

THE LOGIC BEHIND PROLONGED CONCEALMENT **OF IMAM MAHDI A.F**

By Ahmed H. Sheriff

If someone were to proclaim that he was on a particular day going to walk over water, we should expect large multitudes of people of all denominations on that day thronging around him to witness his this unusual action. The people would indeed be overwhelmed with profound astonishment at the sight of his feet over the surface but un drowned into the water. If on some other day, another person declares his ability also to do the same, people may come out to see him but rather in less numbers than previously. If yet on another occasion, a third person claims similar ability, much fewer people would be attracted to see him. If however on a subsequent occasion a fourth person were to claim similar ability and if by chance, too many people turn out to witness his action, the intellectuals of that place would laugh at and ridicule their sense of wonder.

This was the logic applied in one sitting at Baghdad by Seyyid Ali i bne Taus (may Allah bless his soul) the renown Shi'ite jurist and erudite of the 4th Hijra. Opponents had earlier instigated a discussion on the Shi'ite belief of the prolonged concealment of Imam Mahdi a.f. Ibne Taus argued that if according to the popular belief of different Muslim sects, a number of Prophets like Khizr, Idris and Issa are still alive in heaven for thousands of years since their birth till this date, why then wonder at and dispute the prolonged life of Imam Mahdi a.f.? Was it fair to doubt or deny the ability and superiority of a descendant of the Prophet to live so long, he questioned them. This argument made them speechless and convinced of the fact.

Let us now consider the following popular hadith of the Prophet as narrated in tradition no.874 in Saheeh Tirmizi, as related by Zaid ibne Arqam taken from Kanz-ul-Ummal, part I p.44: "I have left amongst you certain things, if you love them you will never go astray. They are the Book of Allah, which is like a rope extending from the heaven to the earth, and my children that is my Ahl-ul-Bait. Those two shall never part from each other until they come to me at the Pool of Kausar(in Paradise) so take care of how you treat them."

From the foregoing hadith, it is crystal clear that along with the existence of the Book of Allah, the existence of Ahl-ul-Bait - the progeny of the holy Prophet till Day of Judgement is closely linked and inseparable. If the holy Quran is meant to be the light of guidance for mankind, then it cannot act alone without torch-bearer and guide. Imagine a torch-light placed at a four-sided cross-road. Would it be enough to guide the public alone without another guide to show which road one needs to take to reach his destination? Surely not. Similarly the holy Qura'n alone without a guide in the person of a divinely appointed member of Ahl-ul-Bait cannot provide the necessary spiritual guidance we need.

Now if we were to ask the Muslim world whether the holy Qura'n does exist today? Their reply would be in the affirmative. But if we ask them about the simultaneous existence

of Ahl-ul-Bait, they would have no answer to give. Refusal of continued existence alive of at-least a member of Ahl-ul-Bait along with the Qura'n would imply the rejection and denial of the aforementioned famous hadith El-Saqlain of the holy Prophet.

How could we cherish belief in the existence of someone who is not to be seen, is one of the questions posed by critics. In reply we say if we are willing to accept the existence of an unseen God, an unseen soul in the human body, then seeing the Imam should not form the basis of belief in his existence. The sun remains concealed behind the clouds for long duration, yet no one argues on its existence.

Why should the believers be deprived of direct contact with Imam Mahdi whereas those in previous periods benefitted by seeing the previous eleven Imams? This can be answered with the following example:

If a king had two most precious stones in his treasury, one of which he gifted to you. Instead of taking good care of it, you misplaced it by throwing it in a filthy place. Were you then to approach him for the gift of that second stone, would he be willing to let you have it ? Surely not, since you did not appreciate and take good care of the first stone. If he were to fear your robbing the same from him, he would make sure of preserving it in a safest place.

Similarly it can be argued that Almighty Allah had blessed mankind with twelve most precious stones from divine treasure in the most noble personages of the twelve Imams one after another vicegerents of the Prophet on earth. But the first eleven Imams were subjected by the peoples of their times to inhuman tortures ending their precious lives either by killing or poisoning. Instead of treating them with reverence and guarding them from ill-treatment, they were put to death one by one. Thus to maintain the proof of Allah on earth and safeguard the life of the last member of Ahl-ul-Bait, Almighty Allah in His infinite wisdom chose to keep him in concealment lest he was also molested by the enemies. When circumstances are conducive, he is going to reappear to bring about a revolution for establishment of a rule of order, peace and justice all over the world.

The prolonged concealment of the Imam is also meant to test the faith and steadfastness of true Muslims in the divine pledge that he is one day to reappear to establish the Islamic rule of peace throughout the world as predicted in the Qura'n and ahadith. That is why one of the emphasized deeds of virtue for every true Muslim is to pray daily for the speedy reappearance of Imam Mahdi a.f. and pledging full support to him when he comes.

MAY ALMIGHTY ALLAH SHOW US THAT AUSPICIOUS DAY SOON OF THE REAPPEARANCE OF OUR IMAM, AMEN.