

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?

These two questions, that of the length of occultation and the desired firm establishment of truth and justice, actually come hand in hand. They can be answered by citing the Qur'anic 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 Qur'an and Hadith, the most straightforward being:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ

"Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves." (13: 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 دَفْعُ اللَّهِ 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”(2:251)

According to the Qur’an, 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:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ إِذَا يَأْتَيْنَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِنْكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِي ۖ فَمَنْ اتَّقَى وَأَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

“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” (7:32)

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

“And We have not appointed you a keeper over them, and you are not placed in charge of them.” (6:107)

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

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

“There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256)

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 تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

“Truth stands out clearly from Error” (2:256)

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 (S) and Imam Ali (a), unlike Omar, never forced anyone into obedience or allegiance. After the general mass of people begged him to govern them, Ali (a) accepted the Caliphate after much reluctance. In a Prophetical hadith we read:

كَيْفَ تَكُونُونَ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْكُمْ

“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.

1. See Bazargan, Mehdi: "Ekhtiyar".

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