

Introduction

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

“God 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.' (24:55)

The traveler 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 splendor 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 Shaban and the anniversary or 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 al-Qorban and Eid al-Fitr.

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 impressibility 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 Shi'ites 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](#)

[1](#). The main reference book I used is: "Adyan & Mahdaviat" by Sayed Mohammad Beheshti.

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