The Only Path to Salvation

Introduction

Many theories of salvage have been introduced to free humanity from its currant dark chaotic status. From a Quranic point of view, “reform” is considered the path to salvage and the secret to an everlasting community (Hud: 117). Of course, there are those who falsely claim reform, which are the hypocrites (Baqara: 11 & 12). In this article, after a general look at the history of religion, we will review three major fields of “Mahdian” reform:

1. *The System of Management*
2. *The System of Legislation*
3. *The System of Knowledge*

Reformism in the Religious History

A brief look at religious history will show that all divine prophets begun their reform against corruption from day one. Cain started “corruption” for the first time on the face of this earth by murdering his brother Able, and Adam (P.B.) reacted by boycotting Cain and his people. The corruption from Cain and his clan eventually spread through Adam’s (P.B.) people. It was now time for Noah’s (P.B.) reformism. There was widespread corruption at Noah’s (P.B.) time. He and his few followers rose to put an end to the corruption. They continued unsuccessfully until finally the rain storm came and did away with the corrupted. Again after Noah (P.B.), corruption spread through the children Adam (P.B.):

- Wealth and living long lives caused ‘Ad to rebel (Fajr: 6-12) and Hud’s (P.B.) guidance was of no use.
- Materialistic development and civilization deviated Thamud from the right path (Fajr: 6-12) leaving Saleh’s (P.B.) reformism resultless (Naml: 48).
- Sexual corruption in the tribe kept Lot’s (P.B.) efforts unsuccessful. His people’s fate, like the others, was in torment.
- Financial Corruption spread through Shu’aib’s (P.B.) people and cheating on deals became a custom. Shu’aib (P.B.) put all his efforts in economic reform. (Shu’ara’: 177,183; Hud: 88)
- Zulqarnain’s attempt in building a barrier against Gog and Magog was itself an act of reform that saved the people from the insecurity caused by Gog and Magog’s assaults (Kahf: 94-95).
- The Pharaoh’s haughtiness and oppression against the Israelites (Zukhruf: 54; Qasas: 4; Nazi’aat: 24) made Moses (P.B.) rise to reform the social injustice.

• The Holy prophet of Islam (P.B.) rose in a society full of Paganism, ignorance, narrow mindedness and animosity to spread faith, intellectualism, friendship and brotherhood (Al-e-Imran: 103) leading the biggest reform in history.

• Imam Ali (P.B.) demanded reform against oppression, social and economic imparity, the embezzlement of the public treasury, and other corruptions. He also fought against frauds and the apostatizing like Talha, Zobayr, and Moawiyah.

• Imam Hasan (P.B.) and Imam Husain (P.B.) also stood against Moawiyah and Yazeed's oppression and corruption trying to bring the Islamic nation back to integrity.

The final result of the efforts made by prophets and saints for reform will crystallize in the uprising of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance). At his time the trend of history and the universe will change and return back to order.

The "Mahdian" Saving Reforms

I. Reforming the World's Management System

The structure of the current management system is inefficient and ill contented causing humanity a great deal of misery. Hence, we'll discuss the management system's reform in two fields: structure and content.

a. Structural Reform Applied by Unified Management

The multiplicity of world management and manmade boarders between states and governments has been an important cause of wars and disputes. The only way to save humanity is unified world management. Arnold Toynbee, an English intellectual, said, "The only way to maintain peace and save human descendents is to form a single world government, and stop the expansion of nuclear weapons." Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein also had similar opinions. Of course theories like these have been introduced much earlier in many different religions.

One of the Hindu books, "Dide," when talking about unified governing at the end of time, says: "After the destruction of the earth, a king will emerge that will be the leader of all creatures. His name is "Mansoor" and every one will convert to his religion."

In this regard, the 29th Psalm of the Psalms of David says: "The truthful ones will inherit the earth and dwell in it for ever." There are also verses in the Holy Quran that, according to the traditions and the interpretation of the interpreters, implicate the universality of Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) government.

And indeed We did write in the Psalms after the Reminder, that My righteous servants will shall

inherit the earth. (Anbia: 105) Another verse reads:

God promises those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will certainly appoint them successors in the earth, as He appointed those before them, and that certainly He shall establish for them their religion (Islam) which He has chosen for them, and that certainly He will, after their fear, in exchange give them security; they shall worship Me ; and associating not with Me aught. (Nur: 55)

Yet another says:

And We intend to bestow (Our) favor upon those who are considered weak in the earth, and to make them Imams (guides in faith)and make them the heirs. (Qasas: 5)

The preliminaries of the Universal Government: There are technological and cultural preliminaries for the formation of the universal government. There are technological necessities for the universal government that have been mentioned in the traditions: A tradition from Imam Sadiq (P.B.) about the improvement of the visual and audio abilities says:

When our revolter rises, God will improve our followers ability to see and hear to the extent that there will be no need for letters. He will speak to them and they will hear and see him, although he's not there.

There have been other narrations similar to those mentioned above. It appears that these preliminaries are present.

In addition, as the cultural preliminaries, the societies need to be prepared for such unified world government spiritually and intellectually. Signs of such aptness are apparent. The nationalistic mentality has given way to that of internationalism. The notion of creating a League of Nations after the First World War; the idea of forming the United Nations following the Second World War; the 1963 Tokyo announcement which proposed four major institutions, The General Assembly, The Supreme Executive Council, The International Police Force, and The International Court of Justice; the concept of Global Trading; the Globalization phenomenon; and etc., show that people are culturally ready for the unified single world government. Of course, there is a difference of opinion about the content of such a government, which will be mentioned in the next section.

b. Reforming the Content with Monotheistic Management

Reforming the structure of global management is a necessity for humanity's salvation; however, we should also pay attention to the role of the content and principles of management. Humanity's salvation other than a unified world government also depends on monotheistic principles of management.

In the materialistic mentality, democracy has become the center of attention. Of course, this isn't a new theory and has come to be noticed by many in the past. When Imam Hosein (P.B.) was admonishing the second caliph for extorting his father's rightful position, he said "The people chose us to govern and we accepted, and if they would have chosen your father we would have accepted as well." The Holy Imam replied "First of all, appointing Abu-Bakr was your doing and not the people's choice. Secondly, your action had no legal (Islamic) reasoning behind it and didn't please the progeny of the Holy Prophet (P.B.)." Moawiyah would also address Imam Ali (P.B.) saying "If you were the rightful (caliph), the people would have accepted your call (for support)." He considered the people's choice the reason for legitimacy or illegitimacy. He also said to Imam Hosein (P.B.) "I'm better than you, for the people accepted me and rejected you.

" The Holy Imam replied "Never! Never! Oh son of (Hind) she who ate the liver (of Hamzah), those who chose you were either free to do so or they were forced. Those that obeyed you disobeyed God and those who were forced (to do so) are excused according to The Quran." When the Ansar proposed Imam Ali (P.B.) for being the caliph, he asked "Are you doing this for a legitimate reason that God has obligated on you or are you doing it because you all agreed to do so?"

These dialogs and others between the Umayyads and the Ahlul-Bait or Shiite scholars that are found throughout Islamic History, show that these two ideologies have always existed and faced each other; one considering divineness of a government the source of its legitimacy, and other considering the people's approval and approbation the source of a government's legitimacy. The Ahlul-Bait have always emphasized on the divineness of government's legitimacy. It seems as if this view has always been a minority. Even today in Islamic communities, some argue that the mere objective of prophethood is God and the afterlife, the Holy Prophet's involvement in government being inevitable not part of the religion itself. They consider Imam Ali's (P.B.) governance has been lent to him by the people and not by God. Although these notions (democracy…) have been processed in the present time, they have roots in the past. The concept of the secession of prophethood from leadership (Imamah) has come from the Umayyads. In one of his letters to Imam Ali (P.B.), this is how Moawiyah explains his views:

You should know that Mohammad wasn't but a messenger like the others, which God sent to all people, and he fulfilled his duty. He had no ownership or guardianship over any thing.

Moawiyah rejects the leadership of the Holy Prophet (P.B.) and considers him a mere divine messenger. Contrary to him, Imam Ali (P.B.) believes that the leadership of the people is a

divine obligation on the Prophets shoulders. In his reply to Moawiyah he writes:

As to your denial of the leadership of (Prophet) Mohammad (P.B.) and the assumption that he is but a messenger, I must say that by doing so you have denied the leadership of all the prophets that were also divine leaders. However, I testify that he was a messenger, a prophet, and a divine leader.

In brief the leadership of the people (Imamah) is one of the responsibilities that God has put upon the prophets.

Legitimacy of Government

In order to understand the religion's reasoning and to clarify the reforms that Imam Zaman (may Allah hasten his reappearance) will perform in the principles of governing, it is necessary to briefly review the concept of government and the criteria for its legitimacy. In the end the different aspects of monotheistic management and the meaning of reforming the principles of governing in the "Mahdian" ideology will be clear as well.

We can discuss the legitimacy of a government from three different perspectives: the governor, how he gets to power and his way of management. Hence, in this argumentation, we must speak of three legitimacies:

The legitimacy of the governor, some say, is obtained by elections. It seems like election has to do with the legitimacy of government and not the governor. From a religious point of view, the legitimacy of the governor is obtained by divine appointment, because the supreme power and absolute sovereignty belong to God. So he's the one with the authority to appoint the governor. In our discussion about the "Mahdian" government, this is the type of legitimacy that applies. God appoints the governor. At the present time, Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) is the appointed governor.

The Legitimacy of the process of getting to power depends on the legitimacy of the instruments that are used to get to power. This is an important principle and without it a government won't be legitimate. From an Islamic point of view, the legitimacy of obtaining power is in direct relation with the principle of free will and his creational (innate) right of self-determination, therefore, the only legitimate way to obtain power is by the will of the people. In other words, people are free to choose their way of life and therefore choose who governs them, whether good or bad. In the religious ideology, forcing a ruler upon a people is unacceptable, even if the government has the legitimacy of the first category. Of course, not accepting the legitimate governor is also unlawful for sure. The legitimacy of the people's choice is different from the legitimacy of the method of obtaining power and has a different

criterion.

The Islamic government, which its purpose is to clear the grounds for the guidance and improvement of people, can not be imposed upon the people. In this regard the Holy Prophet (P.B.) has said:

The leader (Imam) is like the Kaaba amongst the people; they come to him and not him to the people.

The same words are used for Imam Ali (P.B.)as the Holy Prophet told him:

You are like the Kaaba and people should come to you and not you to them. So if the people came to you and submit the government to you, accept it, and if they don't do so, wait until they do.

Imam Reza has also explained this truth, but in a different way:

Because of the Holy Prophet we have a right that you(the people) must grant us and you have a right that we must grant you. When you fulfill your responsibility we will fulfill ours.

This tradition clearly shows that governance is the right of the Imam. However, granting them this right so they can undertake their duties is in the hands of others. This is the sole reason why allegiance is one of the bases of an Islamic government. Whenever the people choose the appointed Imam, the universal government of Imam Mahdi will materialize and the universe, under the leadership of Imam Mahdi, will be steered toward salvage.

The legitimacy of the method of governance can itself be discussed in three different parts:

1. The criteria of legitimacy for governmental commands.
2. The criteria of legitimacy for governmental functions.
3. The criteria of legitimacy for the dealing of the government with people.

The criteria of legitimacy for governmental commands lies in God's satisfaction. The people's satisfaction should be in line with "God's satisfaction." Giving orders by the governor and taking out orders by the citizens should be evaluated by being obedient to God.

There's a narration from Imam Ali (P.B.) in this regard:

The Imam's obligation is to fulfill his trust and command according to what God has sent down. Once he has done so, it's the people's obligation to take out his orders and obey him and to answer to his call for support.

Hence, the legitimacy of the governor's commands lies in them corresponding with divine criterions and only in this case will obeying his orders be legitimate. His eminence Imam Ali (P.B.) in a letter to the people of Egypt when appointing Malik Ashtar as governor, says:

In orders inline with truth and righteousness listen to Malik's words and be obedient to him.

In this saying, as well, Imam Ali (P.B.) has only considered the orders that are in accordance with righteousness legitimate. On another occasion he says:

The most deserving relation between the people and the governor is that which concerns the people's religious duties. It is our (the statesmen) duty to mandate and forbid according to God's orders.

The criteria of legitimacy in the second realm is the skilfulness of the administrator. It is for this reason that Imam Ali (P.B.) gives Malik Ashtar two standards for choosing administrators; the first of which is expediency and ability. The Holy Prophet (P.B.) said: "In the presence of a preferable person, assigning a person other than him is treason to God, his prophet and the Muslims." In our religious sources there are many traditions about the welfare and security of the time of Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) governance. These are some of what the Holy Prophet has said about living at the time of his governance: At the time of his governance, my nation will reach an unprecedented welfare.

A time will come that people will be looking for a needy person to pay the Zakat of their gold and they won't be able to find one. Under Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) government, there will be wide spread social security. In this regard there is saying form the Holy Prophet that goes:

At last, Imamah will come to power and at that time a person traveling from Medina to Hazhri Mowt will have nothing to fear but God.

The standard for the third field, the treatment that the government gives the people, is mercy and compassion. In many traditions narrated from the Ahlol-Bait, they explain that their way of governing is by friendship, good treatment, piety and hard work and that their enemy's way of governing is by violence and oppression. Imam Ali (P.B.), when addressing the people of Kufah, said that I know the sword is what puts you in line, but I don't want to lead you toward improvement by my corrupt doings. Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) government is also a government that will put aside violence. Oppression and harshness are features of governments such as that of the Pharaohs and the Umayyad and Abbasside Dynasties.

Democracy is a step toward eliminating violence, but we still have a long way before being freed of desires. In Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) universal government both violence and personal desires will vanish and God's governorship will crystallize.

It has been said in our traditions that Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) manner will be fighting ; however this will apply to the oppressors and those violating God's rules and the peoples rights. Hence, both the sword and mercy are true about Imam Mahdi

(may God hasten his reappearance): the sword is for the enemy and those opposing him, which is to the benefit of the people; and mercy is for the other citizens of the universal government. Of course, there's a difference between the sword of power and the sword of justice. Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) sword is neither that of obtaining power nor that of maintaining power, but it is the sword of justice. If his sword was that of maintaining power, his occultation would have never come about; and if it was that of obtaining power, this period of anticipation for his reappearance would be senseless. One clear reason for this choice is the people's pledge of allegiance to him. Imam Sadiq (P.B.) said "On the day of his uprising, Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) will stand between the Rokn and Maqam in the house of God and say 'Allegiance is to God (alone)' and the Shiites will gather from all corners of the globe to pledge allegiance to him. And in this way God will fill the earth with justice by the hands of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance)."

II. Reforming the Universal Lawmaking System

Reforming the management system is not all it takes to save mankind. One other element is reforming the law and the law-making system. For this we need two categories of reform: the physical boundaries that the law implies in, and the content of law.

a. The Unification of the Lawmaking System

Since the diversity of law could be a cause of disorder, conflict and dispute, we should move toward unifying the law across the globe. As was said in the discussion about unified management, some believe we should have a "world parliament." In Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) government, this notion will come to existence. In this regard, Imam Sadiq (P.B.) has said to Mofadhal Ibn Umar:

I swear to God, oh Mofadhal, that he will eliminate the differences between nations and religion will be unified as God has said: the [true] religion before God is Islam.

b. Monotheistic Law

If the content of a law is not fair, just and realistic, it cannot lead humanity to glory. In addition to a unified law, we need to have one that in terms of its content and principles prepares the ground for mankind's glory. According to religious ideology we cannot solve people's problems with a law that is created by themselves; we should act according to a divine law. The Holy Quran represents the heads of the divine law system as the guides of mankind and says:

And We made them leader to guide people according to Our orders. (Anbia': 73)

After the recitation of this verse, Imam Sadiq (P.B.) said:

Not according to what the people want. They prefer the orders of God over the orders of the people and God's verdict over the people's verdict.

This is what the Holy Quran tells us about the situation that the peoples wish and God's pleasure interfere with each other: And it is not for a believer, man or woman, to have any choice in their affair when God and His Apostle have decided a matter; and whoever disobeys God and His Apostle, indeed he has strayed off a manifest. (Ahzab: 36)

This verse clearly states the priority of the orders of God and his messenger over that of the people. The Holy Quran believes this priority will benefit the people themselves:

…should he (the apostle of God) obey you in most of the matters, you would certainly be in distress… (Hojorat: 7)

Imam Ali (P.B.), who has studied history in depth , believes that personal desire is one important reason of the destruction of past civilizations and societies and it will also destroy many in the future. This is why, according to all religions, lawmaking is devoted to God (Yusof: 40). For this same reason, the second principle of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran says:

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the faith in:

1. The oneness of God (La Ilaha Illallah) and that governance and law-making are devoted to him and we should all submit to him.

2. Divine revelation and it's key role in presenting the divine laws…

When it comes to creation, many people are monotheists and believe that only God is the creator, but when it comes to lordship they are polytheists. They don't believe in the governance of the divine laws. The Holy Quran says:

And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they would certainly say: "God." Say you: "Bethink you then of what you call upon besides than God… (Zomar: 38)

As the verse states it, the pagans accepted God as the creator but not as the lord. Accepting God as the creator has no cost but accepting him as the lord does. Accepting God as the lord effects all aspects of life. This is why the pagans are against it. This verse says the denial of God's lordship is equivalent to worshiping of idles.

The Almighty has mentioned two features for the false gods that are worshiped:

1. Diverse and at odds: "… are lords differing from each other better or God the One, the All-Dominant?".(Yusof: 39) 2. Violent and quarreling: "God sets forth the examples of the man in (the service of) associates quarrelling with each other, and of a man (devoted) wholly to a (single) man. Can the two (such) ones be alike in condition? (No " (Zomar: 29)

The materialistic civilizations of the past and present have always tried to make personal desires lawful. To be more precise, Lawmaking and legislation in materialistic civilizations is equal to making personal desires lawful, which is a great corruption and will be corrected with the uprising of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance). It has been stated clearly in traditions about the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance), that the book of law in his government will be the Holy Quran. He himself will say in a lecture at the time of his reappearance:

I call you toward God and his messenger, act according to his Book, slay falsehood, and give life to his (the prophet) traditions. The period of the Imams occultation is a period of a new type of ignorance, modern ignorance. The materialistic civilizations have managed to do two things: modernize the former ignorance, and theorize it. Just as the Holy Prophet (P.B.), with his new words, corrected the ignorance of his time, Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) will, with the same words, chasten modern ignorance. The innovation of Imam Mahdi's (may God hasten his reappearance) slogan is not in comparison with the Holy Prophet's words but in comparison to pre-reappearance pagan slogans.

III. Reforming the Knowledge System

Knowledge is what makes the difference between the humans and beasts. It is also an important element for human salvage. The main question in this discussion is how the structure of human knowledge is formed. Is knowledge manmade or made by man's creator? Has God designed the humans system of knowledge or has he done it himself? In other words, is knowledge divine or manmade?

In the materialistic perspective, knowledge has a human source. Therefore, materialistic thinkers are actually theorizing their desires. In this ideology, each notion is introduced with a certain intention: liberalism has been formed to free man of serving God; relativism is to relieve the self-conscious of the pain caused by disobeying God; pluralism is for slipping out of accepting the truthful religion; hermeneutics is to help religiously justify sinful acts; secularism is to keep religion out of politics and eliminate all barriers for those seeking power; etc.

On the other hand, in the religious mentality, knowledge flows out of a divine source to guide mankind. With it, man avoids destruction and deviation from the right path, and achieves glory. Hence, monotheistic knowledge is another pillar of man's salvation. With the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) and under his rule, there will be reform in the epistemological system and, as a result, instead of knowledge being made by man, it will improve man.

One of the problems that has been newly introduced at the time of the Holy Imam's (may God hasten his reappearance) occultation is the possibility that the understanding of the jurisprudents from religion is different from that of the Imam. Yes, it's true that there's a possibility that the juresprudents' opinion and the infallible's opinion are different, and it is true that it is the Imam's view that is the legitimate one. But, the infallible Imam, himself, has acknowledged that the understanding of the jurisprudents and their jurisprudence are legitimate for others. In other words, the jurisprudent's verdict, what ever it may be, must be obeyed by his followers in the same manner that the Imam's command must be obeyed by every one.

In this section, too, we have a discussion about legitimacy: the legitimacy of jurisprudence and the legitimacy of "taqlid" , during the period of occultation. In this discussion, neither is the legitimacy of the work of the jurisprudent scholar dependent on it being identical to the infallible's opinion, nor is the legitimacy of "taqlid" dependant on following what is identical to the Imam's opinion. Rather, the Holy Imam (may God hasten his reappearance) has known the legitimacy of jurisprudence in it being an orderly and honest research in religious texts, and the legitimacy of "taqlid" in following such jurisprudence.

At the time of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) the different understandings of the religion will all come to one. There will also be reform in the field of knowledge.

Conclusion

The theory of Mahdiism is in the same line as the movements of the prophets and divine saints in reform. There will be reform in management, legislation and epistemology. With this alone will the people's problems eventually perish and the path to human glory be paved.