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“Mahdi” in a Special Meaning and Technical Usage

Question:

Is “Mahdi” a specific label and title referring to a particular person with particular qualities and distinctions or a general concept and title applied to everyone Allah has guided? In other words, is the Mahdi and belief in *Mahdawiyyat* related to person or a category?

Answer:

The concept of the word “Mahdi” is a general concept that is permissible to use, according to the language and common usage, for anyone that Allah has guided. With this concept, all of the prophets and legatees (*awsiya*) are “Mahdi” (guided) and using this word for the person of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), Amir al-Mu’minin, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn, and the remaining Imams (peace be upon them) is permissible since all of them were “Mahdi” and guided. Rather, using this word to refer to other individuals were raised and attained guidance in the school of those personages is permissible.

For example, the companions of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) were all guided. Similarly, using the word for eminent Shi’a, or rather all Shi’a or all who have been guided to the truth and are on guidance is permissible. However, everyone knows that the purport of “Mahdi” which the Messenger (peace be upon him and his family) said was a particular label and title reserved for a specific and unusually mighty person about whose appearance the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) has given tidings and has invited his Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) and all the Muslims to be among those awaiting his appearance. Some of these prophetic traditions are:

الْمَهْدِي مِنْ وُلْدِي.

“The Mahdi is from my descendants.”¹

الْمَهْدِي مِنْ عِثْرَتِي مِنْ وُلْدِ فَاطِمَةَ.

“The Mahdi is from my family, from the descendants of Fatimah.”²

الْمَهْدِي مِنْ وُلْدِكَ.

“The Mahdi is from your descendants.”³

“Mahdi” in the meaning of “guided”, as per the various meanings of “guidance”, such as “showing the way,” “conveying to the desired object,” and other instances is also used for non-humans, and the verse:

رَبَّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

“He said, Our Lord is the One Gave every existent what is necessary for its creation, then guided.”⁴

indicates this fact.

In spite of all this, it appears that by studying the instances in which this word has been used, the conclusion is reached that “guidance” is generally used for individuals in whom Allah’s guidance has had an effect.

On this basis, it must be said:

الْمَهْدِيُّ مَنْ هَدَاهُ اللَّهُ وَقَبِلَ هِدَايَتَهُ وَاهْتَدَى بِهَا بِعِنَايَةِ مَنْهُ وَتَوْفِيقِهِ.

That is, one who has received Allah’s guidance is “Mahdi.” In other words, guidance in the meaning of “showing the path” has been directed at him and through the special attention and *tawfiq* of Allah, it has born fruit in him, for which the loftiest examples are the prophets and Imams (peace be upon them). According to reliable traditions, “Mahdi” is the title of the same promised personage of the end of time whose genealogy and qualities have even been pointed to in reliable traditions, which cannot be applied to anyone except the twelfth Imam, the son of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari (peace be upon him). The title

“Mahdi” in the meaning of the receiver of Allah’s guidance, reviver of Islam, one who will fill the world with equity and justice, and possessor of distinguished qualities, was first used with regard to that personage and this took place in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) himself through his person, and the Mahdi in the sense of savior and redeemer—and other synonymous words like this from Allah—are solely his titles.

And *mahdawiyyat* as a concept of a category is not understood from any of the narrations related from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) or Imams (peace be upon them).

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1. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 36, Page 309, hadith 148
 2. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 51, Page 102
 3. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 51, Page 78
 4. Surah Taha (20), Verse 50

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