

The Globe Before and After the Advent of Imam Mahdi, Part 4

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This part of the articles series further delves into the signs of the moral, cultural, and religious state of affairs before the advent of Imam Mahdi as well some events after the his return. This series of papers is based on parts seven and eight of a series of lectures delivered by the author in Muharram 1428/January 2007 in London.

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The Globe Before and After the Advent of Imam Mahdi, Part 4

Mohammad Ali Shomali

This series of papers is based on parts seven and eight of a series of lectures delivered by the author in Muharram 1428/January 2007 in London.

Abstract

Islamic sources hold a rich account of the 'End of Times' – the world's state of affairs before and after the coming of Imam Mahdi to establish worldwide justice and peace. Earlier articles in this series offered an overview from the viewpoint of the dominant world religions, as well as the Islamic perspective using the Qur'an and hadith as sources to visualise the future and increase our knowledge on the advent of Imam Mahdi with the purpose of establishing a positive relationship with him and preparing for his return.

The previous part expanded on the qualities of the people of this time, including their intellectual condition, and scientific and technological advancements. This part further delves into the signs of the moral, cultural, and religious state of affairs before the advent of Imam Mahdi as well some events after the his return.

False Claimants

In continuation of the discussion regarding the moral, cultural, and religious situation of the world in the time before the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj), I would like to refer to the fact that at that time many false claimants will appear – those who will falsely claim to be either Imam Mahdi (aj) or even one of the

prophets. Many have already appeared and are known. And more of this type is expected to surface.1

In fact, it is apparent that the enemies of Islam today are all too well-aware about Imam Mahdi (aj) and his significant role in forming the mind-set of Muslims, and of Shi'as in particular. Therefore, they may have plans to fabricate a pseudo Imam Mahdi (aj), or they may plan to support the assertions of false claimants to cause division and confusion within the Muslim community, or Ummah. Prophet Muhammad (S) says:

لا تقوم الساعة حتى يخرج المهدي من ولدي، ولا يخرج المهدي حتى يخرج
ستون كذابا كلهم يقول: أنا نبي

The Day of Judgement will not happen until Mahdi from my progeny arises. And Mahdi will not rise until sixty liars who claim to be prophets will have come.2

History reveals some of these false claimants. For example, Musaylimah al-Kadhhab, a woman, whose claim to prophethood was based on the argument that the Prophet (S) had said: "There will be no [male] prophet (nabi) after me" and not "There will be no [female] prophet (nabiyyah) after me."

Feeling of Despair (Ya's)

One sign of the end of time is the feeling of despair apparent amidst the masses. This is very dangerous, because when a person does not have hope, they cease to strive and make efforts. One of the greatest sins is to feel hopeless in the mercy of God and this has been considered in Islamic narrations as a major sin. Even a murderer of prophets must not lose his hope in divine forgiveness and mercy. A despaired person is an easy victim in the hands of Satan. Imam Sadiq says:

ان هذا الامر لا يأتيكم الا بعد اياس. لا والله حتى يميزوا

Surely this affair [i.e. the establishment of Imam Mahdi's (aj) just government] will not happen until there will occur a sense of despair in all places. And by God this will not happen unless people are separated and made distinct from one another.3

Another hadith from Imam Baqir states:

فخروجه اذا خرج يكون عند اليأس والقنوط من أن يروا فرجا

His uprising will happen when people have despaired, and they do not imagine there will be any rescue (faraj).4

The Qur'an describes this as a general pattern that afflicted previous nations as well:

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ ۗ مَسَّتْهُمُ
الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَّاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ
اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ

Do you suppose that you shall enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of [what befell] those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, 'When will God's help [come]?' Look! God's help is indeed near! (2:214)

There must be a test and trial, after which only the true believers and the faithful will remain, and it is they who will be firm and motivated in making efforts for the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj).

Injustice and Oppression

At the end of time, injustice will have filled the earth and oppression will be widespread. We already see signs of this. In one of the most detailed single accounts of the end of time, in which 120 facets of the end of time are mentioned, Imam Sadiq says:

رَأَيْتَ الْحَقَّ قَدْ مَاتَ أَهْلُهُ، وَرَأَيْتَ الْجَوْرَ قَدْ شَمَلَ الْبِلَادَ... وَرَأَيْتَ النِّسَاءَ يَتَزَوَّجْنَ
النِّسَاءَ... وَرَأَيْتَ الْمُؤْمِنَ صَامِتًا لَا يَقْبَلُ قَوْلَهُ... وَرَأَيْتَ الْفَاسِقَ يَكْذِبُ وَلَا يَرُدُّ
عَلَيْهِ كَذِبَهُ... وَرَأَيْتَ الْخَمْرَ تُشْرَبُ عَلَانِيَةً وَيَجْتَمِعُ عَلَيْهَا مَنْ لَا يَخَافُ اللَّهَ عِزًّا
وَجَلًّا... وَرَأَيْتَ بَيْتَ اللَّهِ قَدْ عَطَلَ وَيُؤْمَرُ بِتَرْكِهِ

You will see the truth has disappeared and those that follow the truth are not many; injustice has covered all the lands ... you will see women marrying women ... lots of heresies ... a believer in the end of time will have to remain silent and if he speaks no one will listen to him. You will see those who do not have moral principles, they will tell lies and no one will stop them ... wine and alcohol will be drunk in public even in Muslim countries ... The house of God will be deserted and not many people will go to it and people will be asked not to go for hajj.5

From this hadith, we can extract the following:

1. People will be so distorted in their understanding that they will mock wisdom, and the wise will prefer to remain silent as a result of being mocked.
2. Moral principles will be a source of disagreement.⁶ However, this does not mean that we should be apologetic and shy away from such debates, but that we should speak wisely and carefully while clarifying our stance.
3. People in power – leaders, politicians, and media corporates – will be able to lie without being held accountable.
4. The consumption of alcohol on Muslim airlines and in Muslim lands is now commonplace, although it was unimaginable by past generations.
5. The Kaaba in Mecca is a symbol of Islam, and religion becomes attached to it in some way. This ominous warning regarding the desertion of the Kaaba has also been echoed by Imam Ali, who says in his will: “Be wary of [your duty to] God in the matter of the house of your Lord – it should not be left unattended and without a crowd, for it is the power and dignity of Islam.”⁷

Collapse of Moral Values

The end of time will see a collapse of moral values. According to a hadith from Imam Sadiq, in the end of time if a day passes and a person has not been able to do some great sin such as misusing others' money, or cheating, or doing some kind of unlawful (haram) transaction or drinking alcoholic drinks, then this person, at night, will feel that he has not achieved anything, and he will feel sorry for himself. ⁸

According to Imam Ali, during this time, many people will be fully devoted to their wealth. Their appetites to earn and consume will blind them from seeking moral development. They will also be devoted to immoral women, rather than faithful women. They will obey such women at the cost of disobeying God and annoying their parents. The Prophet said:

يأتي على الناس زمان بطونهم آلهتهم ونسأؤهم قبلتهم ودنانيرهم دينهم و شرفهم
متاعهم

Some people will worship gold and silver coins [i.e. money] and would only have ambitions to fill their stomachs. Their *qibla* [i.e. the focus of their attention] will be their women and their honour will be their belongings.

The role of a pious and faithful woman in a family and household cannot be underestimated. Where

there is a pious wife and mother in a household, it has a great effect on the husband and children; such women are able to change the direction of the family.

Furthermore, people's status and honour at the end of time will be decided by the amount of wealth they have. People will be impressed by materialism, such as the amount of money someone has, or the size or location of their house.

Comparison with the Age of Ignorance (Jahiliyyah)

In some hadiths, the end of time is compared to the Time of Jahiliyyah, i.e. the period before the establishment of Islam by the Prophet.

The term Time of Jahiliyyah refers to the situation of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. The situation then was extremely harsh in almost every aspect. Ignorance was manifest through ignorance and immoral acts such as illiteracy, superstition, idol worship, nudity, prostitution, and the killing of baby girls. The Prophet said:

بعثت بين جاهليتين، لآخرهما شر من أولهما

I have been raised between two jahiliyyahs. One before me and one to come after me, and the latter is more evil than the former.

At the end of time, the type and intensity of the features of jahiliyyah will be worse than the jahiliyyah before Islam, because people will possess the skills and resources to expand this new jahiliyyah and export it to other places, whereas in the past people were unable to spread corruption to other parts of the world. Abu Sufyan, an arch opponent of the Prophet, was a rich trader although he was an uncivilised man. Today, however, the situation is more complex. Corrupted people are more cunning in their evil actions under the pretence of protecting people's rights such as anti-discrimination and freedom of expression.⁹

A companion of Imam Baqir asked him: "How will Mahdi conduct himself when he comes?"

The Imam replied:

بسيرة ما سار به رسول الله

He will act in the manner that the Prophet acted.

The person enquired: “And what was the manner of the Prophet? Can you tell me in a few words?”

Imam replied:

أبطل ما كان في الجاهلية، واستقبل الناس بالعدل، وكذلك القائم إذا قام يبطل ما كان في الهدنة مما كان في أيدي الناس، ويستقبل بهم العدل

He stopped the practices of jahiliyyah and spread justice among the people [i.e. jahiliyyah lacks a sense of justice] and in this same way the Qa'im [Imam Mahdi] will halt jahiliyyah; he will act with complete justice, and establish it on the earth.¹⁰

From this we can conclude that there will be some people who will not want to accept the Imam's approach, and will resist his attempts in establishing justice.

Imam Sadiq has said:

إن قائمنا إذا قام استقبل من جهل الناس أشد مما إستقبله رسول الله من جهل الجاهلية

When our Qa'im will rise up, what he will receive from the ignorant ones of his time will be worse than what the Prophet received from ignorant ones in the time of jahiliyyah.

In other words, what the Prophet's opponents such as Abu Sufyan, Abu Lahab, and Abu Jahl did to him will be not as severe when compared with what the ignorant ones will try to do to Imam Mahdi (aj). The task of establishing justice will not be an easy one.

Before the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj), the groups of the good people and corrupt people will each reach a peak in their behaviours and attributes. There will be a group so good that the world has not seen its like, and there will be a group so corrupt humanity has not witnessed such evil. Imam Sadiq states:

لا والله لا يكون ماتمدون إليه أعينكم حتى يشقي من شقي، ويسعد من سعد

No, by God, your eyes will not witness him [Imam Mahdi (aj)] until the people who are wicked will reach the level of wickedness they are after, and the good and pious will flourish in piety and goodness.¹¹

In another hadith from Imam Sadiq we read:

This [i.e. the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj)] will not happen until you will be tested very severely and people will be made distinct as a result of this test.

Through the difficult tests that lie ahead, people's reality and nature will be apparent.

Events after the Advent of Imam Mahdi (aj)

The first thing we find in the hadiths with regards to the events after the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj) is that he will establish justice – a vital part of his mission.

As justice is one of the key characteristics of Shi'a Islam, the priority of Imam Mahdi (aj) to establish justice is deliberate. The concept of justice is a very far-reaching concept, which begins with divine justice but is not confined to Him; rather, it affects our understanding of the world, our relationship with God, with one another, and with ourselves.

Ignoring the genuine desires God has placed in us is being unjust with ourselves. If a person desires knowledge, and does not pursue it, he or she he has not been just to himself. By extension, we all have a natural urge to become closer to God, and if we fail to satisfy this, we are being unjust to ourselves.

The Qur'an says:

وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

Whoever transgresses the bounds of God certainly wrongs himself. (65: 1)

Hence, justice is not only to have fairness in a few limited relationships. In Islam, when we say that the imam of the congregational prayer should be just (adil), this means he should not sin publicly, and even in private as it is limiting his self in achieving his potential.

According to Muslim scholars of ethics, justice is always good (and perhaps it is unique in this regard) whereas acting upon other virtues may not be always necessarily good. Take honesty for example, it could be that honesty is not wise in a situation leading to endangering an innocent person. Justice, however, is good and desirable in any given state, and injustice is evil and undesirable at all times.

At this juncture, a question may arise: If justice is always good and desirable, why do Muslims supplicate to God to treat them with His grace and mercy, and not His justice?12 'Justice' is used in a specific and narrow sense to mean 'giving people exactly what they deserve and nothing more nor less' in such supplications.

When someone is owed money, justice requires the debtor to pay the money back. However, if more is returned, then this does not violate justice; it is more than justice (when justice is taken in this narrow

sense). So when the debtor pays back more than his debt, without it being interest, this would be desirable (*mustahabb*) and does not violate justice in its wider sense.

As seen in various supplications, on the Day of Judgement, there is a fear that God will give us exactly what we deserve and nothing more, without any addition from His mercy, forgiveness, and grace. This would be a frightening prospect as we are imperfect beings.

In one story, there were two believers in which one had loaned an amount of money to the other. When the creditor demanded the debtor to repay the full amount, the debtor was in genuine trouble and could not afford to do so. They both decided to go to Imam al-Sadiq, who asked the creditor why he pressured his believing brother whilst knowing he did not have the means to repay it. The creditor argued that he was not doing any injustice by asking for the amount. Imam al-Sadiq said, "Have you not recited this verse" 13:

وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ الْحِسَابِ

And those who join what God has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and are afraid of an adverse reckoning? (13:21)

'Adverse reckoning' does not mean – God forbid – that God will treat them unjustly in any way. Rather, it refers to the feeling that people have – that God will ask them to account thoroughly for every duty they failed to perform. Hence, when we ask for God's mercy, it is not that we are scared He will be unjust; rather, we beseech Him to give us better than what we deserve.

Regarding Imam Mahdi (aj), the most important thing mentioned in hadiths is that he will fill the earth with justice after it has been previously filled with injustice (*dhulm*) and oppression (*jawr*).

According to Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi, when these two terms are mentioned together they mean different things:

- *dhulm* refers to withholding something from someone who deserves it, and taking it for one's self, i.e. the misuse of someone's right
- *jawr* means giving the belonging of a specific person to someone else. This is usually practised by people in power through unequal distribution of resources to gain favour.

Imam Mahdi (aj) will put a halt to this as everything will return to its proper place. This is the true meaning of justice (adl). On justice,

Rumi says:

What is adl? To put something in its proper place What is dhulm? To put something in its improper place
Adl is to water trees and plants

Dhulm is to water thorns¹⁴

Imam Baqir says:

إذا قام قائم أهل البيت قسم بالسوية وعدل في الرعية

When Mahdi comes he will distribute resources amongst the people in a just and fair manner. ¹⁵

ويُسوي بين الناس حتى لا ترى محتاجا الى الزكاة

And he will distribute everything amongst people in such a way that there will be no need for zakat (alms tax). ¹⁶

Attempting to Challenge Imam Mahdi (aj)

Hadiths also report that when Imam Mahdi (aj) acts according to the principles of justice, this will irritate some people who will then use the Qur'an to challenge him.

For Muslims, it is rather sad to witness people disputing against the implementation of justice. Nonetheless, this occurred in the past: at the time of Imam Ali, some people such as Talhah and Zubayr opposed the just rule of Imam Ali, as they were not personally benefitting as they thought they would.

True justice is accepting what one deserves without expecting more. There are 130 hadiths on justice during the time of Imam Mahdi (aj). Justice is what humanity will need, as it is the solution and medicine for all problems. Everyone should be working from now on implementing justice, starting from one's self, home, and workplace. There is no reason to wait for the advent of Imam Mahdi (aj) for this. Furthermore, even in the larger international problems, so many of the problems could be solved with applying true justice.

Spirituality and Worship

After the advent of the Imam, there will be an increase in peoples' piety and spirituality, as they will worship God to a greater extent. This will occur to even those who formally committed great sins; those who were not faithful will begin to change and become obedient to God. The Holy Prophet says that one of the things that Imam Mahdi (aj) does after establishing justice is that he:

يملأ قلوب العباد عبادة

Fills the hearts of people with the worship of God. 17

Not only will people perform good acts of worship, but they will love doing so. They will love to worship God, perform salah, and supplicate; and there will exist no distractions or obstacles for them. Imam Ali declares:

يبعث المهدي (ع) الى أمرائه بسائر الامصار بالعدل بين الناس... ويذهب الربا وشرب الخمر والرياء وتقبل الناس على العبادة والمشروع والديانة والصلاة في الجماعات وتطول الاعمار وتؤدي الامانة وتحل الاشجار وتتضاعف البركات

Mahdi will send his governors to different parts of the world to establish justice... Usury, fornication, drinking alcohol, and showing off (riya) will all stop. People will start to enjoy legal actions and worship (ibadah), religiosity, and congregational prayers; lives will become long, trusts will be returned, trees will bear fruits, and blessings will multiply. 18

Hence, from this hadith we understanding that

- 1) Loving worship is natural once obstacles are removed and one's sustenance becomes lawful, and
- 2) Our lives do not necessarily have to be as short as they are. Our organs are not limited, as they are capable of supporting longer lives. However, due to bad habits, pollution, unwholesome food, stress, etc., we are not living to the fullest term possible.

Ibn Abbas narrates the following hadith from the Prophet regarding his night ascension and journey (mi'raj):

لما عُرِّجَ بي الى السماء السابعة ومنها الى سدرة المنتهى ومن السدرة الى حجب النور ناداني ربي جل جلاله يا محمد انت عبي واا ربك فلي فاخضع و... بالقائم منكم اعمر ارضي بتسبيحي وتقديسي وتكبيرتي وتمجيدتي

During mi'raj, when I reached the sidrat al-muntaha, 19 my Lord told me "O Muhammad! You are my servant and I am your Master. You must be humble to Me, worship Me and trust Me ... [with Mahdi] I will improve and restore My earth with my glorification, praise, declaring My unity, and mentioning My

greatness.”²⁰

Therefore, Imam Mahdi (aj) will be an instrument for God, and will inspire people to invoke, praise, and glorify God; this is what will advance the state of affairs throughout the world. The hadith continues:

وبه اظهر الارض من اعدائي واورثها اوليائي وبه اجعل كلمة الذين كفروا
السفلى وكلمتي العليا وبه احيي عبادي وبلادتي بعلمي وله اظهر الكنوز
والذخائر بمشيئتي واياه اظهر على الاسرار والضمائر بارادتي وأُيِّده بملائكتي
لتؤيده على انفاذ امري واعلان ديني

I will cleanse the earth from My enemies and make My friends inherit it. And I will lower the word (rank) of disbelievers, and raise the rank of My word. I will revive My servants and lands by him and with My knowledge. I will uncover and unveil the treasures of the earth with Mahdi, I will disclose My secrets to him, and I will support him with My angels so that he can implement what I ask of him, and so that he can declare My religion.²¹

Moreover, as said in the Qur'an:

الَّذِينَ إِن مَّكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ

[The believers] who, if We granted them power in the land, maintain the prayer. (22:41)

The most important action to perform when power is granted to someone is for them to establish prayer (salah). And Imam Mahdi (aj) will do this. He will remove the obstacles to worship and people will welcome it joyfully.

1. It is worth noting that some to whom these claims have been attributed to were not immoral, nor were they responsible for the claim; rather, the claims have been made for them by others who were perhaps genuinely confused by their good qualities. Impressed with their good qualities, some people thought that they must be the awaited Mahdi. This is especially true for some of the descendants of Imam Ali and Sayyidah Fatima, some of whom were distinguished for their piety. False claims were made that they were Imam Mahdi (aj) as they seemed to be very pious and charismatic. However, other qualities and facts were overlooked. For example, Imam Mahdi (aj) will be the direct son of Imam Hasan al-Askari. Unfortunately, some people did not have the maturity to properly discern this, thus rendering it unfair to consider all those that were attributed as being the Mahdi as immoral people, and nor were they all responsible for the claims.

2. Al-Irshad, vol. 2, p. 371

3. Kamal ud-Din wa Tamam un-Ni'mat, vol. 2, p. 333

4. Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 52, p. 231

5. Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 52, page 256
6. We observe debates in the media and in mainstream society today where people disagree on simple matters such as child abuse in the church, or the treatment of homosexuals. In many of these discussions people have taken for granted fundamental issues, such as the definition of family. A hundred years ago it would have been unthinkable for gay marriages to be sanctioned. It makes us think about where the boundaries will be drawn on what is and is not acceptable. Perhaps a day will come where some will desire marriage with animals.
7. For more information on this detailed hadith by Imam Sadiq, please refer to volume 11 of the commentary on Usul al-Kafi by the late Muhammad Salih Mazandarani.
8. Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 52, page 256:
ورأيت الرجل اذا مر به يوم ولم يكسب فيه الذنب العظيم من فجور أو بخس مكيال أو ميزان أو غشيان حرام أو شراب مسكر كئيبا حزينا يحسب أن ذلك اليوم عليه وضیعة من عمره
9. Interestingly, Sayyid Qutb of Egypt has a book Jahiliyyah in the Twentieth Century.
10. Ithbat ul-Hudat, vol. 3, p. 455
11. Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 52, p. 112
12. إلهي عاملنا بفضلك ولا تعاملنا بعدلك.
13. Tafseer 'Ayyashi, p. 210
14. Mathnawi Ma'nawi, Book 6, Chapter 84
15. Bihar ul-Anwar, vol. 52, p. 351
16. Ibid., vol. 51, p. 88
17. Ibid., vol. 51, p. 75
18. Uqad ud-Durar, Yusuf Muqaddasi Shafe'i, p. 239
19. The Qur'an mentions this sacred place as the place reached by the Prophet when he was closest to God. The angel Jibrail could not travel beyond this point but the Prophet was able to.
20. Al-Amali, Shaykh Saduq, pp. 504-5
21. Ibid., Shaykh Saduq, pp. 504-5

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- [11] <https://www.al-islam.org/feature/resources-further-research>

[12] <https://www.al-islam.org/feature/responses-misconceptions>

[13] <https://www.al-islam.org/feature/shia-beliefs-explained>

[14] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/end-times>

[15] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/imam-al-mahdi>