

*In the Name of Allah
Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

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Editorial

After forming the renaissance and the elements of modernity in the Western world, many Islamic regions faced the question of relationship and link between religious customs and civilization and modernity. What does religion propose and model for responding to different questions in the new age and whether it is at all possible to draw agreement and accordance between these two epistemological perspectives to the world and human being? Whether religion can answer the cosmological, ontological and anthropological questions of the new age which is rooted in the age of modernity and whether or not it can provide suitable proposals and models for human facing with the elements of the new age such as individualism, humanism, scientism, rationalism, secularism and the like.

Based on the eternal convention of religions, the pivot of the world is God and God is considered as the root of all truth and the value and significance of human is secondary to God's pivotal role and is in the radius of his spiritual greatness and beauty in a way that human admits his minuteness in front of God's magnitude and reach his greatness through servitude and submission to God. Going against this, the new world is being based on pivotal role and belief in human and marginalizing the God. Islamic

scholars and thinkers each endeavored to suggest a model from different perspectives in response to this question of modern era, some of which included Mahdism and the messianic concepts as an essential component.

In Islamic culture facing with western culture, Islamic thinkers have tried to introduce solution for Islamic societies aligned with the fast pace of evolutions following on from the modern era and the questions posed from the new era. In some of these theories, despite emphasis on the messianic concepts, two negative aspects are highlighted. Firstly that some Muslim thinkers and intellectuals have had passive acceptance in facing with western civilization and the culture followed by modernity. They have done little to look at it critically and pursue developing an independent model and plan and have always found a compound of Islamic-Western elements in their thought. Secondly, although the issue of Mahdism is present in some of their solutions as a proper Islamic element, which has been present in futuristic research and philosophy of history, and has been accepted as one of the major elements in Muslim's intellect, yet interpretation of Mahdism in some of these theories is not consonant with Islamic texts. These texts have not been used as deserved and have been only looked at a tool.

For instance, fundamentalism as a newfound movement among a few Muslims would never try to adjust Islamic thought with the accepted concepts in the modern world and it is not important to them how people in the modern world think of Islam. The fundamentalists think more of their religious purity than the ability of religion in solving life's novel questions and although they use industry and achievements of modernity, the rationality of religion and its teaching is not important to them and do not care that the western world is using words like violence, terrorism,

dogmatism, monologue, intolerance ‘uncommunication’ and the like for the Islamic world. This interpretation of Islam has made the western world and those who are in conflict with the Islamic world, try to propagate a fundamentalist picture of Islam among the western populous and assign this reading of Islam as if it is the reading of all Muslims. Regarding the fact that these concepts do not lend themselves to naturalisation, this interpretation of Islam spreads rebellion and hatred towards Islam.

Despite the fundamentalists, many thinkers and scholars of the Islamic world stress the importance of rationalizing the religious concepts in Islam in addition to the fact that ideas and theories should be based on religious teachings that are they should be Islamic. They even reacted to the 9/11, which is referred to be a fundamentalist act or in agreement with their thought patterns. They strongly oppose this hostile approach to religion and therefore after the incident tried to prove that Islam, unlike fundamentalist thinking, is about the dialogue, tolerance and has an intellectual history and does not conflict with the humanistic concepts.

It should be noted that although movements attributable to fundamentalism in the Muslim world do not offer specific and important perspective into messianic thinking and Mahdism or simply do not comment, but their approach led to the formation of certain literature in the field of international relations in the Western world. What is common to all of these approaches has been that to justify hegemony (domination) and the military attitude of some domineering countries that propagate the clash of civilizations, Islamophobia, Shiite Crescent , Shiite Renaissance, Preventive attack, creating military bases in the region and other political patterns, following the

protection of Israel's interests and trying to control and secession of Islamic regions and changes in the geopolitics of the region. In fact, as fundamentalist Islam, especially after 9/11, has been on the course to a new era of Orientalism called neo-colonialism. The signs of this period in the Western world are the formation messianistic literature by Christians and Western politicians in the western countries. Although Islamic fundamentalists themselves do not offer a specific approach to Mahdism, but they have had a significant impact in the formation of two phenomena of Islamophobic and Apocalyptic literature.

Looking back at Islamic culture suggests that always historically some people in political movements, social movements and the vengeance for bloodshed were relying on their topic of Mahdism to provide for their own legitimacy. From the beginning of the Umayyad, and ever since the birth of Imam Mahdi (May God's grace Hasten his Appearance) their people or their political leaders have falsely claimed to be Mahdi aides, or have relationship and assignment to the Imam. However, they misused concepts of Mahdism and messianic culture to justify their political thought and international interest. In all these approaches there has been a drift and deviation from the Islamic teachings. An interesting fact to be seen is the importance of Mahdism in the intellectual process common to all Muslims and shows its special status. Abuse and diversion from Mahdism concept has exacerbated problems that include:

1. Social (misguided groups and sects attributed to Imam Mahdi (May God's grace Hasten his Appearance))
2. Political (undue political theorizations)
3. Psychological (mental fantasies and hallucination)

Today, by exploring among the Islamic lands, extensive statistics can be gained from large and small groups and

sects. Some for them are inclined to Mahdism claims due to depressions, national failures, betrayals of the rulers of Islamic states and the invasion by Western civilization on Muslims. Ideas that sometimes distract them away from the beliefs of Islam are found among them. The dominant approach in the contemporary era is either Mahdism being used as a tool to achieve political power by the Muslims and the underground bands, or used by Western belief in Messiah and the final savior. A close look at art, film and contemporary literature proves how popular this approach is. So today, one of the important questions in western politics is whether the West's approach and attention to the increasing religious discourse and the Apocalyptic literature, is a sign of developing religiousness and spirituality and the belief in the savior of the religions, or is it just in line with the political strategies and purposes that some domineering countries follow.

Against the fundamentalist approach, there is another approach consistent with an Islamic attitude towards the philosophy of history and future of humanity. The attention is to Mahdism relying on the readings from the religious texts. From this perspective global governance of Mahdi, is an acceptably nice and based on religious predictions that has always been desired and emphasized during history by religious leaders and religious texts and has been a common concept among different Islamic scholars and all the Abrahamic religions. But to accept this doctrine does not mean refraining from duties and making no effort to build the community, but rather it means paying attention to something definite. This is one the Eternal traditions of God which is never opposed to human effort. From this perspective, belief in Mahdism is beyond any solution and political strategy and is a belief that can also help to Islamic

societies to back up strategies and theorizations. Yet, Muslims should never forget its potential harmful aspects in social, political and psychological areas. Lack of awareness regarding what is considered correct Mahdism has always brought about deviations in the history of Islamic civilization. This requires religious scholars to offer a firm reading (of the concept of Mahdism).

Some Thoughts on the Origins of Mahdism (Islamic Messianism) and its Socio-Political Function

By: Dr. Ismail K. Poonawala

Although the English term "messianism," is derived from the Hebrew word "*mashiah*," meaning "the annointed one,"¹ it has no equivalent in Arabic. The figure of the Mahdī, meaning "the rightly guided," or "God-guided," evolved very early in Islamic history conveying the Judeo-Christian concept of messianism. Originally, the Hebrew term denoted a king whose reign was consecrated by a rite of anointment with oil. In the Old Testament, it is always used in reference to the Kings of Israel. However, in the intertestamental period, which extends approximately from 220 BCE to 70 CE, its connotation changed. From this point forward, it was applied to the future king of Israel who was expected to restore the kingdom of Israel and save its people from all evil². Subsequently, Helmer Ringgren states, that messianic expectation in Judaism developed in two distinct manifestations. One was national-political figure who was a descendent of David and shall defeat his opponents and

establish a universal kingdom where the people will live in peace and happiness. The second manifestation was an apocalyptic, mythological figure considered to be the "son of man,"³ who would descend from heaven to save the chosen people. In apocalyptic books, "the son of man" was a transcendental figure, with divine characteristics who resided in heaven, but will appear at the end of time to pronounce judgment on the resurrected people. According to this concept, the pious will be freed from the dominion of the wicked and this transcendental figure will establish peace and justice. Without going into the details of Jewish Messianism, it should be pointed out that early Christianity incorporated many of the Jewish beliefs regarding the Messiah and applied them to Jesus. In Christianity, the term Messiah was translated into Greek as Christos (Christ), thus associating Jesus with Jewish messianic expectations.⁴ Historians of messianism have demonstrated that the belief in messianism flourishes during times of suffering and persecution. They further add that when the present is satisfactory mankind does not need to be redeemed, but the belief itself should be perpetuated until the present becomes completely unsatisfactory and circumstances require it could be revived and re-energized as a possible response. The tendency to look toward future fulfillment is a recurring theme in Judaism and Christianity.

In his article "Jewish Messianism," Werblowsky⁵ points out that another version of the "double messiah," developed in the 2nd century CE probably as a reaction to the catastrophic failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt that produced the belief that a warrior messiah who dies a heroic death will be followed by the victorious messiah. This concept further demonstrates that messianic fulfillment is preceded by cosmic, natural, and social disasters. The Christian

accommodation of this Jewish belief is the idea of the Antichrist who will rule the world before being finally vanquished by the Second Coming of Christ.

Returning to the concept of Mahdī in Islam, it should be noted that despite the notion of divine guidance, a fundamental principle in the Qur'ān, the word Mahdī does not occur in the Qur'ān. The doctrine of the Mahdī has evolved in Islamic history to embody the expectation of a divinely sent prophetic figure at the end of time who will restore true religion and fill the earth with peace and justice and will rule until the end of the universe. It is worth noting that the term Mahdī, especially its connotation and usage emerged over a long period of time. However, discussions about the Mahdī's characteristics and identity by religious scholars can be traced back to during or after the second *fitna* (civil war) in Islamic history.⁶ Various factors contributed to the growth of such literature.

The belief in the Last Judgment or the coming of "the Hour" and the accompanying eschatological account depicted in the Qur'ān concerning that momentous event have received exegetical elaborations in traditions ascribed to the Messenger of God. In the opinion of the present author, it was in this context that the Mahdī traditions originated. Therefore, before we address or analyze other factors that contributed to the growth of Islamic Messianic literature, let us first turn to the Qur'ān. Unfortunately, this primary source is often overlooked by the Western scholars. It should be noted that the early Meccan revelations of the Qur'ān reflect the mood of eschatological expectations that pervaded the Near East during the period immediately preceding the birth of the Prophet. Verse A1 of *sūrat al-Baqara* (chapter two) states: *When a Scripture comes to them from God, confirming what is in their possession - and previously they have*

*been seeking victory over those who disbelieve - and when what they recognize [as the truth] comes to them they do not believe in it."*⁷

This verse clearly demonstrates that certain Christians and Jews in Arabia foretold the coming of an eschatological figure. Furthermore, historians of early Islam believe that messianic typology had been utilized by the imperial powers of that age for their own aggrandizement, i.e. the Byzantine emperor, the Abyssinian Negus, and the Jewish king Dhu Nawās of Yemen. The Muslim claim that Muhammad was the "seal" of the prophets, meaning that he was the final link in the chain of prophecy, may have originally been understood in a messianic significance.⁸

In the eschatology of the Qur'ān, the following three themes dominate: i) the Signs of the Hour; ii) the Day of Judgment; and iii) the rewards of the righteous and torments of the wicked. The Day of Judgment is described as when all people shall be made to answer before God for their deeds. This is a prominent theme in the Meccan period of the Qur'ān and is referred to as the Day of Reckoning (*yaun al-hisāb*), the Day of Judgment (*yaum al-din*), the Day of Resurrection (*yaun al-qiyāma*), or the Last Day (*al-yaum al-ākhir*). The Signs of the Hour (*alāmāt/ashrāt al-sā'ad*)⁹ are depicted in the Qur'ān as the climax of history, a catastrophic and terryfying event that will affect each and every creature on earth. Several *sūras*, i.e. 81, 82, 84, and 99 vividly describe the cosmic upheaval that will occur on that day and will dislocate the earth from the heavens. Some verses describe that the natural world will disintegrate as the seas boil over, and the mountains crumble into dust, and the dead will rise from their graves. The Qur'ān speaks of the judgment that will be delivered by the weighing of deeds to determine whether good or evil will tip the scale. Once judgment has been rendered, people are consigned to the

bliss of Paradise or to the torments of Hell, and are to remain there forever. Hell is supervised by angels appointed for that purpose. Its inhabitants, in addition to suffering from scorching fire, are made to undergo further agony by eating bitter dry thorns and drinking from a boiling spring that neither nourish nor satisfy hunger. On the other hand, the dwellers of Paradise will enjoy all pleasures colorfully portrayed in the Qur'ān, i.e. reclining in raised couches in a lofty garden, with flowing spring and carpets spread, and goblets placed before them.¹⁰

When the Messenger of God was asked about the time of the Last Hour, he replied: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord only,"¹¹ or "the Hour shall come on them suddenly while they are unaware,"¹² or "the matter of the Hour is but a twinkling of the eye," or "it is nearer still."¹³ Eventually the Day of Judgment and the eschatological description depicted in the Qur'ān received exegetical elaboration and apocalyptic traditions were ascribed to the Messenger of God. Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim, whose collections are regarded by the Sunnīs as the most authentic canonical collections of traditions, transmit a tradition that states that the Messenger of God spoke to his Companions about the events leading up to the Last Hour.¹⁴ This tradition served as a spring board to further speculations and fabrications of spurious traditions.

All the aforementioned characteristics of the Day of Judgment described in the Qur'ān evoke the mood of an apocalyptic vision. Graphic descriptions of that day imply that the Qur'ān speaks of the destruction of the cosmos and its eventual rebirth to create new forms of life. The eschatological tension recounted in the Qur'ān is resolved by an idealized hereafter.¹⁵ For in Islam there is no particular "salvation," or "redemption," as astutely pointed

out by Fazlur Rahman, only "success (*falah*)" or "failure (*khusrān*)" in the task of building the type of world order propounded in the Qur'ān."¹⁶

Secondly, numerous factors including the socio-political crisis and religious ferment that prevailed in Muslim society following the first and the second *fitna*¹⁷ largely contributed to the proliferation of messianic beliefs. Thirdly, views borrowed from other religions and cultures must have influenced the manifestations of these beliefs. In his book entitled *Early Mahdism*, Jan-Olaf Blichfeld argues that the notion of the Mahdī should not be considered exotic or sectarian, and it does not reflect the views of some of the extreme groups like the Extrem (*ghulat*) Shīa or the Khawārij.¹⁸ Mahdism, he contends, grew out of the socio-political conditions that prevailed in Muslim society following the civil wars. He stresses that the notion of the Mahdī must have emerged from a particular set of social and political conditions. To substantiate his claim, Blichfeld devotes a major portion of his book to elucidating the prevailing circumstances in Kūfa that led al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī to employ the term "al-Mahdī" for Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya.¹⁹ There are many references in the account of al-Mukhtār's uprising regarding the belief that Ibn al-Hanafiyya was the Mahdī. G. R. Hawting states that in preparing the way for the coming of the Mahdī, al-Mukhtār and his followers saw themselves as serving in an apocalyptic role. This view of his movement was shared by the contemporary Christian Syriac writer, John of Phenek.²⁰

Leaving aside the history of the term Mahdī and how it was applied to various historical figures beginning with the Messenger of God, Wilferd Madelung states that the discussion about the Mahdī and his identity among the religious scholars can be traced back to the time of the

second *fitna*. He further states that it was the Kūfan tradition which insisted that the Mahdī would be from the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). Additionally, he identifies cAsim b. Bahdala (d. *ca.* 127/744-45), a well-known Qur'ān reciter, for disseminating the following tradition supported by a Kūfan chain of narrators (*isnād*) beginning with cAbd Allāh b. Mascud, a Companion of the Prophet who had received the Qur'ān directly from the Prophet's mouth and had settled in Kūfa after the conquest of Iraq.²¹ It states: "The Messenger of God said: 'The world will not pass away before the Arabs are ruled by a man of my family whose name will be the same as mine.'"²² The claim that the Mahdī's name and the *kunya* (surname, consisting of *abū* or *umm* followed by the name of the son) will be the same as that of the Messenger of God, appears to have originated during the rebellion of al-Mukhtār in favor of Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya.²³

In his article "Some Religious Aspects of the Caliphate,"²⁴ Helmer Ringgren argues that although the "caliph," a political successor of the Prophet, was not originally intended to be a sacral king, in reality, quite a number of qualities and functions were ascribed to him that were characteristics of the sacral kingships of ancient Near East. Hence, he contends that in many cases the Mahdī traditions ascribed to the Prophet, have foundations in Jewish-Christian or Zoroastrian eschatological ideas.

It is well-known that the cAbbāsīd revolutionary movement used messianic expectations and the notion of a restorer of Islam and the just rule of the family of the Prophet. The very fact that the Mahdī traditions were included in the four Sunnī canonical collections of the traditions, viz., the *sunan* works of al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Māja, al-Nasai and the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal, all

compiled during the second half of the 3rd/9th century, attest to the popular belief in the doctrine of the Mahdī among the Muslims. The Mahdī traditions found in the *Musannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-San'ānī (d. 211/827) indicate that their inclusion in the Sunni collections occurred even earlier than their inclusion in the canonical collections mentioned above.²⁵

For the Imāmī Shīas, the reappearance of the hidden Twelfth Imām, who had gone into occultation in the year 260/873-74 and identified with the Mahdī, is a fundamental tenet of their faith. It is fervently expressed in a popular prayer: "May God hasten the release from suffering through his advent."²⁶ Abul Aziz Sachedina has convincingly argued that the doctrine of the Mahdī concerning the Twelfth Imām developed with eschatological connotations following the period of the shorter occultation (*al-ghayba al-sughrā*), between 260/873 and 329/941.²⁷ Soon there arose among the Imāmīs a literature dealing with the events that herald the Mahdī's coming known as *calāmāt-i zuhūr* (the signs of [the Mahdī's] appearance or advent). *Al-Kāfī*, the earliest Imāmī collection of *hadīth*, by Kulaynī (d.329/941) does not contain anything about the signs that will precede the Mahdī's *zuhūr*. However, in a brief section entitled *karāhiyyāt al-tawqīt* (abhorrence of fixing the time [of the Mahdī's advent]), Kulaynī refers to the prohibition of assigning a date to the Mahdī's appearance. As the Mahdī's *raj'ah* (return) and *zuhūr* became an integral part of the doctrine of the *ghayba* (occultation), most of the Imāmī scholars who wrote on the *ghayba*, beginning with Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991-92), included a chapter entitled '*Alāmāt zuhūr al-Qa'im* (the signs of the Mahdī's appearance)²⁸ or *min al-'alāmāt al-ka'ina qabl al-khurūj* (some of the signs bound to happen before his coming). These apocalyptic visions of a

future restoration through the dramatic intervention of God in human history served as a source of solace for believers and provided them with an additional incentive to preserve the faith during the difficult days of the *ghayba*. The messianic expectations relieved them of the duty to actively oppose or rebel against the established unjust authority. Accompanying those traditions were reports on the merits of waiting patiently for the *zuhūr*.²⁹ The absence of information on the exact time of his return required believers to be vigilant and ready for his reappearance through a constant reevaluation of contemporary circumstances on the basis of the foretold signs. Familiar with this literature, every generation expected the *zuhūr* to take place during their lifetime.

In its development as an independent genre, *'alāmāt-i zuhūr* drew chiefly on Islamic eschatological literature, *'alāmāt* or *ashrat al-sā'ah*, and described the catastrophic events preceding the end of time. Both al-Bukhārī and Muslim incorporated in their *sahihs* certain traditions that stated that the Messenger of God had told his Companions about everything that would happen up to the Last Hour.³⁰ Sunnī *hadīth* collections attribute a great majority of the apocalyptic traditions directly to the mouth of the Messenger of God, whereas the ShTi *hadīth* collections generally ascribe those *ahadīth* (traditions) to the Imāms, the legitimate heirs to prophetic knowledge. Time and space do not permit me to discuss *Mushaf Fatima* (the Scroll of Fatima) and *Kitāb al-Jafr* (the Book of Divination), two books among others that the imām inherits from his predecessors, which provide additional information of apocalyptic traditions. However, the material found in Sunnī *hadīth* collections in *Kitāb al-fitan* (chapter on sedition),³¹ dealing with civil strife and seditions cover various themes such as the signs of the

Last Hour (*ashrat al- sā' ah* or *amor āt al- sā' ah*), the account of the *Dajjāl* (Antichrist), and the descent of Jesus. These topics formed the nucleus around which the signs of the Mahdī's *mhūr* developed among the Shīa. The *calāmāt-i mhūr*, thus, follows the same pattern as the Sunnī *hadīth* collections, and demonstrate a great resemblance in form and content.³² After scrutinizing the vast aquantity of Sunni and Shīa *ahādīth*, it becomes clear that later *ahādīth* were more or less elaborations of earlier expositions of authenticated traditions. Very often details of later political and social turmoil were regarded as prophecies. For example, the disintegration of the Abbāsīd caliphate was interpreted by many scholars as the fulfillment of the approaching Hour. Numerous traditions predict the final Muslim victory over the Byzantines and the conquest of Constantinople as a sign of the *Dajjāl's* appearance. The constant reference to conflict among enemies found in those *hadīth* collections reflects the political turmoil of the time and provided the Shīa with assurance that the great event of the *zuhūr* of the Mahdi was approaching. It should be noted that the great majority of the *ahādīth* in the Shīa collections are ascribed to the Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq (d.148/765) and bis father Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. ca 122/740). Very few are ascribed to CAH b. Abī Tālib (d. 40/661), CAH Zayn al-Abidin (d. ca. 94/712), Mūsa al-Kazim (d. 183/799), CAH al-Ridha (d. 203/818), and some of the Companions of the Prophet.

In addition to the six canonical Sunni *hadīth* collections, I have referred to *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-n'emah* by Abu Jacfar Muhammad b. cAti al-Qummī, known as Ibn Bābwayh and al-Shaykh al-Sadūq (d. 381/991), *al-Irshad* by Shaykh Mufīd (d. 381/991), *kitāb al-ghayba* by *Shaykh* Abu J'afar Muhammad al-Tusī (d. 460/1067), *Bihar al-anwar* by Muhammad al-Bāqir Majlisi (d. ca.1110/1699), and *al-Najm*

al-thaqib or Mahdī-e mou'ood by Mīrza Husayn Tabrisi for analysis of the following themes.³³ Precluding the numerous detailed descriptions and specific references, this shapeless mass of traditions can be classified into several major themes: Celestial Signs. The Mahdī's *zuhūr* will be preceded by extraordinary natural phenomena, such as the rise of the sun in the west, a solar and a lunar eclipse at the middle and the end of the month of Ramadan respectively, a lunar eclipse in the east and the west, and the sun remaining stationary in the middle of the day. Some traditions describing the halting of the sun state that the face of Sufyāni will be visible at its center portending his destruction. A shining star similar to the moon will rise in the east; redness will appear in the sky and spread to the horizon, remaining for three to seven days. Time will contract. A year will be like a month, a month like a week, a week like a day, a day like an hour, an hour like the kindling of a fire. The angel Gabriel will proclaim from heaven in the early morning: "Verily, the truth is with cAll and his followers," and his words will be heard by all the earth's inhabitants in their respective languages. Satan, on the other hand, will announce from the earth in the evening: "Indeed, the truth is with cUthmān (or Sufyānī) and his followers," and the liars will waver in their doubt about what is proclaimed by Gabriel and Satan. The Mahdī's name will be proclaimed on Friday night, the 23rd of Ramadan. The aforementioned celestial signs are quite conspicuous in the Imāmī sources. Terrestrial Phenomena. Extraordinary and calamitous events, such as earthquakes, famines, copious rains, and weird epidemics will take place on the earth. As a result, the yield of all crops will decline enormously and dates will rot on the date-palms. Social Anarchy. The Mahdī's advent will be preceded by a period of terrible

suffering, great commotion, and civil strife, and mankind will sink into a state of moral turpitude. Pretenders to the prophethood and the imamate will arise and "a pure soul" from the descendants of Banū Hāshim will be killed at the sanctuary of the Kaaba in Mecca. Many traditions state that Sufyānī, Khurāsānī, and Yamanī will simultaneously rise. During this period of violent convulsions, almost two-thirds of humankind will perish. Sufyānī. The Mahdī's appearance will be heralded by the coming of Sufyānī, a figure whom the Umayyads were accused of devising as a counterpart of the Shici Mahdī.³⁴ He is not mentioned in the six canonical Sunnī *hadīth* collections, but other Sunnī collections cite him in detail. His name is given as cUthmān b. cAnbasa and he will rise from among the descendants of Abū Sufyān b. Harb b. Umayya. He will be of medium height with a large head containing marks of smallpox that will make him appear to be one-eyed. He will come from the desert during the month of Rajab and march into Syria after defeating the Byzantines. After occupying Syria for eight or nine months, he will be killed by the Mahdī.

Dajjal (Antichrist, lit. "deceiver"). His appearance is a sign of the Last Hour. Endowed with miraculous powers, he will come before the end of time and undertake mischief left and right to lead people astray. He will rule the world with impurity and tyranny for forty days. One day like a year, one day like a month, one day like a week, and the remaining 37 like any other day. He is described as a corpulent, red-faced youth blind in the right eye, his other eye resembling a floating grape. The letters k, f, r (meaning infidel) will be written on his forehead. He rides an ass and is attended by sinners and hypocrites. Traditions state that he will emerge in the remote regions of the east, such as Khurāsān. Despite his conquests, he will be incapable of

entering the mountain passes of both Mecca and Medina because the angels guard its gates. According to the Sunni traditions he will be killed by Jesus.³⁵ The figure of *Dajjāl* does not appear in early ShTi works, although he is discussed in detail in Sunnī collections. In later Imāmī works, he is mentioned in a few *ahadīth* where he is said to be killed by the Mahdī, not Christ. Some traditions trying to reconcile the figures of Sufyānī and *Dajjāl* by interpreting *Dajjal's* emergence as a test for identifying the true believers.

The Advent of Jesus. In Islamic apocalyptic traditions, Jesus is assigned a significant role and the description of his return, regarded as one of the signs of the approaching Last Hour, does not vary significantly between the Sunnī and the Shīa sources. Jesus will descend to a hill in the Holy Land or on to the white arcade of the eastern gate of Damascus with a spear in his hand to kill the Antichrist. He will then proceed to Jerusalem as the dawn prayer is being said. The Imām will attempt to offer up his place to Jesus, but Jesus will decline to lead the prayer and take a place behind the Mahdī. Thereafter he will break the cross, kill all the swine, destroy the synagogues and the churches, and kill all the Christians except those who believe in him. The People of the Book will believe in him and will form one single community, - the Muslim community. He will establish the rule of justice and insure its survival for forty years; then he will die. His funeral will take place in Medina and he will be buried beside the Messenger of God.³⁶ The Imāmī doctrine about the Mahdī's coming at one point merges with the return of Jesus. Imāmī *ahadīth* emphasize that Jesus will descend during the Mahdī's reign and that he will offer his prayer behind him. The function of killing the *Dajjal* is also reserved for the Mahdī. The Advent of the Mahdī. The prohibition regarding the fixing of a definite time about the

Mahdī's advent appears to relate to the year since many traditions mention the day he will appear. The most cited date is 'Ashūra, the tenth of Muharram, when it falls on a Saturday in one of the odd-numbered years of the *Hijra*. Though the traditions widely vary regarding the place where he will rise, they agree that his *zuhūr* will occur in Mecca at the sanctuary of the K'aba between the *rukṅ* and the *maqām*,³⁷ at which point his followers will swear allegiance to him. Then he will move to Medina and march triumphantly into Kūfa, which will become his capital.³⁸ In some early traditions ascribed to Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir the number of years which had to elapse before the Mahdī's coming was specified. The fact that the period passed without the prophecy being fulfilled was, therefore, interpreted as *bada* a change in circumstances causing God to alter His ruling in the peoples' own interest."³⁹

The Mahdī will be old in age but young in looks. Those who look at him will think that he is forty or less. The proof that he is the true Mahdī is that he will not age with the passage of time. He is described as having white complexion with traces of redness. He will have a beautiful face with lovely black hair hanging down to his shoulders and two birth marks on his back, one like the color of his skin and the other resembling the birth mark of the Messenger of God. There is no agreement in the Imāmī sources about the duration of his rule. One report states that it last for 309 years, the number of years the *Ashab al-Kahf* (the people of the cave)⁴⁰ slept in the cave, while another report states it will extend for 7 years (given in the Sunnī collections), each year equal to 70 years; thereafter he will die. The purpose of *zuhūr*, stressed in all the sources, is to secure justice on earth and liberate the world from suffering, oppression, and war as well as to inaugurate an era of

spiritual and worldly felicity.⁴¹ His rule, therefore, personifies the millennial dream, the accomplishment of an ideal Islamic society.

Notes

- 1 It is true that the word "masīh" is used either with ʿĪsā ibn Maryam or with Ibn Maryam or interchangeably for ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam on several occasions in the Qurʾān, its usage is completely devoid of any Christian understanding of Messiah. It is probably used in the Qurʾān as a title for Jesus. Western scholars consider the word "masīh" a loanword from Aramaic or Ethiopic, but the Arab writers view it as a loanword from Hebrew or Syriac. For example, Ibn Manzur, author of the famous dictionary *Lisān al-ʿArab* (s.v. m-s-h), states that "masīh" is a loan word from the Torah (Hebrew) and adds that Jesus was given this title because, first, he journeyed throughout Palestine and second, because he used to cure the sick by the stroke of his hand. (In Arabic the root m-s-h means "to measure," or "to wipe, stroke.") *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (thus forth referred to as *EL*²) s.v. al-masīh, by A. J. Wensinck & C. Bosworth. See also Jan-Olaf Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism: Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 2-3, n.8
- 2 *Encyclopedia of Religion* (thus forth referred to as *ER*), ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987), s.v. Messianism, by H. Ringgren; R. Werblowsky et al., eds. *The Oxford dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York, 1997), s. v. Messiah. It should be noted that in the royal ideologies of the ancient Near East, especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the king played the role of the savior of his people and that Zoroaster is the oldest known millenarian prophet. As Zoroastrian apocalyptic developed, his religious, social and cosmic message became nationalized by being linked with Iranian myth and legend. Édouard Dhorme, *Les religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (2nd edn., Paris, 1949); *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London, 1986), s. v. Apocalyptic in Zoroastrian, by M. Boyce.
- 3 The term used in the *Book of Daniel* (7:13-14) to describe a cloud-borne humanlike figure was transformed in Jewish and early Christian speculation into a transcendent eschatological agent of divine judgment and deliverance. In the New Testament this figure was identified with the risen Jesus. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York, 1992), s. v. Son of Man, by George Nickelsburg.
- 4 *ER*, s.v. Messianism.
- 5 *ER*, s.v. Messianism, Jewish Messianism, by R. Zwi Werblowsky.
- 6 For the history of the term Mahdī, see *EL*², s.v. al- Mahdī, by W. Madelung; Saʿd Muhammad Hasan, *al-Mahdiyya fī -islām mundh aqdam al-cusūr hattd -yawm: dirāsa wāfiya li-tārkihihā al-ʿaqadī wa l-siyāsī wa 'l-adabī* (Cairo, 1953).
- 7 *The Qurʾān*, translated into English by Alan Jones (Gibb Memorial Trust/London, 2007), p. 35. See also al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr al-Tabarī: Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan ta'wīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Mahmūd Shākir, 2nd edn (Cairo, 1969), vol. II, pp. 331-37.
- 8 *ER*, s.v. Messianism, Islamic Messianism, by Douglas Crow.

- 9 M. Jabr, *Ashrāt al-sā'ā wa-asrārohā* (Kuwait, n. d).
- 10 Qur'an88:1-17.
- 11 Qur'an7:187, 31:34, 33:63, 43:85.
- 12 Ibid., 6:31, 12:107, 22:55, 43:66, 47:18.
- 13 Ibid.,16:77, 42:17.
- 14 Al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*(Cairo,1958),vol. IV, p.129; Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*(Cairo, n.d), vol.VIII, p.172
- 15 Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis, 1980), pp. 106-20; *ER*, s.v. *Qur'ān*, by Charles Adams; Sayyid Qutb, *Mashāhid al-qi'yāma fi'l-Qur'an* (Cairo,1981); idem, *al-Taswīr al-fanni fi'l-Qur'an* (Cairo,1980).
- 16 Rahman, op. cit., p.63; the words used in the Qur'an are derivatives of the verb "f-l-h," such as *aflahā*, *tuflihūn*, *yuflihūn*, and *muflihūn*.
- 17 The series of events beginning with the murder of ʿUthmān, the third caliph, followed by civil wars during the reign of ʿAlī until the seizing of power by Muʿāwīya, is often called "the great *fitna* (*al-fitna al-kubrā*)," or "the first *fitna*." *EL*², s. v. *Fitna*, by L. Gardet. The events following the seizure of power in Mecca by ʿAbd Allāh b. Zubayr in 61/681 until his defeat in 72/692 is generally called the second *fitna*
- 18 Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism*, p. 13.
- 19 " Mukhtār was the leader of a pro-ʿAlid movement that controlled Kūfa in 66/685-86. He claimed to be acting as the representative of Muhammad b. al-Hanafīyya, the son of ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib. *EL*², s. v. al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd al-Thakafī, by G. R. Hawting
- 20 Ibid
- 21 *EL*², s. v. Ibn Masʿūd, by J. C. Vadet
- 22 *EL*², s. v. al-Mahdī, by W. Madelung. Both al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd transmitted it. Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-masabīh* (Damascus, 1862), vol. III, p. 24; English trans. James Robson, *Mishkat al-Masabih* (Lahore, 1675), vol. II, p. 1140.
- 23 Ibn Saʿd, *al-Tabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau (Leiden, 1905), vol. V, p. 66.
- 24 Helmer Ringgren, "Some Religious Aspects of the Caliphate," in *Studies in the History of Religions* (Supplement to *Nvmen*), vol. IV: *The Sacral Kingship (La Regalità Sacra)* (Leiden, 1959), pp. 737-48.
- 25 *EL*² s. v. al-Sanʿānī, ʿAbd al-Razzāk, by H. Motzki.
- 26 Kulaynī, *al-Usul min al-kāfī*, ed. A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1968), vol. I, pp. 168,371; Hilli, *Sharh bāb hadl ʿashar* (Tehran, 1950), P- 57; English trans. W. Miller (London, 1958), p. 81
- 27 A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany, 1981), pp. 150 ff. William Tucker's *Mahdis and Mellenarians* (Cambridge, 2008), discusses Shīʿī groups in the early history of Islam in Iraq whose ideas reflect a mixture of indigenous non-Islamic religious teachings and practices.
- 28 Al-Qa'im is another term used for the Mahdī in Shi'a terminology. *EL*² s. v. Ka'im āl Muhammad, by W. Madelung.
- 29 Tabrisī, *al-Ihtijāj* (Najaf, 1966), vol. II, p. 50.

- 30 See Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-masābīh*, vol. III, p. 3; English trans. Robson, vol. II, p.1120.
- 31 *Fitan* pl. *of fitna*, carries different meanings, e.g. temptation, trial, civil war, generally meaning an affliction whereby some good or evil quality is put to the test. Edward Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1984; lithographic reproduction of the 1863 original), s.v. f-t-n. In Bukhārī, Tirmidhī, and Ibn Māja it is called *Kitāb al-fitan*, while in Muslim it is entitled *Kitāb al-fitan wa-ashrat al-saʿa*, and in Abū Dāwūd it is named *Kitāb al-fitan wa 'l-malahim*. *Malhama* pl. *malahim* means fierce battle. In modern Arabic it is applied to a heroic epic.
- 32 It should be noted that the ShTa Ismaʿills have a different interpretation of the Day of Judgment and the related themes. See Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-iftikhār*, ed. Ismail Poonawala (Beirut, 2000), pp. 181-213.
- 33 In addition to the six canonical Sunnī hadīth collections I have used Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl al-dm wa-tamām al-nicma*, ed. with Persian trans. M. Kāmraī (Tehran, 1958)? vol. n, pp. 362-70; Shaykh Muflid's *al-Irshdd* (Najaf, 1962), PP- 3356-66; shykh Tūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Najaf, 1965), pp. 265-80; Majlisī's, *Bihar al-anwār* (Tehran, 1964), vol. VI, pp. 295-316v vol. LII, pp. 181-308; Mīrzā Husayn Tabrisī's *al-Najm al-thdqīb yd Mahdī-e mawcm* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 462-80.
- 34 Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Cairo, ?), vol. XVI, p. 88; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zahira* (Cairo,1929), vol. I, p. 221; Hasan, *al-Mahdiyya*, pp.177-81; R. Hartman, "Der Sufyānī," in *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen* (Copenhagen, 1953), pp.141-51.
- 35 *Elʿ*, s. v. al-Dadjdjāl, by A. Abel.
- 36 Thaʿlabī, *Qisas al-anbiyā* (Bombay, 1888), pp. 461-62; Baydāwī, *Tafsīr al-Baydāwī* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. IV, p.132 (commentary on the verse 43:61); *Elʿ*, s. v. ʿIsā, by G. Anawati.
- 37 *Rukn* in this context is the eastern corner of the Kaʿba where the Black Stone is located and the *maqām* is the *rmaqārīn Ibrāhīm* to the left of the Kaʿba.
- 38 For detailed description see Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. LIII, pp. 1-38; its summary in Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 161-66.
- 39 Tūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p.265; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., s.v. *Badā*, by I. Goldziher and A. Tritton.
- 40 They are mentioned in the Qurʾān in the *sūrat al-kahf* (chapter 18)
- 41 M. Hodgson, "A note on the millennium in Islam," in *Millennial Dreams in Action*, ed. S. Thrupp (New York, 1970), pp. 218-19.

Paving the Ground for the Appearance of the Savior; What Is the Main Responsibility for Those Who Await Him

By: Dr. Hans Ucko

The title could be the theme for a sermon in a church or a khutbah in a mosque. The title contains words of exhortation that could have come from any Christian sermon and it suggests that next there will be instruction for those who have gathered for worship and one wouldn't be able to tell whether the worshippers are Jews, Christians or Muslims.

I am mentioning this in the beginning of these reflections to emphasize how close we are to each other. I do so because I know that in our time such an emphasis is even more necessary than ever before. It is a sad fact known to us all that after the collapse of the Soviet empire, referred to by President Reagan as the evil empire, the role of the evil one has ever since 9/11 been assigned to Islam. We have heard it and we have read it. Islam is cruel and fanatical. The

caricature of Islam as the enemy has captured the imagination of the masses and supplied material for television and cinema and thus contributed to become the way whereby ordinary people in the West learn about Islam. This imagery reinforces stereotypes. It is our hope that the recent address in Cairo by President Obama, where he seeks “a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world” can counter these stereotypes.

It is on the other side also a sad fact of our time that many Muslims view the West as inherently hostile to the traditions of Islam. There are Muslims, and not only those who come to the West, who are convinced that the West wants to destroy Islam, the Muslim family, defile women and children and humiliate the men. Needless to say that the theory of the “Clash of civilizations” insisting that Islam and the West must always be in conflict has not done anything to do away with these stereotypes.

When it seems that we have become each other’s stereotypes risking making estrangement unending, it is important to delve into how much related the words and concepts of the religious traditions of Jews, Christians and Muslims are to each other. They are not all the same but there are here possibilities for us to discover genuine closeness and proximity to and with each other. And this is not only in the universal parameters of the bodies we call Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is not only in general statements about ethics and morality that we see similarities. It is not only in theological statements about the Abrahamic traditions or monotheistic religions that we see affinities. In the words about paving the ground for the appearance of the Saviour, we have a whole world revealing deep longings and yearnings. We are at the very heart of what it means being a human being realizing that we cannot be satisfied

with how things are. And it is not only anything we see far away in the horizon. It is also in our own lives that we experience gross injustice. We experience the hardships of life and look for something to calm the wounds and afflictions. The waiting for the appearance is therefore a sign of the cries of the heart that there will be change for the better, for healing of wounds and for redressing unfair conditions, where the just are suffering and the poor are made even poorer. It is hunger for justice that drives our longing for a saviour to come. This is deep in our hearts and minds as human beings and our religious traditions allow us to express these longings and yearnings. Everything is not fine. We cannot close our eyes. In spite of all we have received, there is nevertheless this longing for the ills of the world to be corrected. We are waiting for a saviour because the world suffers, because we see injustice triumph. It makes us angry and almost filled with despair. When is it to end? When will there be justice? The prophet Jeremiah voices our own experiences when we ask ourselves the questions about ‘why’ we have to live and witness how the poor are being trampled upon in the midst of unjust structures and evil machinations. “Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?” (Jeremiah 12, 1).

Our religious traditions have left us with the conviction that we are still to experience more and more of divine revelation, that we have not yet reached our destination. There is more to be said about that which we have received and to borrow from the lyrics of the African-American singer Al Jolson, “we ain’t seen nothing yet”.

If reality itself, lack of justice, the bane of poverty, wickedness, wars, prompts our longing for someone to redress the wrongs, our religious traditions, although close

to each other, have different narratives and put their emphasis differently.

The Messiah

Judaism has given us the title Messiah, who is the ideal king of the Messianic age. In the Old Testament the earliest use of the word is with YHWH as a title of the ruling sovereign Meshiah YHWH, "God's anointed one". In post-exilic times, the high priest, who filled the place formerly occupied by the king, is spoken of as "ha-Kohen ha-Mashiah" (the anointed priest). But the Messiah is also referred to as "Mashiah Nagid" (an anointed one, a ruler) or only "Mashiah" (an anointed one). In all he is consecrated to God's service and has immediate access to God, chosen by God to represent God's rule in Israel and to bear witness to God's glory before the nations.

But the face and the role of the Messiah has changed over the centuries. The first Zoroastrian Persian *Shāhanshāh* (Emperor) and the founder of the Persian Empire Cyrus the Great is by prophet Isaiah called "God's anointed one", because God has called him and given him victory after victory for the distinct purpose of putting an end to the Babylonian kingdom and the worship of idols, of setting free exiled Israel, and thus introducing the new era of God's universal reign.

We are, as Christians and Jews, very much inspired by the vision of the Messiah as described by the prophet Isaiah. It is this image that has given rise to the peace movement with its symbol of swords turned into plough bills. The Messiah, to whom Isaiah looks forward, will be filled with the spirit of God as a spirit of wisdom, valour, and religion, and will rule in the fear of God, his loins girt with righteousness and faithfulness. He will not engage in war or in the conquest of

nations; the paraphernalia of war will be destroyed; his sole concern will be to establish justice among his people. The fruit of his righteous government will be peace and order. The lamb will not fear the wolf, nor will the leopard harm the kid. Tyranny and violence will no longer be practiced on God's holy mountain, for the land will be full of the knowledge of God as the water covers the sea. The people will not aspire to political greatness, but will lead a pastoral life.

This is a Messiah, who will rise from the ranks of the pious and oppressed, who will ride into Jerusalem not in military splendour, but on a donkey; one can easily compare with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey or Ibn Kutaibah's account of Salman, the governor of Medina at the time of the dissensions of the caliphs, who rode on a donkey in order to show his advocacy of peace.

There are yet other images. In later times the Jews of the Exile dreamed of the coming of a second David, who would re-establish them as a glorious nation. The future Israel is to be a united nation as it was under David of old. This is longing for days gone by and the dream of a restored kingdom with power.

And then there is the image, not of a personal Messiah, but a collective, a servant of God, the people of Israel itself. God has called Israel for the realisation of His purpose toward humankind. This servant of God will spread the true religion among all peoples, convert all into willing servants of God, and lead all tongues to confess God. It is not the actual Israel of the present; it is the ideal Israel of the future. This servant of God has been prepared and equipped through suffering to fulfil God's mission. Here Jerusalem is the religious centre of the world. From here salvation will radiate to all.

Wandering through the centuries of Jewish perceptions of the Messiah will make us meet different Messiahs besides the Prince of Peace, Messiah ben David and the people Israel. There is also the strange Messiah ben Joseph, who will appear prior to the coming of Messiah ben David; he will gather the children of Israel around him, march to Jerusalem, and there, after overcoming the hostile powers, re-establish Temple-worship and establish his own authority. He will be killed by Gog and Magog. His body will be hidden by angels with the bodies of the Patriarchs, until Messiah ben David comes and resurrects him.

Throughout the centuries the saying of the medieval sage Maimonides reflects one tradition in Jewish belief and tradition: "I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may delay, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come". But his belief came during centuries to be more and more forgotten.

False pretenders to the title shook messianic expectations. Among those, one needs to mention Sabbatai Zevi, who made the Jews in Europe sell all they had and go to meet him in Smyrna in 1665. Here he made his messianic declaration in the synagogue, with the blowing of horns, and the multitude greeting him with: "Long live our King, our Messiah!" But when the sultan of Constantinople had him arrested, it was told that Sabbatai Zevi chose to convert to Islam to save his life. His apostasy sent shock-waves throughout the Jewish world and the belief in a personal Messiah began to crumble even more.

Eventually the belief in a personal Messiah succumbed to other forms of Messianism, which emphasised the image of the collective or the messianic principle. I think we cannot here but mention that Zionism to a certain extent came to replace the waiting for a personal Messiah. The Zionist

movement advocated the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and the establishment of a Jewish State. The state of Israel has in many respects today come to replace the Messiah. It sounds like a messianic vision to have a scattered people coming back to the land of their ancestors, relearning a language that had been reduced to the language of synagogue worship alone, become a nation that left the ghetto of denigration and humiliation and enter a land, where Jews were their own masters.

All the time forgotten was that this vision clashed with the reality of the Palestinian people. Few gave many thoughts to the people already living in the land. The messianic myth created narratives that wanted Jews and others to believe that this was a land without a people that was now given to a people without a land, the Jews. The Six-Day War and the spectacular victories over the Arab armies enhanced messianic fantasies about Greater Israel, which led to the continuing denigration and humiliation of the Palestinian people.

When we ask ourselves about the main responsibility for those who await messianic events, we must warn against any appearance that becomes a tool of oppression of the other. It is important to bring into awareness hidden and unconscious implications of our worldviews and identities that affect our relationships with others. My waiting for the appearance must not lead to the denigration or occupation of the other. Let us bear in mind that those we call “the others” are often our own projections and constructions. These constructions may be different from the way in which others represent themselves. It is important to respect the right of others to self-definition.

To conclude this part with a positive learning from the Jewish tradition, one could retain the understanding that the

coming of the Messiah in Judaism is not independent of the doings of the people. It is not enough to pray and hope for the coming of the Messiah. The coming of the Messiah is conditioned: "The Messiah will come when the whole Jewish people keep and remembers the Sabbath twice in a row" (Tractate Shabbat 118 b). Working towards the coming of the Messiah is thus meritorious. It is possible to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Be that as it may, there is in spite of it all a tragic ring in waiting for the appearance of the Saviour. In the Jewish tradition the waiting for the Messiah is as we have seen it tainted with disillusionment. Jews waited and thought they recognised the Messiah. But it wasn't the Messiah. Whether the Messiah will come, whether the Messiah is a person or a principle, whether the people or the land has a connection to the Messiah, remains part of the theological discourse but is maybe today not among the most burning issues in the Jewish tradition.

The Christ

Also the Christian waiting for the appearance of the Saviour has a tragic ring to it. Christian theology speaks about the *Parousia*, which is Greek for 'presence' or 'arrival'. The Parousia signifies the future return of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead. Belief in the Parousia was widespread in the earliest church but theology had to be reinterpreted because the imminent return of Christ did not appear as the early Christians had understood it. The New Testament itself bears witness to the conviction that Christ would come back immediately following his resurrection. Jesus says to his disciples: "... you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Matt.10, 23). If he was referring to himself and he

believed the end of time would take place in his day, and that the apostles would not get their mission accomplished before he came, then he was wrong in his prediction. One can well understand how such verses caused and continue to cause confusion and controversy among Christians in their interpretation of the appearance of the Saviour or the Parousia. There are similar verses, equally difficult to interpret. Jesus said to his disciples: "‘For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom’" (Matt.16, 27-28). He would be back in the life span of his disciples. It didn't happen and already in the New Testament there is a tone of apologetics trying to come to terms with the non-materialisation of the returning Christ. The one who wrote Second Peter tries to comfort himself and other Christians. He tries to build up the defence against those who question the waiting. He calls them "scoffers" who indulge "their own lusts ... saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’" And he tries to find an answer that will silence those who are questioning the veracity of the imminent return, saying "do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed" (2 Peter 3, 3-

10). But could it make the early Christians appreciate this to be the correct understanding of Christ's words about imminent return or did they have to do with it as the second best, i.e. he didn't come but he meant it in a different way?

Prevailing Christian tradition has not entertained speculations about the appearance of the Saviour. There are those who give up waiting all together and see the Parousia more as a symbolic reminder that the future is not in our hands and that the only thing we hold in our hands is the hope that one day will correct injustice and iniquity. But for some the waiting mode led to a reading of the Bible, which entered into an exegesis calculating and speculating on which day the return of Christ would take place. There have been individuals, movements and sects telling the world that the last day will be on such and such date and everyone should make sure that they were prepared for an unparalleled climax and last turning point in history. But when the day came and went without any visible apocalyptic end, the humiliation was difficult but significant.

Some Christian waiting for the "appearance of the Saviour" is not an innocent pastime or theology. It can have dire political consequences. I am thinking of Christian Zionists as they are called or they call themselves. Christian Zionists see the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Some Christian Zionists believe that the "ingathering" of Jews to the Holy Land is a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Jesus. It is thus very much connected to waiting for the appearance of the Saviour. Their theology insists upon hastening the return of Christ and Christian Zionists believe that this can be achieved by encouraging the return of the Jews to Israel, making Israel prosper,

encouraging even more Jews to immigrate, and in all this maintaining a vision of a Grand Israel, where its borders are defined not by agreements between nations but by a literal interpretation of biblical verses. Their main concern is the second coming of Christ and the Jews play the role of a pawn in this apocalyptic waiting for the Saviour. Such Christian support of the Jewish return to the Land of Israel as well as the ongoing support of Israeli politics in its most maximalist version is a political feature in the US, the so called Christian Right. It had its heydays during the eight years of the Bush presidency, when Christian Zionists did little to be peacemakers promoting the peace process.

The Jews, although a major player in the worldview of the Christian right are a playing piece in an eschatological game and of little interest in their own right. There is no interest for Judaism in its own right. The Jews are there for one purpose alone, to prepare for the return of Christ. They are there only for the second coming of Christ. When Christ returns the Jews are expected to convert and become Christians.

Any paving of the ground for “the appearance of the Saviour” that neglects concern for the oppressed and fails in respect of the other or disregards morality and ethics is the very opposite of what we associate with the Saviour, whether the Messiah, Christ or the Imam Mahdi. People cannot be made into means for the benefit of one’s own theology.

The Imam Mahdi

There are many hopes invested in the Imam Mahdi and they are narrated in the light of different Muslim traditions and schools. Al-Mahdi is an eschatological figure, who like the Messiah and the Christ will come to herald in the end of

all things. There are many stories, all of them illustrating the pains we live through as human beings and the hopes we all are trying to hold on to in order to travel through life in commitment, in respect and humility. When the eleventh Shi'a Imam Hasan al-Askari died, al-Mahdi's uncle, Jafar ibn Ali approached to lead the funeral prayers. However, al-Mahdi approached and said, "Move aside, uncle; only an Imam can lead the funeral prayer of an Imam." Jafar moved aside, and the five-year-old child led the funeral prayer for his father. It is reported that it was at this very moment that al-Mahdi disappeared and went into *ghaybat*, or occultation. There would be no further imam. The Mahdi would be hidden until God gave him permission to manifest himself. The Mahdi will fill the earth with justice and equity where before it was filled with tyranny and injustice.

Also Shi'a Islam knows of those from history who claimed that they were the true Imam Mahdi but who were imposters. Some proved to be the very opposite of the Mahdi, tyrants who spread corruption and fear. It seems a common feature for us, whether we are Jews, Christians or Muslims that we not always can read the signs of the time and so easily get lost. Waiting for the appearance of the Saviour does not take place in a vacuum but on the contrary in a world and in a time where there is great confutation, intense disputes and violent deaths. We use the same language in both the Christian tradition and in Islam to illustrate the conditions of life and the waiting for the appearance of the Saviour. It is at a time when people are afflicted by strife and fear for the future. Calamities will fall upon people, so much so that a man shall not find a shelter to shelter himself from oppression, as it is said in the Muslim tradition. In the Christian tradition, the same situation is painted in the New Testament with similar

sweeps. There are rumours of wars and insurrections, nations rising up against nations, kingdom against kingdom, Jerusalem surrounded by armies, people in Judea fleeing to the mountains and those inside the city forced to leave it and those out in the country advised not to enter. And I read in Muslim thinking that people will be troubled to such an extent that they even will long for death. It is then that the Imam Mahdi will be sent. It is in these circumstances that the longings for the “appearance of a Saviour” emerge.

The Shi’a tradition witnesses to an insight into what it means to be human. The Shi’a community is built on the insight of the preponderance of suffering in the world. There is a correspondence between the struggles of Ali and al-Husain and the Shi’a community’s situation. I now allow myself to see the Shi’a community also as a symbol for humanity. The Shi’a community tells me of insights into the predicament of what it means to be human. Suffering is a heavy toll on us and in so many ways it constitutes what it means to be a human being. It is in this way that we can see the appearance of the Saviour not exclusively as an issue for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Already in the waiting of Jews, Christians and Muslims there are vast differences revealing diverse ways in interpreting revelation and self-understanding. And yet, we are held together through common waiting. And in this we are not alone. We need to address the question of eschatology in its intrinsic connection to the role of hope in human existence and consider it with the utmost seriousness. See for example the waiting and the hope or lack of hope in Samuel Beckett's two act play, "Waiting for Godot". Here Estragon and Vladimir, two tramps and life-long companions, wait by a tree for Mr. Godot, who never comes, who will come tomorrow, but doesn't. It tells us something about the longing for something to appear, although most of us don't

know what we are waiting for. In our societies today, the words of our religious traditions mean less and less. Sometimes they have lost meaning altogether. And yet we wait like in the play “Waiting for Godot”. The two men divert themselves while they wait expectantly and unsuccessfully for someone named Godot to arrive. They claim him as an acquaintance but in fact they hardly know him, admitting that they would not recognise him were they to see him. To occupy themselves, they eat, sleep, converse, argue, sing, play games, exercise, swap hats, and contemplate suicide - anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay".

What is the main responsibility for those who await him?

We have now entered the second part of the title of the paper: “what is the main responsibility for those who await him?” I will be brief. Divine disclosures through angels, dreams, visions were the instruments available for apocalyptic discourse in biblical times. They revealed the secrets of the cosmos; they talked to the present history and foresaw the end. They revealed the immense cataclysms that would be the precursors to the end. But today, when we all are waiting, most of us are like Vladimir and Estragon and the angels are few, even if the dreams are many.

I hope I have throughout my wanderings in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions in their different expectations of a Messiah, a Christ and Imam Mahdi indicated the main responsibility for those waiting. I will say it again: waiting for the appearance of the Saviour must be related to ethics, to morality, to the dignity of all people. No one must be reduced to inferiority, to stereotyping, to an object, which can be used to fit my eschatological claims and beliefs.

I have mentioned the two protagonists Vladimir and Estragon in “Waiting for Godot”. They are almost pathetic and yet they represent humanity in its sometimes

disorientated and confused waiting for change, hoping for hope, longing for justice. What does this tell us? It tells us that in our waiting for the Messiah, the return of the Christ, the coming of the Mahdi, we must not become prisoners of our own traditions, looking upon our waiting in a way that it becomes a retreat that it becomes escapism from reality itself. The waiting of Vladimir and Estragon, albeit inchoate, should hold us back from looking upon ourselves as if we possessed all truth and were entitled to look down upon the other. On the contrary, Vladimir and Estragon should make us realise that all around the world, there is a fellowship among humans in their hope for something better. Irrespective of race, religion, or station in life, all of us share common aspirations - to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God. All people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity. The challenges we face are shared, and our failure to meet them will hurt us all.

The main responsibility for those who await the one who is coming is therefore to take seriously the old dictum *ora et labora*, pray and work, which in this context means, wait as if you couldn't work and work as if he is not coming. The justice we are longing for will not come from heaven unless we prepare it in all humility.

The Cultural Imperative: Role of Islamic Seminary Schools in Reconfiguring Muslim Societies for the Awaited Mahdi

By: Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal

*And whoever holds fast to Allah, is indeed guided to the right path.
(3:100)*

Introduction

We live in a world transformed by a cultural force of unprecedented order: never before in the history of humankind there has been such an intrusive and forceful onslaught of one culture on other cultures and ways of life as humanity has witnessed since World War II. This onslaught has been aided by technological developments of an order which was simply unimaginable half a century ago. Today, young men and women can watch a movie on a DVD inserted in a portable device in a remote village of Africa just as easily as they can watch the same movie in an

apartment in downtown Manhattan and young men in Karachi can discuss with their friends in California (through a voice over IP connection) the details of a latest release of a music CD—both the possibility of these connections as well as the mere thought of this cultural penetration were utterly unthinkable for their fathers' generation.

These examples can be easily extended to other regions and other areas—from clothing to kitchen appliances. In fact, it would not be an overstatement to say that the whole world is at the receiving end of an economic, cultural, political, and ideological onslaught that is attempting to reshape all human societies according to one particular way of life which is, nevertheless, not devoid of variety, even though that variety emerges from the same crucible. That cultural force, which is attempting to spread itself all over the world, is complex, the routes of its spreading crisscross with interwoven economic, political and military agendas, but it can be clearly identified for its Western provenance.

This cultural domination of the Western civilization over the rest of the world has deep historic roots going back to the seventeenth century, when the global balance of power started to tilt in favor of the Western world, both due to the rapid and powerful changes through scientific and technological developments as well as due to the failure of the other civilizations, especially the Islamic civilization, to realize shifting patterns which would soon tilt the global balance of power against it.¹ Ruled by a centuries-old inertia and unable to rise to the challenges posed by a reawakened West, the Muslim world would then experience a depression unlike any previous era of its existence so much so that “the depression...in cultural life in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries would stand out in retrospect...chiefly in the light of what followed. With the nineteenth century

came the utter collapse of the strong Muslim posture in the world: that nothing was done in the eighteenth century to forestall this, smacks of inexplicable folly. But the sense that there was a depression also reflects the actualities of the Muslim lands in the eighteenth century itself.”²

There were many routes through which a very large part of the Muslim world was conquered and controlled by the Western powers, but the most important and by far the most effective was education. Education as a method of change was clearly recognized by all conquerors of the Muslim world—from Napoleon to the directors of the East India Company. The infamous statement of Lord Macaulay (180-1859) on Indian Education, made on 2 Feb. 1935, is not an atypical example of this awareness:

It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.³

What is surprising at the practical level in this oft-quoted passage, representing a typical colonial mindset, is not its racism and the sense of superiority—for these are taken for granted—but the actual submission of the Muslim societies to willingly become what Macaulay and so many other colonial rulers wanted them to become: “persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”. What is even more surprising is the very long-term impact of the colonial policies which would

keep flowering long after the actual physical departure of the colonizers from most of the Muslim world.

This flowering can be seen in the current blossoming in the Muslim world of Western-style educational institutions. There is hardly any country in the world where Western-style educational institutions of various hues and colors—from original to copied, from a mixture simply to cosmetic veneers—do not exist at all levels, from elementary schools to colleges to universities. That education is the best vehicle to spread culture requires no further elucidation. That Western-style education has become the greatest source for the spread of Western culture is also obvious.

What remains to be explored are the following facets of connections between education, culture, and the ultimate destiny of humanity through the eventual coming of the promised Mahdi, upon him peace, and the just rule at the end of time:

What is culture?

How cultures spread through education?

The role of Seminary Schools in reconfiguration of Muslim societies?

The relevance of this reconfiguration with the awaited Madhi (*pbuh*)

Culture: What is “Culture”? How does it come into existence? What are the conditions for its flourishing and decay? Are there laws which govern its development, flowering, decay, and degeneration?

The word “Culture” (from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*) means “to cultivate”.⁴ It is a term that has been used in over 165 different meanings, but in its most basic sense, it means: excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also known as high culture; an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the

capacity for symbolic thought and social learning; the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group.

When the concept first emerged in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, it connoted a process of cultivation or improvement. In the nineteenth century, it came to refer first to the betterment or refinement of the individual, especially through education, and then to the fulfillment of national aspirations or ideals. In the mid-nineteenth century, some scientists used the term “culture” to refer to a universal human capacity.⁵

How cultures spread through education?

It is obvious from the definitions given above that no matter how we define culture, there is an inherent relationship between culture, its spread, and education. Seen from the Islamic perspective, both culture and education are deeply related to the ultimate purpose of life on this earth as Allah, the Most High, says in the Book of Guidance that He did not create humans and jinns, except to worship Him (*al-Dhariyyat*: 51:56); that the entire order of creation has a purpose (*Sad*: 38:28; *al-Dukhan*: 44:38); that there are basic integral links between what one learns and how one behaves and therefore, education is the most important path through which tastes, lifestyles, and ways of living are cultivated, but education takes place within a pre-existing worldview. The young learner in the Kindergarten class or at home is not aware of what constitutes culture; he or she is simply immersed in it. The child enters the world as an amanah, with an instinctive awareness of the *mithaq* established by the Creator with all children of Adam, *Alastu bi-Rabbikum (al-A'araf*: 7: 172). Every child is born in a state of purity. Created on the best of all patterns by an All-Knowing

Creator Who shapes what He wills in the wombs of mothers.

Unlike the current secular views, Islam does not consider this newly born child as something like a blank slate upon which anything can be written; rather, the Qur'an vividly describes various stages of existence involving the unique interplay of a biological process—which imparts its own specific hereditary code, giving us characteristic physical features—as well as a spiritual process beginning with the insertion of a special and unique *ruh* into the *jism* formed in the womb through the combination of two fluids emanated from the male and female partners. The life thus starts in the protected and sanctified womb of the mother is fashioned on a pre-eternal *fitrah*, the innate nature ingrained with an instinctive recognition of the Creator.

This view of creation is a reality recognized by all existing things, whether willingly or under compulsion. This recognition does not mean that human beings are forced to accept it; rather, it simply means that our beings—as they exist in various realms of existence (biological, spiritual, emotional, psychological)—have an innate recognition of the fact that their existence is due to a Creator. Furthermore, all existing beings also recognize that their existence is maintained at all levels through the continuous sustenance of a Sustainer. Thus, though we do not have any compulsion to consciously, willingly, and actively acknowledge this Creator-created relationship with the One Who fashioned us all as children of Adam, upon him peace, and with whom He established a pre-eternal *mithaq*, we are nonetheless compelled to acknowledge this relationship existentially; this is part of unalterable human condition.

Within the first few moments of our coming into this world we start to absorb an enormous amount of sensory

data. One of the first senses to receive this external data is the hearing, a sense that was already active in the mother's womb during preceding months. Soon visual memory begins to receive its first images of the persons and things in the immediate environ. From this point onward there is a non-stop acquisition of sensory data which rapidly stacks layers and layers of audio-visual memory in the inner recesses of our being where it is rapidly processed. Our mind plays a very active role in these processes, though in addition to the mind there are several other realms of existence where this received data is processed. What we absorb from our environment contributes to the making of our worldview, the lens through which we "view" the world.

The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, has informed us of this process in the famous Hadith: "Every child is born on *fitrah*; it is his parents who make him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian". This "conversion" of the baby born pure and on *fitrah*, into a person with a certain belief system and way of living, is a complex process in which countless factors are involved. These range from the belief system and the way of life in the home where the young child lives to the unexpected, inexplicable, and totally unpredictable turns in one's life which sometimes obliterate years and years of previously acquired beliefs and modes of living. No one can fathom the mysteries of these sudden turns, for it is He Who guides whom He wills and leads astray whom He wills. These transforming moments in one's life have the potential to restore the initial purity with which the child was born and are manifestations of Divine Mercy for which the best response on our part is simply *al-hamduli'Llah*.

Apart from these moments of Divine Mercy, the worldview acquired by each one of us is, ultimately,

constructed around our beliefs about the “Beginning” and the “End”—that is, the Beginning and the End of all things: How did the cosmos come into existence? How did life originate? What happens when we die? What will happen to the entire cosmos at the end of its time? These are foundational and primary questions; their answers condition, inform, and determine all relationships—from our relationship with ourselves to that with others as well as the entire cosmos. Certain fundamental perspectives on the nature of reality, truth, and morality also originate in these primary concepts.

More often than not an adult does not consciously sit down and think about these primary concepts and their answers; these are acquired and assumed questions and answers; they “emerge” through a variety of complex processes in which early childhood plays the most important role. During the years of early childhood, children are exposed to a certain kind of educational material, tools, routines, customs, and a host of cultural, social, and family influences. In schools, or studying at home, they are subjected to certain educational techniques and procedures. They are “taught” certain books, written by writers who themselves believe in certain answers to these primary questions and their works betray these beliefs, sometimes overtly but often in a subtext. Likewise, tools, teaching aids, and even physical objects such as toys, balls, and lego blocks used in many primary classrooms and homes have a contributing presence to the making of the framework within which young learners take their first steps.

The environment, learning-materials, the teaching-methodology, and the specific worldview of teachers all contribute to a rapid solidification of the framework in which the young learners spend much of the rest of their

lives. Rather than computation, language arts, and science lessons, it is this “molding” of the young learner that is the most important aspect of early childhood education. Once formed, this framework then influences one’s entire life. It not only affects initial ideas about how the physical world surrounding us came into existence, but also informs our inter-personal relations, lifestyles, habits, attitudes toward life and learning, and much deeper processes which affect spiritual and emotional composition of our beings. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the years of early childhood education are the most important developmental time in a person’s entire life.

Considering the tremendous impact these early years have on children, it is not surprising that a multi-billion dollar industry has come into existence to produce material used in early childhood education. Every year, this industry churns out millions of books, toys, educational and teaching aids, and all manner of other material. This material is bought by schools and parents for use by children who cannot yet make their own choices. What is bought often reflects the prevailing worldview of society or the parents, though a large amount of this material is bought “thoughtlessly”, or merely because of successful marketing techniques.

Thus, at home and in school, children are often surrounded by books, toys, and other materials assumed to be aiding their education. Usually, the more affluent a parent, school, or society, the more abundant is such material. This is a global trend, but like all trendy things, it owes its existence more to marketing techniques than to any inherent value, for this multi-billion dollar industry did not exist even two generations ago and the quality and standard of education were much higher. This decline of quality of education, which is a worldwide concern of educators, has

reached such alarming levels that today many high school graduates, who have been surrounded by all manner of educational materials and electronic gadgets to aid their learning, can hardly add two four-digit decimal numbers or compose a paragraph of text expressing their ideas in a meaningful manner.

Regardless of where it sells, this multi-billion dollar industry is a characteristic product of the Western civilization and one of its most apparent aspects is its monochromatic worldview—the entire industry is a product of a consumption-oriented secularized worldview which attempts to shape the next generation through education on its own model. Like all worldviews, the worldview upon which materials are churned out by this multi-billion dollar industry is based on certain primary and foundational precepts which can be summarized in a few words: the world has come into existence through a nebulous “big bang” or some such variation of the idea of an automatic beginning; life originated in cellular form through a random and chance process and then “evolved” to give rise to more complex forms of life of which human life is but one from. Rather than come into existence in its present form, human life evolved. There is a linear development in this evolution—past ages were dark, less developed; future time will be better, advanced, and more developed. These foundational precepts then form the warp and the weft of a whole belief system. Sometimes, the idea of a Creator is inserted into this worldview through secondary routes—by assigning the original “big bang” to a Creator, or by allowing the Creator to be the author of the random and chance processes through which life is supposed to have evolved. But for all intents and purposes, this worldview generates a body of “knowledge” that is thoroughly

secularized—that is, a knowledge from which the Sacred has been abstracted.

At another level, this worldview assumes implicitly that the present world order, in which the Western civilization has an economic, military, and socio-cultural dominance over all other civilizations, is a *fait accompli* destined to remain inviolable for all time to come. It further holds that all other civilizations are somehow inferior to Western civilization, and that nations are divided into “rich” and “poor”, of which the “rich” countries are rich in all respects while the “poor” countries are poor in all respects. These underlying beliefs (rather, dogmas) then translate into social studies textbooks in which the present world order is not only a solid and unchangeable reality of the first order, it is propagated as the most natural outcome of history—that is, all other civilizations are treated as precursors to the present Western civilization and their present state is considered as nothing but a woeful state of chaos, poverty, and disintegration, in need of aid. Likewise, numerous international organizations which have come into existence in the post-World War II era—the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, and the like—are generally portrayed as beneficial, genuine, and representative bodies reflecting the aspirations of humanity. Even when there is a critique of this or that aspect of these organizations, it is presented within these broader assumptions.

In concrete and practical terms, these hidden beliefs produce material with deadly consequences for young minds. Such material presents a solidified structure of today’s world as an unchanging and unchangeable reality. It presents history from its own mono-chromatic view and ignores or distorts solid historical data to maintain its own interpretations. In high school science textbooks, for

instance, one finds cursory mention of the Greek scientific tradition before the text jumps over seven centuries of Islamic scientific tradition to introduce to the young minds theories that arose in early modern science. In social studies, these textbooks advocate a watered-down and disguised version of what is essentially social Darwinism, and in language arts they ignore all literary traditions other than the Western or sprinkle some exotic texts from other civilizations on a thoroughly Western literary tradition. In short, educational material constructed on this secular foundation contains a host of hidden ideologies, which in turn indoctrinate the minds of learners.

Regardless of the causes of its spread, the fact is that educational material produced on a secular model is being used by a large number of Muslim children, and that too not only in the West but also around the world. This brings these young Muslims in direct contact with a worldview—and a value-system based on that worldview—that runs against the grain of the Islamic worldview. In later years, this results in emotional, psychological and spiritual traumas. This crisis has been recognized by many perceptive Muslim scholars who have called for an epistemic correction of knowledge. It has been further recognized that this epistemic correction cannot be achieved by merely sprinkling of the Qurānic *āyāt* on material which originally arises from within a secular framework and worldview. It can only come into existence by redefining the two primary tenets which inform the creation of educational resources and their delivery. The first of these is related to our understanding of the cosmos and our place in it, for the way we perceive the cosmos invariably defines our relation to it as well as our ideas about the nature and function of our own lives. How and why did the cosmos

come into existence? What is life and how did it begin? The second primary tenet pertains to the nature and purpose of education: What is knowledge? How does it come into existence? What is its purpose? How is it transmitted and used? These are foundational questions and all textbooks and other educational resources assume a certain answer to them even though they are not always stated and often remain as subtext. Young learners receive the worldview on which educational resources are based in small doses and slowly this worldview becomes the background of their own beliefs.

The role of Seminary Schools in reconfiguration of Muslim societies

Education takes place at schools, homes, in the very process of buying and selling in the bazaar, in the small and secluded workshop of an artisan in Isfahan who silently works on a masterpiece or in a room in Qum, where an exquisite carpet is being woven by a family. All of these places are enclosed in an envelope of culture. All of these places use material resources, ranging from textbooks (in schools, seminaries, colleges and universities) to wool, wood, colors, and other materials. All of these things are products of a worldview and a particular mode of life. Imagine a textbook based on the belief that there is no real purpose behind the coming into existence of the cosmos and another that assumes that life originated on its own through some random and chance permutation of cells with the one based on the message of the Qur'an which informs us that there is a Creator Who fashioned this cosmos and all that exists in it for a purpose and for a fixed duration: *Ma khalaqas -samawati wal ardi wa ma bayna huma illa bi'l-haq wa ajal musama (al-Dukhan: 44:38)*. These two books would have to

be *fundamentally different* in the way they are conceived, written, and organized. There may be a certain overlap of data in the two books, but both would interpret the data through their own lenses. In one book, the falling of rain will be presented merely as a physical process; in the other, it will have a metaphysical and physical aspect. The book based on a foundational understanding of the One Creator Who sustains all creation will have a central unity, reflecting the vertical axis of *tawhid*; all material in such a book will have to continuously reflect and refer back to the purpose of learning: the transformation of the learner into a human being with an awareness of the Creator and, consequently, the purpose of his or her creation which the Glorious Qur'an tells us is to be a devoted servant of Allah.

Thus, it becomes imperative to infuse all learning with the worldview of Islam—something that most Western-style educational institutions are incapable of doing. A seminary, that is, a religious school, on the other hand, seldom teaches subjects which fall outside narrowly defined curricula of Islamic sciences. This has been the main cause of a dichotomy of worldviews that now exists in the Muslim world. Recently, there have been bold corrective initiatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as in certain other Muslim countries and also in some private institutions in Europe, America and Canada. These new initiatives are aimed at producing unified curricula which will produce a new class of men and women—people who would be deeply rooted to the Islamic worldview and yet be computer scientists, engineers, and medical doctors. This means that the new role of seminaries will not be limited to the production of religious scholars, but it will be comprehensive education with possibilities to cover all branches of knowledge.

Yet, what would be the content of this new hybrid education? From where would this new initiative draw its source material? How would it be possible to Islamize an advance and deeply secular science, such as biology? From where would this effort draw its teachers? These are mighty challenges faced by the Muslim world. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that this unification of education, and challenges associated with this initiative is the greatest challenge faced by the Muslim world today.

These challenges notwithstanding, the only way to move forward is through the unification of knowledge through a rigorous and active process of Islamization of learning. It is through this process that culture will be Islamized and the distinction and differences between seminaries and universities will be removed. The role of education will then be restored to its rightful purpose: transformation of the Muslim societies on true teachings of Islam. There will be purpose and direction in learning and in scholarly research. Scholars will be able to develop critical skills to elucidate the truth of the teachings of Islam. The educational process needs to be restructured so that by the time a student finishes his or her studies, he or she is fully rooted in the worldview of Islam and is able to live a life dedicated to the higher purposes. This needs to be done in every field of learning. The seminaries need not remain restricted to the narrowly defined areas of religious sciences. There is a need to creatively devise mechanisms through which all subjects can be taught in the seminaries with competence and rigor. It is through this transformed system of education that seminaries will be able to transform Muslim societies and thereby reconfigure them, producing a culture of learning, objective inquiry, deeply rooted Islamic values and ways of living.

This process will counter the other processes institutionalized through the *taghuti* regimes and will eradicate and uproot un-Islamic ideas or beliefs from the minds of the students. It is well-recognized by scholars of educational psychology, that education is like slow poisoning of the mind or a slow process of positive creativity. Seen from the Islamic perspective, anything that uproots students from their relationship with the Divine is poisonous and anything that binds them with Allah is full of blessings. Thus students, who come out of universities with their beliefs shaken, add to the disfiguring of the Islamic character of the society whereas students, who learn to bind themselves with Allah, add to the emergence of a society in which Islamic culture and Islamic values flourish.

It must also be recognized that not only the so-called human sciences, but all branches of knowledge must be reformed, restructured. This is so because hidden behind the apparently perceived objectivity of the so-called hard or natural sciences are layers and layers of ideology and tacit assumptions. Thus it is no wonder that these sciences present mere hypotheses and theories as “fact”, in fact, as “absolute truths”. Thus, it is no wonder that ninety-nine percent of university science graduates implicitly believe all things which they read in their textbooks.

It is a long task. We are still at the beginning of this process. There is no unified structure so far to teach all the natural and human sciences, as well as religious sciences through a unified methodology. But the paths are being opened for this. The many fields of the human sciences have great impact on the making of a society, on our minds of students, and their behavior. As Muslims, we believe in the point of view of the Qur’an regarding the purpose of human creation and life, as well as how societies should be

configured. This belief, however, needs operative methodologies to be functional and that can come from a fully functional seminary system of education which teaches all subjects.

The relevance of this reconfiguration with the awaited Madhi (pbuh)

Built into our belief about the awaited Mahdi, upon him peace, is the revival of true teachings of Islam and perfection of society as much as is humanly possible. The era of the awaited Imam is depicted in both Sunni and Shia sources in more or less similar terms:

Umm Salamah, may Allah be pleased with her, said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah say: “The Mahdi is of my lineage and family.”⁶

Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri said: “The Messenger of Allah said: “He is one of us.”⁷

Whatever differences there are between the Sunni and Shia interpretation of source material, do not change the basic expectation of the coming of the Imam and the final phase of human time on earth. Thus, the question before us is what kind of society we want to build here and now, so that when that Divine intervention takes place at the grand scale we, as individuals as well as societies, are on the right side of the divide, on the side of the *haqq*. At another level, there is a need to recognize the importance of continuous effort required of all Muslims in the form of Divine imperative of *amr bi’l maruf and nahi `an-il munkar*.

At this level, there is no pragmatism, there is no grey area between *haq* and the *batil*; here the agnostic has no place, only the definitive inclination of the heart to follow Divine teachings, to submit with full consciousness. This consciousness then leads to a desire to actively participate in

the making of that society where the reality of higher life is lived on a daily basis, as an organic activity, in the stillness of the night and early hours of dawn, with men and women bowing and prostrating when the world is asleep. A society reconfigured through education on solid Islamic principles is a society with a cultural of remembrance of Allah, the Most High, as opposed to heedlessness (*ghaflah*) that characterizes societies where education prepares students for the life of this world only and the Hereafter is a remote unknown.

To reconfigure society in which the consciousness of the waiting for the Imam—and hence the re-establishment of a just rule—is not merely a theoretical possibility, but is a lived experiential reality for millions of men and women, is to strive and struggle for a higher purpose and for a higher goal and therefore results are not the consideration of those who tread on this path; only the path is important and the steadfastness. It is a life of abstinence in the true sense that should be the goal of every member of the transformed society as Ali bin Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “O people, abstinence is to shorten desires, to thank for bounties and to keep off prohibitions. If this is possible then the prohibitions should not overpower your patience. Allah has exhausted the excuses before you through clear, shining arguments and open, bright books.”⁸

Notes

1. At their peaks, the British Empire had 33.67 million km² (1922); the Spanish 20.0 million km² (ca. 1740-1790); the Second French Colonial Empire - 12.3 million km² (1938); the Portuguese Empire - 10.4 million km² (1815); compared to the Roman (6.5 million km² (117 CE) and the Ottoman Empire - 5.2 million km² (1683).
2. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 134.
3. Lord Macaulay, *The Indian Education Minutes of Lord Macaulay, Collected Works of Thomas Macaulay*, New York: Classic Books, 2000, p. 223; emphasis added.
4. Harper, Douglas (2001). *Online Etymology Dictionary*.
5. Levine, Donald (ed) '*Simmel: On individuality and social forms*', (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 1971. p6.
6. Sunan Abu Dawud, 11/373; Sunan Ibn Maajah, 2/1368.
7. Reported by Abi Na'eem in "Akhbar al-Mahdi," see *al-Jaami' al-Sagheer*, 5/219, hadith 5796. For other Sunni sources see: Sunnan Tirmidhi, vol. 2, P86, Vol. 9, PP 74-75; Sanan Abi Dawud, Vol. 2, P7; Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Vol. 1, P376 & Vol. 3, P63; Mustadrak al-Sahihain, by al-Hakim, Vol. 4, P557; Al-Majma', by Tabarani, P217; Tahdhib al-Thabit, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Vol. 9, P144; al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Ch. 11, section 1, P249/[i]; Kanz al-Ummal, Vol. 7 P186; Iqd al-Durar Fi Akhbar al-Mahdi al-Muntadhar, Vol. 12, Ch. 1; al-Bayan fi Akhbar Sahib al-Zaman, By Ganji al-Shafi'i, Ch. 12; al-Fusool al-Muhimmah, by Ibn Sabbagh al-Maliki, Ch. 12; Fathul Bari, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, V7, P305; al-Tathkirah, by al-Qurtubi, P617.
8. *Nahj al-Balagahah*, "Fi-l Zuhd", p. 283.

The Muslim Youths and Internet Activism: Paving the Ground for the Reappearance in Cyberspace

By: Reni Susanti

Abstract

The recent development of the Muslim society has turned into the internet based activism through which Muslims around the globe establish ties among them in many social networking sites. It is evidenced that many followers of Imam Mahdi, are connected through these networking sites in which they are trying to spread the messages of Islam, Mahdism, and at the same time striving for justice in the cyberworld. I will argue that the social networking sites have given a new space for the Muslim digital natives around the world to establish relationship and solidarity to work together regardless nationalities and distance among them. The Indonesian case shows that social networking site enables the Shi'i Muslims to build a virtual community where online and offline activities in paving the ground for reappearance are intertwined. However, there are some

challenges need to be faced. The intervention of the scholars or the seminary students in this activity would be benefit the digital community to help the members focus on the right path guided by Imam Mahdi.

Introduction

The Internet plays the role of an alternative source of media for Muslim communities around the world. Through the tool, Muslims are connected and are able to share ideas, experience and knowledge. The largest Muslim communities in the world today live in Asia and Middle East. According to statistic data provided by www.internetworldstats.com, we see that the internet users in Asia are the biggest in number, it is 42,4% out of 1,802, 330, 457 internet users worldwide, while the users in Middle Eastern regions are 3,2% respectively. Three Muslim countries that are Iran, Indonesia and Turkey are in the top 20 internet users in the world. Iran is in the 11th rank between South Korea and Italy with 32,200,000 internet users, while Indonesia in the 13th with 30,000,000 users and Turkey in the 16th with 26,500,000 users(Internet World Stats 2009).

The nature of web 1.0 that is represented by tools like miling lists, web pages and chat rooms are now replaced by web 2.0 that offer facilities for group-forming and networking without the social component. The users of the current media are mostly youths that also familiar with other digital tools, hence researchers call them digital natives. In discussing the Muslim digital natives and their roles in paving the ground for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi, the paper will be consisted of four parts as follows: the first part will be discussing what the notion of digital natives followed by a brief description about the relationships

among them. The second part will be portraying the works conducted in the social networking sites in producing new cultural products as parts of the way in paving the ground for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi a.s. The third part will show the case of how Facebook benefits the Indonesian Muslim community, and the last part I will suggest few strategies in paving the ground for the reappearance in cyberspace particularly with regards the young cyber Muslims.

Digital Natives, Social Media and Muslim Cyber Activists

While talking about the role of cyber space in paving the ground for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi, we cannot leave the discussion on digital natives and digital immigrants as the people behind the screen in every cyber activity.

The term digital natives become more popular among scholars and activists working on youth and technologies recently. It is Marc Prensky that found the term *digital natives* to refer today's generations that become the *native speakers* of digital languages of computers, video games and internet (Prensky 2001a). He then attributed the term *digital immigrants* for those who were not born into the digital atmosphere but later found the needs for the technology and adopted it into their daily lives (Prensky 2001a). Palfrey and Gasser suggest more specific definition on digital natives that are generation born after 1980, characterised as familiar with networked technologies (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). Furthermore, the Berkman Center for Internet & Society in its Digital Natives project mentions that "digital natives share a common global culture that is defined not by age, strictly, but by certain attributes and experiences in part defined by their experience growing up immersed in digital technology, and the impact of this upon how they interact

with information technologies, information itself, one another, and other people and institutions” (Digital Natives and Berkman Center for Internet & Society 2010).

In today’s Muslim society we can also find this type of generation that engages so much their everyday life with digital technology. In many parts of the world we easily find young Muslims read or listen to digital Al Qur’an, download or upload Islamic books, pictures and *duas* in the internet, send Islamic messages to each other through sms, gather in mailing list group or website to discuss many Islamic issues, and so on. As for this paper, I will use the term “Muslim digital natives” to refer the young Muslims that familiar with digital and networking technology and “Muslim Cyber activist” to refer Muslim digital natives that actively working for the cause of Imam Mahdi in cyberspace.

This paper focuses in the ways Muslim digital natives and Muslim cyber activists use social networking site, Facebook, as a tool for supporting their cause that are spreading the message of Islam as well as the Mahdism doctrine among global and local cyber audience. Facebook is choosen because it has become one of the the most-visited websites in the world, particularly in most parts of the Middle East and Asia. Below is the figure of Facebook statistical record:

10 Largest Countries			10 Fastest Growing Over Past Week		
1. United States	94,748,820		1. Poland	12.46 %	137,900
2. United Kingdom	22,261,080		2. Thailand	10.96 %	161,300
3. Turkey	14,215,880		3. Portugal	9.81 %	80,040
4. France	13,396,760		4. South Africa	9.25 %	189,080
5. Canada	13,228,380		5. Taiwan	7.82 %	367,400
6. Italy	12,581,060		6. Romania	7.65 %	28,060
7. Indonesia	11,759,980		7. Germany	7.54 %	350,240
8. Spain	7,313,160		8. Malaysia	7.43 %	236,840
9. Australia	7,176,640		9. Indonesia	6.84 %	752,640
10. Philippines	6,991,040		10. Iraq	6.72 %	6,380

Source: www.checkfacebook.com

Chong articulates that the difference between social media and the other is their inherent network properties (Chong 2009). These inherent network properties able the users not only to communicate in one to one (phone calls) and one to many (television, radio) but also many to many (Shirky 2009). Social media encompasses many social tools like blogging, microblogging, video-sharing, social networking and social voting (Chong 2009). Boyd and Ellison define Social Networking Sites (SNS) as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) formulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and pass over their list of connections and those made by others within the system (boyd and Ellison 2007). Clay Shirky points out that social media has generic effects that are allow formation of group easily and reduce the costs of organizing groups, sustaining and communicating within them (Shirky 2009).

Within the Facebook system, users can promote their cause by inviting people to join their group or profile. The more member they get, the more successful the cause, because the idea is to get as many as possible people, which can be mean many people aware and support it. The notion of support seems to be vague in this sense, because we need to question whether they really support the cause or they accept it just because it is suggested by their friends or relatives. However, the figure provides by this system may help the users and the creator of the groups to estimate the number of supporters; which is something that lack in the conventional websites.

The Cyber Activists and Cultural Production

I recognize two types of works made by the Facebook members in order to paving the ground for the reappearance of Imam Zaman. The first is raising awareness of the existence of Imam Mahdi. as well as the need to paving the ground for his reappearance and the second is resisting the global injustice, particularly defamation against Islam and societies that are paving the ground for the reappearance that massively spread by the enemies of Islam in the cyberspace.

The first groups are exist in so many names and created by activists from many walks of life and mazhabs, however the most group related with Imam Mahdi are created by the Shi'i believers. This phenomenon is well explained by ayatollah Ali Khamenei while he explains the difference between Mahdism doctrine in the Shi'i and Sunni world. He emphasizes that the Shi'i already known the Imam, therefore they are feel connected with Him, while the Imam Mahdi in Sunni is not yet known.

The most populous group about Imam Mahdi in Facebook is "Soldiers of Imam-e-Zamana (af) created by a Pakistani brother. It reaches 3220 members as recorded in 1st of May 2010. The Creator, Syed Khurram Raza Abidi, started the group in Orkut, a social networking site provided by Google, four years ago and then moved it to Facebook. He elucidates that there is a need to change the youths' mind to be aware of the presence of Imam Mahdi as well as to be ready become his soldiers such as Hizbullah in Lebanon. He manages the group altogether with two administrators and currently they are working for a website with similar theme.

The second largest group on Imam Mahdi is "Shalawat...Shalawat...Sambut Al Mahdi (afs)" (Shalawat, shalawat, shalawat, welcome Imam Mahdis.) created by Indonesian brother, Ali ben Yahya, in Indonesian language,

with 2660 followers. Through the group, the creator asks Muslim public to pave the ground for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi by doing simple and meaningful thing, that is reciting shalawat as many as possible and asking as many as people to do so. He frames that in waiting Imam Mahdi one should keep him/herself to have spiritual connection with the Imam, thus one of many ways to maintain such connection is by reciting shalawat for him and spread the words on the eminence of shalawat.

The third largest group is “Taqleed and Wilayat-e-Faqih Shia United for Al Mahdi (ajfts)” created by Abu Haydar from United Kingdom, that reaches 2603 members. The creator articulates the aim of the group as “We are here to help those who require assistance with any questions they may have with regards to the Shiite school of thought and its principles and questions on jurisprudence (fiqh), converts to the Shiite school of thought are especially most welcome”.

Name	Type	Creator Location	Members	Mazhab	Language
Soldiers of Imam Zamana (AS)	group	Pakistan	3220	Shi'i	English
Shalawat...Shalawat ...Shalawat Sambut Al Mahdis	group	Indonesia	2660	Shi'i	Bahasa Indonesia
Taqleed & Wilayat-e-Faqih Shia United for Al Mahdi ajfts	group	UK	2603	Shi'i	English
The Shia of Imam Mahdi	group	n/a	2025	Shi'i	English
The Companions of Imam Mahdi (as)	group	Pakistan	2203	Shi'i	English
Imam Mahdi Brigade	group	Bangladesh	1897	Shi'i	English
Imam Mahdi aj.	group	n/a	1370	Shi'i	English
Zahoor of Imam-e-Zamana (af)	group	n/a	1324	Shi'i	English
Tentara Imam Mahdi, The Soldier of Al Mahdi	group	Saudi Arabia	1017	Shi'i	Bahasa, English, Arabic
Imam Al Mahdy	group	Saudi Arabia	939	Shi'i	English

Source: Facebook, self documentation

The second category of the works in paving the ground for reappearance is the resistance against global injustice that is promoted by the cyber activists from many parts of the world. The young activists believe that by their engagement in social networking sites, they are able to publish, create cultural products, mobilize local resources, promote community based causes and build new forms of socio-cultural relationship that led to paving the ground for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi.

Below are few expressions of the youths working their cause in Facebook:

“Internet gives me the opportunity to be part of the fight against 'The Beast', also to fulfill my obligations and duties in life such as *“amr maroof nahi munkar”* (Shariar Zolgharn, living in Sweden)

“we are cells of a greater organism , the society of being, internet is a part of the nervous system or conscious unity of the cells of this organism we have become global cells active in a global mission” (Xdaniel Masbout, a born Christian, living in Lebanon)

“...the best way to break this media terrorism and mythology against Islam and Muslims is to come into contact with the world and contrast the reality with the distorted picture that the media feed the people and internet societies is one of the best ways of doing that” (Mostafa Hessami, living in Mashhad, Iran)

“...we can use Facebook to propagate such stuff. We can use every possible legitimate means for propagating truth and fighting against Evil and Instead of Wasting time online in useless stuff, I think it’s our duty to utilize every possible legitimate means to serve some better purpose.” (Qaiser Hussain Turi, living in Saudi Arabia)

German Vogel, a Chilean resides in Japan, is working in at least three different sites that are Youtube, Facebook, and Blogger. In Youtube, he creates various videos with different topics but in the similar theme that is resisting the unbalance perspectives against Islam in the internet particularly amongst Youtubers. The most impressive videos are the series of Ahmad Deedat speech on Shia-Sunni unity titled “Iran: A Nation Reborn” that are translated into many languages in which he collaborates with many other youths from different countries of origin. His Facebook activities can be traced through few groups he created such as “Iran Resists: The World Supports Iranians Fighting New CIA Coup Attempt” that reaches 2,319 followers. The group is dedicated to support Iran from western intervention against its internal affairs that was very obvious particularly during the last election. In his Blog named “Nureinwort” German writes his ideas on Islamic revolution, politics, and global injustice such as capitalism, Zionism and secularism.

Though Facebook is banned in Iran, we can also find ocyber activists like Mostafa Hessami, an Iranian resides in Mashhad that organize a group named “We Call for Nuclear Disarmament of USA”, he just established the group altogether with Zahra Karimi, a teacher living in Tehran that actively engage with Islamic revolution issues in her blog. Hassaan Zia, a Pakistani, also very active in Facebook; though he never created any group, many people hired him as administrators of few groups such as “Imam Hasan as.” And “Save Shia”. Furthermore, Azmira Fatema Vally, living in Dubai, fills her profile with words from the Imam and Islamic scholars as well as social justice issues while Agha Ali Hasnain, an Iranian living in Pakistan, creates a

special account named “Bibi Syeda Fatima Masooma Qom (AS)” where he posts many Islamic graphics and photos.

In this global Facebook community, many challenges should be faced by the activists, for example conflicts and disputations among them that often led to removal of one or more activists from one’s friends list. According to my experiences and observations, conflicts among activists occurred because of the lack of knowledge about the subject they were disputing at, while the disputing parties were not connected to the Islamic scholars that might give better explanation about the subject debated. Another source of misunderstanding is inability to deal with cultural differences, where the lack of understanding the culture and context of society where other activists are living may lead to disputation.

One can also sense the lack of trust among the global activists. In my opinion, it is rooted from the nature of relationship among them that merely based on how often they are present and how many posts they made in the public sphere. This fragile relationship is the result of the inexistence of physical activism that may help growing trust and solidarity amongst the cyber activists. This analysis seems to be materialistic in seeing the Islamic fraternity and cooperation, but being Islamic activists in cyberspace often have to face threats, defamation as well as humiliation from the enemies of Islam that exist in the cyberspace. Not to mention the chances of being spied by them.

Local Indonesians Facebook Community

Among Indonesians, Facebook has become very popular recently, that most of social encounters in Indonesia now end up with asking Facebook account rather than exchanging emails or phone numbers. Indonesia today is in

the 7th among the world largest Facebook population with more than 11 million users. Although there are many local or regional Shi'i communities in Facebook, I could only manage to observe the Indonesian community as I have been part of it.

The Indonesian Shi'ites are considered as minority group in the country with approximately less than 100.000 adherence nationwide. However, the small in number does not discourage the community to pave the ground for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi. Organizations and foundations work in many ways to spread Islam and Mahdism doctrine to as many as possible members of the society through online and offline media. Following the technology advancement, the Muslim activists move to Facebook to establish network and cooperation.

Facebook activism of the Shia Believers in Indonesia slightly different with the ones conducted in the international level. In this cyber community, we can find many Organisations create profiles in Facebook to get closer to their members and the Shia public in the country. Islamic Cultural Center (ICC), The All Indonesian Ahlulbayt Assembly (IJABI), and Mafatihul Jinan Community are the examples of those who go online to reach as many public as possible. Therefore, we rarely see the single fighter activists in this community, because most of the people are member for one or more organization in the real life and they get connected with others in the Facebook.

Two main profiles that many people are connected with are a scholar named Ustad Muhsin Labib who has 2,307 friends and Komunitas IRIB (IRIB community), a group that has 1,220 members. Ustad Labib has created more than 900 notes mostly Islamic lectures, self reflection on social, political and cultural problems, features, and philosophical

jokes. Since he is a prominent scholar in Indonesia, many people response in every post he made that usually leads to discussion among the commentators. His presence in Facebook has been a blessing for the Shia believers since Indonesian archipelagic nature limits the adherence to meet scholars living in different island. The adherences can ask question through facebook chat application, read the Ustad's notes, involve in discussion as well as feel connected to the scholar.

Komunitas IRIB in this circle provides alternative news in Bahasa Indonesia that very important since many Indonesian media are following the mainstream western, particularly in its covering on Islam and Muslim world. However, the group acts like the conventional media in maintaining communication with the public that is one way, although it always tries to engage with many local and global communities by posting its alternative news.

As a minority group in Indonesia, the Shia believers benefit from their Facebook activities because the tool enables them to get connected and establish network, it is something that not easily happen because Indonesia is very wide. The lonely feeling being in the majority Sunni Muslim environment is overcome by engagement with other brothers and sisters living in different cities and islands. Moreover, Facebook has become a space for informing, fund rising as well as conducting transparency policy with regards activities of organizations that are conducted in real life.

To compare with the international Facebook community, the Indonesian circle is more solid because it is also supported by offline activism conducted by people living in the same regions; hence the trust and bounded feeling are easily grown. In the opposite, the global community has less

trust to each other and the recognition only given to they who are actively online and post something to the public. Many debates and disagreement in the international community often solved by removing one's account from one's friends list because there is no emotional ties among them and the lack of knowledge of Islamic rules in fraternity and cooperation. The lack of cultural understanding is also a problem should be faced by the virtual activists that may prolong the disputation among them. This problem is rarely occurs in the small community like the Indonesian circle because of the embracement of the similar culture.

Issue should also be addressed with regards the nature of Facebook relationship and works is that the internet or cyber activisms are always related with class, language, skill, and spirituality. Most of the internet users today are educated youths and they are mostly come from middle class and above of the society yet there are many other creative and talented young Muslims but are not able to engage with the technology because of their social economic circumstances. The hegemony of English language is also a problem for many people for getting in touch with the global community; hence they are very dependent on their local network. The lack of skill in the technology may hamper someone from being actively engage in the virtual forums, and the lack of strong Islamic character and spirituality of the cyber activists will lead the online activism to be a self-centered activity and a battle of power struggle amongst the Muslim activists themselves.

Strategies for paving the ground for the reappearance in Cyberspace

Few strategies can be developed in paving the ground for the reappearance of Imam Zaman af in cyberspace

particularly in support the youths engaged their everyday life with internet. First, provide the youths with regional and local physical condition that help them to be aware of their role in paving the ground for the reappearance. This can be formed in assistance and guidance given by local Islamic scholars with regards the youths' responsibility as Muslims as well as online activists. Second, establish sustainable condition for the young to work as agent of change by promoting youth camps, exchange, digital broadcast, organizations and infrastructures for breeding and growing effective and creative ideas using online tools. Third, consolidate knowledge and experience by creating multilateral network involving the field's major players. Conference and workshop under guidance prominent scholars are part of this effort. Last but not least, assist the young with financial support like incentives and scholarships that can be accessed through simple procedures.

Conclusion

There are few conclusion can be drawn from the discussion above. The first is that the digital natives and immigrants' contribution in propagating Islam and Mahdism doctrine in the Muslim society context are seen through the young cyber activists that dedicated their most of time to work in the cyberspace. They are producing cultural products such as videos, photos, graphic designs, articles, and many more that very useful to introduce Islamic culture to the broad audience. The second is that there is a need to educate the digital natives, digital immigrants as well as cyber activists regarding Islam and the Islamic movement that is guided by Imam Zaman af. The third is a need of support from the Islamic scholars to this cyber activism so

that the young can use the technology in good and responsible manner as their contribution in paving the ground of the reappearance of the Awaited one as.

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The Mahdaviat and the Spiritual Roots of Culture

By: Dr.Olivier Souan

God Almighty first planted a garden

Francis Bacon

Paving the ground for a future era that the various religions predicts and depicts with similar features: this also means taking a deliberate course of action in the field of culture. Culture, indeed, must here be taken in its widest sense, as a set of social productions which impacts the beliefs, attitudes and lives of people. The transformation of a society can indeed proceed by transforming culture. The French Encyclopedists of the Enlightenment (Diderot, Voltaire, etc.) consciously joined their forces to redraw culture along the lines of their progressist views. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist of the 1930s, struck by the fact that the revolutionary process did not go very far in Western

Europe, theorized that the bourgeois State was supported not only by a military force and by its economic power, but by a "cultural hegemony" it had within society, which prevented the voices of the dissident to be heard with success (*Prison Notebook*).

The Mahdaviat, which is deliberately a effort in religion and politics, must then likewise articulate its efforts in the field of culture in order to prepare the advent of the era of peace and justice predicted by the abrahamic religions. This is a hard task to undertake, since this is not only one society which must be changed, but also the whole world. We do not have to be impressed by this situation, because the state of affair in the world is catastrophic. The efforts of the least individual is welcome, and anyway integrated within the divine plan leading to a better world.

In order to draw a possible strategy, it is first necessary to define what culture really is, then to cast a look on contemporary culture and finally to examine the data of the religious traditions concerning the relationship between culture and eschatology.

I. What is culture?

a) Culture and human existence

But what is culture? The word "culture" derives from a latin word, *colere*, which has different associated meanings. In Latin, the original meaning is "to clip", "to prune." In French, *élaguer*. *Colere* describes an act specific to agriculture: to clip trees in order to ease their growth. The second meaning is wider: it describes the whole process of cultivating a ground, a field, including irrigating, tilling, sewing, plowing, etc. A third meaning is to care after a land, or a group of people. A fourth meaning is to dwell, to

inhabit (hence: a colony), in the sense that men cannot live but near a zone of cultivated fields. This culture of fields makes possible the dwelling of man on earth. "Culture" has then an array of meanings describing what makes possible the habitation of man of this planet. It is to note that "culture" is not only an act, or a set of acts, but a set of techniques and know-hows related to that purpose. Culture is then the knowledge whereby man can live on this planet - and care after it.

b) The culture of the soul

A derivated cluster of meanings has a metaphorical function: it transposes 'culture' in psychology to designate the development of the soul. Like a farmer or gardener tills the ground, an individual can by his efforts acquire knowledge, stable habits and good dispositions within his soul.

The meaning of *colere* as "a constant attitude in life" (*modus vivendi*) is grounded in those habits, together cohered towards higher values. Culture becomes a *modus vivendi*, a way of life, a "bios" in the Greek sense of the word (as oppose to *zoe*, biological life, mere existence). (cf Cicero, *nec vitam illam colere possum*, "I can no longer live this way of life", To Atticus, 12, 28, 2; Off, 1, 3.) This way of life can also be based on negative dispositions. Lucretius, *De Natura Rerum*, V, 1145, thus qualifies a "way of life filled with violence", *vi colere aevum*, a barbarous state of nature making the institution of law a necessity.

The Greeks, followed by the Romans, insisted heavily on the necessity of education (*paideia*) to strengthen the character, morality, and virtue (*arete*) of young men and to transform them into responsible adults to fostering and defending the Common Good of the City (cf Werner Jaeger,

Paideia; H-I Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité*). Socrates and Plato took over this idea of education, focusing on science and wisdom. Plato compares the education of a disciple with the cultivation of a field (*Phaedrus*, 275b), the seeds being the words of the teacher and the plants being the virtues, or good dispositions. In Plato's *Republic*, the objective of education is to develop justice within the soul, justice being understood as an harmonious combination of its faculties accomplished by the development of intellectual virtues purifying the mind. In the wake of those efforts, *Paideia* was bound to acquire a humanistic and universalist meaning, referring to an ideal of man brought forth by education.

This vision of education has been adopted by the Romans. Cicero thus speaks of the cultivation of virtues and justice within the soul (Arch. 16, Off, 1, 149). Philosophy itself, according to Cicero, is defined as "the cultivation of the soul" (*philosophia cultura anima est*, Tusc. II, 13), even if the translation of *paideia* by "humanitas" is preferred by some authors (Aulu-Gelle, *Noctes Atticae*, XIII, 15). This philosophical enterprise is, for Cicero, aimed at the formation of good and just leaders, and more generally, of fully mature and developed men (*De oratore*, II, 17, 56; *De officiis*, II, 40.).

Why has this metaphor been chosen? Because of a close similarity, indeed, between education and cultivation. A gardener or a farmer plows a virgin soil, sows seeds in it, irrigates it, cares about the trees, prunes it. Likewise, an individual, while learning, thinking or creating, plows his soul; the external influences are like seeds in it, likely to be developed in many directions. The individual, by his efforts,

prunes the bad habits, the bad thoughts, the inefficient or harmful attitudes.

Lastly, culture can also mean the development of artistic and aesthetic skills. A ground can be cultivated to provide sustenance but it can also be ornamented by flowers, trees to become a garden. Likewise a soul can be ornamented by such skills, either to enhance its aesthetic tastes, or to produce works of art.

c) The modern sense of culture

The modern sense of culture stems from this old conception of culture. At the Renaissance, a renewal of interest for "culture" took place, as it is shown in the works of Petrarchus, Picco della Mirandola and other writers. Even if it was associated with christianism, it exalted the autonomy and freedom of man in such a way that humanistic education progressively became cut from God.

Culture then came to mean the "development of man's potentialities by education." The reference to abstract values (justice, virtue) became less and less prioritary. Culture then came to signify "knowledge in literature, history, science, " and "advancement of the arts." Culture was then progressively imbued with an overall sociological meaning.

A derivated sense is "culture" in the sense of having "good taste", "good manners", a good knowledge of the arts and science. Under this sense, culture no longer refers to the utilitarian cultivation of a ground, but rather to its aesthetical ornamentation into a garden composed with flowers and trees.

The present, modern sense of "culture" comes from this fifth meaning, which includes the submeanings of "way of life", "education into virtue and justice", "formation of taste." This sense of culture was revived during the

Renaissance, and acquired later the wider meaning of "the spiritual products of civilization" and then that of "customs, mores, productions of a people."

In Arabic, culture is translated as *al thaqafa*, which refers first to the work of the craftsman who adjust and polishes a metal. It refers to culture in the modern sense of the word, but *'ilm* (spiritual science) and *adab* (mores imbued with spirituality) refers to the first meanings of culture. In Hebrew, culture is *tarbut*, "growth" (cf Arabic *tarbia*). It is used in Nb 32:14: "a breed of sinful men". I.e., culture as an inherited way of life.

d) Culture and religion

Culture seems by essence separated from religion as it expresses Man's autonomy and creative freedom in his quest to understand and transform the world. But culture can be related to religion in two ways: as God intends to form each individual and because culture is none other as a collective richness grounded in social habits, most of which have a religious origin.

In any case, the culture-cultivation, field/tree metaphors are also widely used in spirituality and religion, revealing God's role in education.

For instance, in the book of *Genesis*, man is *defined* as a gardener. After being born in a place where tilling is needed (Gn 2:5), man is *commanded* to till the garden of Eden (Gn 2:15) under the supervision of God. Man himself is made out of clay, and, like a tree, is commanded to be "fruitful" (Gn 1:22).

According to Philo of Alexandria, this is an allegory: the Paradise, Eden, is "an emblem of the soul"; "the bounteous God plants in the soul, as it were, a paradise of virtues and of the actions in accordance with them, which lead it to

perfect happiness"(Noah's work, §§37-38). Indeed, Jr 31:11 affirms:"their soul shall be like a well-watered garden" and that God will be "the fountain of living waters"(Jr 2, 13). Likewise, the pious "is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."(Ps 1,3) True culture brings virtue which brings happiness. The reward for the believer, universally qualified as a "paradise", is a garden, that is to say, the external and appropriate manifestation of the inner beauty of the duly cultivated soul.

Once cast out of Paradise, Adam is still ordered to till the ground (Gn 3:23)- this time with great pain. Indeed, virtue is difficult to reach nowadays. We have to toil hard - at least for some of us in order to progress in virtue. But the happiness in the afterlife shall be all the more rewarding. Such is the true sense of *work*.

That's how true culture consists in bringing forth virtues by a conscious effort with God's help. God has given us laws and guidance to proceed. This culture is not merely the work of man. God's grace is needed. By his inner work, man allows God to irrigate his soul by His transforming grace and to operate within it (some Christians have forgotten the true sense of the work, which is a divine command, and imagine that "work" means "building a Babylon of wealth and pleasure.")

God's laws shows the men in which directions they must work. That's how in Judaism, the Torah, often compared to a "living tree"(Pr 3:17) or a "fountain of life"(Pr 13:14). It gives rules for everyday life, in order to irrigate it, so to speak, with divine ordinances and to help the soul to grow and to increase in beauty. Culture in the extended sense of the word thus proceeds from culture conceived as spiritual education.

The same metaphors are to be found in Christianity. The soul, the heart of man is a ground where the Words of God are cast (Mk 4,14-20). Jesus is also the gardener of the soul (Jn 20:16), irrigating it with the flow of divine grace:"but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."(Jn 4:14) Men are compared to trees (Mt 3.10) are pruned by God (Jn 15:12). Jesus is the perfect man, the everlasting green tree (Lk 23:31). Indeed, the emphasis is put on Jesus, the Word of God. He has the role of an Instructor. Clement of Alexandria describes Him as Logos, or Reason, common to God and man (*Paedagogus*, II, 10); He helps the soul to lead a virtuous life (I, 1). Clement gave precise rules for Christian life, but they were not considered authoritative. Later, Christian education merged Greek and Roman elements into a new synthesis. After the Carolingian Renaissance and the Middle Ages, the imprint of christianism on Western civilization became dominant in the arts and science.

Those metaphors are less frequent in Islam, a religion born in the desert. However, it is implied by the fact that Adam and Eve were placed in a Garden: "O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and enjoy (its good things) as ye wish: but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression."(7:19). This dwelling place is lost after the Fall. "Allah said: "Get ye down. With enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood, - for a time."(7:24). Earth is the new dwelling place, but man has to prove his worth by good works and repentance in order to regain Paradise: "they will meet deception save him who shall repent and believe and do right. Such will enter the Garden(...) They hear therein no idle talk, but only Peace; and therein they have food for morning and evening."(19:59-63).

Thus mankind, expelled from a garden, must progress in virtue in order to return to paradisiac garden. Meanwhile, he lives in a world compared to an unstable garden: "the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the tiller, but afterward it dries up." (Al Hadid, 20). To prevent men to be led astray within this unstable world, God gives men divine guidance, through the Prophets and the Messengers. This guidance is effected by God's own Word: "Allah keeps the Believers Firm in This Life and in the Hereafter with a Word that stands Firm." (14:27). And this Word is precisely described as a tree: "See you not how Allah sets forth a parable? - A goodly word as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the sky" (14:24). Thus, the Word(s) of God educate(s) the Believers, slowly shaping their souls, and allowing them to reach paradise. The believers are thus made similar to this Word, which progressively perfects them. That's why the Muslims are compared to a tree: "the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Amongst the trees, there is a tree, the leaves of which do not fall and is like a Muslim. Tell me the name of that tree.' Everybody started thinking about the trees of the desert areas. And I thought of the date-palm tree but felt too shy to answer. The others then asked, 'What is that tree, O Allah's Apostle?' He replied, 'It is the date-palm tree.'" (Bukhari, *Hadith* #58)

Islamic culture and education have to be understood in this context. They draw from the Quran rules of conducts, precepts of good behavior, practical and ethical norms which are instilled within society and helps God doing His formative work. This is an anthropological necessity. According to Al Ghazali's *Ihya*, each thought, deed, action impresses an image (*mithal*) upon the heart and becomes one of his attributes (*sifa*) governing his limbs and directing his

actions. That's why the good impulses, either coming from God's words, or indirectly inspired by Him, are to be favored. Miskawayh's *Treatise of Ethics* thus indicate how the souls can be educated and cultivated in order to bring forth good fruits. In his perspective, Muslim Law is the basis for the training and the education of the young. They thus acquire the *adab*, i.e. a moral formation complemented with cultural refinement.

e) Culture and the arts

Thus, culture is culture of the soul by God, fostered by man's own efforts and in a good education. The soul is irrigated by God's grace, the bad habits are pruned and the virtuous planted, so that man could be turned towards God, grow in faith and be happy. But God seldom acts directly. He acts through the Holy Scriptures. At various degrees he acts through the religious communities, through their leaders, through the teachers, our relatives, our friends. What He gives is used and reflected freely in science, arts and literature, activities which foster the Common Good, elevate the spirit of man, and open it to new horizons of thoughts and experiences.

Culture, however, cannot be reducible to a good education. Like the artist's skills are the necessary but not sufficient conditions for the production of its work, in the sense that his own genius, personality and inspiration are required, the objective social and religious conditions of culture cannot by themselves bring works of arts and science. Even God's impulses in the mind are not sufficient. It is up to the creativity of the individual to bring his skills and those influences together to produce a work of culture.

II. Spiritual origins and elements of modern culture

We must have in mind those correlative meanings of the word "culture": cultivation of the soul and of the mind in order to bring forth the social and spiritual potential of the individual, the collective experience of mankind as condensed in works of fine arts as well as in the elaborations of science and philosophy describing the world, of man and of God and, last but not least, culture as cult and religion, which brings forth the idea of a God and of a moral law we must strive to serve and obey. The very core of culture is the *cultus*, that is to say, the presentation of transcendent values and of a divine being to which a cult must be offered. Culture is often associated with this cult. Indeed, the soul and the mind have to be elevated towards God, the works of arts are often imbued with a spiritual meaning, philosophy tells of the struggle of the human mind to understand the Absolute, true science uncovers God's works in the universe, etc.

However, modern contemporary culture seems very far from religion. In the West, it can be indifferent or even downright hostile to religion and divine values. This seems to contradict the idea that culture is by essence related to spirituality. However, a closer look at the phenomena of Western culture shows that spirituality still somehow constitutes it. This can be seen as we consider that the cultural genre to which it belongs has a religious origin, or that the creative process has spiritual elements, or that there are religious elements, hidden or manifest, in the work in question.

For instance, modern physics seem very foreign to spirituality. However, its root is in ancient philosophy, chiefly in Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, which describe the basic concepts of a phenomenological physics,

according to which the existence of a Prime Mover - God - can be inferred from the phenomenon of movement. Likewise, Plato's *Timaeus* introduced the idea of a world created by God according to the principles of mathematics. Many centuries later, Newton concludes his *Principia* with an invocation of God: "this most beautiful System of the Sun, Planets, and Comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being."(Principia Mathematica, *Scholium Generale*) Newton had also the idea that the proportions of the Temple of Jerusalem, as revealed by the Bible, were a blueprint for the Creation - he then intensely studied the Bible to gain more insights in physics. But his deistic/theistic view of the Universe was rejected by his French disciples (like Laplace), and the atheistic picture became dominant. However, the deistic view is still shared. That's how Paul Dirac, one of Britain's finest physicist, wrote that "God is a mathematician of a very high order, and He used very advanced mathematics in constructing the universe" (Paul Dirac, "The Evolution of the Physicist's Picture of Nature," *Scientific American*, May 1961).

The same holds for philosophy. Nowadays, philosophy is considered as a synonym to atheism and secularism. However, the first impulse of philosophy was a spiritual and religious one. E.R Dodds (*The Greeks and the Irrationals*) has shown the continuity between the greek religions and the first greek philosophers. Socrates, in Plato's *Apology*, presents himself as a prophet sent by God to the Athenians, which reminds us of this verse:"to every people was sent a messenger."(Quran 10:47) Plato's program of education, exposed in the *Republic* and reserved to the leaders, aims at converting the soul towards the Idea of the Good, the philosophical equivalent to God. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle

defines man as motivated by the quest for knowledge. Since knowing everything is impossible, at least the knowledge of the first principles is possible. *Physics* VIII and *Metaphysics* L prove the existence of a prime mover, God, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, the necessity to turn the human intellect towards Him.

Christianism, Judaism and Islam have taken advantage of the theological insights of the Greeks: Justin Martyr, the School of Alexandria, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas for Christianism, Philo, Ibn Gabirol, Maimonides for Judaism, Avicenna and Averroes for Islam, etc. One could argue that modern philosophy is, by contrast, atheistic. But a closer look indicates the contrary. Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, places the idea of God in the center, so to speak, of the human mind, in such a way that it is incorrect to say that he is a subjectivist. Likewise, Kant's Ideal of the Pure Reason, i.e. God, structures the human mind, and receives an objective reality from its moral application. Marx' philosophy is impossible to understand without the hegelian view of history, where the Spirit, considered as a divine reality, progressively takes conscience of Himself during the different stages of history. Nietzsche, "the last philosopher to have sought God with passion"(Heidegger), presented the atheistic figure of Zarathoustra in the eponymous book, but pointed later to the figure of Dionysos as a new epiphany of the Divinity yet to come. Atheistic existentialism, that of Sartre and other authors, actually stems from christian philosophers who insisted on the frailty of man and the misery of a life without God (Pascal, Kierkegaard, etc).

III. Inverted culture

In the West, God has totally disappeared from mainstream culture and from education. The individual is presented both as fully responsible for his actions and totally determined by various factors (biology, psychology, sociology, etc.). Education is reduced to its purely intellectual elements: mathematics, physics, languages, history, etc. Ethics is never taught, with the exception of a very few hours in private schools. It is left to the parents, who usually work hard to earn a living and do not have enough time to really care for their children. Religion has almost totally disappeared from the landscape, not to speak of spirituality, identified either with madness or empty sentimentality.

Totally deprived of a sane and coherent worldview or of the perspective of higher goals, the individual usually focuses on his own goals, oblivious of God. He thus misses his own destiny. From the spiritual viewpoint, the average western man is an uprooted tree, a waste land, unaware of its hidden spiritual potential. True, western freedom can be a chance and there exists unprecedented opportunities of learning. But mainstream culture lead the masses away from God and higher values. As said George Bernanos, "modern civilization is a conspiracy against inner life."

In fact, truly spiritual culture, albeit easy to access, is no longer understood, for lack of education. Likewise, the spiritual roots of culture are unknown. But there is a greater danger: the active presence of a truly *inverted* culture, i.e., a culture which is consciously anti-spiritual. This inversion is the result of a long process. At first, true culture was spiritual, as it tried to put the soul under God's influence. With time, and under the influence of some (mostly misunderstood) Greek and Roman authors, the emphasis is no longer put on God but rather on the development of the

human faculties. This humanist conception has grown in importance from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. Likewise, science has become the development of the technological possibilities of mankind and the arts the development of its aesthetic tastes. Culture then becomes equivalent to the the artistic and scientific realizations of a people, binded together within a "unity of style"(Nietzsche). Meanwhile, the free struggle of the creative individual against routine and academism, so strong in Romanticism, becomes an exaggerated exaltation of egoism and individuality. Beaudelaire thus wrote that modern art, casting a blazing light "on the latent Lucifer inhabiting every human heart", had "an essentialy demonic tendency."(*L'art moderne, Théodore de Banville*). In the XXth century, the triumph of consumerism and the indifference to spirituality is epitomized by "mass culture", i.e. a culture understood as a mere entertainment regulated by the imperatives of the economy, while modern art is talentuously exploring the darkest depths of the human psyche.

The center of gravity of the cultural effort is no longer God, or some higher values, or the true self, but the lower self which spontaneously drags us downward. This false self, laden with demonic tendencies, must be seduced and contented at all cost. This is an inversion of culture, since culture, in its first meaning, precisely means the opposite: the departure from the lower self and its upbringing toward the spiritual realm.

True, some cultural products, nowadays, can convey some high values and interesting spiritual insights, but in most of the cases they are nothing else as a sophisticated incitation to violence, greed, debauchery, morbidity and cynicism. Many studies have thus indicated that the Western youth,

frequently exposed to violence on TV (they spend from 3 to 4 hours a day in front of it), become desensitized to violence and more aggressive. The same holds for promiscuity, greed, etc.

It is as if not only the soul was left to itself, without real culture, but was also encouraged to have bad dispositions. Instead of the flow of divine grace, a quagmire of passions appears, instead of a steady and upright growth, a convoluted and difficult one, bringing fruits of violence, rebellion and corruption. Spiritually, this means nothing else as the exposure of people to nefarious spiritual influences, the soul being turned towards its sole animal instincts, in a social climate which is antinomial to true culture.

Some authors believe that this situation has been deliberately instigated. They say that the forces of evil have coalesced to undermine true culture and civilization, working both on the spiritual and material plane. Freemasonry, at the highest level, is such "mystery of iniquity at work." It acts as a mystical body from where evil impulses are communicated to the society. For instance, in a book of private revelations written by Don Gobbi, Freemasonry is described as working in seven branches, each one corresponding to the seven capital sins, in order to foster them at the individual level, to exalt them as new trendy social values, to promote chaos within society and to lead men to perdition.

IV. The Mahdaviat and culture

It is often useful, when one sets one's mind to the realization of an objective, to contemplate the future states of affairs at that time, in order to better evaluate the means to be taken and the strategies to be elaborated. It is thus necessary to understand what culture will be under the

future Era. It is very likely that we will see an unprecedented revolution in culture. Spiritual culture will be centered on God. Education will be harmonious and spiritual. Far from any academism, the creative potential of the individual will know an unprecedented growth. What a contrast with the present situation! This will be made possible because of a spiritual renewal. And the various religious traditions indicates that this new impulse will be communicated by the revelation of the hidden meaning of the various Scriptures.

1) Judaism

Judaism is founded on the revelation of the Torah by God on Mount Sinai. It comprises a written and an oral Torah. The expected Moschiah of Judaism, according to the traditions, will restore the davidic Kingship and make God worshipped by all the Nations. They claim that the Gentiles will follow the Noahide Laws, the Torah will be given to the whole world (Za8:23). This apparent contradiction is perhaps dispelled when it is considered that the Moschiah will give a new interpretation of the Scriptures: under the Messiah, "a new Torah will emit from Me" (*Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus*, based on Isaiah 51:4). In fact, "the Torah which we study in this world is naught in comparison to the Torah of Moshiach" (*Midrash Rabbah, Ecclesiastes 11:12*). The cultural renewal in the Messianic Era is deeply related with this new Torah or new interpretation of the Torah.

2) Catholicism

Christianism identifies Jesus as the Verb of God and the Jewish Messiah, just like the Quran does, with the exception that the concept of "Verb of God" is equated to that of "Son of God". Jesus, as such, interpreted the Bible (Lk 24:27) as indicating His coming. More generally, the New Testament

reveals what was hidden in the Ancient Testament: *novum testamentum in vetere latet, et vetus in novo patet* (St Augustine, Quaest.in.Hept, 2-73). It is then considered that the Christian Revelation is closed with Jesus Christ: God "spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say" (John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2, 22, 3-5).

However, Jesus said: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12), thus explicitly pointing to further revelations. Those would be effected by the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of Truth": "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13).

In the Middle Ages, Joachim of Flore introduced the idea of an Age of the Holy Spirit, succeeding to the Age of the Father and the Age of the Son. This view was never really condemned but was not popular. It could be maintained, however, provided the (i) we insist on the absolute unity of God and of human history (ii) we interpret the work of the Spirit as subordinated to the work of Jesus Christ, since Jesus said: "[the Paraclete] will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me." (John 16:13-14). There is then the possibility of a new epoch of the Church (cf Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15), in which the inner meaning of the Scriptures will be fully revealed.

3) In Islam

In Islam, the Mahdi is also related to the interpretation of the depths of the sacred texts. Indeed, Ali was depository of the "science of the Quran", i.e. the possibility to apply it to any circumstance of common life as well as the science of its hidden meaning. This science was transmitted from

generation and generation until the 12th Imam. That's how the Imams, inspired by God, can reveal to their followers the hidden meaning of the Quran (*bâtin*).

According to the traditions, the Mahdi will reveal this hidden knowledge at His return. He will, it is said, reveal the complete Quran according to Ali (Al-Kafi, tradition of Salim ibn Salam transmitted by Al Kulayni). Some say he will reveal another Book, the Book of Fatima (a.s)(Al Kafi, 380). In any case, according to a hadith, the Mahdi "will fight to lead you into the spiritual sense (*tawil*), as [Mohamed has] fought for the revelation of the literal sense."(Safinat Bihâr al-Anwâr, II, pp.101-102).

4) Religious interpretation

Provided we include a kind of mild and acceptable joachinism in Catholicism, the three abrahamic traditions all predict that a future renewal, led by one or two messianic figures, will allow a new comprehension of the accepted Scriptures to take place, thus revealing unexpected depths. This coincidence, once more, is remarkable and indicates that the tenants of the three Abrahamic traditions must work together for the coming of a better world, all the more that there are clear indications that they will closely collaborate, if not completely merge, at that time.

This will certainly have tremendous consequences for culture, as the spiritual foundation of culture, found in the Scriptures, will be fully revealed, acknowledged and protected. In consequence, under this Era, the cultural activities of mankind will be completely imbued with divine values and with the Presence of God. This does not mean that culture will lose its autonomy, but on the contrary, that it will gain in creativity, clarity and purpose.

V. Preparing the transition

We have drawn three conclusions about culture:

1) Culture is culture of the soul and has a spiritual origin. Only subsequently it is an intellectual and social activity bringing forth works of culture.

2) Western contemporary culture seems atheistic but, it has, in fact, a strong link with spirituality, being either a hidden (deformed) or inverted spirituality. Thus, the phenomenon of modern culture, encompassing Western culture and the religions, has three different moments:

Culture as inverted spirituality(the culture of death);

Culture as deformed spirituality(the hidden spiritual content within culture); culture as fragmented spirituality (the division of religions)

3) In the future, the hidden meaning of the religions will be revealed, in such a way that they may well work together.

This descriptive outlook can help us drawing normative conclusions. First of all, the coming global civilization cannot take root in such a desolated waste land. It cannot either renounce any cultural ambition or send into oblivion three millenia of artistic and scientific accomplishments. Culture is necessary to build the character of the individual and enrich his soul by giving him a complete world view. Likewise, it is not possible to wait for this global civilization and the cultural fruits it will surely bring. We are in a difficult period of transition where apparently everything has to be built again from the outset.

Given our conclusions, three tasks must be undertaken:

1) against "deformed culture" in the West, to reveal its spiritual and religious origins, in order to refute the idea that modern culture is by essence atheistic and to give people a higher idea of what culture really is about.

2) against (Western) "inverted culture", to expose its harmfulness to the individuals, as well as its dark underpinnings.

3) against the fragmentation of religions, to work towards the coordination of the religions and their harmonious cooperation within a coherent interreligious framework.

It is expected that the Mahdi will likewise 1) reveal 2) expose 3) unify. But this work has to be undertaken right now by all people of goodwill, all the more as the Holy Spirit, or the *'aql*, or the Mahdi are at work to guide us.

In the Roman Empire of the 1st Century, violence, greed, paganism and immorality prevailed. Then Jesus appeared. Three or four century after, the Roman Empire was Christian. The level of morality and culture had skyrocketed.

In the Arabian peninsula of the 7th Century, the arabian tribes were living in paganism, greed, bloody feuds, etc.

Nowadays, we are living in a similar world. In many areas of the world, chiefly in the West, violence is outpoured constantly from television and theatres to the people's minds. Indecency fills the Internet, the movies, the minds. People only live for their egocentric purposes while the great corporations threaten the economy and the stability of the planet. Greed is the basic impulse behind the stock exchange. Education has no element of morality or sociability.

Given the situation, which is worsening year after year, a new divine intervention is likely to happen in a near future. The worrying point is that the number of people aware of the situation and working in the direction of the Mahdaviat is very low, while most people do not care and an active and harmful minority of evil persons maintain the world in a nightmarish system of slavery which is at the same time an

unimaginable slaughterhouse for everything that is noble, pure and spiritual. They are very powerful, very well organized and very decided to thwart our efforts at all costs. They can immensely harm our projects and our hopes.

Moreover, since this future epoch will be magnificent, we shall suffer (and are already suffering) as much to *earn* it. The trials, efforts and suffering we will have to endure before entering it will be *proportional* to the blessings and happiness we will enjoy at that blessed time. We shall certainly endure not only physical sufferings, but, what is perhaps worse, bitter disillusion, utter disorientation, total dispiritedness. In the dark times we will soon live, let our faith and our hope be our guiding stars.

Necessary Preparations for Hastening Al-Mahdi's Coming

By: Dr. Ahmad Al-Hashimi

The beauty of the Quran is in its approach for building the character of the Muslim individual. By moving him to the level of belief and then piety, the criterion necessary for the Creator's acceptance of his deeds becomes available. Naturally, man needs a role model during his spiritual development. A present Imam will fill that role; and, he will be Allah's special mercy for mankind. This is the same title the Quran has given to the Prophet of Islam. If the human intelligence is the Creator's hidden evidence, the Imam is His apparent evidence, especially after the demise of the seal of the Prophets. Living the values of the Glorious Quran will make man a leader for his family. By proper spouse selection, a Muslim can build a family that will shoulder its responsibilities while facing the trials and tribulations of life. Ideally, every Muslim family member must be strong in belief and focused to please the Creator. Man is social by nature. The formation of parties that promotes the values of fairness and truth always endangers

the ruling elites who survive only on deceit and deception. Therefore, the struggle between right and wrong is as eternal as man's history. Allah and His envoys lead the former, whereas the Satan and his hosts lead the latter. The message of the Quran to mankind is clear: Establish Justice. When tyranny prevails, it is the masses' collective responsibility to dispel it and work for the communal good. The tyrants have always used coercion to subdue their opponents, if offering a carrot did not work. The human history has witnessed a number of bloody battles, with Imam Hussain's Karbala preserved a unique status among them all in defending the social justice. Imam Mahdi is the 9th Imam from progeny Imam Hussain, as a fulfilled prophecy made by Prophet Muhammad. He is the last of the Twelve Chiefs, from the loins of Ishmael, about whom the Old Testament speaks. In this paper, some discussions will be presented on what needs to be done on individual and collective levels as humanity heralds the coming of Al-Mahdi. Pertinent Quranic verses will be quoted for the necessity of the preparatory stage. How Imam Ali and his two sons prepared the Muslims, and thereby mankind, for the eventualities of the End Times will be presented next. The unified Muslim view on Al-Mahdi's mission will be brought closer to the understanding of the Christians who are waiting for the son of Adam to come as a Saviour. Armageddon may take another turn when the Christian world will see Jesus Christ, who will descend from Heaven and pray behind Imam Mahdi. Converted Christians augmented by resurrected youth of the Cave will be among the soldiers of Imam Mahdi. Ad-Dajjal represents the hegemonic Western forces on the Muslim lands. Jesus Christ himself will be given the duty to kill the leader of these evil forces. As a Quranic and Prophetic unfulfilled

prophecy, Imam Mahdi's conquest of Jerusalem to put an end to the Israelites' injustices will also be discussed in the light of the latest developments for lifting the lengthy blockade on Gaza.

Preparation at individual level:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مِثْلَىٰ خِزْفٍ وَمَنْ يَنْصُرْكُمْ فَإِنَّ يَدَيْكُمْ بِرِجَالِكُمْ وَلَنْ يَنْصُرَكُمْ اللَّهُ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ كَافِرِينَ ۚ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ.¹

Say (unto them, O Muhammad): I exhort you unto one thing only: that ye awake, for Allah's sake, by twos and singly, and then reflect: There is no madness in your comrade. He is naught else than a Warner unto you in face of a terrific doom.

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَا هُدًى.²

We narrate unto thee their story with truth. Lo! They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance.

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ³

Lo! Abraham was a nation obedient to Allah, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolaters.

Rising up against tyranny is a monumental task. Normally individuals can not undertake it. But men of God have a will that (re)moves the mountains.

The Glorious Quran has a unique approach in building the character of such individuals who possess iron wills. Firstly, each one of them minds his own personal responsibilities. Of course he is pretty focused about his objectives and goals in this and coming life. Secondly,

through the preparatory stages and in order to challenge the odds of life, he may join efforts with similar minded individuals. Thirdly, in defiance of prevalent tyrannical rules of the time, he can function both independently and in team. But, the team is only in twos, resembling “Small is Beautiful,” and minimizing the number of casualties when confrontation occurs.

Interestingly, modern management science has found that such a size for any team makes it the most efficient. Not too much time is lost in managing meetings and/or dealing with participants objections in the decision making process make such teams very functional and quite efficient. Therefore, in the most optimal size for a functional team one can see a subtle support from the Creator to seemingly weak individual(s). The Quran declares: what is important is the quality of the belief (in Allah) not the number (quantity) of (the so-called) believers. This by itself is one of the miracles of the Quran that only the time has recently proven.

Man is social by nature. Forming associations, groups, unions and parties is something individuals with similar viewpoints and interests normally achieve. Such independent social entities threaten the existing tyrannies. As the Quran states, the true believers have always lived in a state of fear from the tyrants' crack down. Youths are not only the essential tools for many historic revolutions but also they fall victims of each and every power-thirsty despot. In the chapter of the Cave, Allah tells us how He protected a group of sincere believing youths from the rage a tyrant by putting them to sleep for 309 (lunar) years.

The Quran is not a history book. By narrating such stories, it reveals some important natural and social laws. The removal of tyranny from man's life requires the zeal, power, and stamina of the youths. Old men may have long-life

(theoretical) experience, but they are not up to the challenge to (practically) bring any social changes. Fear of change is always there, even though change is a fact of life. Therefore, the fearless individuals who aspire to join Imam Mahdi's global revolution must be up to the challenge. Many authentic Hadiths foretell the personal attributes of the Imam's close aids. Other narrations prophesize the return of the Cave's youths back to life, in order to join Imam Mahdi's campaign and be among his close aids and confidants.

As in the case of (young) Prophet Abraham, one true believer in Allah is a nation by himself. He tirelessly works against all odds that may face him. His arguments are as strong as his will in defying the tyranny's fallacies. Death never scares him. He is not a terrorist or suicidal, as the Western media nowadays like to portray. Rather, he is a mini resemblance to the father of the prophets Abraham whom Allah protected from the fierce fire of king Nimrud.

Each of the 313 close aids of Imam Mahdi has worked hard on the character building. The divine leader knows them by names. Like Prophet Jesus who will be descending on a minaret in Damascus, these particular individuals will be gathered overnight to pay allegiance to the victorious Imam upon his (re)appearance. The meeting place will be sacred House of Allah in Mecca.

Preparation at familial level:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
كُلُّ أُمَّرٍئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِيْنٌ⁴

And they who believe and whose seed follow them in faith, We cause their seed to join them (there), and We

deprive them of nought of their (life's) work. Every man is a pledge for that which he hath earned.

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا⁵

They pray, "Lord, let our spouses and children be the delight of our eyes and ourselves examples for the pious.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ⁶

O you who believe! Ward off from yourselves and your families against a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is people and stone, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who disobey not (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah, but do that which they are commanded.

The fire of injustice may touch everyone who has shown apathy towards the ruling despots. All those who supported the Pharaoh-like rulers reached miserable fates. Right after being drowned, the Pharaoh's host ended in the Hellfire, the Quran confirms. Therefore, such corrupt despots could also be imams, i.e. political leaders, who will lead their followers to Hell.

As his name indicates, Imam Mahdi is a guided Imam who leads his followers to Paradise. Each follower must begin with his own family right after the self building. The progeny will follow the Quran when they find their parents are practicing what they preach. The Quran's message and Imam Mahdi's mission are inseparable, as the prophet declared in his well-recorded farewell sermon [1]. When the Muslim parents lead by example, no double standards and no confusion crosses the minds of the children. The children

will be spiritually nurtured to become the jewels of the parents' eyes. Naturally before forming such a believing family, individuals should have a clear criterion for spouse selection. Dysfunctional families can rarely produce pious offspring. All strength and energies will be spent in futile battles, often in the despot's courts. Observing piety and choosing a pious spouse will be the greatest investment in the believers' life. It soon pays its dividends through children who are the delight of the parents' eyes.

It is one of Allah's affirmed promises that He will resurrect the progeny of the true believers and permit them to join their parents on the Day of Judgment.

The pious met the criteria for the acceptance of their deeds. These are the same deeds which the recording angels offer to the Imam of our time, according some narration twice a week. The observing family heads will make sure that they do not do anything that violates the Shariah. At a familial level, he is fair to his wife and does his best to fulfill his responsibilities towards the children. Such a harmonious environment will be pleasing to Allah and also to His Vicegerent. And, above all, it will be a reason to endow the power of intercession to the believers on the Day of Reckoning.

Preparation at societal level:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ❖ إِرْمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ ❖ الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ ❖ وَثَمُودَ
الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ ❖ وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ ❖ الَّذِينَ طَغَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ ❖ فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا
الْفُسَادَ ❖ فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ ❖ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصَادِ.⁷

(Muhammad), consider how your Lord dealt with the tribe of Ad, whose like has never been created in any other land. (Also consider how He dealt with) the Thamud, who carved their houses out of the rocks in the valley. (Also consider

the people of) the Pharaoh who victimized people by placing them on the stake, lead rebellious lives, and spread much corruption in the land. Thus, your Lord afflicted them with torment; your Lord keeps an eye on (all evil-doing people)

وَسَكَنْتُمْ فِي مَسَاكِنِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ كَيْفَ فَعَلْنَا بِهِمْ وَضَرَبْنَا لَكُمْ
الْأَمْثَالَ.⁸

You lived in the dwellings of those who wronged themselves, even though it was made clear to you how We dealt with them. We also showed you examples.

وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ.⁹

We have written in the Psalms which We had revealed after the Torah that the earth will be given to Our righteous servants as their inheritance.

On the tongue of all Allah's messengers, one universal message they all delivered to mankind: People establish Justice on Earth. Often the human society moves in a direction that is diametrically opposite to what the Creator intended. By enslaving the people, the despots project themselves in an arrogant manner. Building mammoth material edifices and structures has normally been at the cost of human suffering. Egypt's archaeological remnants indicate that at the dawn of that land's civilization, man was tall enough (~ 60 meters) to be able to assemble rocks as heavy as 1000 tonnes in the form of Pyramids. As (the late) Dr. Ali Shariati observed,¹⁰ in "Ari Inchenen Bood Baradar," thousands of weak workers may have been buried alive in mass graves near the Pyramids construction sites.

Instead of enabling Moses to bring the Israelites closer to the Creator, Pharaoh claimed lordship. He asked his Prime

Minister Haman to build for him an earthen structure so he can use it as a launching pad to challenge Moses' God. How futile that project was? Similar to this are NASA's fruitless projects during and after the cold war era. Remember the star wars. Occupying the space was a naive proposition. The Challenger's mission was not that challenging. Billions of dollars turned to ashes just a few minutes after launching the vessel. When decadence prevails at a societal level, Allah intervenes to support the righteous.

Always the soldiers of the Creator are victorious, as the Quran predicts. The tyrants' defeat is so humiliating. Allah ambushes the tyrants' powerful hosts, just to demonstrate His swift backing for His envoys. Moses' followers were outnumbered by the Pharaoh's soldiers. But eventually Prophet Moses became victorious by safely crossing the Red Sea. It was Allah's Will to preserve the Pharaoh's corpse, as vivid evidence about the Creator's intervention when the society chooses a wrong path. It was neither mummification nor the advancement of Medicine in old Egypt that preserved the artefacts. Many other cities turned to ruins when wrongdoing prevailed and Allah's envoys were ridiculed. Take the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples. These were Prophet Lot's cities that are now at the bottom of the Dead Sea.

Allah revealed the Psalms to Prophet David, after the book of Moses – The Torah, which the Quran calls Al-Thikr (meaning The Reminder!). Reminding mankind about the importance of being Godwary, all messengers prophesied the coming of the Messiah. So did the seal of the Prophets in his Farewell Sermon.¹¹ His arrival will eventually precede the End Times.

A unique feature of Imam Mahdi's coming is that it will be extremely sudden. Luck comes when preparations meet

opportunity. Lucky indeed will be the ones who seize this opportune time in man's history by performing their collective preparations. Similar to rejecting any repentance at deathbed, Allah does not accept the repentance who insisted on worshipping the false deities until the Imam's (re)appearance. The collective preparation should bring the human societies to Allah's straight path. Accepting the rightful Imam, who is a true manifestation of this path, will pave the way to establishing God's Kingdom on Earth.

Preparation by the Prior Imams:

As it becomes known to any avid researcher, the Prophet of Islam has appointed his successors by names beginning with the Commander of faithful – Imam Ali bin Abi Talib. In a Hadith, he said: “Our first is Muhammad, our middle is Muhammad, and our last is Muhammad. To his good companion Jabir bin Abdullah Al-Ansari, he said that he will live long enough to see the middle Muhammad, i.e. Muhammad bin Jaffar As-Sadiq. He also conveyed his salam via Jabir to this particular (great)grandson. Through many other Hadiths, the Prophet proclaimed the name of the last of his successors – Imam Muhammad bin Al-Hassan. Some Muslims confuse this Hassan (who is the 11th Imam) with Imam Hassan bin Ali (who is the 2nd Imam). Thus, Imam Mahdi will be the 9th Imam from the progeny of Al-Hussain (the younger son of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet), as prophesized by the Prophet himself. To Imam Ali the Prophet said: The successors of every Prophet are from their seeds, except me. My successors are from your seeds. In brief, it was Allah Who chose the rightful Imams as successors very similar to His selection for the Prophets. Nothing in the selection was left for the Muslims to implement. What Allah expects from the Muslims is to

discover the Straight Path of the rightful Imams and follow it. Not only the Quran, but also the Prophet declared: Path of Ali is the Truth, you must follow it.

Again both the Quran and the Prophet prophesized the reversion that has occurred right after the Prophet's death. Take this Hadith as an example:

عن أبي حمزة الثمالي عن ابي جعفر عليه السلام قال : قال رسول الله ﷺ لأمير المؤمنين عليه السلام : يا علي ان قريشاً ستظهر عليك - الى ان يقول - واعلم ان ابني [ينتقم] من ظالميك وظاملي أولادك وشيعتك في الدنيا ويعذبهم الله في الآخرة عذاباً شديداً . فقال : سلمان : من هو يا رسول الله؟ قال : التاسع من ولد ابني الحسين عليه السلام الذي يظهر بعد غيبته الطويلة فيعلن امر الله ويظهر دين الله [وينتقم] من أعدائه.¹²

The Prophet told the Commander of the faithful: O Ali, Quraish will subdue you ... Know that my son will revenge in this world from those who wronged you, your sons, and your followers; and, Allah will punish them severely in the Hereafter. Salman said: Who is he O Allah's Messenger? He said: the 9th from Al-Hussains' sons – who will appear after a lengthy occultation, declaring Allah's Commands, prevailing Allah's Religion, and revenging from His enemies.

Not only Prophet Muhammad but also all the rightful Imams, who succeeded him, foretold about the coming of Al-Mahdi. The authenticity of the Prophetic sayings in this respect has been examined by Hadith experts; and, the narrations are being accepted beyond any doubt by all Muslim denominations. Al-Mahdi's global role by the End Times is also known to all studious Muslims.

In this paper, the chronological preparation of the first three consecutive Imams for the (be)coming Mahdi's ear

will be presented. Ample literature citations can be brought on the relevant narrations from the remaining Imams. The fact that some of the late Imams had she-slave mothers is of academic curiosity for this and probably many other researchers. After knowing Imam Mahdi's father, it is fitting here to mention that his mother's name was Narjes (or some history books cite: Maleekah) – a she-slave captured in one of the Muslims battles with the Romans. Her story of being a princess in the Emperor's Palace in is well documented.

Imam Ali (AS)

As stated earlier, the Prophet foretold the coming of Imam Mahdi. So did Imam Ali. Below are four quotations, just to cite a few.

1. ... Then a companion from Egypt will march towards Jerusalem, facilitating for the coming of Al-Mahdi. He realizes that Al-Mahdi's reappearance is on every tongue. His followers are learned men, who (will) teach people what they do not know. They bring to light the hidden evident for the ignorant. Allah will establish via them the (compelling) evidence for the (new) believers; the ones who had ears, but they did not hear.¹³

عن أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام قال : وينادي مناد في شهر رمضان من ناحية المشرق عند الفجر : يا أهل الهدى اجتمعوا . وينادي مناد من قبل المغرب بعد ما يغيب الشفق : يا أهل الباطل اجتمعوا . وتقبل الروم إلى ساحل البحر عند كهف الفتية ، فيبعث الله الفتية من كهفهم مع كلبهم ، منهم رجل يقال له مليخا وآخر خملاها ، وهما الشاهدان المسلمان للقائم . (البحار : ٢٧٥ / ٥٢).

2. A caller in the month of Ramadhan will call in the East, at dawn time, O the folk of guidance assemble. And a caller

in West, at dusk time, will call: O the folk of falsehood assemble. The Romans will come to the sea's shore, nearby the Youth's Cave. Then Allah will resurrect the Youths along with their dog. Among them there is a man called Maleka, another called Khamlaha. And, the two will deliver (the original Torah and the Evangelic) to Al-Qaim.¹⁴

3. Allah will suddenly dispel all the hardships by a man from us Ahlul Bayt. May my father be his ransom. He is the son of the best she-slaves. Carrying his sword on his shoulder for eight months, he will kill the wrongdoers in magnitudes by his sword.¹⁵

4. In the forth Hadith, Imam Ali presents 35 marks which will dominate man's reality just before the End Times. Knowing that Imam Mahdi will appear and Jesus will descend from Heaven so they jointly establish God's Kingdom on earth, all Muslim denominations accept this particular Hadith as authentic. Therefore, the Arabic text will be provided here without translation. The recitation of the Hadith can be found at the end of the literature cited.

قال أمير المؤمنين علي عليه السلام: احذروا الدنيا إذا أمت الناس الصلاة، وأضاعوا الأمانات، واتبعوا الشهوات، واستحلوا الكذب، وأكلوا الربا، وأخذوا الرشى، وشيدوا البناء، واتبعوا الهوى، وباعوا الدين بالدنيا، واستخفوا بالدماء، وركنوا إلى الرياء، وتقاطعت الأرحام، وكان الحلم ضعفاً، والظلم فخراً، والأمراء فجراً، والوزراء كذبة، والأمناء خونة، والأعوان ظلمة، والقراء فسقة، وظهر الجور، وكثر الطلاق وموت الفجأة، وحليت المصاحف، وزخرفت المساجد، وطولت المنابر، ونقضت العهود، وخربت القلوب، واستحلوا المعازف، وشربت الخمر، وركبت الذكور، واشتغل النساء وشاركن أزواجهن في التجارة حرصاً على الدنيا، وعلت الفروج السروج، ويشبهن بالرجال، فحينئذٍ عدوا أنفسكم في الموتى، ولا تغرنكم الحياة الدنيا فإن الناس اثنان بر تقي وآخر شقي، والدار

داران لا ثالث لهما، والكتاب واحد لا يُغادرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا، أَلَا وَإِنْ حَبَّ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسَ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ، وَبَابَ كُلِّ بَلِيَّةٍ، وَمَجْمَعَ كُلِّ فِتْنَةٍ، وَدَاعِيَةَ كُلِّ رِيْبَةٍ، الْوَيْلَ لِمَنْ جَمَعَ الدُّنْيَا وَأُورَثَهَا مِنْ لَا يَحْمَدُهُ، وَقَدَّمَ عَلَى مَنْ لَا يَعْذُرُهُ، الدُّنْيَا دَارَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ، وَلَيْسَتْ بِدَارِ الْمُتَّقِينَ، فَلْتَكُنْ حِظُّكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا قَوَامَ صَلْبِكَ، وَإِمْسَاكَ نَفْسِكَ، وَتَزُودَ لِمَعَادِكَ

Imam Hassan (AS):

Do not you know that each one of us will have an allegiance on his neck for a (contemporary) tyrant except Al-Qaim – behind who the Spirit of Allah Jesus the son of Mary will pray? Allah will hide his birth and person, so when he starts his mission, he has no allegiance on his neck for anybody. That (Imam) is the ninth from Al-Hussain's progeny, the son of the best she-slaves. Allah will give him such a long life in his occultation, then He will make his reappear, by His Power, in the form of a young man, just below 40. This is for all to recognize that Allah is able to do everything.¹⁶

Imam Hussain (AS):

From us there are twelve guided (Imams), the first of whom is the Commander of the faithful Ali bin Abi Talib (AS). The last of whom is the ninth from my progeny. And, he is Al-Qaim who establishes the Truth. By whose blessing, Allah will resurrect the Earth after being dead. And, (Allah) makes the true religion prevails over all other religions, even if the pagan detest it.¹⁷

Global governance between theory and practice:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

People, We have created you all male and female and have made you nations and tribes so that you would recognize each other. The most honourable among you in the sight of God is the most pious of you. God is All-knowing and All-aware.¹⁸

As a monotheistic religion, Islam advocates a fairly simple model of belief system. This model can be summarized: The Creator is One; the human family is one; and the message that the Creator has sent for man's guidance must be one (Al-Islam). In Muslim faith, the Creator did not get weary after creating the Heaven and Earth in six days (i.e. stages). Nor did He abandon His creation on this tinny planet called Earth. Although Unseen, Allah is a living Being Who sustains man's life and existence. The Quran submits this ironic fact thus:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

God exists. There is no God but He, the Everlasting (and) the Guardian of life ...¹⁹

Al-Qayoom, the Guardian of life is at the heart of the Muslim belief. The Creator has delegated many tasks related to man's life to His angels. Again, the belief in the angels is a core one. Allah is the Creator of very many creations, e.g. humans, jinn, angels ... etc. Above-mentioned delegation is not because of inability or weakness. As the very many evidences in the vast universe indicate, He is indeed an Omnipotent Lord (of the lords). On a similar premise, He has chosen a Vicegerent: Imam Mahdi for the Time Ends. Once again, this does not imply that the Creator became weary or fell dead to need an heir. Allah's selection

of the Vicegerent is in a sense giving Royal accent to the chosen Imam. Such announcement does not drop His intervention at needed times. The Quran calls these times Allah's Days. Critical analysis of man's history shows that Allah's Days are the significant occasions in which His support to His envoys became evident for all to see. Saving Abraham from Nimrud's fire, Moses from Pharaoh's hosts, and Jesus from being crucified are but a few examples.

Imam Mahdi's mission is the culmination of all Allah's envoys efforts. All prior prophets knew about him. They vividly described him for their peoples. In brief, he is Allah's appointed Chief Officer. Thereby, he deservingly carries the title Al-Qaim.

The Arabic word Al-Qaim has two connotations. Firstly, to fulfil duties delegated to him by Allah. Secondly, to rise up (yaqoom) against tyranny and injustice. This uprising occurs when injustice and transgression become pervasive in man's life, just before the End Times.

Although Communism theoretically advocated the global governance of the workers, it could not survive more than 70 years. That materialistic creed was an adamant foe to any religion. Because the genuine religion of Allah (Al-Islam) has not been properly introduced to mankind, the atheists consider the concept of God's Kingdom on Earth nothing but utopia. They claimed that the bourgeois have used the religion as opium to intoxicate the masses. They argued: the religion's purpose is to divert the masses' attention from this world's bitter realities to the Hereafter's promissory gardens. All this is done to consolidate the power in the hands of the ruling elites, after subduing the voices of their subjugated peoples.

On the contrary, Islam has always been on the side of the downtrodden. How many times the Quran declares that Allah does not like the unjust? Any injustice is abhorred. Be it at individual, familial, or societal levels. Allah's constant victory to the few seemingly weak proves the point.

Serving justice and the just causes will remain man's biggest challenge. When Allah chose Prophet David as a Vicegerent, He advised him to rule with fairness, especially when he sits on a judgment seat. The Quran reports an interesting court case at the end of David's reign. The sheep of a farmer crossed over a fence and ate the wine trees of his neighbour. When the two disputing farmers were trying to reach a settlement, David had selected his heir to the throne. Solomon was the elder David's youngest ten sons. But, Allah has taught this particular son how to reach the right settlement for case.

Thus, the knowledge reaches Men of God through two routes: Acquired and Divine. The first route is accessible to all, whereas the second Allah has reserved only for His chosen envoys. Solomon was not Prophet David's choice for a vacant seat, but he was Allah's. On the same premise, Allah has chosen the rightful Twelve Imams who succeeded the seal of the Prophets. This was the crux of Fatima bint Muhammad's evidence in the court of Abu Bakr, who usurped Imam Ali's post along with her inheritance in Fadak. Her heir Imam Mahdi may revisit the case.

The Kingdom of Solomon is another interesting case study. Iran's film industry recently produced a documentary that carries the same title. The Quran describes that Kingdom as being global. When the throne of Queen Sheba was brought from Yemen to Jerusalem in a blink of the eye, something extraordinary manifested itself not only for the King but also to all who can see. Solomon brought an entire

nation to Al-Islam without shedding a single drop of sweat or blood. He later married that nation's ex-Queen.

Allah's promise to help those who strive in His path is always holding. His support to His Vicegerent is a given fact. When He permits him to start his mission, the humans will be put to test. The faithless will be caught in a surprise. No time they have for apology. Imam Mahdi, aided by Jesus Christ, will eradicate all those who insist on their rebellion and disbelief. The present day Christianity describes these as Anti-Christ. Only those who have prepared themselves will recognize the rightful leader, who will lead Jesus in a congregational prayer. Humanity shall experience peace, happiness, and prosperity in this becoming era. A fulfillment to what Allah has promised the seal of His Prophets – Muhammad bin Abdullah (pbuh and his progeny):

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ.²⁰

It is God Who sent His messenger with guidance and a true religion that will prevail over all other religions, even though the pagans may dislike it.

Interestingly, Prophet Muhammad's (great)grandfather Amr Al-Ulaa (whose fame name was Hashim) played an important role in his era. Not only he became the immaculate and unmatched master of all Arabian tribes, but also he initiated the Winter Trade expedition to Yemen and the Summer Trade expedition to Syria (Al-Shaam). The Glorious Quran makes a reference of these two expeditions in one of its short Suras (Quraish). Hashim was a Haneef (pl. Ahnaaf), the pre-Islamic Arabs who remained on following Prophet Abraham's religion. He became such a

famous leader in his days that even the Roman Emperor used to send him special greetings via the Arab tradesmen who had traded with Rome.

Hashim emancipated his contemporaries from the clutches of poverty by opening a 5000 km trade way with neighbouring countries.²¹ That way was not less economically important than the Silk way during the old times. He also established social justice by ordering the tradesmen to help those who were less fortunate in society. Leading by example, he put his money where his own mouth was. He spent his wealth to feed the poor and the destitute, especially at the times of famine. In one of his expeditions northward, he died and was buried in what is now known as (occupied) Palestine. Muslims in the occupied land pay customary homage to him by visiting his tomb in Gaza. The besieged city of Gaza, which recently exposed the true nature of the Zionists, is known as Hashim's Gaza.

Who determines the grand happenings in man's life?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 لَهُ مُعَقَّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ
 يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ²²

Everyone is guarded and protected on all sides by the order of Allah. Allah does not change the condition of a nation unless it changes that in its heart. When Allah wants to punish a people, there is no way to escape from it and no one besides Allah will protect them from it.

الم ❖ غَلَبَتِ الرُّومُ ❖ فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ غَلَبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ ❖ فِي بَضْعِ سِنِينَ²³

لِلَّهِ الْأَمْرُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدِ وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ❖ يَنْصُرِ اللَّهُ جَيْشَهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ²³

Alif. Lam. Mim. The Romans have been defeated in a nearby (low) land after this defeat, within a few years, they will be victorious. All matters of the past and future are in the hands of Allah. The believers will enjoy the help of Allah on that Day. He helps whomever He wants. He is Majestic, All-Merciful.

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا ❖ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ أُولَاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ ۗ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَفْعُولًا ❖ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ الْكَرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَاكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا ❖ إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا ۗ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ لِيَسُوءُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبِّرُوا مَا عَلَوْا تَتْبِيرًا²⁴

We made it known to the Israelites through the Torah that they would twice commit evil in the land with great transgression and rebellion. (We told them) during your first uprising of evil We shall send to you Our Mighty servants, who will chase you from house to house. This is a decree already ordained. We, then, gave you a chance to defeat your enemies with the help of increasing your wealth and offspring. (We told them), if you do good, it will be for your own benefit, but if you do bad, it will be against your souls. When the prophecy of your latter transgression will come to pass, sadness will cover your faces. They (your enemies) will enter the mosque as they did the first time to bring about utter destruction.

Allah (SWT) expects from the believers to give their best shot. Human effort, be it individual or collective, for the betterment of communal life is always necessary. Such

effort is often non-violent at peace time, but it turns violent at war times. Because war does not know who is right (it only knows who is left), the peaceful effort for social change is always preferred. Humanity must change and perform the preparatory requirements to deserve the leadership of the awaited rightful Imam – The anticipated Saviour. The above verse of change does not only speak about a universal social law, but also explains the philosophy of the present Imam being in occultation. The positive awaiting, therefore, dictates that the striving believers to do more good. This is because the Imam is waiting for their good deeds. Comparatively, the negative awaiting leads the lazy believers to await another aeon for the coming of a leader to bring goodies to their life.

The Quran portrays the Creator as being the One Who is in charge of any grand happening, without negating the individual's effort immaterial of its size. The human (will)power is insignificant when it is compared to The Omnipotent's. As far as the men of God are concerned, their individual will coincide with Allah's. Aided by a few hundred early Muslims, when Prophet Muhammad strived against his own tribesmen and other adversaries in order to establish the Islamic state in Medina, Allah described the Muslims efforts in the battlefield thus:

فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَىٰ وَلِيُبْلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْهُ بَلَاءً حَسَنًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ²⁵

It was not you (believers) but God Who slew the pagans. It was not you (Muhammad) but God Who threw dust at them He did this as a favourable test for the believers. God is All-hearing, All-Knowing.

When the early Muslims became sad because the believing Romans lost a battle (in 622) against the (then) pagan Persians, Allah revealed the above-cited relevant verse as a solace. Interestingly, there are two fulfilled prophesies in this particular verse. One, geographically, the scene of that historic battlefield happened in a (Philistinian) land that was the lowest in comparison to the sea level. Secondly, the promised victory of the Romans occurred 7 years (i.e. in 628) after their defeat as the history books record. Muhammad was neither a specialist in Geography nor History to author such core undisputed facts. Therefore, the entire mankind must pay serious heed to other not-yet-fulfilled prophesies made by Prophet Muhammad. Specifically, the happenings that will eventually occur in (occupied) Jerusalem: Jesus' anticipated prayer behind Imam Mahdi there; and, the ultimate defeat of the forces of evil by the End Times.

Amazingly, how the Quran is precise in describing the power-thirsty Israelites. The land of Philistines (now occupied Palestine) was historically first inhabited by the Canaanites (Canaan was one of Prophet Noah's sons: Sam, Ham, and Canaan). As the name indicates, the Semites descended from Sam. After many generations, the Israelites came to Philistines fleeing the persecution of the Pharaoh. When they became intoxicated with power in their new abode and committed extensive injustices, Allah sent them a powerful army under the leadership of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar²⁶ to utterly uproot them and take them in captivity to Babylon. Their current second hegemony after coming from Germany, Poland, and Russia (just to cite a few) and establishing an illegal entity on what they call "the promised land" is against all equitable norms the human race has ever established. As the Turkish PM recently stated

while protesting the Zionist recent attack against the ships (Freedom Filotilla) which carried humanitarian aids for the besieged Gazans, the Israelites have reached the apex in their arrogance and injustices. Is the land of Philistines on the brink of a not-yet-fulfilled Quranic prophecy, this author, the Turkish author Harun Yahya, and many others wonder? Adnan Ar-Rifaei [10] predicts the year 2022 to be the end of this present insidious Israelite (Zionist) global hegemony. History rejects any colonial enterprise. Even a recent CIA report also predicts the fall of the Zionist entity in 20 years.

Interestingly, both the Christian and Muslim historians agree on above historic perspectives. The Muslims revere the Prophet Jesus to high estimation, and so they do to all other prophets before him. Christian history summarizing the life of the Great Prophet Daniel writes:²⁷

“This Prophet was from the tribe of Judah, and from the posterity of king David. He was taken along with the Israelites by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon when he captured Jerusalem in the year 3398 of the world. He stayed in Babylon for seventy years. This prophet was young in age, however, he conducted himself in virtuous life, the Holy Spirit filled him and he prophesied in Babylon.”

Prophet Daniel rightly prophesied the fall of the kings of his days because they were not just. So, did Prophet Muhammad and the rightful Imams after him. The Muslims reverted right after the demise of the Prophet, Fatimah bint Muhammad was wronged in her inheritance in Fadak, a number of dynasties rose to power and declined. After the downfall of the ill man (the Ottoman Empire), the Christian Western powers dominated the world utilizing the “divide and conquer” scheme. Nowadays, one can find the members of the old club (League of the Nations) have reassembled in

the form of the so-called United Nations. The US and the American Zionist lobby have treated the UN, with a headquarters in New York, as a branch of the US State Department. The right of Veto power was wrongfully used at the General Assembly to defend the Zionist crimes in Philistines.

The wealth of the other nations are being plundered by either waging aggressive wars or forging domineering financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). With no gold backing, the "Almighty" dollar hegemony is destined to end as a currency sooner or later. Usury-based economies have been suffering and all nations seek a more just financial system that promotes economic and social growth. Deception in the global power chambers has become known to the Muslim World as Al-Maseeh Ad-Dajjal, a term which is equivalent to the Anti-Christ in Christianity. Every Muslim²⁸ heralds the coming of Imam Mahdi, who will be aided by Jesus Christ, to kill Ad-Dajjal and rid the humanity from its vices. This is a task which the Creator has delegated to the 12th Imam Muhammad bin al-Hassan al-Askari.

Notes

1. Quran (34:46).
2. Quran (18:13)
3. Quran (16:120)
4. Quran (52:21)
5. Quran (25:74)
6. Quran (66:6)
7. Quran (89:6-14)
8. Quran (14:45)
9. Quran (21:105)
10. <http://www.iranianmovies.com/reviews/shariati/info1.htm> (accessed 14 June 2010).
11. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Farewell_Sermon (accessed 14 June 2010)
12. <http://www.allikaa.net/?list=8&part=1> (accessed 14 June 2010).
13. www.yamahdinet.net/index.php?showtopic=4506 (accessed 27 May 2010).
14. Allamah Majlesi, Bihaar Al-Anwaar, vol. 52, page 275.
15. Al-Shareef Al-Radhi, Peak of Eloquence, vol. 2, page 178.
16. http://oqaili.com/arabic/sire/imam_mahdi/01.html (accessed 11 June 2010).
17. Kamil Al-Hashimi, Imam Mahdi and the Global governance treatise in the Contemporary political thoughts. <http://bahrainline.org/showthread.php?t=497> (accessed 11 June 2010).
18. Quran (49:13)
19. Quran (2:255)
20. Quran (9:33)
21. www.alameli.net (accessed 14 June 2010).
22. Quran (13:11)
23. Quran (30-1-5)
24. Quran (17:4-7)
25. Quran (8:17)
26. <http://www.alargam.com/prove/jews/ragm211.htm> (accessed 15 June 2010)
27. <http://www.coptictamgeed.com/B-PropheDaniel-1.htm> (accessed 15 June 2010)
28. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4duB3Vnu9kM> (accessed 15 June 2010)

The Global Messiah of Islam: Paving the Ground for Reappearance from the Viewpoint of Abrahamic Religions

By: Moch Ali

I. Introduction

Messianic consciousness is power, becoming the house of being of our humanity. Even, the messianic consciousness itself is the real manifesto of our heavenly consciousness to believe the Being. This messianic consciousness in the viewpoint of Abrahamic faiths is surely a significant portion to represent a common ground of our belief in the scriptures. To create a new understanding of the Semitic scriptures on that consciousness is to make possible a new effect of those scriptures on us as the Abrahamic ancient writings. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions for rereading the Semitic culture that the writings reflected. To expose and question that complex of ideas and mythologies about messianism, mahdism or

millenarianism as the episteme of messianic consciousness which exist in our society and are confirmed in the ancient writings is to make the system of power embodied in the sacred writings open not only to discussion even to change. Such questioning and exposure can, of course, be carried on only by a consciousness radically different from the one that informs that sacred literatures. Such a closed system cannot be opened up from within but only from without. It must be entered into from a point of view which questions its values and assumptions and which has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the divine literatures wish to keep hidden. Here, both textual criticism and historical criticism will provide that point and embody that messianic consciousness as 'ens realissimus'. Obviously, Abrahamic ancient writings as the Semitic scriptures are indeed political, and the power is the main issue and the core of power in the sacred literary politics is the messianic consciousness. So, applying a new consciousness of scriptural readings offers new ways of reading and interpreting the heavenly ancient writings.

Messianism, mahdism and millenarianism which politically reflect the concept of 'Expectation' are the secretive consciousness culture within the global village to fight against the satanic supremacy, injustice and the bad doers' expansion among the righteous men. Therefore, the existence of the heavenly ancient writings that voices the messianic consciousness in the world is a significant document of a global village. This world which is a well-known cliché, however, is the house of the global society to embody the messianic consciousness for paving the ground of the coming of the global awaited savior. But the fact, this global village is really pluralistic in a religious and

multicultural sense as well, and the Global Messiah of Islam will appear in this context.

II. The Hope for Messiah: Messianic Text at Qumran in the Quran

For 3500 years the Jewish people have awaited the arrival of their anointed redeemer, deliverer, and savior – the Messiah. The hope for the Messiah actually predates the promise recorded by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter XVIII. For thousands of years the rabbis have recognized that the promise of a redeemer for mankind goes all the way back to the garden of Eden and is thereafter woven throughout the Old Testament, even up to the last prophet Malachi. The promise of Messiah is so prominent in the biblical text that it led one Talmudic writer to state,

“All the prophets prophesied only of the day of the Messiah.” Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 99a.

“The world was not created but only for the Messiah.” Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b.

The above quotes from the Babylonian Talmud 98b - 99a, both summarize the exalted view of the Messiah in the eyes of the rabbis during the Talmudic period, 200 B.C.E. – 500 C.E. The Mishnah, Targum, Talmud, and the Midrashim which are the interpretations of the Old Testament were at first transmitted orally, but by the time of the second century C.E. they were being compiled in written form as commentaries (pesharim) on the entire Hebrew Bible, represent a very high view of the Messiah. It is fair to say that the Messiah is the central focus of these incredibly voluminous works written by ancient rabbis. Every aspect of the origin, life, mission, time of his coming and destiny are discussed in these writings. The promise of the Messiah is so central to the Bible that, according to the rabbis,

prophecies of his mission and destiny are woven both visibly and invisibly throughout the biblical text. The rabbis see those prophecies that were predictions of some aspects of his life such as the birth, lineage, character, mission, and destiny. Then there were types, shadows, and similitudes which were veiled prophecies of some aspects of the Messiah's life. For centuries ancient rabbis believed that the Messiah would be rejected by the bad doers. Furthermore, they believed that he would come after the destruction of the Second Temple, and there were even some rabbis believed that the Messiahs are two and they would come twice. But, Christians claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the very fulfillment of this ancient messianic composite. The Jewish rabbis, however, reject the messianic claim of Jesus on the basis that he didn't fulfill the messianic requirements. Christians now teach a radically different view of the Messiah. Many passages that the ancient rabbis believed were messianic area are denied by the Christians.

In Judaic episteme, eschatological signs are believed to be encoded in apocalyptic ancient works as found in the Old Testament as well as the extra-textual Jewish apocalyptic literary texts, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Now, the powerful new evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran strictly reveals that ancient Jews were expecting two Messiahs who would be *tzadiqīm* (צדיקים), the righteous ones. The text of Qumran on 'the Messiah of Heaven and Earth (4Q521), fragment 1, column 2, line 5, is truly a biblical commentary (the *peshar*) on the Psalms 37:29 in Hebrew about 'the righteous themselves will possess the earth' (*tzadiqīm yireshu aretz*). Amazingly, this messianic text at Qumran has a parallel allusion to confirm the relationship of the *tzadiqīm* (צדיקים) with *al-shālichūn* (الصلحون), the messianic text of the Quran.

Tzadiqīm yireshu aretz

ve yishkenu la'ad 'aleyha.
 The righteous themselves will possess the earth,
 And they will reside forever upon it.
 (the Hebrew Psalms/Tehilim 37:29).¹

Wa laqad katabna fi al-Zabur

min ba'di al-Dzikr,
 anna al-ardh yaritsuha 'ibadiya al-sholichun.
 Before this We wrote in the Psalms,
 after the message which was given to Moses,
 'My servants the righteous shall inherit the earth.'
 (the Arabic Quran, al-Anbiya' 21:105).

Reappearance of the Righteous Ones in the Abrahamic religions is to confirm the root of common messianic consciousness in the Semitic episteme, and it is to portray the values of revelation in the movement of eschatological revolution of our global society. Even, the return of the awaited savior is the great assurance for Abrahamic faiths. On one hand, Seymour Siegel has commented, "the central problem of Christianity is if the Messiah has come, why is the world so evil? For Judaism, the problem is if the world is so evil, why does the Messiah not come?"² On other hand, Muslims have the same issue. The crucial problem of Shiites is if the Mahdi has come, why is the world so evil? For Sunnites, the problem is if the world is so evil, why does the Mahdi not come? The dual awaited saviors of Abrahamic faiths are coming to solve both dilemmas. In the Reshīt Da'āt Sefat 'Eber, there is a Jewish religious creed on the messianic consciousness.³

אָנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאֵמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה שְׁנִבְוֵאת מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם הִיְתָה

אֲמִתִּית. וְשֶׁהוּא הִיְתָה אָב לְנִבְיָאִים לְקוֹדְמִים לְפָנָיו וְלְבָאִים אַחֲרָיו

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה בביאת המשיח. ואף על פי שיתמחמה עם
כל-זה אהקה-לו בכל-יום שיבא

Ani ma'amin be-emuna shelemah, shenebuat Mosheh rabenu 'alaiv ha shalom, hayatah amitit. Ve shehu hayah ab la-nebi'im la qodamim le fanaiv ve la baim acharaiv.

Ani ma'amin be-emuna shelemah, be-biat ha-Moshiach, ve af 'al pi sheyitmahmeah, 'im kol zeh ahakeh lo, be kol yom, sheyabo.

I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be unto him, was true, and that he was the leader of the prophets, both of those preceded and of those that followed him.

I believe with perfect faith in the reappearance of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.

Here, the common messianic consciousness was previously discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the sacred text of Quran. The role of this consciousness is to fight against the global arrogance of the evil for common prosperity and global cultural responsibility. Furthermore, both Messiahs would suffer initial defeat, but they would ultimately triumph in the End of Days, to return later in glory. In the Damascus Document, there is some indications in the first column of the Cairo Genizah recension that the messianic root of planting out of Aaronic and Israelite has already come. It is completely clear in the Cairo Damascus Document that the allusion to 'Aaron and Israel' implies dual Messiahs, and not a single Messiah out of two genealogical stalks.⁴ This new evidence led Hebrew scholars to state that the writers of the scrolls were expecting two Messiahs. Even, one of them, 'the War

Scroll' text from Cave 1 at Qumran also uses eschatological 'rain' imagery to identify the 'clouds' with 'the Holy Ones' ('the Qedoshīm') to represent the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, and describes both as the leaders (Nasi) of Light to restore the kingdom of God and divine leadership in the 'End of Days'.⁵ That is in fact astonishingly quite close to the messianic beliefs of Islam for reappearance of dual Messiahs, the 12th Hidden Imam, the son of Ali (AS) as the Aaronic Messiah, and Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary as the Israelite one.

III. Ulū al-'Azm: the Messianic Code in the Abrahamic Religions

What does the hadith mean with the Ulū al-'Azm in Islam? There is a hadith of Ulū al-'Azm in Islamic doctrine, referring to the highest position of five apostles than others, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad peace be upon them. Obviously, the hadith is an interpretation of the Quranic verse, al-Ahqāf 46:35, and it is originally quoted from the Shiite source as cited in al-Kulainī's al-Kāfī, vol. I, p. 17.

عن سماعة ابن مهران قال ؛ قلت لابي عبدالله عليه السلام قول الله عز وجل "فصبر كما صبر أولوا العزم من الرسل" فقال نوح وإبراهيم وموسى وعيسى ومحمد صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم.....

Samā'ah, the son of Mahrān said: 'I asked to Abī 'Abdillāh peace be upon him about the words of God the Almighty "therefore patiently persevere, as did all messengers of inflexible purpose." He then said that they were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad peace be upon him and his family.....' (al-Kulaini, al-Kāfī, vol. I, p. 17).

Amazingly, these five apostles of God are always related with the messianic code in the context of twelve leadership heritages of their religious missions, and that leadership system per se is indeed a prophetic tradition of the five apostles of ūlū al-‘Azm. This leadership system of prophetic tradition is able to be explained as follows:

The Semitic Divine Leadership

Both ancient Semitic prophets, Noah and Abraham are not the followers of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam as the organized Abrahamic religions, but they are really the hanīfs (see al-Baqarah 2:135). The Moslem scholars regard that Noah and Abraham are two of five prophets of ūlū al-‘Azm. The scholars of Semitic culture also explained that both followed the Semitic religion as the ancient monotheism before the making of Abrahamic religions an sich. According to the Quran, al-Shāfā’āt 37:79-83, Abraham is the syī’ah (follower) of Noah; and Abraham himself is the Imām (leader) of all men, and his offspring (dzurriyyah), Ishmael and the children of Ishmael, indeed, have this messianic imamate position too (al-Baqarah 2:124-129). Interestingly, the Quran itself mentions the name of Ishmael is strictly not more or less than twelve (itsna ‘ashar) times; (1) al-Baqarah 2:125, (2) al-Baqarah 2:127, (3) al-Baqarah 2:133, (4) al-Baqarah 2:136, (5) al-Baqarah 2:140, (6) Ali Imran 3:84, (7) al-Nisa’ 4:163, (8) al-An’am 6:86, (9) Ibrahim 14:39, (10) Maryam 19:54, (11) al-Anbiya’ 21:85, (12) Shath 37:48. Amazingly, according to the Old Testament (I Chronicles 1:28), Noah is the first one of twelve Semitic leaders, and Ishmael is the twelfth Semitic caliph of Noah, and Abraham himself is the eleventh Semitic caliph of Noah too (Genesis 10: 1, 21-25; 11: 10-26; 17:5; I Chronicles 1:4,24-27), because Genesis 23:6

states that Abraham is the Nesī (leader) among all men. According to the Old Testament, there are twelve Semitic leaders: (1) Noah, (2) Shem, (3) Arpachshad, (4) Shelah, (5) Eber, (6) Peleg, (7) Reu, (8) Serug, (9) Nahor, (10) Terah, (11) Abraham, (12) Ishmael. In the Hebraic culture, the rabbis called Ishmael as the Nesī ha-‘Arabī (the Arab leader), but to Isaac, they called him as the Nesī ha-‘Ibrī (the Hebrew leader). God prophesied to Abraham that Ishmael will bear twelve sons and they will be the twelve Ishmaelite leaders - sheneim ‘asar Nesīm (see Genesis 17:20, 25:13-16; I Chronicles 1:29-31,). Thus, those twelve leaders of Ishmael are; (1) Nebayot, (2) Kedar, (3) Adbeel, (4) Mibsam, (5) Mishma, (6) Dumah, (7) Massa, (8) Hadad, (9) Tema, (10) Jetur, (11) Napish, (12) Kedemah. In the Old Testament, Kedar the second son of Ishmael who would be the ancestor of the twelfth Quraishite Messiah is the highest Arab leader (Nesī) of twelve Ishmaelite leaders (Genesis 25:13,16). According to the book of Isaiah 21:16, Kedar has the sons - beney Qedar - who they are the mighty men, the archers. Meanwhile, according to the book of Ezekiel 27:21, the sons of Kedar would be the Kedarite leaders - Nesīei Qedar in Arabia. Amazingly, the Old Testament itself also mentions the name of Kedar is not more or less than twelve (sheneim ‘asar) times.

1. Nebajoth the first born of Ishmael, and Kedar. (Genesis 25:13)

2. the first born of Ishmael, Nebajoth and Kedar. (I Chronicles 1:29)

3. I dwell among the tents of Kedar. (Psalms 120:5)

4. O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar. (Song of Solomon 1:5).

5. all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. (Isaiah 21:16)

6. the mighty men of the sons of Kedar. (Isaiah 21:17)
7. the villages of Kedar inhabits. (Isaiah 42:11)
8. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you. (Isaiah 60:7)
9. send to Kedar and examine with care. (Jeremiah 2:10)
10. Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor. (Jeremiah 49:28)
11. Rise up, advance against Kedar. (Jeremiah 49:28)
12. Arabia and all the princes of Kedar. (Ezekiel 27:21).

Interestingly, a hadith of Shiite reference also mentions that another name of Imam Ali, the first one of the twelve Quraishite leaders is Haidarah, the feminine form of the proper name of Haidar in the Arabic, or Qedar in the Hebrew. Meanwhile, the Arabs in the land of Arabia call him as 'Ali.

عن محمد الباقر بن علي زين العابدين بن الحسين قال؛ قال علي ابن أبي طالب عليه السلام، أنا إسمي في الإنجيل إلبا، وفي التوراة بريئ، وفي الزبور أري، وعند الهند كبكر، وعند الروم بطريسا، وعند الفرس جبير، وعند الترك بشير، وعند الزنج حيتر، وعند الكهنة بويئ وعند الحبشة بشريك، وعند أمي حيدرة، وعند ظئري ميمون، وعند العرب علي، وعند الأرمن فريق، وعند أبي ظهير؛ رواه شيخ الصدوق أبي جعفر محمد بن علي بن الحسين بن بابوية القومي.

Narrated from Muhammad al-Baqir ibn Ali Zainal 'Abidin ibn al-Husein, he says that Ali ibn Abi Thalib said: 'my name is Iliyā in the Gospel, and Barī in the Torah, and Arī in the Psalms, and Kabkār in the Sanskrit, and Buthruisa in the Greek, and Jebir in the Parsee, and Betser in the Turkish, and Heitar in the African, and Bawī in the language of the priests, and Bathrīk in the language of Abyssinians; my mother called me Haidarah, and the rabbis called me Maimon, and the Arabs called me 'Alīy, and the

Armenians called me Paroqa, and my father called me Dzahīr. (hadith of Syech al-Shaduq Abi Ja'far al-Qummiy).⁶

The hadithic term, Iliyā (إليّا) is an Arabicized-Aramaic word, which adopted from the Hebrew name 'Eliyāh עֵלִיָּהּ (lit., my god is Yahveh). This word is etymologically constructed from Eli (my god) + Yahveh (Jehovah). Others, both hadithic words, Barī' (برئى) and Arī (أرى) are Arabicized-Hebrew words, derived from Masoretic Hebrew, Barīah בְּרִיָּה (lit., the main gate), and Arī אֲרִי (lit., the lion), and the word Kabkār (كَبْكَار) in this hadith, is an Arabicized-Sanskrit term, derived from Kabkār (कबकार), and other Arabic word, Buthruisa (بطريسا) is derived from Pētros πेत्रος (lit., the rock). Meanwhile, Jebir is also an Arabicized-Persian word, derived from Geber which means 'non-Aryan', or 'non-Zoroastrians', and interestingly, in history, the Zoroastrians who left in Iran have been contemptuously named Gabar or 'unbelievers' by the Arabs.⁷ Ali's name, 'Haidarah' (حيدرة) is linguistically an Arabicized-Akkadian word, as well as 'Qedar' (קֶדָר), an Hebraized-Akkadian word; and both words have similar semantics, 'powerful' or 'tiger' which were originally derived from the native language of Abraham, the common Semitic. In the cultural perspective, especially a tradition among the Arabs, they always called the names of their sons according to the names of forefathers, grandfathers, and fathers. It indicates that Imam Ali (AS) is a descendant of Kedar, the son of Ishmael. Similarly, the first five books of Moses also mentions the name of Hagar the Oppressed One is not more or less than twelve (sheneim 'asar) times.

1. She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar (Genesis 16:1).
 2. Abram's wife took her maid Hagar the Egyptian (Genesis 16:3).
 3. He went in to Hagar and she conceived (Genesis 16:4).
 4. Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from (Genesis 16:8).
 5. Hagar bore Abram a son (Genesis 16:15).
 6. Abram named his son whom Hagar bore, Ishmael (Genesis 16:15).
 7. Abram was 86 when Hagar bore him Ishmael (Genesis 16:16).
 8. Sarah noticed the son of Hagar, the Egyptian (Genesis 21:9).
 9. He gave to Hagar and put on her shoulder (Genesis 21:14).
- The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven (Genesis 21:17).
- Hagar, what is troubling you? (Genesis 21:17).
- Hagar the Egyptian, Sarai's maid, bore to Abraham (Genesis 25:12).

Thus the Quran, the Torah and the Old Testament have a common episteme to introduce the Semitic leadership through the use of twelve messianic code among three persons who have a genealogical relation: (i) twelve name of Hagar (הָגָר) as cited in the first five books of Moses, (ii) twelve name of Ishmael (יִשְׁמָעֵאל) as cited in the Quran, (iii) twelve name of Kedar (קֶדָר) as cited in the Old Testament. As the grandmother of Kedar and as the mother of Ishmael, the memoir of Hagar, the second wife of Abraham, has a highest position than the first wife of Abraham, Sarah herself, because the seal of the prophets will appear from Hagar's offspring. Furthermore, in the tradition of Islam, all

Moslems really respect to Hagar's position, mainly in the tradition of hajj (pilgrimage).

The Hebraic Divine Leadership

All Moslem scholars of Sunnites and Shiites regard that Moses is the third man of the five prophets of ūlū al-'Azm, as cited in al-Kulaini's al-Kāfī. Meanwhile, the Western scholars of Semitic civilization also explained that Moses was not a follower of the Semitic religion, but he was the founder of Judaism, the first three religions of Abrahamic faith, and the lawgiver of the Torah to the Hebrews. According to the Qur'an, the God arose twelve leaders from among Israelites and Moses himself elected them as the naqība (leaders), see the Quran, al-Maidah 5:12. As the great prophet of Judaism, Moses has elected twelve men from among Israelite tribes as the twelve tribal leaders which the hadiths of Islam then called this Hebraic leadership system as the Israelite leadership (nuqabā' banī Isrāīl) as well as cited in Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal's al-Musnad, vol. I. no. 3593, 3665. Meanwhile, other version called the Hebraic leadership as the Mosaic leadership (ashāb Mūsā) as cited in Ibnu Kathir's al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah, vol. VI, p. 186. According to the book of Numbers, Moses elected them as niqqebu (the leaders) of Israel, one from each of the twelve tribes. For census purposes the names of the leaders of the Israelite tribes are given in the book of Numbers 1: 3-17,44; they are called 'every one of the head of the house of his fathers'. Other twelve leaders of the children of Israel were selected to spy out of the land of Canaan, their names are mentioned in Numbers 13:1-16. Among those who returned after spying out the land were two men who had faith and courage. They were Joshua and Caleb, and the Quran, al-Maidah 5:23

described this narrative. This sacred story also directly referred to both men who had faith and courage although the Quran itself did not mention their names. The Quran just mentioned in the Arabic word *rajulān* (two men). Based on that Hebraic leadership system too, Moses also appointed twelve names from among Israelite tribes as twelve tribal leaders, and Moses gave the instructions to each of the leaders brought him the wooden rods with their names inscribed upon them, including Aaron's name, from the tribe of Levi. But, only Aaron's rod, representing the tribe of Levi had budded and was blossoming, and Moses himself placed Aaron's rod into the Ark of the Covenant, namely Mishkan in the Hebrew (the Numbers 17: 16-26). The Torah miraculously reported it. Interestingly, the Quran, al-Baqarah 2:248 also mentioned about the Ark of the Covenant, *Tābūt* in the Arabic, as the relics, left by the family of Aaron and Moses, from the tribe of Levi.

The Israelite Divine Leadership

The fourth man of the five prophets of *ūlū al-‘Azm*, is Jesus the Israelite Messiah as cited in al-Kulaini's al-Kāfī. As a Jew, Jesus received a new revelation of God and transmitted it to the people of Israel. Based on the system of Israelite leadership too, Jesus elected twelve disciples from among Israelite tribes to transmit his Gospel. Matthew 10:1-6 mentioned the twelve names of Jesus' disciples as the twelve Israelite apostles **שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר הַשְּׁלִיחִים** (*sheneim ‘asar ha-shelīchīm*) in the Hebrew New Testament.⁸ The Quran, al-Shaff 61:14 also mentioned the twelve Israelite disciples of Jesus as *al-hawāriyyūn*. Furthermore, Jesus the seal of Israelite Messiahs also elected Simon the son of Jonah as the first disciple of Jesus and the leader of twelve Israelite apostles, so that why Jesus then called him as Buthrus

(بطرس), an Arabicized-Greek word, which was originally derived from the Greek word Petros (Πετρος). Jesus spake unto Simon: ‘you are Peter – oti su ei Petros (οτι συ ει Πετρος) and on this rock – kai epi taute te petra (και επι ταυτη τη πετρα) I will build my congregation – oikodomeso mou ten ekklesian (οικοδομησω μου την εκκλησιαν), see Matthew 16:13-20. Amazingly, the position of Simon the son of Jonah, one of the twelve Israelite leaders beside Jesus the Israelite Messiah like the position of Imam ‘Ali (AS) as the first disciple of Muhammad (SAW), and one of the twelve Quraishite leaders. The prophet said:

ألست اولى بكم من انفسكم؟ قالوا بلى، قال؛ إن الله مولاي وأنا مولى المؤمنين، وأنا اولى بهم من انفسهم، من كنت مولاه فهذا علي موله. ألهم وال من واله وعاد من عاده، وأحب من أحبه، وأبغض من أبغضه وانصر من نصره واخذل من خذله؛ مسند أحمد ج ٤ ص ٢٨١، سنن ابن ماجه ج ١ ص ٤٣، صواعق ابن حجر ص ٢٥، خصائص أمير المؤمنين للنسائي، سنن الترمذي ج ٦ ص ٢٩٨.

Do I not have more authority upon you than you have yourself? They said: ‘Surely yes.’ Prophet said: ‘God surely my authority, and I am the one who has an authority among all believers, and I have more authority upon them than they have themselves. Whoever whose leader I am, ‘Ali is his leader. O God! Love him who loves ‘Ali, and be he enemy of the enemy of ‘Ali, help him who helps ‘Ali, and forsake him who forsakes ‘Ali. (Ahmad’s al-Musnad vol.4, p. 281; Ibnu Majah’s al-Sunan vol.1, p.43; Nasa’i’s Khashāis Amīr al-Mu’minīn; Ibnu Hajar’s al-Shawa’iq p. 25; Tirmidzi’s Sunan vol.6, p. 298).

In the authority of Simon, Jesus will build his congregation (church), and the gates of hades shall not prevail against her. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus himself spake unto his disciples in the Syro-Aramaic, saying: ‘all power is

whatever you allow on earth will be allowed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19).

As Jesus called Simon the son of Jonah as Petros (Πετρος) in the Greek New Testament or Buthrus (بطرس) in the Arabic New Testament, so also the name of Imam ‘Ali was really known as Petros (Πετρος) in the Greek or Buthruisa (بطريسا) in the Arabicized Greek, as cited in al-Shadūq’s Ma’ānī al-Akhhbār. Therefore, we precisely know that in the episteme of Jesus, the Israelite discipleship system has a link with the Israelite divine leadership system too. Interestingly, there is completely clear in the kitab Muntaha al-Amal, an ancient historical writing of Syech Abbas al-Qummy that the blood of the 12th Imam implies dual lineages, out of two genealogical stalks, Israelite and Ishmaelite. The 12th Imam was even out of dual genealogical stalks of Peter(s), Simon the son of Jonah (AS) as Saint Peter of Hebrew, and Imam ‘Ali the son of Abu Thālib (AS) as Saint Peter of Arab. Imam Hasan al-Askarī (AS), the father of the 12th Imam was the descendant of St. Peter of Arab, the first leader of twelve caliphs of Muhammad the prophet (SAW), but Princess Nargis, the mother of the 12th Imam was the offspring of St. Peter of Hebrew, the leader of twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, and St. Simon Peter himself, according to the New Testament, is one of the descendants of Manasseh, the son of Joseph.¹¹ Amazingly, according to the Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a, ‘Mashiach ben Yosef’ will appear from among Israelites.¹² So, Jesus the son of David the Judahite tribe, and the 12th Imam the son of St. Peter the Josephite one are dual Messiahs who will reign the world in justice and divine leadership. According to the hadith, the 12th Hidden Imam (AS) as the amīr and Jesus the Christ (AS) as the wazīr.

The Quraishite Divine Leadership

The Sunnite and Shiite scholars regard that Muhammad (SAW) is the fifth one of the five prophets of ūlū al-‘Azm, as cited in al-Kulaini’s al-Kāfī. The Quran also mentioned that he was the seal of the prophets (Quran, al-Ahzab 33:40). The historical documents of Islam described that Muhammad (SAW) was also regarded as the twelfth caliph of Quraish, namely Fihir, one of the descendants of Kedar, the son of Ishmael. The ancient Moslem historians; Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, al-Tabary, Isfahany, Mas’ūdi, Ya’qubi, and Waqidi noted that there were twelve generations from Fihir ibn Mālik to Muhammad (SAW), and they were all leaders. al-Tabari also quoted an ancient myth of Arabs that Qushay ibn Kilāb, the seventh chaliph of Quraish made many sha’ir to honour his forefathers until to Kedar ibn Ishmael.¹³ To understand the messianic code of Quraishite leadership in pre-Islamic Age, however, these twelve imamate from Fihir (AS) to Muhammad (SAW) are not ‘the myth of origins’ of Quraishite genealogy, but it is ‘a historical fact’ to proclaim that Muhammad is the Ishmaelite Leader from the seed of Quraish the Elder.

The Quraishite Leaders

1. Fihir (قريش)
2. Ghālib (غالب)
3. Luay (لؤي)
4. Ka’ab (كعب)
5. Murrah (مرة)
6. Kilāb (كلاب)
7. Qushay (قصي)

8. ‘Abd Manāf (عبد مناف)
9. Hāshim (هاشم)
10. ‘Abd al-Mutthalib (عبدالمطلب)
11. ‘Abdullāh (عبدالله)
12. Muhammad (محمد)

Meanwhile, in the Islamic Age, there will be twelve Quraishite caliphs, and the 12th Imam, is the Mahdi of Islam. Muhammad (AS) will be the twelfth caliph of Quraishites as well as Muhammad (SAW) was also the twelfth caliph of Quraish. The ancient Sunnite scholars, Imam al-Suyūthī, in his book *Tarīkh al-Khulafā’*, p. 12, Imam Ibn Hajar, in his work *al-Shawā’iq al-Muhriqah*, p. 9, and Ibnu Katsir in his *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Adhīm* vol. II, p. 34, when they comment the verse of al-Maidah 5:12 they also said that Muhammad (AS) will be the twelfth caliph of Quraishites. Obviously, these dual messianic imamates represent the divine leadership an sich.

حدثنا هداد بن خالد الأزدي، حدثنا حماد بن سلمة عن سماك بن حرب قال؛ سمعت جابر بن سمرة يقول؛ سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول؛ لا يزال الإسلام عزيزا إلى اثني عشر خليفة، ثم قال كلمة لم أفهمها، فقلت لأبي ما قال؟ فقال كلهم من قريش - رواه مسلم في صحيحه

Narrated from Hadab bin Khalid al-Azady, narrated from Hamad bin Salamah, from Samak bin Harb said; I heard Jabir bin Samurah said; I heard Rasulullah saw said: ‘Islam will have the power and victory in the era of twelve caliphs, he then said something which I cannot understand it. Then I said to my father: ‘what did he say?’ My father said: ‘all

caliphs are from the Quraishites.’ (the hadith of al-Muslim in his Shahih).

Ibnu Kathir, in his work *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* vol.VI, p.187, said: ‘in the Taurat, there is a great narrative which God gave good news to Abraham about the birth of Ishmael, and the God also promised to Abraham about the descendants of Ishmael. The God will make him fruitfull, and will multiply him exceedingly. Twelve sons of Ishmael will be chosen as twelve leaders for their nations by God Himself, and will make him a great nation’ (Genesis 17:20). Ibnu Kathir then added: ‘my master, Ibnu Taimiyah said, ‘these twelve leaders of Ishmael are equivalent with the hadith of Jabir ibn Samurah.’ He said this when he quoted the prophecy about the coming of twelve Quraishite caliphs, and the End of the Days wouldn’t come before their appearances. Many Jews who were converting into the quasi-Islam also regarded that they were the Shiite twelve caliphs. The Jews of Islam said to other Jews to follow this fundamental Shiite imamate creed. Therefore, they also convert into this quasi-Islam, the school of thought of *Rāfidzī*.’¹⁴ If I read Ibn Taimiyah’s commentaries, I have the important conclusions. First, he directly stated and affirmed that both texts which he quoted from Taurat and the Hadith were the messianic prophecies of Abrahamic faiths. Second, he directly affirmed that there will be the great twelve Quraishite leaders as well as there were the great twelve Ishmaelite ones. Third, he directly also states that there is twelve messianic code of Ishmaelite caliphs and of Quraishite ones. Fourth, he also claims that twelve caliphs of the Prophet (SAW) will appear fom among the Quraishites. Here, the Arabic term *itsna ‘ashar* (twelve) means ‘the limited number’ (al-‘adad al-haqīqī), and it is textually not referring to ‘the unlimited number’ (al-adad al-

majāzī), as well as the use of Hebrew term *shene'im* 'asar (twelve) which narrates the twelve Ishmaelite leaders (Genesis 17:20; 25:13-16). Similarly, the Qur'an, al-Maidah 5:12 also said about the number of Israelite men, twelve leaders (banī Isrāīl, itsna 'ashara naqība). Based on the Islamic sacred texts, you have to compare the messianic number with the Jewish text, the book of Numbers 1:3-17,44 which also narrates about 'the leaders, twelve Israelite rulers' (niqqebu, neshēi Yisrael sheneim 'asar).

IV. Axis of Evil and the Light of Global Messiah of Islam

There are three entry points of Abrahamic religions to pave the ground for reappearance. First, messianic consciousness is the soul of humanity as the preexistence of the Messiah is the cosmic reality of the soul of universe. The world is really waiting for its Messiah as we are surely expecting for the words of the Messiah. Ahmadinejad's messianic policy also states this consciousness. He says that mankind must hurry towards the Hidden Imam in order to reach him. Mankind is proceeding rapidly towards perfection, truth, justice, love, peace and compassion, and this is possible only under the rule of the perfect man, the 12th Hidden Imam.¹⁵ Second, the twelve messianic leadership system is a divine imamate, and this system is to represent the heavenly grand design of perfect government, even, to confirm a common leadership spirit of Abrahamic faiths. This messianic leadership system, however, is a representation of a global government. Third, the existence of the Messiah is the greatest assurance in the Abrahamic religions, and the return of the Messiah per se is the greatest guarantee for Abrahamic societies.

Here, we have a common religious capital force to disseminate those three entry points among the global

society to reject the global arrogance as the real axis of evil in the world on one side, and on other side is to reach the global justice in economy, politic, and humanity among the nations in the paradigm of the global ethic, as Hans Küng's slogan - *'kein überleben ohne weltethos'*. Thus, the coexistence needs the global ethic, and without noxious ethics such as exploitation, oppression, and tyranny. The Abrahamic societies such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believed that there is only global tyranny, and the greatest duty of those awaiting the appearance of the Messiah is fighting it. Nowadays, in the Western episteme, the global superpowers use all its recourses to move against 'the axis of evil'. But, for whom? Is this the political term as an identity marker for those who reject the Western political dynasty? If the answer is yes, it is really the greatest scandal in the peace world so that why Seymour Siegel has commented that the world is so evil.¹⁶ However, the world without the words of the Messiah is so criminal and even evil. The world without the light of the words of Messiah is a quasi truth, dehumanization, and imperialism. Today, intellectual forces of the great scholars with their morals of the prophets cooperate to demolish the foolish credulity of the tyrants and the self-interestedness of the evil politicians, and based on the divine words of the Scripture, the divine leadership of Islam have to control the world and bring the global society out of disintegration, injustice, conflicts, and guide them to the equal opportunities to be the righteous humans for preparing the reappearance of the Global Messiah of Islam.

Notes

- 1 Norman Henry Snaith, *Sefer Torah Neviem ve Ketuvim: Hebrew Old Testament* (London: the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 973
- 2 Billy Graham, *Storm Warning: with the Collapse of Communism the Nuclear Threat Has Diminished, But Ominous Shadows of Deceptive Evil Loom on the Horizon* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), p. 295
- 3 M. Qerinsqi, *Reshit Da'at: Sefat 'Eber* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 94,96
- 4 Robert Eisenmen and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: the First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Document Withheld for Over 35 Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 18
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 20
- 6 Syech al-Shaduq Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin 'Ali bin al-Husein bin Babuwaih al-Qummiy, *Ma'āniy al-Akhabār*, edited by Ali Akbar al-Ghifāriy (Qum: intisharat Islami, 1341), pp. 58-59
- 7 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 397-398
- 8 United Bible Societies, *Seferi ha-Berith ha-Hadashah: Targum Hadash* (Jerusalem: the Bible Society in Israel, 1976), pp. 25-26
- 9 R. Kilgour (ed.), *d'Ktaba Hdata d'Moran Yesu' Mshiha: Suryanice Incil ve Mezmurlar* (Istanbul: Bible Society in Turkey/ Sirkeci – Kitabi Mukaddes Şti, 1909), p. 43.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 22
- 11 See the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew 10: 1-5; cf. Muhammad Musadiq Marhaban, 'Imam Mahdi dalam Tinjauan Kristologi' in Ali al-Kurani, *Imam Mahdi: dari Proses Gerakan hingga Era Kebangkitan* (Jakarta: al-Misbah, 2004), p. 35
- 12 Mark Eastman and Chuck Smith, *The Search for Messiah* (Fountain Valley: Joy Publishing, 1996), p. 218
- 13 al-Tabary, 'the Ancient Kingdoms', trans. by Moshe Pearlman, vol. IV in *the History of al-Tabari*, pp.66-70. cf. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Muhammad at Mecca*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt, vol. VI in *the History of al-Tabari* (1988), pp. 37-42. cf. Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *the Life of Muhammad : a Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 4
- 14 Ibnu Kathīr al-Damsyiqī, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. VI (Lebanon: Dar Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994), p.187; Mohammad Reza Modarrese, *Syi'ah dalam Sunnah: Mencari Titik Temu yang Terabaikan*, trans. Salman Parisi (Jakarta: Citra), p. 20
- 15 A. Savyon and Y. Masharof, 'the Doctrine of Mahdism: in the Ideological and Political Philosophy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatullah Mesbah-e Yaddi, June 1st, 2007, source: Bright Future News Agency
- 16 Billy Graham, *Op. Cit.*, p. 295