

THE INEVITABLE VICTORY



by

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**Professor of Engineering and
former Dean of the College of
Engineering, University of
Tehran - Iran**

Translated by:

Mohammad Yusefi

ALI A. BEHZADNIA M.D

NAJLA DENNY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1907 Professor Mehdi Bazargan was born in Tehran, Iran. He attended elementary and high school in Soltani, then he graduated from the Teacher Training Center in Tehran. Professor Bazargan was among the first group of students who were granted scholarships to pursue post-graduate studies. Two years later, he entered the Central School of Paris where he earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering. For a year, he was employed at French industrial institutions.

With the establishment of the Tehran Technical College, he was invited to teach a course in Thermodynamics and Steamengines. He became department chairman and held that position until 1962. In 1945-1950, he was dean of the Technical College and in 1952-1953, he was chief executive of the water refineries in Tehran.

Professor Bazargan is one of the founders and leaders of Iran's contemporary Islamic Movement. He is the author of many books related to his field of specialization as well as Islam. An example of a good Muslim, Professor Bazargan throughout his life has been active not only in the realm of science and religion, but also extremely involved in social and political affairs. His activities may be summarized in two periods:

First, during 1936-1950 he attempted to establish a new movement for freedom and an improved introduction to the genuine Islamic doctrine. A series of lectures were presented to the masses, students, religious groups and political groups. Simultaneously, he wrote many books and participated in the programs of various social organizations.

Secondly, during 1950-present, following the movement's growth and development, Dr. Bazargan has been directly involved in social, political and religious activities at all levels. He has worked closely with and supported the "Islamic Society of Students, Teachers, Engineers and Physicians", the "Society of Islamic Studies" and the "Islamic Centers". He was an active member in the "Iranian National Front" and supported Dr. Mosaddegh in his struggle against the British government to nationalize Iranian oil (1950). Following the coup of 1953 and Mosaddegh fall, Professor Bazargan and other responsible Muslims created the underground organization of the

"National Resistance Movement". Due to the fact that he opposed the colonialistic Contract of Consortium (which plundered Iranian natural resources), he was dismissed from the university in 1953. Soon after, in 1955, he was arrested because of his activities in the Islamic movement. After his release, he called upon many previously active members of the "National Front" to re-establish the "Second Iranian National Front"; this was in 1959. As a result of his stand against the government's false election in 1960, he was arrested again. With the assistance of some members of the "National Resistance Movement" and the conscious spiritual leaders, they were able to establish the "Movement For Freedom In Iran". Its purpose was to oppose the cruel and dictatorial regime in Iran. In 1962, Professor Bazargan and several leaders of the movement were arrested because they raised their voices against the Shah's "White Revolution"! He was finally released in 1969 only to be closely observed by the Shah's security agents.

Today, at the age of seventy-one, having spent a life of struggle and hardship and following the path of the prophets-Professor Bazargan is as strong and faithful as ever! He is watching the new generation and helping the growth of the movement.

Since the first edition was published, the author (who was actively involved in the Islamic revolution in Iran – Feb. 12, 1979) has now become the provisional Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ
 كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَ
 لَيَدِّلَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ
 ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

14God has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that he will establish in authority their religion --- the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they lived, to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me'. If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked.'

(The Quran: Noor, Verse 55)

The traveller to Iran will most probably have seen the likes of such a celebration - an occasion that sees Tehran's streets and bazaars decked with glittering illuminations, a strong feeling of happiness and elation, and a striking splendour that not only pervades the capital, but is manifest in towns and cities across the whole country. No doubt he will have also noted that among all the religious and nonreligious festivals held in Iran, it is this particular one that rouses the most festive spirit and excitement. This event has the most majesty, and is in turn, treated with the most sincerity. It is a religious and national celebration, a celebration of the people.

However, this celebration has been the cause of much surprise for non-Muslims and those who do not generally hold any religious beliefs. Indeed, it has often been an object of their criticism, and, at times, ridicule. They more or less accept other Islamic festivals on historical, ethical and even sentimental grounds; however, where the 15th Sha'ban and the anniversary of the birth of the 12th Imam is concerned, they doubt even the very origin and principle of such an occasion, to say nothing of the qualities attributed to that Excellency and the incidents which will constitute Resurrection Day and the general period known as the "End of Time". Surprisingly enough, they are not alone in their criticism. Even in recent years, certain Shi'ite intellectuals have been able to find fault with the aforementioned event. However, it must be stressed that it is not the principle of the matter that concerns them, but that they object to the disproportionate amount of pomp and ceremony which surrounds the event, which seems quite distorted when compared with bigger Islamic celebrations such as Eid-e-Qorban and Eid-e-Fetr.

Quite naturally there are firm reasons for the incredibly strong interest and pre-occupation concerning the subject.

It is a psychological fact that the extent of man's natural reaction and impressability regarding a particular occurrence or situation is not always proportionate with its true nature or significance. His reactions depend on several factors --- his mental and physical condition at the time of the happening, his own degree of involvement, be it of an intimate or a detached nature, and his own personal thoughts and expectations ---- all of which constantly fluctuate. It is therefore, his actual condition of these different factors and the interplay between them that sets the balance of any subsequent gratification or displeasure that he may derive from the incident. In this way, any notion of proportion becomes disrupted. With this in mind, we may be able to understand a little more clearly the exact reason behind the surge in enthusiasm and interest among Shiites concerning the 15th Shaban in the last century.

In brief, if we suggest that the celebration of the birthday of the "Imam of the Age" and the ideas and beliefs surrounding it constitutes one of the pillars of faith of Shi'ite doctrine, then we shall be guilty of no exaggeration. In order to clarify the situation and

present the reader with more detailed information, it is necessary to study the inner significance and purpose of the festival, and consequently, the question of Mahdism in general. Naturally, investigation into any field or subject may stem from a multitude of reasons. For example, a flower may be examined from several different angles and with various aims in mind. It can be studied purely on the basis of its chemical qualities, in an economical light with view to its eventual selling ability, or, from a horticultural point of view, be examined as an interesting and informative specimen of its own species, without the surface beauty of its leaves and petals being taken into consideration. In the same way, faith and conviction in the 'Mahdi' can be examined and discussed from both sociological and psychological points of view, and in the light of its role in scientific and Islamic revolution.

Although the very brief nature of this book and the even sparser amount of information within does not allow for the complete and correct kind of investigation into our subject, as would prove acceptable to both writer and reader, it does offer what amounts to a series of indexical allusions and a summarized discussion of the subject.¹

Shi'ite Beliefs concerning the "Lord of the Age"

The Shi'ites of the Ethna Ashari Ja'farite school hold the belief that the 12th Imam, whose name was the same as that of the Prophet, but who was known as Mahdi, was a descendant of Ali and ninth in direct line from Imam Hossein, "Lord of Martyrs". He was born on the 15th Sha'ban, 255 A.H., from the union of Hassan ebn Ali Askari, the 11th Imam, and Narges Khatun. Upon the death of his father he became Imam. By Divine Order, he went into "Minor Occultation" (Gheibat-e-soghra). At that time, he was completely hidden from public view and appeared only to his deputies, (navvab) who acted as intermediaries between the Imam and the Shi'ite community, and through whom he ruled. The "Minor Occultation" lasted until 329 A.H. when the Imam was 74 years of age and the special line of

¹The main reference book I used is: "Adyan & Mahdaviat" by Sayed Mohammad Beheshti.

deputation had come to an end. Thus began the second period of absence or the "Major Occultation" (Gheibat-e-kobra), which began in 329 and will continue until the day God permits his re-appearance before the "End of Time". The exact date and time of the Imam's appearance is known to no one (including the Imam) save God. However, what is known is that he will rise up at a time when the world is completely overrun with tyranny and oppression, when all that is left of Islam is a name and when all that remains of the Holy Book is but a trace or a shadow. It will be a time when the love of money, lust and gluttony will be the religions of the people. The name of Islam will be uttered and its lessons taught in renovated and richly decorated mosques; yet the hearts of the people will be asleep! The scholars of the day will be of a perverse and iniquitous nature. The people will be burdened with oppression, famine, internal disagreements and revolutions. An air of continual fear and anxiety will be prevalent in society. Most Muslims will have strayed from the True Path, and only a limited number will have retained their faith.

However, after his appearance, the Concealed and Existing Imam will fill the troubled world with justice and reform. He will provide an abundance of everyday necessities, sharing equally among the people according to their requirements. He will spread the God's pure religion across the earth....¹

A Happy Dream

When presented for examination by people who are unfamiliar with the subject or those who are conversant yet in disagreement with the idea, the question of Mahdism may appear to be little more than idle-talk or rumour. Their conclusion may be that the idea is one based on fantasy or surmise, surrounded by a whole host of flaws and ambiguities. An example is the present, concealed existence of the Imam Mahdi and the seemingly unnatural life-span accredited to him, the reasons for and the qualities of his Occultation and the immediate triumph that he shall score after his eventual appearance. Unfortunately, they count this among the numerous other false claims and flights of fancy that litter most religions and schools of thought.

¹Pages 35-45 of the book, 'Adyan va Mahdaviat'

Even if we suppose that this belief is nothing save hope and aspiration, it does, nevertheless, deserve investigation into its origins and ontological value. For whatever it may be, it has carved a deep niche in the hearts and lives of a whole nation, thus taking on historical and sociological importance. Therefore, it may prove interesting to discover from where and whom the roots of this conviction or habit have sprung, which person or persons have inspired and nourished it throughout history, and exactly how it has come to occupy such an important place. This constitutes, in itself, a separate chapter in the study of Islam and popular thought.

When comparing Islam with other major religions, we can see that it possesses a more clear and lucid history, with sacred scriptures and documents that were not only collected with greater meticulousity, but which have a more compiled form and more reliable sources. Therefore, the task of study and investigation is made considerably easier. One of the reasons for this is that Islam is the youngest of all religions; another is that it was introduced in the period when stylized writing as we know it today was just becoming customary. At the time of the Revelation in the Holy Quran, however, formal writing instruction was still a rarity in that part of the world. It was only after repeated recommendation and inducement made by Islam concerning the importance of knowledge and science, that the regular recording and registration of daily events, religious thoughts and sermons became commonplace. Subsequently, histories, narratives, Hadith and all intellectual discussions took on an academic and critical nature, giving rise to a wealth of books dealing with Tafsir¹, hadith, religious narratives and countless works on social etiquette and morals. Later on, the sciences of Rejal and Derayah came into being. They involved the examination into the validity of the chains of prophetic transmission -- a process which entailed the methodical sorting and sifting of sayings and transmissions with regard to their eventual acceptance or rejection.

¹Tafsir — the exegetical commentary on the Quran and other religious scriptures.

At the head of all these scriptures and documents is the Holy Quran itself, which acts as the infallible criterion for all other documentary evidence. It is the only religious book in existence which has not undergone any kind of impairment or corruption. Incidentally, the point is unanimously agreed upon by both its supporters and opponents. After the Quran, we have the texts of various sermons and prayers, such as Imam Ali's "Nahj-ol-Balaghe" and the "Sahifehe-Sajjadih" of the 4th Imam, Zein-ol-Abedeem, the authenticity of which is beyond refute. Continuing on, we come to the mass of books of Hadith of the Prophet and the Imams. Although the contents of this latter group are of a somewhat more scattered and inaccurate nature, the investigation into their authenticity or falsity is no Herculean task, especially for those who have a special insight into the subject and are willing to exert themselves in this particular field. Just as these documents are used by orientalists as a basis for their research, the Shi'ites base their discriminations upon the criterion prescribed by the Imams, which states that "...any transmission which is related in our names must first be checked for compatibility with the Quran; if it is found to be contrary to the Holy Book, then it should be discarded." Another means for separating the true narratives from the false is to take into consideration the actual value or benefit that society may derive from the narrative in question. However, if in the case of a Hadith whose interpretation could prove beneficial to one party and detrimental to the other, Shi'it and Sunnite narrators are in accordance, then the degree of credibility of that particular narrative becomes considerably higher.

The Divine and Islamic Basis of Mahdism

Apart from numerous allusions in the Holy Quran itself which have been interpreted as direct references to the 12th Imam¹, there

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هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

"It is He Who hath sent His Apostle with Guidance

exist, in various chapters of the aforementioned “Nahj-ol-Balaghe”, several clear and definite assertions made concerning the same subject¹. Likewise, in over 500 Hadith cited in Shi’ite and Sunnite

← and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion.” (Taubeah, 33)

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ بَرِّئُهَا عِبَادِيَ
الصَّالِحُونَ

“Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): ‘My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth.’ ”. (Anbia, 105)

These offer a definite promise of what will be the complete and final victory of Islam on earth, when its pious adherents will gain not only possession, but be endowed with Truth, security and material abundance. Also, in other Quranic ‘surah’ (Hajj 41 & 42, and Nisaa 157) there are verses which, according to many commentaries, can be interpreted as references to the period which will be characterized by the appearance of the Promised Imam.

¹ Among these are sermons 107 and 150 which are descriptions of state of the world at the “End of Time” and in chapters 138 and 181 in which Ali discusses the Imam himself and the steps he will take in his task of world reform.

“The society will be engulfed by ravaging wars, overflowing with havoc and devastation. At first, the conquerors will feel elated over their successes and booties gathered therein, but it will all have a tragic end. I warn you of the wars of the future; you have no idea of the enormity of evil which they will carry. The Imam who will create a world state will make the ruling nations pay for their crimes against society. He will bring succor to humanity. He will remove the hidden wealth from the breast of the earth and distribute it equitably amongst the needy

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sources from the Prophet and the Imams, Mahdism has been discussed with the greatest possible explicitness. From the gist of these collected narrations, it can be clearly understood that the whole question of Mahdism and the surrounding belief and expectation concerning the eventual appearance of the Concealed and Existing Imam, a member of the Household of the Prophet, is one of the most universally recognized and distinct points of debate in the Islamic world.

Below are a few of the above-mentioned Hadith concerning the promised Imam.

1. Hafez Abu Na'im, a celebrated member of Sunnite ulema has

← and deserving. He will teach you simple living and high thinking. He will make you understand that virtue is a state of character which is always a mean between the two extremes and based upon equity and justice. He will receive the teaching of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (may the peace of God be upon him and his descendants) after the world has ignored them as dead letters.”

“: He will protect and defend himself with resources of science and supreme knowledge. His control over these resources will be complete. He will know how supreme they are and how carefully they will have to be used. His mind will be free from the desires of bringing harm and injury to humanity. Such a knowledge to him will be like the property which was wrongly possessed by others and for which he was waiting for the permission to repossess and use. He, in the beginning, will be like a poor stranger, unknown and uncared for, and Islam then will be in the hopeless and helpless plight of an exhausted camel who was laid down its head and is wagging its tail. With such a start, he will establish an empire of God in this world. He will be the final demonstration and proof of God's merciful wish to acquaint man with the right ways of life.”

quoted from Abu Sa'id Khaduri that, "The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, 'A man from my progeny will appear on earth and act according to my tradition (Sunnat); God will bestow him with His grace and blessing from both heaven and earth, and he will fill the world with justice in the same way it had been filled with oppression and iniquity'."

2. Hafiz Abu Na'im, quoting from Gheiss ebn Jaber and his grandfather wrote that the Prophet (PHUH) said, "After the appearance of tyrannical and unjust Caliphs, kings and princes, a man will appear from among my Household and fill the world with justice, just as it was previously filled with oppression and iniquity."

3. In the book 'Kafayat-ol-Asar', related from the book, 'Montakheb-ol-Asar', quoting from Abuzar Ghaffari that, "God's Prophet pointed to Ali and his children, Hassan and Hossein and said, "This brother of mine is the best Executor (of my will) and these grandsons of mine the most excellent of grandsons. Soon, from the House of Hossein, our Exalted Lord will produce religious leaders, and the Mahdi (Guide) will be of our community." I asked, "Oh, Prophet of God, what shall be the number of these Imams?" The same number as the Tribes of Israel.', he answered.

4. Yanabi' ol-Mowdodeh has related from Sheikh Kamaloddin who said, "The Prophet said, 'There is a vicegerent who, in the name of god, will appear on earth at a time when the world will be torn with tyranny and oppression, and thus fill it with justice and equity -- he will divide (among men) with complete equality, treat his subjects in a just and honest manner and in all disputes separate Truth from Falsity. In his time, there will be not a single drop of rain in the sky capable of falling that will not do so. Likewise, there will not be a single plant on the face of the earth capable of growing that will not do so (an allusion to the concept of the greatest possible use and exploitation of natural resources). He is the Imam Mahdi, and he will rise at God's order, banishing all religions from the surface of the earth, leaving nothing save the pure religion. He will be the ninth son of Imam Hossein (i.e. ninth in succession to that Excellency).' "

5. From the source of Jaber ebn Abdollah Ansari who has related that, "The Prophet of God said, 'A vicegerent shall appear at the End of Time and render all wealth and property infinite and

immeasurable'."

6. Salit affirms that Hossein ebn Ali ebn Abutaleb said, "There are 12 Mahdis (Guides), the first of whom was the Amirol-Mo'memin, Ali ebn Abutaleb, and the last will be the ninth in my progeny, Imam Gha'em, who with his God-given right, will restore the earth to life after its apparent death. Thus, he will expose the infidels and polytheists and will gain victory over the whole world. For him there will be a long occultation during which a certain number of people shall stray from the True Path. Another group will remain faithful to their beliefs, but will do so while under oppression and torture. They will be constantly tested with jibes such as, 'if this claim of yours (concerning the advent of the Mahdi) is true, then when will it come to pass?' Let it be known that those who during this period of absence can offer resistance to this injustice and bear this torment and disbelief quietly and patiently -- then they will be likened to those who fought in the retinue of the Prophet in the Holy wars (jihad)".

7. It is interesting to note that a considerable number of Sunnite ulema who apart from being responsible for the narration of many of the relevant Hadith, have also allocated a considerable number of books and treaties which offer proof of the eventual rise and appearance of the Concealed Imam. Among them are Abu Abdollah Mohammed ebn Yusef Ganji Shafe'i (the author of *Kashf-ol-Zonun*), Sheikh Nooroddin Ali ebn Mohammad ebn Sabbagh Maleki Makki (author of *Fosul-al-Mohemmeh Fima 'refacto' A'emeh - Important Chapters in Imamology*), Mohioddin ebn Mohammed ebn Ali ebn Mohammed al'Arabi Hatam Tayy Andolosi Hanbali (Chapter 366 of the book '*Fotuhah*'), Sheikh Adib Abu Mohammad Abdollah ebn Ahmad ebn-Heshab, Sheikh Abdol-vahab ebn Ahmad ebn Ali Sha'rani....

In brief, Islamically, the whole concept of Mahdism, with its inherent hope and belief in the Concealed and Promised Imam, is a considerably old and deep-rooted one. It is not, however, an Iranian invention; nor is it a belief borrowed from the Zorastrians (as orientalists such as the French Jew Darmsteter have argued). In the same way, it is not something which has been solely confined to Shi'ite beliefs. As can be witnesses, it has roots which can be quite clearly traced back to the personage and sayings of the Holy

Prophet himself. An interesting example of the deep-rootedness of this belief and the general acceptance and influence it has had among Moslems of all periods is the considerable number of "would be-Mahdis" who have, with noticeable recurrence, made fraudulent claims to that exalted position. They have appeared from the outset of Islam until the present day and throughout the Islamic world. Their actions have been linked by more or less one common aim -- to rise up against the tyranny and injustice of the Caliphs and Kings of their respective periods and to implement religious reform.

Below is a list of names of some of the people who have appeared as the Promised Mahdi -- and in some cases, the names of followers who attributed the title and position to their leaders:¹

Abu Eshagh Abu Obideh Saghafi claimed to be Mahdi (after Mohammad Hanifeh in the first century A.H.) when, under the banner of "Avenger of Hossein" (may peace be upon him) he rose up with the assistance of Ebrahim ebn Ashtar; Abol Hassan Zaid ebn Ali, killed in a campaign against the tyrannical Ummayyads, was recognized as Mahdi by his followers, who were convinced of his eventual re-appearance; Ebrahim ebn Mohammad ebn Abbas was acknowledged as Mahdi at Kufa in the year 104, when the people swore their allegiance to him and prayed alongside him; Abu Moslem Khorasani rose up against the Ummayyads in Khorasan in 127 and later assumed the title of Mahdi; Abu Abdollah Mahdi had gold 'hojjatollah' (proof of God) coins minted in his own name in Africa in the year 297; Mohammad ebn Towmart Abu Abdollah Maghrebi al-Hassan claimed he was the Promised Mahdi in the Far West in 522, and participated in several important wars which followed; the famous Sudanese Mahdi rose during the 12th Century A.H. (1881 A.D.), taking Khartoum and subsequently the whole of the Sudan under the banner of the Promised Imam; Abbas al-Rifi rose up in the latter part of the 7th century and headed a revolt; Al-Said Mohamad al-Junivari al-Hendi proclaimed himself Mahdi in the year 901, and gained the allegiance of many people; Musa al-Kurdi from Kurdistan, and a contemporary of Sultan Khoda Bandeh, was

¹Quoting from M. Beheshti, 'Adyan va Mahdaviat'.

another claimant; Abolkaram al-Dorrani amassed a following of some 60,000 as Mahdi in Bokhara and was later killed in the Mongol invasion; Gholam Ahmad Ghadiani appeared and made his claim in India shortly before the 1st World War; Mirza Taher Hakkak Esfahani was a pupil of Said Kazem Rashti, the latter who, having asserted his so-called rights as "representative of the Prophets", was engaged as counsellor to the Ottoman Sultans in Istanbul and after reaching a considerably high degree of fame and influence, proclaimed himself Mahdi, although he was later poisoned and died in the year 1300; Seyed Ali Mohammed Bab, another of Rashti's students, came to the fore during the reign of Nasser-od-din Shah, introduced himself as "Gate" or intermediary between man and the Imams and then proclaimed himself Mahdi, and sowed the seeds for what later became the Babi and Baha'i sects.

Essentially, this expectation and deep conviction in a Promised Savior, a World Avenger who will appear at the "end of time" and restore peace to a disrupted world, is a dominant feature of nearly all existing monotheistic religions. These faiths have usually given glad tidings of his coming. The Zoroastrians call him Soashyant, Brahma or Ishnoo; the Jews await the arrival of the Mash'i, or Promised Guide (Mahdi), King of Kings -- believed to be of the generation of Isaac; the Christians, however, believe in the return of Christ and the Promised Messiah. Even in the religious scriptures of the Indians, with their numerous faiths and religions, the happy news of a Saviour has been given. As may be seen, all these indications given by other religions concerning the Promised Saviour are, according to Islam and Shi'ite ulema, in close coincidence with indications in Islam concerning Imam Mahdi.

This was, in a nutshell, an indexical look at a few religious scriptures and documents which contain material pertaining to the 12th Imam.¹

¹In the book 'Adyan and Mahdaviat', a considerable number of examples and allusions on the subject have been related from the books of Zand, Shakmoni, Jamasebnameh, Vavang, Did, Basak, Patkil and Gatha -- apart from glad tidings given in both the Old and New Testaments.

Naturally, it is difficult to offer any definite proof or effective ratiocination on the subject for the reader who does not hold any religious beliefs; therefore, it is necessary to first fortify the basic pillars behind the belief in God, His Prophet and the Holy Book before we can embark upon such a topic.

Usually, a straight denial of any theory provides a comfortable short-cut for those in disagreement with it. As soon as they hear anything strange or unexpected arguments which appear contrary to reason and intellect, immediately and without any due consideration to the background and basis behind that theory, they will nullify and then reject it totally. However, if such an unproved theory is found to be logical and applicable to current affairs and facts, something not possible at the time of its introduction, then at least there will be favourable ground for that doctrine and the acceptance of its ideas.

Mahdism from a Social and Political Viewpoint

We will now digress from the religious angle and discuss the question of Mahdism from a sociological point of view. Furthermore, we will not consider Shi'ism in the light of the superficial differences in religious jurisprudence that it has with Sunnism (e.g. laws pertaining to ceremonial ablutions, prayer postures, divorce, etc.), nor will we treat it on the basis of any bias it may hold towards the Ahl-e-Bait (Family of the Prophet). It is time to unveil and behold the social and political face of Shi'ism, the sect which has always been a "militant minority" in official Islamic society. In fact, being 'militant' on one hand, and a "minority" on the other, are the two most distinguished and outstanding characteristics of Shi'ism.

Even today, fourteen centuries later, when Shi'ites possess their own country and have freedom of religion, if the number of Shi'ites in the world is estimated as 30,000,000 and compared with the total of 500,000,000 world Muslims, it is clear that the former still only comprises six per cent of the latter. In effect this is still an extremely weak and apparent insignificant minority.¹

¹Figures given concerning Muslim population may now be out of date -- for example, there are 25,000,000 Shi'ites in Iran alone, let alone other countries with heavy Shi'ite population such as Pakistan, India, Iraq, etc.

However, the militancy and fighting spirit for which the Shi'ites are renowned is manifested in many ways. The following are examples the very existence of numerous tombs of the descendants of Imams, scattered across the Muslim world; the annual, monthly and even weekly rituals of collective mourning which have now become customary, and a thousand and one stories of the most tragic and disastrous calamities that have befallen the sect's adherents -- (the atrocious killings and molestation, the suffering and rejection that proved continual threats to their existence).

It is obvious that the Shi'ites opposed and fought against the ruling powers for a good reason -- otherwise they would have never suffered such disasters and catastrophes for the sake of a few differences in religious jurisprudence!

Since their existence and general activity were forced into one of a hidden and underground nature, the Imams, along with their representatives and Shi'ites in general, adopted the idea of camouflage and dissimulation (taghiyyeh) as their slogan and battle cry. Islam's history is filled with the murders, torture, continual harassment and imprisonment that the Shi'ite Imams and their followers suffered at the hands of the Caliphs and leaders of the time. (For example, Abuzar Ghaffari at the hands of Osman; Malek Ashtar and Hojr ebn Addi at the order of Moavieh; Hani ebn Orrveh during the reign of Yazid, Da'bal...the First, Second and Third Shaheeds and a host of Shi'ite narrators of tradition and ulema, not forgetting the massacre of 2,000,000 Shi'ites in Ottoman Turkey at the command of Sultan Salim, etc.)

The wealth of sad and heart-rendering prayers, the painfully plaintive complaints that the Shi'ite Imams petitioned to God concerning the wickedness and oppression of the Sultans -- the seemingly endless wave of distress and helplessness which engulfed them -- all these serve as bitter examples of the persecution, censorship, deprivation and the basic encroachment of civil rights which was the unhappy lot of this depressed and downtrodden "militant minority" -- as opposed to the happy and fortunate state of the opposing majority and the general iniquity of the age.¹

¹We read in the Sunday and Thursday prayers of Imam Sajjad, and also in the Eftetah prayer that, "O God, we complain to you..."

The basic reason is quite simple -- all of the trouble and hostility emerged from the interpretation of the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ
فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا

“Oh, ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Apostle, if you do believe in God and the Last Day; that is best, and most suitable for the final determination”. (Quran, Nisaa 59)

The Shi'ites have never, throughout their history, been able to consciously observe any kind of neutrality or tolerate the wheelings and dealings of any Caliph, Governor or Sultan who had elevated himself to the position of ulu-l-amr (vicegerent, or “holder of authority”). They have, however, recognized the importance of such a position, the obedience towards which is obligatory. They uphold that it is obvious and quite logical that any authority (vali amr) should, after God and His Apostle, be a representative of these, and that his government should be imbued with righteousness, and not, as has been the case, act and govern in such a way as would be contradictory and incompatible with the Order of God and the Prophet. A vicegerent, or any authoritative leader who is to be the object of obedience and fidelity of the community should be a Man of God, and nominated by the Lord and His Prophet for this designation. Therefore, he should possess power of execution, leadership and a sense of duty. In the time of absence of the Imam, he must fulfill the certain conditions and pre-requisites of such a designation -- piety, justice, wisdom, competence, etc. Having come to possess such virtues, he must gain the further satisfaction and allegiance of the people -- or, on the other hand, be chosen by the

community. Furthermore, should the circumstances in any way differ from these, then it is considered tantamount to usurpation and oppression, be it of the kind of Yazid or Moavieh, Haroon and Ma'mun or Nasser-od-din Shah and others.....

Thus, the basis of hostility towards the Shi'ites can be traced to this point---that is, the whole question of Government and despotism---an evil totally contrary to Shi'ite belief, and something from which they have always retained rigid abstention.

In the book 'Vo'az al Salatin' by Doctor Ali Vardi (Professor of Sociology at Baghdad University), a whole chapter is devoted to Shi'ism. The author likes Shi'ism to a virtually extinct volcano virtually extinct in the sense that it still lets out occasional torrents of steam and smoke, and at times can be seen to shake and rumble. He recognizes Shi'ism as the personification and, be it directly or indirectly, the central source of all social and religious revolutions which have taken place in the Islamic world. He adds that in every one of today's Shi'ite ceremonies (such as the mourning and passion-plays connected with Ashoora, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein, dissimulation of belief (taghiyyeh); ejtehad (independent judgment) and taghlid (imitation of the mujtahed), there is a clear view of the social elements involved in national militance and the militance of minority groups and schools of thought.

In short, throughout many long centuries, all that has constituted power, be it through wealth or weight of numbers, domination and superiority, opportunity and potential have been enjoyed by the Sunnite majority and the Caliphate system (from the Rashedin Caliphs through the Ummayyads and the Abbasids to the Ottoman Emperors). At the other end of the scale, harassment, calamity and martyrdom was the unhappy fate of the Shi'ite underdogs.

In this light, if Shi'ism has been able to keep its head above water and survive as a sect at all, it has done so in an enigmatic manner. One of the clues to its survival ability is this very hope and conviction that it holds for the emergence of the Concealed Imam, the joy and comfort that his coming will bring, and the final triumph that he will achieve. And that, as a belief, is not to be overlooked.

Imagine, for one moment, a militant sect party whose members, at the hands of the enemy, have been completely scattered and routed, its books burned and destroyed, its leaders beheaded or led before the firing squad and its supporters terrorized and forced to flee or imprisoned. All in all, any line of survival is completely severed leading to absolute defeat (in the fullest sense of the word)! Simultaneously, its enemies try to convince it, or to convince themselves at least, that all its members have either been destroyed or forced to surrender, and that there is no future for them--not even the slightest ray of hope. In this case, just what will be the spiritual state of these persecuted individuals and that which was once their school of thought? Will there be any possible alternative left open to them save despair and submission, resignation to the treachery and degradation and contamination?

On the other hand, if, in the most difficult and exacting situations and throughout the darkest days of trial and tribulation, a warm flame of faith, hope and expectation has been kept alight in their hearts--then however much the cold, grey ash of destruction may choke and dampen it, it will still flicker with light and life underneath. However frequently their leaders and members are knocked down and destroyed, this faith will not die. At the earliest opportunity, like the Phoenix, they will rise from the ashes and carry on the struggle until victory is achieved.

Therefore, it was quite justifiable to affirm that the belief and expectation of the Shi'ites for the Concealed and Existing Imam, which manifests itself in the ceremonies of 15th Shaban, is one of the pillars of the Shi'ite faith. It is a force which offers assurance of its permanence and a guarantee of the final, inevitable victory. The glad tidings concerning the Universal Saviour, the Mahdi, and the promise and assurance of his eventual emergence were given by the Holy Prophet and their Imams to their followers with the stipulation that it be passed on to future generations. In addition, the events and realities of that unknown future time were explained -- True Islam will become weak and the faithful will be burdened with severe problems and difficulties. It was also emphasized that during these times, they must be patient and resist the opposing forces. Above all, they must always keep in mind that the forthcoming vicegerency

upon earth and the defeat of the opponents of justice and religion will stem and be motivated from agents within their own group. Furthermore, those who possess the required perseverance and hope, and continue along the right path despite adversity, will be likened to those who fought for the same cause in the 'retinue of the Prophet' (as the reader will have witnessed in the tradition narrated from Imam Hossein). Such a reminder and glad tidings prove to be an invaluable lesson in hope and comfort. It is also the basic and infallible key to triumph.

Considering the fact that such predictions could have served no useful purpose in solving the problems and difficulties of the period in which they were offered, and that their sole aim was one of instruction and enlightenment of future generations, we can see something of the far-sightedness of those who predicted them. Evidence of their truth and authenticity is presented.

It must be added that amidst all these beliefs and ceremonies, it is not only a limited minority or sect or clan that is involved, but a whole school of thought. It is a school whose flag of hope and encouragement is forever flying, a school which, however bogged down with difficulties and troubles, keeps its eyes firmly fixed on the future, and sees itself as the owner of the key to problems and needs of all ages -- with a motive that is not exclusively Arab or Iranian or Shi'ite -- but Divine and Universal.

During one of Professor Henry Corbin's annual trips to Iran¹ I asked him, during a lecture, whether or not it was true that, after the war, there had been a sudden upswing in interest and pre-

¹Corbin, Professor in Islamic Studies at Paris University and the successor to the late Louis Massignon, is also Director of the IranFrance Institute and one of the leading contemporary orientologists. He used to, and may still, make annual trips to Iran where he would study and research into his own subject from close quarters. A feature of his visits were the weekly meetings he would hold. Several were also attended by the revered and renowned Islamic theologian, Haji Mohammad Hossein Tabatabai, present, incidentally, at the meeting in question.

occupation among European intellectuals towards spiritual and religious matters. Corbin's answer was affirmative, he agreed that there had been a noticeable increase in interest amongst Catholic and other church circles. "However," he added, "what is the point? The Christian religion is a dead one -- however much they endeavour to stride forward, their outlook is still geared to the past and to Christ. They do not have the inclination or desire to furnish answers to the intellectual, ethical and philosophical questions of the day." He then continued, "The Sunnite range of thought also grinds to a halt around the question of prophecy and khatemia¹. It is only the Shi'ite faith whose rivers is still in full flow and whose doors are still open. Its faith lies in the Imam of the future as the solution to all world problems."

The Hope for the Final Victory

Thus, we can see that Mahdism and the beliefs surrounding it -- the ardent expectation for the emergence of a 'World Saviour' and the final victory of truth over falsity and justice over oppression -- is, in its various forms, a prominent feature in all religions. It is not, contrary to popular opinion, a coincidence; nor is it pure fancy. It is an extremely natural and acceptable thing. In addition, among all these Mahdis and Mashis, Messiahs and Ishnoos, we must realize that there is a common feature which links all of them.

Basically, we must take into consideration that no doctrinarian or inaugurator of religion is going to be devoid of faith and conviction in the ultimate triumph of his own particular school of thought. Likewise, it is absurd to think that he will have previously adopted defeatist attitudes and consider his own plans and ideas futile and inadequate --- unless, of course, he has presented them as a limited, short-term remedy to immediate problems that might evolve. Those intellectuals who are somewhat more realistic and far-sighted see the personification of all their theories and indoctrination in idealistic and perfect future societies. They consider the future as that of their making. Plato wrote of his ideal society. In the same way, nineteenth

¹Khatemiati -- the question of the Prophetic Cycle and its conclusion with the Prophet Mohammad.

century socialists pinned their hopes on the heavenly state of Utopia as the typification of all their ideals and theories. Even materialist Karl Marx, irrespective of whether he believed in God or not, believed in some kind of Hereafter -- at least as far as the final triumph of his own social class and theories, and the establishment of an ideal social system were concerned. Marx, considering that history, in its natural course, would finally result in the spiritual awakening of the working class, looked ahead to the day when the proletariat would assume the ruling position and the world would become free of class-exploitation, economic crises and stagnation, and other social evils such as poverty and war. Obviously, he most seriously stipulated that his followers work enthusiastically with this aim in mind.

Therefore, it becomes much more necessary for a montheistic religion (one extreme of which is concerned with pre-existence and perpetuality and the other with the Hereafter, and whose belief is in the existence of Divine Government and the Unity of God) to definitely and most earnestly strive for complete promulgation of its beliefs and teachings, with its ultimate use and implementation in mind.

There is, however, one basic difference between political and philosophical schools on the one hand and Divine religions on the other. The man who worships God--the Shi'ite for example--bases his endeavours and efforts on his belief in the Unity of God and the deep, inherent sense of brotherhood he feels for his fellow beings (be they close or distant, of the past or of the future). Furthermore, he realizes that he may never see the triumph towards which he is working--the triumph of Truth and Justice which will be that of his descendants. Nevertheless, he sees their victory as his also, and thus celebrates and congratulates those around him.

However, in the books and scriptures that have been handed down to us from monotheistic religions of the past, we only catch a brief glimpse of any allusions or glad tidings concerning any such future events. This may be due to the extreme remoteness of the time in question, or the general undeveloped and deficient nature of intellect among those who wrote such books. In fact, they give only a very brief mention of the subject and then pass on. Thus, the

question of government and social justice of even their own people does not concern them, let alone the idea of a Universal Government. It is only in Islam (and that, again, in the Shi'ite sect) that there is such complete awareness and consideration for the periods which will mark the "End of Time", the question of justice and security, and Divine Grace ('production')---all of which are explicitly connected with the idea of a 'Resurrector' and are incorporated in the essential beliefs and general religious ceremonies of the Shi'ite sect. It is obvious in their litanies and prayers. Furthermore, the hope, aspiration and expectation in the eventual realization of such a state is considered a duty, and what is more, religiously meritorious.

An example is the Eftetah Prayer, which is recited by the very pious before dawn during the fasting month of Ramazan. Half of it directly concerns the 12th Imam:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَتَجَبَّبُ لِنَبِيِّكَ فِي ذِي قَعْدَةِ كَرِيمَةٍ تُعْرِضُهَا لِالْإِسْلَامِ وَأَمَلَةٍ
وَتُؤَدِّي بِهَا التَّغَاثُرَ وَأَمَلَةٍ وَتَجْعَلُنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الدَّاعِيَةِ إِلَى طَاعَتِكَ
وَالْفَارَةِ إِلَى سَبِيلِكَ وَتُرْزُقُنَا بِهَا كَرَامَةَ النَّبَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

Thus, we can see that this great and long awaited Saviour is, in Shi'ite eyes, concealed yet very much alive. They look upon him as their helper and the solution to all their troubles. He is the one towards whom they direct all their pleas, prayers, wants and wishes.

In fact, as we have seen, all religions and schools of thought give such promises of a “final triumph” as a reward for the sacrifices and devotion of its followers. If among these schools, pure Islam, as taught by the Ahl-e-Bait, is seen to lean more definitely and with greater explicitness on the necessity for man to arm himself with such beliefs, then it does so. Having concerned itself more with general human and world society, the idea of eternity and the infinitely distant future of Hereafter, it has placed the heaviest and most exacting duty upon the shoulders of the pious members of its faith.

The Certainty of Victory

Apart from the socio-psychological aspects of belief, which necessitates such expectation and conviction in an inevitable victory, we must consider the subject from a realistic and material point of view. We must decide whether such ideas and aspirations are, in fact, valid and viable.

In Islamic jurisprudence, *ijmah* (consensus of opinion) is the stable and trustworthy criterion by which the validity of laws and traditions can be sounded. The Sunnites relate that the Holy Prophet said, “ (لا تجتمع امتي على الخطاء) ” “Consensus between our people is not mistake”. The Shi’ites believe that if in any matter there is a consensus of opinion and the Imam is in agreement, then its validity is unquestionable. Therefore, if not only the Islamic sects and communities are in agreement over a question, but there is a general consensus between the more clear-sighted and learned leaders of all world communities, then the authenticity of the matter must be a foregone conclusion.

This is not said merely to provoke sentiment; there is positive historical evidence.

At the very outset of Time and Creation, man possessed virtually nothing that could be called his own. Indeed from many aspects, especially that of natural equipment and ability, he was considerably weaker than the animal, and even more in need and dependent than the plant. However, despite all his failures and deficiencies, he possessed as much hope and aspiration as one could possibly imagine. Now, when we look at Man of today, we see an entirely

different picture. Compared to these times, he lacks virtually nothing. As opposed to the time when he went naked and homeless, he now clothes and houses himself in the most extravagant manner. The insecurity and danger he once faced against savage animals and various other natural catastrophes have now been eradicated by him. His wish to soar through the sky like the birds has now been fulfilled to the point where he has actually penetrated the heavens and reached the moon--something which was, at one time, beyond anyone's wildest dreams. He can project his voice anywhere he wishes. With the use of radio and television, he can carry out feats which no human, however sharp their sense of sight or hearing, could ever perform. Likewise, on the political front, he has, out of sheer disappointment and rebellion against the tyrants and absolutists of old, created new and strong central governments, based on freedom and democracy.

So this human, originally weaker and more helpless than the animal, with his apparently imaginary and immaterial assets of "hope, aspiration and will-power", has reached and obtained anything and everything that he has desired or deemed necessary, however difficult or at times impossible it may have seemed. On this reckoning, it is absurd to think that such an old and deeprooted ambition -- the organization and predominance of a secure and just government -- should not be fulfilled. Indeed, as can be seen, there has been worthwhile progress made towards such an aim. Considerable stages have been reached--the establishment of constitutional systems and civil codes; central government, law and legal consultancy; political freedom and equality; freedom of vote and the right of the people to elect or depose their ruling party or leader at will -- in short, autonomous government by means of proportional representation and basic social and political rights, such as the freedom of national and international relations, etc. Quite naturally, each separate stage of progress has been headed by designers and leaders who, as their own particular aims and ambitions have been sought, have had to tolerate considerable hardships and set-backs.

However, every social and political spearhead has, in proportion to the basic needs and level of mental perception of the people in

their respective age and society, only been able to plan and predict for one or two future stages of what is a very long and exacting journey. Unlike the Prophets, they have not been able to specify the actuality of the final stage and halting-place nor assert it in the minds of people as the inevitable aim and destination.

Thus, such a victory is, as it seems, inevitable. The establishment of a government based one hundred per cent on Truth and Justice which will satisfy the hopes and aspirations of all men, will, one day, be actualized! The whole of humanity, regardless of race, creed or color, is working towards it. Furthermore, they have discovered the formula -- Single, Universal Government.

In discussing the subject of a "Single, Universal Government", three basic questions must be posed¹:

- (1) Is the idea of a Single, Universal Government a practical one?
- (2) Will the establishment of such a government pave the way for complete repittance of all social differences and problems, and subsequently see the development and expansion of absolute justice?
- (3) Supposing that the proposed government does come into effect, and absolute justice and security are established, will this give rise to happiness and prosperity among mankind?

Actually, the answer to all three questions is a negative one. However, the negation is not absolute; it is negative purely in regard to the method of thought, reason and action of present ruling forces — and their enforcement of policies which are egocentric and materialistic. Under these conditions, the aforementioned ideal and desired government is quite out of the question. If such a government is to come into existence, it will only do so on the fulfillment of three basic conditions, which are as follows:

- (1) The Government would consist of a single, universal body, shared by the people and working for the common good of all.
- (2) Complete justice and brotherhood must be the dominant factor; any kind of disaccord or oppression must be totally

¹See: Bazargan, Mehdi — "Hokumate Jahani-ye-Vahed"

obliterated.

(3) The whole concept must be based on and adhere to complete unity of policy, belief and aim — an aim which cannot be other than one based on the worship of God and the acceptance of the Everlasting Life, or the Hereafter.

Thus, the whole subject returns to “ideology” — the ideology of a Single, Universal Government based on solid foundations and with the total acceptance of its people — an ideology which is no other than that of religion and God!

George Sabine, in his book *History of Political Theory*¹, confirms

“All the philosophies after the death of Aristotle became agencies of ethical instruction and consolation and, as time passed, took on more and more the characteristics of religion. Often philosophy was the only religion that an educated man had (in any sense) that implied conviction or feeling. No social tendency is more clearly marked in this period than the increasing importance of religious institutions, a tendency which culminated in the appearance of Christianity and the formation of the Christian church.” (Page 113)

“In the great world an individual could hardly be said to have function unless in some religious sense.” (Page 114)

“This new custom gave Alexander and his successors the authority needed to make their alliance with the cities effective.” (Page 117)

“The world-city of the Stoics was already on the way to becoming the City of God of later Christian thought.” (Page 120)

“By the beginning of the first century (Before Christ) the political processes which began with Alexander’s conquest of the East had in a large measure complete themselves. The whole Mediterranean world had been cast into the melting-pot and had become in no small degree a single community. The city-state had ceased to count, and there were no politically self-conscious nations such as the modern era has produced. Already it was apparent that the successor to Macedonia and also to Egypt and the Asiatic Kingdom would be Rome. It was apparent that the known civilized world would be

this. In discussing the transition of the Greek "city-state" to the "world-state" of Alexander or the "half-world" imperialism of Rome, wherever the subject turns to that of the establishment and enforcement of ruling governments over the various states and nations of the world, he states that, "political philosophy and ideology must, of necessity, be of a religious and Divine nature."

← united under a single political rule, as, indeed, happened in the course of the century following. By the beginning of the first century, also, the Stoic philosophy had spread the ideas of a world-state, of natural justice, and universal citizenship, though these terms had an ethical rather than a legal implication. The stage was set for the further development and clarification of these philosophical ideas. The more negative ethics of the Epicureans and the Sceptics — the identification of 'nature' with self-interest — continued to exist, but the immediate future, at least, lay with the ideas developed by the Stoics.

These had now become so dispersed that they were ready to lose their identification with any philosophic system and become the common property of educated men. These ideas included a number of convictions having an ethical or a religious import but not a very high degree of philosophical precision. With an ever-increasing tendency of the Schools to borrow from one another, they had even lost some of the precision which they had in the Stoicism of Chrysippus, as was to be expected when they became current in a culture that was substantially world-wide. They included the belief that the world is the subject of divine government by a God who is, in some sense, reasonable and good, and who stands therefore in a relationship to men that may be compared with that of a father to his children. They included, also, the belief that men are brothers to one another and members of a common human family. Their rationality makes them as a race akin to God and in some fundamental way alike, even after allowance has been made for the distinctions which diversity of language and local custom create among them. Hence, there are rules of morality, justice and reasonableness which are binding upon all men, not because they are laid down in the positive law or because a penalty follows their violation, but because they are intrinsically right and deserving of respect." (Page 129)

George Sabine, *History of Political Theory*

The Extent of the Ideology

Nevertheless, we cannot accept the validity of such a proposition merely because religion would have us do so or because Mr. Sabine has affirmed it in *History of Political Theory*. It is an evident and natural fact that just as the realm of government becomes wider and life in general, with all its underlying problems and difficulties becomes more and more confused and intricate, and man's thought and involvement in the world reaches higher and more excellent levels, then therefore his goal and ideology must be greater and more ambitious. He must widen his horizons and look at the world from a position that is more elevated and which encompasses far more than it has ever done before.

A simple example may clarify the situation. Imagine a lone traveller walking in the desert or any other barren place. It is enough that he focus his vision a mere one hundred paces in front of him in order to prevent a fall into any pit or crevice or a stumble over rocks or ridges. All that is needed is a swift, horizontal inspection. Naturally, this kind of vista will not suffice for long distances; as for average ones, it will throw the viewer into confusion. It does not allow for any streams, and other impassable obstacles such as gorges and canyons, which, at distances even less than one mile, may be completely indiscernible. If the walker is replaced with a hunter, supposing that the ground from his own standing position to the point where his catch falls is comparatively smooth and obstacle-free, he will walk blindly in a straight line, seeing his road closed before him.

Now, let us move on from the slaughter of animals to that of humans. During the period when war consisted mainly of hand-to-hand combat, or at most bows and arrows or rifles, it was sufficient for the fighter merely to be on horseback in order to get a good view of the field of attack and pursuit. However, as soon as the gun and other artillery weapons were introduced to the battlefield, this was no longer adequate. These new inventions necessitated the introduction of various war tactics and maneuvers---the methodical arrangement of troops and battlefield positions, the installation of high look-out posts whose function it was to determine the distance

of the enemy or intended goal, and the surveillance of firing ranges. Subsequently, it became necessary for those engaged in the battle to have previously mapped out the area in question (cartography). During the First World War, when the firing range of the cannon and artillery had exceeded ten miles, these look-out posts, situated on hills or at the top of fortresses behind the firing line, no longer offered effective guidance. Prior to this, the airplane had been invented and was used primarily as a more elaborate look-out system and an effective aid to the artillery line. Later, however, it was used to carry and drop bombs, and for pre- and post-war battle maneuvers, such as aircartography and the photography of enemy areas devastated by the bombing raids. Now, although the range of airplane altitude has gone from hundreds to thousands of meters, it cannot match the progressive increase in the power range of today's highly modernized fire-arms and atomic weapons; and therefore, out of necessity, it has recourse to space-rockets and moon-ships.....

Just as in warfare, the area of battle activity becomes constantly wider so the detection of the goal, or enemy, and the consequent viewing and interpretation of results and after effects must be on a higher and more precise level. In terms of everyday life and government, man's ideology and "world-outlook" must also, from day to day, take on purer, commoner and more excellent aspects. Consequently, private and even national ideals will no longer be of any use. Likewise, a simple economic or moral view will not be able to provide answers to all the social problems and upsets of Modern Man -- Man who, each and every day, shows a thousand different and new faces of his character and has wants and needs that are beyond all account and measure; Man who, having stepped his foot outside of this world and popped his head up through the heavens, can no longer be content with small and unambitious, insignificant aims which now limit and suffocate him, thus proving detrimental to his progress and security.

Even supposing that we do not believe in God in any religious sense, we can see that the historical, economical and material necessities of life are drawing us all toward one great social and political state--an ideology which will encompass all human values and needs, and all beings and realities on the greatest possible scale

and from the highest level---an ideology and goal which will take all conditions, times, places, individuals, nations, problems and topics into consideration from one sole viewpoint. In short, it is the ideology of all ideologies.

The necessity of the age and the actual present and future needs of human society urge us to look at life and the world in general from a Divine and Godly viewpoint (inasmuch as that God is described by the Prophets as the Personification of Strength, Perfection, Goodness and Virtue.) Only from this Divine viewpoint is it that our consideration and view of the world can take in all possibilities and situations, and like a bright sun, shine equally in all places---not only on the pebbles at the top of the mountain but also on the weeds at the pit of the deepest valley. This is a view which recognizes all countries and peoples of the world as one, as brothers---with all social classes and degrees having an equal place and situation. This would be in total contrast to the short-sighted and narrow-minded view of individual factions, such as East or West, nobility or working class, each of which sees, relates and acts only according to its own particular situation and needs -- with the obvious result being nothing save arrogance, disunion, dispute and general unrest.

Thus, neither is the expectation and belief in the triumph of Truth and Justice at the "end of time" just idle and absurd fancy, nor the claim that the unique, promised Islamic state (Single, Universal Government) will eventually be realized.

Why an Occultation

But, one might ask, why should there be such a long interval or occultation before the eventual appearance of the Promised Mahdi? Those in opposition challenge, "If this God of yours is as kind and omnipotent as you claim, then why did he not produce this victorious and beloved Leader, his vicegerent on earth, right at the very beginning?" Secondly, with all the signs and signals which will herald the "end of time" before the appearance of the Imam, does not the idea of a world suffocated with tyranny and injustice, and men who have turned away from God's religion, clash somewhat with your own logical argument that man must tread a pure and excellent road to progress before attaining their Ideal Government? Isn't there a contradiction somewhere?

Actually, these two questions, that of the length of occultation and the desired firm establishment of truth and justice come hand in hand. They can be answered by citing the Quranic view of Government. As can be witnessed, the Holy Book affirms that any kind of government or vicegerency should stem from the people, and that they themselves should, having chosen and stated their preference for the kind of government in question, be the motivating force behind its enforcement and control. There are numerous examples of this in the Quran and Hadith, the most straightforward being:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغَيِّرُ مَا بَقِيَ مَحْتَجِّبِيَّغَيْرَ مَا بَانَفْسِهِمْ

“Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves.” (Quran: Ra’d 11)

From this it can be concluded that the initial steps in the general amelioration or reconstruction of any social condition must be taken by the people themselves before Divine Will will intervene and come to man’s assistance, rescuing him from the pit of hopelessness and despair. In another verse, the Quran quite explicitly states that such a condition, that is, the expulsion of tyranny and corruption, will be reached through human hands but with Divine succor:

وَلَوْلَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ

“And did not God check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief” (Quran: Baghara 251)

According to the Quran, God, before the actual Creation of Man, had bestowed the robes of free-will upon man so that he, in time, would become God’s vicegerent on earth.¹ Subsequently, the first claimants to our freedom were the angels. However, the Lord was wiser and more aware than the angels. He created Man, granted him free will and determination and said:

¹ See Bazargan, Mehdi: “Ekhtiyar”.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا إِنبَأَكُمُ رَسُولٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ الْكِتَابِ الَّتِي لَمْ تَكُنْ عَلَيْكُمْ فَلا تَخَوْفُوا
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُونُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِمْ

“Oh ye Children of Adam! Whenever there come to you apostles from among you rehearsing My Signs unto you, those who are righteous and mend their lives on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve” (Quran: A'raf 32)

To His Prophet, who acted as a go-between and conveyor of communication between the Creator and the Created and who occasionally grew weary and annoyed with the doubt and disobedience of the people, He repeatedly reminded the Prophet that he was sent neither to judge them nor to be liable for them:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِوَكِيلٍ

Also, it is stressed that there is not room for constraint or compulsion in religion:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

**“Let There be no compulsion in religion.”
(Baghara 256)**

Religion must only be accepted by the people along with their progressive and simultaneous educational and intellectual development. It must be accompanied by complete instruction and explanation. It must also be clearly separated from error and misdirection.

قَدْ بَيَّنَّ الرَّشْدُ مِنَ الضَّلَالَةِ

“Truth stands out clearly from Error” (Baghara 256)

Since Islamic Government is one based on belief and piety, and in the Islamic faith religion and politics are, in the true sense of the words, inseparable from each other, in any Government of Truth and Justice, there would be no room for compulsion. Furthermore, such a Government must find its own way into the hearts and minds of the people encompassed by it. It must be their own choice. It must be completely distinguished from any kind of corrupt and impious kind of government. Lastly, it must be completely evolved and developed.

Concerning the question of World Caliphate, or Government of the People, we can see that both the Holy Prophet and Imam Ali, unlike Omar, never forced anyone into obedience or allegiance. After the general mass of people begged him to govern them, Ali accepted the Caliphate after much reluctance. In a Prophetical hadith we read:

كيف تكونون يوآى عليكم

“You will be governed in the way you deserve”.

Therefore, the light of a True and Just Government will never fall on a society which is darkened with corruption and oppression. In addition, it is essential that we understand that any state or government based on Absolute Universal Justice, along with complete barakat (abundance), must be a fully conscious desire of the people themselves. It must be constructed and motivated by them. As we have witnessed, the achievement of such an objective hinges on the people’s final acceptance and adoption of a straightforward and correct ideology---that is, Islam. Before this can be realized, long periods of time and effort are necessary along with successive evolutionary transformations and revolutions (both social and intellectual).

Before the final communication and God’s ultimatum, (in other words the Prophetic Mission and the Imamate of his successors) there must, out of necessity, exist a long period of respite--an interval for the development and perfection of education so that man can acquire the desired preparedness for the acceptance of Islam and the Government of Absolute Justice that shall accompany it.

During this period, man has not remained passive. On the contrary, having gradually opened his eyes and ears to the surrounding world, he has tried and tested countless systems which he has claimed hold the key to prosperity and redemption. Indeed, in many aspects success has been achieved and man has found a solution to his problems and difficulties. However, more often than not, it has been a case of falling out of the proverbial frying pan and into the fire. Since his life and ambitions have been based on egotistic materialism, all social pressure, injustices, transgressions and wars have taken on a deadlier aspect. However, just as man has been plagued with so much hardship and wretchedness and suffered innumerable kinds of tyranny and oppression, he has, at the other end of the scale, seen a matched increase in social and intellectual awareness, a growth in his thirst for Truth and Justice and a readiness to welcome it with open arms. Thus, when Man, having failed time and time again, realizes that he has no option but to change his ideology from one of ego-worship to God-worship, then, and only then, will the door to salvation and prosperity open before him.

The Phenomenon of Appearance

At this moment in time, the appearance of Imam Mahdi seems similar to all other social and historical phenomena. It is motivated and characterized by a general feeling of need and readiness, accompanied by the emergence of a small group of luminaries or rectifiers or a single prodigy who will, more than anyone and everyone else, possess greater insight into the problems of the day and, above all, carry the answer to them with him.

As was shown in "Islam and Communism"¹, such leadership cannot according to logical reasoning and through inner necessity, stem from anywhere but the cradle of Islam and the Family of the Prophet. It can be no-one other than the Concealed and Ever Present Imam, Mahdi.

¹ See Bazargan, Mehdi: "Islam va Communism"

The Longevity of the Imam

By now, most of the main questions concerning the subject of Mahdism have been answered. Any ambiguities that may have existed have been cleared up. However, one of the most sensitive issues that has remained untackled is that of the life span of the Imam--the apparently impossible length of which provides a sitting target for Islam's opponents. Quite unexpectedly, they consider it to be pure superstition, completely inconsistent with human and scientific reasoning -- as if anyone could live for twelve centuries?!!

Let us first offer a reply to the group of opponents who profess to possess faith or religion yet oppose the idea of Mahdism, be they Jews, Christians or Muslims. The answer is quite simple. Apart from the fact that they believe in God and His unquestionable and unlimited Power, and in addition, the occurrence of miracles, they also accept the very long life-span attributed to some of God's prophets (e.g. Noah at 950 years, Solomon at 712 years, Abdollah Kanane (Habl) at 600 years etc.) In this light, their protests seem extremely strange and without foundation.

As for non-believers, or those who do not wish to discuss the subject in the light of religious logic, a reply is equally simple. As can be witnessed today, modern science has by no means ruled out the possibility of man achieving very long life-spans (even of a 1000 years or more) and has set no limit as to what is the longest possible period of human existence. Thus, from a scientific and biological viewpoint, such an idea is far from absurd.

Evidence can be seen in the fact that at this moment elaborate research is being conducted by medical scientists all over the world to discover methods for slowing down man's natural aging process and to eradicate senility and even death itself. It is worthy to note that initial results in this field have not been totally unsuccessful. Investigations into other fields have also been carried out; for example, where the aim has been to create special scientific and biological conditions such as freezing at intensely cold temperatures, wherein simple organisms, and maybe even intricate ones (such as man itself) can be stored for long periods of time in the

state of half-life (or suspended animation) ready for eventual restoration to life in a future time.

Thus, although we cannot offer any precise formula or palpable proof concerning the unusual length of life of the Concealed Imam, from the point of view of Divine Will and Power, along with the everwidening scope of human potential and the possibilities and progressions made by nature, it appears perfectly acceptable!

Although we may not have treated the subject of Mahdism in the same way as we would have a straightforward scientific experiment or any other definite historic event, and although the reader may not consider it to be infallible proof of an incident which has not even happened yet (and will not for some considerable time in the future), it is possible that he will now have a much more enlightened view of the subject. The reader will be more aware of the gist of the matter. Not only will the possibility and inevitability of such an event have now become more obvious, but it will also be quite clear that this belief and expectation held for the Promised Mahdi is not only Shi'ite or Islamic, but religious and universal. As a necessity, it is essential; as a victory, inevitable.

For those of us who have received this news directly from the tongues of the most reliable and irreproachable sources, from the pick of the crop of human genius, our hopes are considerably higher. Upon these glad tidings, we pin our hopes, inspirations and pride. It is with the greatest enthusiasm that we look forward to the Promised Age. This will be an age when truth and justice will prevail over falsehood and iniquity, when tyranny and impurity will be replaced with justice and righteousness-----and we know that our hopes are not in vain!

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوفًا

“And say, ‘Truth has arrived, and Falsehood perished; for Falsehood is bound to perish’ ”.
(Quran: Bani Israel 81)

THE END

BY PROFESSOR MEHDI BAZARGAN

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