

Introduction

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

The month of Sha'ban in the Muslim calendar is a time of celebrations. It is marked with the birth of the third Imam, Husayn b. 'Ali, his half brother, 'Abbas b. 'Ali, his son 'Ali b. Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin, and finally, his renowned descendant, the Qa'im of the *Ahlul Bayt*, the twelfth Imam Mahdi (peace be upon him). I attended a function organized to celebrate the birthday of the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) on the 15th Night of Sha'ban at one of the high schools in Tehran. It was a well organized affair attended by all classes of people. However, the majority of the participants were educated people, including young, upper class high school students. The function was sponsored by the Islamic Association of that school.

The occasion opened with the recitation of the Qur'an by a young student, who, through his beautiful recitation captured the spiritual dimension of the event. Following him another student recited a poem he had composed about the Hidden Imam (peace be upon him), and a third presented a well-written and very relevant paper about the subject. At the end of the program, Mr. Hoshyar, one of the outstanding teachers of the school, gave a pertinent talk on the topic of the Imam of the Age (peace be upon him), and this brought the evening to a close.

That function left a deep impression upon me. It was not so much its ceremonial side that caught my attention, but rather the experience of being overwhelmed by the spirit of sincerity and piety which flowed from the young people. They had brought together religion and knowledge, and were engaged in spreading religious truth and understanding among the people, enlightening their thoughts with faith. The atmosphere at the gathering was dominated by purity of intention and sincerity in the actions of these youths, whose interaction with the audience radiated warmth and consideration.

This enthusiasm among the youth and their religious fervor, guided by clear thinking, made me hopeful about the future of the Muslim community. I almost saw the future leadership of the civilization and the responsibility for the progression of humanity on their shoulders. My eyes were filled with tears of hope and I prayed to God, the Almighty, with all sincerity for the success of the Islamic Association of the students and the schools that had pioneered this sacred mission among the young people.

At that very moment, Engineer Madani, who was seated next to Mr. Hoshyar, raised a question: “Do you really believe in the existence of the Hidden Imam? Is your opinion based on research or do you merely defend such a belief on the basis of your bias?” Mr. Hoshyar replied: “My belief is neither founded upon blind faith nor upon blind imitation. Rather, I have accepted it through careful study and research. In any case, I am still open to do more research and adjust my opinion accordingly.”

Mr. Madani continued: “Since the subject of the Imam of the Age is not sufficiently clear for me, and so far I have not been able to convince myself of its veracity, I would very much like to discuss the subject and benefit from your study and research on the topic.”

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