 7: *Namāz* and the Ambivalence of Sin and Repentance

7.1 Introduction

In the true *montazer's* heart, there is a perpetual hope and *entezār* of the Mahdi's Advent. This always keeps him hopeful, helps him to improve the existing situation and strengthens his capability and effort in orienting himself into the Mahdi. There is no doubt that the desire to come closer to the Hidden Imam and to pave the way for his return encourages my interlocutors to enhance their inward qualities, which have a direct impact on their responses to sin and motivation for repentance. For my interlocutors, it seems that the most motivating factors for performing *namāz* have been the concepts of submission, getting closer to the Hidden Imam, guilt, and the desire to repent, combined with collecting rewards and making a vow. It has emerged from my interviews with my respondents that many of them placed a lot of emphasis on the communicative aspects of the *namāz* prescribed by the Hidden Imam.

This chapter examines how my interlocutors perceive committing sin, feeling guilty, repenting, and seeking forgiveness to demonstrate how the ritual of *namāz* helps them maintain their moral sense and cultivate an ethical self. While they perform ritual practices such as the *namāz-e Imam Zaman*, they have a different perception of the *namāz*, and they understand sin, repentance, and forgiveness differently. However, it can be argued that all of these different views about sin and the experiences associated with their failure to practice true repentance are all pointing towards a course of action in which the practitioner's actions and efforts will lead to the creation of a moral self.

7.2 I Missed the Jamkaran Pilgrimage Due to a Big Sin

To begin my discussion of Jamkaran's ritual of *namāz* and its impact on the moral project of the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims, I would like to share a brief ethnographic vignette on how the ritual of *namāz* directs my attention as a bodily technique by which the interlocutors repent and cleanse themselves of sin. During my fieldwork, one of my travelling companions, whom we became friends with, used to visit Jamkaran Mosque every Tuesday night for a long time, and for four weeks he was absent from the Mosque. On the bus after a while, I met him again and, during our brief conversation, I asked him about the reason for his long absence. With a confused expression on his face and a tear in his eye, he said: "I was not invited." After insistently asking him for a reason, he explained in his own words:

I failed to make a pilgrimage to the Mosque in the first week because the moment I returned home, I was struck by severe heartache. Because of my illness, I could not take part in the trip. The second week, I was working outside the city. When I woke up in the morning, I told my wife that I would finish work by noon and then I would go to Jamkaran from there. I returned home at night, and when my wife asked, “Why didn’t you go to Jamkaran tonight?” I just remembered that tonight was Wednesday night, and I was supposed to go to Jamkaran as usual tonight. It was very strange, but I had forgotten entirely. On the third week, I was ready to leave the house and go to the Mosque, but a piece of glass cut my son's leg, my wife was supposed to take him to the hospital, and I would go to Jamkaran, but my son insisted and cried that his father should accompany him, and he must take me to the doctor instead. After taking him to the hospital, I missed the trip again. During the fourth week, I decided to join the pilgrims of Jamkaran Mosque at the bus station, but unfortunately, the bus had already left by the time I arrived at the station. Although I was going to be a passenger in another convoy at Tehran Gate station, I failed to see the bus, and everyone had left when I arrived. Upon reaching the second station, I realised an hour and a half had passed since Jamkaran buses left, so I returned disappointed.

Following these explanations, I asked him to explain to me what took place that caused this failure to end, and he continued:

On the way, I wanted to take a taxi and go back home, but I realised for a moment that for the past four weeks, no matter what I did, I could not go to Jamkaran Mosque. What sin caused this *towfīq* (success) to be taken from me? My feelings were strange, so I went to the mosque nearby while crying. When I was in the mosque, I recited *namāz* with tears of repentance in my eyes, and as soon as the *namāz* was completed, I sought refuge in the Imam, asking him to forgive me and allow me to make a pilgrimage to Jamkaran Mosque again. In the evening, around 4:50 P.M., I left the local mosque with the intention of revisiting the Mosque of Jamkaran. However, when I came to Qom Road, a car stopped before me and asked where I was going. [I responded]: I intend to go to Jamkaran, but I will follow your route wherever you lead. The driver replied: “By the way, I am also going to Jamkaran.” He did not take any money from me during this trip. I realised that Imam Zaman had forgiven me and invited me to his house. In the Jamkaran Mosque that night, while reciting *namāz* and speaking with the Imam, I had another pleasant experience.

As a result of overcoming these few weeks of not being able to travel to Jamkaran, when he reached the Mosque, he began to discover the reason that impeded him from making the pilgrimage. To realise the impediment, he said:

When I was reciting the *namāz* of the Imam in the main Shabistan, I asked him to make me aware of why I was not invited to the Mosque for a couple of weeks. It wasn't until a few nights later that I dreamed of one of my friends who asked me: Do you know why you weren't invited to the Jamkaran? I said: No. He said: That night when you were invited to the wedding, at the end of the night when men and women were sitting together, and the men were dancing together in front of the women while music was playing in the background. Not only did you not forbid them, but you also cooperated with them, and several people behind you said, "Look how this man is dancing while he goes to Jamkaran every Tuesday." Due to this, you have hurt the heart of the Imam as a result. In my dream, I realised that I should not only pay tribute to the Imam by visiting Jamkaran on Tuesday nights, but all actions and behaviour of mine should also be as honourable as possible for him. Thus, I became aware that I gained the heart of Imam Zaman by reciting the *namāz*, so he invited me back to his home after I repented by reciting the *namāz* again.

The above ethnographic vignette demonstrates that my interlocutors' communication with the Hidden Imam through the performance of the ritual of *namāz* inspires them to become more submissive to Him and assures them with the feeling that the Hidden Imam is watching them, listening to them, and he can become pleased or dissatisfied with his followers' behaviour. In this section, I provide some of my interlocutors' accounts of how they undergo a cycle of committing sins, feeling sudden guilt, and then asked for forgiveness by performing the ritual of *namāz* prescribed by the Hidden Imam. By reciting the *namāz* in the process of confessing and repenting, they can reflect on their sinful actions and practice moral self-cultivation through repentance. Using the perspectives of my interlocutors regarding sins and true repentance, we can gain invaluable information that illustrates the challenges that they face as they strive to maintain and cultivate a sense of moral self, as well as demonstrating that it is not an easy process to avoid sin and attain a true repentance on their own. Even though they all go through the process of repentance and requesting forgiveness, their perceptions of sin and approaches to repentance are quite different from one another. In the narratives I will be providing about three of my interlocutors, who perform the ritual practice of *namāz* to repent and ask for forgiveness, I will highlight the contradictions and difficulties they face in maintaining their moral sense as a result of the way in which they perceive sin and repentance. Through examining the ritual of *namāz* as well as the theme of sin, as part of the pilgrimage experience of my

interlocutors, I can identify the depth of their experience, as well as an understanding of how sin is acknowledged, guilt is taken into account, and forgiveness is expected.

7.3 Ritual of Repentance and Technologies of the Self

A primary question that the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims encounter in this period of change is how they can live as true *montazers* of the Hidden Imam within the material world that routinely draws them into sin. The Twelver Shi'i rituals are heavily focused on resolving issues such as these either by helping the pilgrim to control their willpower so that they can avoid sin or by helping them regain their moral status after they sin through repentance.

Using Foucault's concept of technologies of the self to articulate their function, I argue that Jamkaran ritual culture is utilised by pilgrims to help meet the Shi'i messianic ethical demands by avoiding sins or repenting of them. My argument is that, by looking at the ritual of *namāz* as one of the most important rituals of the Jamkaran pilgrimage as an example, both the symbolic design and the processual pattern of these rituals assist my interlocutors in overcoming the challenges of moral self-fashioning. In the ritual I discuss, the self plays a significant role, as one might expect. The following paragraphs keep this focus in the forefront, discussing how the ritual practices are supposed to work on pilgrims who follow them. I need to make some further introductory remarks before I discuss the rituals. The nature of Shi'i ritual prayers, in their essence, is not the subject of my arguments; instead, I am concerned with the functional and consequential aspects of the ritual. However, not all ritual prayers are integral to specific ritual technologies of the self. It is sometimes used by pilgrims to achieve success in the material world, prevent various calamities that have affected them in their material lives, or to seek healing. In these cases, people have turned to prayer to fill the gaps in their daily lives. My purpose in this account is to focus on rituals, as the role they take to help the Shi'i pilgrims to work on themselves. By prayer ritual, I mean a worshipful action that pilgrims accomplish within the Mosque and belongs to Jamkaran ritual culture, which includes *namāz -e Imam zamān* (the prayer/salāt of the Lord of the Age), *do'ā* (supplication) and *tawassol* (intercession). They all serve different purposes and are used by pilgrims for various reasons, including repenting their sins, getting closer to the Imam, making a vow, seeking healing, and collecting rewards. more importantly, they are meant to cleanse the pilgrim of sin. Therefore, ritual prayers are offered to those who have committed sins

to help them purify their heart and get closer to the Hidden Imam, paving the way for his return by getting closer to him.

As discussed in Chapter Five, moral self-fashioning is one of the main prerequisites of practising true *entezār* for the Mahdi's Advent. One of the crucial effects of believing in Mahdism is that a person tries not to commit sin and not to succumb to pollution. Because waiting for the Advent motivates the true *montazer* to improve himself morally to prepare for the Advent. Thus, great importance is placed on the inward quality of my interlocutors to improve themselves. In addition, the matter of the Shi'i pilgrims' willpower has been targeted by the preachers in the sermon so that the right willpower is being portrayed as willpower whose direction is in the hand of the Hidden Imam. For my interlocutors, therefore, it is their renunciation from willpower and transferring it to the Hidden Imam that helps them avoid sin and improve their moral self. They are constantly being reminded that a good Shi'i is a person whom the willpower of his master must have priority over his or her own willpower. Therefore, they should always be submitted to God and the Hidden Imam to remain on the straight path of improvement.

This submission of one's willpower to the Hidden Imam is one of the main characteristics of a true *montazer*. It is the act of delegating willpower to the Imam and obeying his orders that embodies this submission within the heart of the *montazer*. I believe that the practice of *namāz* is a very effective way to cultivate this sense of surrendering one's willpower to the Imam and a prime example of the bodily technique in which this sense of submission is embodied. It is this sense of submission and effort towards moral reform that, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, keeps my interlocutors in need of the Imam's attention to fulfil their task of moral reformation. As they recite *namāz*, my interlocutors ask the Imam to correct them, as if they do not have the power to correct themselves and need his willpower to improve themselves. To achieve piety, pilgrims must give up their freedom of choice and follow the orders of the Hidden imam. It is interesting to note, even when an interlocutor experiences a change, that he or she does not see this change as the result of their own willpower but rather believes that it is the Hidden Imam's willpower that enabled them to reach a moral disposition. Not only does the fact of submission appear in the words of my interlocutors when they are reciting *namāz*, but it also appears in the bodily act of praying as a result of the words used. Such physical acts are visible through bodily postures of the pilgrims which transfers the sense of submission from the heart to the

rest of the body. The embodied actions like closing their eyes and putting their head down when they recite *namāz*, putting their hands on their chest, raising their hands towards the sky and shedding tears while praying or supplicating all represent their bodily form of expressing submission.

Closing the eyes is a bodily act of submission my interlocutors perform when supplicating or reciting *namāz*. By closing their eyes, they seek to connect their heart to the Hidden Imam. In Shi'i culture, the eye serves as a channel that stimulates desires (Robbins, 2004: 262). In the context of Shi'i messianic tradition, it is common for the preachers to promote the idea that the eye that wants to see the Imam should not be polluted and should always be controlled. Therefore, my interlocutors are encouraged to train their eyes because if they do not control their eyes, their hearts may become infected and lead them to sin. There is a strong connection between the heart and the eyes in popular culture. It has always been portrayed that the eyes are the gateways of the heart through which everything starts and flows into the heart. As such, the eyes have the potential to intervene in the heart through the images they direct to it. Therefore, the disposition of the heart is formed based on the images that the eyes have transferred to it through watching. In Iranian popular culture, there is a famous *do-beytī* (double distich), that is found in popular literature, written by a famous Iranian poet named *Bābā Tāher*, pointing to the relationship between the eyes and the heart in a sincere yet spiritual undertone:

“I am beset by cruel Tyranny,
My heart remembers all mine Eyes must see,
I'll fashion, straight, a pointed sword of steel,
Put out mine Eyes, and set my poor Heart free” (Bābā-Ṭāhir et al, 1902:
2)

Allowing the eye to look at whatever it wants does not protect the heart from its harmful effects. The lack of eye control is at the root of so many great sins. When a person looks at stimulating and lustful images or scenes, the seed of sin is planted in his heart, causing him to follow this lust aroused by these polluted looks and commit various sins to satisfy it. Because the eyes and heart are strongly connected, controlling the eyes can control the heart's desires and can be used to limit and surrender one's willpower. Therefore, for my interlocutors, closing the eyes during the *namāz* is an exercise to close the heart's entrance gate and establish a deep connection with the Hidden Imam.

In Chapter Six, I discussed in what manner my interlocutors employ writing petitions for self-reflection and how such reflection helps them to repent from their sins and purify their hearts. As I said, the Hidden Imam is introduced as the watcher of the pilgrims' practices who can remove sin from their hearts. Thus, the *namāz*, which is incorporated into the Jamkaran rituals, serves as a way of communication with the Hidden Imam as well as a technology for self-transformation.

7.4 Namāz-e Imam Zamān

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Hasan bin Muthlih Jamkarani, in his revelation, was assigned by the Hidden Imam to build the Jamkaran Mosque. The Imam also instructs him to inform believers about a special *namāz* they should perform during the pilgrimage. The community of believers, as part of the special ritual of this Mosque, are encouraged to recite the *namāz*, which has become known as the “*namāz -e Imām zamān*”. As opposed to the daily *namāz* that Shi'i Muslims are obliged to perform (as part of their religious obligations), this *namāz* is a *mostahab* practice (favoured act) specifically designed to be dedicated to the Hidden Imam. This *namāz* is mostly recited individually, and a sense of spiritual connection to the Imam is stimulated by performing it. Its purpose is to communicate with the Imam and get his attention. Therefore, the *namāz* is a very important part of self-fashioning rituals. The *namāz* consists of four *rak'ats* (prayer cycles) as follows.

In the first *namāz* of two *rak'at*, *Sūreh al-Hamd* should be recited once, followed by *Sūreh al-Ikhlass* seven times to give salutation to the Masjid. Just like the first *rak'at*, the second must be recited in the same manner. When performing the second *namāz* of two *rak'at*, the intention should be to recite *namāz* for Imam Zaman, which will include reciting *Sūreh al-Hamd* one time and repeating the line *Iyyāka Na'budu Wa Iyyāka Nastāin* (The only one we worship is you, and we only ask for help from you) one hundred times. There should then be completion of the *Sūreh*, followed by recitation of *Sūreh al-Ikhlass* once. Just like the first *rak'at*, the second must be recited in the same manner.

After the two *namāz* have been completed, the pilgrim should say once: *Lā ilāha illalāh* (there is no god but God), and then recite the *Tasbīhāt* of Lady Fatima, which is a special *zikr* associated with the daughter of Prophet Muhammad consisting of 34 times *Allah Akbar* (God is the greatest), 33 times *al-Hamdo li Allah* (Praise be to God) and 33 times *Subhān Allāh* (Glory be to God). Then, one must prostrate and recite

Salawāt one hundred times on Prophet Mohammed and his family. As for the reward for those who perform this *namāz*, it is narrated from the Imam that it will be similar to the reward for those who perform *namāz* inside the *Ka'beh*.

7.5 *Namāz* and Moral Self-Fashioning

To cultivate an ethical disposition, pilgrims are encouraged to fulfil the *namāz* as a characteristic of pious devotees of the Hidden Imam. Placards and posters around the Mosque remind pilgrims that being inattentive to *namāz* will have consequences in the afterlife.

Ritual prayer is viewed differently in different cultures as a moral practice and a means of self-improvement (Zigon, 2008:57). In Islam, the ritual of *namāz/salat*, is considered the most important means and end of resolving moral issues. In her research on the Women's Piety movement in Cairo, Saba Mahmood (2005) used the Aristotelian concept of *habitus* to explain the conscious process and bodily techniques forming the ethical self. For this *habitus* to become an embodied disposition, it needs to be formed with consciousness and reflection. This means that *namāz*, as a bodily technique, can direct the conduct of the subject through such qualities as sincerity (*ekhlas*), piety, submissiveness, and humility (*khushu*). Consequently, individuals' desire and involvement in *namāz* can shape their *habitus* and provide them with an embodied knowledge of themselves. Through the practice of *namāz*, embodied awareness and sensibility are developed, allowing the subject to improve his/her ethical self-concept.

Here, I will examine a ritual prayer that differs from daily *namāz* in several ways. The first point is that although this *namāz* is similar in structure to the daily *namāz*, it isn't mandatory like the daily *namāz*, but rather *mustahab*. As a result of the fact that it is a *mustahab* act, it is not performed for fear of punishment nor to comply with religious requirements by the practitioners. As a third point, the *namāz* has nothing to do with worshipping God, but rather communicating with the Hidden Imam, gaining closer to him, avoiding sins, seeking forgiveness, and asking for worldly necessities. Furthermore, unlike the daily *namāz* that follow a specific sequence of time, the Jamkaran ritual of *namāz* do not follow a set sequence of time. There is no restriction on the time and place when this *namāz* is performed. My interlocutors do not perform this *namāz* to worship God. Their primary concern isn't the meanings of the words, which are almost the repetitions of the exact phrases of the daily *namāz*; it is the

performance of the act to communicate with the Imam and benefiting from its potential that is the most important reason for them to recite the *namāz*.

When it comes to the Jamkaran ritual prayer, it is imperative to consider the capacity of the heart and the inward quality that makes this ritual meaningful. My interlocutors find this practice meaningful because of the special inner relationship they have with it. Otherwise, it would appear that the *namāz* itself is not intrinsically meaningful in itself. This would be consistent with Humphrey and Laidlaw's (1994) description of rituals as unmeaning for themselves, but it is the practitioner who must be the one to impart meaning to these rituals. Jamkaran's performance of *namāz*, in some ways, resembles this. The performance of *namāz* does not necessarily induce the same mental state of being in all those who perform it. The meaning to which the *namāz* of the Hidden Imam is supposed to be embedded may not be the same for all of those who perform it, so this implies that its effect may be different.

My main objective in this chapter is to portray the multiple inner experiences of my interlocutors through an examination of *namāz* so that I can portray how they shape the interlocutors' selves. By exploring the subjective and individual aspects of *namāz*, I demonstrate how my interlocutors cope with their inner tensions by engaging with *namāz*. In line with Simon's (2009) ethnography and Haeri's (2020) study, I further elaborate on the idea of *namāz* as an act of self-transformation through the lens of multiple personal experiences. In my approach, I am examining *namāz* as an embodied bodily technique in relation to the ways in which my interlocutors understand sin, true repentance and forgiveness, and moral failures in general.

Generally, most of the interlocutors I have talked to say that reciting *namāz* brings them peace and eliminates their stress. It also helps them to cultivate or maintain their moral sense by reducing their sense of guilt. It is essential to understand that the basis of all these moral understandings has to do with the idea that in *namāz*, the individual embodies a sense of submission to the Imam. The emotional attachment pilgrims have to the *namāz* is because through living a sinless life and having a pure inner self, they can realise the concept of a moral self. It is through experiencing a lack of problematic unethical dispositions and behaviours and retaining a sense of moral self by getting rid of their sense of guilt that my interlocutors have come to understand the importance of practising *namāz* as a technique of self-fashioning. As I have mentioned in Chapter Five, my interlocutors are constantly encouraged by the preachers that the ritual practices involving the *namāz* can only be considered a true *namāz* if it is

performed with the heart. If it is not performed with the heart, then the external act of prayer (body movements) is useless to the worshiper. My argument is that even though attaining the inner purity necessary for performing the ritual of *namāz* is not always achieved at every time and for everyone, and also that true repentance is not always experienced since repeated sins can make it nearly impossible to achieve it, Performing the *namāz* keeps a person on the path of morality, help him/her to retain a sense of moral self and through undergoing a cycle of committing sin and repentance try to practice moral self-cultivation. Having a sense of guilt itself could be considered proof of living morally, according to my interlocutors, since the feeling of guilt itself could be a step in the road of redemption and self-improvement. According to them, the feeling of guilt provides them with the sense that half of repentance has been accepted.

7.6 Reward-Seeking and Moral Cultivation: Sin and Ambivalence Towards Repentance and Forgiveness

As part of their pilgrimage, pilgrims usually engage in Jamkaran rituals to please the Hidden Imam. Because Jamkaran rituals are optional, pilgrims can seek more personal and intimate relationships with their Imam beyond the mandatory daily *namāz*. During this ritual, the pilgrim can reflect more individually and have a more spontaneous relationship with the Hidden Imam. There could be some uncommon encounters that could be experienced by the pilgrim during this ritual of *namāz*. I intend in this section to examine the ritual practices of *namāz* from the perspective of a participant in my study named Hosna. As I analyse this ritual practice, I will be demonstrating how the issues of sin, repentance, and forgiveness are redefined and interpreted by my interlocutors considering their perceptions of these matters and how the perceptions help them achieve a sense of moral self-improvement.

7.6.1 Hosna and the Redemptive Power of Good Deeds

The first time I asked Hosna about the reason for performing the Jamkaran ritual of *namāz*, she answered as follows:

I find reciting this *namāz* to be very rewarding. There is a need for me to recite this *namāz*. Eventually, I will be able to benefit from it at some point in the future. We all, indeed commit sins at some point in our lives. Nonetheless, I think that as long as we continue doing good deeds, eventually, one day, our rewards will be more than our sins, and as such, we will no longer need to worry about our sins.

In the *namāz*, Hosna states:

If I am fortunate, I feel that I'm close to the Hidden Imam, but it's very difficult to experience this state of closeness.

In the exceptional experiences of closeness to the Hidden Imam, the pilgrim may experience intense emotions as one puts his/her heart in front of the Hidden Imam. The way Hosna describes this encounter is as follows:

I cry when I feel that I am talking to him through *namāz*; it is like he is listening to me and accepting what I am saying to him. It makes me feel good to know that the Imam is pleased with me for my good deeds.

Following these explanations, I became curious as to whether or not Hosna experiences the same feelings during her daily prayers as well. She described the difference in the following way:

The daily prayer I do is good, but I have become accustomed to it because of repetition. However, this *namāz*, supplication and reading of the Qur'an are always new for me since they do not become habitual for me. My mood is good when I recite this *namāz*. I cry out of love and longing for the Imam. This means that I feel close to him and connected to him.

This feeling, according to Hosna, changes every time. As an example, she explained this difference to me as follows:

While performing this *namāz* some time ago, I was in such a good mood that I spent nearly half an hour in prostration and cried and spoke to the Imam in my heart. There was nothing I could do but keep my head down because I was in such a good mood. There was a sense in which I could see the Imam watching me and looking at me with satisfaction as I spoke. As a result, I found myself cut off from the rest of the world for a while. As I imagined myself before the Imam, I felt an overwhelming sense of humility. At that moment, I was filled with a sense of submission in all areas of my life. At that moment, I felt as if my sins had all been forgiven, and I had become lighter in heart. However, it is not always possible to achieve this feeling and inner state of *namāz* like this, but there will be different experiences every time, and this is a dynamic of this *namāz* for me.

In response to Hosnas' comment that it often seems difficult for her to attain a state of purity in her heart during every *namāz*, I asked her if she recited this *namāz* to repent of any particular sin. Her answer was as follows:

It is not enough for me to perform *namāz* simply to be forgiven. Instead, I want to be reunited with my Imam and, so I don't perform *namāz* to be forgiven only. As long as he pays attention to me, I will be pleased. There is nothing I would like more than to go to paradise. I believe that I need to do more good deeds in every aspect of my life.

As long as I am performing this *namāz*, I do not restrict myself to it, but in fact, I try to gain energy from it so that I can do more good deeds to please Mahdi so that I can be honoured with the opportunity to be with him either in this world when he appears or in the afterlife.

When Hosna considers the Mahdi's Advent, she ponders repentance and seeking forgiveness, but she believes the act of repentance and forgiveness does not satisfy her. As far as the Imam is concerned, either in this world or in the afterlife, she wants to be with him. This had certain consequences, such as motivating her to do more good deeds and living her life as a disciplined person. To add to her credit, she always needs to seek rewards and do good deeds. According to Hosna, although she tried hard to do good things, she was never aware of what sins she committed in the past, and this caused her anxiety due to having no knowledge of how much sin she committed in the past. The deep sense of guilt that she feels in her heart arises from the fact that every time she does something that she regrets, she feels the need to clean herself from sin through praying more and doing more good deeds as she believed:

Maybe I have committed too many sins. When I don't recite *namāz*, I feel my heart has become heavy and that my heart has become black in the absence of prayer.

According to Hosna, good deeds possess some kind of redemptive power which can remove sins from a person's life through their actions. Instead of avoiding sin and going through sincere repentance, Hosna seems to deal with her sinfulness with collecting rewards and doing more good actions. This strategy results from her approach to the matter of sinning and seeking repentance. As I was curious to know I asked her to clarify for me how she takes advantage of *namāz* and good deeds as rewarding practices to remove herself from sin. With the help of an example, Hosna explained to me how she handles doing good deeds and receiving rewards to eliminate sins:

I think of my sins as being like a container full of mud and dirt. The first way that can be done is to begin by removing the dirt and mud that is inside this container. When you remove some of this mud and dirt, this dish is still dirty. It should be noted that even after all this dirt has been removed, this dish is still dirty and needs to be cleaned and washed. Alternatively, you can start pouring water into this container full of mud and dirt as another way of cleaning it. As soon as this container is filled with water and overflows, the dirt and mud inside will begin to pour out, and the more water you pour into this container, the more rubbish will come out. This will gradually clean the container of dirt and

mud, and over a period of time, you will be able to see the water in the container becoming cleaner and clearer as you continue to do this. It is in the same way that I look at my sins.

Using this example, instead of focusing on avoiding sins, Hosna focuses on collecting rewards by performing *namāz* and doing good deeds as a way to remove her sin:

My experience has taught me that I can't repent of all my sins simultaneously. There are many small and big sins that I have committed in my life. Hence, even if I wanted to repent from each of these sins individually, my vessel would still be dirty because of other sins within it. thus, after repenting of my sin, instead of focusing on avoiding sin altogether, I prefer to recite *namāz* and do more good deeds. I use *namāz* and good deeds (reward collection) as a means to remove sin from my life when I have committed one. Eventually, my good deeds outweigh my sins, and I will be transformed by the good works that I have done.

Hosna's effort is not only limited to collecting rewards but also extends to leaving everything that causes her to lose doing good deeds and collecting rewards to protect all of the rewards that have already been collected. Rather than grappling with the nature of her sins or avoiding wrongdoings, her struggle is more about the thoughts and actions that prevent her from doing good deeds and collecting rewards. She says she is motivated to go beyond the call of duty to protect her reward by avoiding thoughts that could undermine her good deeds. It is a habit for Hosna to ask the Imam every day to forgive her without thinking of a specific sin to avoid the possibility of what could be considered sins that she does not know about. As a result of the fear that she is being driven by, she just wants to make sure that she has asked forgiveness from the Hidden Imam and has mentioned every possible sin that she might commit. Hosna's fear of sinning comes from the thought that she will lose out on self-reward if she sins. Hosna's willingness to abandon sin to avoid losing reward is what leads her to reject wrong thoughts and to abandon sin. She believes:

Whenever I encounter a wrong thought or a sinful act that may lead me to lose the reward, I reject those thoughts and actions.

Another reason why Hosna has been diligent in collecting rewards as a way to erase her sins is the doubt she is experiencing regarding the forgiveness she has been able to achieve through her repentance. She believes that there is no way she will ever be sure whether she is forgiven of her sins or not. As a result of this uncertainty in believing in forgiveness, she remains stable in doing good deeds and collecting rewards to remove her sins as well as cultivating her moral self. Because of her persevering desire for true

repentance, she constantly seeks forgiveness from the Imam and hopes that the Imam will show mercy towards her. Despite the fact that Hosna's hope and her constant efforts to be redeemed and forgiven never turn into certainty, only at the time when Mahdi finally arrives or at the time when doomsday hits will Hosna know if she has been forgiven or not.

Hosna has had a challenging time receiving forgiveness in her life that is still unresolved, which has kept her caught between a long-lasting and profound sense of guilt and a strong hope of receiving forgiveness. In addition to the fact that her repentance does not necessarily signify the forgiveness of a specific sin, it implies that it has an impact directly on her imagination of the Advent period, or the Last day, her final home. The only time she will know whether her repentance has been accepted and her sins have been forgiven will be in these final days of her life when she will know the final destination of her life. For her, it is impossible to have self-evidence of God's forgiveness, which could release her from the sense of guilt that she acquired for years and years during her lifetime. Therefore, as she cannot detect her position in the Imam's mind or the afterlife, she disciplines herself to live morally. She describes this doubt as follows:

There is still a lot of uncertainty in my heart as to whether my repentance has been accepted or whether I have been forgiven. I will discover this in the end [the doomsday or the Advent]. When I repent, I am unsure to what extent my repentance has washed away my sins, and I am also not sure whether or not I have been forgiven because of my repentance. Because there is a possibility that you might repent, but it may not be accepted by God. Therefore, the sign that I have been accepted for my repentance and the evidence that I have been forgiven is the fact that I would be able to go to paradise and that I would be with my Imam either in this world or in the afterlife. As far as I am concerned, this is a true definition of repentance and forgiveness of sins that I am trying to achieve through collecting rewards.

This ambivalent feeling towards true repentance and forgiveness has another invaluable impact in Hosna's moral self-fashioning. She took the opportunity to look positively at her feelings of doubt regarding sincerity of her repentance, in the midst of uncertainty and excitement accompanied by great hope on their part. This feeling of uncertainty and doubt is considered by Hosna to be a motivating force that keeps her holding on to the path and hoping in the future to keep her going. To her, doubt has caused her to keep monitoring herself and keep repeating the ritual practice.

According to her, if she is sure she has repented truly and that her sins have been forgiven, then it will be more difficult for her to remain committed to the duty of not committing sins and doing good deeds as she would like. She believes that if she feels confident about her forgiveness, she might commit more sins as a result of this feeling of confidence:

Because I am not sure if my sins have been forgiven or not and what my status is with the Imam, [she believes] I will continue to repent of my sins and obtain rewards by not knowing whether they have been forgiven.

The doubts and uncertainty she feel about her repentance and the amount of sin she has committed cause her to repent and do good deeds constantly. Relying on the idea that being certain about forgiveness might lead her to be entirely dependent on the Imam and not do her part in submission to the law, meaning that she might be motivated to commit more sins as a result. As can also be seen in her statements:

I always doubt my repentance no matter what. In fact, I don't know whether my repentance will be accepted or not. Due to this, I always duplicate it and do more good deeds to achieve more rewards. This is a good thing for me. I am at least doing something. If I knew I had already been forgiven, even if I had no intention of committing any more sin, there would still be the possibility that I might not be able to collect more rewards since I had been certain about accepting my repentance. So, when I am uncertain as to whether my repentance will be accepted, I feel closer to the Imam, and I hope in His favour more. When I am not sure, I can only hope in him!

As a result, Hosna gives credit to her doubt since it helps her not rely heavily on the favour of the Imam, which might lead to her being proud and reliant on him, thereby neglecting her duties or committing more sin. However, she is grateful for this hope since it does not leave her in the very pit of despair, and she is convinced that it will count toward her in the afterlife when she stands before God. While there is no inner evidence of forgiveness, Hosna attempts to hold on to a more tangible hope, namely that of doing good deeds, to balance the uncertainty and lack of inner self-evidence regarding forgiveness. In the interest of avoiding sin, she said:

I repeat my pilgrimage, recite this *namāz* and engage in helping people and doing good deeds in order to get rewards.

By enhancing good deeds, Hosna is able to eradicate sins and bad deeds in her lives by allowing good actions to replace bad deeds. Taking care of the poor, reciting the daily prayer at the appointed time, participating in charitable works, repeating the pilgrimage to Jamkaran, along with performing the *namāz* of the Imam is all of the

activities which will reduce Hosna's sins and increase her good deeds. By performing the *namāz* and doing good deeds, Hosna can remove her sense of guilt without facing the nature of her sins directly.

To conclude, Hosna can experience repentance and forgiveness through the ritual of *namāz* and the communicative functions it provides to connect Hosna to the Imam. when she keeps looking for a more effective tool to calm her worries about her sins, she performs this *namāz* to help ease her anxieties as she cannot state or evaluate how effective her repentance is at offering her true purification from her sins. The pilgrimage to Jamkaran and the ritual practices associated with it, which mediates her relationship with the Hidden Imam, provides her with these tools. Following this ritual practice, she believes a good deed will be counted as a bonus when an evil deed is cancelled. The result is that she engages in an endless challenge and continuous effort to cultivate morality through collecting good deeds, stating that to be successful in life, she must do more good deeds. Thus, Hosna replaces her need for certainty whether the Imam is pleased with her, or he will forgive her by simply trusting the Imam's mercy and her reputation of good deeds as a reward. Although there is no guarantee that she will be with the Hidden Imam when he appears or reaches paradise, her good deeds and her belief in the mercy of the Imam do provide her with a sense of hope that helps her cope with the worry of her guilt in life. According to her, the good deeds she has performed do provide her with that sense of hope. She believes that repentance and good deeds complement one another.

7.7 Retaining a Sense of Moral Self: Persistency in Sin and Consistency in Repentance

I find Vahid's perspective regarding the subjects of sin and repentance and the meaning he perceives from the *namāz* quite different from other interlocutors such as Hosna. A visit to the Jamkaran Mosque is not necessarily an opportunity to gain a deeper knowledge of Vahid's religion but rather a chance to separate and disengage himself from the sins and pollutions inherent to daily life that bother him. The act of going to the Mosque and taking part in its rituals provides him with the opportunity to repent of his sins, whatever they may be, and to start anew so that the rest of his life can be spent in peace. For Vahid, the temptations and the power of sins are still strong, and the only way to curb these temptations and reduce the psychological pressure caused by committing sins is by coming to the Mosque and participating in its rituals. As a result, for Vahid, performing the ritual of *namāz* of the Hidden Imam is a means

to obtain peace as well as get rid of his sense of guilt, moral blame and retain a sense of moral self.

Vahid was introduced to me by another of my interlocutors who worked with me on my project. When he and I met for lunch, he brought Vahid along with him. As Vahid lived in Qom and his house was close to the Mosque, it made it easier for him to reach the Mosque. He worked in a private company outside of Qom and was a single man. It was his parents who introduced Vahid to Shi'i Islam in a general sense and Imam Zaman in a more specific sense. According to him, he learned his religion from his parents, who are traditional Muslims. The high emphasis his parents placed on *shari'a* laws and Islamic rules had resulted in Vahid paying a great deal of attention to the Islamic laws and rules. When I asked him about his approach to Shi'i Islam, he explained that he saw it as a comprehensive system of rules and regulations. The set of rules and regulations governing religion were what he had learned from his parents as traditional Muslims. When I asked Vahid about his perception of sin and sense of guilt, he replied in the following manner:

Whenever you violate one of the *shari'a* laws, in my opinion, you are sinning. Therefore, whenever I do something, I check it with the *shari'a* law so I can determine whether it is defined as a sin by those laws or not. Because I believe in the *shari'a* law.

After these explanations, I asked him about his opinion on wrong thoughts. In response, he said:

In law, a sin is a type of action considered a sin whenever you commit it according to the law. As a result, I believe that thoughts are not sinful until they are turned into actions.

Having said that, I asked him if he felt guilty for having wrong thoughts in the first place. Upon hearing this, he replied:

That's not the case at all! Having wrong thoughts does not make me feel guilty in any way. To assess and determine the feeling of guilt itself, the *shari'a* laws must be consulted.

According to Vahid, his sense of guilt stems from the fact that he has committed acts forbidden by Islamic law. Therefore, in his view, sin is defined by the laws of the *shari'a* rather than by the "feeling of guilt" or other feeling that the sin is committed. The result of this, as he stated, is that when he commits an act of wrongdoing that, according to the *shari'a* law, is regarded as a sin, he feels guilty about it. Consequently, for Vahid, virtue was the ability to follow the rules and regulations of the *shari'a* and to break these rules and regulations was meant to sin. Thus, he does not identify the

nature of his sin in a direct relational context with the Hidden Imam or God. but he explores them within the context of the *shari'a* law.

Vahid, however, found it extremely difficult to comply with the strict moral and religious rules and regulations. As a young man, Vahid faced a lot of temptations and sins in the course of his daily life, and as a result, he had to deal with many temptations. He experienced a lot of guilt in the aftermath of having been tempted by internal temptations and having committed a sin that was considered to have broken the rules and laws of the *shari'a*. Among the ways to overcome his feeling of guilt caused by breaking the rules of the *shari'a* and to reduce the moral blame that came as a result of doing so was to attend the Mosque and take part in the ritualised activities associated with it. To repent from sins, to get rid of his feelings of guilt and to achieve tranquillity, Vahid performed the *namāz*, one of the most important rites of Jamkaran Mosque, which was established as a means for communing with the Imam. He conducted the *namāz* to refute sins, to get rid of his feeling of guilt and to achieve tranquillity.

It is important to note that though Vahid considered religion as a set of rules and laws, he was still able to use his own opinion to interpret the ritual practice of *namāz*, and to interpret the meaning he drew from this Islamic ritual act. It is interesting to note how Vahid's approach to *namāz* and how he performs this ritual shows that the belief that religion is a set of rules and regulations does not prevent him from rethinking and understanding the ritual practice on his own terms. In one of our first conversations about the ritual practice of *namāz*, Vahid explained his approach to it in the following manner:

First, the *namāz* that people do is not to be recited because it is not mentioned in the Qur'an that you should recite *namāz*, but that you should "perform" [adā/eqāma] the *namāz*. There is not a single word about "reciting" [*khandan*] praying in the Qur'an. If the *namāz* was supposed to be recited, you should look at the *namāz* of Prophet Moses and the prayer of Jesus, their relationship with God was completely different. It was not at all in the form of the *namāz* we do right now. This means that the *namāz* is not to be recited but needs to be performed. It means you cannot just recite a series of Arabic words and call it *namāz*. In my opinion, prayer is a metaphysical issue. It is a matter of the heart. It is not something that you can shape with concrete words; if you shape it, it will go out of its original state. It loses its sense of communication. I recite this *namāz* to communicate with the Imam of the time, while the Arabic words we recite in this *namāz* are Qur'anic verses related to God. So, the words are not

important for me at all, but my heart relationship with the Imam, which makes the meaning of my *namāz*, is of important. When I perform this *namāz*, I imagine myself in front of the Imam and in my heart, I talk to the Imam in my own language. Although I recite the Arabic words with my mouth, but my heart is talking with another language with the Imam from behind these words. I always think about my sins and seek forgiveness.

During these explanations, I asked Vahid if he actually comprehends the inner state that happens in *namāz*, and I asked if he could feel the purity of his heart when performing prayer. Vahid responded:

Getting to that inner state of heart is something that I believe is very difficult. As far as I can tell, I haven't succeeded so far. It is only through complete abandonment of sin that you will be able to achieve that inner state. The question that arises in my mind is, what will happen to me if I have not yet wholly renounced sin? I do not consider myself to be an idealist. The only thing I know for sure is that I am guilty, and I am looking for a solution to get rid of them.

As I was curious to know the reason behind Vahid's continued performance of *namāz* even though he has not reached the state of purity within himself, I asked him when you still do not achieve the state of purity within yourself, is it enjoyable for you to pray? He replied:

No, I don't necessarily enjoy the *namāz* itself. It is mostly to apologise for my sins that I perform it. I can honestly say that performing *namāz* itself does not give me pleasure. Nevertheless, after the *namāz*, because I have apologised, I feel less guilty about my sinful actions as a result of having apologised, and as a result, I am more relaxed.

In response to my question about whether my interlocutors felt joy after repenting, Vahid, for example, replied,

I cannot feel joy; a sinful person cannot experience joy; after reciting *namāz* and repenting, I do experience comfort, but not joy.

Although Vahid regrets the fact that he was not able to experience the inner state of the heart when he recites the *namāz* as well as he cannot gain pleasure during the performance of the *namāz* or experience joy after *namāz*, he still believes that reciting this *namāz* will help him to alleviate the sense of guilt and fear he feels. In addition to the issue of not enjoying the *namāz* and the difficulty he has in reaching the state of pure heart inside himself, Vahid's practice of *namāz* also does not prevent him from repeating the same sins regularly. The reason for doing this repetition in performing

this *namāz* has been explained to me by Vahid, even though it will not result in him refraining from committing sins:

Even though I keep on committing sins, the act of reciting this *namāz* gives me the feeling that I have repented, and my sins have been forgiven. My feeling of repentance and forgiveness is kept alive in me because of this. It is this *namāz* that I recite every time I commit a sin. Even though I don't reach that inner state when I recite this *namāz*, I am aware that I have apologized for my actions. In the future when the Imam appears and I can see him, or if I pass away and they put the file of my deeds before me, I will say that it is true that I have not completely avoided sin, but I have apologized for all the sins I have committed during my lifetime. This is certainly different. As soon as the report of my action reaches the Imam every week, he will see that I have apologized if I have committed a sin. So, when I am persistent on committing sin, I try to be consistent in repenting and asking forgiveness.

As Vahid's experience tells us, even though the recitation of the *namāz* would not result in true repentance, it would at least reduce the feeling of moral blame that he has in his existence and would maintain the sense of goodness within him. During *namāz*, Vahid was more focused on his guilt and fear than on the recitation of *namāz*, and because of this level of concentration, he lost the sense of pleasure and credit that would normally accompany *namāz*. His loss of pleasure during *namāz* could be attributed to his view of the *namāz* as a tool for getting rid of his guilt and fear. Despite the fact that true repentance was not achieved by altogether avoiding sin in his view, *namāz* reduced his sense of guilt and inner fear:

When I come to the Mosque, everything is fine, I feel peace, I experience feeling of repentance, but when I go back to everyday life, this feeling changes in me.

According to Vahid, true repentance is not a result of emotions or feelings but rather something governed by the *shari'a* Law. He clarifies that "the *shari'a* law has conditions that explain what it takes to repent and ask for forgiveness; I follow them." While Islam may acknowledge that these two aspects are essential, the heart and the law, he does not feel entirely sure whether the quality of his repentance will be sufficient as he cannot wholly avoid sin but repeat his act of repentance.

In addition to the fear and suffering that Vahid experiences from his own sense of guilt because of the sins that he has committed, he also views his sense of guilt from a somewhat positive perspective. As he points out, feeling guilty can contribute to the cultivation of morality. He considers the feeling of guilt as forming half of the process

of his spiritual healing and, therefore, realises that this is the meaning of the acceptance of half of his repentance. In explanation of his sense of guilt, he said:

My sense of guilt is a very important signal that I need to pay attention to. It means that my heart is still alive and is warning me. This warning is the first step in repentance, in my opinion, and it means that I can be saved. The process could take some time, however. I am glad to feel it in my heart. This means that I am on the path, but I am still struggling with my sins.

Performing the ritual of *namāz* plays a significant role in Vahid's life in two major ways. As a result of performing this *namāz* and apologising through it, Vahid would reach the point when he would be able to overcome his sense of guilt and lessen the moral blame that would have resulted from sinning. Reciting *namāz*, on the other hand, had a profound effect on preserving his sense of moral self since it was a reaction to feeling guilty, which Vahid regarded as a sign that half of his repentance had been accepted and that the process of inner healing had begun. The result of this is that, while true repentance does not occur with the complete abandonment of sin, the feeling of guilt that led to the performance of *namāz* for forgiveness meant that he did not lose his sense of moral self as a result.

7.8 Wrong Thoughts and Sense of Guilt: Reciting More *Namāz* as a Technique for Moral Self-Cultivation

Depending on how my interlocutors perceive sins, their use of *namāz* as a technology of the self and the various methods they employ to repent are influenced by such perception. In this section, I will discuss the views of Elnaz, one of my interlocutors, whom I introduced in the chapter on temporality, concerning the ritual of *namāz*, sin, and repentance. There seems to be a difference between Elnaz's approach to sin and the meaning she perceives from the performance of *namāz* compared to the perspectives of the other interlocutors, such as Vahid and Hosna.

While thinking of the Imam's forgiveness, Elnaz's mind seems filled with conflicting and unresolved thoughts, as well as emotions of hope, despair, and good and bad deeds representing her past and future. Through her experience of losing her son suddenly and experiencing the fear she experienced during his death, she views her life in relation to the Imam. It has become her life's commitment to please the Hidden Imam and obey him as much as possible, hoping that in his mercy, he will allow her to experience the post-Advent period and to go to paradise without stopping by Hell. Having a fear of Advent or the coming of doomsday, which takes away a person's

opportunity and, in the case of sin, a person will become regretful about what she had done, made Elnaz steadfast in the process of repenting from the sins and the wrong thoughts she had had. My interlocutors hope that by reciting the *namāz* they will be able to reach the inner state of genuine repentance and try to identify evidence which might enhance their tangible experiences of such repentance. Elnaz measures the proof of her repentance by stopping sinful acts and wrong thoughts.

As a result of the sudden death of her son, Mehran, she has begun to push her behaviours and actions more towards the afterlife. Having such a lack has a profound effect on her self-improvement process for her to improve her future morally on a deeper level. A visit to Jamkaran at least twice in a month is bound to become a necessary experience for Elnaz. She believes that this keeps her always connected to the Imam. As Elnaz continually envisions herself in the future, participating in Jamkaran rituals is a way for her to build the near and distant futures (the Advent and the resurrection) that she constantly focuses on. For Elnaz, the ritual of *namāz* of Imam Zaman is more than just a bodily technique that she uses to perform the rituals of the Jamkaran Mosque regularly. Instead, by performing this *namāz*, she can cleanse her inner capacity from sin, fight against wrong thoughts and temptations, and preserve her virtue. In response to my question about her experience reciting this *namāz*, she told me the following:

In my opinion, anything that is done without feeling good and under compulsion is useless. To perform *namāz* with good feeling, I always look for the meaning of the things I say during the *namāz* even though it is not only the apparent meaning that I am looking for, but also my interpretation of it that makes me feel good. For example, in this *namāz*, I recite a hundred times that “I worship you, and I ask for your help”. Many people do not know the meaning of this sentence at all. Whenever I come to this sentence, “I only worship you and I only ask for your help,” which I must repeat to a hundred times, I feel the birth of many feelings that are engulfing my heart. Every time I say it, I feel a different feeling as if I have experienced something new. I feel it is like a person is able to talk to the Imam for a hundred times. Whenever I utter this sentence a hundred times, I feel as if I am talking to Imam in my heart. I used to list all the wrong thoughts, sins, and fears that I have, and I recite this *namāz* when this verse comes up, and when I come to the sentence [I only worship you, and I ask you for your help] in my heart, I imagine one of these wrong thoughts and sinful acts that I already listed and I ask the Imam for forgiveness and help every time I repeat this sentence. So I enjoy every word of it and I have a plan for how I intend to use it. I recall bad thoughts,

fears, and sins in my heart when I repeat this phrase a hundred times, for example. I present my wishes in *qonūt*³⁴, and in *Sajdeh* [prostration], I ask the Imam's favour to protect my faith and piety for the long run. For each part of the *namāz*, I have my own strategies that I use each time I do it. In this way, I feel good about *namāz* and do it with enthusiasm.

Contrary to other interlocutors such as Vahid who not consider the meaning of words during the performance of the ritual of *namāz*, Elnaz's practice of *namāz* serve 'as a vehicle for conveying many different meanings' (Haeri, 2013: 24-25). Elnaz's description of her *namāz* demonstrate that the verses are being moved away from purely denotational significance. As a result, when she utters the verses, she creates a presence and meaning in the words that transforms her into a space of co-presence with the Hidden Imam. Using the divine's words to express what she wants; she co-exists with the Hidden Imam in the very words she owns within her heart (ibid). As a result of Elnaz's dynamic way of performing *namāz*, her prayer is much deeper, better, and more effective than that of any other interlocutors.

When Elnaz described her attitude towards the ritual of *namāz* to me, she explained to me in her own words the function and meaning that she attributed to this special *namāz* in the following way:

The ritual of *namāz* for me function as a way to request Imam to heal my inward pollutions, to forgive my sins and to improve my virtue. I believe it is not the glory of the Imam that the paralyzed or the blind are healed and that diseases are cured. The healing that is requested from the Imam should be related to the healing of our heart and soul. As a matter of fact, we should ask the Imam for help in healing the pollution of heart and soul. It is this work that the Imam is responsible for. I believe that the real appeal is for us to ask the Imam to heal our hearts so that our hearts can be cleaned. In the same way, our words, deeds, and thoughts should mirror what Imam says, does, and thinks as well. this should be the real function and meaning of *namāz*. this *namāz* make people close to the Imam.

Elnaz considered her biggest challenge in life to achieve this inner and spiritual healing. In her *namāz*, she constantly asked the Hidden Imam to help her improve herself. She felt that her sins bothered her, and she felt sad when she could not make spiritual progress. For Elnaz, performance of this *namāz* have a function in dealing with sins, but at the same time it is considered sinful when they are not (or not

³⁴ This is an extra prayer that entails raising the practitioner's hands toward the heavens and saying a short prayer.

adequately) performed. Elnaz's view on the nature of sin and the role of *namāz* in achieving a state of true repentance may be partially characterized by this statement. I find that Elnaz holds a strict view regarding the process of sin and repentance, contrary to other interlocutors. It is not only true that she considers sin as committing a sinful act, but at the same time, she also fights against her wrong thoughts that cause her to feel guilty as well. In addition to all this, she believes that she feels guilty when some time goes by, and she is unable to perform the *namāz* of the Imam or when she must postpone her religious duties such as daily prayers for some reason:

I always struggle with my wrong thought. I believe they are source of my failure in doing my religious duties and doing *mustahab* actions. In the event that I fail to perform this *namāz* and other supplications I have been including in my routine life for some time, it will cause me a lot of anxiety and make me feel guilty. I try to be attentive to my religious duties as well. when sometimes they are being postponed, I feel guilty.

The answers Elnaz gave reflect the desire she had to always keep herself clean before the Imam at all times, and to ask forgiveness through reciting the *namāz* to make sure she had asked forgiveness for any possible sin she might have committed. When I asked her how she realizes whether the Imam will accept her repentance, she states that:

If I am enjoying the *namāz*, I consider it to be authentic, and I feel as if my repentance has been accepted by the Imam. In the event that I don't enjoy it, I consider it a sign of the blackness in my heart, which has become heavy with the burden of my sins. Therefore, I repeat the *namāz* and recite extra *rak'ats*. For me, the fact that I do not get the same feeling of pleasure and happiness during *namāz* has two important meanings. The first is that I am still a sinner, and my repentance has not been accepted, and the second is that the Imam is not satisfied with the *namāz* that I have performed.

Contrary to Vahid and Hosna's approach, Elnaz strives more to fight against her wrong thoughts and discipline herself in doing her *vājeb* (obligatory) and *mostahab* religious duties, in which laziness in practising them causes her to feel guilty. The ritual practice of *namāz* represents for her a means to implement her personal strategies and techniques to make ritual meaningful and a means to seek forgiveness from sins that can be hoped that they will be absolved if pleasure is experienced during the performance of the ritual. Thus, she measures the proof of her repentance by stopping the sinful acts and wrong thoughts.

As Elnaz's account in the passage above demonstrates, the practice of *namāz* is clearly a technology that can be applied to obtain and improve moral competencies by repeating the ritual act of recitation. Furthermore, the unique strategies she formulates to transform *namāz* from an act of worship to one of a state of the heart demonstrate to the reader that the *namāz* is achieved through a series of disciplinary tactics that create its own state. In other words, a tactic is both the cause and the result of moral action. Her techniques were aimed at battling against wrong thoughts and sinful acts, and as a result, she was motivated to practice more prayer as a result of fighting against these thoughts and acts. *namāz* is, therefore a ritual act that takes place for the purpose of repenting from sins, achieving the consent of the Imam and also for the purposes of playing a part in the formation of a pious self as well. As is evident in Elnaz's discussion on the significant aspects of the ritual of *namāz*, one of its primary functions is to enable pilgrims to be capable of protecting virtuous behaviour by means of transforming their daily actions towards virtuous behaviour.

7.9 Conclusion

The essence of reciting *namāz* for most pilgrims I encountered during my fieldwork was centred around conscious concentration on their personal relationship with the Hidden Imam. In this way, pilgrims were taught that the practice of *namāz*, along with the communicative aspect associated with it, can cleanse the practitioners' hearts of any sins that might prevent a direct line of communication between them and the Imam. Although my interlocutors' ritual practices may not necessarily flourish internally, and they may not even result in true repentance or sin avoidance, they will still enact the ritual practice of *namāz* because they feel as if it provides them with the opportunity to stay on the path of piety as well as fulfilling their needs. I believe that the ritual of *namāz* within the Mosque is not only a bodily technique to avoid sinning, but it is also a technique of the self to instil a sense of moral identity, reduce moral blame and strengthen the desire to be good. By observing this ritual, I can understand how Twelver Shi'i pilgrims relate with the Hidden Imam: what moves them and what they hope to obtain.

It is evident from what I have discussed in this chapter that my interlocutors hold different views about sin and the methods and tactics by which they can make *namāz* meaningful for repentance and asking for forgiveness from others. My interlocutors hope that by reciting the *namāz* they will be able to reach the inner state of genuine

repentance and try to identify evidence which might enhance their tangible experiences of such repentance. It seems that since my interlocutors are uncertain of their true repentance and its role in preventing them from committing sins, they can also not confront and resolve their uncertainty. Therefore, they wait in hope and attempt to improve themselves relentlessly, although they fail in their trial. The perception of sin among my interlocutors as an act of disobedience is particularly pronounced when wrong actions are compared with wrong thoughts.

When it comes to wrong thoughts, Vahid does not treat them in the same way as wrong actions. He solely considers wrong actions as sins, but Elnaz's sense of guilt results from different reasons. She not only tries to avoid sinful actions but also fights wrong thoughts. Not being able to perform good deeds such as her religious duties or performing the *namāz* of the Imam generates a feeling of guilt in her heart and motivates her to self-improvement. For some of my interlocutors, true repentance is achieved through feeling and emotions (Elnaz), and for others, it is not just a feeling but also a legal act (Vahid). For example, for Vahid, true repentance is not a result of emotions or feelings but rather something governed by the *shari'a* Law. While Islam may acknowledge that these two aspects are important, the heart and the law, he does not feel entirely sure whether the quality of his repentance will be sufficient as he cannot completely avoid sin but repeat his act of repentance. For Hosna, however, performing the *namāz* serves as an alternative means of compensating for bad behaviour; one can collect rewards for "good" behaviour that will help in the future. There are many ways to do this, such as taking care of the poor, reciting the daily prayer at the appointed time, participating in charitable works, repeating the pilgrimage to Jamkaran, along with performing the *namāz* of the Imam are all activities which will reduce Hosna's sins and increase her good deeds. Hosna and Elnaz use different methods and techniques to manage the tension caused by their sin. For Hosna, it is becoming extremely difficult to know if her repentance is genuine or not. Thus, she prefers to invest her hope in the Imam's forgiveness and postpone everything to the distant future as a motivating factor for actions and collecting more rewards. Elnaz, however, states that when she is uncertain about whether the Imam will accept her repentance, she repeats the action.

Chapter 8: Messianic Aspirations and Self-Relocation in Time: Envisioning the Near Future Temporal Horizon

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the messianic temporality and how this temporal assumption creates the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims' model of time to provide a better image of my interlocutors' moral improvement project. I will demonstrate how this messianic temporality provides my interlocutors with a model of time that places them continuously in a state of messianic attentiveness in which every action plays an essential role in facilitating the Mahdi's Advent. As a result of this temporal assumption and the conceptualisation of true *entezār*, my interlocutors are provided with an understanding of time that generates a strong motivation through the manifestation of a phenomenon of Omid (hope) for the future. Throughout this section, I explore the connections between self-fashioning and temporalities or my interlocutors' perceptions and perspectives of time. Based on my interlocutors' responses, I attempt to demonstrate in this paper that the Shi'i messianic perceptions and practices resulting from the Jamkaran pilgrimage play a prominent role in creating two interrelated yet coexisting temporal orientations. Specifically, the focus is on the relationship between the self and the Hidden Imam in the immediate present, along with the imaginative processes by which my interlocutors can craft themselves through envisioning the near future temporal horizon (i.e. the Advent of the Mahdi).

8.2 Messianic Temporality: the Twelver Shi'i Pilgrims' Model of Time

In Islam, eschatology is concerned with the afterlife and the Last Day. Accordingly, Islamic eschatology has a linear perspective. This means that from birth to death, everyone has a unique and linear experience of life, and while the entire universe moves from a unique point of creation to the End Time (i.e. the Last Day), each person also follows the same linear path day (Donner, 2017: 759). The linear approach suggests that everyone has a single life, and the outcome of their life after death is directly associated with the choices they make every day (ibid: 759). The focus of this perspective is mainly based on life after death, which determines the position of believers in that world based on the judgments of their behaviour and actions in the world of the material. It should be noted that Islamic eschatology is a future-oriented

doctrine since it predicts events (such as the Last Day, which is supposed to take place at the End of Time) that are expected to occur in the future. As a result of such a linear eschatology, the future is generally considered to be far away in terms of its temporal dimensions. The future is not tangible and cannot be forecasted, but is taken as a phenomenon that will take place one day. The Last Day is believed to be the end of the world by Muslims, but this apocalyptic event is imagined in a distant future and cannot be predicted. This eschatological event that will occur in the distant future cannot be accelerated or delayed by believers because it is based on God's command and decree. However, within Shi'i messianic tradition, this eschatological approach includes not only the Resurrection itself but also the events that occur before the resurrection, which include the Advent of the Mahdi as the apocalyptic saviour (Amanat, 2009: 41). In the Islamic Shi'i tradition, however, the Advent of the Mahdi should be seen as a symbolic shift in time that add a cyclical character to the former linear approach (Ghaemmaghami, 2017: 635).

It has been argued in Chapter One of this thesis that the recent reinterpretation of Shi'i eschatology involves human agency in the process of accelerating/delaying the Mahdi's Advent. This reinterpretation of the eschatological understanding of the Advent of the Mahdi depicted in traditional and classical Shi'i texts in the distant future has been transformed into a "teleological" understanding of the imminent Advent of the Mahdi in the near future (Rokhsefat, 2020). Consequently, the depiction of the Mahdi's Advent as taking place in the near future has brought about changes in time and space, which require the agency of humans to accelerate or delay the Advent of the Mahdi, in addition to waiting for him to return. As a result of this imminent prospect of the Mahdi's return, the flow of time and space, actions and thoughts are constantly manipulated by prophecies of imminence. With this emphasis on the imminence of returning, the concept of eschatology finds the potential to be flexible when it comes to temporality since it describes it as an imminent and terminating future that is discontinuous, which means that it is capable of happening at any moment and challenges continuity in the present. As a result of this shift in the depiction of the Advent from being in abeyance to that of imminent Advent, the Advent becomes an exhilarating event for Shi'ites and inspires feelings of hope, enthusiasm and aspiration (ibid: 3).

This messianic euphoria is sustained by prophecies that are simultaneously "imminent and indeterminate," making it imperative to prepare for the impending apocalypse

leading up to the Advent of the Savior (Bromley, 1997: 36). Using this new understanding of the Mahdi's Advent and the apocalypse, the Shi'i community can construct a new model of time within which emphasis is placed on the near future and the imminent End of Time, which places the pilgrims within temporal liminality to be *montazer* for the Mahdi's Advent at every moment. In this temporal model, the present moment becomes a gateway to the future in which the End of Time is imminent (ibid). As a result of such a situation, the believers find themselves in a temporal liminality where the present is on the verge of an end and, at the same time, the future has not yet appeared. Due to this temporal liminality, individuals think that they are standing on the edge of time (ibid). There should, therefore, be an active response to bring about or, at the very least, prepare for the imminent apocalyptic future. Various active responses or exercises of human agency can be used to bring about the End of Time (see Chapter One and Chapter Three). My interlocutors' messianic expectations involve shifts in forms of subjectification that result in the reorientation of the self forward in time (Liberatore, 2013). Hence, the Twelver Shi'i pilgrims' projects of self-fashioning are energised by temporal hope. As a consequence of this temporality, my interlocutors are careful to avoid sins that might delay the Advent of the Mahdi and keep them suffering forever. In this model of time, believers are expected to keep the Imam's memory alive in their hearts at all times and to display a pious discipline of continuous self-improvement to speed up his Advent.

Two types of *entezārs* are differentiated from one another within the framework of this temporality: the negative and the constructive *entezār*. Negative *entezār*, which are always rejected by preachers, are passive expectations accompanied by feelings of despair and depression which will gradually distance people from the love of the saviour, one step at a time. Constructive *entezār*, on the other hand, which is always promoted, is considered an active *entezār*, which serves as a commitment to society to prepare the ground for the return of the Mahdi. As a result, those thoroughly convinced that the Mahdi is on the way must pay careful attention to every moment and believe that his Advent is imminent. There is no doubt that the more a *montazer* wishes the Mahdi to manifest himself quickly, the more they should focus constructively on practising the true *entezār* to attain this aim. As soon as the followers of the Mahdi begin counting down the moments until his Advent and can see that the Mahdi's Advent is not far off, the love of the Mahdi begins to flourish in their hearts. The characteristic of *entezār*, as discussed in Chapter Five, is rooted in human nature,

and for this reason, it is considered a moral virtue that a person should cultivate by inculcating other good morals and achieving spiritual growth. In other words, the virtue of *entezār* is not institutionalised in human existence unless its moral foundations are established (see Chapter Five).

I believe that this temporal assumption, which results from the conceptualisation of true *entezār*, forms my interlocutors' understanding of time, which develops a strong motivation through the manifestation of a phenomenon of Omid for the future. A future that is portrayed as utopian, to give direction and meaning to their dispositions in the light of Omid for a better future. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that my interlocutors' self-fashioning is significantly affected by the future (more than the present or the past). As a portal to the future, however, the present can serve as an essential arena for individuals to prepare for the future by leading good Shi'i lives. Therefore, the discontinuous nature of the present, coupled with the imminence of the near future (i.e. the Advent), stimulates my interlocutors' moral projects.

There is another aspect of this view of time that is related to the fact that the future will become disconnected from the present at some point (Robbins, 2004). Shi'i messianic discursive tradition holds that no one can pinpoint precisely the time and hour at which the Mahdi will make his second coming and that no specific circumstances in the present can cause or force his second coming. It is crucial to mention that the Advent of the Mahdi can be accelerated, but it cannot be forced. It is evident, in this sense, that the Mahdi's Advent could take place at any time. However, there is no specific date set for it, and no action can be taken to force it to happen. Shi'i preachers frequently proclaim the famous hadith that no one knows the exact time or hour of the Advent of the Mahdi. Even the Hidden Imam himself does not know the time of his Advent. According to the famous Hadith narrated by the Fourth Shi'i Imam: "Those that specify times lie (*kadhaba al-waqqātūn*)- repeated three times" (Cook, 2002: 195).

Additionally, another highly influential hadith is attributed to Prophet Mohammad, as follows: "The Advent of the Mahdi is similar to the Last Day, which can only be revealed by God at the appointed time, except that it occurs to you [human beings] suddenly." (Sadūq, 2020:63). The word "sudden" in this hadith suggests that the Mahdi's Advent occurs when it is not expected to happen, and people generally do not prepare for and expect it. According to this hadith, the Second Coming will interrupt the present completely spontaneously (Robbins, 2004). Due to this discontinuity, Shi'i

pilgrims come to believe that everyone must always be ready for the day of the Mahdi's Advent since one cannot predict when it will occur. Thus, this gives them an even greater motivation to utilise the present as an opportunity for moral improvement (Robbins, 2004). Accordingly, Shi'i pilgrims have a prospective temporal order that is always focused forward, putting the most effort into preparing for the future. Consequently, my interlocutors must live in a constant state of messianic attentiveness in which every pious action can facilitate the Mahdi's Advent.

To give a better understanding of the way messianic temporality manifests itself in the lives of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims, I would like to provide a quote from a conversation that occurred between three of my interlocutors who are members of a Telegram channel that discusses apocalyptic world news about Signs of Advent, as well as religious content on Mahdism. The first channel, called *Shomareshe-e ma'kūs-e zohūr*³⁵ ("The Advent countdown", which has more than 25,000 subscribers), broadcasts news on the Advent, the End of Time and Mahdist discourse. The second channel, named *Zohūr nazdīk ast*³⁶ ("The Advent is imminent", with more than 5,000 subscribers), mainly announces world news that perpetuates the End of Time theme in the mind of its subscribers. The third channel, named "*Akhar-al-zamān*"³⁷ (The End of Time), is a database for investigations of apocalyptic events. The channel has more than 8,000 subscribers, and broadcasts (the news posted by the admin and the subscribers cannot post in the channel) the secret news³⁸ on the imminent Advent of the Mahdi and provide the reader with apocalyptic prophesies. The apocalyptic news that these channels provide tends to focus on the military movements in the Middle East, mainly in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Azerbaijan, as all these geographical areas are supposed to be the scene of apocalyptic battles according to Shi'i hadiths. In addition, they produce documentaries that deal with the Signs of Advent, the characteristics of the true montazers, as well as apocalyptic battles and the end of the West. One interesting aspect of all these apocalyptic news and documentaries is that Iran is portrayed as a

³⁵ <https://t.me/shomareshmakoosozohor>

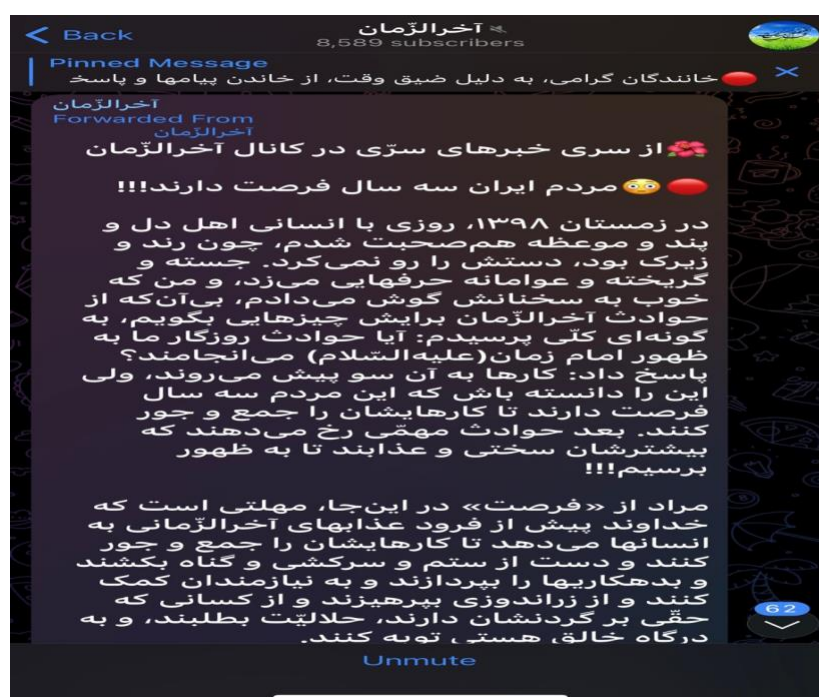
³⁶ https://t.me/Zohour_I12

³⁷ <https://t.me/joinchatakheruzzaman>

³⁸ From the Greater Occultation period onwards, it has been reported that some pious *Marja'-i Taqlid* (source of emulation), clergymen, and mystics secretly meet the Imam or dream about him. As a result of these meetings, the Imam discloses secret information to them. Stories about face-to-face meetings (and sometimes in dreams) and secret news are usually shared within certain religious circles. Most of these stories are circulated on social media and have been published. These channels broadcast secret news from these religious circles, where clerics who recently met the Imam or received secret news from him share it. Chapter One of this thesis mentions an example of this kind of secret news.

major regional and international player in all these apocalyptic matters, which are meant to facilitate the return of the promised Shi'i Messiah. To fully understand my interlocutors' conversation, I must first give a sense of the apocalyptic news broadcast on these channels and the way that this news revitalises messianic euphoria among my interlocutors. The following are four discrete examples of posts containing this apocalyptic news from one of these channels that are intended to target the messianic fervour of its subscribers (the written quote that appears above each screenshot indicates my translation of the post):

- 1- **The first Telegram post:** This is from the series of Secret News on the Channel of End of Time. The Iranian people only have three years left!!! One day, in the winter of 2018, I had a conversation with a person who was full of heart, advice, and preaching. Because he was smart and clever, he refused to reveal himself to me. He was avoiding making me aware of what is going on behind the scenes and was speaking in a general way, so I, a person who listened to his words carefully without telling him anything about the end of the world, asked him in a general way: Is our time leading toward the Advent of the Imam of the Time? In response, he said: Things are moving in that direction, but these people still have three years to sort out their affairs. We will then experience important events, most of which are hardships and torments until the Advent! The meaning of "three years left" here is the deadline God gives people before the end of the world to get their affairs in order, stop oppression, rebellion, and sin, pay off debts, help the needy, avoid tyranny, ask for forgiveness from the people they owe money to, and repent. We should remind some misguided people not to blame the gentleman for determining the exact time for the Advent. This prediction does not specify an exact date or time for the Advent.

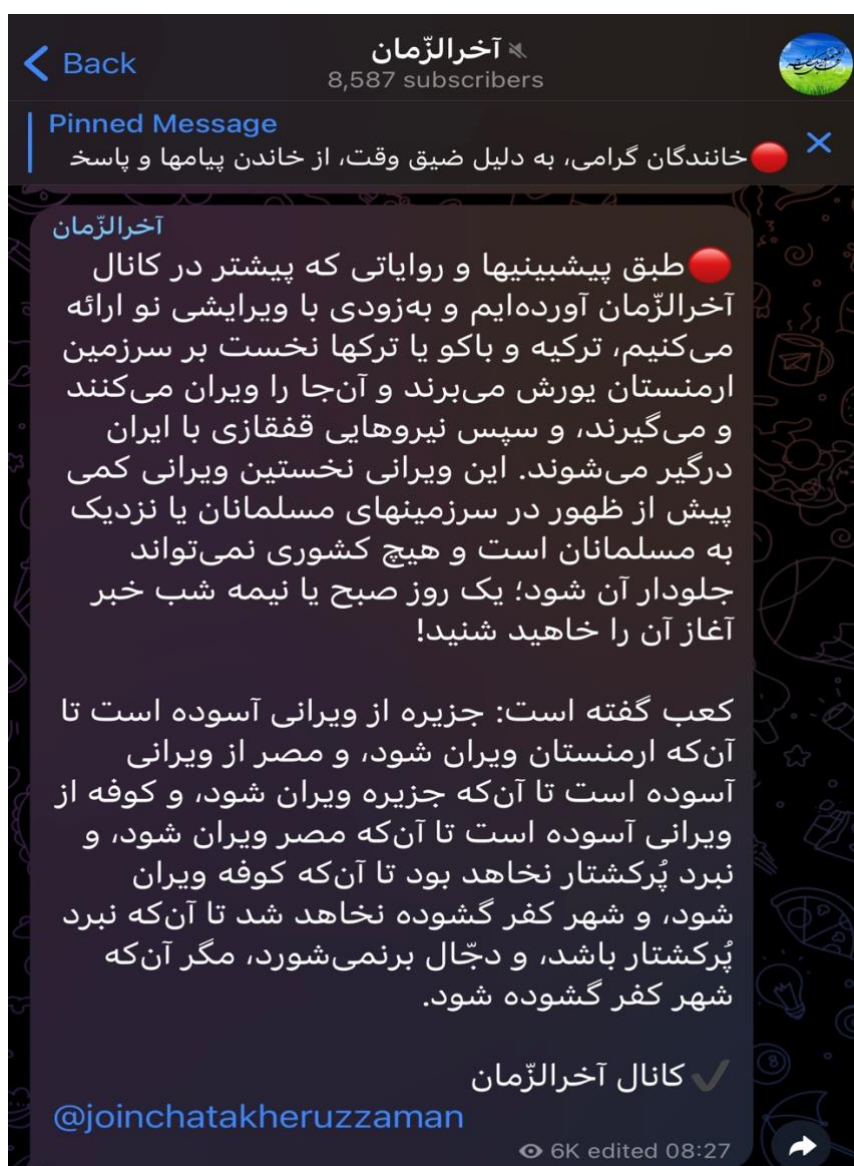


- 2- **The second Telegram post:** Our feeling and that of many who follow the apocalypse news, is that this year's events have gained more momentum than in previous years. If you remember, years ago, through referring to some Islamic traditions, we predicted that African rebel forces such as ISIS and others from the west of Egypt, such as Libya, would attack the ruler of Egypt, take Egypt, come to Jordan and Israel, and they will mount an unsuccessful attack on Jerusalem. They will then come to Syria and clash with Bashar Assad and his followers, including the Lebanese Hizbullah, and start a massive massacre, and then Sofyāni³⁹ will attack all the conflicting groups and be victorious.



³⁹ Sofyāni is an evil character in Islamic eschatology who rises from the Syrian region exactly nine months before the Mahdi appears and commits a lot of corruption and massacre. Mahdi reappears following the nine-month Sofyāni bloody uprising, fighting with Sufani forces.

- 3- **The third Telegram post:** According to the predictions and narrations that we have previously presented on the channel and will soon present with a new edition, Turkey and Baku, or the Turks, will first attack Armenia and destroy it and capture it, followed by the Caucasians engaging Iran. This devastation is the first to occur in Muslim lands or near Muslim lands shortly before the Advent, and no country can prevent it. You will hear the news of its beginning one day in the morning or at midnight! As *Ka'b* said, the island is free from destruction until Armenia is destroyed, Egypt is free from destruction until Armenia is destroyed, Kufa is free from destruction until Egypt is destroyed, and there will be no massacre until Kufa is destroyed. In addition, the city of disbelief will not be opened until the battle is full of slaughter, and the Dajjāl⁴⁰ will not rise unless the city of disbelief is opened.



⁴⁰ Shi'i sources portray Dajjal as an entity or deviant thought in enmity with the Imam. Shi'i traditions regard Dajjāl as a Signs of the Advent of the Hidden Imam. During times of hardship and famine, Dajjal appears to deceive people and draw them to himself before being destroyed by the Hidden Imam.

- 4- **The fourth Telegram post:** Although it is still too early to judge whether this year is the year of Sofyani's uprising or not, readers who follow the messianic and the end of the world news probably remember that, a few years ago, we announced that, contrary to the famous saying, the place of Sofyan's uprising is in Suwayda, 100 kilometres south of Damascus. In addition, we mentioned that unexpected chaos and drought occur in Ray [south of Tehran], and drought in Ray is a clear Sign of the rise of the Sufyani. Additionally, the narration mentions that Syria's chaos would last for twelve years before Sofyani rises up. Accordingly, it appears now that the protests and riots that have taken place this year in Iran, especially in Tehran, as well as the drought that has occurred this year in Iran, especially in Ray, are the same two Signs or the beginning of both. God knows best.



Checking these channels every day, my interlocutors' sense of apocalyptic fervour and messianic euphoria begin to intensify. The news broadcast on these channels generates apocalyptic anxiety among my interlocutors, making them believe that the world is about to end in the near future. It is worth pointing out that the Shi'i pilgrims' habit of checking the Signs of the Advent does not mean that they are investigating whether or not the End of Time is about to come; rather, they are attending to every Sign as a source of information that the End of Time has already begun (Robbins,

2004). The following is a transcript of a conversation between my interlocutors in the Jamkaran Mosque on a Tuesday night in February 2018. The focus of this section is on a piece of apocalyptic world news that Navid, a man in his 40s, shared with his other co-pilgrims. It is a general world news that my interlocutors shared with an apocalyptic undertone. This conversation illustrates the ways in which mundane news reports are incorporated into their moral project.

One night, in the courtyard of the Mosque, a group of pilgrims whom I had accompanied all the way from Tehran to the Mosque, after finishing their *namāz* in the Mosque due to the crowdedness, decided to find a secluded corner to take a break and eat dinner. In one of the Shabistans of the Jamkaran Mosque, they were able to find a corner to sit together in. They were talking to each other, sharing their experience of engaging in the rituals of the Mosque and how it had influenced how they viewed their lives and helped them to grow. Before Navid, a leader of the group, started to speak, it seemed that everyone was busy with their own task. There was a lot of attention paid to him as he began to speak. When it comes to apocalyptic world news, Shi'i pilgrims are always eagerly waiting for the latest reports. (There are ellipses in the transcript which indicate pauses in the conversation. My explanations or interpolations are in brackets. This transcript has been partly edited and condensed for clarity).

Navid: In the Telegram channel yesterday, I checked a series of news, and later, I found it in other news sources as well. According to reports, the Syrian battle has reached a critical point [...] Both Israel and the United States have bombed Iranian bases in Syria. According to reports, US and Israeli forces are now on alert in the region [...] Eventually, we will clash with Israel, and there will probably be a nuclear war. These are all signs of the great fire, of the great fire that will emerge from the east [according to Shi'i apocalyptic hadith] [...] there are very significant signs [...] I believe that we are approaching the expected moment [...] However, we must still be aware of the chaos and seditions (*fitna*) happening in Iraq, Damascus, and Yemen. These *fitnas* are closely related to the Advent of the Imam. Syria is the site of the *fitna* of Sofyani, which is a definite indication of the Advent of the Imam. It is, therefore, possible that more significant signs may emerge in the near future, based on this news [...] Observing the news, you will discover that Imam's enemies (West, America, and Israel) are also afraid. It appears their military forces are on high alert [...] What does this mean? There will soon be great signs, and something will happen. God willing, the

moment of bliss is near. Although we don't know what will happen, we should be aware of the signs [...] I have heard from someone who is in contact with one of Shi'i *'ulamā* who is in connection with the Hidden Imam that there are significant apocalyptic events ahead that will lead to the Advent.

Immediately following Navid's report of apocalyptic news, another group member named Samira shared her own apocalyptic dream in response to Navid's report. The "great fire" mentioned in Navid's prophecy reminded Samira of a dream she had seen a few days back that had an apocalyptic undertone to it.

Samira: Your report reminded me of a dream that I had last week in Tehran. I dreamed that the Day of Judgment had arrived and the sun was approaching the earth. A significant number of people were running away, but there was no way to escape because the heat was increasing as the sun approached, and everything was on fire as the heat increased. We were all scared at the same time. Everyone was trying to do something to save themselves from the constant burning heat that was constantly increasing in intensity. However, no one was able to do anything about it. Everyone was moaning and asking for help. Suddenly, I saw a luminous man standing in the crowd as if he was not affected by the sunlight at all. He was holding his hand in front of the sun, and he and the people around him were protected from the fire that spread. To avoid the fire, everyone tried to get close to him, but it seemed that they were not allowed to do so. I was inspired and realised that he was the Hidden Imam. Everyone was asking him to keep fire and heat away from them. Everyone was crying. I can't remember the rest of the dream. I remember that my dream ended with him disappearing into a corridor of light [her dream's narrative ends here]. As you mentioned that a great fire would emerge from the East, it reminded me of a dream I had.

Then Amin, another interlocutor, tried to interpret Samira's dream. He believed that the reason people could not get close to the Imam in Samira's dreams was likely because of their sinful actions. He stated:

Amin: There is one common thing that all your sayings point out. Samira's dream and the signs Navid shared with us all point to the need to be careful of our actions and the signs around us. It shows the importance of keeping the Imam's remembrance in our hearts, appealing to him and seeking refuge in him during the end-time calamities. I think our real life is similar to the fire you saw in your dream that everyone was caught in. We must take refuge in Imam to save ourselves from many fires in our world. It seems that the Advent of the Imam is imminent, but I am afraid of the day when the Imam will arrive, and we will still be caught in our sin that burns us, and we will still be unable to escape it.

This short conversation illustrates my interlocutors' commitment to moral improvement in the present as well as their openness to a discontinuous future (Robbins, 2004: 166). Apocalyptic world news shared by my interlocutors contains many of the signs presented by Navid. Among the significance of Navid's report is the emphasis that he places on the Signs of the Mahdi's Advent, which is supposedly to occur in the near future, underlining the significance of Shi'i prophecies about the Advent of the Mahdi. Navid's account, although it lacks detailed descriptions of what will happen in the future, nevertheless demonstrates the apocalyptic messianic dispositions of the Shi'i pilgrims towards time by creating a prospective attitude. The only way Navid can describe what will happen in the near future is to point to signs that have appeared. According to his narrative, therefore, what matters most is the coming of the near future, not the signs that will be incorporated into it (ibid: 167).

In contrast to Navid's apocalyptic report, Samira's dream does not provide specific evidence concerning the imminent Advent of the Mahdi in the same way it does in Navid's apocalyptic vision, but it does seem to attach an eschatological image to Navid's apocalyptic vision. Samira is not the only pilgrim who has a dream with an apocalyptic undertone in which they meet the Hidden Imam; I have already seen many other pilgrims with similar dreams in which they meet the Hidden Imam in their dreams. The habit of dreaming and experiencing visions of the Hidden Imam and his imminent Advent is quite common, not only among Twelver Shi'i pilgrims but also among the entire Twelver Shi'i community as a whole. In some ways, Samira's dream can be regarded as a transcendental and eschatological confirmation of Navid's apocalyptic reports that activate the moral sensitivity of the listeners to maintain a sense of moral vigilance. Amin's conclusions link Navid's apocalyptic news and Samira's eschatological dream together. By emphasising the impending Advent of the Mahdi with a prospective approach to time, Amin highlights the importance of paying attention to moral actions and avoiding sins. In his closing remark, Amin implies that even though he and perhaps the rest of the community have no idea what the future holds, he only stresses one point, which is that everyone should watch out for their moral actions and signs of the Mahdi's Advent in the future. It can be said that Amin's attitude should be considered a central part of the Shi'i pilgrims' messianic approach to time, in which a sense of temporal messianic sensibility leads them to conduct a careful examination of everything they do and think about.

In the following days, the report like that of Navid and the dream like that of Samira can stimulate the emotions of the pilgrims and could motivate them to engage more actively in the ritual activities of the Mosque, attempting to create a hearty relationship with the Imam to purify themselves from any sin which may cause a barrier between them and the Mahdi. The Signs of the Advent of the Mahdi and the reports of the apocalyptic world news are always subjects of the pilgrims' discussions. The pilgrims' vision of eschatology and messianic fervour still preoccupies their minds after they leave the Mosque and return to their day-to-day lives. The messianic sense of time that some of my interlocutors share does not imply that they are abandoning their daily lives but rather that they must be continually vigilant for the signs that may change the narrative of the End of Time and discontinuity of the future. Considering this temporal framework, I would like to discuss in the following section how my interlocutors engage in self-fashioning through orienting themselves towards the future temporal horizon, looking at how such repositioning of the self forward in time involves self-fashioning (Liberatore, 2013).

8.3 Envisioning the Advent: Future Temporal Horizons and Self-Refashioning

This section explores the complex relationship between my interlocutors' self-fashioning and their prospective temporal sensibilities, that is, their perceptions of being in time. My argument focuses on how Shi'i messianic perceptions and practices embodied in the Jamkaran pilgrimage are primarily responsible for the creation of two interconnected yet coexisting temporal orientations that are reflected in the responses of my interlocutors: the emphasis on the relationship between the self and the Imam in the immediate present; and the imaginary processes of self-refashioning that take place in the near future (i.e. the Advent of the Mahdi). By understanding these two temporal frames, I can provide insight into how hope flourishes within my interlocutors and energises their efforts to transform themselves (Liberatore, 2013). To give better insight into these multifaceted temporalities, let me begin with a brief ethnographic vignette.

In early spring of 2018, I got to know a group of pilgrims in Jamkaran who invited me to a gathering of special supplication called *Do'a-ye-Nodbeh* (the supplication of lamentation, which is recited on Friday morning) in one of the Jamkaran Mosque's religious centres, called the "Jamkaran's Mahdi helpers' cultural complex" (*mojtame'-e farhangi-ye Mahdi-yāvarān-e Jamkaran*). They introduced themselves as *Mahdi*

*yāvarān*⁴¹ (Mahdi Helpers), who attempted to pave the way for the Mahdi's universal revolution. When I asked them about the characteristics of the *Mahdi yāvarān*, one of them, whose name was Kamal, wanted me to put this question to a cleric named Hāj Aqā Ahmadi after the supplication. When the supplication session was over, Kamal introduced me to Hāj Aqā Ahmadi, who taught *Mahdawīyat* courses (i.e. the belief to prepare and pave the way for the Mahdi's Advent) in the centre. Kamal requested me to address my question to Hāj Aqā Ahmadi because I was a student, and Kamal wanted me to get to know his teacher and get a more scientific answer to my question. Hāj Aqā Ahmadi portrayed the characteristics of *Mahdi yāvarān* and the centre in the following manner:

This centre aims to attract ordinary people as helpers to the Imam. They renew their allegiances to the Imam by joining our centre and preparing the grounds for his Advent. *Mahdi yāvarān* are people of seriousness and effort, using all their strength to pave the way for the Imam's return. Thus, *Mahdi yāvarān* acts as the strong arms of the Imam, serving his goals and opening the path for the Mahdi's universal revolution. We can measure ourselves and our goals as *Mahdi yāvarān* by understanding our ability to accompany the Imam and pave the way for his return. Perhaps tomorrow will be his day to show us his luminous face! Are we prepared for that day? Being Mahdi yvars lets us know if we're ready for this path, and on the promised day, we'll be with him or against him.

After I got acquainted with the meaning of *Mahdi yāvarān*, I realised that there is an extensive network of *Mahdi yāvarān* throughout the country, and similar centres have been established in each province to attract Mahdi Helpers. These networks are usually held in the local mosques of each city and involve activities such as organising sessions for supplication (*Do'a*) and holding specialised *Mahdawīyat* courses (*dorehā-ye takhassosi-ye Mahdawīyat*) that also provide the participant with a messianic certificate. All these centres are connected with the main centre located in Jamkaran Mosque and periodically organise gatherings of those who are waiting for the Advent to renew their allegiances with the Imam, undertaking to help the Imam and pave the way for his Advent. As a result of my acquaintance with this group, my relationship with them strengthened. Once, while I was sitting with some of them in

⁴¹ In 2014, the term *Mahdi yāvarān* was first proposed as part of an international conference on the doctrine of Mahdism, which was organised by Masāf Institute in Tehran, and as a result, it began to be widely used since then. This term honours the cultural, artistic, and social activities of people who promote Mahdism.

the Shabistan of the Mosque after finishing the prayer, everyone's hearts seemed affected by the prayer. Kamal, one of my interlocutors, seemed very upset as he was nodding his head. I asked him what worried him so much. Kamal replied:

I don't know. I am very worried. I am concerned about what will happen at the time of the Advent. If the Advent happens, what will my situation and conditions be then? Will I be with the Imam and the rest of the pious believers who return with him from the other world? Will I revisit them, or will I be on the opposite front? These thoughts keep bothering me a lot.

I then asked him if, apart from meeting the Imam, he thinks about meeting other people at the time of the Advent. He responded:

I know that the martyrs will return to earth at the time of the Advent and will come to the aid of the Imam of the time. This is a Shi'i belief, and no one doubts it. I would very much like to see the Advent because I know that with the Advent of the Imam, I am honoured to visit many other pious believers who passed away, and I haven't seen them.

To complement Kamal's words, Elnaz provided me with evidence of the possibility for the believers to return, if they die before the Advent, to help the Imam after his Advent. She stated:

Those who recite *do'a-ye ahd* (the supplication of allegiance) on forty mornings⁴² prior to sunrise will be one of the helpers of the Imam when he appears, and if they die before his Advent, God will return them on earth to be with the Imam in the post-Advent period.

Sima then added that:

I tried two times to do it. I woke up late, and I missed the time; I failed the first time on day 26 and the second time on day 32. I think it needs the Imam's attention so that one can successfully recite the supplication for forty days.

In the first instance, I found their enthusiasm to be a bit strange, so I tentatively asked them: "Do you believe you will return to this world with the Imam's Advent after death?" Would you expect to meet some of the deceased after the Mahdi arrives? "

Sima responded:

⁴² According to an eschatological hadith by the Sixth Shi'i Imam: "Whoever recites the "supplication of allegiance" forty mornings before sunrise is one of our Mahdi helpers, and if he dies before the Advent of the Imam, God will bring him out of the grave to serve him.." (Qomi, 2008: 349). This hadith has been narrated in one of the most famous and popular Shi'i prayer books, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān* (keys to the heavens), which contains prayers, supplications, texts for pilgrimages, as well as instructions for religious actions for special days, months, and special occasions. Today, this book can be found in almost every Shi'i home, mosque, or Islamic centre.

Oh, Elnaz wants to meet her son, whose name is Mehran! She believes that he will return when our master arrives. I also believe that my uncle will return. He became a martyr during the Iran-Iraq war. He was a perfect example of an honourable and a pious person. We have been told that the martyrs will return on earth to help the Imam when he appears from occultation.

My interlocutors' references to Shi'i eschatological discussions caught my attention, and I decided to pursue the question, "Is there a chance for a return?" Elnaz, who seemed to be more informed about Shi'i messianic theology than the others, explained:

Nothing is beyond God's power. But there are some hadiths in the Shi'i tradition confirming this. Two groups will be brought back to life with the Advent of the Imam. The first group are the saints and prophets whose names are mentioned in the hadiths. The second group are the martyrs and the true *montazers* of the Imam who recited *do'a-ye ahd* forty mornings, and their hearts are filled with the knowledge of the Imam.

My interlocutors' fantasy about the Advent, along with visualising themselves in that imaginary future, preoccupied me. The above eschatological conversations that reveal my interlocutors' prospective temporal orientation led me to examine the types of shifts in subjectification and anticipations of change such temporal sensibilities produce (Liberatore, 2013). I will show that my interlocutors, in the process of true *entezār*, position themselves into the future horizons in their self-fashioning process. The horizons of expectation here include two mandatory components: a forward-looking attitude and its results for action (Poli, 2017: 1).

9.4 Hopeful Envisioning: Self-Repositioning Forward in Time

In chapters one, three, and five of this thesis, I discussed how the Mahdi's Advent linked to moral problematisation. These moral problematisations, according to Moore, engage with hopes and aspirations because they address "how selves and lives are given value and meaning in relation to themselves and to others." (Moore, 2011: 21). Hope can be embodied in a variety of affective dispositions and/or orientations that stimulate the moral imagination, as well as forms of agency that facilitate the reconfiguration of self-other relationships on a temporal scale (ibid: 23). Moore believes that the temporal dimensions of fantasy and imagination are also embodied emotionally and play an integral role in creating, maintaining and shifting the modes of subjectification and identification, as well as understanding the relationships between self and others (ibid: 17).

The notion of hope, also in Mahmood's study, is conceptualised as an emotion that can give direction to the subjects' actions. As a result, according to Mahmood, cultivating and strengthening a pious disposition depends not only on daily acts but also on the creation and orientation of emotions that entail such dispositions (Mahmood, 2005: 140). In a similar manner, Hirschkind (2006) highlights the practice of listening to cassette sermons by Islamic Revival members as a heart-opening act that leads to a change in affective disposition, orientation, and motivation among interlocutors for moral action. However, there are no reflections of the self-fashioning processes within a temporal horizon in the works of Mahmood and Hirschkind as significant reference works of literature on Islamic piety. Hirschkind (2006) addresses this process mainly in relation to the distant future throughout his ethnography of cassette sermons in Cairo. His discussion of "death remembrance" as an eschatological "seeing with the dead eyes" highlights the relationship between temporality and ethics (ibid: 178). When it comes to temporality, Hirschkind points out that sermons present techniques and practices for "death remembrance" to cultivate a sense of sensitivity towards death within practitioners and to introduce fear of death and the afterlife as the strongest motivators of ethical behaviour (ibid: 187-8). As far as he is concerned, the practice of "death remembrance" and the afterlife in daily life effectively makes a virtuous self. Although Hirschkind does not examine the perspective of his interlocutors towards time, he illustrates a moral self-fashioning that is characterised by a death remembrance in the present moment that is always portrayed as collapsing into a future (ibid: 190). As a result, his analysis is based only on the time horizon of the present.

Inspired by Bloch's conceptualisation of hope, which outlines hope as a conscious anticipation of the 'Not-Yet-Become' (Bloch, 1986: 11), Miyazaki (2004; 2006) conceptualises hope through a temporal reorientation to the future. He shows how the subjects utilise concepts and ideas as sources of hope as a means of engaging with the world and reorienting their modes of being in the present. As a result of this temporal reorientation, the hoping subject can re-imagine the present by following specific actions and ways of living based on the perspective of the end (Miyazaki, 2006: 157). Based on the works of Miyazaki and Moore, Giulia Liberatore (2013), in a chapter of her ethnographic study titled *Transforming the Self: An Ethnography of Ethical Change amongst Young Somali Muslim Women in London*, explores hope as a prospective orientation. My approach to conceptualising the relationship between

temporalities and self-fashioning projects is also inspired by Librettore's ethnography. In her ethnography (2013), she highlights the multiple temporalities involved in the self-making of second-generation Somali women in London. Based on the work of Jane Guyer, Librettore demonstrates how these women's self-other relationships are reconfigured through a distancing from the past and a devaluing of the near future at the same time (Librettore, 2013: 228-229). By imagining the afterlife as a temporal dimension of the distant future, she argues, her interlocutors detach themselves from the temporary and seductive gratifications of the near-future of life on earth (conceptualised as the "devaluation" of the near future by Crapanzano), and they focus on the present to prepare for life after death (ibid: 236). Somali women shape their understanding of self-making by prioritising a more profound love and relationship with God within the present and imaginative engagement with a distant future. Due to this simultaneous focus on the present and the distant future, these women devalue temporary material life as the near future.

I want to point out that even though my analysis of the interlocutors' perception of their self-fashioning project within the framework of the present is similar in some ways to Librettore's explanation, my approach to future temporal horizons differs from Librettore's, where she devalues the near future by relying heavily on Jane Guyer and Crapanzano. In *"Prophecy and the Near Future"*, Guyer (2007) states that the 1950s and 1960s in Britain were characterised by a reorientation toward a vision of the near future that increasingly structured everyday life by punctuating dates, terms, and events (Guyer, 2007: 409). Referring to the long-term macro-economic development and evangelical Christianity in which meaningful existence is located in the long-term perspective, She argues that the near future has been "evacuated" in the interest of the present on the one hand and distant futures on the other. She, therefore, contends that there needs to be a gap between the present and the future for change to take place and subjecthood to be repositioned (ibid: 417). As Guyer argues, Christians actively seek ruptures in time rather than simply tolerate them (ibid: 414-415). Although I draw insights from Jane Guyer's article and Librettore's ethnography, my discussion demonstrates things change when the near future temporal horizon of the Mahdi's Advent is declared to be imminent: not only is the near future not evacuated, but it influences the subject's imagination of the future. The near future serves as one of the ideal types and a source of hope, dreams, or imaginings of some possible utopia for most of the temporal orientations of my interlocutor. My interlocutors face two

interrelated yet coexisting temporal orientations: Focusing on the self-Imam relationship in the present and the imaginary process of self-fashioning in the near future (i.e. the Advent). For my informants, the near future is not devalued and does not lose its importance, but this near future serves as a mediator between the present and the distant future, which plays a decisive role in their self-fashioning processes. I demonstrate that for my interlocutors, not only is the near future not discredited, but the distant future is also formed and visualised based on the temporal envisioning of the near future.

In Chapter Five of this thesis, I explained how the virtuous practice of *entezār* should be seen as a “state of the heart” (*hālat-e qalbi*), and that if it is truly practised, then its results will manifest in actions. The practice of *entezār* is both embodied in the true *montazer*’s heart and also temporal, as it prepares the true *montazer* for the Mahdi’s Advent, which is visualised in the near future temporal horizon. The temporal practice of *entezār* allows my interlocutors to envision the Mahdi’s Advent. I argue this envisioning of the Mahdi’s Advent highlights the temporalities and the self-fashioning involved in this process. Moreover, I illustrate how my interlocutors’ relationships with the Hidden Imam at present, as well as their perceptions of themselves in the near future, reflect the complexity of their “ethical imaginations” (Moore 2011).

As I mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that the Jamkaran pilgrimage experience and the messianic knowledge associated with it contribute to enlightening my interlocutors’ perceptions of themselves and of the Hidden Imam, as well as stimulating their messianic sensibilities toward time. Their love of the Imam, their fear of punishment due to their sins, and their hope for the future are all emotions they cultivate in alignment with the Shi’i messianic discursive tradition. This allows me to demonstrate how hope flourishes as an affective disposition and prospective orientation among my interlocutors and that this temporal envisioning involves new modes of subjectification and understanding self-other relations by orienting the self forward in time (Moore, 2011; Miyazaki, 2004; Liberatore, 2013). I highlight how their personalised affective relationship with the Hidden Imam helps them to refashion themselves in the present through repositioning the self towards the near future (i.e. the Advent). This personalised affective relationship between them and the Imam is embodied in the form of an inward quality that animates their ethical imagination to invent new ways of connecting with themselves, the Hidden Imam, and others. By means of the Shi’i eschatological messianic language, my interlocutors can express

emotional experiences that are triggered by the temporal shifts in subjectification. Building on Miyazaki, I present hope as a “prospective momentum entailed in anticipation of what has not-yet- become” (Miyazaki, 2004: 14) and highlight, drawing on Moore (2011), how hope has to do with self-fashioning processes through animating ethical imagination and horizons of expectation that relate to the near future. I argue that these temporal moments reveal the ways in which hope blossoms within them and animates their efforts to transform themselves.

In the following, I reflect Sima’s and Elnaz’s self-fashioning temporal orientation, embodied in their envisioning of the Mahdi’s Advent, which I mentioned their attitudes in the ethnographic vignette I narrated above. As I portray their narration, I am at pains to draw attention to how they function as what Foucault calls “technologies of the self” (1997). There is an impression of rupture created by these narratives, as well as an understanding of the Hidden Imam’s immediacy in the present.

8.5 The Self-Imam Relation in the Present

It is apparent through my interlocutors’ explanations that they are creating a relationship between themselves and the Imam by repeating the narratives of their self-transformation, which exist in the immediate present. To purify themselves from the inside and to have a sense of connection with the Imam in the present, they emphasise that self-discipline actions should focus on exploring their hearts (Mahmoud, 2005). Previously, in Chapter Five on the sermon, I explained that true *entezār* is defined as an inner state of the heart that leads to the formation of pious behaviour in believers. The practice of *entezār* is a heartfelt pledge of allegiance to the Hidden Imam and submission to his willpower, which creates the responsibility in the *montazer* that he has to do his best to uphold the promise he made to the Hidden Imam, to gain his satisfaction as God’s guardian on earth. Consequently, *entezār* is a characteristic that depends on moral factors and a sense of inner responsibility, the absence of which separates a person from the necessity of faith and action. Therefore, until the Imam’s presence is felt in the heart and the capacity of the heart for this presence is not pure, the true *entezār* will not be formed, and pious deeds will be invalidated. It follows that for those who are seeking a solution to their sins, if they feel the presence of the Hidden Imam in their lives, many of their sins will disappear and pious acts will follow.

Sima shared with me her own interpretation of true *entezār* and the way this understanding helps her to make a personalised relationship with the Imam to prepare her *darūn* (inward quality) in the present. Sima described the expectation as follows:

Neither am I waiting for a dream-like issue nor am I waiting for his presence. But I'm awaiting his Advent. At this very moment, you can feel his presence. It does not mean that he is not present just because I cannot see him with my head eyes, I can see him with my *cheshm-e del* (heart eyes). I feel his presence everywhere. My perspective on *entezār* is similar to that of Yūsuf (Joseph) and Ya'qūb (Jacob). Even though Yūsuf [the prophet] was lost from his father [Jacob, the Prophet], Ya'qūb never felt absent from him and said, "I smell Yusuf's scent." I feel his presence even though I am not able to see him.

Sima believed that by connecting the heart with the Hidden Imam, one could thereby cleanse one's heart of the burden of sin. She postulated, as a result, that sins cause the heart to be *sangin* (heavy), and a *qalb-e sangīn* (heavy heart) makes it impossible to communicate with the Imam effectively. To establish a personal relationship with the Imam, the heart should be made light of the sins that burden it, in her opinion. As a result of this *qalb-e sabok* (light heart), one is on the path to reaching pure hearts. She made the following statement to differentiate between a *qalb-e sangīn* and a *qalb-e sabok*:

When the heart becomes heavy with the burden of sins, it cannot communicate with Imam. When one follows the path of sin, one is punished spiritually. *qesāwat-e qalb* [hadness or cruelty of the heart] is one of the spiritual punishments. However, If we send any action to the heart, which is the seat of the Imam of Time, and ask him if he is satisfied with it or not before we perform it, then this will prevent us from committing sins, and it is a sign that our heart is *sabok* and pure. When you have a *qalb-e sabok*, you feel the presence of the Imam, and you are aware that the attention of the Imam is there when your heart is easily broken and your eyes are tearful. This requires daily attention to him, of course!

Sima used another term when referring to a heavy heart, which was *sakht del* or *sang del* (hard heart). She states that when the heart becomes heavy, one becomes *sakht del* or *sang del* (hard-hearted) in such a way that one does not feel affected by seeing something that should affect one's heart, and this hard-heartedness also affects one in such a way that one feels heavy even when worshipping and praying to God. A *qalb-e sabok*, however, can be quickly affected, so it encourages and facilitates external pious action as a result. In this context, the heart is the source of spiritual perception and

insight. Therefore, *qesāwat* and *sangīnī* of the heart are the most severe diseases that can affect the inner heart.

The more Sima monitored her own behaviour, the more she turned inward in search of her true substance. To discipline the self in the present, she also believed that one must obtain the knowledge of the Hidden Imam. Sima attempted to prevent the heart from becoming heavy by constantly monitoring her inward quality as a technique of the self. The case of Sima is one of the most prominent examples among my interlocutors that advocated a *qalb-e pāk* (pure heart) should be inclined toward the Hidden Imam and his attributes and to perform "good deeds" in an attempt to satisfy the Imam. To put Sima's words into context, I asked her to give me an example of what it means to have a *qalb-e sabok*. Her reply was as follows:

A *qalb-e sabok* always shows signs to the person. In addition, it also leads a person to good things. A month ago, I was invited to a relative's wedding. Seeing relatives and friends and talking with them at these wedding ceremonies is always a pleasant experience, but most of the time, these wedding ceremonies often turn into a gathering of sin with excuses such as "one night does not become a thousand nights". I am referring to the playing of music, dancing, and mixing of men and women, some of which even take alcohol. Consequently, staying longer in these gatherings destroys a person's faith. Despite the insistence of friends and relatives to stay longer at the wedding, I chose not to stay. Ultimately, I left there because one corner of my mind was constantly preoccupied with the issue of whether the Imam was satisfied with me, whether he would approve of my actions if he came right now. I think the lightness of my heart probably enabled me to leave the wedding ceremony that night.

For Sima, leaving that place meant consolidating her relationship with the Imam in the present, which allowed her to create a way to have a *qalb-e pāk* by doing actions to get closer to the Hidden Imam. By leaving the ceremony, she prioritised her relationship with the Imam over spending time with her friends and relatives. My interlocutors, to purify their hearts, they must connect with the Hidden Imam, and to connect with the Hidden Imam, they must look within themselves. this allows them to be aligned in terms of outward and inward dimensions. It is through their inward quality that my interlocutors can develop a personalised affective relationship with the Imam and make him pleased just by aligning their inward and outward characteristics. One of the most integral aspects of becoming a true *montazer* is establishing a personal affective relationship with the Imam in the present which is embodied by the feeling of his presence within and allows one to cultivate goodness in the heart, and

teach oneself how to avoid immoral vices through constant self-monitoring and practice. The picture that Sima presented to me of her personal relationship with the Hidden Imam in the present, and the fact that she pays attention to the inside by distinguishing between a light heart and a heavy heart, was mirrored in a similar way by some other interlocutors as well. Through an inward personalised connection with the Imam, Shabnam, one of the interlocutors, was monitoring her actions and behaviours in the present moment. As a result of sin, she believed that the luminosity of the heart was destroyed and polluted, which is a sign of a dark heart. Therefore, she tried to seek the approval of the Imam by disciplining and purifying her heart in the present moment. As such, regardless of the past or the future, she tried to reform her inward quality through her personal relationship with the Hidden Imam. As she puts it:

In truth, I am totally responsible for my behaviour, regardless of whether it is good or bad. Whether I was a good person or a bad person in the past does not matter to me. regarding the future, everyone does not know what their future will be like either. Therefore, the most important thing for me is not to miss this moment. There is a possibility that I may not live tomorrow.

Shabnam tries to forget the past and not rely too much on the future; instead, she tries to focus on her own discipline and communicating with the Imam in the present. Having postponed repentance and good deeds, she firmly believed that a person is diverted away from the Imam towards the material, sensuality and inner desires, and as a result, one's heart becomes hard and dark. Hence, if one can cultivate the presence and remembrance of the Imam in the heart at the present moment, one can avoid sin and succeed in doing good deeds more effectively. My interlocutors considered themselves ultimately responsible for their discipline. Having a personal connection with the Imam and purifying their hearts is enough for my interlocutors to emerge self-discipline from within. They must discipline themselves in order to remain connected to the Imam. Performing acts of worship with a pure heart, such as reciting namaz or virtuous actions, can please the Hidden Imam. As I discussed in Chapter Five, my interlocutors are encouraged that they should not defer their repentance from sin until a later date but instead to begin doing good deeds now. As a result of this temporal orientation, which embodies a personal relationship between the Imam and the *montazer* in the present moment, virtuous dispositions are instilled by these bodily actions. A *montazer's* heart is made receptive to the Imam's presence and finds the

potentiality for purification as a result. There is a growing body of literature on prayer that emphasises how the embodied action fosters an imaginative engagement with divinity and how it creates a willing submission to God (Mahmood 2005; Simon 2009; Liberatore, 2013; Parkin and Headley 2000).

8.6 The Imaginary Processes of Self-Refashioning in the Near Future

Elnaz shared her story with me a few weeks after our first meeting at the Jamkaran *Mahdi Yavaran* Centre when she showed me photos of her son, who had passed away years ago. Elnaz's story had been told to me several times by other members of the group, but hearing it in her own words revealed more aspects of the narrative. Before his sudden and mysterious death, Mehran, Elnaz's son, was 22 years old. Elnaz claims that he was drinking alcohol, having a girlfriend, and not adhering to religious rules. Despite all Elnaz and her husband's efforts to lead their son to a religious and moral lifestyle, their efforts were fruitless. One day, after a long period of fruitless efforts on the part of Elnaz and her husband, they were surprised to notice a sudden and remarkable change in their child's behaviour. There was no longer a sense that Mehran was a deviant person in the eyes of Elnaz and her husband, and his behaviour had changed dramatically as a result.

Elnaz told me that Mehran had started praying and fasting regularly, respected his parents and became well-mannered due to his sudden transformation. When Elnaz noticed Mehran's change in behaviour and lifestyle, she realised her son had repented and decided to live differently. In his room, Mehran began to practice an ascetic lifestyle by giving away his clothes and shoes, as well as valuable items, to the poor. "It was evident that he had internalised his piety through his moral behaviour and words, in addition to praying and fasting externally. He devoted a lot of time to studying Shi'i hadith books and tried to implement the recommendations of Shi'i Imams stated in the books," she said. Since Mehran returned from a path of sin and deviation to a path of spirituality and religiosity, the family was able to come closer together. As Elnaz recounts, they used to go on pilgrimages together as part of their worship. This mystical return of Mehran to the embrace of the family had brought them the joy of family life, the thing Elnaz believed was missing for a long time. Their shared moral and religious beliefs due to her son's transformation strengthened their family bonds and removed the deep gaps that had previously been created among the family members due to Mehran's deviant lifestyle.

In her description of her son's room, Elnaz said:

Aside from a bed he sleeps on, a *jānamāz* (prayer cloth) and a *mohr* (prayer stone) he uses to pray, and religious books he read during the day, there were no other things in the room. It did not have any decorations that distracted one from the material world. My sense of spirituality was enhanced when I entered it whenever he was in prayer or studying, even when he was asleep.

There was, however, a sudden event that ended this relationship. On one day, Mehran left home for a daytrip to the forest and never returned. A couple of days later, he was found dead in the forest. It was a very difficult experience for Elnaz to lose Mehran. As well as her son, she has lost someone she considers to be exemplar of piety and spirituality. Due to this, she attempts to emulate her son's way of life very soon after his death. Elnaz maintains his son's room with his belongings in the same manner and performs all her religious rituals there. Her relationship with her son is strengthened by performing religious acts in that room. The room has become a sacred space for Elnaz and her family. They decorated the room with posters and flags containing Shi'i Imams' names, and they attached a sign saying "Enter with ablution" (*ba-vozū-vāred-shavīd*) to the door, conveying their sense of sanctity over the place. The loss of a loved one is usually a tragic and traumatic experience for those who have been affected. Those who have lost a loved one describe the pain of loss as a bitter experience that is embodied in the form of nostalgia and a yearning to see them once again. These feelings of sadness and a longing to meet again are gradually moderated by the acceptance of reality and the passage of time. Over the course of time, the profound impact of these feelings can also be reflected in the changes in lifestyle, attitudes, and beliefs that result from them. There is no doubt that this traumatic lack should be seen as a turning point in Elnaz's way of life as it generates motivation for action and strengthens her religious attitudes. It is a turning point when intense feelings such as sadness, grief, and mourning are replaced with hope, motivation, and enthusiasm, and states such as depression become replaced by motivation and the potentiality to act for re-configurations in the temporal dimension. After this tragic event, Elnaz feels an innate emptiness. She told me:

After Mehran's death, I felt like I am in a vacuum. I had lost my son at some point in time and history, and I did not know where my life would go. I prayed and supplicated in his room. But I was still restless. It came to me that prayers and supplication no longer make me feel better. I went to a psychologist once. He tried to tell me to close the file in my mind and forget about it. But I could not. Two years had passed, and this

matter would not leave me. In addition to losing my child, my family was torn apart as well. I have felt peace in my heart since I took refuge in Imam Zaman. A specific difficulty that I have had in the past has now been removed by the Imam, so I can bear the distance of my child until the day I see him again. Someday, he will return home! We must get together again, as my husband always says!

In the course of my conversation with Elnaz, I realised that she and her husband sometimes indulge in fantasies about the future regarding their interpersonal relationships and interests. Elnaz longed for a family reunion in an imaginary near future as a faithful person who envisioned her love and affection for her family in this temporal horizon. In her words:

In our family, we have such deep affection for one another that we do not want it to disappear with death, so after my son passed away, all our efforts were focused on coming back together again as a family.

Elnaz's excitement to see her son again and her dream of the family reunion was entirely understandable to me, but the manner in which she embodied this excitement in her lived experience revealed to me another aspect of her religious and moral dispositions, which was temporal in nature. Regarding temporality, I asked her: "How do you think this meeting will take place? You mean, in the Hereafter, that is, in the Resurrection?" She replied:

Not necessarily in the afterlife. This could be one possible option. But there is another possibility. I mean the Advent. Everything will be different with the Advent of our Master; the relationship with people will be different, with family and friends, everything will be resolved, and the revolution will happen. If our Lord comes, everything will change; this is my belief, this is the Shi'i belief, and this is what we believe about the Advent. One of those events that will happen with the Advent is the issue of return. I know that eventually, a series of good people will return at the time of the Advent, and there is no greater joy than being able to understand that promised era. I heard once somewhere that the post-Advent period should be seen as heaven on earth, and before we want to reach the paradise of the hereafter, heaven must first be created on earth. And I believe that this era is a time of pleasure, the time when all suffering ends.

In her conversation with me, Elnaz mentions the matter of the "return of the dead saints" I introduced above. Her beliefs derive from the doctrine of *Raj'a* (return) in Shi'i tradition, which means "the return to the present state of existence after death, before the Day of Resurrection" (Sachedina, 1981: 166). According to this

eschatological doctrine, when the Hidden Imam reappears from occultation, all the other Shi'i Imams, as well as historical figures like prophets and saints of the past, will also return (Turner, 2000: 230-231). Despite the enchantment of the post-Advent period in the mind of the believers, there is only a brief and general picture of this period that has been presented in the Shi'i narrative sources. It is stated in the Qur'an and the Shi'i messianic tradition that the resurrection has successive preliminaries and signs that will appear on the earth, and the universal government of the Mahdi is the last and greatest stage of the movement of the material world before the establishment of the resurrection. Therefore, the Mahdi's universal government is a prerequisite for moving to the next world as well as a precondition for the resurrection.

To perceive the period of the Advent, Elnaz began to renew her covenant with the Hidden Imam by reciting *Do'a-ye ahd*, a popular supplication that is often recommended to be recited during the time of the Mahdi's occultation⁴³. As I

⁴³ This is the transcript of the supplication: "O' Allāh the sustainer of the Great Light, the exalted Throne and the tempestuous sea, the revealer of the Torah, the Bible and the Zabūr [the book of David] the sustainer of the shade and the heat, the revealer of the great Qur'an, the sustainer of the honoured angles, prophets and the Messengers. O' Allāh I beseech You by your benevolent countenance and its brilliance and eternal kingdom: O' the Ever-Living, O' the Self subsisting, by Your name which illuminates the heavens and the earths and by Your name by which the predecessors and the posterity are reformed, O' the Ever-present before any living thing existed and the Everlasting even after all life will cease. O' Ever-living even when there was no life at all, O' One who resurrects the dead and brings death to the living, O' Ever-living, there is no God except You. O' Allāh, convey to our Master, the Imam (Peace be upon him) the guide, the guided, the one established in authority by Your command, may your blessings be upon him and on his pure ancestors, from all the faithful male and female, in the East and the West of the world, in the plains or on the mountains, on the lands and in the sea, and from me and my parents, blessings that equal in weight the "Throne" of Allāh, the ink of His words and such as only encompassed by His knowledge and covered by His book. O' Allāh, I renew on the dawn of his day and all the days the remainder of my life my pledge, covenant and allegiance to him, as my obligation, which I shall neither ever contravene nor neglect. O' Allāh, includes me amongst his helpers, defenders, those fulfilling his wishes and commands, his defenders, the fore-runners to carry out his intentions and those to be martyred in his presence. O' Allāh, should death intervene between me and his Advent—the death which You have made inevitable on Your servants—let me out from my grave covered in my shroud, my sword unsheathed, my spear poised responding to the call of the caller in the cities and deserts. O' Allāh, grace me with a sight of the Advent of one rightly guided and the finest of the praiseworthy and cools my eyes with a light of one to whom I am attentive and hasten his return, renders his Advent smooth and widens his path and leads me onto his path and cause his orders to be executed and strengthen his back. O' Allāh, populate Your cities through him and revive Your servants for indeed You have said and Your words are true: "Mischievous has shown its face on the lands and in the seas on account of what the lands of men have wrought." (Qur'an, 30:41). O' Allāh, present this from us to your friend and the son of the daughter of Your Prophet who bears the name of Your Messenger until he destroys all untruth and manifests the truth fully. O' Allāh, make him the refuge for Your oppressed servants and a helper for him who has no other helper besides You and the reviver of the Commandments in Your book which has been neglected and strengthener of the sciences in Your religion and the traditions of Your prophet. May Allah blessing be upon him and his progeny. O' Allāh, place him among those whom You have protected from the oppression of the oppressors. O' Allāh, please Your Prophet Mohammad, may the blessings of Allāh be upon him and his progeny, and those who will obey the invitation of the Imam and have mercy on our state of abasement after his Advent. O' Allāh, spare us this grief from this Ummah by his Advent and hasten his Advent for verily they (hypocrites) regard it to be far distant, and we see it very imminent by Your mercy, O' the most Merciful.

mentioned above, the true and sincere *montazers* of the Hidden Imam renew their pledge of allegiance and express their loyalty to the Imam every morning after reciting the morning *namāz* just prior to sunrise by reciting the *Do'a-ye ahd* as a sign of their continued loyalty. The purpose of this supplication is not just to communicate with the Hidden Imam but also, because of its apocalyptic undertone, to revitalise the believers' eschatological sensibilities and temporal orientations in general. Furthermore, by reciting this supplication, the true *montazers* are reminded that they are under the supervision and attention of the Imam and should express their loyalty to him both verbally and in the form of personal actions. The title of this supplication is a pledge of allegiance to the Hidden Imam. As a result of reciting this supplication, believers renew their covenant with the Imam. As the eschatological undertone of the supplication indicates, this covenant is not only made for the period of the reciter's life, but it is also made for the period after his death, as the reciter explains in one verse of this supplication that "if death intervenes between me and his Advent, let me out from my grave covered in my shroud, my sword unsheathed" (Bhimji, 2000: 38). As a result, one can infer that the person who recites the supplication wants to understand the time of Advent, and his covenant does not disappear even after he dies. The apocalyptic emphasis on the imminence of the Advent, along with the tone of eschatology and cyclic temporality embodied in the supplication, elicit not only emotions and hope for the future but also shape the reciter's prospective horizon and reorient him forward in time. As a result of reciting this supplication, Elnaz forms her belief based on the doctrine of return and the supplication of allegiance, in which it is mentioned that some people live twice and die twice.

Elnaz's visualisation of the post-Advent period and the idea of meeting her son again at that time ignited hope more and more in her heart, motivating her to spend more energy on self-transformation to achieve her goal. She held many supplication and *zikr* (remembrance) sessions in her son's room, binding herself to read the *Do'a-ye ahd* regularly to realise the opportunity of seeing the Imam's Advent and living in that promised era. She also kept her son's belongings, including his clothes and shoes. Once, I asked her why she doesn't donate these items to charity. Elnaz replied: "he will come one day and use them again." Elnaz even used to bring one of the remainders of her son's clothes and shoes with her every time she made her pilgrimage to Jamkaran

[the reciter then strikes his/her right hand on the right thigh three times and each time recites:] "Hasten, Hasten, O' my Master O' Master of the time"" (Quoted in Bhimji, 2000:38-39)

to do pilgrimage on behalf of her son. During our conversation, I realised that she practised a religious and spiritual life before her son's death, but it was vital for me to understand what difference this rupture brought about in her new virtuous and spiritual lifestyle with respect to the past. The difference she mentioned was about the way she evaluated herself. She said:

In the past, I was preparing myself for death. But now, I am preparing for the Advent. In the past, I thought being good meant rejecting the material world and pleasure and paying attention to the afterlife. But now, everything is different. My connection with my Lord is crucial for me with respect to other things.

As she saw it, to prepare for the Advent, it was most important for her to prioritise her relationship with the Imam over everything else. She used to say that, back then, she understood piety as a renunciation of the world to focus on life after death instead, but now she understands it as prioritising her relationship with the Imam above all else. Elnaz made it clear that until she was exposed to the concept of the Hidden Imam and before she had strengthened her relationship with the Imam, she had a linear view of life and death. She told me:

Prior to the death of my son, I was a religious person. The person I am now is very different from the person I was then. Then, I believed I had to wait until death, and then I would go to the next world after death. However, I now have a different perspective. As I know, the Advent will change everything.

Having visited Jamkaran and communicated with like-minded friends, as well as participating in religious sessions in the Mosque, Elnaz believes her outlook on the hereafter has changed. In Elnaz's view, life on earth is not just about preparing herself for death, it is also about preparing herself for an imminent Advent. A second important aspect of Elnaz's temporal orientations is her view of the hereafter as what I refer to as the distant future. Elnaz had envisioned her son Mehran as a symbol of piety who would return with the Advent of the coming Messiah. She had a dream in which she claimed to have seen her son returning during the Advent. Preparing for the Advent did not in any way mean abandoning everyday life for Elnaz. Instead of renouncing the world to focus only on the Advent, she continued with all her activities. Instead, her worldview had changed. Life began to take on a whole new meaning for her. She said the following to describe her change:

My belief before my son's death was that the life of this world is insignificant compared to the life of the afterlife; I still believe this today. However, in the past, I ignored the world and didn't seek success because I believed that the life of this world is short and

insignificant, and I was only preparing myself for the hereafter. However, the situation has changed since then. The way I view the world has changed. Currently I am faced with the Advent and existence of the Imam of the time, towards which I need to formulate my orientation in this world. Upon the Advent of my Lord [the Hidden Imam], everything will change. What a wonderful thing it is that life does not follow a straight path. This means that even if you die if you are a good soldier of the Lord, you can return and live once more. Although the world does not end, life flows in a different direction. I also believe that if I prepare for the Advent, that is, if I connect myself to the Lord, many things will come together. As well as my world, I can also make the hereafter. If I am alive and see the Advent, I will see the Lord, the saints of God, and my son. I have become blessed. The thought of returning to the world and being with them after I die gives me a lot of energy and motivation to live even if I die.

She added:

When you correct your relationship with the Imam, the afterlife and death will no longer be a source of fear or stress. You know that the Lord fixes everything. I used to spend my whole life preparing for death, but now my whole life is on the path of preparation for the Advent, and this means to me that life in this world has another fascinating stage called the Advent, which is heaven on earth. God bless us to be in that time.

Elnaz's imagination of the Advent of the Mahdi transforms the linear temporality of death and the afterlife into a cyclical temporality with the rupture of the Mahdi's Advent. The Advent of Mahdi as a rupture between the present and the distant future reorients and reconfigures Elnaz's vision of the distant future. According to Islamic eschatology, the life of this world and the afterlife are depicted as having short and mortal and eternal and permanent features, respectively. In this light, worldly life is described as a temporary process that has no meaning beyond the present moment, and its purpose is to prepare the believer for death and the afterlife and to help him or her prepare for the hereafter. This temporary and transitory nature of the material world implicates a separation from the temporary satisfaction of the near future, a process which Crapanzano (2007) refers to as the "devaluation" of the near future. This view holds that believers' actions are regulated and visualised in terms of the afterlife (the distant future) and that anything that takes them away from the distant future loses its value (the near future). A similar argument has been made by Guyer, as I have discussed above, in which she claims that the near future has been

“evacuated” in favour of the present and the distant future. In some ways, however, the prospective orientations of my interlocutors complicate this picture to some extent. As the case of Elnaz shows, the near future does not lose value in favour of a distant future. Instead, my interlocutors make the distant future more meaningful and valid by reorienting themselves towards the near future. There is no doubt that these forward-looking orientations, as well as the messianic euphoria they create, are inspiring, energising, and promising, and by repositioning the subjects forward in time, they ignite motivation and hope in them. Through leaping the subject forward in time, a process that is embodied in prioritising the relationship with the Hidden Imam, these hopeful visualisations encourage the subject to reconfigure their relationships with the Hidden Imam, with themselves, and with the world around them.

Elnaz’s unfortunate event and her deep longing for her son caused her to leap into the near future, and by envisioning the near future, joy and hope filled her heart. As a means of making the fantasised near future come true, Elnaz used to hold prayer sessions with her other friends in her son’s room and frequently made pilgrimages. Rather than passively waiting for the near future to unfold, she leapt into it. During these pilgrimages, she carried her son’s personal belongings with her. Having felt the Imam’s presence in her heart and being connected to him brought the promise of another pleasant event, which was also the possibility of meeting her son. Her visit to Jamkaran and communicating with the Imam, as well as leaping forward into the near future, lessened the pain of being away from her son and gave her more hope and energy for everyday life. In addition to making her daily life more dynamic, Elnaz’s understanding of the afterlife (the distant future) was made more meaningful through her visualisation and leap into the near future. Elnaz had felt a profound lack that filled her life due to the death of her son. The new-found relationship with the Hidden Imam and the messianic perception achieved through her Jamkaran pilgrimages gave her a radical temporal break with her past and put her forward in time. She described the loss of her son as an innate emptiness she felt in her heart that she needed to fill. This emptiness and darkness, with a profound feeling of hopelessness and depression, began to be replaced by the feeling of hope and euphoria when she connected herself to the Hidden Imam and began to prepare for the Advent. Jamkaran pilgrimage provided her with radically new opportunities and enabled her to act on firmer ground, while messianic theology provided a path for leaping out of meaninglessness, hopelessness and disillusionment and into meaning, hope and enthusiasm. To cope

with the present, Elnaz detached herself from the past and oriented herself forward in time through the horizons of expectation.

8.7 Conclusion

The temporal horizons discussed above are both generative and consequential of the messianic euphoria engendered by the Jamkaran pilgrimage among my interlocutors. These temporal horizons can recover and reconfigure a sense of subjectivity that becomes meaningful through an orientation towards the near and distant future. As Miyazaki argues, my interlocutors reimagined (and leapt out of) themselves and their relationships in the present by anticipating and orienting toward the near future (Miyazaki, 2006: 157). The engagement of my interlocutors with these temporalities is a reflection of their desires for self-fashioning and the ideals that they aspire to, which are concurrently embodied in the present as well as in their perceptions of the near and distant future.

According to what I have already explained, the pilgrimage to Jamkaran and the Shi'i messianic perception associated with it encourages believers to speed up their pre-Advent preparations by thinking about and orienting themselves toward the Advent. My interlocutors were instructed by the preachers in the Mosque to strengthen their awareness and sensitivity to the Advent of the Mahdi in their everyday lives, which includes the practice of active *entezār* from within by repenting of sins, as well as hope in achieving prosperity and happiness with the coming of the Mahdi. They often describe in their conversations not only the Advent and its Signs but also the events that are supposed to follow afterwards. There is constant discussion about the Signs of his Advent, the events that followed, the sins that delayed the Advent and caused punishment and separation from the Imam, and the repentance that brought them worldly and hereafter happiness. The Shi'i tradition lacks clear and precise details about what will happen after the Advent to the world and the life of humanity, during that promised period. A common theme found in Shi'i traditions regarding the post-Advent period is the comfortable and peaceful lives of people during that period. It is important to note, however, that this somewhat vague general picture does not prevent my informants from imagining themselves and their relationships in that period, even though their particular imaginings come from themselves rather than from the texts. These eschatological sensitivities, as Hirschkind (2006) argues, are the product of Islamic pedagogical practices, which, in my case, can be seen as a representation of the

Shi'i messianic discursive tradition reflected in the sermon. This messianic Shi'i tradition that is embodied in the pilgrimage of Jamkaran inspires a sense of eschatology in the pilgrims and illuminates the reasons why they are reflecting on the Advent. As the pilgrims begin to envision the future, hope begins to flourish within them and motivates them to take action in the present to obtain its benefits in the future. The visualisation modes described here are similar to what Hirschkind describes as the technique of death remembrance, through which virtues and emotions emerge within an individual as a response to what is being experienced (Hirschkind, 2006; Mahmoud, 2005).

However, what is mentioned in the sermon does not give a clear picture of what will happen after the Advent of the Mahdi. I discussed in Chapter Five that the sermon focuses more on the Signs of the Advent, the characteristics of the true *montazers*, and how the believers can accelerate the coming of the Mahdi. Despite a lack of objective knowledge about the post- Advent period, my interlocutors often engage in visualisations and imaginative speculations about what the Advent and its aftermath will be like in the future. There is no doubt, however, that my interlocutors don't rely exclusively on traditional Shi'i teachings in their orientation toward Advent. Instead, they reposition themselves in the post- Advent period in the near future time horizon. They engage in self-fashioning fantasies about this near-future temporal horizon and reconfigure themselves and their relationships within that horizon of time. This envisioning performs the function of filling in the gaps in their daily life with visions of what they imagine in the near future (imagination of the Advent). Taking part in these innovative forms of communication will require changing and reorienting my interlocutors' relationships with themselves, the Hidden Imam and others in the time dimension.

Due to this reason, the temporal horizons of the present and the near future play an essential role in the self-refashioning processes of my interlocutors. These temporal orientations, embodied in emotions of euphoria and hope, facilitate the mode of subjectification and allow my interlocutors to envision and fashion new relationships. It should be noted that these temporal orientations are not stable and are not achieved completely. It is also important to note that among my interlocutors, there is not uncommon a tendency to visualise the Advent of the Mahdi and to envision an imaginary relationship with the Mahdi and those around them. Accordingly, my analysis tries to enhance the understanding of anthropological studies on Islam by

raising awareness of the importance of the temporal horizon as an under-researched subject in the field (Liberatore, 2013). By emphasising the relationship between time and individual perception, we can shift our analysis horizon from over-reliance on the discursive tradition as a coherent unit to the dynamics of subjects' perceptions and interactions with Shi'i messianic tradition, and, more importantly, how they feel, understand and react to these discursive traditions.

Chapter 9: Challenges of Abstaining from Sin and Maintaining Moral Selfhood in Post-Pilgrimage Everyday Experiences

9.1 Introduction

During the last stages of my fieldwork in 2018, I found myself in one of the cafés in Tehran's centre, unexpectedly seeing one of the interlocutors I had met at Jamkaran Mosque at the beginning of my fieldwork. Helma, a girl in her late twenties, was one of those who visited Jamkaran with a group of other pilgrims several times, and according to her statements at the time, she described her experience there as being transformative and influential for her future. Nevertheless, the thing that struck me the most about Helma was her very different appearance from what I had remembered from the beginning of my fieldwork. As she wore a yellow scarf over her head, her dyed hair was partially visible from both the front and the back of her head, her makeup was almost dramatic, and her choice of clothing style was something that was completely modern and somewhat derived from everyday fashion. It was quite astonishing and a little bit shocking, compared to the different image I had of Helma in my mind at the beginning of the fieldwork, when I first encountered her as a Muslim woman who believed in the Islamic hijab without a *chādor* but used to wear a long scarf, dressed simply and without makeup, wearing a long mantle and baggy pants to cover her body and hair as a Muslim woman who was in search of improvement at the time. My attention to Helma's new appearance came from the fact that women's hijabs and clothing are an external representation and disposition of the piety and moral conduct that they exhibit, and this change in appearance was a way for me to pay attention to the changed moral dispositions that Helma might have undergone. It was during a brief conversation I had with Helma in the cafe that she mentioned something that ultimately led me to write this chapter:

Real life is very different from the temporary and short experiences that pilgrimages offer. The goal in life should be for each individual to make their own decisions find their own path and lead their own personal journey. There are many moral conducts that take time to develop. There is no doubt that we live in an age in which there are countless resources for personal growth and improvement available to us. The pilgrimage is one of them.

I came to understand more about the contradictory and complicated nature of my interlocutors' everyday experiences after the pilgrimage by listening to Helma's sayings. During my conversation with her regarding the significant change in her appearance, she pointed out the profane and contradictory nature of everyday life, which makes it difficult to correlate with and sustain the moral virtues cultivated during the pilgrimage with the profane rhythm of everyday life as a whole. My attention was also drawn to the liberal concepts of choice and autonomy that she applied to the reinterpretation of her own moral behaviour and pious actions. According to Helma, being exposed to other sources of knowledge in society made her reinterpret some of the moral behaviour she has shown over the past few years and re-examine others. As she puts it:

Well, after the pilgrimage is over, everyday living is totally distracting one's mind from the Imam and God. The situation at home makes it difficult for me to simulate the emotions and feelings that I experience during the pilgrimage because my daily routine makes me feel repetitive. But I believe that for growth and progress, a pilgrimage is not the only means to accomplish these goals. At the moment, I am attending mystical classes in Tehran, which has helped me to grow both personally and professionally. In these classes, I was able to realize that it is not necessary to cover the whole of your body with a rigid covering. Having a relationship with God and the Imam is a very personal and spiritual connection that begins at the heart level. In this sense, it is important not to focus on the appearance of a person, but rather on their heart.

The account of Helma's post-pilgrimage experiences has led me to contemplate the question as to what extent pilgrims can incorporate and maintain the moral values cultivated and the spiritual transformation achieved during their pilgrimage into their daily lives once they are back home.

Before getting into the discussion about the contradictions and ambivalences that pilgrims encounter when they leave the place of pilgrimage and return to their daily lives, I want to point out the difference between the experience inside a pilgrimage place and the outside. It has been mentioned in previous chapters that a pilgrimage experience allows one to separate oneself from everyday life and to break out of the ordinary cycle of time and space in order to reach spiritual progress as well as inner transformation. Along this journey, a pilgrim is not only influenced by the place of pilgrimage but also by the like-minded pilgrims who accompany him or show up at the place of pilgrimage. As a result of the pilgrim's participation in the rituals associated with the Jamkaran pilgrimage, the pilgrim is reinfused with profound feelings of

spiritual and inner transformation as a result of the intense emotional experiences they have. There is more to this experience than mere embodied affective participation in the rituals. Moreover, the pilgrims are also given the opportunity to cultivate the desired patterns of moral self-cultivation as exemplified by the characteristics of the true *montazer* of the Hidden Imam in a sermon that is intended to encourage them to leave their sins behind and make a heart connection with him to hasten his Advent. These religious thresholds put the pilgrim in a state of liminality, resulting in his perception of inner transformation and a sense of moral growth as a result of his presence. There is no doubt that this intense spiritual feeling and the feeling of moral self-transformation and improvement begin to decline as soon as one leaves the place of pilgrimage. Although there is a decline in emotional feeling, this does not necessarily imply that the pilgrim's desire to maintain or improve his moral character has been diminished or devalued. As soon as the pilgrim leaves the pilgrimage site, he/she encounters the secular nature of the outside world that is in stark contrast to the spiritual energies and tranquillity that was experienced when the pilgrim was at the pilgrimage site. At this point, the pilgrim's own personal dispositions and choices regarding the implementation of his agency in belonging to and committing to the moral values and spiritual emotions cultivated throughout the pilgrimage become prominent. An interlocutor of mine once told me that, after leaving the Mosque, he took a taxi to get back to Tehran. The car played music with energising and tempting rhythm leading one to dance in the course of the journey, causing him to lose the spiritual state that he had gained during the pilgrimage. Later, he added that the distance between sacred and mundane experiences is as close as getting into a taxi. Essentially, he had meant when a pilgrim returns home from the place of pilgrimage, aiming to highlight the secular nature of the environment outside of the pilgrimage site.

As soon as the pilgrims return home from the place of pilgrimage, the first challenge that they face is the adjustment and return to the normal routine of daily life as well as the accommodation and implementation of the spiritual discoveries that they obtained and the moral improvement that they cultivated during their pilgrimage. There is no doubt that everyday life seems somewhat incongruous in comparison to the spiritual experiences that you experience at a place of pilgrimage. It is also true that the experience of returning is a kind of separation from the space and place as well as the spiritual circle, which has served to transmit affective influences and reintegration of

the pilgrim in his or her previous mundane environment. When pilgrims return from pilgrimages, neither the daily process nor the time and place cycles that are associated with them have changed in any way. There is only one change in the pilgrims' life, and that is the spiritual and inner discoveries that they have made during the pilgrimage, and the decisions and intentions they make in order to reintegrate into and adapt to their daily life after the pilgrimage.

9.2 Everyday life and Moral ambivalences

As the pilgrim goes through his or her daily life, these feelings of improvement and transformation are negotiated, reinterpreted and redefined by the pilgrim and shared with the network of family and friends. The way that these values reconcile and renegotiate the lessons learned in pilgrimage as well as the ability to reintegrate spiritual and moral behaviours into daily life, should be viewed as one of the dynamic characteristics of pilgrimage studies that anthropologists should consider in their research (Al-Ajarma, 2020; 2021).

Many studies that have been undertaken on the anthropology of pilgrimage have focused on the objectives and aspirations of pilgrims during the journey (destination), and not so much on the impact of these objectives and aspirations at the end of the journey (return). Among the pioneers of the concept of attention being paid to returning to everyday life as an aspect of almost every pilgrimage, Alan Morinis (1992) may be considered to be one of the first to highlight the necessity of focusing on this aspect. As a part of his introduction to the collection of essays that he has written on modern pilgrimage, he states:

“The return to the everyday is a component of almost every pilgrimage. While the sacred place is the source of power and salvation, it is at home once again that the effects of power are “incorporated into life and what salvation is gained is confirmed. The return journey and the reincorporation of the pilgrim into social life are the test of the pilgrimage. Has there been a change? Will it last?” (p.27).

It is his belief that one of the most important outcomes of the pilgrimage is “change”, which is mostly manifested when the pilgrim returns home and resumes daily activities. In one of the first ethnographic studies on the topic of return, Nancy Frey's (1998) ethnographic research, *Pilgrim's Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*, explores the different ways in which the experience of pilgrimage continues to be felt in daily life and how these pilgrimage experiences “are interwoven into daily life, influencing future actions and ways of being” (p. 179). Frey portrays the difficulties

that pilgrim as transformed individuals face in reintegrating into mundane surroundings that remained the same from before. As a result of their reintegration into routine activities, she portrays feelings of isolation, exhaustion, disinterest, disorientation, and conflict (Frey, 1998).

The study of everyday life has become increasingly important to anthropologists as they have found it to be an invaluable source of meaningful experiences. By focusing on the subjects' behaviour and actions in specific contexts, these anthropological studies reflect on the ways in which the subject shape as well as express their spiritual and religious experiences in the form of lived religion as a way to shed light on the everyday experience of the subjects (Schielke and Debevec 2012; Dessing et al. 2013; Hall 1997; McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2007). The experience of constantly forming and reforming the subject's religious beliefs through their participation in religious practices should be taken into consideration in conjunction with the different and sometimes competing priorities and experiences that the subject faces in his or her everyday life, which should be regarded as an experience which is impacted by all aspects of the subject's life (Ammerman, 2007). This explains why daily life can be seen as a reflection of the subject's real experiences and a testing instrument to determine the stability of the unique experiences acquired as a result of being separated from everyday life in daily life. As part of my efforts to reflect on the post-pilgrimage lived experiences of my interlocutors, I tried to follow them in public and private environments as part of their everyday domains of daily interactions such as at home, in cafes, restaurants, parks, on the streets, in the bus, in mosques, as well as in virtual environments, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram.

There can be no doubt that Samuel Schielke has been one of the most prominent advocates for conceptualizing everyday Islam as a field that reveals the more real and neglected aspects of Muslim subjects. There are many sections in my dissertation that have been inspired by his research, including this chapter in particular. In the article "*Being Good in Ramadan*", Schielke (2009) describes the daily experiences and actions of ordinary Muslims during Ramadan in a fishing village in northern Egypt. He describes various forms of social and cultural activities and entertainment that the Muslim subjects participate in, in addition to the fasting and prayer practices they practice during this month, including football, in order to describe Ramadan as a time not only for fasting and praying but also for joyful and pleasurable social activities as well. In another article (2010), he introduces these various choices of the subjects in

everyday contexts as an example of ambivalent or contradictory, even immoral, views and experiences of the subjects in daily life that should also be analyzed and looked into while examining the ethical and moral subjectivity of the individual.

The ethnographic study *Mecca in Morocco*, by Kholoud Al-Ajarma (2020) should be considered as a newly conducted and among the first ethnographies addressed post-pilgrimage experiences in the everyday context of Muslim life, which draws on anthropological scholarship on daily life, particularly Schielke's approach to everyday Islam. This study examines the impact of the Hajj pilgrimage on Muslims in Morocco as a transformative experience, and how this impacts their interactions with social relations and micro-practices in rebuilding their identities as "*al-ha ĵĵ or al-ha ĵĵa*" (p.4-5). As part of her ethnographic analysis, she reflects on the experiences of his interlocutors when integrating into everyday life after their Hajj pilgrimage. Using Schielke to illustrate the ambiguities and contradictions that his informants experience in their daily lives, she illustrates how they utilise the spiritual experiences that they have gained during the Hajj pilgrimage to make sense of their daily lives; however, despite the inconsistencies of their daily lives, he depicts his informants' effort to acquire moral virtues and to become pious Muslims. Al-Ajarma also discusses how pilgrims are faced with different expectations and competing demands when returning from Mecca, as well as ways in which they can shape their own social and religious behaviour after the pilgrimage (p.154-156). As a result of her research, she examines how fellow citizens, as well as their family members, who live in the vicinity, situate pilgrims in relation to what is expected of them as religious people in general, as well as their perceptions of the Hajj within the dichotomies of daily life in a variety of public spheres, which offers insight into how pilgrims view their pilgrimage in relation to their religious identity (ibid).

The findings of her ethnography are largely consistent and similar to the results of my own ethnography in this chapter. However, my work differs somewhat from that of Al-Ajarma in a number of ways. There is a strong emphasis in her work on Hajj as a rite of passage and as a formal or normative act that every Muslim is expected to perform. During this pilgrimage, he describes Hajj as a collective action with a social element, in which a pilgrim acquires a religious as well as social identity (social status, social validity, and spiritual merit) in the process of performing the act of pilgrimage. The pilgrim's social, and religious identity causes him to be monitored, judged, and expected by his family, friends, and in general by the public space in and around him

in order to test how far he has transformed from his former self to his new status as a “al-haġġ or al-haġġa”. Thus, the sociocultural aspects of the return experience are more prominent in his research.

Jamkaran pilgrimage, however, cannot be defined as a rite of passage in my ethnography, and unlike Hajj, pilgrims behave differently according to their cultural contexts and subjective pursuits, and laws and rituals of pilgrimage differ from those of Hajj. As far as my interlocutors are concerned, the post-pilgrimage experience manifests primarily in their personal experience as they relate to the pilgrimage. As opposed to Hajj, the pilgrimage of Jamkaran does not have a significant social aspect, and it does not necessarily attach social identity or religious status to the pilgrim, so that he or she may be monitored or judged by public expectations as part of the pilgrimage. In the process of integrating these moral discoveries into daily life, monitoring has become increasingly individualistic, and the continuation of the cultivation of moral values has become objectified in the form of critical self-reflection. A major part of what I’m trying to do is to evaluate the conflicts and ambivalences my interlocutors are facing on a post-pilgrimage daily basis, mostly in the direction of avoiding sin and cultivating a moral self, which has been conceptualized as the characteristics of a true *montazer* and depicted for them at the pilgrimage site as the main prerequisite to pave the way for the Mahdi’s Advent.

The purpose of this chapter is to show to what extent pilgrimage experiences of self-transformation lead to pilgrims’ short and long-term personal transformations in their daily lives. According to the narratives of my interlocutors, I will be able to show that the experience of inner and moral transformation in the aftermath of pilgrimage is impermanent, oscillating, and full of ambivalence and contradiction as well. It is evident that my interlocutors’ narratives are replete with reflections of moral failures in the face of the contradictions of everyday life, which demonstrates their failure to internalize the moral dispositions they cultivated on the pilgrimage to an adequate degree (Al-Ajarma, 2021). According to the narratives of failure and challenges that my interlocutors experience in their daily lives, pilgrimage may not always be the only factor that will enable the moral self to persist permanently in the long run. In spite of these contradictions and ambivalences, the pilgrim’s path towards moral cultivation is not terminated. It is rather my interlocutors who invent methods and strategies to deal with and even justify the experiences of moral failure and spiritual tensions they encounter when they return to everyday life. In my opinion, these strategies for

overcoming the experience of moral failure are part of the pilgrim's technique of self-constitution (Foucault, 2000) and can be considered a tactic to preserve a sense of moral self and to stay on the path to improvement in the face of moral failures. In analyzing the narratives of my interlocutors, I draw inspiration from the work of Beekers and Kloos (2017). In the introduction to their edited volume, *Straying from the Straight Path: How Senses of Failure Invigorate Lived Religion*, they analyse the tensions and contradictions that subjects struggle with in their daily lives and believe that these tensions and contradictions create constructive paths in the process of moral self-formation. It is, therefore, necessary to pay attention to and analyse the failure experiences of the subjects, as well as their spiritual and moral experiences, in order to provide a better understanding of the formation and orientation of the subjects. I intend to use this chapter to illustrate and highlight the heterogeneity and ambiguity between the dualities of moral considerations and the sinful desires and interests of the Muslim subject, as well as the unpredictable ways in which they navigate these dualities (Deeb 2011; Schielke 2010). This highlights the ambiguities and differences that exist in the formation of moral subjectivities of subjects rather than their coherence and straightforward nature as a whole (Marsden, 2005; Schielke, 2015; 2010).

Moreover, I will discuss the different methods of negotiation that my interlocutors use to encounter different teleologies, which, in turn, leads to the development of multiple modes of subjectification as a result (Liberatore, 2013). Using this analytical lens, it is possible to shed some light on the heterogeneous and fragmentary nature of the Jamkaran Messianic Pilgrimage experience on the ground of the inconsistencies, contradictions, and doubts that are inherent in the dimensions of daily life. In the theoretical part of the thesis, I have reviewed in detail the critiques of conceptualizing the Islamic discursive tradition as straightforward and coherent, a concept that is frequently portrayed in the anthropological literature on piety, especially Mahmud's ethnography. I believe, therefore, that the focus of the study should be shifted from examining the normative ways of living associated with dominant pedagogies derived from Islamic discursive traditions (as Mahmoud suggests) to the dispositions and actions of the subjects, as well as how they attempt to avoid sin and cultivate a moral self in spite of their failure or successes. As well as that, the ways in which pilgrims negotiate their spiritual discoveries and the moral self they cultivate during pilgrimage

with other discourses and ideals, as well as other models of self-making that they are able to take advantage of in their daily lives, need to be considered.

Before getting into the ethnographic discussion, I would like to mention the way I approached “the everyday experience” of my interlocutors as the subject of inquiry outside of the pilgrimage place. I had the possibility of meeting and studying a diverse group of pilgrims as part of my multi-sited ethnography, as well as having the opportunity to comprehend the different levels of experience engendered by pilgrimages in a variety of locations during the course of my ethnography. I monitored the impact of the post-pilgrimage experience on the daily life of some of my interlocutors at intervals of three months, six months, nine months, and a year so that I could understand how the pilgrimage affects their daily lives. The majority of these follow-ups were conducted through semi-structured and sometimes informal interviews about their pilgrimage experience and its impact on their daily lives. I have met with my informants mostly in person, but we have also exchanged messages via WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram in some cases. As a result of continuous in-person and virtual tracking of my interlocutors in daily life, this chapter reflects their pilgrimage experiences outside of the pilgrimage place.

9.3 Everyday Challenges, Moral Failure and Triggering Quality of Pilgrimage

During the chapter on the sermon, I discussed that the Jamkaran pilgrimage encourages the pilgrim to establish a heart connection with the Hidden Imam in order to have a fulfilling pilgrimage. This approach implies that the pilgrim should consider the Hidden Imam as a constant watcher over their actions and a present figure to remain attentive to their own conduct. This emphasis on the constant surveillance and presence of the Imam, which is cultivated in the pilgrim’s heart during the pilgrimage by encouraging the pilgrim to renew their allegiance to the Hidden Imam, makes the pilgrim aware that the Imam is always surveilling their life and, due to the sense of shame and modesty the pilgrim experiences as a consequence, avoids mistakes and sins on a daily basis. In fact, the idea is that the pilgrim’s sense of the Imam’s presence in his heart strengthens the pilgrim’s sense of modesty and shame when he is tempted to commit a sin. A sense of the Imam’s presence, as we discussed earlier, is one of the most important achievements and effects of pilgrimage, which makes it the perfect tool for keeping pilgrims on the path of moral development.

“It is a fact that every state disappears”, Elnaz, one of my interlocutors (whom I also talked about in chapters 4, 7 and 8 of this thesis), said this as she was disclosing her post-pilgrimage daily experience during our telephone conversation in the middle of a hot summer day. In her opinion, no state, good or bad, will ever be stable, and this is one of the characteristics of the world we live in. A good state passes and ends, while a bad state won’t last. Humanity and the world were regarded by Elnaz as inferior and forgetful, respectively. The evil of the world, according to her, is that *“it involves you in your everyday life; as you become more involved in it, it will carry you away like a river”*. A person should remember God and pay close attention to her Imam at all times in order to maintain a high level of piety and servitude, which Elnaz considered as an objective she wanted to achieve. Achieving this state, according to her, is a difficult task when one is in the midst of the mundane tone of everyday life. As part of her challenge, she always mentioned that:

The first thing you should realize when you decide to go on a pilgrimage is that you are the only one looking for change; the others might have other priorities, which may not coincide with yours. After you have returned from your pilgrimage, this will become more apparent to you. As time goes by, you get a better understanding of how the interests and preferences of people outside and the normal daily routine of life are different from what you experienced there. You are surrounded by relatives, friends and social networks all the time, and you alone cannot influence them all, but they will influence you on the contrary.

In Elnaz’s opinion, it is very difficult to find people outside of the pilgrimage destination with similar ideas and a sense of mutual understanding in order to share the pilgrimage experience with them. The varied and fragmented beliefs and lifestyles of those around Elnaz made it difficult for her to commit to her pilgrimage achievements and to stay committed to going towards it. In her opinion, daily life should be regarded as a thief of spiritual and moral states since it constantly occupies one’s mind and heart, resulting in constant distractions that lead people to sin and make sin normal for them. During the course of the conversation, she pointed out that she does make mistakes, and sometimes she is unable to avoid them because of the circumstances of her daily life. She stated, for example, the following:

Most of the time, when we get together with our relatives at social events, I engage in backbiting with them. As if this had become a culture not in our gathering but in Iran, I find it quite alarming. Whenever I attend one of these parties, I usually come to my senses for a moment and am shocked to see that an hour has gone by, and I am also a

participant in backbiting, either by listening to the backbiting or by participating in the backbiting myself. Nothing can be done about it. Even though I warned them a lot, I cannot break up my relationship with my relative.

To avoid participating in backbiting as a sinful act that can be caused by the complexity and contradictions of Elnaz's interpersonal relationships with those around her, according to Elnaz, sometimes even led to other sins in addition to backbiting. As far as she is concerned:

Due to the sense of guilt, I felt caused by the backbiting that occurred during these gatherings, I once decided that I would not go to my husband's relatives' house in order to avoid the backbiting that occurred there. As a result of my not attending once, my husband and I got into a verbal fight, and I ended up yelling at him and making some insults verbally to him. Later on, I realized that I had committed other sins in order to avoid committing that particular sin in the first place.

Getting caught up in everyday contexts and interacting with people with varying thoughts and opinions, my interlocutors are often faced with tensions and crises. They must ponder over crises and tensions in order to resolve them. As a Shi'i believer who holds the belief that she is under the surveillance of the Hidden Imam, Elnaz stated that, after daily prayers, she confessed her immoral behaviour to the Imam in order to repent to him. Nevertheless, her act is not limited to verbal repentance as well as performing daily rituals. To protect the spirituality she has cultivated in her pilgrimage, Elnaz uses a variety of tactics. In her words:

I tried to change my approach as soon as I realized I had no other choice but to participate in these gatherings. When this backbiting started, I would try to go to the kitchen and occupy myself by washing the dishes and taking care of the food to distract myself from the backbiting. The other alternative I would try is to keep silent, put headphones under my scarf, and listen to something to keep myself from hearing their voices. I would sometimes leave the gathering for a moment and go to another room to recite *namāz*. To put it simply, I always came up with an excuse to avoid this sinful situation.

Leaving the gathering was one of the strategies that Elnaz used to maintain the spirituality she had acquired during the pilgrimage, and to preserve her moral self in the process. However, it is clear from her words that this is not her only technique, just as backbiting was not the only sin she committed as per her words. According to her, in order to deal with what she considered to be the complexities of everyday life, one must constantly use a variety of methods and techniques, since daily religious

practices alone are not enough to guarantee personal piety, in her opinion. In addition, it is essential to possess the ability to deal with the complexities of everyday life to be able to protect one's moral self, such as what she did after her fight with her husband, i.e. deciding to attend the gatherings instead of avoiding it and producing tactics to cope with it.

Back to the first point mentioned by Elnaz in our phone call conversation, "*every state disappears*". According to Elnaz, this fluidity in the moral and spiritual state is a natural part of living in the material world. "*We must understand that moral and spiritual states aren't permanent, they happen to us, but they won't last forever,*" she said. Her explanation of this disappearance of the spiritual and moral state after the pilgrimage was based on the difference between the state and potentiality that she had heard in the sermon sessions in the Mosque.

She had learned from the preachers in the Mosque that spiritual and moral states become permanent when they become part of the potentiality of the subject. As long as this does not happen, she believes that the transformative spiritual feelings that pilgrimage can produce will decline and will ultimately result in moral failure. As such, the state disappears and is unstable, but the moral conduct and the spiritual emotion that has become the subject's potentiality (internalized) will stand the test of time and remain permanent. Elnaz expressed that shortly after the pilgrimage was completed, she experienced a relapse of lack of motivation and reluctance in her everyday life that she described as an inherent characteristic of mundane everyday existence. She begins to lose the emotional passion and the transformative experience that accompanies her since the pilgrimage at the beginning of the trip loses its potency as the days pass. She believes, however, that this moral and spiritual state won't vanish completely, but will rather be blurred rather than disappear completely. As she puts it:

I always find the first couple of days after a pilgrimage to be the best. I feel like I have a lot of energy and motivation. Once the initial days have passed, it appears as though I run out of gas. There is a sense of stillness about me, which I know is due to the sins I commit. However, I do not think we are very attentive to the effects of pilgrimage, since I think we are not very aware of them. It is true that the transformative spiritual state we experienced on our first day in the shrine is not permanent, but from what we have observed, it is certainly much better and higher than it was before we embarked on our pilgrimage.

As I was trying to understand her approach more fully, I asked her to clarify the issue of pilgrims completely disregarding the effects of their pilgrimage. The following example was given to illustrate her point:

The point at which I am at before I embark on a pilgrimage, for example, is zero. In the pilgrimage experience, I come to the point of the hundredth point, which is the point of transformation. When I come back, it is going from one hundred to thirty but not zero. It is because of this decrease from one hundred to thirty that the pilgrim draws the conclusion that all those transformations have disappeared. The problem is that we don't realize that we had been in a state of zero before leaving, and now we have reached a level of thirty. This, I think, is an outcome of our pilgrimage that we don't consider.

The declining spiritual and moral feelings after the pilgrimage that impacted the transformation cultivated as a consequence of my interlocutor's moral failures can be analyzed in two ways. On the one hand, Elnaz's narrative shows that it is necessary to separate the feeling and disposition towards transformation, what she describes as unstable states, from the real transformation that has become the subject's potential and capacity. Although most pilgrims describe pilgrimage to be transformative, this means the feelings and dispositions for change have been ignited within them, in other words, their transformative experience has remained, as Elnaz points out, in their "state" situation. There is no doubt, however, that achieving both the sustainability and real realization of the moral transformation cultivated in the pilgrimage requires the intention and continuous practice of the practitioner for change in order for it to become and remain the internal potentiality and capacity of the subject. On the other hand, Elnaz's narrative raises some questions regarding the all-inclusive, immediate and permanent approach to the transformation of the subject after the pilgrimage. The example of Elnaz illustrates that the issue of transformation should be treated as a short-term, gradual, oscillating, smaller-in-scale and work-in-progress incident, rather than a comprehensive, instantaneous, and integrated phenomenon.

In spite of the decline in spiritual and moral feelings and the fluidity of the moral transformation acquired during the pilgrimage, Elnaz compensates for this experience through the use of some techniques. As mentioned above, the real transformation that Elnaz, as a Shi'i believer who sees herself under the surveillance of the Hidden Imam, has been able to experience is when she is able always to feel and remember the presence of the Hidden Imam. As far as she's concerned, the Imam's perpetual presence and remembrance in the heart of the practitioner should be seen as a high

level of piety, in which one achieves a potentiality to see oneself as always being in his presence at all times, according to her. In Elnaz's opinion, it is very difficult to achieve this high standard of moral and spiritual status in the everyday course of life. The mundane rhythms of everyday life distract her from the constant devotion and heartfelt remembrance of the Hidden Imam, which she needs to achieve to attain this state of mind. She believes that neglecting the Imam's remembrance is a factor that leads her to make a mistake. As a result of these moral failures, she repeats the pilgrimage to compensate for them and to inject new motivation and energy into her transformational goals. As she puts it:

After a while, when I see that my progress is stagnant, I go back to Jamkaran to reaffirm my allegiance to my Imam. There is a stronger sense of his presence there. As a result of my pact with him, I promise never to commit sin again, and I will return. I believe this covenant renewal has an effect on achieving the real covenant in the end. In my opinion, this renewal of the pact needs to be repeated constantly in order for the memory of the Imam to be permanent in one's life so that one can remember him at any given moment.

Elnaz's strategy of constantly repeating the pilgrimage can be compared to Pelkman's (2017) ethnography *Fragile Conviction*, in which he refers to the "energizing act" of "proselytizing tour" (*dawat* movement) in Kyrgyzstan. In his ethnography, the *dawat* is depicted as a practice *tablighi*s perform three days a month in a mosque far from their local mosque in order to maintain their religious faith, which is fragile and unstable in their daily lives. Similar to this, pilgrimage can also be seen as an "energizing act", as a strategy of enhancing the "pulsating" quality of moral and spiritual faith in order to compensate for moral failures and to stay on the path of improvement in spite of them (Pelkman, 2017). There is a "pulsating" quality to Elnaz's strategy of repeating her pilgrimage, which is similar to the techniques used by *Tablighi Jamaat*, as Pelkman argues. This repeated pilgrimage strategy for pilgrims, similar to the *dawat* movement, is an opportunity for pilgrims to internalize the moral knowledge within themselves further and consolidate them in their daily practices as a result of this repeated pilgrimage strategy.

In general, this repetition reflects the pilgrim's oscillations and difficulties in establishing a balance between the reality of daily life and the experience of pilgrimage (spiritual ideals) (Beekers and Kloos, 2017). Taking part in the Jamkaran pilgrimage frequently, acts as a strategy in order to regularly strengthen internal energy so as to cope with the consequences of successive moral failures by systematically

compensating for the damage caused by repeated failures (Pelkman, 2017: 122). To be able to deal with the worldly contradictions and dualities that plague the pilgrim's daily life, they benefit from pilgrimage as a "state of refuge" that is both embodied in the space of pilgrimage and in the feeling of the presence of the Imam, which nourishes and rejuvenates the pilgrim spiritually as well as morally (ibid). This resonance is echoed as a "pulsating" quality of belief in my interlocutors' accounts of the repeated pilgrimage strategy as well as Pelkman's.

Moreover, these narratives demonstrate that the spatiality of the pilgrimage, on the one hand, is like a refuge to escape the frustrations and contradictions of daily life, from which the pilgrim is able to gain peace and affective energies as well as to visualize and strengthen the motivations of moral cultivation. Pilgrimage, on the other hand, acts as a tool for renewing and intensifying spiritual and moral emotions and desires within the pilgrim, which then enables them to develop concentration and strength to overcome the contradictions and dualities of daily life. The repetition of pilgrimage acts as a continuation of the sense of Imam's presence in the heart of my interlocutors, and it also serves as a tool for them to renew their commitments to moral cultivation and to overcome doubts they encounter in their daily lives. It is important to understand that pilgrimage actually places the pilgrim in the orbit of feeling the presence of the Imam.

9.4 Protecting Religious Deeds, Profiting from Immoral conduct and retaining a positive Sense of Moral Self: A Moral Failure Justification

On a sunny day in November of 2018, I had been travelling to Jamkaran Mosque with a group of pilgrims. The cleric stood up somewhere along the Tehran-Qom highway, on the way to the site, and started giving a few recommendations to the pilgrims before they arrived at the Jamkaran Mosque. He puts it this way:

You are all chosen and invited. As you all find this honour and opportunity to perform *ziyārat* in this Mosque, you are all considered by the Hidden Imam. This means that he recognizes your potential to help him. Dear brothers and sisters! You have the opportunity to grow closer to your Imam through this *ziyārat*. To become close to Mahdi, you must cleanse your heart and soul of any sins that make your relationship with him difficult. By removing this black and dark curtain, you will be granted great success, including meeting and seeing the Imam of the Age. No doubt, this is not an easy task and requires a great deal of care and effort. In order to gain the satisfaction of our Lord, we must follow his orders and behave in a manner that pleases him.

Then he concluded his remarks by saying:

When you complete this pilgrimage experience, you will be given the opportunity to start a new life because upon your return home, the Imam will already purify your heart due to the *zīyārat* you made, and it will be your responsibility to keep that *nūrānīyat* (luminousness) after you have completed the *zīyārat*.

According to the short remark of that cleric, Jamkaran opens a path to a new life, one that is cleansed from sin, and one which begins as soon as a pilgrim returns from a pilgrimage. “*holding to religiosity at the apocalypse is extremely difficult at the moment*,” said Mehrdad, one of my interlocutors who was sitting next to me. Then he added:

It seems to me that these clerics don't have any knowledge of the outside world at all.

As far as I am concerned, it is impossible for a person to live without sin.

As a first point, these statements were indicative of the moral failings that he was unable to overcome in his daily life as a result of these statements. He used pilgrimage as a way of reaffirming his convictions and beliefs that he had learned from his father. It was a belief he held that in the course of the apocalypse, religiosity would be the equivalent of holding a fire in one's hand (referring to a hadith he heard in the Mosque), and that he must endeavour to keep the few things he still has protected. In his words:

It is during this period of time that Satan and colourful temptations and lusts surround us. In order to keep my hat from being blown away by the wind, I try to keep it flat on my head.

In his view, the apocalypse is a storm that destroys everything in its path. The rational decision, in his opinion, would then be to stand still during the storm and make sure that what is there is protected. Mehrdad considers this as a justification of the fact that he won't be able to evolve and progress further as a result of the hardships of the End of Time; therefore, he is satisfied with preserving what remains of his beliefs and actions while he can. Mehrdad was a clothing shop owner in Tehran at the time and introduced himself as a lover of *Ahl al-Bayt*, particularly the Hidden Imam. Pilgrimage, to him, was a way of escaping from the everyday life he described as an apocalyptic trap. There was no sense to which he perceived the experience of pilgrimage as a dramatic change in his daily life, but rather as a means by which to protect and preserve what he thought would be left in his basket after the pilgrimage. According to Mehrdad, the lifestyle he was leading as a seller in Bazar did not give him

the option of escaping sin, which he referred to as the inevitable things and contradictions of everyday life that could not be avoided. As he sees it:

When you go to the municipality, and the person in charge does not do the job for you, and you have to pay money in order for the work to be done (he means bribery) or if you go to the tax office and the same thing happens. what is your duty? Can you stop living? In the current economic environment, the situation is bleak, the dollar rate has risen, and the market has become inflamed. The fault isn't mine; everything in society these days isn't in the right place. The truth is, when nothing is in its place, I am not in my place as well. To be able to live, I am forced to do things that are probably not ethical, but there is no choice but to do them.

Mehrdad, as a shopkeeper, described the market's prevailing conditions in such a way that ethical behaviour was not possible in a situation of such complexities. The descriptions he gave of the dirty conditions of the market relations were used to justify his own inevitable moral failures. Basically, he believes that life in the apocalypse is difficult, and it differs from life in any other era in history. As a result of this justification of how difficult it was to live at the End of Time and the moral failures he suffered as a result of this difficulty, he had begun to activate mechanisms of forgiveness, emphasizing the kind character of the Imam and simplifying religion in order to identify himself as a Shi'i believer in the Hidden Imam by simplifying religion. In my opinion, these mechanisms of highlighting forgiveness and simplification were a way for my interlocutors to justify moral failure and re-identify themselves as Shi'i believer of the Hidden Imam and retain the sense of moral self. During one of our conversations, he mentioned the following:

Certainly, those who are religious in the apocalypse will receive a greater reward compared to those who were religious in the past. There is no doubt that God takes it easier on those of us who live in the apocalypse. Look, we haven't seen any prophets face-to-face yet. As of yet, we have not seen our Imams. At the moment, we do not have any of them. Also, our twelfth Imam has been hidden. We are surrounded by a multitude of different religious schools and sects, as well as temptations and lusts at the same time. Did these exist for a Muslim during the time of the Prophet? There are much more challenging conditions in our lives, and God is surely more forgiving and easier for us.

Mehrdad's post-pilgrimage experience did not appear to have had a significant effect on his moral conduct, but, according to him, they were able to make him remain stable in the performance of his religious duties. According to him, as long as he recites

namāz, goes on pilgrimage and loves the Imam with all his heart, then it means that the Imam is considering him, which means that he has not yet become so bad. This is what he said in his own words:

I have this much knowledge, and I have this much capacity to use it. The Imam himself corrects the rest of the errors. He is aware of my limited capacity and will forgive me because he sees it. As a matter of fact, I believe that we are all guilty in the end. Therefore, we must all count on the mercy and grace of the Imam to forgive us and to forgive our mistakes.

Throughout our conversations, Mehrdad always referred to the Imam as being kind, merciful and forgiving as a technique and mechanism to justify his moral failure and calm his conscience. In addition to the mechanism of forgiveness that he used to rationalize the moral failures he made in his daily life, another method he used was that of exonerating himself by comparing his own sins with that of more serious slips and sins. He once brought this issue up in our conversation with the following example:

No matter how much we sin, we are not worse than Hor [he is referring to Hor ibn Yazid Riahi, who was a companion to Imam Hussain, the third Shi'i Imam]. He closed the way for Imam Hussain in Karbala, who was God's proof on earth and stood in front of the Imam until the day of Ashura, but on the day of the war, when he came to the Imam and asked for forgiveness, the Imam accepted his apology, and he was martyred together with the Imam. It is no longer the case that we are worse than Hor. When the Imam forgave him, then he will also forgive us. As far as I know, the Imam should provide us with an opportunity to improve and repent, and I am sure that he will do us the favour of giving us a chance to do so.

He was one of the military commanders of the Umayyad army dispatched from Kufa, just before the Ashura incident, with the responsibility of stopping Imam Hussain's movement to Kufa. After repenting on the Day of Ashura, he joined Imam Hussain's army, fought in his defence, and was martyred as a result of his actions. As a result of his repentance and joining the Imam, he has a great deal of respect among Shi'ites. In the eyes of the Shi'ites, Hor represents someone who committed the highest sin, yet his repentance was accepted, and he was redeemed at the same time. By making use of this analogy, Mehrdad is able to justify his moral failures, increase his hope of forgiveness, and maintain a positive sense of himself in terms of his moral character. Since he considers his moral failures to be insignificant compared to Hor's behaviour which is the worst sin, he is able to attenuate the negative influence of his morally

wrong conduct, and he continues to hope that the Imam will show him mercy and forgiveness. Mehrdad did not rely solely on this instance to justify the moral failures he committed on a daily basis. Another example he used was the Prophet Yunus' story in the Qur'an, which was supposed to illustrate that deviating from moral laws is a natural part of a person's nature and cannot be avoided at all costs. He says the following:

Despite the fact that Yunus was a prophet, he stopped leading his people, got angry, left the city and cursed his people for what they had done. It was due to his misbehaviour that the fish swallowed him and took him to the bottom of the ocean.

Then he pointed to a verse of the Qur'an that Yunus refers to himself as a wrongdoer in which he asks God to forgive him for committing the evil deed. It is perfectly clear that all the mechanisms Mehrdad used to justify his moral deviance in his daily life were a means for him to retain his sense of moral self and a means for him to identify himself as a Shi'i believer who wished to protect what remained in his religious basket. By employing these mechanisms and techniques of forgiveness, simplification, and comparison with worse situations, he was able to maintain a positive self-concept with no need to quit immoral behaviour. There is no doubt that these justifications are also aimed at reducing the threats to his moral self as a result of the moral failures he is forced to deal with in his everyday life. It is true that Mehrdad tries to make the link between the profit he is gaining from his morally wrong conduct and retaining his sense of moral self through his justifications of his moral failures, but he maintains that performing his religious duties and having a heartfelt connection with the Hidden Imam keeps him on the path to improvement. It is important to note, however, that this growth does not solely depend on Mehrdad's own actions; rather, Mehrdad hopes that the Imam's grace and mercy will protect him from the hardships of the End of Time and grant him the opportunity to grow personally and transform himself in the process.

9.5 The Pilgrim in Post-Pilgrimage: Negotiation with Intersecting Discourses and Implementation of Autonomy and Choice

It has been discussed in detail in chapters one and five of the thesis that the true *montazer* for the Advent of the Hidden Imam must communicate with him through heart perceptions. As this heart perception implies, the change has to begin from within the subject in order to be able to alter the subject's external disposition.

Consequently, Jamkaran pilgrimage and its rituals are always associated with the issue of abandoning sin and cultivating a moral self. It is therefore expected that a pilgrim of Jamkaran, who is to be a true *montazer* and play a vital role in accelerating the Advent of the Mahdi, should remain committed to avoiding sin and cultivating a moral character in his daily life after leaving the pilgrimage site. Thus, a pilgrim's devotion to the transformation of his moral self and abstinence from sin in daily life is regarded as proof of the pilgrim's pilgrimage's validity and authenticity. I think, however, that most of my interlocutors are not necessarily practising waiting for the Mahdi as a part of their daily lives. It is the sense of longing for the return of the Mahdi that is more prevalent, but at the same time, when faced with the contradictions of daily life, they find it difficult to incorporate the messianic spiritual and moral version, prescribed to them in the Jamkaran Mosque, into their daily lives.

In the face of disappointment and failure as a result of not being able to incorporate the messianic version prescribed by the Jamkaran messianic narrative in the form of the true *montazer* in his everyday life, the subject is forced to negotiate intersecting discourses, which simultaneously create doubts as well as motivates the subject to implement his autonomous agency to redefine his spiritual and moral dispositions not only to deal with the contradictions of daily life but also to continue the path of moral self-fashioning that had been hard to enact within the context of a true *montazer*. As a result, the process of self-transformation that takes place after a pilgrimage is redefined and reoriented in relation to negotiating alternative and intersecting discourses by implementing the subject's choice and autonomy to ensure that the subject remains on the path to moral self-improvement after the pilgrimage. This puts the subject in a sort of limbo between different intersecting discourses, in such a way that he simultaneously wants to remain faithful to the impact caused by the pilgrimage, but since he has trouble implementing it, he also takes advantage of the alternative discourses available to him. By doing this, the subject is able to choose selectively between discourses in order to refashion himself while still trying to adhere to the pilgrimage values in the process.

Back to Helma, the subject of the ethnographic vignette I started this chapter with. Being a religious girl, Helma didn't find life in the form of a true *montazer* prescribed to her in the Mosque joyful. In her opinion, religion is supposed to bring happiness to a person, and a religion that causes a person to be sad and depressed is a religion that has malfunctioned. For Helma, as it is for many other pilgrims, the post-pilgrimage

experience is initially associated with enthusiasm for performing religious duties, but gradually this motivation begins to fade as the day-to-day activities of daily living begin to dominate her life. According to Helma, after the pilgrimage, she had the following experience:

I would say that the experience of inside the Mosque is definitely a different experience than what happens outside. There you devote your life just to pilgrimage rituals and getting closer yourself to your Imam through establishing a heart connection with him, and you are completely disconnected from the noise and bustle of the outside world. You will not be distracted by anything. However, once you are outside, you must try to stay on track and fight to preserve what you already achieved. The success of your life depends on you, your outlook, your goals, and the lifestyle you live.

Helma described the path to practising to become a true *montazer* based on what was presented to her in the Mosque as going to be an extremely difficult and unattainable task. This is a way in which, in her opinion, only the clerics of the Qom area who live in monasticism have the ability to integrate it into their daily lives in a practical manner. I once asked her to explain to me the difficulties that she faces as a true *montazer*, which she finds to be a very difficult task to accomplish. She explained this difficulty in the following way:

Basically, real waiting has a very clear sign. Of course, according to what I heard in the Mosque, it is that the person must refrain from sin, his or her repentance must be sincere, and he or she must act in such a way that the Imam is pleased with him or her. In other words, whenever you see after repentance that you are not committing any sin, your repentance is accepted and the Imam is pleased with you, and you are a true *montazer*; however, if you commit any sin, your repentance has not been accepted. As a result, it is not acceptable, and the Imam is not satisfied with what you have done. If, however, you continue to leave sin after repenting, this is a sign that God received your repentance and that the sins that you have committed in the past have been erased and forgiven by Him. The same can be said about pilgrimages as well. If you commit a sin after you have completed your pilgrimage, then it means that your pilgrimage was not an authentic one. I understood it this way. This seems problematic to me. I don't believe it's possible for things to be this way. Despite my best efforts, I was not able to do it.

Helma perceived her efforts after the pilgrimage to become a true *montazer* as being in contradiction and challenged at the same time with the surrounding environment in which she interacted. Based on what she has told me:

I tried my best to leave my bad habits and sins that caused a distance between me and my Imam after I returned from the pilgrimage. The fact that I was trying so hard to leave this sin behind and to become a true *montazer* gradually led me to become more isolated. When I wanted to do something or go somewhere, I always considered the Imam's satisfaction first, and if it was a sin that I might commit, then I was not going to do it or go there. Because of this, I was unable to do a lot of things. I did not attend many parties or gatherings of friends or even missed many good opportunities for marriage as a result, for example.

In order to become a true *montazer* and preserve the spiritual and moral discoveries cultivated as a result of the pilgrimage, she puts all her efforts into performing religious duties and actions and avoiding sin. However, slowly, she begins to lose her social life as a result of this waiting-based lifestyle which not only leads to isolation but also to a loss of vitality and joy in her life. Helma's lifestyle has even caused her to be isolated from the other students at the university because of it. She expressed to me that she had been separated from many of his classmates because of her lifestyle and the way she dressed in a hijab, and this emphasis on religious lifestyle even caused her to lose a number of marriage cases that happened to her during her time at university. As a result of the waiting-based lifestyle that she had adopted, any form of conversation with the opposite sex outside of the marriage space was considered a sin and thus, she explained to me, this has caused her to show no interest in attending student gatherings in which boys and girls mix. Thus, she gradually fell into the trap of isolation as a result of this. The decisive moment for Halma, however, came when she was judged by colleagues at work. While Helma was studying engineering at the University, she was required to work in a private company for a while. She found herself under close supervision by girls and women with a modern lifestyle and up-to-date appearance, who constantly judged the style of the hijab she wore as well as the lifestyle she led. According to her own account:

There I realized that there was a huge difference between my world and the real world, and later on, became my awakening. I almost felt inadequate with my simple appearance without makeup, in comparison to those who had makeup on, wore colourful and modern clothes, and were in a true sense of being happy and attentive to themselves. I felt that I was not attractive at all, and it became more bothered when I noticed that in addition to being religious, they were also joyful, the thing that had been missing from my life.

A number of feelings, including the need for attention and recognition as an attractive girl, the need to overcome fear and loneliness, the need to participate in society, the need to deal with social exclusion, and the need to create opportunities for friendship and marriage, were all feelings Helma believes were evoked by her interactions with her workmates. These contradictions are more prevalent in the workplace environment, which poses a threat to her waiting-based lifestyle. As Helma was interacting with her colleagues at work, she began to have doubts about the type of waiting-based lifestyle she was maintaining at the time. As a result of the limitations created in Helma's personal and social life, due to her loyalty to the waiting-based mystical lifestyle, which had sapped all joy and vitality from her life, Helma came to doubt the meaning of this lifestyle and almost despaired of it. She said that as a Shi'i girl who is devoted to the Hidden Imam, she needed to rethink the ethics of expectations with which she lived and reshape her lifestyle, which had prevented her from connecting with people and achieving social and personal opportunities. As an example, she spoke of how she had missed a number of marriage opportunities that were presented to her during her time at university or at the workplace since she adhered to a waiting-based lifestyle. Because in these traditional models, girls were expected to meet their suitor at home (In order to get to know boys and girls, it is essential that the process begins at home under the supervision of the parents), and since the conditions of society had changed, she was anxious that she would be unable to find a suitable husband and a suitable relationship if she kept living in this manner. Due to the changing ways of getting to know girls and boys for marriage, the styles of getting married in the way that used to be the norm (that is, with the girl staying at home until the suitor comes for her) has almost lost its meaning. Therefore, the waiting-based lifestyle that she was presented with in the Mosque was not only in contradiction with her desire to have joy and happiness, but it also hindered or possibly blocked her path to personal and social growth. Putting it in her own words:

As far as I am concerned, it is neither fair nor rational to place the entire burden and responsibility of the Advent of Imam Zaman on the shoulders of the people. My mind keeps wandering to the thought that what the Advent of the Imam, who is a manifestation of God's existence on earth, really has to do with my sins and mistakes. Is God upset by the sin and error that I commit? Obviously, that's not the case. As a result, Imam Zaman, who is the manifestation of God, has nothing to do with these issues. Secondly, they keep saying that Imam Zaman is going to come for the world government in the near future. Do you think that it is only the sin of two hundred

million Shi'ites that is not tolerated? The rest of the eight billion people on this planet have what responsibilities? Aren't they delaying the Advent?

The doubts Helma experienced caused her to rethink her waiting-based lifestyle; as a result, she enrolled in a series of spiritual self-improvement courses based on the New Age philosophy in Tehran, and she began to negotiate her moral and spiritual discoveries cultivated during the pilgrimage with the intersecting discourses of the society at large. By means of these negotiations, Helma comes to understand religion as a matter of personal choice and as an inner spirituality, which allows her to rethink the waiting-based lifestyle, that she was taught during the pilgrimage, through the use of her autonomous agency. The implementation of autonomous agency in the reinterpretation of morals and spirituality cultivated in pilgrimage does not necessarily separate her from the discourse of pilgrimage, but by negotiating with intersecting discourses, she has been directed from a limiting way of living a waiting-based lifestyle to one in which the subject is provided with happiness and vitality, and more particularly her personal interests. Her narrative is as follows:

Is Imam Zaman seeking a follower who is sad, isolated and depressed? Or does he want me to be happy and cheerful? How does common sense tell us what we should do? The Imam wants each of us to achieve the highest level of personal perfection. The Imam does not require our personal worship. As a result, we ourselves need to worship and abandon sin in order to grow as a person. The relationship between our Imam and ourselves is also of the heart, so we should not focus too much on the appearance of persons. Thus, it can be said that wearing the hijab is not very difficult. The only thing that should be avoided is the type of clothes that draw attention as well as showing the body without covering it. I believe that each of us has a unique relationship and spiritual connection with the Imam, and each of us is on a different journey with him. Don't get caught up in appearances too much.

Helma's struggle to remain loyal to the waiting-based lifestyle forced her to question the traditional messianic life model which she had previously accepted without question. At the same time, in negotiating with the intersecting discourses, she was inspired to rethink the messianic religious laws and obligations that she believed did not seem logical to her. The effort she made did not separate her from the discourse of pilgrimage that she had been influenced by, but it clearly moderated her commitment to it as a result. For example, in Halma's claim, hijab is an act that still functions within the context of her religious lifestyle, but at the same time, it is being reconsidered and moderated as part of her own autonomous agency based on secular and liberal norms

(Jouili, 2011). This moderation of Halma's Hijab, which is the result of the renegotiation of her beliefs with intersecting discourses and the exercise of her autonomous agency, is in no way in opposition to her piety, as Jacobsen (2011a) claims, it shows how the subject's relationship to the norms of moral behaviour intersects, converges, and conflicts in her pious life which assists the subject in reorienting her pious life (Jacobsen, 2011a: 79).

By negotiating the pilgrimage experience with intersecting discourses, Helma reveals a way to fulfil her personal interests in everyday contexts and also grow personally, which, according to her, would not have been possible by relying solely on the pilgrimage experience. The fact that she is able to negotiate with intersecting discourses and resources, as well as exercise her autonomy, does not necessarily conflict with her personal belief in the Imam and her close relationship with him. As a result of these selective choices and personal interpretations, the modes of subjectification are redefined through a reshaping of her relationship with herself, the Imam and others. Helma's experience is an excellent example of many other interlocutors of mine who renegotiated their moral and spiritual discoveries gained during the pilgrimage either as a result of insufficient and unsuccessful internalization or as a result of difficulty in applying them in their daily lives. In the process of renegotiating their post-pilgrimage experiences with intersecting discourses, my interlocutors were exposed to various types of internal spirituality and personalization of religion in which the dominant traditional discursive narrative is challenged that manifests itself as an individual and internal model. It is through these negotiations with intersecting discourses outside the place of pilgrimage that styles of religiosity and different modes of subjectification are depicted that reflect the creativity, resistance, autonomy, and, in a word, the agency of the subjects (cf. Kamalkhani (1993); Kalinock (2004); Sadeghi (2009); Khosravi (2008); Varzi (2006); Mahdavi (2009)).

Moreover, Helma's narrative suggests that rather than taking into consideration that subjects are necessarily followers and implementers of the forms of normative living that are imposed on them by the dominant discursive tradition (as Mahmoud portrays), it is better to pay attention to all aspects of a subject's action when attempting to reach the spirit of piety (whether the subject succeeds or fails) and, more importantly, to consider how the subject negotiates with intersecting discourses and other self-fashioning models. This approach reveals to us the variety of processes

through which the modes of subjectification are enacted and does not trap us in the trap of considering piety as a homogeneous concept and understanding subjectivity through the lens of a cohesive and straightforward concept (Libratore, 2013). Helma's narrative also emphasizes how important it is to prioritize and deal with the real life of the subjects over the importance of prioritizing and focusing solely on the Islamic tradition. In their collection of essays (2010), Soares and Osella apply a similar approach in which, for example, the authors discuss methods of negotiation, as well as the combination of reformist morality and commitment by elite entrepreneurs in Kerala and their participation in the neoliberal economy. They have, in this study, focused their attention on the real world of Muslims rather than on Islam itself, in order to avoid the reduction of the analysis of Muslims to an Islamic tradition or to the impact of formal and informal power in moral self-fashioning (Soares & Osella 2010: 12). In a similar fashion Schielke (2010) argues that these approaches reveal a subject's ability to manoeuvre between multiple and contradictory self-portrayals that change constantly and are entangled between conflicting self-ideals, while at the same time highlighting the subject's attempt to present themselves coherently. As a result, Schielke (2010) emphasizes the need to be aware of ambivalence to study moral subjectivity and ethics (Schielke, 2010).

9.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how pilgrims use their transformative experience of the pilgrimage to engage with contradictions and ambivalences of the post-pilgrimage everyday experiences embodied in the form of religious, moral, and socio-cultural practices. I attempted to depict different narratives of my interlocutors' post-pilgrimage experiences and the manner in which they incorporated their experiences into daily lives, which are loaded with ambivalence and inconsistencies. Throughout this chapter, I tried to illustrate the inconsistent and contradictory nature of the situations my interlocutors encounter on a daily basis. Although these ambivalences may result in moral failure as well as fluidity in their spiritual development after a pilgrimage, these moral failures, along with a fading of the transformative experience that pilgrimage provides, should not be seen as a sign of the end of the road; as I have discussed, by inventing tactics, techniques, and mechanisms that can be considered as part of the process of self-fashioning, my interlocutors are able to fashion their orientation towards retaining their sense of moral self and staying on the path of moral

improvement. In addition to showing the inadequacy of pilgrimage as the only tool for the transformation and moral self-fashioning of the subjects, these failures also depict the issue of moral self-fashioning and pious living as one which is multifaceted, work-in-progress and fragmented. As a result of these contradictions and complexities, it becomes increasingly necessary to pay attention to the modes of subjectification as processes of incoherent and ambiguous in nature.

Additionally, I demonstrated that my interlocutors are not necessarily passive subjects when it comes to perceiving and receiving the dominant discursive tradition and the representations that have been imposed upon them. In addition to responding to these processes, they negotiate and integrate the dominant religious discourse (the pilgrimage) that they are influenced by with intersecting discourses, with the purpose of shaping themselves into religious subjects by integrating these discourses. In reconstructing their moral substance (external and internal dispositions) and their modes of subjectification (the way of heart connection with the Imam, feeling his presence, practising expectation for his Advent, and relation to the self and others), they use both the discourse of pilgrimage and intersectional discourses. In the last two decades, these alternative discourses, such as alternative spirituality (called the New Age Movement), poetry, and self-help literature, have blossomed throughout Tehran and other major cities in which meanings and knowledge are produced to create specific subject positions, in order to construct, negotiate, and redefine the subject in a more effective manner in relation to oneself and others.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that an eschatological understanding of the concept of the Mahdi as an apocalyptic Saviour and his Advent, which is depicted in traditional theological texts as a distant and unattainable future, has been portrayed in Iran as imminent due to post-Revolution political and ideological reinterpretations. The emergence of this shift in discursive tradition can be attributed to the integration of Shi'i messianism with politics and the re-conceptualisation of notions such as *entezār* and eschatology, which has led to the development of a revolutionary view of the Mahdi and his Advent, in which the Advent of the Mahdi is always seen as imminent, and the human agent plays a significant role in stimulating and facilitating his Advent. In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic tried to appeal to the public and to create revolutionary subjects loyal to the principles of the Islamic Revolution by utilising revolutionary messianic rhetoric.

My argument has been that these apocalyptic visions and expectations of the Mahdi's Advent that have been circulated as messianic discourses since the Islamic Revolution are not necessarily ideologically mobilising. Rather, they have profoundly influenced the process of moral self-fashioning of subjects through pilgrimage rituals as a way of shaping their moral identities rather than ideologically mobilising. These messianic discourses have redefined the ethics of *entezār* to emphasise the idea of avoiding sin and achieving moral virtue as prerequisites to the Mahdi's Advent. My interlocutors' moral self-fashioning is profoundly influenced by these apocalyptic and messianic sensibilities, with the apocalyptic future and the imminent Advent of the Shi'i Messiah creating a break in the continuity of the present and causing religious/spiritual emotions and moral disposition to emerge. As a result, I showed in ethnographic chapters that many of the virtues and practices promoted by the Islamic Republic under revolutionary messianic rhetoric are not necessarily ideologically mobilising and that my interlocutors are not inevitably revolutionary subjects who adhere to the original principles of the Islamic Revolution. These messianic discourses have been negotiated, reinterpreted, and redefined by practitioners ever since the Islamic Revolution, and they are also understood in the dynamics of moral self-fashioning and piety. It is evident that this active understanding of Shi'i messianism, which emphasises the imminent Advent of the Mahdi and promotes messianic fervour among Twelver Shi'i pilgrims in preparation for his Advent, can be observed at

Jamkaran Mosque, which is regarded as one of the most critical places for practising and embodying these messianic anticipations. As such, it can be argued that the development and growth of the Jamkaran Mosque after the Islamic Revolution can be attributed to the integration of Shi'i messianism with politics, as well as to the obvious efforts by the Islamic government to appropriate the Messianic belief system and spread symbols of public piety. Thus, the Jamkaran Mosque is considered not only a place of pilgrimage and piety but also a place for practising and internalising the multi-dimensional messianic project that encompassed the Islamic Republic after the Revolution.

Throughout this thesis, moral self-fashioning and piety have been explored throughout the context of the Mosque as well as outside its context in daily life, which has provided an insight into how practising Islam entails multifaceted dimensions beyond the patterns of Islamic discursive models of piety. As a result, this thesis has argued that Jamkaran's messianic pilgrimage and its associated rituals assist my interlocutors in imagining novel relationships with themselves and others, including a personalised affective relationship with the Hidden Imam. I have demonstrated that these novel imaginations of the self and the self-other relations expressed by my interlocutors involve changes in subjectifications that lead to a reorientation of the self forward in time. As a result, I have presented hope as one of the most essential elements in motivating my interlocutors' efforts to bring about transformation in their lives.

The importance of Saba Mahmood as a reference work on piety has been discussed, and I have demonstrated how my work, like Mahmood's, draws upon Foucault's ethical principles but departs from her exclusive focus on Islamic discursive tradition to demonstrate how ethical practices are simultaneously influenced by both the subject's agential perception and the intersecting discourses around it (Liberatore, 2013). The recent critique of the literature on piety and a focus on the approaches to the lived experience of the subject were used to explain how my work reflects the everyday experiences of moral self-fashioning outside the confines of the mosque. My aim was to replace the overemphasis on the influence of piety discourse by examining some of the recent anthropological scholarship on Islam that stresses the inseparability between piety discourses and other contemporary discourses, practices, and attitudes. I contribute to the field of anthropology of Islam by exploring how these ethical imaginations are being enacted through pilgrimage as a movement that has

transformative potential for individuals and enables them to achieve new changes in their lives. Based on the concepts of messianism, apocalypticism, pilgrimage, ethical imagination, hope, and everyday experiences, this thesis has revealed how these concepts are related to Twelver Shi'i pilgrims' moral self-fashioning projects.

Initially, I examine the phenomenon of pilgrimage, which I addressed as a means of re-evaluating one's self and forming a new identity for the individual. It is through pilgrimage that my interlocutors can reconstruct a shared meaning for their collective and individual experiences, which is useful for redefining identity and cultivating morality, spirituality, productivity, commitment, acceptance, and peace within oneself. My discussions show that liminality played a crucial role in my interlocutors' pilgrimages, as they separated them from their daily routines and provided them with a performative social space in which to exercise their agency through interacting and learning from others' experiences during the pilgrimage, which affected their subjectivities and ethical disposition and imagination. Their experiences at the pilgrimage site, their participation in Mosque rituals, and their interactions with pilgrims with similar attitudes have all contributed to their transformative experiences. Based on Frey (1998) and Reeder (2006), I also contend that pilgrims' continuous repetition of the pilgrimage experience keeps the transformative nature of the pilgrimage experience alive at home. It is more likely that emotionally influenced pilgrims will undergo self-transformations at the end of their pilgrimage. Consequently, these affective stimulations can result in transformations that affect not only the pilgrim's self-identification but also the local environment and society in which the pilgrim lives. It is evident from the accounts of my interlocutors that pilgrims' personal experiences in the Mosque, along with their inward relationships with the Hidden Imam, reinvigorate their spiritual emotions, which affects both their relationship with the Hidden Imam and their interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, pilgrims' emotional experience, coupled with their spiritual advancements, can help them identify new aspects of themselves and enhance their moral project.

To reflect how pilgrimage helps subjects embody spiritual emotions and moral disposition, this thesis, adopting Foucault's understanding of ethics, deals with moral self-fashioning as a process that includes the identification of a part of oneself (moral substance), reformulating the technology of the self, modes of subjectification to the moral code, as well as novel ways of envisioning relationships between the Imam and the individual. Throughout this dissertation, I have outlined how my interlocutors

improved what they saw as their inner moral substance by establishing a heart connection with the Imam. The Jamkaran Mosque's pilgrimage rituals emphasise the importance of purity of heart as an essential prerequisite to becoming a true *montazer* of the Hidden Imam and facilitating his Advent. The ultimate mode of subjectification is to become a true *montazer* and submit oneself to Shi'i Islam's authority as a divine tradition. Pilgrims are encouraged as part of their moral project to seek knowledge from the Imam and engage in Mosque rituals, such as listening to sermons, reciting *namāz* and writing petitions that should inspire them with their inner piety. Finally, the telos is the ideal model of the true *montazer*, which the Mahdi regards as worthy of attention.

I have demonstrated how Twelver Shi'i pilgrims engage differently with ethical imagination and how they understand, redefine and reinterpret concepts such as guilt, repentance, forgiveness, and moral improvement. My ethnography, which emphasises both the subjective experience of pilgrims in a Mosque and in the context of daily life, also has revealed the incoherent, oscillating, multifaceted, work-in-progress and fragmented nature of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims' moral self-fashioning process, as well as its ambivalence and contradictions.

For instance, as I have shown in the thesis (particularly in the second half), the Imam's presence and attention can only be reached by interlocutors who make inner connections to him, which gives the relationship a personal, individual nature. This personalised affective relationship allows my interlocutors to prioritise inner qualities over outward actions, leading Shi'i pilgrims to negotiate different methods of subjectification (pleasing the Imam; submitting their willpower to the Imam's willpower; executing both the Imam's and subject's agency and the subject's choice) and a variety of teleologies of the subject (being a true *montazer* of the Imam; being autonomous; and being a good Shi'i). In Chapter Six, for example, I discussed how my interlocutors use the performative act of petition-writing as a technique to realise their not-yet-fulfilled moral self, which they perceive as arising from within. Since they believe their internal capacities are not adequate to fulfil their moral project, they petition the Imam to negotiate about their moral failures and to obtain his miraculous attention. In the quest for transcendence of their insufficient internal capacities, they simultaneously hope the Imam's agency will help them transform their inner capacities and find the opportunity, worthiness, potentiality, and capacity necessary to achieve their yet unfulfilled moral selves. This process of forming a personal

relationship with the Imam and appealing for his attention allows them to rethink how internal values interact with external actions, to reconstruct their self-perception by expressing their autonomy and shifting their modes of subjectification. In the context of everyday life, I have also reflected these multiple forms of subjectification and processes of moral self-fashioning among my interlocutors. Chapter Nine demonstrates, for example, how my interlocutors do not necessarily perceive and accept the dominant discursive tradition and the representation imposed on them passively. Their response to these processes is negotiated and integrated with intersecting discourses, with the intention of shaping themselves into religious subjects by integrating dominant discourses (the pilgrimage) into their own.

In their efforts to become a true *montazer* (a pious self), Twelver Shi'i pilgrims engage in embodied, emotional and inner personal relationships with the Hidden Imam. This personalised emotional relationship with the Imam is embodied through the messianic pilgrimage of Jamkaran and performing its related rituals, such as writing petitions, reciting *namāz*, seeking knowledge and recognition of the Imam through attending sermons, and emphasising inwardness as a moral substance and the necessity of pleasing the Hidden Imam or being submissive to him as a mode of subjectification.

Moreover, my interlocutors' personalised emotional relationships take on a temporal dimension in that they allow them to reimagine (and leap out of) and reconfigure themselves and their relationships in the present by anticipating and orienting themselves toward the near future (Miyazaki, 2006: 157). Ultimately, these temporal orientations, which are embodied in the feelings of euphoria and hope, facilitate the process of subjectification and allow interlocutors to reimagine and reformulate their relationship to themselves and to each other in new ways. Therefore, my analysis seeks to advance the understanding of anthropological studies of Islam by emphasising the importance of the temporal horizon as a less-discussed topic (Liberatore, 2013). My thesis demonstrates that it is possible to shift the focus of our analysis from relying too much on the discursive tradition as a coherent unit to examining the dynamics of individual perception and how subjects interact with the Shi'i messianic tradition, as well as how these discourses impact their feelings, understandings, and reactions.

In this way, my interlocutors' processes of moral self-fashioning are characterised by ruptures from the past and present as well as a tendency to project oneself forward to the future. Therefore, reconfiguring the self includes repositioning the self forward in

time. As I show in Chapter Eight, many Shi'i pilgrims engage in eschatological sensitivities and ethical imaginations when performing the virtuous and temporal act of *entezār*, which enables them to reconfigure themselves and their relationships through temporal horizons. These interrelated yet coexisting temporal orientations can recover and reconfigure a sense of subjectivity that makes sense through an orientation to the near and distant future. Twelver Shi'i pilgrims, for example, complicate their ethical imaginations by simultaneously focusing on the relationship between themselves and the Hidden Imam in the present and the imaginative processes through which they construct themselves by visualising the horizons of the near future (i.e., the Advent of the Mahdi) (Moore, 2011). As a result of their negotiating with multiple temporal frames and emotional orientations that stimulate ethical imagination, their self-fashioning processes are intertwined with time. Therefore; drawing on Miyazaki (2004; 2006), and inspired by Bloch's conceptualisation of hope, which portrays hope as a conscious anticipation of the "not yet" (Bloch, 1986: 11), I also consider the virtuous and temporal practice of *entezār* (which has a prospective horizon and requires reorienting oneself in time) as an action inspiring hope, and conceptualises this hope through temporal reorientation to the future. As a result of this temporal reorientation, the hoping subject can re-imagine the present by following specific actions and ways of living based on the perspective of the end (Miyazaki, 2006: 157).

In this regard, my ethnography attempts to contribute to the anthropological literature of hope by considering hope as both an emotional orientation that stimulates ethical imagination as well as a forms of agency that facilitate the reconfiguration of self-other relationships on a temporal scale (Moore, 2011). Through the virtuous and temporal act of *entezār* and the personalised emotional bond with the Hidden Imam, Shi'i pilgrims can constantly engage in the prospective ethical imagination, and as hoping subjects, they can continually re-fashion themselves and their relationships in time. It is crucial to remember that these prospective moral self-fashionings, as well as the new imaginary self-other relationships, are temporary in nature and are never capable of lasting a lifetime. It is precisely the instability and non-fulfilment of such a prospective self-repositioning that keep hope alive among Shi'i pilgrims, as it provides them with the possibility of a permanent change in the temporal horizon.

Furthermore, this thesis reflects the experiences of Shi'i pilgrims' moral failures, both during pilgrimage and its rituals and in everyday life. Although my interlocutors wait

in hope and constantly strive to better themselves, my findings suggest that they are constantly failing in their moral project and are stuck in a cycle of guilt and repentance. Pilgrims' moral failures illustrate the complexity of their moral self-fashioning and their failure to internalise moral dispositions adequately during pilgrimage. Considering the failures and challenges my interlocutors face in daily life, pilgrimage may not be the only factor that enables the moral self to remain permanent. I have shown in Chapter Nine how these feelings of moral transformation that pilgrims cultivate during pilgrimage are negotiated, interpreted, and redefined by them in the context of sharing with family and friends and intersecting discourses. It is evident from these negotiations and reinterpretations that the post-pilgrimage experience of moral transformation is unstable, fluctuating, ambivalent and contradictory. Despite these contradictions and dualities, I have demonstrated that the pilgrim's path to moral cultivation does not terminate. Shi'i pilgrims always invent methods and strategies for dealing with and even justifying their experiences of moral failure when they return to everyday life. It is possible to view these strategies as a tactic for maintaining a sense of morality and staying on the path of progress (Foucault, 2000). Therefore, this thesis emphasizes the heterogeneity and ambiguity between moral considerations and sinful desires and interests of Shi'i pilgrims, and the unpredictable methods used by them to navigate these dualities (Deeb, 2011; Schielke, 2010).

Also, the thesis has examined how Shi'i pilgrims employ different modes of negotiation to encounter diverse teleologies, and how this, in turn, results in multiple modes of subjectification (Liberatore, 2013). I have examined in detail the critiques of conceptualising Islamic discursive tradition as straightforward and coherent, a notion that is often propagated in anthropological literature, especially Mahmood's ethnography. Therefore, my thesis shows that the focus of the study should be moved from examining normative ways of life associated with dominant pedagogies derived from Islamic discursive traditions (as Mahmood suggests) to examining the subjects' dispositions and actions, as well as how they strive to avoid sin and cultivate a moral self regardless of whether they succeed or fail. Moreover, it is necessary to examine how pilgrims negotiate their spiritual discoveries and moral selves during pilgrimage with other discourses and ideals, as well as how they make other models of self-fashioning that they can apply in their daily lives.

The data of this thesis in no way reflect the phenomenon of pilgrimage in general and its complexities among Twelver Shi'ites. In this thesis, Jamkaran has been analysed as

a newly emerging pilgrimage destination that is linked to the phenomenon of apocalypse and political messianism. The Jamkaran Mosque differs from other traditional Shi'i shrines in Mashhad, Karbala, Samarra and Najaf, where religious relics are buried. First, the sanctity of the mosque comes from the report and experience of the appearance of the Mahdi in that place. Second, the mosque is still a place of miraculous experiences. As a place of pilgrimage and piety, Jamkaran Mosque mainly aims at the messianic beliefs of pilgrims. In this regard, my study examines the trends and practices that led to the rise in popularity of Shi'i messianism after the Islamic Revolution by providing an overview of political and discursive reinterpretations to examine the interrelationship of Messianic aspirations and pilgrimage and explain how this messianic journey helps pilgrims to configure moral self-fashioning.

This, of course, does not reflect all the aspects and areas of pilgrimage of Twelver Shi'i pilgrims. For example, in my research, factors such as gender, political affiliations, the analysis of social stratifications of visitors, along with the transformations and rapid growth related to virtual space which have created new ways of virtual pilgrimage, have not been taken into account. The analysis of the aforementioned concepts in future research can provide researchers with a better understanding of the pilgrimage phenomenon. Also, to draw a clearer picture of the phenomenon of pilgrimage, future research should not focus only on the studied society, which is mostly exclusive to pilgrims, the host society and other stakeholders in pilgrimage and religious tourism should also be taken into consideration. In addition, to achieve a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of pilgrimage, it is suggested that comparative research on sites, religions, customs and behaviours of actors, which is usually absent in case studies. Comparative research between pilgrimage destinations inside and between inside and outside destinations and even between Islam and other religions can help achieve patterns at the local, national and transnational levels.

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