

Prologue

A figure more legendary than that of the Mahdi, the Awaited Saviour, has not been seen in the history of mankind. The threads of the world events have woven many a fine design in human life but the pattern of the Mahdi stands high above every other pattern. He has been the vision of the visionaries in history. He has been the dream of all the dreamers of the world. For the ultimate salvation of mankind he is the Pole Star of hope on which the gaze of humanity is fixed.

The Qur'anic prophecy of the inevitable victory of Islam will be realized following the advent of the Mahdi who will fight the wrong, remedy the evils and establish a world order based on the Islamic teachings of justice and virtue. Thereafter there will be only one religion and one government in the world.

It may be mentioned here that the movement for the establishment of a world government is already afoot and this point is engaging the attention of many prominent intellectuals. The setting up of the United Nations is a step in this very direction. In spite of the growing consciousness of its desirability, the unification of the world is still a distant dream.

The vested interests and the mutual rivalries of the regimes in the various countries and the mutual animosities of the divergent blocs constitute a big hurdle in the way of its materialization. Hence, its consummation cannot be expected to come off automatically. It will need the active struggle of a world reformer in the person of Mahdi. Anyhow, a start has been made and the things are gradually turning out exactly as predicted by Islam fourteen centuries ago.

The belief in an expected reformer and a saviour of humanity is not peculiar to the Shi'ah School of Islam. It is common not only to all the Muslim sects, but is also shared by all the great religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

In this quest for the truth about the Mahdi there is no distinction of any caste, creed, or country. The quest is universal, exactly in the same way as the Mahdi himself is universal. He stands resplendent high above the narrow walls in which humanity is cut up and divided. He belongs to everybody. For all that and much more, what exactly is the Mahdi? Surely that is the big question which the thinking people all over the world would like to ask.

It is only Islam that has given this concrete shape to an abstract idea. The Mahdi is not to be born in the distant future. He is already living amongst us and shares our joys and sorrows:

His appearance will mean not only the materialization of an Islamic aspiration, but will also be the realization of a hope cherished by the entire humanity.

Prof. Henry Corbin of Sorbonne University, says:

"To my mind the Shi'ite is the only sect which has preserved and perpetuated the link of Divine guidance between man and God through its belief in the Imamate. According to the Jews the Prophethood, a real link between man and God, came to an end with Moses. They do not believe in the Prophethood of Jesus and Muhammad. The Christians too, do not go beyond Jesus. The Sunnite sect has also stopped at the Prophet Muhammad and believes that the link between man and God has been severed with the end of the Prophethood".

It is only the Twelver Shi'ah who believe that the link still exists through the Mahdi and will continue to exist forever.

It is hardly necessary to give an explanation as to why the Mahdi disappeared immediately after assuming the Imamate. Let it suffice to say that Allah in His Divine Wisdom ordained so.

In the meantime it is the duty of all the Muslims, especially the Shi'ah, to strive steadfastly for the creation of the proper atmosphere and the right climate for the establishment of a world order based on justice, virtue and piety. They should not only mould their individual lives according to the teachings and high ideals of Islam, but they should also bend their efforts to set up the Islamic order on the collective and communal level. They should devote themselves to the service of the faith and be prepared to receive the Awaited Saviour. That is what was meant by the Imams when they exhorted the Muslims to keep on waiting for the Mahdi.

An authentic and universally accepted *Hadith* (tradition) reports the holy Prophet of Islam (Peace and benediction be upon him and his infallible progeny) to have said explicitly on several occasions that he would be followed by twelve *Amirs*, [1](#) (according to another version, twelve caliphs) the first of them being Ali and the last Mahdi. [2](#)

According to another reliable tradition he pinpointed the personality to Imam Mahdi when he said that the Mahdi would be a descendant of Imam Husayn in his ninth generation.[3](#)

In certain other traditions the holy Prophet referred, in clear terms, to the last Imam's mission and narrated the events connected with his occultation and reappearance.

In this connection it is interesting to note, as pointed out by the famous historian Tabari, that the reports about the occultation of the Mahdi were recorded in their books by the Shi'ah traditionalists during the lifetime of Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq i.e. long before Imam Mahdi was born. This fact alone is enough

to vouch for their genuineness.

The Sunnite scholars have also mentioned and recorded hundreds of traditions about the Mahdi in more than seventy books by their own valued and dependable authorities of which we shall mention a few examples.

- *Musnad* – Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 A.H.)
- *Sahih Bukhari* – Muhammad b. Ism'ail Bukhari (d. 256 A.H.)
- *Sahih Muslim* –Muslim b. Hajjaj Nishapuri (d.261 A.H.)
- *Sunan Abi Dawud* – Sulayman b. Ash'ath Sijistani (d. 275 A.H.)
- *Sahih Tirmizi* –Muhammad b. Isa Tirmizi (d. 279A.H.)

The authors of the above books, each one of them, died either before or shortly after Mahdi's birth.[4](#)

The other facts which can be gleaned from the prophecies of the holy Prophet about the Mahdi are briefly stated below:

- a. He will bear the same nomenclature as the holy Prophet.
- b. He will not be bearing allegiance to any tyrant.
- c. He will fill the earth with justice and fair play after its having been filled with injustice and tyranny.
- d. At the time of his advent he will be found leaning against the wall of the Ka'bah. He will call together his 313 supporters who will respond to his call and gather around him. Then he will lead the congregational prayers.
- e. He will establish Islamic law in the whole world.
- f. On his second advent Jesus will offer prayers behind him.

According to the Islamic traditions Jesus will descend from the heaven and espouse the cause of the Mahdi. The Christians and the Jews will see him and recognize his true status. The Christians will abandon their faith in his godhead. The holy Qur'an says:

"There shall be none among the People of the Scripture, but will believe in him (Jesus) before his death; and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them" (Surah al-Nisa, 4: 159)

Evidently at that time Jesus will not be following the Christian law which has already been repealed. He will be following the Mahdi, the master of the time, and that is why he will be offering prayers behind him.

According to a tradition recorded in the celebrated books of the tradition, including the Sahih Bukhari and the Sahih Muslim, the Prophet is reported to have said:

"How about you, when Mary's son will descend into your midst, while your Imam will be from among you?".

Here the word Imam refers to Imam Mahdi. This tradition clearly shows that Jesus at the time of his second advent, will be a follower of the Mahdi.

According to these and many other prophecies handed down by the holy Prophet and the great Imams to the succeeding generations, Imam Mahdi was born in the city of Samarra (Iraq) in the middle of the month of Sha'ban in 255 A.H. His mother's name was Narjis.

He succeeded to the Imamate at the early age of five on the death of his father, Imam Hasan al-Askari, the eleventh Imam.

Soon afterwards he went into occultation from the scene of life but retained contact with his followers through his vicegerents. This period which spreads over 70 years is known as *al-Ghaybat al-Sughra*, the period of minor occultation.

During this period the people could refer their problems to him and receive his replies through his vicegerents. The minor occultation was followed by *al-Ghaybat al-Kubra*, the major occultation which still continues. During this period direct contact with him had been severed.

Anyhow, those who are aware of the historical conditions prevailing at the time of his occultation know well that the Abbasid rulers regarded the Mahdi as the biggest potential threat to themselves and their dynasty and were determined to remove him from their way. at any cost. Hence, to foil an attempt on his life, it was advisable for him to go into occultation. Several sayings of the Imams expressly refer to this situation.

The Mahdi is alive. He visits different places and takes an intelligent interest in world events. He often attends the assemblies of the faithful but does not disclose his true identity.

He will reappear on the appointed day, and then he will fight against the forces of evil, lead a world revolution and set up a new world order based on justice, righteousness and virtue as you will read in detail in this book.

The holy Qur'an has clearly promised that a day is to come when truth will prevail and the righteous will come to power. We quote here a few verses:

"Indeed We have written in the Psalms after the Torah had been given: The earth will be inherited by Our righteous servants" (Surah al-Anbiyah, 21:105)

'Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will surely make them successors on the earth as He made those who were before them and that He will surely establish their religion which He has chosen for them'. (Surah al-Noor, 24: 55)

"They wish to put out the light of Allah with their breaths (propagation) but Allah will perfect His light, howsoever much the disbelievers may be averse. It is He who has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over every other religion, howsoever much the disbelievers may be averse" (Surah al-Tauba, 9:32 33)

It is clear from these verses that ultimately the righteous will take the world administration in their hands and Islam will be victorious over all the religions.

Shaykh Yusufali Nafsi

This book contains two articles by two great scholars known for their learning, erudition and convincing style. The first valuable article by Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr refutes all the doubts and objections raised by the sceptics in connection with the Mahdi's existence, his role, his early Imamate and his occultation. The second article by Ayatullah Shaykh Murtaza Mutahhary deals with the philosophical aspects of the Mahdi's mission and removes a grave misconception about the circumstances in which he will reappear.

It is hoped that the scholarly treatment of the subject will augment the faith of the readers and at the same time fully satisfy their intellectual curiosity.

Publishers

1. Sahih Bukhari, p.175, Egypt; Sahih Tirmizy, vol.2, p.45, Dehli.
2. Sahih Muslim, vol. 2, p. 191, Egypt; Sahih Abi Daud, vol. 2, p. 207 Egypt; Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal, vol.5, p. 106 Egypt; Mustadrak al-Hakim, vol.2, p.618 Hyderabad; Taysir al-Wusul 'ala jame' al-Usul, vol.2, p.34 Egypt. Tarikh al-Baghdad, vol. 14, p.353; Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, p. 445 Istanbul; Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummal, vol.5; p. 312.
3. Kifayat al-Athar, Allamah Abu Abdillah b. Muhammad Yusuf al-Kanji al-Shafi'i; Bihar al-Anwar, Allamah Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi; Al-Amali, Abu Abdillah Muhammad b. Nu'man alias Shaykh al-Mufid; Yanabi al-Mawaddah, Shaykh Sulayman b. Ibrahim al-Qandozi.
4. Masabih al-Sunnah, al-Baghwi (d. 516 A.H.); Jame' al-Usul, Ibn Athir (d. 606 AH.); al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah, Muhyuddin ibn al-Arabi (d. 638 A.H.); Tazkirah al-Khawass, Sibt ibn al-Jawzi (d. 654 A.H.); Fara'id al-Simtayn, al-Hamawi (d. 716 AH.); al-Sawa'iq, Ibn Hajar Haythami al-'Asqalani (d. 973 A.H.); Yanabi al-Mawaddah, Sulayman al-Qandozi (d. 1293 A.H.)

Some of the Sunnite scholars have written books especially about the Imam of the Age.

- (i) Al-Bayan fi Akhbar al-Sahib al-Zaman, Allamah Abu Abdillah b. Muhammad Yusuf al-Kanji al-Shafi'i.
- (ii) Iqd al-Durar fi Akhbar al-Imam al-Muntazar, Shaykh Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Damishqi.
- (iii) Mahdi Ale Rasul, Ah ibn Sultan Muhammad al-Harawi al-Hanafi.

- (iv) Kitab al-Mahdi, Abu Daud.
 - (v) Alamat al-Mahdi, Jalaluddin Suyuti.
 - (vi) Manaqib al-Mahdi, Hafiz Abu Na'im al-Isfahani.
 - (vii) Al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi 'alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar, Ibn Hajar Haythami.
 - (viii) Al-Burhan fi 'alamat al-Mahdi Akhir al-Zaman, Mulla Ali al-Muttaqi.
 - (ix) Arba'in Hadith fi'l-Mahdi, Abul Ala' al-Hamadani.
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