

An ideal society – the Promise of the Mahdi

By Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir As-Sadr

To hope for the appearance and revolution of the Mahdi* is an inspiring Islamic social idea. Besides being a repose of trust in the future, it is an appropriate mirror in which the nature of the Islamic aspirations of mankind can be seen.

This prophecy comprises many elements, some of them philosophical, others cultural, political, economic or social and still others human or physio-human.

It is not possible in this short article to discuss the subject in detail nor to quote extensively from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, but, in order to make the nature of "The Big Expectation" clear, we propose briefly to throw some light on its salient features. They are as below:



Optimism about the Future of Humanity

There are divergent views about the future. There are some who believe that adversity, distress, disorder and mischief are the lot of humanity and on that account life has no value. In the eyes of such people the most judicious action would be to put an end to life.

Some others think that human life has already been thrown into disarray. They believe that, following the marvelous technological progress and the accumulation of huge stockpiles of the means of mass destruction, mankind has reached a stage where its final annihilation is Imminent.

The English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, says in his book, 'New Hopes' that there are people, including Einstein, who see the possibility of man having completed his span of life and think that with his wonderful scientific skill he may, in a few years, succeed in completely exterminating himself.

According to this theory there is a great possibility of the total extinction of the human race just when it is on the threshold of attaining maturity. If we rely on perceptible evidence only, such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

According to a third theory distress and disorder are not a part of human nature. Nor will the tragedy of collective suicide ever take place. In fact, a very happy and bright future awaits humanity. A great man will appear who will uproot all corruption and mischief. This is a religiously inspired theory and it is in this context that Islam gives the glad tidings of Mahdi's revolution. Its salient features will be:

- Final victory of righteousness, virtue, peace, justice, freedom and truth over the forces of egoism, subjugation, tyranny, deceit and fraud.
- Establishment of a world government (one government in the whole world).
- Reclamation and rehabilitation of the whole earth so that no area remains waste.
- Attainment of full sagacity by mankind, adherence to ideology and emancipation from animal impulses and undue social restrictions.
- Maximum utilization of the gifts of the earth.
- Equal distribution of wealth and property among all human beings.
- Complete eradication of all vices like adultery, fornication, usury, use of intoxicants, treachery, theft and homicide and total disappearance of abnormal complexes, malice and ill-will.
- Eradication of war and restoration of peace, friendship, cooperation and benevolence.
- Complete coherence between man and nature.

All these points require detailed discussion and analysis but here the idea is just to acquaint the readers with the nature of the Islamic tidings and aspirations.

Big expectations

It simply means hoping and aspiring for the materialization of the order (referred to above) which the Divine Will has destined for the world. Now let us turn back to the point that the expectation is of two kinds. One kind is constructive and dynamic which is an act of virtue and the other is destructive and paralysing which is a sort of licentiousness.

We have already mentioned that these two kinds of expectations are the outcome of two divergent notions of the great appearance of the promised Mahdi. These two notions have sprung from the two approaches to the nature of historical development. Now let us explain further the two kinds of expectations.

Destructive expectation

The concept which some people have of the rising of the Mahdi and the revolution which he will bring about is only of an explosive nature. These people believe that the appearance of the Mahdi depends solely upon the spread of injustice, discrimination, frustration and disasters. They are of the opinion that, immediately prior to the appearance of the Mahdi, the forces of evil will gain a complete hold and not a single good man will be left in the world. They look forward to an explosion, following which the divine forces will redeem the truth but not the supporters of truth, for they would not be existing.

On this basis they would condemn every reform and regard every sin, every excess and every injustice as valid and proper, because, according to their idea, corruption and tyranny bring the explosion nearer and pave the way for the eventual betterment of a permanent nature. They believe in the maxim that ends justify the means and as such unlawful means become lawful if the objective is desirable. That is how deadly sins besides giving pleasures are supposed to help in bringing about the final sacred-revolution. The following lines most appropriately apply to their case:

"Win the heart of your beloved even by deceit and treachery. Commit a sin if you are unable to perform a good deed."

Such people naturally dislike the reformers and all those who enjoin good and forbid evil, because they think that their action is delaying the appearance of the promised Mahdi. They, even if they do not commit the sins themselves, at least appreciate the reprehensible activities of the sinners who, according to them, are preparing the ground for the appearance of the Mahdi.

This sort of notion may be called semi-dialectic, because it regards corruption and distress as a prelude to the sacred explosion. The dialectic thinking also opposes partial reforms and allows the creation of unrest, but it has some merit, because it does so with a view to making the split wider and the fight hotter, whereas the supporters of this outrageous notion simply allow corruption and disorder and then do nothing except to sit back and hope for the desired result to follow automatically. It need not be added that this sort of notion of the appearance of the promised Mahdi is against the tenets of Islam and must be regarded as a sort of licentiousness.

Constructive expectation

All the verses of the holy Qur'an, which form the basis of the concept of the Mahdi and all the traditions cited in support thereof go against the above notion. What is inferred from the holy Qur'an is that the appearance of the Mahdi is a link in the series of fights between the righteous and the wicked and the Mahdi is the symbol of the final and complete victory of the righteous and the faithful. The holy Qur'an says:

Allah has promised the righteously striving believers to appoint them as His deputies on earth, as He had appointed those who lived before. He will make the religion that He has chosen for them to stand supreme. He will replace their fear with peace and security. They will worship their Lord without fear and will not submit to anyone other than Him and will associate nothing with His worship and obedience. (Surah al-Nur, 24:55)

The appearance of the Mahdi is Allah's favor for the oppressed and the weak and is a means of their coming to power and gaining the promised Divine succession in the whole world. The holy Qur'an says.

We have decided to grant favor to the suppressed ones by appointing them leaders and heirs of the earth. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:5)

The appearance of the Mahdi means the realization of the promise Allah made to the righteous in His sacred Book.

Verily We have written in the Psalms after the Torah had been revealed: My righteous servants shall inherit the earth. (Surah al Anbia, 21:105)

The well-known saying of the holy Prophet that Allah will fill the earth with justice after its having been filled with injustice and tyranny testifies to the fact that at the time of the appearance of the Mahdi there will exist two classes. One will consist of the oppressors and the other, howsoever small, of the oppressed who are subjected to injustice and tyranny.

Shaykh Saduq narrates on the authority of Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al Sadiq that the Mahdi would appear only when the virtuous would become the most virtuous and the wicked the most wicked. From this also it is evident that both the virtuous and the wicked will be in existence.

Islamic traditions make mention of a group of people who will come forward and join Imam Mahdi immediately on his appearance. From this again it is evident that the virtuous will not be completely wiped out and though their number may be insignificant, yet they will be best in the quality of faith and comparable to the companions of Imam Husayn ibn Ali.

According to Islamic traditions the rising of the Mahdi will be preceded by other risings of the virtuous. What has been mentioned as the Yamani's rising is an instance.

In some Islamic traditions a mention has been made of a government of the righteous people which will continue to exist till the rising of the Mahdi (May Allah hasten his solace) and, as we know, some Shi'ah *ulama*, who held good opinions about some of their contemporary Shi'ah governments, considered it probable that it would be those very governments which would last till the rising of the Mahdi.

It is gathered from the various Qur'anic verses and traditions taken together that rising of the promised Mahdi will be the last one of the chain of the battles which have taken place between truth and falsehood since the creation of the world.

The promised Mahdi* will realize the ideal of all the prophets, saints and fighters in the path of truth.

Source: <https://www.al-islam.org/the-awaited-saviour-muhammad-baqir-sadr-murtadha-mutahhari/ideal-society>

More: *For more about the "Mahdi" see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahdi>
"Who is Imam Mahdi? http://english.khamenei.ir/Opinions/Imam_mahdi
A taste of Iranian Islamic vision: <http://english.khamenei.ir/>