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MAHDI'S ADVENT
THE END OF DARKNESS

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CONTENTS

1. Despair	5
2. Hope	11
3. Expectation	17
4. Saviour	21
5. Conspiracy	37



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God
the Compassionate, the Beneficent

Despair

It is a desert, dark and fearful,
No goal for man, no way, no companion,
No sun, no candle, nothing is seen,
As if he has gone blind.
No wise man can he find to ask the way,
When suddenly thunder roars tiger-like,
And this man presses his ears for fear of
the roar of thunder,
Then follows a brief lightning,
No one by him, no way is found,
Darkness and silence, and no hope is left.

It seems as if pain and torture are born with man, for, he has never been free from them throughout history. The apparently sweet moments of life, too, have been so brief that before tasting their pleasure, he has paid their indemnity by a tormenting pain and a life-consuming calamity. The rise of reformers in history, too, even if it has, sometimes and for a short time, provided some people with tranquility, yet it has been unable to liberate humanity for ever from the sanguine clutches of the monster of confusions. A greater disaster is that with the passage of time, man's pains are not only not reduced, but rather increased and intensified.

The progress of science and technology in the present-day world, too, has not only failed to show a way to freedom; it has also produced fresh difficulties for human society. This lack of harmony between scientific and technological progress on the one hand, and spiritual tranquility of life on the other is on the increase every day and it has reached a point to-day where some western thinkers, such as Ernest Yunger, who live in wholly industrialised countries, express this belief: "Man's perfection and technical perfection are not attainable together, and if we desire one of them, we must sacrifice the other." (1)

The collapse and annihilation of spiritualities have driven the bewildered man of our time, so far that he is prepared to destroy great communities of mankind for the sake of the most trifling things. The pages of human history have never been bloody to this extent, and, at no time, has humanity been so entangled with the defilment of hostility.

The expenditure on military equipment and armament to-day in various countries of the world forms the greatest item of their budgets. For example, the armament expenditure of 120 countries of the world in 1970 was twenty percent more than the amount spent on education in those countries; and their health and hygiene budget was only forty percent of their military budget. (2)

To-day the nations, engaged in cold war, spend an yearly sum of 3 billion pounds sterling (66 thousand pounds sterling a minute) preparing to

(1) Passing the Line, Ernest Yunger, p.9.

(2) Journal of World Problems, June 1973.

kill human beings. (3)

According to observers: "The armament strength of the world up to 1961 was capable of destroying the globe twenty times" (4). This ratio has been augmented tenfold to-day. Up to the same year, a total of 50 thousand atomic bombs were discovered by international spies in different countries (5). And to-day the kinds of bombs made by man are 2500 times more powerful than the one which destroyed Hiroshima(6). He has also made hydrogen bombs for the operation of which only an atomic explosion would be required (7). It is dreadful that all these destructive forces are able to annihilate the whole of mankind by pressing a button even if it is done by mistake.

Meanwhile, the weak nations of the world which are exploited by the strong, are faced with such problems as poverty and hunger, so much so that to-day we see three-quarters of the world population confronted by the monster of poverty and hunger(8). And since this large group of oppressed people is a threat to the interests of exploiters, those who hold power have assigned some funds for the so-called "combat with poverty and hunger", but really to preserve themselves and silence the protesting groups. But it must be remembered that

(3) Has Man Any Future? Bertrand Russell, p. 242.

(4) Has Man Any Future? p. 140.

(5) Atom as a constructive and destructive force. Quoted from Humanist Journal, March-April 1961.

(6) Has Man Any Future? p. 111.

(7) Ditto, p. 53.

(8) Geography of Undergrowth, Iolakst.

the said funds amount only to one-fiftieth of the expenditure incurred on drinks and cigarettes consumed in their own countries (9).

To-day in order to solve such problems as poverty and hunger, war and class conflicts, man takes refuge in various ideological schools, but after some time he finds these, too, either an accomplice of such misfortunes, or unable to combat them. Therefore, in a state of total helplessness and despair, he gazes at the dark world to seek a sign of a lightning which would set fire to that blackness and save man from all this gloom.

The project of the United Nations seemed to be such a light which, in the gloomiest and most ominous period, namely after the deadly blows of the two World Wars on human society, shone in the minds of thinkers and reformers, and as the wounds inflicted on the body of the nations by the two Wars were still fresh, the leaders of various countries in the world took steps for the establishment of this organisation due to the fear of occurrence of a third World War.

At first, most people supposed that a final solution had thus been found for deliverance from difficulties, but the hope in this organisation was short-lived, for, from the very beginning the powers, which should have committed themselves to the observance of the international laws and their non-violation, reserved for themselves the right of committing every kind of crime on the pretext of the right of "veto". After a short time it became clear that this organisation, too, was nothing but a dazzling

(9) Journal of World Problems, July 1973.

formality, for, these were only the weak nations which were, in fact, duty-bound to carry out its regulations.

The failure of the United Nations Organisation to solve difficulties, owing to the lack of guarantee of execution, once more revealed the fact that neither plundering countries feel any pity for poor and hungry nations, nor is their own satiety to their interests. Neither are expansionist governments willing to abandon their military bases in weak countries, nor do they divide such countries peacefully between themselves. Also neither does there exist a basis for their educational programs, nor is the propagation of education and people's awakening in the interest of big powers. As a result, neither was the United Nations Organisation able to remove the danger of great nuclear wars, nor could it save mankind from the clutches of poverty and hunger, nor solve man's mental problems.

With this failure of the United Nations, the last aperture of hope too was closed for mankind, and man began to be convinced of the futility of all hopes as well as the futility of the world. To escape from this bitter fact, man either turned to suicide or retired from society by taking to hippyism, and thus trampled all social laws to seek refuge in narcotics. There is an increasing inclination towards hippyism as a rebellious movement in the world. For example, in 1968 in America three hundred thousand people retired from society, joined the hippies and took refuge to L.S.D. and Marijuana. (10) The rush upon narcotics by this group reached such a point that in

(10) Hippies, Heil Oder Holle, published by Ambassador College.

San Francisco alone one ton of Marijuana is consumed every week. (11)

In their bid to find humanity and brotherhood in eastern gnosticism, Hippies turn to India, but when they observe the Indians, too, suffering not only from poverty and hunger, but also of racial and class differences and sectarian clashes, and see nothing in gnosticism but dancing, poetry and addiction, they aimlessly and desperately return from this journey with their only souvenir, namely narcotics, and wander about mountains and deserts. Thus, the present-day human beings is, in utmost despair, awaiting for death to be released from this painful and burdensome life.

Will a nuclear war destroy the whole mankind? Is three-quarters of world population condemned to death because of poverty and hunger? Will narcotics eventually annihilate the human race? Will the days of man's misery never come to an end, and will he never be liberated from this hopeless life? Will a day not come when poverty is uprooted from human society? Can a solution be ultimately found to do away with all this confusion of human societies and put things in order? Will man be able one day to find a way towards his ideal life? Will this despair give way to a future which is full of hope coupled with equality and brotherhood? Will a day not come when human-looking beings, who are true animals, put aside their beastly vices and start a pleasant life based on human virtues and fine qualities and service to their fellow-creatures? Is there any hope in future?

(11) Rebellious Hippysim agaisnt Western Civilisation, Farzin Doostdar, p. 45.

Hope

Most thinkers and reformers believe that the only solution for putting the present world in order is the establishment of a single world government based on justice(12). Undoubtedly in order to check mutual clash among the great powers of the world for the sake of expanding their spheres of influence over weak nations, to abstain from the destruction of large masses in the way of securing greater profits, to remove the problem of poverty and hunger which has been caused solely for the sake of pillaging the wealth of the weak by the strong, and finally to take a step towards liberation from difficulties so that people, like hippies, do not, in despair, resort to narcotics in order to forget their wrong notions about the futility of the world and all efforts and hopes, it is essential that a government based on justice and authentic human values, must take over the reins of affairs of the whole world, unite all mankind into a single nation, and distribute all wealth equally among human beings, fully control the military power of the world, and place genuine human culture at the disposal of all.

Bertrand Russell, the great Western thinker and philosopher, says in this connection:

(12) Has man any future? p. 101.

"There is only one way to prevent war, and that is by setting up a single world government which could solely control all the great and important weapons. In my opinion if such a world government is set up, its establishment will be met with agreement and satisfaction in some parts, and must be effected by conquest in other regions. I do not suppose that the human race possesses such an ability and statesmanship to submit to the establishment of a world government willingly and wholeheartedly. That is why I think that the use of force and pressure is necessary at the outset for its establishment and preservation." (13)

Thus, a great obstacle in this way is the lack of adequate force to stand against the factors which start war and create other disorders, for, to-day the great powers of the world are in the hands of a group of selfish profiteers in whose minds the only question that does not arise is to forsake their own chances in favour of mankind and to set up a single world government on the basis of justice. For this reason in order to attain such an ideal, it is necessary to have a well-informed and virtuous leader who would rise with an immense power against these forces of oppression.

The presence of such a leader has long been felt by mankind for the establishment of a society based on justice, and therefore, such a religious leader has been spoken of, in some form or other, by various peoples and nations. The Hindus call him "Brahmin Kala"; Celtic groups name him 'Arthur';

(13) New Hopes, B. Russell, p. 134-6.

Zoroastrians name this saviour "Socianes"; the Jews call him "Joshua"; and the Christians and Muslims give him the title of "Reformer" and "Mahdi".

Evidently enough, an individual, whose most important program is to combat super-powers and to break up the organisation of rioters, should have a power superior to that of all others to be able to remove them all in the shortest possible time, and set up his wholly just rule in the world. Such a person can not attain his goal unless he is supported by divine power, and for this reason he has been considered by all religions as an individual selected by God, and they have presented a picture of him and his program, and with the lessening of time between these religions and the rise of that reformer, his picture has become more vivid.

Accordingly, the Muslims are unanimous that in future a man of the Holy Prophet's household who bears the same name as he, will rise by divine command, will establish a single world government with a solid basis of brotherhood and equality, and will put an end to all inequalities and human miseries. (14)

The Qur'an portrays the future most clearly in the following lines:

(14) This unanimity of view is based on the Prophet's utterances quoted by various Islamic sects in their reliable books. One of them says: "If only one day is left of the life of the world, God will prolong it so much until a man of my descent bearing my own name is roused to fill with justice the earth which is polluted with tyranny. (From Montakhab-al-Athar, Chapter 2, Section one)

"God has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers on the earth as He make rulers those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange; they shall serve Me, not associating aught with Me. (15)"

The Shi'a traditions and narrations have given the following description of Mahdi's program:

"He will continue his armed combat until the total annihilation of oppressive governments.(16) He will be aided by combatants and by the fear that God creates in the enemy's heart. As a result, he will not turn to any land without hoisting the banner of Islam there. (17) In this way, he will conquer the east and west (18) and will set up a single world government on the basis of justice. Under his leadership of the Islamic world society, human beings will be able to attain mental growth (19), and acquire the highest levels of knowledge and

(15) Verse 55 of Chapter "Noor" (the Light) .

(16) Rowza Kafi, Volume 3, p. 471 from Imam Bagher.

(17) Kamal-eddin p. 327 and Montakhab-Al-Athar Volume 1, p. 284.

(18) Ditto p. 331 and Volume 1, p. 229.

(19) Bohar-el-Anwar Volume 53, p. 336.

insight (20). Then the most perfect moral values will rule the world (21) and under their auspices, unity and purity will be established among human beings (22). He will divide the wealth equally between people (23) and abolish all class differences (24), so that everyone will have the possibility of activity and progress. Consequently, the world will enjoy such a degree of wealth and prosperity (25) that people will have no need of seeking profit in their dealings, and consider such an action as undesirable as usury (26).

To be brief, all human societies, particularly the Muslims, are awaiting for a bright future in which there is no fear and terror, no riot and confusion, no poverty and hunger, and no sorrow and misfortune. It is this hope and expectation that have been able to preserve human society so far against total destruction, and protect them against the danger of drowning in this wild and stormy ocean, by sticking to a wooden plank until they reach the safety of a ship.

(20) Ditto p. 325.

(21) Ditto p. 336.

(22) Al-Ekhtesas p. 24.

(23) Bohar-el-Anwar Volume 51, pp. 78 and 88 from the Prophet.

(24) Ditto, Volume 52, p. 309 from Imam Sadegh.

(25) Kamal-eddin p. 190, from Imam Bagher.

(26) Wasa'el-a-Shi'a from Imam Sadegh.

Expectation

The Shi'a expectation is one which rouses ardor and motivation, and gives hope and life. It is this hope that has not only helped the dynamic Shi'a society to proceed in its motion inspite of intense oppositions and intolerable sufferings, but has also been an inspiring factor in its advance. This expectation has been the key to its survival and progress. It would be fitting to remove the rust of superstition from this human-nurturing and epic-making principle to show what expectation it is that turns a numb nation into one full of fervour; a dispersed society into a well-organised one; despondent beings into joyful ones; distracted travelers into a steadfast group; violent humanity into a tranquil community; and a futureless history into a history-making morrow.

To become acquainted with the true meaning of this principle, the best authorities to refer to are Shi'a leaders. Imam Sadegh says:

"Those who live in the expectation of the establishment of the government of the concealed Imam are like those who serve under him, or even like swordsmen in Mahdi's retinue. Nay, I swear to God that they are like martyrs who have offered their lives in the company of the

Prophet." (27)

This profound utterance defines the lofty role of expectation, showing that true expectants, like believers at the advent of Islam, should rise resolutely and fervently against the paganism of their time, and endeavour heroically to the extent of martyrdom in preparing the masses to accept a divine and human order.

In this context, another utterance of the same leader throws light on our silence and inactivity, and calls us to the constructiveness of society by saying:

"He who is awaiting for our order (meaning government) is like one who is plunged in his own blood in the way of God." (28)

And we see in the objective-pursuing argument of Imam Reza the remark that: "The expectation of relief is a part of relief." (29) We realise that an informed Shi'a should act during the period of expectation as if it were the time of Mahdi's advent. Thus, we understand from the meaning of expectation the depth and worth of this remark that "The loftiest act of my followers is the expectation of relief." (30)

For the same reason, if the fiery epic of expectation is understood properly and introduced

(27) Bohar-el-Anwar, Volume 52, p. 156.

(28) Kamal-eddin, p. 326.

(29) Bohar-el-Anwar Volume 52, p. 130.

(30) Montakhab-al-Athar, Chapter 10, Section 2, p. 496 as quoted by Kamal-eddin.

to anxious masses, it will result in the blossoming of their young tree of life, so that they would, with a fervent mind and a firm resolution, make a great effort to build up a bright future.

To clarify this point further, you may think of a large army the commander of which owing to a wise necessity, leaves his headquarters, and announces to his army that the time of his return is not certain, but that they should all be ready for fighting, because, on his return, he will issue the order for assault, and begin a victorious war. The alert and capable soldiers, on receiving this instruction, keep themselves always ready to engage in combat with vice and wickedness awaiting for the arrival of the commander and the issuance of his order.

The insolence of the enemy and the large size of its number during this period, make the soldiers more determined to fight, and even though they are awaiting for their commander with tearful eyes, zealous hearts and prayer-whispering lips, they do preserve their ability to combat wrong and falsehood. Such a vigilant and alert group never thinks of dispersion and taking things easy until the commander returns to put the affairs in order, or let him fight alone to give it victory, or make a personal endeavour to grant itself benefits, or let him enter the battlefield to place the crown of honour on its head, or let him die so that it could live eternally!

It is obvious as to what the consequence of such an attitude would be, and that is why it is said: "A nation that is awaiting for a reformer must itself be honest." The uprising of the Shiites on hearing the name of Mahdi also means being ever-

ready for his call in order to offer their lives in his way. This preparedness trains them for combat to such an extent that if death, which is the ultimate end of all, separates them from Mahdi, they beg God to bring them back from their graves at the time of the reappearance of the Imam, all ready with battle-shroud and drawn swords and spears to rush to the aid of Mahdi in towns and villages (31)

If the Shiites have not been exhausted in the ups and downs of their life-span of fourteen centuries and in the course of the combat with evil, and have constantly entered battlefields as self-sacrificing soldiers ready for every effort to fulfil human ideals, one of its factors has been this positive expectation.

We see that unlike those who seek their glory in past history, true expectants always look upon a bright future and proceed towards it, for, true expectation changes the direction from the past to future.

Briefly, if the Shi'a expectation is a true one, and if our understanding of this principle is a genuine one, then we, as a nation, must be honest, and do our utmost, by constant efforts, to fight falsehood, to prepare the ground for Mahdi's uprising, and to acquire the ability for taking part in the last battle in his presence, and in this way look forward, with all our heart and soul, to his advent.

(31) The prayer of covenant.

Saviour

For such an expectation it is necessary to have an exact knowledge of the promised figure so that we could not mistake him with the dolls of the puppet-shows of the powers that sing a new song every day in order to break up and destroy the wonderful epic of expectation, nor could the extravagant talks of ignorant and self-interested people cover up this matter with a veil of superstitions, and thus change our hope into despair, and our longing into defeat.

He is the twelfth and last leader of the Shi'a society of Muhammad, a son of Imam Hassan Askari, born in the middle of the month of Sha'aban of 255 of the Hejira. His fine mother was Narjess, a Roman lady who was converted to Islam and had become Imam Askari's consort.

The true and great Shi'a leaders have, on sorrowful occasions, given their friends the tidings of his advent. When Imam Hassan Mojtaba was compelled to make peace with Mo'avieh and was reproached for it by some people, he offered several reasons for the correctness of his deed, of which superficial people were ignorant, and said:

"Did you not know that there is no Imam of ours who is not forced to show allegiance to the arrogant men of his time except the concealed

and awaited Imam behind whom Jesus performs his prayer? Then, as God indeed conceals his birth and hides him from people so that, on his reappearance, he could owe allegiance to no one, know that he is the ninth offspring of Hossain, my brother's generation, and son of the noblest slave-girl. God will give him a long life in his absence and then, by His might, He will let him re-appear as a young man under forty in order to show that God is mighty in everything." (32)

Since it was God's will that Mahdi should be secure against enemies' harm, and be able in future to carry out the great plan of setting up a single world government based on justice, he disappeared from public view when in 260 of the Hejira, Imam Askari, his father, suffered martyrdom, and he had performed the prayer rites for his father's corpse. The reason is that the tyrannical Abassid Caliphs knew, on the strength of the tidings given by the prophets and previous Imams(33), that he would break up the whole system of the wicked based on oppression and crimes. So they were seeking his death, and after the above-mentioned burial ceremony, they rushed to his house to kill him.

He was hidden from public sight for seventy years from that date onward, and only the select Shi'as of the Imam were allowed to meet him, and explain the difficulties experienced by themselves

(32) Kamal-eddin p. 316, Montakhab-el-Athar, p. 206.

(33) Montakhab-el-Athar, Chapter 2, Section 33-34, pp. 289-291.

and others. Those men were given the name of 'select deputies' in Shi'a history, and this period of seventy years was called 'the short absence'.

At that time when some wicked individuals thought of communicating with the Imam for the purpose of misleading the people, the Imam, in a letter in his own handwriting delivered by his fourth deputy, announced the question of deputyship and declared all communication with himself terminated until his reappearance.

In this period which is called "the long absence", the Imam lives incognito among people, and as it is mentioned in Shi'a traditions and narrations, he walks about markets, steps on people's carpets, and they see him without recognising him, whereas he sees and recognises them, and this state is considered similar to that of Joseph and his brothers, (34) for the people saw Joseph a ruler of Egypt and talked with him, but were unable to recognise him, while Joseph knew them all.

In this period, Imam Muhammad-bin-Hassan, in cases of need, defends the religion as an ordinary individual and solves the difficulties of the Shi'as. And whenever necessary, he introduces himself to a trustworthy Shi'a who can guard a secret and issues orders to him. It is a belief in these helpful acts of Imam Mahdi that gives the Shi'a a remarkable courage, and by reliance on such assistance, they resume their fearless combat against falsehood howsoever strong it might be. This state reminds one of the utterance of Imam Ali who says:

(34) Montakhab-el-Athar, Chapter 2, Section 38, p. 301 and Kamal-eddin, Volume 2, p. 134.

"By reliance on the presence of the Prophet in the hardest moments of the battle, we did not withdraw from the scene and continued to fight till victory was won." (35)

During the period of Imam's absence, the Shi'a act to receive religious edicts in the same way as in the periods when other Imams were living. This means that similar to the time when the Imam sent for them an honest scholar and expert in religious matters to submit their questions to him and learn their duties from him, while most of them never met the Imam even once in all their lives, in his absence, too, the Shi'as are duty-bound to approach to their religious scholars who are protectors of religions, never follow their whims and fancies, and only obey God's commands given in the Qur'an and tradition (36).

But, on his advent, all human beings follow the religion of Islam, Muhammad faith and the Book of God, and act on the instructions issued by Imam Mahdi. To explain this point further, we refer to the words of the leader of the Shi'as who says:

"The concealed Imam will invite the people to my faith and to follow the Qur'an's infunctions." (37)

"In his government of the world, there will remain no land in which the call of faith, God's uniqueness and Muhammad's Prophet-

(35) Nahjol-Balagha, Sermon 146.

(36) Bohar-el-Anwar, Volume 1, p. 92.

(37) Kamal-eddin p. 411.

hood is not heard." (38)

"Mahdi will establish the Islamic prayer and will himself act as its Imam. (39)

Imam Ali, the first Imam of the Shi'as, says:

"The concealed Imam will, on his advent, offer Islam to people and calls upon them to follow it." (40)

Imam Bagher, the fifth leader of the Shi'as, says:

"The concealed Imam will begin his task at Mecca, and will seek people's allegiance on the basis of faith in the Qur'an, the Prophet's ways, his own guardianship, and dislike of his enemies." (41)

He says also:

"In the government of Mahdi no one remains without having joined the followers of Muhammad." (42)

It is under the auspices of this program that Islam which has been forgotten and the Qur'an which has been laid aside, will be brought back to the people's life; the society will be built up on the basis of the Qur'anic injunctions; a new life will be given to

(38) Ketabol-Mahja Bahrani; Montakhab 3/293.

(39) Anwar-al-Tanzil.

(40) Al-Mahja.

(41) Bohar-el-Anwar, Volume 13, p. 180.

(42) Majma'ol-Bayan.

Islam and Muslims, and the glorious rule of the Qur'an will be revived. And this greatness will be so noticeable that the people will find it hard to believe that they have attained that sublimity through the Qur'an which they possessed." Imam Sadegh says about Imam Mahdi's program:

"Mahdi will do what the Prophet of God did, that is, he will do away with the existing innovations in the same way that the Prophet destroyed paganism, and then he will rebuild Islam." (43)

The Prophet says about Mahdi's uprising:

"A time will come when Islam is left only in name and the Qur'an becomes a mere formality. Then God will permit him to rise up and with his assistance, Islam will be strengthened and renewed." (44)

Therefore, as the other Imams did not introduce a new religion, but only revived and strengthened Islam, Imam Mahdi, too, will act as Imam on the basis of Muhammad's religion, and will not even hide his belief against enemies for the sake of a greater expediency, but he will declare his mission openly from the very outset. According to the words of Imam Sadegh, hiding one's faith will not only be forbidden for him but also for all his followers at the time of his advent, (45) because such a covert

(43) Bohar-el-Anwar, Volume 52, p. 352.

(44) Montakhab-el-Athar, p. 98.

(45) Esbatol Hodat, Volume 2, Tradition 649, p. 128.

act is required in difficult circumstances or in the eventuality of any damage to Islam, and these factors will be non-existent since his advent is the beginning of relief and ease.

Reflection about the question of absence clarifies certain facts, the way to realise which is the Imam's absence in itself. For example, the only way to reform those individuals who preferred their whims to the logical reasonings of the prophets concerning the necessity of following religion, or created or adhered to various schools of thought and ideologies in spite of the clear utterances of the prophets about the inability of man in the matter of legislation, is to practically prove this fact that man-made schools of thought produce nothing for mankind but confusion and distress, and if someone seeks happiness, he should obey the orders of the prophets. Moreover, those who, in spite of clear evidences and signs, lose their identity in the face of knowledge and suppose that knowledge can replace faith, should discern this point that knowledge acts only as a means, and the mode of its utilisation should be determined by religion, otherwise it may cause the greatest damage to mankind.

The period of the Imam's absence is the phase of leaving man to himself, so that by not following nature and reason, experience proves to him that human society is always in need of divine guidance. As the leaders of Islam have declared, the advent of Imam Mahdi takes place at a time when the majority of human beings wholeheartedly desires divine guidance to be liberated from the disorders and confusions that have been created by itself, and seeks the establishment of a society on the basis of the Qur'anic laws. That is why we see that there is a constant increase in the number of thoughtful beings who are

aware of the need for religion and admit it.

In addition to the above matter, during this period of absence, the Shi'as are tested for their steadfastness in religion. As this period is long, and infidelity may dominate faith and add to the commitment of sins and oppression, as well as indulgence in carnal desires, the Shi'as are subjected to a constant trial so as to differentiate between those who verbally claim to be believers while in comfort, and those who are true believers.

We find both these points concerning the subject of Mahdi's absence in a brief utterance of Imam Sadegh who says:

"This matter - the Imam's advent and uprising - will not take place until after despair of finding happiness through man-made schools of thought or by virtue of the victory of Islam on account of the lengthy wait. Nay! I swear to God that it will not come until you believers are separated from hypocrites. By God, it will not come until the miserable become truly miserable, and the happy truly happy." (46)

He says also:

"As the absence period is long, only one group remains steadfast, and a group of other people say "He is not yet born!" Others say: "He was born and then died." Some say: "The eleventh Imam had no

offspring." Others commit sin by saying
 "The Imam is incarnated in another body
 and then speaks." (47)

This question may arise that if the reappearance of Imam Mahdi takes place many centuries after his father, Imam Askari, why, then, was he born in the lifetime of his father to remain unidentified for such a long time? In response, we must point out that according to the Shi'a belief which is based on the utterances of Islamic leaders, the world never remains without evidence, namely, in every era, there must exist a perfect human being who has known God in the most perfect way, and has obeyed and worshipped him in the worthiest manner.

Imam Ali says:

"The world will never be devoid of evidence,
 whether it is known or unknown." (48)

Also Imam Sadegh says:

"If there are only two people left on the earth,
 one of them will be the evidence." (49)
 "If there were no evidence of God, the earth
 and its inhabitants would be destroyed." (50)

Thus, we see that the world never lacks evidence.
 But according to the utterances of the Prophet and

(47) Montakhab-al-Athar, p. 260 and Kamal-eddin,
 Volume 2, Section 34, Tradition 51.

(48) Nahjul-Balagha Sermon 139 and Montakhab-
 el-Athar Volume I, p. 270.

(49) Ossoul Kafi, Volume I, p. 253.

(50) Ossoul Kafi, Volume I, p. 252.

Imams, the evidence of God next to the Prophet himself is presented by the twelve Imams. As an example, an utterance of the Prophet is quoted below, saying:

"Indeed, the deputies and evidence of God after me are twelve people, the first of whom is Ali, and the last is Mahdi." (51)

In view of the above two points and also the fact that history gives the exact details of the life and death of these Imams, there is no alternative but that after the eleventh Imam, there should exist Mahdi as God's deputy thenceforth, to show the continuity of existence in the world. Moreover his program requires preliminaries, some of them mentioned before, for which the passage of many centuries would be necessary, and thus Mahdi must have a long life.

It, therefore, becomes clear that the need for evidence and continuation of the world's existence, and the fact that there remained no deputy but Mahdi after the decease of Imam Hassan Askari, leave no alternative but Mahdi as a living evidence on the earth after his father's death and until the time he (Mahdi) reappears.

Another point which may seem obscure is the life-span of several centuries of Mahdi as stated in various traditions and narrations, and considered as one of Mahdi's characteristics.

As an example, we will quote a few of the words of the Shi'a Imams related to this matter.

(51) Kamal-eddin p. 146, and Elam-Assouri pp. 375-8, and Yanabi'e-el-Mawada, p. 447.

Imam Sajjad says:

"In Imam Mahdi, there is a quality of Noah and that is the length of his life-span." (52)

Imam Reza says about Mahdi:

"He is of a long age and has a young face, and an observer may take him for a man of forty or less and another sign of his is that he does not grow old until God's command is issued." (53)

To clarify this matter, it should be remembered that if we recognise God to be All-Powerful, every difficult and extraordinary thing is possible for Him if He desires so; and in view of the role of Mahdi in human history which is the consequence of the ceaseless endeavour of the prophets, it is reasonable to believe that God will keep him young and powerful until Resurrection time.

Moreover if we regard this matter scientifically, we realise that the present-day knowledge does not only not fix a limit for human life-span, but what it considers natural is very a long life. If we are witnessing the short life of human beings, it is due to the fact that man is not aware of the mechanism of his existence and does not know its proper use. Consequently he is every moment faced with great losses which damage his body and spirit. Therefore, with the advance of knowledge and man's greater awareness of his own mechanism, his life-span has continued to increase. This is clearly shown by age

(52) Kamal-eddin p. 322 and Montakhab 2/275.

(53) Kamal-eddin p. 625 and Montakhab, 2/284.

statistics of human beings .

As an example, in England the average age of men between the years 1838 and 1845 had been 39.91 years, and that of women 41.85 years. In 1937, the average age of men had risen to 60 and that of women to 64. Similarly, in America in 1901 the average ages of men and women were respectively 48 and 51, while in 1944 these had gone up to 63.5 and 69. (54)

Learned men of to-day have discussed the longevity of human beings in different ways, some of which are given here as example:

The German scholar, Weisman, says:

"Death is not necessarily a law of nature, and in the world of nature, there is eternal life as well as a momentary one. What is natural is an everlasting life In our own time, man's life-span has increased, and there is no reason why it should not continue to rise and allow a human being to live nine centuries."
(55)

Yuri Fialkov, professor of technology at Kiev in the Soviet Union, says:

"An Atom which forms the basis of matter is eternal and is never destroyed by itself provided it is not done so by outside forces."

(54) Dadgostar Jahan, Ebrahim Amini, p. 215.

(55) Fifteen Discourses, M. Minovi, quoted from Bernard Shaw's "Back to Methuselah".

The cell, too, which is the basis of living creatures is eternal on condition that it is duly fed and is not destroyed by extreme cold and heat." (56)

He says also:

"Man should live for ever and never die, for, a living cell is eternally alive." (57)

Jean Rostand, the well-known biologist, says:

"I admit that there exist natural factors of ageing in a human being, but many of the bodily cells are not destructible, and it is not right to say these eternal cells assemble to create a mortal body." (58)

Attention to these matters shows that modern knowledge does not only reject the idea of a long life-span being incompatible with the mechanism of creation of man, but also regards a short life as unnatural.

History, too, is a true testimony of man's length of life, and tells us of those who have lived long, such as Noah, Elias and Methuselah (59), as well as others mentioned in other books. In our own time, we have heard of ages several times that of ordinary life-spans such as a 207-year-old man of

(56) Khandaniha Journal, No. 38, Volume 28, p. 43.

(57) Khandaniha Journal, No. 38, Volume 28, p. 43.

(58) First university and Last Prophet, Dr. R. Pak-Nejad, Volume 2, p. 229.

(59) Al mo'amaroon, Abu-Hatam Sistani.

south America (60), Sayed Abu-Taleb Musari Farsi who lived for 101 years (61); Muhammad Bagher Oghlu of 184 years (62); Shir Aliov of the Caucasia 168 years of age (63); Hatin Nin, a Turkish woman of 168 (64); Luisa Trosko, a woman of 175; Teps Abzip of 180; and Sayed Ali Kutahi of 185 (65).

The only point that remains is the small number of people with a long life. But it must be remembered that the rarity of matter is not an evidence of its impossibility, in the same way that geniuses rarely appear, but this does not mean the absence of great talents of such men as Edison, Einstein etc.

Thus, the question of Mahdi's life-span, in addition to its being the wish of God and in view of His absolute might, and therefore practicable, is also possible from the viewpoint of modern knowledge as is confirmed by various testimonies.

The above discussion show that the world is in need of a saviour and awaits him. This expectation, in its most genuine form, figures in Shiism as a revolutionary principle, and the leader of an Islamic world government, who will rule the world on the basis of the Qur'an and traditions, is none but Muhammad, son of the eleventh Imam of the Shi'as, who was born in 255 of the Hejira, and lives incognito amidst people. He has been given a long life by God

(60) Daneshmand Journal, No. 61.

(61) Daily Etela'at, No. 11180.

(62) Ditto, No. 8963.

(63) Ditto, May 1968.

(64) Daily Kayhan, No. 5958.

(65) Etela'at Almanac No. 5.

in order to reappear when the world is ready for the rule of the Qur'an, take over the world affairs and fight oppressors.

Conspiracy

Destructive and evil powers for whom the epic of expectation is a disrupter of their injustices and plunders, have always continued to forge Mahdi-looking puppets in order to get rid of this history-making and revolutionary idea and turn the warm hope of the masses for a bright future into despair.

The appearance of these actors in the big powers' puppet-show did not only fail to find a remedy for human anxieties, or change destructive wars into joyful tranquility, or put an end to the tragedy of hunger, poverty and worry, but all those miseries also increased and added to human sorrow.

As an example, we will deal here with one pseudo-Mahdi namely that of Mirza Ali-Muhammad Shirazi, to show that there is nothing in common between these claimants and the true Mahdi. (*)

He was a son of Mirza Reza Bazzaz Shirazi, born in 1235 of the Hejira, in Shiraz and his mother was called Fatima. In his youth, he studied Islamic

(*) The statements on the Baha'i sect in this section are based on the books written by the leaders of this very sect, and, therefore, considered valid by its followers.

subjects at Najaf and Karbala, and these studies were undertaken from the viewpoint of the Sheikhia who believe that, at all times, there exist individuals as intermediaries between Imam Mahdi and people (66). After the death of his teacher, Sayed Kazem, he claimed to be his successor and set up the creed of Babiism (67), and a few of the Sheikhia followed him.

His claim coincided with the years of internal riots and turmoil in Iran, and with the blows dealt with by colonising countries, especially the Czarist Russia. In that period of hardship, the people heartily welcomed the tidings of Islamic leaders, and more than any other time, longed for the advent of Imam Mahdi to liberate them from their sufferings. When Mirza Ali-Muhammad declared that he had been nominated by Imam Mahdi to prepare the preliminaries for his advent (68), some simpletons and ignorant people, hoping for this advent of the Imam, gathered round this man, and called him Bab (i.e. door) which led to the Imam's threshold.

As the Czarist Russia thought of him as a proper means of breaking up the united ranks of the Shi'as against itself, it gave him a free hand on the principle of "divide and rule", and helped him to propagate his ideas. His followers were sent to various parts of Iran to convert people to Babiism, and there were started riots so as to engage Iran's military forces in suppressing this confusion, while the colonisers could easily secure what they desired.

(66) Matale'a-al-Anwar, p.28.

(67) Asrar-al-Athr, Volume 2, p. 11.

(68) Article by Sayyah on Abbas Afendi pp. 3&4.

As an example the incidents of Badasht, Neyriz, Zanzan, and Ghal'a Sheikh Tabarsi at that time may be mentioned. (69)

As Mirza Ali-Muhammad realized about people's interest in his claim, he made a still greater claim to declare that he was Imam Mahdi himself. (70), forgetting that those who had gathered round him were believers in Imam Mahdi, and his second claim showed that his first one, too, had been nothing but a demagogic act. (71)

But as he was indulging in the pleasures provided for him by the Russian Government through Manouchehr Khan Gorji, Governor of Isfahan who was of Russian origin (72), and as he (Ali-Muhammad) had taken as true (73) the promises of the Governor about the conquest of Iran in the war with Muhammad Shah, compelling people to follow him and placing huge amounts of money at his disposal (74), he

(69) Kavakeb-a-Dorria of Ayati .

(70) Seven Reasons of Ali-Muhammad pp. 25 and 67, and other sources .

(71) The followers and friends of this man, to justify his self-contradictory claims, say that Mirza had, at first, hidden his identity as Imam Mahdi. But according to various narrations, this man explicitly stated that Imam Mahdi was another person and called himself a servant of the Imam. Moreover, Boha-ollah, another leader of this sect, has denied the case of Mirza's hidden identity. From Ighan, Boha-ollah p.179 .

(72) Gharn-e-Badi'e, Volume I, p. 110 of Showghi.

(73) Gharn-e-Badi'e, Volume I, p. 114.

(74) Bahaollah, p. 104 and other sources .

insolently declared: "I am Imam Mahdi whose advent had been promised to people." (75)

When the people realised that his name was not Muhammad, and he was not a son of Imam Hassan Askari, nor was his mother the Roman Narjes, nor a descendant of the disciples of Jesus, nor the date of his birth 255 of the Hejira, nor his life a lengthy one like that of Noah, nor was he hidden from public view, they abandoned and opposed him. Among the opponents could be seen two of his former (*) followers who were praised by him in his books, and whose conversion to Bahai sect he took as a sign of the authenticity of his claim. (76)

But he was not content with this, and some time after, by writing two books called 'Bayan-e-Farsi' and 'Bayan-e-Arabi' he issued a verdict on annulling Islam and claiming his own prophethood, and declared that the Qur'an was no longer a book to be followed by people, and offered his own book in its place.

This contention was another proof of his false claim, for, the people knew that according to the leaders of Islam, Mahdi would not introduce a new religion and, like the other Imams, would propagate the Qur'an and Muhammad's faith.

(75) Ghamous Towghi'e Volume 2, pp. 51-2 and Zohur-el-Hagh pp. 173-4.

(*) They were Molla Abdol-Khalegh Yazdi, and Haj Molla Muhammad Ali Baraghani Ghazwini.

(76) Maieda Asemani, Section 7, Bohaollah pp. 231-2, and Ghamous Volume 2. pp. 51-2.

But this man who thought only of winning his masters' satisfaction, and obeying what they commanded him, went so far as to declare himself God and said: "Indeed Ali-Muhammad Shirazi is God and is the reality of His existence." (77), and thus offered the seekers of truth the most futile testimony of his claim.

It is interesting to know that this same Mirza Ali-Muhammad who passed through the stages of claiming Babiism, Imamate, Prophethood and godhood, in the year 1264 of the Hejira which coincided with his declaration and the ensuing riots in various parts of Iran, at a meeting held in Tabriz in the presence of the then crown prince, Nasser-eddin Mirza, to investigate that claim, was given lashes. (78) The prince then wrote to his father, Muhammad Shah: "This man has given a written and sealed pledge that he would no longer commit such improper acts." (79) and after this lashing, he was exempted from further punishment by those present owing to the probability of his mental disbalance. (80)

Abol-Fazl Golpayegani, the well-known Baha'i missionary, has quoted, in his book "Kashfol-Gheta'e", a letter written by Ali-Muhammad Shirazi to the crown prince, Nasser-eddin Mirza, at the same meeting begging for pardon. Abass Afendi, titled Abdol-Boha, who is another leader of Babiism, has seen this book, shown much appreciation of it

(77) Lowh-e-Heykal-eddin, p. 5.

(78) Talkhis Tarish of Nabil, p. 324.

(79) Kashfol-Gheta, p. 201.

(80) Ditto, p. 205.

to Golpayegani and ordered its publication. (81)

This letter is as follows:

"My life is for you. God and he who is with him witness that this humble servant has no intention to act contrary to the satisfaction of the God of Universe and His deputies, even though my existence is wholly sinful. If I have let my pen write words contrary to His satisfaction, my intention has not been to rebel, and in any case, I am penitent and beg His forgiveness. This humble servant has no knowledge at all that would justify a claim. I beg God for forgiveness and repent any matter attributed to me. If certain words and benedictions have been uttered by me, these are not the proof of anything, and I deny being a special deputy of Imam Mahdi, and I never claim this or any other matter." (82)

This letter is the best evidence of his inconsistency with his program, and with the armed combat of Imam Mahdi that would continue until the total destruction of oppressors. In this course, Imam Mahdi and his followers are never permitted to conceal their faith, let alone expressing repentance!

We discover the real motive for this event when we see that on his being hanged in 1266 of the Hejira for his riots, the Russian consul presented himself beside the corpse together with some painters to prepare a valuable document and evidence of

(81) Asrar-ol-Athar, Volume I, p. 80.

(82) Kashfol-Gheta'e, p. 204.

a sacrifice as a martyred soldier in the service of the Russian government, namely that of Mirza Ali-Muhammad Shirazi! (83)

As God always provides the best evidence of the falsehood of liars by their own hands so as to convince all people, we see in the works of Mirza Ali-Muhammad Shirazi the sacred name of Imam Mahdi mentioned repeatedly, especially in his writings before his claiming Imamate, such as his 'commentary on Qur'anic Chapter Yusuf', "Commentary on Chapter Yusuf", "Commentary on Chapter Baghara", "Commentary on Chapter Kauthar" and other commentaries, as well as his books like "Dala'el Sab'a" and "Sahifa Adlia" in which he explicitly speaks of Muhammad-ibn-Al-Hassan, and has even given reasons for his long life and absence.

As an example, we quote some sections from his book "Sahifa Adlia":

"Thirdly there is the knowledge of Doors (Chapters). There is a duty here to confess to the guardianship of Ali, Commander of the Faithful. Fourthly, there is the matter of knowing Imamate. There is the duty here for all beings to know the twelve holy Imams who are deputies of absolute guardianship. Here are their sacred names: Al-Hassan-bin-Ali, Al-Hossain-bin-Ali, Ali-bin-Hossain . . . Al-Hassan-bin-Ali, and the concealed Imam

(83) Gharn-e-Badi'e, Volume I, p. 257 and other sources.

Muhammad-bin-Hassan, the lord of the time,
(84)

Thus, this man has considered it a duty to believe in the Imamate of Muhammad-bin-Hassan after Imam Hassan Askari. This point is asserted elsewhere, too, as the following quotation from his book:

"The prayer given in the fifth Chapter includes all the phases of belief, and it is, by itself, sufficient for faith." (85)

And in the same Chapter we note this:

"I testify to the successors of Muhammad, namely Ali, Hassan, Hossain . . . then Ali, then Hassan, and after him the lord of the time and Your treasure . . . I testify, too, that the concealed Imam who belongs to these twelve, greetings, is my rightful Imam." (86)

So Mirza Ali-Muhammad considers testifying to the Imamate of Muhammad-bin-Hassan as a requisite of true faith, and expresses his testimony to that Imam in the same manner. It is interesting that he writes at the conclusion of the same book:

"Indeed, all the points mentioned in this book are my beliefs in God. I have lived with them,

(84) Sahifa Adlia, Mirza Ali-Muhammad Shirazi p. 26.

(85) Sahifa Adlia, p. 38.

(86) Ditto, p. 40.

and I shall die with them by God's command, and shall rise with them by God's will on Resurrection Day. I testify, too, that Ali-Muhammad, in all matters, is the servant of the Remainder of God." (87)

After this brief investigation, we return to the original topic, and remember that the world is awaiting for Muhammad-bin-Hassan to reappear by God's command, and act as a leader in defence of truth for the last combat with evil and its total destruction. We must remember also that our duty during his absence is to prepare the environment for his advent. Therefore, we should start his program of combat with falsehood within our own ability and limit, and beg God Almighty to make us worthy of a true expectation and to witness his advent. Now that the human world is despairing of finding a remedy for its sufferings and distresses, we should await in this dark night for the bright dawn of Mahdi's uprising, gazing at the hope-inspiring harizon, and uttering the following prayer:

"O God, our hope and longing in you are to grant us the blessed government of Imam Mahdi, and in that government grant Islam and its followers honour and greatness and abase hypocrisy and its fellows, and grant us the glory of the life in this world and the life hereafter. (88).

(87) Sahifa Adlia, p. 42.

(88) Opening Prayer.

ظهور المهدي [ع] نهاية الظلام

تُرجم من الفارسية إلى الانكليزية

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