

EQUALITY

***PROPHET MUHAMMAD
AND
IMAM MAHDI***

By

**Afzal-al-Ulama Hz. Syed Najamuddin Rh.
President Majlis-e-Ulama-e-Mahdavia-e-Hind**

Translated By

Hz. Syed Ziaullah Yadullahi

Published By

Faqeer Syed Mahmood Najaf Khundmiri

Naya Daira

EQUALITY: PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND IMAM MAHDI

NOTE: The following is the inaugural address by Afzal-ul-Ulama Hazrat Syed Najmuddin to the Jashn-e-Milad-e-Imamana, convened by the Markazi Anjuman-e-Mahdavia, Hyderabad, in 1961. Excerpts from the address are being reproduced now in English translation in view of its importance to the readers.

It may be recalled that Imam mahdi, Hazrat Syed Muhammad of Jaunpur, on his deathbed, with his head resting on the lap of Hazrat Bandagi Miyan Syed Khundmir, explained the meaning of the Quranic Verse: "Say thou (O Muhammad !) This is my Way: ' I do invite unto Allah, an evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes,--- I and whoever follows me. Glory to Allah; and never will I join gods with Allah; ' " (S. 12: 108)

The commentators of the Quran and *mutakallimeen* (experts who prove religious issues with rational arguments) have been very careless in their commentaries of this Verse. The term, 'unto Allah', has been interpreted by them as 'unto the religion of Allah'. They have taken '*haseerat*' (Vision) to mean 'clear argument' (*dalil-e-wazih*). They have treated '*tabe*' (follower) as an ordinary follower, be he a perfect or an imperfect one. (What I mean to say is that) the duty of scholars is to invite the people towards the religion of Allah by clear arguments and meaning.

We disagree with this *tafseer* (commentary or interpretation). While the meaning of *haseerat* has been given (by them) as 'clear argument,' authentic Arabic dictionaries have given its meaning as 'sight, vision' etc. The research-oriented commentators have used

this meaning (in their interpretations). In this Verse, Allah has mentioned *tabe'* as absolute, and by absolute is meant a perfect individual. Hence, this Verse cannot apply to a person who is incapable of perfectly following the Prophet, and whose invitation cannot be universally accepted. The perfect following of an innocent (*masoom*) can only be performed by one who is himself an innocent and whose invitation will be binding on all, as the invitation of Prophet Muhammad was. And that is the *zath* (essence, nature) of Imam Mahdi, the vice-Regent or Khalifa of Allah. The follower has been described in the *Hadis*: "He will follow in my footsteps and will not err." In the *Tafseer-e- Tavilat*, it is stated that '*haza sabili*' means '*tawheed-e- zati*' (divine Unity). And Shaikh Akber Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi has said that '*man*' in "*manittaba'ani*" (in the Arabic text of Quran) refers to Imam Mahdi. And Imam Mahdi too has said that '*man*' refers to the *zath* (essence, nature) of this servant (*banda* of Allah).

According to the Arabic grammar, the word '*ma*' refers to the speaker (*mutakallim*) and it particularises the negation with the speaker. Hence the sentence, '*Wa ma ana minal-mush-rikin*' (I am among the idolators), becomes the particularity of Prophet Muhammad. And, since the absence of idolatory is the particularity of the Prophet, it is also bound to be the particularity of this perfect follower, Imam Mahdi. Hence Imam Mahdi has interpreted the meaning of this Verse by saying that "the two of us (the Prophet and the Imam) are not among all the idolators (*jumla mushrikan*)."

Hearing this, Bandagi Miyan Syed Khundmir asked Bandagi Miran Syed Mahmood in a low voice: "Which idolatory is this? If it is not finally settled today, there will be trouble in future." Imam Mahdi opened his eyes immediately and said: "Syed Khundmir! He who sees Allah confined (*muqayyed*) is an idolator."

This saying of the Imam is a mine of (hidden) meaning. It

means that a person who sees Allah as confined (to a shape or so) is an idolator. And, since the two, the Prophet and the Imam, do not see Allah as confined, they alone are not idolators. In other words, there are two ways of seeing Allah: *ruet-e-mutlaqa* (Absolute Vision) and *ruet-e- muqaiyida* (Captive Vision). The Vision which is without a medium and which is unlimited, is Absolute. And the Vision which is through a medium and which terminates at some point is called Captive. The two Seals (*Khatam-e-Nubuvat* and *Khatam-e- Vilayat*) are the mirror of Divine Unity (*Ahdiyati*). They achieve the divine Vision without any medium; indeed, they are from tip to toe the '*ain zath* (the very essence). This position is interpreted as Absolute Vision. Apart from the Seals, whoever sees the Divine Vision, he sees Him through the *mishkat* (niche) of the Seal (*khatam*) of the Vilayat of Prophet Muhammed; and this is Captive Vision. And since there appears to be a (sense of) strangeness, the term idolatory (*shirk*) applies to it. The seals of Prophethood and Sainthood are free from this conceptual idolatory (*shirk-e-i'tehari*) also. And this is the stage of "We are not from among the idolators."

Some people make the mistake of understanding the total perishing (*fana* in Allah) and Absolute Vision as one and the same, though one needs the niche of the Seal of Sainthood even after total perishing of oneself (in Allah). The rank of Absolute Vision is much higher than the total perishing (*fana-e-kamil*), and this is the position of the Seals (of Prophethood and Sainthood). The position of a Musalman from tip to toe and divine bounty without a medium are the different interpretations of the same phenomenon. And, it may be recalled, that Imam Mahdi has given the glad tidings of being a Musalman from tip to toe and bounty without a medium to Bandagi Miran Syed Mahmood and Bandagi Miyan Syed Khundmir. Hence, after Prophet Muhammad and Imam Mahdi, it is only these two Saiyyadain (Mahmood and Khundmir) are the Musalmans from tip to toe and get the divine bounty without a

medium by their own capability, bounty of Allah and by the grace (*sadaqa*) of Imam Mahdi. In other words, they enjoy the position of Absolute Divine Vision. The difference is that the Seals (of Prophethood and Sainthood) occupy this lofty and high position by virtue of their originality (*asalatan*) and entirety, while the Saiyyadain occupy it by emulation (*itteba'*). The other way of Captive Vision is that the spiritual stroll (*sair*) of a seeker of Allah terminates at some point and he sees the divine splendour and brilliance (*tajalli*) only once, or, maybe, he becomes the manifestation of one the divine attributes. And this is Captive Vision. But, since the Seals are the manifestation of the *Zath* (Divine essence or nature) and the servants of Allah are only those two *zaths*, their divine stroll does not terminate anywhere. It is for this reason that Imam Mahdi said that "there is no limit to the *Zath* of Allah and there is no limit to the desire (*talab*) of the two Seals." This is Absolute Vision. In comparison to this Limitless Vision, the other divine stroll, which terminates at some point, is treated as idolatory (*shirk*). The Seals (*Khatamain*) are free from it. But, since the divine stroll of the Saiyyadain is in the *zaths* of the two Seals, their divine stroll too is unlimited and does not terminate anywhere. From this concept (*i'tebar*) too, the Saiyyadain also achieve Absolute Vision, which is a particularity of the Seals, and which are the attributes of the Saiyyadain by emulation (*ittiba'*). Allah says: "*Such is the grace of Allah which He giveth unto whom He will.*" (S. 5: 54). This is the stage where there is no difference between the Prophet and the Imam, and Miran Syed Mahmood and Miyan Syed Khundmir. When this reality is in view, there would be no doubt in the veracity of the *taswiyat-e-Khatamain* and the *taswiyat-e-Saiyyadain* (the equality of the two Seals and the two Syeds). The issue of equality of the Syeds is our community's belief, based on the sayings of Imam Mahdi, *Khalifatullah*. The sayings are the final arguments, and there is no need of any other argument or proof.

However, the issue of the equality of the Prophet and the

Imam is not confined to the Mahdavis. The researchers (*muhaiqin*) of the Ahl-e-Sunnat too are convinced of it and believe in it. The beliefs of the Mahdavis, in accordance with the research of the researchers and *mutakallimin* (experts who prove religious matters with rational arguments), is that Prophet Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets (*Khatam-al-Anbia*) and that Imam Mahdi is the Seal of the Religion (*deen*), the Seal of Sainthood of Muhammad (*Khatam-e-Vilayat-e-Muhammadia*) and the Seal of the Saints (*Khatam-al-Aulia*). The Mahdavia beliefs do not contradict the relationships, the *muhaiqin* and the *mutakallimin* have established between the prophet and the Imam, based on their principles. The ulema of the Ahl-e-Sunnat have given various interpretations to the relationships between the Seal of Prophethood and the Seal of Sainthood. They have interpreted them as similarity, resemblance, manifestation, perfect relationship or praised virtues (*ittesaf bil-ansaf*). And in the Mahdavia parlance, this is called *taswiat* (equality), and this term is one among the other terms for the relationship between the two Seals.

Before dilating upon the relationships (*nisbaten*), it would be interesting to discuss if an equal (*nazeer*) of the Prophet is possible or not. About a hundred years ago, the question whether a person like (*misl*) Prophet Muhammad could be born in the Islamic community (*ummah*) or not, was hotly discussed among the ulema of India. Maulvi Abdul Ha. Farangi Mahli has argued about an equal of Prophet Muhammad on the basis of a *Hadis*, reported by Hazrat Ibn Abbas, that "like the skies, there are seven earths. In every one of them, there is a Prophet like your Prophet and a prophet like Adam, Noah, Ibrahim (Abraham) and Esa (Jesus)." (Tabarani, Baihaqi, Hakim and others).

Abdul Hai Sahib countered all the criticism that could have been made against the *Hadis* and proved that it was correct and that Prophet Muhammad had actually said what was reported in it.

Some others have argued on the basis of *mubuvvat* (Prophethood) and *khatamiyat* (the attribute of Prophet Muhammad's being the Seal of Prophets). They have said that since Prophet Muhammad is a *nabi* (prophet) and *Khatam-al-Anbia* (Seal of the Prophets), there is no possibility of his having an equal, even though it is not necessary for the equal of Prophet Muhammad that he (the equal: *nazeer*) too should be a prophet. Thousands of earlier prophets have come and gone, but none of them was like Prophet Muhammad. And Prophet Muhammad's being the Seal of Prophets does not require that there should be no equal or match to him.

Maulvi Haider Ali Rampuri was a proponent of the possibility of there being an equal or match to Prophet Muhammad. He has written: "A king has two high ranking officers. One is the head of the territories of the kingdom and the other is the head of the armed forces. Each of them has a separate sphere of his own duties. But both of them are equal to each other in the eyes of the king."

Maulvi Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi, a great scholar of Logic and Philosophy, was a strong opponent of the possibility of an equal to Prophet Muhammad. He has written a book; entitled "*Imtina'-An-Nazeer*". Maulvi Fazl-e-Haq and Maulvi Abdul Hai had died. And the question of the possibility of an equal to Prophet Muhammad remained unresolved. Abdul Haq, the learned son of Maulvi Fazl-e-Haq, was, like his father, a strong opponent of the possibility of an equal to Prophet Muhammad. He had come to Hyderabad. The question of the possibility of an equal to the Prophet became the topic of discussion. In the meeting, Maulvi Abdul Samad Qandahari was also present. He was the teacher of Maulana Syed Nusrat and Maulana Syed Ashraf Shamsi, (two of the great scholars of the Mahdavia community). Maulana Qandahari said: "After conceding that Prophet Muhammad is the Seal of Prophets, his existence is not free from three situations: either it is binding (*wajib*) or impossible (*mumtana'*) or possible (*mumkin*). If the existence is

binding (*wajib*), it leads to plurality; there would be two gods. If it is impossible (*munтана*), it is totally non-existent. But the *zath* of Prophet Muhammad does exist. Hence, his existence is essentially possible. If the equal of a possibility too is binding (*wajib*), plurality will result. Besides, the equal may excel the original (*asl*), which is absurd (*batil*). If the equal of one possible is impossible, it is dissimilar to the original (*asl*). When the equal of one possible is neither binding nor impossible, it must be possible."

Further, Maulvi Qandahari explained the correctness of the Hadis of Ibn Abbas, and made a sharp speech about the possibility of an equal (*nazeer*) with rational and reported arguments. Abdul Haq Khairabadi did not reply or controvert the views of Maulana Qandahari. In short, eminent and extraordinary ulema of Ahl-e-Sunnat agree that the equal of Prophet Muhammad is possible, logically and as reported (*naqli*).

Dr Muhammad Iqbal, (the poet), had a (sharp) eye on Quran, *Hadis, Irfan and Suluk*, besides Logic and Philosophy. Possibly, he had before him the Islamic traditions and the sayings of the researchers about the advent of Imam Mahdi, too. It is not known how a couplet in one of his poems, eulogising Prophet Muhammed, crept in against the rules of rationality and reported traditions. This couplet does not fill the bill on the touchstone of rational thinking and reported incidents. (His couplet reads in translation:) I do not deny the advent of (Imam) Mahdi, but the birth of your (the Prophet's) equal is impossible." Only one thing is impossible: Allah cannot create a god like Himself. However, even this is a controversial issue. Some of the experts in the *Ilm-e-Kalam* (who try to prove religious issues through rational arguments) contend that, by virtue of the Quranic Verse: "Verily, Allah hath power over all things," (S. 2: 20), even this is possible. But Allah's will (*mashi'at*) has not been issued to create a god like Himself...

In short, from rational and reported arguments, ~~the~~ equal of Prophet Muhammad is not impossible. The saying of Imam Mahdi that "The two of us are not from among the idolatrs," benefits the concept of the equality of the two Seals (of Prophethood and Sainthood); so does the Quranic Verse: "... Soon will thy Lord raise thee in a station of Praise and Glory (*Maqamam- Mahmooda*)." (S. 17: 79). The equality can be argued from this Verse too. In other words, Allah has given a promise to Prophet Muhammad that He would create him in *Maqamam-Mahmooda*. The scholars of the manifest knowledge (*Uloom-e-Zahiri*) have taken *Maqamam-Mahmooda* to mean the position of Intercession (*maqam-e-shafa'at*). There is no doubt that Prophet Muhammad is the Intercessor of the sinful (*Shafi'-al-Muztubin*) and the Mercy to all mankind (*Rahmat-al-lil-alamin*). However, despite this manifest meaning, the researchers have, in their commentaries of Quran, written that *Maqamam-Mahmooda* is the "station of the Seal of Sainthood with the advent of Imam Mahdi." This Statement comes from the Tafseer-e-Taveelat. Most of the researches have given this meaning to to *Maqamam-Mahmooda* (the Station of Praise and Glory). Imam Mahdi too has said that the Station of Praise and Glory means Allah's *Vilayat* (Sainthood). The purport of the Quranic Verse, in short, is that Allah has given a praises to Prophet Muhammad that "you are now in the Station of Hamid (one who praises Allah), and you are propagating the commandments relating to Shariat in the grab of Prophethood (*nubuvat*), but, shortly (in future) He will send you in the Station of Praise and Glory or in the Station of the Sainthood of Muhammad (*Maqam-e-Vilayat-e-Muhammadiya*), and you will then propagate in the grab of Sainthood, the commandments relating to (Divine) Reality." In the Verse stated above, Allah has addressed Prophet Muhammad. And Imam Mahdi is intended here. Hence, the manifestation of Imam Mahdi in the Station of the *Vilayat-e-Muhammadiya* is the manifestation of Prophet Muhammad in all respects.... The auther of *Ibrahad-al-Arifeen* has written that the (divine) Reality in the position of Prophethood became the Seal

of the Prophethood, and it got the name of Muhammad. And in the position of *Vilayat* (Sainthood), he became the Seal of Sainthood, and got the name of Mahdi. Let nobody think that this is transmigration of souls, which is unlawful and impossible in Shariat. This is the Reality of (divine) Unity.....

The Quranic Verse relating to *Maqamam-Mahmooda* proves that the Seals are one *zath* (essence, nature) with all the attributes (*sifat*). The *Vilayat-Allah* or the *Vilayat-e-Muhammadiya*, which is also called the *Ta'yin-e-Awwal* (First Determination), that is, the *Zath-e-Wahid* has manifested itself twice: once in the grab of Prophethood and the second time in the grab of Sainthood. The difference is only of The First and The Last and The Earlier and The Later; nothing else.

The arguments of the Mahdavis are based on the plain phraseology (*nass*) of the Quran. The question of the equality of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Mahdi can be discussed in many ways on the principles of the researchers and the experts in the *Ilm-e-Kalam*. For instance, the experts in *Ilm-e-Kalam* hold, on the basis of their principles, that sacred *zath* of Prophet Muhammad is Allah's Vice-Regent, possessing the attributes of being incapable of erring and the great character (*Khulq-e-Azeem*), and he is the Protector of the community (*ummah*) against eternal damnation (*Dafa '-e-hilakat-e- Ummat*). And, since Prophet Muhammad has said that Imam Mahdi is the Vice-Regent (*khalifa*) of Allah, the Vice-Regency of Allah is the attribute which is not associated with anybody other than Imam Mahdi, as was associated with Pophet Muhammad. The great scholars of Ahl-e-Sunnat have based their contention about the sinlessness (*ismat*) of Imam Mahdi on the *Hadis*, which says: "Mahdi will be from among my descendants; he will follow in my footsteps and will not err." This *Hadis* proves that Prophet Muhammad and Imam Mahdi are common in the attribute of being incapable of erring. And it is obvious that only one who is

sinless can perfectly follow the Prophet, who, too, is sinless. And the generalisation that a follower cannot be equal to his principal applies only to the imperfect follower (*tabe'-e-naqis*). Since Imam Mahdi is sinless, he is the perfect follower of the Prophet. And a perfect follower is equal to the person whom he is following in all actions and deeds, except the particularities of the principal. This saying of the Prophet is proof of the Imam's being incapable of erring; his being the perfect follower of the Prophet and his utterances, deeds and circumstances (*hal*) being exactly as those of the Prophet. And in the attribute of sinlessness, the Imam is equal (*nazeer*) of prophet Muhammad. Allah has said in favour of Prophet Muhammad: "For thou indeed doth possess an eminently exalted character." (S. 68: 4). And Prophet Muhammad has said that Imam Mahdi would be similar (*mushabah*) to me in this character. Hence, the similarity between the Prophet and the Imam in "eminently exalted character" is proved.

Prophet Muhammad has said that Imam Mahdi is the protector of the community (*ummah*) from eternal damnation like the *zath* of the Prophet himself. Hence, the similarity between the Prophet and the Imam in this attribute, too, is proved. These are some of the great attributes which have been mentioned here as examples. There is none other than Imam Mahdi, who shares the above-mentioned attributes with the Prophet.

After having discussed the principles of the experts who prove the religious issues with rational arguments, it would be proper to look at the mode of arguments of the researchers of the Ahl-e-Sunnat, too, who have discussed deep and minute points in the relationships (*nishat*) between the Prophet and the Imam. But, this is not the occasion to go into details about them. In short, in the view of the *sufis*, the prophethood of Muhammad is perfect, superior to and loftier than the prophethood of all other prophets. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad's *Ilahiyat* (sainthood), which is also

called the *Vilayat-e-Muhammadi*, *Noor-e-Muhammadi* and *Haqiqat-e-Muhammadi*, is also superior to the *Vilayat* of all other prophets. The most perfect manifestation (*muzhir*) of this *Vilayat-e-Muhammadi*, Imam Mahdi is called by the *sufis* as the Seal (*Khatam*) of *Vilayat* of Prophet Muhammad, the Seal of Saints (*Aulia*) or the subliminal self (*batin*) of the Seal of the Prophets. They also prove that Imam Mahdi is the Seal of the *Vilayat-e-Muhammadi* or the Seal of the Saints. The author of the *Tajalliat-e-Rahmani* writes: "As prophethood was sealed by Prophet Muhammad, *Vilayat* (Sainthood) will be sealed by Imam Mahdi." The author of *Mafatih-al-I'jaz* writes: "Imam Mahdi, whose advent was promised by Prophet Muhammad, is meant by the term '*Khatam-al-Aulia*.'" Maulana Abdur Razaq Kashani has written under the head, *Istilahat-e-Sufia*, that: "*Khatam-al-Aulia* is Mahdi al-Mau'ood (the Promised Mahdi), who will be sent (by Allah) during the Last era (*Aakhir Zamanah*)."
 Shaikh Akber (Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi), too, has written that the seal of Prophet's Sainthood is Imam Mahdi.

Hence, Prophet Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets and Imam Mahdi is the Seal of the Saints. In this attribute of being the seals (*khatamiat*), Imam Mahdi is the *nazeer* (equal) of Prophet Muhammad. This superiority (*fazilat*) and particularity (*khususiat*) is available to none other than Imam Mahdi in the Muslim Ummah.

The author of *Gulshan-e-Raz*, and its commentary, the author of *Mafatih-al-I'jaz* has written that there is perfect affinity (*insbat*) and unity (*ektai*) between the Seal of Prophethood and Sainthood. Imam Mahdi is the subliminal self (*batin*) and the inheritor of the Station of "لِي مَعَ اللّٰه" (turn to and be with Allah), which is the special station of Prophet Muhammad. Perfect affinity or relationship means that there is the blood relationship, the relationship of the hearts and the relationship of divine Reality, that is, there are three kinds of relationship. Since the Seal of the Saints (Imam Mahdi) is among the descendants of Prophet

Muhammad, the genealogical relationship does exist (between them). Since the heart of Imam Mahdi, by virtue of perfect emulation of the Seal of the Prophets, has become the mirror of the unlimited manifestation and brilliance (*tajalli*), the relationship of hearts is proved. And since the Seal of Saints is the inheritor of the station of “لى مع الله” a special station of the Seal of the Prophets, where there is no room for any prophet or angel, however close to Allah he may be, (*malak-e-muqarrab*), the relationship of the Truth and Reality is truly established. And, he writes that this relationship is higher and superior to all other relationships. Hence, the author of *Mafatih-al-I'jaz* has interpreted the equality of the Prophet and the Imam as the Perfect relationship and unity (*ektai*).

Shaikh Akber Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi has written in his book, *Fusus-al-Hikam*, that some of the experts in the science of recognising Allah (*ilm-e-I'rfan*) have said that we have not recognised (Allah) as we should have recognised Him. In other words, the first group has confined the *Zath* (essence, nature) of Allah, the second group lost its desire. These two situations are called the *ruet-e-muqayyada* (confined vision), in the Mahdavia parlance. The third station of the knowledge of the recognition of Allah is that the *'arifeen* (experts) neither claim perfection in the divine recognition, nor there is a limit to their desire of the Vision. As there is no limit to the *Zath* (essence, nature) of Allah, there is no end to their desire. In Mahdavi terms, this is *ruet-e-mutlaqa* (Absolute Vision). In the terminology of the researchers, this is called *ilm-billah*, *ilm-e-sukuti* and *sair-e-al-mutanahi* (knowledge acquired from Allah, silent knowledge and unlimited stroll). After this, Shaikh Akber says that this third station is not available to anybody other than the Seals of the Prophets and the Saints. Imam mahdi has said that there is no limit to the *Zath* of Allah and there is no limit to the desire (*talab*) of the Seals of the Prophets and Saints. From this explanation of Shaikh Akber, it is proved that in the *ilm-billah*, *ilm-e-sukuti* and *sair-e-la-mutanahi*, Prophet

Muhammad and Imam Mahdi are equal. Imam Mahdi's saying that "the two of us are not among the idolators (*mushrikan*)," manifests this station.

Shaikh Akber has also discussed the nuances that not only the saints of the Muslim Ummah but also prophets, including the Seal of the Prophets, cannot achieve the Divine Vision without the niche of the Seal of the Saints. Although the Seal of Saints, Imam Mahdi, is a follower of the Seal of the Prophets in Shariat, the manifest following (*taba'iat*) does not lessen the eminence and rank of Imam Mahdi, because the Seal of the Saints is of a lower rank (*anzal*) from one angle of view, while from the other, he is the highest (*a'la*).

This is not the occasion to delve into the details of the commentary of this saying of the Shaikh Akber by Maulana Abdul Rahman Jami and Maulana Abdul Razaq Kashani. In short, (it purports to saying that) Imam Mahdi is the Seal of Saints and the subliminal self (*batin*) of the Seal of the Prophets. He has both a lower and a higher relationship with Prophet Muhammad. He is the follower (*tabe'*) of Prophet Muhammad on the one hand, and on the other, he is followed (*mathu'*). Conversely, Prophet Muhammad is followed (*mathu'*) on the one hand, and on the other, he is a follower (*tabe'*). This following (*taba'iat*) and being followed (*mathu'iat*) is proved by the sayings of the researchers of Ahl-e-Sunnat. Imam Mahdi has only confirmed this when he said: "I am a follower (*tabe'*) of the Messenger of Allah in Shariat, and am followed (*mathu'*) in meaning." The following and being followed is the (final) argument about the perfect equality between the Prophet and the Imam.

The summary of the research of the researchers of Ahl-e-Sunnat, like the author of *Gulshan-e-Raz* and the commentator of his book, that is, the author of *Mafatih-al-I'jaz*, the author of *Irshad-*

al-A' rifeen. Shaikh Akber Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi, Abdur Rahman Jami, Abdur Razaq Kashani and others, is that the Seal of the Sainthood of Prophet Muhammad, that is, Imam Mahdi has three positions: (1) Allah has made him the defender (*nasir*) of the religion of Prophet Muhammad, (2) the founder (*muassis*) of the laws of Shariat; and (3) Vice-Regent (*Khalifa*) and follower (*taba'*) of Prophet Muhammad, in the station of Shariat. Imam Mahdi too has said that Allah commanded him to say: "I am the servant (*banda*) of Allah, the follower (*tabe'*) of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.

The second position of Imam mahdi is that, by virtue of his being the Seal of the Saints and the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, he is the place of refuge (*marja'*) of all. All inclding the high and the low and the saints and the prophets, achieve the Vision of Allah from his niche. By virtue of this position, the *zath* (essence, nature) of Imam Mhdi is the one which is followed in the real terms (*matbu'-e-haqiqi*). Imam Mahdi has pointed out this position when he said: "I am the follower of the Messenger of Allah in Shariat and am foliowed (*matbu'*) in meaning." And this is the position, where Imam Mahdi has said: "There is none superior to Mahdi, except Allah."

The Imam's third position is that *ilm-billah*, the *ilm-e-sukuti* and *sair-e-la-mutanahi* is not achieved by anybody except the Seals of Prophethood and the Sainthood. In Mahdavi parlance, this is called *rueet-e-mutlaqa* (Absolute Vision of Allah). From this position, the holy *zawat* (essences and natures) of the Prophet and the Imam are equals in the ranks of *ilm-billah* and the rank of nearness to Allah to a degree where there is no difference between the two (even as insignificant as) a hair. And this is the station about which Imam Mahdi has said in respect of himself and the Prophet that: "The two of us are not among all the idolators (*jumla mushrikan*)."

This saying of Imam Mahdi is the explanation of the Quranic Verse: "*Wa ma 'ana minal-mush-rikin*." (S. 12:108). Hence, at

this stage and in this station, the Seals (*Khatamin*) are equal, in accordance with the command of Allah. Some of our people have understood this belief of Equality as a minor matter. But this is a mistake. The matter which is proved by Quranic Verses is a matter of principle. Its importance is so exalted that a person, who differentiates between the Prophet and the Imam, even to an extent of a thousandth part of a hair (in width) is unfortunate enough to be bereft of faith (*iman*). The imperatives of perfect knowledge, sound belief, religion (*deen*) and honesty demand that every rank must be kept at its proper place. Confusing in the matter or inter-mixing the opposites would led to ruin and damage.

The famous *tabi'i* (successor to the companions of Prophet Muhammad) Ibn Seereen's saying is comprehensive of all the manifest and subliminal reasons, put forth by the researchers and experts in the *Ilm-e-Kalam*. The author of *Aqd-ad-darar* has quoted Auf who in turn quotes Ibn Seereen as saying that "Imam Mahdi is equal to our Prophet".

In conclusion, the Mahdavis are not alone in the belief of the equality between Prophet Muhammad and Imam Mahdi. Their belief is identical with the research of the researchers of Ahl-e-Sunnat. The belief of Mahdvis is based on the clear Quranic Verses: "... And never will I join gods with Allah," (S. 12:108) and "... Soon will thy Lord raise thee in a station of Praise and Glory (*Maqam-Mahmooda*)," (S. 17:79), besides others. In addition to this, it is also based on the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and the Sayings of Imam Mahdi. All these have been quoted above. In view of these, there is no need for any other argument and proof. However, the beliefs of the Mahdavis are not contrary to the relationships established by the researchers on the basis of their principles between the Prophet and the Imam. However, the Mahdavis refer to these relationships with the term '*taswial*' (equality).
