The Awaited Saviour

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir As-Sadr, Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari

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Author(s):

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir As-Sadr [3]
Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari [4]

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The return of the 12th Imam, Imam Mahdi (a), answering objections about him, and his revolution.

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

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

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

unification of the world is still a distant dream.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the meantime it is the duty of all the Muslims, especially the Shi'ah, to strive steadfastly for the creation of the proper atmosphere and the right climate for the establishment of a world order based on justice, virtue and piety. They should not only mould their individual lives according to the teachings and high ideals of Islam, but they should also bend their efforts to set up the Islamic order on the collective

and communal level. They should devote themselves to the service of the faith and be prepared to receive the Awaited Saviour. That is what was meant by the Imams when they exhorted the Muslims to keep on waiting for the Mahdi.

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

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

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

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

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

● *Musnad* – Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 A.H.)

● *Sahih Bukhari* – Muhammad b. Ism'ail Bukhari (d. 256 A.H.)

● *Sahih Muslim* –Muslim b. Hajjaj Nishapuri (d.261 A.H.)

● *Sunan Abi Dawud* – Sulayman b. Ash'ath Sijistani (d. 275 A.H.)

● *Sahih Tirmizi* –Muhammad b. Isa Tirmizi (d. 279A.H.)

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

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

a. He will bear the same nomenclature as the holy Prophet.

b. He will not be bearing allegiance to any tyrant.

c. He will fill the earth with justice and fair play after its having been filled with injustice and tyranny.

d. At the time of his advent he will be found leaning against the wall of the Ka'bah. He will call together his 313 supporters who will respond to his call and gather around him. Then he will lead the congregational prayers.

e. He will establish Islamic law in the whole world.

f. On his second advent Jesus will offer prayers behind him.

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

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

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

According to a tradition recorded in the celebrated books of the tradition, including the Sahih Bukhari and the Sahih Muslim, the Prophet is reported to have said:
"How about you, when Mary's son will descend into your midst, while your Imam will be from among you?".

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

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

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

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

During this period the people could refer their problems to him and receive his replies through his vicegerents. The minor occultation was followed by *al-Ghaybat al-Kubra,* the major occultation which still continues. During this period direct contact with him had been severed.
Anyhow, those who are aware of the historical conditions prevailing at the time of his occultation know well that the Abbasid rulers regarded the Mahdi as the biggest potential threat to themselves and their dynasty and were determined to remove him from their way. at any cost. Hence, to foil an attempt on his

life, it was advisable for him to go into occultation. Several sayings of the Imams expressly refer to this situation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shaykh Yusufali Nafsi

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

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

Publishers

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

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

(i) Al-Bayan fi Akhbar al-Sahib al-Zaman, Allamah Abu Abdillah b. Muhammad Yusuf al-Kanji al-Shafi'i.
(ii) Iqd al-Durar fi Akhbar al-Imam al-Muntazar, Shaykh Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Damishqi.
(iii) Mahdi Ale Rasul, Ah ibn Sultan Muhammad al-Harawi al-Hanafi.
(iv) Kitab al-Mahdi, Abu Daud.
(v) Alamat al-Mahdi, Jalaluddin Suyuti.
(vi) Manaqib al-Mahdi, Hafiz Abu Na'im al-Isfahani.
(vii) Al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi 'alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar, Ibn Hajar Haythami.
(viii) Al-Burhan fi 'alamat al-Mahdi Akhir al-Zaman, Mulla Ali al-Muttaqi.
(ix) Arba'in Hadith fi'l-Mahdi, Abul Ala' al-Hamadani.

The Mahdi is not only an embodiment of the Islamic belief but he is also the symbol of an aspiration cherished by mankind irrespective of its divergent religious doctrines. He is also the crystallization of an instructive inspiration through which all people, regardless of their religious affiliations, have learned to await a day when a heavenly mission, with all its implications, will achieve their final goal and the tiring march of humanity across history will culminate satisfactorily in peace and tranquillity.

This consciousness of the expected future has not been confined to those who believe in the supernatural phenomena but has also been reflected in the ideologies and cults which totally deny the existence of what is imperceptible. For example, dialectical materialism which interprets history on the basis of contradictions believes that a day will come when all contradictions will disappear and complete peace and tranquillity will prevail. Thus we find that this consciousness experienced throughout history is one of the widest and the commonest psychological experience of humanity.

The religion, when it endorses this common consciousness and stresses that in the long run this world will be filled with justice and equity after having been filled with injustice and oppression, gives it a factual value and converts it into a definite belief in the future course of humanity. This belief is not merely a source of consolation, but it is also a source of virtue and strength. It is a source of virtue because the

belief in the Mahdi means the total elimination of injustice and oppression prevailing in the world. It is a source of inexhaustible strength because it provides hope which enables man to resist frustration, howsoever, hopeless and dismal the circumstances may be.

The belief in the appointed day proves that it is possible for the forces of justice to face the world filled with injustice and oppression, to prevail upon the forces of injustice and to reconstruct the world order. After all prevalence of injustice, howsoever dominant and extensive it may become, is an abnormal state and must in the long run be eliminated. The prospect of its elimination after reaching its climax, infuses a great hope in every persecuted individual and every oppressed nation that it is still possible to change the state of affairs.

Although the concept of the Mahdi is more wide spread than the Muslim community, yet its detailed features, as determined by Islam, meet more fully all the aspirations attached to it since the dawn of history. They are in greater conformity with the feelings and sentiments of the oppressed and the persecuted of all times. It is Islam which has given a concrete shape to an abstract idea. It is no longer necessary to look forward to an unknown saviour who may come into the world at a distant future.

The saviour is already here and we simply have to look for the day when the circumstances are ripe for him to appear and begin his great mission. The Mahdi is no longer an idea. He is no longer a prophecy. We need not wait for his birth. He already exists actually and we only wait for the inauguration of his role. He is a specific entity living among us in his real human form and shares our hopes and disappointments and our joys and griefs. He witnesses all the acts of oppression and persecution which are perpetrated on the face of the earth and, somehow or another, he himself is affected by them. He is anxiously awaiting the moment when he will be able to extend his helping hand to everyone whom any wrong has been done and be able to eradicate injustice and oppression completely.

Although this Awaited Saviour is living among us, waiting for the appointed moment for his advent, yet he is ordained not to proclaim himself nor to disclose his identity.
It is evident that the concept of the Mahdi, with its Islamic features, shortens the gap between the oppressed and the expected saviour. It spans the bridge between them, howsoever long the period of waiting may be.

When we are asked to believe that the Mahdi is a particular person already living a normal life, we are also expected to believe that the idea of absolute eradication of every kind of injustice and oppression by the Mahdi has already been embodied in the person of the Awaited Saviour who will reappear while he will be, as the tradition says, 'owing no allegiance to any tyrant'. The belief in him means the belief in eradication of all evils in a concrete form.

The tradition urges the believers in the Mahdi to keep on waiting for him and to continue looking forward for solace. The idea is to establish a close spiritual and intuitive link between the believers, on the one hand, and the Mahdi and all that he stands for, on the other. It is not possible to establish such a link

without believing that the Mahdi has already been born and is a living and a contemporary personality.

Thus we find that the concept of the living Mahdi has given a new impetus to the idea of an expected saviour. It has made it a source of effective strength and consolation to every person suffering from deprivation and injustice, a person who rejects all forms of tyranny because he feels that his Leader, being a contemporary and a living personality and not a future idea, shares his sufferings and feels his misery.

Yet this concept, being beyond the imagination and comprehension of a number of people, has led them to adopt a negative attitude towards the very idea of the Mahdi.

Some of the objections raised by them are mentioned below:

(a) Longevity

They object to the Mahdi being a contemporary of so many successive generations during the past ten centuries and continuing to live until he reappears on the scene. How is it possible for him, they ask, to live such a long life without being affected by the natural laws, according to which everyone has to pass through the stages of old age and senility and eventually has to die at a time far earlier than the supposed present age of the Mahdi. Such a long life is impossible from a factual point of view.

(b) Suspension of laws

They also inquire as to why Allah is so keen to suspend natural laws for the sake of this particular person and to prolong his life so extraordinarily. Is humanity unable to produce any other competent leader? Why is it not possible that the role of filling the world with justice and equity be left to a leader who may be born on the eve of the appointed day and grow like other people?

(c) Lack of training

They also say that if it is true that the Mahdi is the name of a particular person who is the son of the eleventh Imam of the Prophet's House, who was born in 255 A.H. and whose father died in 260 A.H. and who at the time of his father's death was a child of not more than five years of age, then obviously this age was not sufficient for his having been trained religiously and intellectually by his father. They ask as to how then has he been prepared for his great role.

(d) His continued existence

They also say that even if it is presumed that the existence of the Mahdi is theoretically possible, how

can they believe in his actual existence in the absence of any scientific or religious proof? According to them, a few traditions of unknown authenticity attributed to the holy Prophet cannot be considered to be enough for such a belief.

(e) Delay in appearance

They also say that, if the leader is already prepared for the performance of his great role, then what is the necessity of waiting for hundreds of years. Could not the upheavals and the tragedies so far witnessed by the world justify his appearance on the scene?

(f) His superhuman role

With reference to the Mahdi's role they ask as to how it is possible for an individual, howsoever great he may be, to play such a decisive role in the world, when it is known that no individual by himself can make history nor can he give it an entirely new turn. It is the prevailing circumstances which produce and direct historical changes. The greatness of an individual lies only in his coming to the fore-front, in the given circumstances, and in effecting a practical change by selecting one of the multiple solutions.

(g) His modus operandi

They also ask what practical methods will be employed by that individual to bring about the colossal change and to ensure the final victory of the forces of justice over the mighty and dominating forces of oppression and injustice, which now have the most destructive weapons, scientific potentialities and political, social and military power at their disposal.

These are the questions which are frequently asked in this connection and repeated in one form or another. They are not always motivated merely by intellectual curiosity. There are psychological reasons also which stimulate them. There is a strong general feeling that there is little chance of overthrowing the present world system, which is too powerful and invincible.

This feeling produces scepticism and gives rise to queries. It leads to defeatism and an inferiority complex. One begins to shudder at the very idea of a world-wide change which may eliminate injustice and historical contradictions and usher in a new system based on justice and equity. This mental frustration impels one to doubt and reject every possibility of such a change by giving one reason or another.
We now propose to take up the above-mentioned queries, one by one, and deal with them briefly.

(a) Longevity

Is it possible for any human being to continue to live for many centuries, as is presumed in the case of this Awaited Saviour who has already lived for more than 1145 years? This long life is about 14 times the life of an ordinary man who passes through all stages of life from infancy to old age.

The impossibility of such a long life is the objection. Let us have a close look at the objection. The word impossibility here (like any other truth) is relative. It has meaning only in relation to some person, place and time.

What is impossible for one person need not be so for the others. Then what is impossible in one place may be quite possible in another place. Again what is not possible at one time may be quite possible at another. There is no dearth of illustrations to prove how impossibility is a relative term.

In other words, the possibility of a thing may be of three categories viz. factual possibility, scientific possibility and logical possibility. To journey across the ocean, to reach the bottom of the sea and to travel to the moon are practical possibilities. There are people who have accomplished these tasks in one way or another.

By a scientific possibility we mean that there may be certain things which may not be practicable in the present circumstances but there exists no scientific reason to justify the denial of their practicability in favourable circumstances and the scientific trends indicate that they will be feasible sooner or later. For example, there exists no scientific reason to deny the possibility of man's travelling to Venus. Although, it has not been possible for anyone to go to that planet so far, yet we know that there is only a difference of degree between man's landing on the moon and his landing on Venus.

It is only a question of surmounting additional difficulties because of the greater distance. Hence, it is scientifically possible to go to Venus, though practically it is still impossible. In contrast, it is scientifically impossible to go to the sun in the sense that science does not hope that it will ever be possible to manufacture a protective shield against the heat of the sun which is virtually a huge furnace blazing at the highest imaginable degree of temperature.

By a logical possibility we mean that, on the basis of self-evident laws, reason does not regard a thing impossible. For example, it is logically impossible to divide three oranges into two equal parts without cutting anyone of them. It is self-evident that, three being an odd number, it is not divisible into two whole numbers.

Only an even number can be so divided and the same number cannot be both odd and even simultaneously, because that will mean self-contradiction which is impossible. But a man's entering into fire without being hurt or going to the sun without being affected by its heat is not logically impossible, for it is not self-contradictory to suppose that heat does not pass. from a body having a higher temperature

to a body having a lower temperature. Only experience has proved that if two bodies are mixed or put together, heat passes from a body having higher temperature to a body having lower temperature, till the temperature of both the bodies is at par.

Thus, we know that the scope of the logical possibility is wider than that of the scientific possibility and the scope of the scientific possibility is wider than that of the practical possibility.

There is no doubt that a person's remaining alive for thousands of years is not logically impossible, for there is nothing irrational or self–contradictory about it. Life itself does not imply the sense of quick death.

Admittedly, such a long life is not as practical as descending to the bottom of the sea or ascending to the moon. Notwithstanding the present scientific facilities it has not so far been possible to prolong human life to hundreds of years. Even those who have all the modern facilities at their disposal and are the keenest to continue to live cannot have more than the normal span of life.

As for the scientific possibility there exists nothing to justify its denial from a theoretical point of view. In fact this question is related to the physiological explanation of senility. The question is, whether there exists a natural law according to which human tissues and cells, after attaining the stage of full development, automatically begin to stiffen and degenerate, till they cease functioning at a particular moment or the senile degeneration is caused by some external factors, such as microbes and poisons infiltrating into the body through polluted food, unhealthy jobs or some other causes.

It is a question with which science is grappling at present and is earnestly trying to find an answer to it. For the present there is more than one scientific explanation of senility. Anyhow, if we accept the view that senile degeneration is caused by external influences, it means that if the tissues of the human body are secluded from these particular influences it is theoretically possible to prolong life, to delay senility and even to control it eventually.

The other view tends to suppose that living cells and tissues are governed by a natural law according to which they carry within themselves the seeds of their complete exhaustion. They, in their natural course, pass through the stages of old age and senility and eventually cease to function.

Even if we accept this view it does not mean that this natural law is not flexible. In fact it is supposed to be a flexible law, for we see in our ordinary life, and it has been confirmed by scientific laboratory observations also, that senility is an untimely physiological phenomenon in the sense that sometimes it appears early and sometimes very late.

It is a common experience which has also been confirmed by the observations of the physicians, that many a man of advanced age still possess a supple body and do not suffer from any old age ailments. It is because of the flexibility of this natural law that the scientists have already succeeded in prolonging the life of certain animals, hundreds of times beyond their normal span of life by artificially creating

conditions conducive to the delay of senility.1

They have falsified the law of natural senility by acquiring brilliant successes and have made it clear scientifically that to postpone senility or to provide opportunities and specified factors therefore is possible and if present day science is not able to enforce this programme in the case of phenomena like human beings it is on account of the fact that more difficulties are involved in the matter with regard to man as compared with other animals.

In a nutshell, it is logically and scientifically possible to prolong life, though it is still practically impossible to do so. Anyhow, science is endeavouring to make it practical also.

If we consider the question of the Mahdi's age in this light there appears to be nothing strange or surprising about it, for it has been proved that such a long life is logically and scientifically possible and the scientists are working to turn its possibility into a reality. All that appears to be surprising is that the Mahdi has attained such a long life before the scientists have been able to turn its theoretical possibility into a practical one. This phenomenon can be compared to the discovery of a cure for cancer or brain haemorrhage before science can make such a discovery.

If the question is how Islam, which planned the age of the Awaited Saviour, could anticipate science in this field the answer is simple. This is not the only field wherein Islam has anticipated science. The Islamic *Shari'ah* as a whole anticipated the scientific movement and the natural development of human thinking by several centuries. Islam had already presented, for practical application, the laws which science has taken hundreds of years to discover.

It has propounded doctrines, the wisdom of which has been corroborated by science only recently. It disclosed such secrets of the universe which none could think of at that time and the truth of which was later confirmed by science. If we believe in this, then it is not too much for Allah, the Exalted, to anticipate science in planning the age of the Mahdi. We have talked of only those aspects of anticipation which we can see directly. We can add other instances about which Qur'an has told us.

Here we have talked of only those aspects of anticipation by Islam vis-à-vis science which we can observe directly. It is, however, possible for us to add some other instances of anticipation about matters which it has not been possible for science to comprehend so far. For example, Qur'an tells us that the holy Prophet was carried one night from Masjid al-Haram (at Mecca) to Masjid al-Aqsa (at Jerusalem).

If we try to perceive the quality of this journey within the framework of natural laws it points to the application of laws which govern nature in this sense that science has not yet been able to understand them and it will take it hundreds of years more to specify their quality. The same Divine Knowledge, which granted the holy Prophet this high speed long before science could consider it to be possible, also granted long life to his last Divinely appointed successor, long before it could be achieved by science.

(b) Suspension of laws

It is true, as far as common experience and the experiments carried out so far by the scientists are concerned, this long life granted by Allah to the Awaited Saviour appears to be very unusual. But his role of revolutionizing the world order and rebuilding the entire system on the basis of justice and truth is also so extraordinary that neither are the people familiar with it nor has it ever been experienced in history. So it should not be surprising if at the preparatory stage also his role is preceded by some unusual and extraordinary events, like his long life.

Howsoever, unfamiliar these events may be, they are not more unusual than the great role to be performed by the Mahdi on the appointed day. If we can relish that role, having no precedent throughout history, there is no reason why we should not relish his long life unprecedented in our ordinary life.

We wonder if it is a mere chance that each of the only two persons who undertook to purify the human civilization of all its impurities and to reconstruct the world should have had a very long life span, several times that of a usual one. One of them played his role in the past. He was Noah, about whom the holy Qur'an has expressly said that he lived among his people for 950 years. He reconstructed the world after the Deluge.

The other is to play his role in the future. He is the Mahdi who has already lived among his people for more than a thousand years and is destined to play his role on the appointed day and build the world anew.

How is it then that we accept the longevity of Noah who lived at least for about a thousand years and deny that of the Mahdi.

We have learnt that a long life is scientifically possible but let us suppose that it is not so and the law of senility is inexorable and cannot be defied either today or in future. Then what does this mean? It means only this that to live for centuries, as is the case with Noah and the Mahdi, is contrary to the natural laws established by science through modern methods of experimentation and investigation.

In this case a long life may be accepted as a miracle which suspends a natural law in particular circumstances to preserve the life of a particular person entrusted with a celestial mission. This miracle is not unique in its kind, nor is it alien to the Muslim belief derived from the text of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

The law of senility is not any the more relentless than the law of the exchange of heat, according to which heat passes from a body having a higher temperature to a body having a lower temperature. This law was suspended to protect Abraham when he was thrown into the burning fire, for this was the only way to preserve his life. The holy Qur'an says:

"We said: O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham". **(Surah al-Anbia', 21:69).**

Accordingly, he came out of the fire unscathed.

In many other cases also natural laws were suspended to protect the prophets and other Divinely appointed people.

The sea was parted for Moses. It appeared to the Romans that they had captured Jesus whereas they had not. Muhammad got out of his house while it was surrounded by a mob of the tribe of Quraish, waiting for an opportunity to assassinate him. Allah concealed him, so that the Quraishites could not see him when he walked out through their midst. In all these cases natural laws were suspended for the protection of the people whose lives the Divine Wisdom wanted to preserve. The law of senility too, can be bracketed with these cases of suspension.

From the above discussion we can arrive at a general conclusion and say: Whenever it is necessary to preserve the life of one of the chosen servants of Allah to enable him to accomplish his mission, the Divine Grace intervenes to protect him and one of the natural laws is suspended. On the contrary if the period of his appointment comes to an end and the task entrusted to him by the Almighty is accomplished he meets death in accordance with the natural laws related to life or is martyred.

In this connection we are usually confronted with the following questions.
How can a natural law be suspended and the compulsory relationship existing between the various phenomena be severed?

Will such a suspension not be in contradiction with science which has discovered that law determines the compulsory relationship on the basis of experimentation and investigations?

Science itself has provided an answer to this question. It has already given up the idea of compulsion in respect of natural laws. It only says that these laws are discovered on the basis of systematic observation and experiment. When it is observed that one phenomenon invariably follows another, this invariability is treated as a natural law.

But science does not claim that there exists a binding and compulsory relationship between any two phenomena, because compulsion is a factor which cannot be proved by experiment and scientific methods of investigation. Modern science confirms that a natural law as defined by it, speaks only of an invariable association between two phenomena and is not concerned with any compulsory relationship between them.2

Hence, if a miracle takes place and the natural relationship between two phenomena breaks down it does not amount to the breaking down of a compulsory relationship.

In fact, a miracle in its religious sense has become more comprehensive in the light of modern scientific theory than it was when the classical view of casual nexus prevailed. According to the old theory it was presumed that the phenomena invariably associated with each other must have an inevitable

relationship between them and this inevitability meant that their separation from each other was inconceivable. According to modern scientific thinking, however, this relationship has been transformed into a law of association or invariable succession.

Thus, a miracle need not come into clash with inevitability any longer. It is only on exceptional state of the invariability of association and succession.

We agree with the scientific view that modern scientific methods cannot prove the existence of an inevitable relationship between any two phenomena. Anyhow, we are of the view that there must still be some explanation of the invariability of association and succession. As it can be explained on the basis of the theory of intrinsic inevitability, it can also be explained if we assume that it is the Wisdom of the Organizer of the universe which requires a particular phenomenon to be invariably related to some other phenomenon and that in certain cases the same wisdom may require that there should be an exception. Such exceptional cases are called miracles.

Now let us take up the question as to why Allah is so keen to prolong the Mahdi's life that, even natural laws are suspended for his sake. Is it not advisable to leave the leadership of the appointed day to a person to be born in the future and brought up according to the needs of that time? In other words, what is the justification for this long occultation?

Most of the people who ask this question do not want an answer simply based on belief. It is not enough to say that we believe it to be so. What the interrogators really want is a social explanation of the position in the light of the tangible requirements of the great change expected to be brought about by the Mahdi.

Hence, we leave aside for the time being the qualifications we believe the infallible Imams to have possessed and take up instead the following question:
Is it likely, in the light of the past experience, that such a long life of the leader-designate will contribute to his success and will enable him to play his role better?

Our reply to this question is in the affirmative. Some of the reasons are given below:
The proposed great revolutionary change requires that its leader should possess a unique mental calibre. He should be conscious of his own superiority and the insignificance of the knotty system he has to overthrow. The more conscious he is of the insignificance of the corrupt society he has to fight against, the more prepared he will be psychologically to wage a war till victory is won.

It is evident that the size of his mental calibre should be proportionate to the size of the proposed change and the size of the social system required to be eliminated. The more extensive and deep-seated this system is, the greater should be the psychological push required.

The mission being to revolutionize the world, full of injustice and oppression, and to bring about a radical change in all its cultural values and diverse systems, it is but natural that it should be entrusted to a

person whose mental calibre is higher than that of anyone in the whole of the existing world and who may not have been born and brought up under the influence of the society required to be demolished and replaced by another culture of justice and righteousness. One brought up under the shadow of a deep-seated and world-dominating culture is naturally impressed and overawed by it, that being the only culture which he has seen and by which he has been influenced from a tender age.

But the case should be different with a person who has a long historical background, who has witnessed several great cultures successively grow and decline, who has seen the big historical changes with his own eyes and has not read about them in books, who has been a contemporary of all the stages of the development of that culture which happens to be the last chapter of the human history before the appointed day and who has seen all its ups and downs. Such a person, who himself has lived through all these stages very carefully and attentively, is competent to look at the culture he has to grapple with in its historical perspective and is not daunted by its magnitude. He does not regard it as an unalterable destiny. His attitude to it will not be like that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) to the French monarchy.

It is reported that Rousseau, in spite of being a great champion of political revolution from an intellectual and a philosophical point of view, shuddered at the very thought of there being a France without a king, the reason being that he was born and brought up and had always lived under the shadow of monarchy. But the man having a long historical background and being fully aware of the historical factors knows perfectly well how and when the prevailing culture and the prevailing system came into being and developed. He knows that the historical age of the cultures and systems, howsoever long, is very limited. Have you read the Surah al-Kahf (Chapter 18 of the holy Qur'an) and have you gone through the story of the youths who believed in Allah and were virtuous, but had to face an idolatrous system which was dominant at that time and which ruthlessly crushed every idea of Monotheism? They felt greatly distressed and lost all hope. In utter despair they took refuge in a cave, for they were at their wits' end and did not know what to do. They prayed to Allah to resolve their difficulty.

They thought that the then existing unjust system would continue to prevail for ever and would liquidate all those whose hearts throbbed for the truth. Do you know what Allah did? He sent them to sleep in the cave for 309 years. Then He awakened them and sent them back to the scene of life. By then the unjust regime, the power and tyranny which had dazzled them, had completely collapsed and become a part of past history.

This arrangement was made to enable those young men to see themselves the downfall of falsehood, the power and grandeur which had overawed them. The people of the cave achieved moral uplift and sublimation through this unique experience which extended their lives for three hundred years. The same privilege will be enjoyed by the Awaited Saviour through his long life which will enable him to see the giant dwindling into a dwarf, a lofty tree shrinking to become a mere seed leaf and a tornado turning into a mere whiff of the wind.

Furthermore, the experience gained through the direct and close study of so many successive cultures will widen the mental horizon of the person designated to lead the revolution and will prepare him better for the accomplishment of his mission. He will have benefited by the experience of others, knowing their strong and weak points, and will be in a better position to assess social developments correctly in their true historical context.

As the revolution to be brought about by the Awaited Saviour is to be ideological and based on the message of Islam, the very nature of his mission requires him to be close to the early Islamic sources and to have a personality built independently of and detached from the influences of the culture he is destined to fight. A person born and brought up under the shadow of a particular culture cannot in all probability, escape its effects totally, even if he leads a campaign against it. To ensure that the leader–designate is not himself influenced by the culture he is expected to change, his personality must be built fully at a cultural stage closer in its general spirit to the system he wants to establish.

(c) His training for the mission

Now we come to the third question as to how the preparation of the Awaited Saviour for his mission was completed, as he was only about five years old when his father, Imam Hasan al–Askari died. This age is the time of early childhood and the child is not old enough for the development of the personality of a leader. Then how did his personality develop?

The answer is that several of his forefathers also assumed the Imamate at an early age. Imam Muhammad ibn Ah al–Jawad assumed it when he was only eight years old and Imam Ali ibn Muhammad al–Hadi when he was only nine.

It should be observed that the phenomenon of the early Imamate reached its zenith in the case of the Imam Mahdi. We call it a phenomenon, because it assumed a tangible and practical form as in the case of Imam Mahdi's forefathers. It was felt and experienced by the Muslims coming into contact with the Imam concerned. Experience of the people being the best proof of a phenomenon, we cannot be asked to give a more tangible or a more convincing proof of it. The following points will elucidate what we mean:

(i) The Imamate of an Imam belonging to the Holy House was not a centre of hereditary power and influence, nor did it have the backing of any ruling regime, as was the case with the Imamate of the Fatimid caliphs and the caliphate of the Abbasid caliphs. The extensive popular support and allegiance which the Imams enjoyed was due only to their spiritual influence and the conviction of their followers that they alone deserved the leadership of Islam on spiritual and intellectual grounds.

(ii) The popular bases supporting the Imamate had existed since the early days of the Islamic era. They expanded further during the time of the Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq. The school set up by them assumed the form of an extensive intellectual movement which included among its ranks hundreds of

legists, scholastic theologians, exegetes and others learned in various fields of Islamic scholarship and the humanities known at that time. Hasan ibn Ali Washsha, when visiting the Masjid of Kufah, found there 900 scholars all repeating the traditions narrated to them by Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq.3

(iii) The qualifications which an Imam possessed, as believed in by this school and the popular bases represented by it, were very high. The Imam was judged by the standard of these qualifications to find out whether he was really fit to be an Imam. They believed that the Imam must be the most learned and wise man of his time.

(iv) The school and the popular bases had to make great sacrifices for the sake of their belief in the Imamate which the contemporary governments regarded as a hostile line, at least from the ideological angle. This attitude led the then authorities to the persecution of the followers of the Imams. Many people were killed. Many others were thrown into dungeons. Hundreds died while in detention. Their belief in the Imamate of the Prophet's House used to cost them dear. The only attraction was their conviction of gaining the favour of Allah.

(v) The Imams, whose Imamate these popular bases acknowledged, were not living like the kings in high towers isolated from their followers. They never segregated themselves, except when imprisoned, exiled or forcibly kept aloof by the ruling juntas. This we know for certain on the authority of a large number of reporters who have narrated the sayings 'and deeds of each of the first eleven Imams. Similarly, we have a record of the correspondence exchanged between the Imams and their contemporaries.

The Imams used to make journeys to various places and appointed their deputies in different parts of the Muslim world. Their supporters also, while visiting the holy places during Hajj, made it a point to call on them at Madina. All this meant a continuous contact between the Imams and their followers scattered all over the Muslim world.

(vi) The contemporary caliphs always regarded the Imams and their spiritual leadership as a threat to themselves and their dynasty. For this reason, they did all they could to disrupt this leadership and in pursuance of their nefarious ends, they resorted to many mean and arbitrary actions. Occasionally their behaviour was too harsh and despotic. The Imams themselves were continuously chased and kept in detention. Such actions were painful and disgusting to all the Muslims, especially to the supporters of the Imams.

These six points comprise historical facts. If we take them into consideration, we can easily come to the conclusion that the early Imamate was a real fact and not a fiction. It is certain that an Imam who appeared on the scene at a very early age, who proclaimed himself to be the spiritual and intellectual leader of the Muslims and who was acknowledged to be so by a vast cross-section of the people must have had great knowledge, competence and mastery over all branches of theology. Otherwise, the popular bases could not be convinced of his Imamate.

We have already said that these bases had continuous contact with the Imams and were in a position to judge their personalities. It is not conceivable that so many people should have accepted a boy to be their Imam and should have made sacrifices for his sake without ascertaining his real worth and assessing his competence. Even if it is presumed that the people made no immediate efforts to ascertain the position, still the truth could not remain unknown for years in spite of the continuous contact between the child Imam and the people. Had he been childish in his knowledge and thinking, he would certainly have been exposed.

Even if it is supposed that the popular bases of the Imamate could not discover the truth, it was easy for the government of the day to expose the child, if he had been really childish in his thinking and cultural attainments like all other children. It certainly would have been in the interest of the government of the day to bring him before his supporters and others to prove that he was not fit to be an Imam and a spiritual and intellectual leader.

It might have been difficult to prove the incompetence of a man of 40 to 50, but it would have been quite easy to prove the incompetence of an ordinary child, howsoever intelligent he might have been. Evidently this would have been much simpler and easier than the complex and risky policy of suppression adopted by those in power at that time. The only explanation for why the government kept quiet and did not play this card is that it had realized that the early Imamate was a real phenomenon and not a concoction.

The fact is that the government did attempt to play that card but did not succeed. History tells us of such attempts and their failures, but it does not report any occasion on which the child Imam vacillated or showed signs of such embarrassment as could shake the confidence of the people believing in his early Imamate.

That is what we meant when we said that the early Imamate was really a phenomenon and not a mere presumption. This phenomenon has deep roots, for there exist parallel cases throughout the history of the heavenly mission and Divine leadership. We cite just one instance.

We commanded John; Zachariah's son, to follow the guidance of the Lord with due steadfastness. To John We gave knowledge and wisdom during his childhood', (**Surah Maryam, 19. 12**)

After it has been proved that the early Imamate had been a real phenomenon already existing in the life of the people of the Prophet's House, no exception can be taken to the Imamate of the Mahdi and his succession to his father while he was still a child.

(d) Reasons for his continued existence

Now we come to the fourth question. Even if it is presumed that theoretically the existence of the Mahdi,

with all its implication including the long life, the early Imamate and the complete occultation is possible, how can we believe that he actually exists, for a mere possibility is not enough to prove that. As the concept of the Mahdi is unusual and extraordinary, the existence of a few sayings of the holy Prophet, which are enshrined in the books, is not enough to prove that the existence of the Mahdi is a historical fact and not a mere presumption which has seized the imagination of a large number of people for certain psychological reasons.

The answer to this question is this that the concept of the Mahdi as the Awaited Saviour who is to change the world for the better has been mentioned in the traditions of the holy Prophet generally and in the sayings of the Imams particularly. It has been emphasized in so many passages that there is no reason to doubt it. The number of the reports on this subject found in the books of our Sunni brethren comes to 400,4 and the total number of the reports found in both the Shi'ah and the Sunni sources comes to more than 6,000.5 This is a colossal figure, unparalleled in the case of most of those Islamic issues which are not usually doubted by any Muslim.

As for the embodiment of this concept in the person of the twelfth Imam, there exists enough justification to believe that. This justification can be summarized in two arguments, one being Islamic and the other scientific.

By the Islamic argument we prove the existence of the Awaited Saviour and by the scientific argument we prove that the Mahdi is not a mere myth but his existence is a fact proved by historical experience.

As for the Islamic argument, it is represented by hundreds of traditions which have come down from the holy Prophet and the Imams of his House. They specify that the Mahdi will belong to the Prophet's House, will be descended from his daughter Fatimah–tuz–Zehra and will be the descendant of Imam Husayn in the ninth generation.

The traditions also say that the total number of the caliphs will be twelve. Thus, the traditions give a specific shape to the general idea of the Mahdi and determine that he is none other than the twelfth Imam of the Prophet's House. The number of these traditions is very large in spite of the fact that the Imams were very reserved on this subject, for fear of an attempt on the life of the Mahdi.

It is not only because of their number that we have to accept these traditions, but there are also other indications of their authenticity. According to the different versions of a tradition of the holy Prophet, he has to be succeeded by twelve caliphs, by twelve Imams, or by twelve commanders.

The total number of reports about this saying as counted by some writers exceeds 270 and they are found in the most celebrated Shi'ah and Sunni books, such as Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sahih Tirmizy, Sunan Abu Dawud, Ahmad's Musnad and Hakim's Mustadrak. It may be noted that Bukhari, who has quoted this tradition, was a contemporary of Imam Muhammad bin Ali al–Jawad, Imam Ali bin Muhammad al–Hadi and Imam Hasan al–Askari.

This fact has great significance, for it proves that the tradition was recorded before its contents could materialize. Hence, it cannot be suspected that it is a possible reflection on the actual number of the Imam, as believed by the Twelver Shi 'ah to reinforce their belief in the twelve Imams. This is because the spurious sayings attributed to the holy Prophet refer to the events which take place earlier and the saying comes afterwards. Such sayings do not precede the events nor are they recorded in the books of tradition earlier.

So long as we possess material evidence of the fact that the tradition was recorded before the number of the Imams was actually completed we can safely say that it is not a reflection on an accomplished fact. It is only an expression of a divine truth, expressed by him who never spoke whimsically, and a prophecy which was subsequently fulfilled by the actual number of the Imams beginning with Imam Ali and ending with Imam Mahdi.

As for the scientific argument, we have to state that it consists of the experience of a large number of people for a period covering about seventy years. This period is known as that of minor occultation. To elucidate the point we propose to explain minor occultation briefly.

The minor occultation represents the first stage of the Imamate of the Awaited Saviour who was destined to keep himself physically absent from the public scene, from the very inception of his Imamate, though he still continues to take an intelligent interest in what happens around him. Had this occultation come suddenly it would have been a great shock to his supporters, for they had been accustomed to be always in contact with the Imam and to consult him on their divergent problems.

His sudden disappearance would have caused a big vacuum which might have absorbed and even destroyed the whole organisation, for his supporters would have felt that they had been cut off from their spiritual and intellectual leadership. In order to familiarize them with the idea of occultation and to. enable them to adapt themselves to the new situation it was felt necessary that a preparatory stage should precede the final occultation.

This stage was that of minor occultation during which the Imam disappeared from the public scene, but maintained his contact with his followers through certain representatives who formed a connecting link between him and those who believed in his role as an Imam. During this period four persons, whose piety and impeccability was recognized by all, occupied the position of the vicegerents of the Imam. They are as under:

1. Uthman ibn Sa'id al–'Amravi

2. Muhammad ibn Uthman 'Amravi

3. Abu'l Qasim Husayn ibn Ruh Nawbakhti

4. Abu'l Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad al–Simmari

These four persons performed the duties of his vicegerent in the above order. As and when one of them died, another was duly appointed by the Mahdi to succeed him.

The vicegerent was in contact with: the Shi'ah. He carried their questions to the Imam and submitted their problems to him. He also conveyed the Imam's replies to his followers. The replies used to be mostly in writing and were occasionally verbal. The people who missed the sight of the Imam, found consolation in correspondence and indirect contact. All the letters received from the Imam during the tenure of his four vicegerents, which lasted for about seventy years, Were in the same hand-writing and in the same style and bore the same signature.

Al-Simmari was the last vicegerent. He announced the end of the stage of the minor occultation, the distinctive feature of which was the appointment of the particular vicegerent. It was turned into the major occultation after its object had been achieved and the Shi 'ah had gradually adapted themselves to the absence of the Imam.

They had been immunized against the shock and the vacuum. Following the major occultation, instead of being represented by a specially appointed vicegerent, the Imam is now represented in a general way by the qualified *mujtahids* (eminent legists, capable of arriving at an independent decision on issues of religious law) having a keen insight into both the spiritual and temporal affairs. Now, in the light of the foregoing, it can easily be inferred that the existence of the Mahdi is a. fact which was experienced by a larger number of the people.

He was represented by his vicegerents for seventy long years during. which they dealt with so many people but no one observed any inconsistency in what they said, nor discovered any signs of deception in their conduct. Is it conceivable that a fraud could be continued for seventy years by four persons, one after the other, without giving rise to the least suspicion? These four persons had no special link with each other and no collusion between them could be suspected. Their conduct was above reproach. They gained the confidence of all and everyone believed in the genuineness of their claim and the reality of their experience.

An old proverb says that truth will always come but. Events of practical life also prove that a fraud has no chance to last for such a long time in such a way. It is not possible to deal with so many people fraudulently and at the same time to gain their confidence.

Thus we know that the minor occultation is tantamount to a scientific experiment to prove the facts about the Awaited Saviour including his birth, life and occultation and the general proclamation of his major occultation, according to which be retired from the scene of life and does not now disclose his identity to anyone.

(e) Reasons for his delay in appearance

Why did the Saviour not appear during all this period when he had already prepared himself for the intended task? What prevented him from reappearing on the scene of life during the period of the minor occultation or immediately thereafter, instead of converting it into the major occultation? At the time it was simpler and easier to bring about the required change.

He had a good opportunity at that time to mobilize his forces and to start his work forcefully because he already had contact with the people through the organization which existed during the period of the minor occultation. Moreover, at that time the ruling powers were not so powerful as they subsequently. became as a result of the scientific and industrial development.
The successful execution of a revolutionary order depends on certain pre-requisites and on the existence of a particular atmosphere. Unless these conditions are fulfilled and that atmosphere is created, it cannot achieve its object.

As regards the Divinely ordained shape of things it has two aspects. As far as its missionary aspect is concerned it, being Divinely ordained, does not depend on any congenial atmosphere, but, as far as its operational side is concerned, its timing and success is linked with the conducive circumstances.

The same was the reason why the pre-Islamic period of five centuries had to elapse before the Last Divine Message came to Prophet Muhammad, though the world had been in dire need of it since a far earlier time. It was delayed only because its successful completion was linked with certain suitable circumstances.

The conducive circumstances, which affect the accomplishment of the change, include those which create a suitable atmosphere for it and those which determine the right moment for the beginning of the operation. For example, the revolution which was successfully led by Lenin in Russia was linked with certain factors, such as the out-break of the First World War and the decline of the Czarist regime. In addition, there were some minor factors also. For instance, Lenin's safe journey during which he secretly slipped into Russia. If he had met with some accident which might have impeded his entry into that country at that time, the revolution would possibly have been delayed.

It has been the unalterable practice, decreed by Allah, that the actual implementing of a Divine revolution is linked up with such objective circumstances as create the right climate and general atmosphere for its success. That is why there was a long gap of a several hundred of years before the appearance of Islam during which period no prophet was raised.

No doubt Allah is All-powerful. He can miraculously remove in advance all difficulties and obstacles impeding a Divine Mission. But He does not do so, because the tests, trials and tribulations through which man gains perfection require that a Divine revolution should come about in a natural and normal manner. This does not mean that occasionally Allah does not intervene in arranging certain details not

related to the creation of the right atmosphere but which tend to give an impetus to the revolution. The Divine help rendered by Allah to his friends at critical junctures for the purpose of protecting their mission was of this nature.

The fire set alight by Nimrud did no harm to Abraham; the hand of the treacherous Jew who had drawn his sword to kill Muhammad was paralysed and, a strong wind hit the camp of the infidels who had besieged Madina during the Battle of the Ditch and demoralized them. In all these cases help was rendered at a critical juncture, but only after the right atmosphere for the desired change had already been created in a natural manner.

On this basis, when we study the position of the Imam Mahdi, we find that the revolutionary task which has been entrusted to him like any other process of a social change is linked with certain circumstances which will provide the right climate for its success. Hence, it is natural that is should be timed accordingly. It is known that the great task, for which Imam Mahdi has prepared himself, is not of a limited nature nor is it confined to any particular region.

His mission in fact is to revolutionize the world order in its entirety. It is to rescue mankind from the darkness of vice and to usher in an era of light and guidance. For such a gigantic revolution the mere existence of a task and a leader is not enough, otherwise it would have been accomplished during the period of the holy Prophet himself. Such a revolution requires specific climate and a general atmosphere conducive to the fulfilment of all the prerequisites.

From man's viewpoint the frustration and disillusionment of a man of culture may be considered to be the basic factor in creating the right climate. This feeling stems from the failure of diverse cultural experiments. Only then does a man of culture feel that he is in need of help and turns to the unknown. From the material angle the modern conditions of life may be regarded as more suitable for the fulfilment of a mission on world level than the conditions which prevailed at the time of occultation, for now the distances have been shortened, the chances of contact between various people of the world have been improved and better facilities for a central organisation to enlighten mankind on the basis of the new message have become available.

It is true, as pointed out in the question, that the military power and the war equipment which the Awaited Leader would have to face have enormously grown, but it is to be remembered that material power is of no consequence when man is moralized and is determined to fight against injustice.

Many a lofty civilization in history has collapsed at the first touch of an invader, because it was already dilapidated and lacked the power of resistance.

(f) His superhuman role

Now we come to another question of the above-mentioned series. The question is whether a single

individual, howsoever great he may be, can accomplish such a great task, when it is known that a great man is only he whom the circumstances bring forward to be in the forefront of the events.

This question is based on a particular viewpoint about history which explains historical developments on the basis that man is only a secondary factor, whereas the main factor consists of the forces which work around him. Man at the most can be described as an intelligent interpreter of the inter–play of these forces.

It is evident that history has two poles, one of them being man and the other the material forces around him. Just as the material forces influence man like the conditions of production similarly man also influences the material forces around him. There is no justification for supposing that action always begins with matter and ends at man. The opposite can also be as true. In history, man and matter have always been interacting. If the interacting force of man is celestial then his role in life will also assume the celestial hue. Then it is the Divine force which directs the course of history.

This is a fact which is abundantly proved by the history of the mission of the Prophets and especially by the life history of the last Divine Messenger, for Muhammad (P) assumed the control of the course of history and created a culture which could not be created by the external circumstances around him.6 Hence, what was possible to be accomplished by the greatest of the Prophets can also be accomplished at the hands of the Awaited Saviour of his Family – The Leader whose appearance has been predicted by the holy Prophet and about whose great role he has already informed mankind.

(g) His modus operandi

Now we come to the last question which is about the method which the Mahdi is likely to adopt to achieve his objective of the final victory of justice and of the complete eradication of injustice.

A definite answer to this question depends not only on the knowledge of the timing and the stage at which the Mahdi will reappear but also on the possibility of imagining what particular circumstances will be prevailing at that time. It is only in the light of these circumstances that a picture of his possible strategy can be drawn. So long as we do not know at what stage the Mahdi will reappear and what will be the prevailing circumstances at that time, it is not possible to make any prediction on scientific lines. Any presumptions made in this connection will be based mostly on fiction and not on facts. Anyhow, there is one basic presumption which can be accepted in the light of the traditions and the historical experience of the great changes.

This much can in any case be predicted safely that the Awaited Saviour – will appear when the stage for his appearance is set, neither earlier nor later. Let us be clear as to the meaning – of this stage for his appearance. This stage means the conditions prevailing in the world and in the human society. It means the decline in man's moral life, when oppression and tyranny will be rampant and when mankind will have fallen into the abyss of crime and immorality.

In addition, this stage for his appearance means that the conditions then prevailing would create the necessary psychological atmosphere for the reception of a saviour. Mankind would be dead tired and fed up with the shape of things and would quite naturally look forward to a saviour for its liberation. This will happen when wickedness will reach its climax. There will be a great upheaval, a great conflagration, that will send this universe to its doom. In the darkness that will then prevail, there will dawn a new Sun in the form of the Mahdi, spreading light and lustre. Having liberated mankind from its misery and curse, the Mahdi will then bring about a transformation of life in which justice, peace, virtue and righteousness will abound. Thus will the Awaited Imam accomplish his mission.

Certain Islamic traditions speak of a government of the virtuous which is to continue until the appearance of the Mahdi (May Allah hasten his advent) and, as we know, some Shi'ah scholars who held a high opinion about a certain number of their contemporary rulers have hinted at the possibility of the continuance of their dynasties until the appearance of the Mahdi.

On the whole, it is derived from the Qur'anic verses and the Islamic traditions that the rising of the Mahdi will be the last in the series of fights between the good and the evil which have continued from the very inception of the world. It will be the Mahdi who will give a concrete shape to the ideal of all the Prophets, the saints and the fighters in the way of Allah.

During the period of the occultation it is our duty to be expecting the Awaited Imam. We must devise a sound and judicious system of social development based on the holy Qur'an and present it to the world. We must prove the excellence and efficacy of Divine laws to the people and attract their attention to the Divine system we must fight superstitions and false beliefs and pave the way for the establishment of Islamic world government. In the light of the teachings of the holy Qur'an and traditions of the holy Prophet we must chalk out a programme for solving the world problems and put it at the disposal of world reformers. We must enlighten the thoughts of the people of the world and at the same time, prepare ourselves to receive the Awaited Imam and the emergence of a just world government.

1. For thousands of years man has been aspiring to delay death which is a predestined phenomenon. During the past centuries the efforts of the alchemists to find out an elixir of life ended in fiasco.
At the end of the nineteenth century scientific advancement revived the hope for a long life and it is possible that in the near future this sweet dream may turn into a reality. In this connection the scientists have resorted in the first instance to experiments on the animals.
For example, McKee, a distinguished expert of the Cornell University and Alex Komfort of London University have conducted experiments about the connection between food and senility. Alex Komfort was able, in the course of his experiments, to increase the age of a group of mice by fifty per cent. The results of the studies spread over four years conducted by Richard Rothschild, another American expert, regarding increase in the life of mice by the use of Methyl aminoethynol were published in the spring of 1972.
This scientist and his associate Akeep arrived at the conclusion that the use of Methyl aminoethynol during the period of the experiment increased the life of the mice between 6 to 49 per cent. The experiment conducted on the mosquitoes increased their life upto 300 per cent.
2. It is not possible to ascertain directly that one phenomenon is the cause of the appearance of another phenomenon (like the rising of the sun being the cause of the earth becoming hot). We understand only this that one phenomenon (rising of the sun) is continually followed by another viz. the surface of the earth becoming hot.

It has also been observed that some events always taking place in succession to others is not limited to a special relationship of the phenomena but is a special feature of nature. However, neither the relationship of one single cause with its effect nor the generality of this relationship throughout nature is visible automatically and does not form an essential part of our thinking. (David Hume).

3. The number of Imam Sadiq's pupils has been reported upto four thousand, some of the well-known among them are: Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man b. Thabit, Abu Basir Yahya b. al-Qasim, Aban b. Taghlab, Ali b. Yaqteen, Abu Ja'far alias Mu'min al-Taq, Hisham b. Hakam, Harith b. Mughira, Hatim b. Isma'il, Jabir b. Hayyan, Malik b. Anas, Mufazzal b. Umar al-Kufi, (For details see: Al-Imam al-Sadiq wa'l mazahibul arba'ah, Asad Haydar, (Darul Kitab al-Arabia Beirut).

4. Al-Mahdi by Ayatullah Sayyid Sadruddin Sadr.

5. Muntakhab al-Athr fi Imam al-Thani 'Ashr by Lutfullah Safi.

6. Al-Fatawa al-Waziha 'by Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.

The idea of the final victory of the forces of righteousness, peace and justice over those of evil, oppression and tyranny, of the world-wide spread of the Islamic faith, the complete and all-round establishment of high human values, the formation of a utopian and an ideal society and lastly the accomplishment of this ideal at the hands of a holy and eminent personality called, according to the Islamic traditions, Mahdi is a belief which, of course with variations in details, is shared by all the Muslim sects and schools of thought.

Basically this is a Qur'anic concept and it is the holy Qur'an which in very clear terms, predicts:

1. The final victory of Islam.

It is He who has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over every other religion. However much the disbelievers may dislike it. **(Surah al-Tawbah, 9:33 and Surah As-Saff, 61:9)**

2. The absolute supremacy of the good and the pious.

Indeed We have written in the Psalms after the Torah had been revealed: The righteous among My slaves shall inherit the earth**". (Surah al-Anbia. 21:105)**

3. The final collapse of the oppressors and the tyrants.

We willed to show favour to those who were persecuted in the earth and to make them leaders and masters. It was also Our will to give them power in the earth and to show Pharaoh, Haman and their hosts to experience from their victims what they feared most. **(Surah al-Qasas, 28:5-6)**

4. A bright and happy future for humanity.

Moses told his people to seek help from Allah and exercise patience. The earth belongs to Him and He has made it the heritage of whichever of His servants He chooses. The Final Victory is for the pious. **(Surah al-A'raf 7:128)**

This idea is not an outcome of any wishful thinking, but it emanates from the total working of the system of nature, the evolutionary process of history, man's confidence in the future and the total rejection by him of pessimism about the destiny of mankind, which is extraordinarily bleak, according to certain theories.

Aspiring for the realization of this human ideal has, in the Islamic traditions, been termed as 'Expectation of Solace'. Its underlying idea is substantiated by the Islamic and Qur'anic principle of the prohibition of despair of Allah's Mercy.

Those who believe in Allah's universal Kindness can never lose hope, whatever be the circumstances, and can never submit to despair and despondency. Anyhow, it must be borne in mind that the principles of the expectation of solace and non-despair of Allah's Mercy have no personal or group application. They simply refer to Allah's general Benevolence and Kindness to the entire man kind. As for the exact nature of solace, it is determined by certain other Islamic traditions and prophecies.

Expectation of solace or cherishing of a hope for the future is of two kinds. One is constructive and dynamic. It is an act of virtue. The other is destructive and paralysing. It is a sin and should be taken as a sort of licentiousness.

These two kinds of expectations are the direct result of the two divergent notions of the appearance of the promised Mahdi which in turn have emanated from two different approaches to historical changes and revolutions. Hence, it would not be out of place here to refer briefly to the subject of historical changes.

Let us examine whether the historical developments are a chain of accidental occurrences or a sequence of natural events. In nature there is nothing really accidental.

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Expectation of solace or cherishing of a hope for the future is of two kinds. One is constructive and dynamic. It is an act of virtue. The other is destructive and paralysing. It is a sin and should be taken as a sort of licentiousness.

In other words, no phenomenon can come into existence casually and without a case, though, relatively speaking, there are incidents which may be regarded as taking place accidentally and just by chance.

If, one morning, you leave your house and run into a friend whom you had not seen for years and who is passing by your house at that particular moment, such a meeting will be considered accidental. Why? Because there exists no natural law that you leaving your house will essentially be followed by such a meeting or else such a meeting would have taken place everyday. How ever, it is also true that such a

meeting is an essential consequence of this particular departure at a particular moment in specific circumstances.

When we see that no binding and invariable sequence exists between a cause and its effect we call the resulting event an accident. Accidental occurrences are not governed by any universal or general rule, nor do they come within the purview of any scientific law, for a scientific law is concerned only with an invariable sequence between specific conditions and a specific phenomenon.

One may say that the historical developments are nothing more than a series of accidental occurrences, not governed by any universal or general rule. To support his view, he may argue that a society is a mere collection of individuals. Everyone of them has his own personal traits and individual character. Personal whims and individual motives produce a set of incidents, which lead to a series of accidental occurrences and it is these happenings which constitute a historical development.

But that is not the real story. According to another point of view a society has its own personality, independent of the individuals, and it acts as demanded by its own nature. The personality of the society is not identical with that of the individuals. It comes into being through the combination of individuals and their cultural actions and reactions.

Thus, the society has its own nature, its own character and its own rules. It acts according to its own genius and its actions and reactions can be explained through a set of universal and general laws.

We have to admit that a society has its own independent personality, because only then can we say that history has a philosophy and is governed by norms And rules. It is only then that history can be a subject worthy of deep study and a source for learning lessons.

On the contrary, if it is assumed that history has no personality then only the life of the individuals can be studied and not the collective life of nations and peoples. In that case the scope of taking lessons and drawing morals will also become limited to the individual's life. As mentioned above, there are two contrary notions of history and historical developments, which, in fact, revolve around the main question whether a society has a personality or not.

The Qur'an and history

The expectation of solace, which forms the subject of the present study, is a question which is philosophical and social as well as religious and Islamic. As mentioned earlier, it has a Qur'anic basis. Hence, before an attempt is made to describe the nature of this expectation, it will be in the fitness of things to throw some light on the Qur'anic view regarding society and the ever–changing course of its life i.e. history.

It is undeniable that the holy Qur'an looks at history as a lesson, a precept, a source of knowledge and a subject worth contemplation and deep thinking. Now the big question is whether the Qur'an looks at

history from an individual angle or a collective one; whether it puts forth only the life of the individuals for persuading others to emulate the example of the good and to abstain from the ways of the wicked, or it has an eye only on the collective life, or at least on the collective life too. In the latter case, is it possible to infer from the Qur'an that the society, as distinct from the individuals, has a personality, a life and even consciousness and feelings? Similarly, is it possible to deduce that groups and nations are governed by definite rules which are equally applicable to all of them?

Due to lack of space it is not possible here to discuss these questions in detail, but it may be stated briefly that the answer to all three questions is in the affirmative.1

The holy Qur'an, while relating the stories of the past for the purpose of reflection and instruction, puts forth the life of the past nations as an admonishing material for the benefit of other people:

That nation is gone. They have reaped what they sowed, and the same applies to you. You are not responsible for their deeds. You are responsible for your deeds only". **(Surah al-Baqarah 2:134-141)**

The holy Qur'an repeatedly refers to the subject of the existence of the nations and their duration. For example,

Every nation can only live for an appointed time. When its term ends, it will not remain **(*alive*)** ***even for a single hour, nor will they die before the appointed time.*** **(Surah al A'raf 7:34 and Surah al-Nahl 16:61)**

It emphatically refutes the idea that destiny can in any way be affected by the blind forces of fate. It clearly states that the destiny of nations is subject to and governed only by the firm and consistent laws of nature. It says

Are they waiting for the punishment which has been the lot of the earlier people. You will not find any change in Allah's way **(*of dealing with such people*).** **(Surah al Fatir 35:43)**

It also draws attention to a point which is of vital importance. It points out that the people, by looking at their deeds and behaviour, can find out for themselves whether a good or a bad destiny awaits them, for the forces which determine the destiny are just a sequence of reactions set in motion by their own deeds. In other words, particular acts are always and invariably followed by particular reactions.

Thus, though the course of history is ordained by the Divine Will, the role of man as a free agent is not eliminated. There are many passages in the Qur'an which refer to this subject. We quote just one verse here.

Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people unless and until they change their own conduct, behaviour, customs and manners. **(Surah al-R'ad 13:11).**

1. See Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Tafsir al-Mizan (vol. 4, p. 102 – vol. 7, p. 333 – vol. 8, p. 85 – vol. 10, pp. 71 to 73 and vol. 18, p. 191)

If it is admitted that a society has its own nature, character and a living, growing and developing personality then the next question is, how is its evolution to be interpreted i.e. how does it strive for a state of perfection?

We have already seen how the holy Qur'an lays stress on the genuineness of society's personality and its evolutionary progress. We also know that there have been, and still are, other schools holding a similar view. Now we must find out how, from the viewpoint of the holy Qur'an and from these other schools of thought, history develops. What are the responsibilities of man in this respect and what part is he supposed to play? What form should "The Great Expectation" assume is another closely related subject which must be explored simultaneously.

Historical evolution is interpreted in two different ways. One method is known as the materialistic or dialectic and the other is called human or natural. In other words, in respect of historical evolution there exist two different approaches and two different ways of thinking.
According to each of them the great expectation assumes a different form and a distinctive nature. We propose to explain these two ways of thinking, but only to the extent that they are related to the question of the expectation and hope for the future.

Dialectic Approach

Some people interpret history from the angle of transformation of one contradictory into another. Not only history but the evolution of the entire nature is also interpreted by them on this basis. Hence, before explaining the materialistic interpretation of history, we propose to explain briefly the dialectic interpretation of nature, which is the basis of the materialistic interpretation of history.

Firstly, according to this doctrine, everything in nature is constantly moving and striving to reach the next stage. Nothing is static or motionless. Therefore, the correct approach to nature is to study things and phenomena while they are moving and changing and to realise that even our thinking, being a part of nature, is constantly undergoing a change.

Secondly, every part of nature is influenced by other parts and in turn influences them. The whole universe is bound by a chain of actions and reactions. Nevertheless, a complete harmony exists among all parts of nature. Hence, the correct approach is to study everything in nature as it is related to other things and not in isolation.

Thirdly, motion originates from contradiction. It is contradiction which is the basis of every motion and change. As the Greek philosopher, Heracleitus, said 2,500 years ago, struggle is the mother of all

progress. Contradiction in nature means that everything is inclined to its opposite and it nurtures its antithesis within itself. Along with everything that exists, factors which tend to destroy it, also set off factors those which tend to preserve the existing state and those which tend to transform it into its antithesis.

Fourthly, this internal struggle continues to intensify and grow till it reaches a point where a sudden revolutionary change takes place. There the struggle culminates in the triumph of the new forces and the defeat of the old ones with the result that the thing is transformed into its antithesis completely.

Following this transformation the same process begins anew, because this phase again nurtures its opposite within it, and a further internal struggle leads to a fresh transformation. Anyhow, this time the thing does not revert to its original state, but is transformed into a state which is a sort of combination of the first and the second phases. This third state is known as synthesis. Thus, nature moves from thesis to antithesis and then finally to synthesis and after completing one cycle, again starts following the same evolutionary course.

Nature has no ultimate goal and is not striving to a state of perfection but is rather inclined towards self destruction. However, as every antithesis tends towards its own antithesis, this process perforce takes the shape of synthesis, resulting in compulsory evolution. This is what is called the dialectic interpretation of nature.

History being a part of nature, the same law of evolution applies to it also, the only difference being that, its components are human. History is a continuous process and is influenced by inter-relations between man and nature and between man and society. There is a constant conflict and confrontation between the progressive groups and others which are in a state of decay.

This struggle, which in the final analysis may be described as the struggle of contradictories, after going through a violent and revolutionary process, ends to the benefit of the progressive forces. Every event in the course of this struggle is followed by its antithesis and the process goes on until the evolution is completed.

The basis of human life and the motive force of history is the function of production which at every stage of its development creates particular, political, judicial, domestic and economic conditions necessitating the development of relations among individuals.

But the function of production does not remain static at any particular stage. It continues to develop, for man is a tool-making creature. With the gradual development of tools the production goes up and with that new men with a fresh outlook and a more developed conscience appear on the scene, for not only does man make the tools but the tools also make the man. The development of productions and the increase in its quantum create new economic equations which bring about a set of new social conditions.

It is said on this account that economy is the understructure of a society and all other affairs are

subservient to it. Whenever it undergoes a change as a result of the development of the means of production and the going up of production level, it becomes necessary to change the superstructure also.

But that stratum of the society which depends upon the old economic system regards this change as being against its interests and endeavours to maintain the status quo. In contrast the newly up-coming stratum attached to new means of production, considering a change in the situation and in the establishment of a new system to be in its interest tries hard to change and push the society and all its affairs forward to bring them into harmony with the newly developed means of production.

The intensity of the struggle and the conflict between these two groups, one decrepit and reactionary and the other progressive and forward-looking, continues to grow until it reaches an explosive point and the society with a revolutionary group steps forward and undergoes a complete change. The primitive system gives place to the new and thus the process ends in the complete victory of the new forces and defeat of the old ones. Thereafter a new phase of history begins.

This new phase again faces a similar fate. With the further development of the means of production fresh men come into the field. With the increase in the quantum of production the current system loses its capability of solving social problems and the society once again faces a deadlock. There again appears the need of a big change in the economic and social systems. This phase also gives place to its antithesis and a new phase begins. And thus the process of change and development goes on steadfastly.

History, just like nature itself, passes through contradictories, i.e. every stage of it harbours the germs of the next stage within itself and gives place to it after a series of struggles and conflicts.

This mode of thinking in respect of nature and history is called dialectic and according to it, all the social values throughout history have been subservient to this means of production.

Chief Characteristic

Now let us see as to what is the chief characteristic of the dialectic thinking which distinguishes it from what is termed as the metaphysical thinking. The exponents of dialectic thinking mention four principles as the distinctive features of their doctrine. Let us take them one by one.

Firstly, they maintain that all things are constantly moving and progressing whereas, as they assert, according to metaphysical thinking, things are static and motionless.

This imputation has no basis. The upholders of metaphysical thinking do not believe that things are static . They use the term "Unchangeability" relatively. Otherwise they also believe that all physical things are subject to change. It is only metaphysical things which may be described as static.

Unfortunately the supporters of dialectic logic, being the adherents of the maxim that the end justifies the means, concentrate their attention on achieving their objectives and in doing so, ignore the correctness or other wise of what they attribute to others. Anyhow, the principle of motion is not a distinctive feature of dialectic thinking.

The second principle is that of correlation and interaction of things. This, too, cannot be considered to be a characteristic of dialectic thinking. Though the supporters of this doctrine allege that the rival theory of metaphysical thinking does not believe in this principle, yet the fact is not so.

The third principle is that of contradiction. But the question is whether it is the characteristic only of the dialectic thinking. Is it a fact that the upholders of metaphysical thinking totally deny the existence of contradiction in nature? On this point the supporters of dialecticism have unnecessarily raised such an uproar.

They base their arguments on the existence of the principle known in logic and philosophy as the law of non contradiction and assert that as the supporters of metaphysical thinking believe in this principle, they must naturally deny the existence of all sorts of contradiction. But the dialecticians conveniently forget that this logical principle is not even remotely connected with the existence of contradictions, in the sense of conflict between the various elements of nature or the elements of the society or history.

Anyhow, the dialecticians go a step further and assert that the supporters of the metaphysical thinking because of their beliefs that all parts of nature, including such obviously divergent things as fire and water, are in a state of mutual harmony and compatibility call upon the various elements of that society to be at peace and on this basis urge the persecuted not to resist oppressors and adopt a policy of appeasement and surrender.

We again emphasize that all this is a distortion of the truth. According to the supporters of metaphysical thinking contradiction in the sense of divergence and mutual competition of the various elements of nature does exist and it is necessary for the continuity of Allah blessings.

The fourth principle of mutation in nature and of revolution in history is also not a basic characteristic of dialectic thinking. It was never mentioned as a dialectic principle by Hegel, the father of the modern dialectic method of reasoning, nor by Karl Marx, the hero of dialectic materialism. It was recognized as a biological principle of evolution in the 19th century and was later introduced into dialectics by Frederick Engels, a disciple of Karl Marx. Today it is an accepted principle of biology and is not the exclusive monopoly of any particular school of thought. Then what is the basic characteristic of dialectic thinking?

In fact, the distinctive feature and the real basis of this school is two fold. One is the doctrine that not only external realities but ideas also have a dialective nature i.e. the ideas are subject to the above mentioned four principles. In this respect no other school of thought shares the views of this school. (This point has been discussed in detail in the 1st volume of the book 'The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism').

The other distinctive feature of this school is that it interprets contradiction to mean that everything necessarily nurtures its antithesis within itself and subsequently gets transformed into it and that this anti thesis itself passes through the same process. This doctrine is claimed to apply to both nature and history both of which, as they put it, pass through contradictories. According to this school evolution means the combination of two opposites, one of which is transformed into the other.

The doctrine of contradiction in the sense of conflict between different parts of nature and their occasional combination is quite old. What is new about dialecticism is the claim that, besides contradiction and conflict between different parts of nature, contradiction also exists within each part of itself and this contradiction takes the form of a battle between the new progressive factors and the old decadent ones and culminates in the final triumph of the progressive ones. These two features are the corner stone of the dialectic way of thinking.

Hence, it is entirely wrong to consider every school upholding the principles of motion and contradiction to be dialectic. Such a mistake has been committed by those who, having come across the principles of motion, change and contradiction in Islamic teachings, have drawn the conclusion that Islamic thinking is also dialectic. The fact is that according to the dialectic thinking all truths are transient and relative, whereas Islam believes in a series of permanent and eternal truths.

Further, to believe that nature and history move in a triangular form (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) and pass through contradictories is an essential characteristic of the dialectic way of thinking. Islamic teachings do not approve of this belief.

The fact is that this misconception has been created by the supporters of dialectic materialism. They, in their discourses, which are never free from an element of propaganda, give all non-dialectic thinking the name of metaphysical thinking according to which, as they allege, all parts of nature are motionless, unrelated to each other and free from all sorts of contradiction. They accuse the Aristotelian logic of being based on these very principles. They assert this view with such force that those who have little direct knowledge are often misled.

Not only that, but also those who are impressed by such statements, if lacking in the knowledge of Islam, easily come to the conclusion that the principle of immobility, unrelatedness and absence of contradiction must form the basis of Islamic thinking. They base their arguments on the premises that Islam, being a religious creed, has a metaphysical basis and therefore, its thinking must also be metaphysical and that metaphysical thinking being based on the above-mentioned three principles the belief in them must be a part of the Islamic way of thinking.

Another group, which is somewhat acquainted with Islamic teachings, presume that Islamic thinking, not being metaphysical, must be dialectic. As this group recognizes no third alternative, naturally it comes to this conclusion.
All this misunderstanding and confusion is the result of undue reliance on what the supporters of

dialectic materialism attribute to others. Anyhow, as already mentioned, truth is quite different.

From the above discussion we may draw the following conclusions:

The new and old ideology

In the present context the young and the old do not refer to the younger and the older generation and the conflict between them has nothing to do with the problem of the so-called generation gap. It does not mean that the younger generation always supports a revolutionary movement, or that the older generation is necessarily conservative. Similarly, confrontation between the new and the old has no cultural implications either. It does not mean a confrontation between the educated and the illiterate. Its significance is purely social and economic and it simply means a conflict between those classes which are the beneficiaries of the existing order and those which are dissatisfied with it and being inspired by new means of production, are keen to bring about a change in the existing social structure.

In other words it means a struggle between the progressive and the liberal minded elements of society favouring evolution and those that are decrepit and narrow-minded and tend to maintain the status quo.

Consequent to the fact that social conscience and the social attitude of man are inspired by his class position and environmental conditions the privileged classes, being the beneficiaries of the existing order, necessarily become obscurantist, whereas the exploited and deprived classes are stirred to action. This is entirely different from the question or having or not having a formal education. Mostly the evolutionary movements are launched by those who are educationally backward but, owing to their class position, are forward-looking and liberal minded.

Logical continuity of history

Evolutionary stages of history are linked with each other by a natural and logical bond. Each stage has its own place and cannot be moved forward or backward. For example, capitalism is the middle link between feudalism and socialism and it is impossible for a society to pass directly from feudalism to socialism without passing through capitalism. Such a happening will be in a way similar to what was termed by ancient philosophers as "abrupt jump" i.e. passing from one point to another without passing through any of the routes connecting them.

This will be as if the human seed, without passing through the foetus stage, reaches the delivery stage, or a new-born child, without passing through childhood, becomes a fully grown-up youth, or that "B" who is the son of "A" should take birth before "A" comes into the world.

That is why the supporters of this logic gave the early socialists, who wanted to lay the foundation of socialism merely on ideology, ignoring the compulsion of history and logical continuity of its stages, the name of idealists and called their socialism fantastic. Contrary to early socialism, Marxism is based on

the logical continuity of historical stage.

Not only is an abrupt transition and traversing several stages in one leap not possible, but it is also essential that every phase reaches its natural climax before the evolutionary process takes the final form. For instance, feudalism, or for that matter capitalism, has its definite course which must run gradually so that, at a historical moment, a change may come about. To expect any stage to come, before the stage prior to it attains its climax, is tantamount to expecting a child to be born before completing its foetal stages. In such a case the result may be an abortion, not the delivery of a healthy child.

The fight between the new and the old is the basic condition of the transition of history from one stage to another and is an essential factor in the evolution of human society. Such a fight is always sacred. Similarly, the extermination of the old elements is lawful, even if they do not commit any act of aggression, because without doing so the society cannot be pushed forward towards evolution. On the basis of this logic lawful fights need not necessarily be defensive, or with a view to forestalling an aggression.

Not only is the struggle against the old by the new lawful and sacred but every other action also, which paves the way for a revolution and accelerates the evolutionary process, is equally lawful. Thus, all subversive and disruptive activities, with a view to creating dissatisfaction and unrest, widening the split and deepening the conflict, are sacred.

As stated earlier, evolution depends on a revolutionary and violent change of one contradictory to another and such a change does not materialize unless and until the internal conflict reaches its boiling point and the breach becomes the widest. Therefore, anything which widens the gulf accelerates the transition of the society from lower stage to a higher stage. As unrest and discord may play such a role, they are also lawful and sacred, according to this logic.

In contrast, such measures as partial reforms, appeasing and pacifying action and redress of grievances are considered to be wrong and improper. They are supposed to serve as an anaesthetic and are, therefore, tantamount to a betrayal of the cause. Such actions obstruct the way of evolution as they, at least, temporarily narrow the split and thus delay the revolution. These are the conclusions which may be drawn from the materialistic approach to history.

The human approach to history is just the opposite of the materialistic approach. It gives basic importance to man–and human values, both in relation to the individuals and the society. From the psychological point of view it considers itself to be composed of a set of animal instincts which are common to both man and beasts and the other set of higher instincts, religious, ethical, inquisitive and aesthetic which are peculiar to man and distinguish him from the animals.

From the philosophical point of view it considers a society to have two aspects. Firstly, it is composed of individuals, each of them having a mixture of high and low qualities. Secondly, as a whole, it has its own variety of attributes which are the eternal characteristics of man in general. A Persian poet expresses this fact thus:
"This sweet water and this saltish water in every vein of creatures will flow till the Day of Resurrection. "

Here a vein refers to the veins of the society i.e. man in an indefinite and general application. In some individuals sweet water flows i.e. good qualities dominate and in others saltish water flows i.e. bad qualities are more numerous and remarkable. This position will continue so long as man exists on the face of the earth. The death of individuals makes no difference to it. Anyhow, with the evolution of man and human society the position will certainly improve a great deal.

According to this approach history, like nature itself, is developing and progressing towards a state of perfection. The development of history is neither confined to the technical nor the cultural aspects, nor to the growth and improvement of the means of production. It is an all–round and all pervading process and extends to all human affairs. Man, as a result of his comprehensive evolution, is moving towards liberation from environmental and social bonds and is gradually throwing off the shackles which bind him to his environment.

At the same time his adherence to an ideology and faith is growing. In the future he is expected to secure complete emancipation and with that to reach the stage of complete adherence to faith and ideology. In the past when man was less able to exploit natural resources he was a slave to nature. In the future, with more and more exploitation of natural resources, he will not only be free from the bonds of nature but will also gradually bring it under his domination and control.

It is erroneous to say that evolution follows the development of the means of production. Those who say so confuse the cause with the effect. In fact, the development of the means of production is the result of man's natural craving for perfection, expansion and diversification. It originates from his power of invention which has, with the passage of time grown and is still growing. According to this approach one of the characteristics of man is the internal and individual contradiction between his terrestrial and celestial aspects, i.e. between those instincts which are inclined down wards and aim only at the individual, limited and temporary gains and those which are inclined upwards and want to encompass the whole of humanity and aim at achieving the moral, religious, scientific and intellectual objectives. The famous Persian poet, Mawlawi says:

The soul inclines to wisdom and science,
The body inclines to gardens and fruits,
The soul inclines to progress and honour,
The body inclines to property and chattels,
The body inclines to greenery and flowing water,
because it originates from them,

The soul inclines to life and the living;
because its origin is divine,
Allah also inclines to soul,
So say that He loves them and they love Him.

The internal conflict of man, which the ancients called the fight between reason and passion, automatically leads to the conflict between different groups of human beings, the elated and morally liberated beings on the one side and the nasty and brutish beings on the other.

This approach accepts the existence of a conflict as a part of the development and evolution of history, but not in the form of class war between those attached to the old means of production and old social system and those attached to the more modern means of production.
It claims that a conflict has always existed between men with mature faith who are free from the captivity of nature and the environment of animal instincts and have an object in view and the degraded and brutish persons and it has played a very effective role in the evolution of history.

To interpret all the wars in history as class wars is tantamount to closing the eyes to the most beautiful and the brightest manifestations of human life all along.

Throughout history many battles have been fought to secure material needs like food, clothing or housing, or on questions connected with sex, power and prestige. But there have definitely been certain battles which can be described as fights between the right and the wrong and the good and the evil. They represented a struggle between the human motives and the animal propensities, between the common good and the individual interests, between the high human values and the base desires and between the progressive and the elated man and the low and the perverted man.

In the words of the holy Qur'an they were fights between the troops of Allah and the troops of the Devil. The supporters of this theory strongly censure the attempts of the materialists to interpret all religious, ethical and human movements on the basis of class struggle and regard such attempts as a distortion of history and an insult to human dignity. Historical events show that many movements which were initiated for securing the primary material needs were led and guided or at least supported by individuals who themselves were well–off and well–placed.

Contrary to the claim of the materialists that all progressive campaigns are waged by the oppressed and the deprived classes wanting to displace the existing system and to replace it by another system which may ensure their material needs in conformity with the developed means of production there exists historical evidence to prove that progressive movements have not always been confined to the oppressed classes.
They have occasionally been led by the individuals belonging to the privileged classes who thrust their dagger into the heart of the ruling system.

The risings of Abraham, Moses, Muhammad and Husayn were all of this nature. It is also misleading to

suggest that the progressive movements have always aimed at material objectives. The movement of the early Muslims bears witness to the fact that this is not so. Ali identifying the nature of this movement said: "They were given permission to defend their faith with the help of their swords".1 Similarly, progressive movements have not always been the result of the development of the means of production.

During the past two centuries a number of freedom movements were launched both in the East and the West. One such movement was the movement for securing a constitutional government in Iran, known as the Mashruta Movement. In this case it cannot be claimed that the development of the means of production had created a crisis in Iran.

It is also not true that unrest in the society has always been caused by the unsuitability of the legal provisions of the existing system. In certain cases the provisions as such were quite acceptable, but a campaign had to be waged to secure their effective enforcement and the Alawi uprisings during the Abbasid period had this nature. Human conscience is not so depraved that people cannot be inspired by anything higher and nobler than their basic material needs.

From the above the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Evolutionary battles: Battles in history have been of divergent forms, nature and causes: But those which contributed to the development of history and humanity have been only those which were fought between the men of high ideology, free from selfishness and greed and the men of selfish and beastly nature lacking in aspirational and intellectual life.

The nature of the wars which have contributed to the advancement and evolution was not that of a class war nor that of a confrontation between the new and the old in the sense mentioned earlier during the course of the discussion on the materialistic theory. Wars have, by and by acquired an ideological aspect and from the viewpoint of human values man is gradually coming closer to perfection i.e. to the stage of an ideal man in an ideal society. He will continue to advance on this path till a world government, having full regard for all human values is established and that will be the end of all the evil forces and selfish wars.
According to the Islamic terminology this government is called the Mahdi Government.

2. Absurdity of logical continuity: A logical continuity of the historical stages as described by the materialists is baseless. Historical events, especially those of the past one century, prove the absurdity of this theory. During this period only such countries have gone over to communism as had never passed through the stage of capitalism. The Soviet Union, China and the East European countries are a conspicuous example of it.

On the other hand the countries with a highly developed capitalistic system like the United States, Great Britain and France are still maintaining their old systems and a century old prediction of the protagonists of materialism concerning the workers revolution in the heavily industrialized countries like Britain and France has turned out to be mere illusion.

It is evident from the above that there is no such thing as a historical compulsion. It is quite possible that in a capitalistic society the proletarian class attains such a state of prosperity and well being that it may totally reject all ideas of revolution. Similarly, it is also possible that with appearance of a clear and convincing ideology and an elevation of religious and social conscience a nomadic society may reach the highest stage of human culture in one leap. The renaissance of the early Islamic era bears witness to this fact.

3. Sanctity of an armed struggle: The lawfulness and sanctity of an armed struggle does not mean an encroachment on any individual's rights or aspirations. The struggle becomes lawful and sacred whenever anything sacred to humanity is in danger. Whenever any right, especially that which pertains to the entire society, is threatened an armed struggle is allowed. Freedom is one such right. A struggle for the liberation of the oppressed, as specifically mentioned in the holy Qur'an, is another instance.

If the belief in the Oneness of Allah, which is the greatest asset of humanity, is in danger then a fight is naturally lawful.

4. Reforms: There is no reason why partial or gradual reforms should be condemned. History does not compulsorily pass through contradictions and the transformation of one contradiction into another is not a universal truth. Hence, it is not correct to say that partial and gradual reforms prevent an explosion and block the way to evolution.

Even partial and gradual reforms do encourage and help those who fight for a rightful and just cause and bring the chances of their final success closer. In contrast corruption, turmoil and perversions help the hostile forces and slow down the movement of history in favour of the righteous people. According to this approach, what is required is a sort of development which precedes the ripening of the fruit on the tree and not an explosion. The better the care, anti pest protection and watering of a tree, the better, healthier, and sometimes earlier is the fruit it produces.

5. Disorders: The same reasons which justify partial and gradual reforms also make unlawful subversion and sabotage with a view to creating deadlock and crisis, which is recommended by the materialistic theory.

6. Vacillations of history: Although, on the whole, history moves towards evolution, yet contrary to the materialistic view, such a movement is neither compulsory nor inevitable. It is also not essential that every society in any stage of its history should be more perfect than it was in the preceding stage.

The prime mover of history is man who is free and the master of his actions. Hence, history fluctuates in its movements. Sometimes it goes forward and sometimes backward.

It sways now to the right and now to the left. Some times it moves fast and sometimes slow and occasionally stands still. A society continues to rise and fall. The history of human civilization is nothing but a series of rises, falls and extinctions. As the famous historian, Toynbee, has pointed out, decline of

every single civilization is inevitable, though on the whole, human history continues to advance steadily along a line of evolution.

7. The evolutionary march of humanity towards freedom from the restrictions imposed by natural environments, economic conditions and individual and group interests has on the whole, been guided towards a purposeful life, a better ideology and a deeper faith.

The will of a primitive man is mostly conditioned by his natural and social environments and his animal impulses, whereas a culturally advanced man with his broad outlook has gradually attained a great deal of freedom from such restrictions and has consequently, to a large extent, brought his environments and his impulses under his control.

8. The jihad and the efforts to persuade others to adopt the righteous path are quite different from a class war, for they have a humanitarian basis.

9. The power of conviction and reasoning is genuine, natural and effective. A conviction enables the human conscience to overcome material urges.

10. The Hegelian and Marxian triangle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is neither applicable to history nor to nature and consequently it is a false presumption that history passes through contradictories or that historical stages are a series of contradictories derived from each other and transformed into one another.

The triangle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is based on two transformations and one combination i.e. the transformation of a phenomenon into its antithesis, then its transformation into the antithesis of antithesis and the combination of these two forms at the third and last stage viz. the synthesis.

But, in reality, nature does not work in this manner. What actually exists in nature is either a combination of two contradictories without transformation, or transformation of one contradictory into another without any combination. The third form which is met with is evolution without either transformation or combination.

Many elements which are somewhat contradictory to each other combine together but are not transformed into each other. For instance, water is a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen. In such cases there is a combination, not transformation. There are other cases where nature gradually tilts from one excessive state to the opposite state and in the process strikes a balance between the two. In such cases there is a transformation, but no combination. There are still other cases where a third thing comes into being as a result of the combination of the two things. Of course, there is no harm if we call the resulting third thing synthesis and the two original ones thesis and antithesis respectively, but that means nothing more than the use of common and familiar terms.

The same is the case with the use of the word "dialectic". It is a beautiful and well-sounding word and no

writer would like to be deprived of it. Therefore, there is no harm if it is used in connection with any idea that combines the principles of motion and contradiction though it may not have those distinctive features of dialectic thinking to which we have referred before.

1. See: Sermon 154, Peak of Eloquence, Nahjul Balaghah, ISP 1979.

The above-mentioned two approaches to the evolutionary movement of history have resulted from two concepts about man, his real identity and his hidden capacities. According to the first concept man is a prisoner of his material interests, all his actions being invariably determined by the compulsion of the means of production and economic conditions. His conscience, his temperament, his judgement, his ideas and his selections are all but a reflection of his natural and social environment against the dictates of which he cannot make the slightest move.

According to the second concept man is free from compulsion of nature, environment and temperament. He is the master of his destiny and righteousness. Human values are inborn in him. He can use his reasoning power and can implement his ideas. He need not be dictated to by his environmental conditions. No doubt, man is influenced by his environment but this is not a unilateral process.

Environment, too, is affected by man. Being free and a master of his environment, man's conduct and his reactions to environmental conditions are often different from that of an animal. Man's basic characteristic which, in fact, is the criterion of his humanity is his ability to control his passions and base desires. This ability which is a very bright aspect of the human life has been totally ignored by the materialists.

No doubt the holy Qur'an interprets history on the basis of the second view. From the Qur'anic point of view there has been an eternal conflict between a group of righteous people like Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and their faithful followers on the one hand and the other group of evil-doers like Nimrud, the Pharaoh, the Jewish tyrants, Abu Sufyan etc. on the other.

Against every Pharaoh there is a Moses, says an Arabic proverb. In the words of the Persian poet, Mawlawi, two banners have always been afloat, one white and the other black. In the fight between the forces of right and the forces of wrong sometimes the former has been victorious and sometimes the latter. Anyhow, all victories and defeats have been the outcome of a set of social, economic and moral factors. The holy Qur'an emphasizes the effect of moral factors and thus turns history into a source of instruction.

If history is considered to be merely a string of accidental happenings, having no definite cause behind them, it will not be in any way different from fiction which may provide an entertainment and serve as a pastime, but it can have no instructional value.

In case we admit that history has definite rules by which it is governed, but think that human will has no

part to play in determining its course, then history may be regarded as instructive from a theoretical point of view, but can have no practical value. In this case it will only be as instructive as the farthest galaxy about which we may know quite a lot, but can do nothing to determine or change its course.

In case we concede that history is governed by definite rules and man also plays an effective role therein, but think that, despite all that, the determining factor is money or force, then history will no doubt be instructive, but only as an evil. The same will be the result, if knowledge is looked upon, not as a determining factor, but as an instrument for acquiring power or force.

However, if we consider history to be subject to definite rules and at the same time admit that human will plays an effective and final role in determining its course for the benefit of the society, then and only then is history both instructive and useful and its study is educative and rewarding. The holy Qur'an looks upon history from this very angle.

The holy Qur'an has described those who are termed reactionaries as the rabble, pleasure-seekers and egoists and those who fight for the right cause as the oppressed and the persecuted. From the Qur'anic point of view the nature of the eternal struggle, which has continued from the dawn of history and which has helped the advancement of the society, is moral and human, not material, nor is it a class war.

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 comprise 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 marvellous 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, co operation 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 favour 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 favour 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.

Belief in the Mahdi (the 'guided' latter-day ruler who will establish justice) is deeply rooted in Islam, and is an obligatory part of belief in the view of some *ulama*. There may be differences of opinion on the characteristics and the person of the Mahdi ,but all are of the opinion that most of the traditions on the Mahdi are right and that the tidings about him are *mutawatir*.

In addition to the direct references to the Mahdi in Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, there are also almost 50 traditions, with direct reference to the Mahdi, in other well-known collections such as Abu Daud, Tirmizi, Musnad-i Ahmad bin Hanbal, Ibn Maja, Tabarani (in all the three collections: *Al-Kabir*, *Al-Awsat* and *Al-Saghir*), Al-Hakim (*Mustadrak*), Abu Ya'li, al-Bazzar, Ibn Hibban, Abu al-Shaykh (*Kitab al-Fitan*), Ibn Asakir, Ibn Adi, Abu Na'im (*Akhbar al-Mahdi*), Al-Royani (*Musnad*), al-Dailami, Al-Dani (*Sunan*), Ibn Mandah, Na'im ibn Hammad (*Kitab al-Fitan*), Al-Harith ibn Ali Usamah (*Musnad*), Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (*Tarikh*), Ibn Abi Shaibah (*Musannaf*), Al-Darqutni, Abu Na'im (*Dalail al-Nubuwwah* and *al-Hilyah*), Ibn al-Munadi (*Al-Malahim*), Abu Ghannam al-Kufi (*Kitab al-Fitan*), Tammam (*Fawaid*), Ibn Sa'd (*Tabaqat*), Ibn Jarir (*Tafsir*), Al-Muhami (*Al-Amali*), etc.

These authoritative source books contain almost 50 traditions of the Prophet, (Peace and benediction be upon him and his infallible progeny) which clearly foretell the emergence of the Mahdi before the Day of Resurrection. Many of these traditions are 'Sahih' and directly narrated on the authority of the Prophet by 33 well-known companions, who include: Ali ibn Abi Talib, Husayn ibn Ali, Abu Sa'id al-Khudari, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Umm Salmah, Thauban, Abu Hurayrah, Anas ibn Malik, Jabir ibn Abdullah, Uthman ibn Affan, Awf ibn Malik, Talha ibn Ubaidallah, Huzaifah ibn al-Yaman, Umran ibn Husayn, Abdullah ibn Umar, Ayesha, Abdul Rahman ibn Awf, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, Ibn Abbas, Tamim al-Dari, Umm Habibah, Abbas ibn Abdil Muttalib and Ammar ibn Yasir.

The most famous of these traditions is the one narrated by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud in which the Prophet said: "Even if a (single) day is left in (the life of) the world, Allah will lengthen that day to send a person of my House whose name will be like my name and whose *Kunyah* will be similar to mine. He will fill the world with justice and equity just as it was previously full of injustice and oppression". (Abu Daud, Tabarani, Ibn Hibban, Hakim, Ibn Maja, Abu Na'im, Ibn Asakir etc).

This and many other traditions are in accordance with the highest standards of scrutiny set by the traditionists and therefore it is the consensus of Islamic scholars of all ages that the tradition is true and mutawatir (uninterruptedly conveyed on the authority of the Prophet). Following is a selection of affirmative references to the Mahdi by Muslim authorities from the old to the modern times:

● Ibn Taimiyyah, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*

● Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Tazkirah*

● Al-Hafiz, Abul Hasan al-Abiri, *Manaqib al-Imam al-Shafi'i*

● Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*

● Al-Hafiz al-Sakhawi, *Fath al-Mugheeth*

● Al-Suyuti, *Al-'Urf al-Wardi* and *Al-Kashf 'an Mujawazat Hazihi al-Ummah al-Alf*

● Al-Zarqani, *Sharh al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyyah*

● Abul 'Ala al-'Iraqi al Husayni, *Al-Mahdi*

● Al-Shaukani, *Al-Tawzih fi tawatur me jaa fi'l Mahdi al-Muntazar wa'l Dajjal Masih*

● Siddiq Hasan Khan, *Al-Izh'ah lima kana wa ma yakunu baina yadai al-Sa'ah*

● Abu Abdillah Muhammad Jassis, *Sharh Risalah ibn Abi Zaid*

● Muhammad al-Arabi al-Fasi, *al-Marasid*

● Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman al-Fasi, *Muhhij al-Maqasid*

● Al-Safarini, *Al-Durrah al-Mudi'ah fi 'Aqidah al-Firqah al-Murdiyah*

● Qutbuddin Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Kitabi, *Nazm al-Mutanathir min al-Hadith al-Mutawatir* Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Siddiq, *Al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*

● Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ghimari, *Ibraz al-Wahm al-Maknun min Kalam Ibn Khalladun*

● Ibn a1-Qayyim, *Al-Manar*

● Al-Hafiz al-Dhahabi, *Al-Muntaqa*

● Abu al-Tayyib ibn Ali al-Hasan al-Hasani, *Al-Iza'ah lima kana wa ma yakunu baina yadai al-Sa'ah*

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