

Imam Al-Mahdi: The Awaited Hope for Humanity

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The belief in the Mahdi is not only an essential doctrine deep-rooted in Islamic faith but rather it is an embodiment of human nature regardless of one's religious affiliations. For it is the universal desire of humans as a whole to try to achieve or at least witness the realisation of the ultimate objective of their existence, through which they will achieve perfection and social happiness in their entirety. Therefore by reason of inner necessity and inspiration, humans will see a day when society will be replete with justice.

More importantly, from a religious perspective the concept of the Mahdi is the culmination of human struggle in their path towards God the Almighty. It is when true Justice will be established through human hands but with Divine succour resulting in the prevalence of truth over falsehood and all its offshoots.

And say: Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished away. Lo! falsehood is ever bound to vanish. [Holy Quran: Chapter 17, Verse 81]

Having identified that the need for the Mahdi is a subject of inner necessity that is instilled into the hearts of human beings, it is essential to outline the duties of the human race as a whole in trying to achieve a purgatory state of social felicity in the outward absence of the Mahdi that would lay a foundation for his imminent reappearance.

This goal and its realisation however, prompts one to question the fundamental motive behind the concealment of the Mahdi despite when social and political factors are welcoming to his presence and his precepts.

To this we say: Indeed, this is exactly where the problem lies! The principle reason for the delay in the reappearance of the Mahdi is that his followers are not ready to acknowledge the perfect leader and the perfect ideology, rather more correctly they have not prepared themselves for his coming and the system that is to be established by him. This is clearly mentioned by the Imam himself in one of his narrations:

'If our Shi'a (followers), may Allah help and succeed them to His obedience, were united in wholeheartedly honouring the promise and obligation that is upon them, there would have been no delay in meeting us (i.e. in our reappearance), and bliss and felicity for them would have hastened by seeing us with full knowledge and certainty of testifying to our (leadership)' -

[Bihar Al-Anwaar, Ch. 53, Pg. 177]

Therefore, each and every one of us has to be very cognisant of their acts in relation to the part

we play during the occultation of the Mahdi. This period has been like none other before nor is the test set upon the Muslim Ummah and humanity at large like any before. With lack of direct contact with the divine leader of the time and the many injustices that have overwhelmed today's society resulting in moral demise and social injustice, the resort of the believers is in seeking the help of Allah (SWT) and beseeching Him to hasten in the reappearance of the Mahdi and his promised victory.

Strong faith in the promised triumph in the midst of injustice and darkness is a means of separating the true believers from the rest. A brief look into history shows endless of these so-called followers who eventually betrayed their leaders and thus put eternal shame and disgrace on themselves. A perfect example being the story of the inhabitants of Kufah at the time of the great ancestor of the Mahdi, Husayn son of Ali, for whom he weeps blood each day until the day of his reappearance.

Certainly those fortunate and blessed individuals who will take part in this grand culmination of servitude, which will result in the prevalence of Truth over all forms of falsehood will be those whose conviction in the Mahdi and the promised day is resolute. The believers will be constantly tested by those whose aim is staunchly fixed in denying the Mahdi, by using arguments such as his age, for the Mahdi's age is now more than 1170 years. Many find it difficult to believe that a human can live for a period of this length, however, the impossibility in this objection is relative and its relation is to some person, place and time. What is an impossibility to one person, time or place may be very possible to another, as we well know.

Moreover, it should be said that living for such a length of time is neither a scientific nor a logical impossibility. Today scientists have succeeded in prolonging the life of certain animals, hundreds of times beyond their normal life spans by artificially creating conditions that delay the degeneration of their tissues and cells. The failure of this being effectively carried out on humans is merely due to the increased difficulties involved, however it is in no way an impossibility, from a scientific point of view, to achieve this in the future. Yet it is through the light of faith that one can truly appreciate the magnanimity of the person of the Mahdi and his blessed and most extraordinary role. The two personalities who will lead the ship of humanity toward the shore of safety and success, both share this characteristic of long age -- Imam Al-Mahdi and Prophet Jesus, the two leaders of the promised revolution, are both alive according to the Islamic viewpoint.

These two leaders have been and are witness to the various modes of thought and systems that human beings have introduced and adapted, failingly seeking to bring about the innate

desire of peace and harmony. They are aware of the inner intricacies and failures of these systems and the keys to the secrets of the quest of human struggle lie only in their hands. The Mahdi was born on the fifteenth of Sha'ban in the year two hundred and fifty five after Hijrah. His birth was kept secret since the authorities of the time were actively seeking to execute him should he be found alive. The circumstances of his birth were therefore very similar to those of Prophet Moses who was also being searched for by the authorities of his time.

The Pharaoh of the time was well aware of the prophecy that a child would grow up to prevail over him and his evil rule and would replace this with the belief in the true One God whose Power, Might and Wisdom is Absolute. A belief which directs humanity towards perfect Unity and removes the shackles of inequity and imbalance from all spheres of life. Similarly the Abbasid Caliphate was well aware of the Mahdi and of how he would fill the world with justice and truth after it had been filled with injustice and falsehood from several traditions originating from the Prophet Muhammad. These narrations are present to date in both Shi'a and Sunni books.

"The world will not come to an end until a man from the descendants of Husayn takes charge of the affairs of the world and fills it with justice and equity as it is filled with injustice and tyranny."

At the age of five, after the tragic martyrdom of his father, the eleventh divine successor of the Prophet Muhammad – Hassan son of Ali, the Mahdi went into a minor occultation. During this period, the Mahdi was in contact with his followers through appointed deputies. This lasted for a period of about sixty nine years.

A few days before the death of his fourth and final deputy the Imam informed his followers, through his deputy, that there would be no more deputies after the death of the current one and after this period the Imam would go into a Major Occultation, which would continue until the day God grants permission to the Imam to manifest himself.

During this period, none would be able to approach the Imam through deputies or through direct contact. In regards to the duration and the importance of this period, the Prophet Muhammad was once asked about the nature of the reappearance of the Mahdi. In his reply the Prophet likened the time of the Reappearance of the Mahdi to that of the Hour of Resurrection and then narrated the Quranic verse;

"He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares" (Holy Quran: Chapter 7, Verse 187)

An important question is raised in relation to this specific period, by those who doubt or

question the existence of the Mahdi. What is the benefit of the Imam to his followers during his occultation?

In order to answer this question, one should realise that the position and the role of an Imam is not only to administer the affairs and the needs of the Ummah, rather he is the link between man and God, the link between the material and the spiritual worlds. Moreover, his physical presence or absence has no bearing on his position in regards to this role. This can be derived from one of the sayings narrated by the Imam himself;

‘My benefit (to the people) during my occultation is similar to that of the sun when it disappears from sight behind the clouds.’ - [Bihar Al-Anwaar, Ch. 53, Pg. 181]

Examining the above saying from a scientific approach, we understand that just like how the Earth is sustained with the Sun’s energy and light irrespective of whether it is behind clouds, similarly, we derive immense spiritual benefit from the Imam regardless of whether he is physically with us or not.

Furthermore, one can also obtain another important role of Imamate from the saying above. Today, we know that the Sun is the centre of the solar system and its existence nourishes and nurtures for the planetary objects around it, similarly the Imam’s sole presence, whether active or not, is of paramount importance as it is the source of life for all as without the existence of God’s proof on Earth the world is tantamount to complete annihilation.

We therefore have to be mindful of what we do and should endeavour in making our souls pure by nourishing them with the Divine light thus making our souls the abode for Allah and his beloved angels. Spiritual perfection should be our goal and if there is any doubt as to whether the Imam is aware of our acts and is overlooking the welfare of his followers, a saying by the Imam should suffice;

‘We have not ignored your consideration, and have not forgotten your mention; otherwise hardship would have descended upon you and your enemies would have exterminated you.’

[Bihar Al-Anwaar, Ch. 53, Pg. 175]

The Imam is therefore watching over our affairs and is patiently awaiting our response to his call. The matter regarding the return of the Imam is not one simply related to awaiting a time frame chosen by the Almighty Allah, rather in accordance to the narration from the Prophet (SAW), it has a direct relationship with our own actions, as he says;

‘The best of actions is awaiting Al-Faraj (the return)’

The emphasis in this saying is on the word ‘actions’, because it is in reference to participating in an action in order to bring about that awaited time. From this narration stems the School of Awaiting which is a comprehensive study into the necessary approaches and actions of the

Muslim community in order to hasten the appearance of the return. It is this exact approach that the AhlulBayt Islamic Mission (AIM) undertakes as its core doctrine, and it is through this that all AIM projects are run. It is therefore the objective of the AhlulBayt Islamic Mission, to outwardly promote a platform for the blessed return in all fields of life, and to encourage and motivate the masses to embrace true Islam and work towards the fulfillment of the command of Allah on Earth.

AIM believes that the solution to all problems be they on a worldly or individual level, and that the completion of the Divine plan is realized with the return of the Imam of our time. Based on this and on the narration mentioned earlier, AIM believes that it is the duty of every Muslim to continually remember the central significance of the Imam and to place all efforts in to working for the return of the Imam.

It is therefore necessary for everyone to work tirelessly for this objective and to remember that this mission is the only legitimate solution to the problems faced by mankind at large. It is the responsibility of everyone to remind those around them of this sacred mission and it is likewise their responsibility to sacrifice their time, efforts and even their finances for the cause of the awaited Imam.

It is a frequent saying amongst many Muslims, when they remember the martyrs of Karbala to chant: "If only we were with you, for surely we would have been victorious." We today have that option, we have an Imam in occultation waiting for us to reach out towards him. He is patiently waiting for that time to come where a small group of people would truly be of his followers such that he may appear and lead this Ummah towards salvation, and yet we as a people sit and do nothing.

The AhlulBayt Islamic Mission, calls on everyone to join its ranks and help in this sacred mission to bring about the return of the Imam of our time, for surely as the Imam himself stated:

"In my return is your return