

SLB-008
Spiritual Life Basics
Lesson 8
9-10-06

**The Necessity of a Spiritual Life:
The Times in Which We Live**

Hebrews 10:20-25

- Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have "a great priest over the house of God," let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy. We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- The August 22 date has passed, of course, and no Hidden Imam has yet, arguably, appeared; nor has an Apocalypse, in our literal understanding of it, transpired.
- By why did the Iranian president refer to August 22? And who exactly is the Hidden Imam? How and why does his supposed return inspire the nuclear Mullahs' visions of annihilating Israel and, eventually, the rest of the non-Islamic world?

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Does Ahmadinejad believe that “speeding things up” in terms of the usage of nuclear weapons will hasten the return of the Hidden Imam?

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- The Mahdi's ascendancy to power is said to be preceded by an army from the east that will be carrying black flags or banners of war. Sheikh Kabbani states:
- hadith indicate that black flags coming from the area of Khorasan will signify the appearance of the Mahdi is nigh. Khorasan is in today's Iran, and some scholars have said that this hadith means when the black flags appear from Central Asia, i.e. in the direction of Khorasan, then the appearance of the Mahdi is imminent.
- [The Approach of Armageddon? An Islamic Perspective; Published by the Supreme Moslem Council of America in 2003, and Written by Shaykh Mohammed Hishan Kabbani]

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

This is Ahmadinejad's Vision For Iran

- Another Tradition States:
- The Messenger of Allah said: The black banners will come from the east and their hearts will be as firm as iron. Whoever hears of them should join them and give allegiance, even if it means crawling across snow.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Dr. Furnish, let's begin with you. Tell us in the simplest way you can please, who is the Hidden Imam and how does he fit with the Iranian Mullah's nuclear visions?
- Furnish: The Hidden Imam is the Shi`i Muslim version of the Awaited Mahdi, one of two positive eschatological figures in Islamic thought, the other being Jesus. Al-Mahdi means "the rightly-guided one" and is described in many Sunni and Shi`i hadiths (or sayings allegedly going back to Muhammad himself) as coming before the end of time to make the entire world Muslim and establish global justice.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Sunnis believe that the Mahdi will stride onto the world stage for the first time before The End, while Shi`is believe that he has already been here, in the person of one of the descendants of Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, and thus the Muslim prophet's closest male relative).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- In the 10th c. CE the last Imam, or legitimate ruler of the Islamic community according to Shi`is (because of Alid descent) disappeared and, it is claimed, went into "ghaybah," or hiding whence he will return. So the major difference between Sunni and Shi`i belief in the Mahdi is that the former say he hasn't come yet, the latter that he'll return. In any event, the UnHidden Imam/Mahdi will create a global caliphate by conquest.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- As for 22 August that just passed: that is the date this year that corresponded to 27 Rajab, the traditional date in Islam of Muhammad's mi`raj, or miraculous night ascent to heaven from Jerusalem. Sunni Mahdism, to the best of my knowledge, attaches no special eschatological significance to this date. It would seem that Shi`i Mahdism does, however. I would be leery of imputing apocalyptic (in the sense of Armageddon-related) motives to the ayatollahs, for in both Shi`i and Sunni eschatology the Mahdi does not destroy the world but makes it right (i.e., Muslim).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- FP: Well the problem is that destroying the world might be the prerequisite for making it “right,” as the Nazis, Communists and Islamists believe. In other words, the world must be purified by human blood -- earthly paradise can only be built on the ashes of destruction and death.
- So does Ahmadinejad believe that he can “speed things up” so to speak in terms of annihilating Israel or whatever other evil lunacy is in his brain? In other words, he and the Mullahs want the Hidden Imam to come back so bad that they think they can hasten his return by perpetrating some kind of mass genocide?

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Spencer: Jamie, you're absolutely right that "destroying the world might be the prerequisite for making it 'right'" in this case. The Hidden Imam is, according to Islamic tradition, due to reappear after a period in which the Muslims suffer great persecution and calamity. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, said that the Mahdi "will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny" (Sunan Abu Dawud, book 36, no. 4272).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- The Mahdi will not appear until that oppression and tyranny have for Muslims reached levels unparalleled in human history: as Muhammad also says: "It will be a calamity which, in severity, shall be unprecedented. It will be so violent that the earth with injustice and corruption will shrivel for its inhabitants" (Ibn Hajar, al-Sawa'iq al-muharriqa, p. 161).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- It is not beyond the realm of possibility that Ahmadinejad is calculating that he can hasten the coming of the Imam Mahdi by bringing about an increase of what he would regard as oppression of the Muslims - "oppression" that would in reality be a defensive response to an Iranian attack.



Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- The Iranian Mullahs either already have, or will very soon be in possession of, nuclear weapons. This reality is horrifying in the context of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's verbalized fantasy of annihilating Israel. Part of this fantasy, and also the inspiration for it, is the apocalyptic world vision of Ahmadinejad -- and of many of his co-rulers. This vision involves the Islamic Shiite belief in the return of the Hidden Imam, who, according to some, was supposed to have returned on August 22 -- which Ahmadinejad ominously referred to when speaking about Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- As for who the Hidden Imam is, there are two answers. Conceptually, Muhammad al-Mahdi, "The Guided One" is the key theological tenet in Shi'a Islam and the cornerstone of its prophetic doctrine. He is mystically anointed to disseminate Muhammad's message to humanity and to redeem a fallen world. Historically, we need to start with the fourth Caliph, Ali, who in Shi'a tradition was the first legitimate successor to the "Prophet." Ali's position vis-à-vis Muhammad is comparable to that of Aaron vis-à-vis Moses or Peter's to Jesus.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Shi'a hold that Ali and all subsequent 11 imams were infallible: they were neither prophets nor Allah's messengers - Muhammad was the last of those, of course - but they nevertheless had an essential function in keeping the world "whole." On the other hand, all three caliphs before Ali were usurpers who had strayed from the path of Islam and were seduced by power, money, and earthly delights. Their successors, ruling from Damascus, killed Ali's son and successor Husayn, revered as a martyr by all Shi'a Muslims. Those who regard the corrupt early caliphs as "rightly guided," i.e. the Sunni majority through the centuries and to this day, continue to stray.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Eleven imams, in Shi'ite teaching, succeeded Ali on the basis of male primogeniture. The historical record on ten of them is sparse but devoid of overtly mystical elements. The tenth successor and eleventh imam, Hasan al-Askari, left no heir, however, causing Shi'ites to split into several sects. The dominant one holds that Hasan al-Askari did have a son after all, Abul-Qasim Muhammad (the same name as that of the "Prophet" himself).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- HE is supposedly al-Mahdi, the twelfth Imam who has been in hiding for the past 1132 years. He is being kept miraculously alive by Allah in a cave and he will return shortly before the Day of Final Judgment, waging war on the forces of evil, ushering in a period of perfect rule, and heralding the end-times. The believers in this tradition are known as Ithna-Ashari - i.e. "Twelver," or Imami Shi'a - and their sect is commonly treated as synonymous with Shi'ite Islam in general.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- For as long as the Imam remains hidden, the world is doomed to remain fallen. Shi'ites are fixated on the end-times and they are on the constant lookout for the signs of the pending return of the Hidden Imam; likewise the Communists saw their own "signs" in 1914, or 1936, or 1941... This obsession shapes not only Shi'as' philosophy of life and culture, but also their politics, and - as attested by Ahmadinejad's idiosyncrasies - their approach to world affairs.

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- (Joel Richardson in Antichrist - Islam's Awaited Messiah)
- "Throughout the Islamic world today there is a call for the restoration of The Islamic Caliphate.
- The caliph is in Islam the supreme political and religious leader of all Muslims.

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- The caliph is viewed as the vice regent for Allah on the earth.
- It is important to understand that when Muslims call for the restoration of the caliphate, it is ultimately the Mahdi that they are calling for.
- For the Mahdi is the awaited final caliph of Islam.
- The Mahdi is believed to be a future Moslem world leader who will not only rule over the Islamic world, but also the non-Muslim world as well.

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- "As such, Muslims everywhere will be obligated to follow the Mahdi."
- Quotations from Muslim commentaries:
 - "If you see him, go and give him your allegiance, even if you have to crawl over ice, because he is the vice regent of Allah, the Mahdi."
 - " He will pave the way for and establish the government of the family of Mohammed... every believer will be obligated to support him."

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- The Mahdi is said to lead a world revolution that will establish a new Islamic world order throughout the entire earth:
 - The Mahdi will establish right and justice in the world and eliminate evil and corruption. He will fight against the enemies of the Muslims who would be victorious.
 - He will reappear on the appointed day, and then he will fight against the forces of evil, lead a world revolution and set up a new world order based on justice, righteousness and virtue... ultimately the righteous will take the world administration in their hands and Islam will be victorious over all the religions.

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- The Mahdi's means and methods of accomplishing this world revolution will include multiple military campaigns or holy wars ("jihad"). While some Muslims believe that most of the non-Muslims of the world will convert to Islam peaceably during the reign of the Mahdi, most traditions picture the non-Muslim world coming to Islam as a result of being conquered by the Mahdi.
- Even a moderate and very popular Muslim author () refers to the Mahdi's invasion of the numerous non-Muslim lands: "the Mahdi will invade all the places between East and West."

A Universal Leader for All Muslims

- The Miraculous Provider Will Be Loved by All
- It is said that the Mahdi will have control over the wind and the rain and the crops. Under the Mahdi's rule, the world we live in prosperity. As a result of the numerous benefits that the Mahdi brings, it is said that all the inhabitants of the Earth will be possessed with a deep love of him.
 - "Al Mahdi appears, everyone only talks about Him, drinks the love of Him, and never talks about anything other than Him."

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Trifkovic: The difference between the upholders of Sunni orthodoxy in Saudi Arabia, say, and Ahmadinejad may be compared to that between Stalin and Trotsky 70 years ago. The Saudis are playing Moscow cca 1950: oppressively conservative at home, while exporting hard-line Party cadres and financing fifth columnists and fellow travelers abroad, in pursuit of a long-term geopolitical project: quiet conquest of Dar al-Harb from within.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Trifkovic: One could say that orthodox Sunni Islam is "optimistic," Realpolitik-based, and pragmatic. It expects that the "contradictions" of the West make it ready for quiet demographic and cultural conquest in the fulness of time, and prefers to avoid any overt adventurism that may force the issue before the fruit is fully ripe.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Trifkovic: Ahmadinejad, by contrast, shares with Trotsky an apocalyptic world outlook. He favors direct action in pursuit of a permanent Islamic revolution that will pave the way for the return of the Hidden Imam, pave it with blood, sweat and tears. Indeed he'd like to speed things up, as you point out, and implicitly he hopes to achieve this by twisting the arm of the Almighty - no less so than the cloners of red heifers and would-be re-builders of the Temple hope to do as a means of speeding up the Rupture. The fact that he is more sincere in his beliefs and more earnest in his endeavors than the kleptocrats of the House of Saud are in theirs, is alarming but unsurprising. He is a visionary; they are Machiavellian cynics.

The Jews in Islam

- Boston: Georges Vajda— in a seminal 1937 essay, *Jews and Muslims according to the hadith*. *Journal Asiatique*, 1937, Vol. 229, pp. 57-129.)—provides an overall assessment of the portrayal of the Jews in the hadith collections (the putative words and deeds of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, as recorded by pious transmitters), complemented by Koranic verses, and observations from the earliest Muslim biographies [or “sira”] of Muhammad.

The Jews in Islam

- **Bostom:** Vajda’s research demonstrates how in Muslim eschatology Jews are described as adherents of the Dajjal—the Muslim equivalent of the Anti-Christ—and as per another tradition, the Dajjal is in fact Jewish. At his appearance, other traditions state that the Dajjal will be accompanied by 70,000 Jews from Isfahan wrapped in their robes, and armed with polished sabers, their heads covered with a sort of veil. When the Dajjal is defeated, his Jewish companions will be slaughtered— everything will deliver them up except for the so-called gharkad tree. Thus, according to a canonical hadith, ([Sahih Muslim, Book 40, Number 6985](#)), if a Jew seeks refuge under a tree or a stone, these objects will be able to speak to tell a Muslim: “There is a Jew behind me; come and kill him!”

The Jews in Islam

- Bostom: Not only are the Jews vanquished in the eschatological war, but they will serve as ransom for the Muslims in the fires of hell. The sins of certain Muslims will weigh on them like mountains, but on the day of resurrection, these sins will be lifted and laid upon the Jews.
- Hence one can better understand the obsessive fixation on the Jews in both Shi'ite and Sunni eschatology, and the obvious connection to the ongoing jihad being waged to destroy Israel.

The Jews in Islam

- Furnish: As Andrew Bostom just succinctly pointed out, Muslim eschatology has as its main antagonist the Jewish Dajjal and his minions. David Cook points out in his book on Muslim apocalyptic that for Muslims who take their eschatology seriously (and that seems to be a growing number today), "the Jew" is the metahistorical foe, whereas "the Christian" is (merely) the historical one. So whereas tactical alliances are possible with the latter, they NEVER are with the former.

The Jews in Islam

- Furnish: Also, don't forget, not just traditions and beliefs but Islamic history reflects anti-Jewish activity; Muhammad had the Jewish Banu Qurayzah tribe of Medina liquidated (the men killed, the women and children given away as spoils of war) for allegedly plotting against him. So the pattern of violence against Jews was set by the prophet of Islam himself.

The Jews in Islam

- Furnish: I'm not sure that Serge Trifkovic's analogy of the Sunni-Shi'i split over establishing a global caliphate to the one between Stalin and Trotsky really holds up all that well. By asserting that "Ahmadinejad...shares with Trotsky an apocalyptic world outlook," and contraposing that to the "optimistic, Realpolitik-based, and pragmatic" view of The Endtimes allegedly held by the Sunni Saudis, Serge leaves out of the equation the fact that many, if not most, of the openly declared and reified Mahdist movements over the last millennium were Sunni ones (Ibn Tumart, Ahmad Barelwi, Sayyid Jawnpuri, Muhammad Ahmad, etc.).

The Jews in Islam

- Furnish: And in fact, the last overt Mahdist movement was the 1979 attempt by Juhayman al-`Utaybi and a cadre of followers to overthrow the KSA government in the name of the Mahdi, his brother-in-law Muhammad al-Qahtani. Now while the Saudi regime of course condemned and repressed this attempted coup, note that a revolutionary Mahdist movement erupted in the heart of Wahhabi Sunnism!

The Jews in Islam

- Furnish: Ahmadinejad may be "visionary," but not all Sunnis are "Machiavellian cynics," as is the Saudi ruling house. Serge seems convinced that Sunni Mahdism can never be as spasmodic or volcanic as that of the Shi`is--but with all due respect, I simply disagree.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Furnish: Robert Spencer agrees with the analyst Reuven Paz that Ahmadinejad is attempting to "hotwire" the apocalypse. I'm just not convinced of that, perhaps because my research focuses on Sunni movements which, historically, have not ascribed to the doctrine that "destroying the world might be the prerequisite for making it right." From what I can gather in Arabic books and websites, the Sunni world at least is already convinced the ummah (Islamic community) is already at its absolute historical nadir--so there's no need to increase the oppression of Muslims.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Furnish: What I am more concerned about is the possibility that Sunni and Shi`i views of the dire straits of the ummah, and the need for the Mahdi/UnHidden Imam to appear, will increasingly converge such that sizable factions of each branch of Islam would be willing to accept a charismatic leader as the Mahdi.
- And since I'm convinced that Usama bin Ladin, the most charismatic leader in the Islamic world (still outshining Nasrallah), is in Iran being protected by the ayatollahs, there is a very real possibility that UBL could emerge in the near future as the "ecumenical" leader of the jihadist world, both Sunni and Shi`i. And if Tehran has nuclear weapons by then....

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Spencer: Jamie, I'd just like to interject at this point an additional note about Islamic eschatology: I don't think it's quite accurate to say, as Dr. Furnish does, that "for Muslims who take their eschatology seriously 'the Jew' is the metahistorical foe, whereas 'the Christian' is (merely) the historical one. So whereas tactical alliances are possible with the latter, they NEVER are with the former."

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- If I understand this correctly to suggest that Muslim enmity toward Jews is theologically driven and rooted in the Islamic texts, while Muslim enmity toward Christians is only an accident of history without roots in the Islamic texts, it is only half correct.
- A hadith amplifies all this while describing both Christians and Jews as renegades from the truth faith, which is of course Islam:

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- “On the Day of Resurrection, a call-maker will announce, "Let every nation follow that which they used to worship." Then none of those who used to worship anything other than Allah like idols and other deities but will fall in Hell (Fire), till there will remain none but those who used to worship Allah, both those who were obedient (i.e. good) and those who were disobedient (i.e. bad) and the remaining party of the people of the Scripture. Then the Jews will be called upon and it will be said to them, 'Who do you use to worship?'

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- They will say, 'We used to worship Ezra, the son of Allah.' It will be said to them, 'You are liars, for Allah has never taken anyone as a wife or a son. What do you want now?' They will say, 'O our Lord! We are thirsty, so give us something to drink.' They will be directed and addressed thus, 'Will you drink,' whereupon they will be gathered unto Hell (Fire) which will look like a mirage whose different sides will be destroying each other. Then they will fall into the Fire.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Afterwards the Christians will be called upon and it will be said to them, 'Who do you use to worship?' They will say, 'We used to worship Jesus, the son of Allah.' It will be said to them, 'You are liars, for Allah has never taken anyone as a wife or a son,' Then it will be said to them, 'What do you want?' They will say what the former people have said. Then, when there remain (in the gathering) none but those who used to worship Allah (Alone, the real Lord of the Worlds) whether they were obedient or disobedient. (Bukhari, vol. 6, book 65, no. 4581)

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- In Islamic eschatology, Jesus will set things right at the end of the world. He will return to end the second-class dhimmi status of non-Muslims in Islamic societies - not by initiating a new era of equality and harmony, but by abolishing Christianity and imposing Islam upon everyone. As Muhammad explained: "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler); he will break the Cross and kill the pigs and there will be no Jizya (i.e. taxation taken from non Muslims)" (Bukhari, vol. 4, book 60, no. 3448).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Another tradition puts it this way: "He will break the cross, kill swine, and abolish jizyah. Allah will perish all religions except Islam" (Sunan Abu Dawud, bk. 37, no. 4310). And yet another hadith has Muhammad saying: "How will you be when the son of Mary (i.e. Jesus) descends amongst you and he will judge people by the Law of the Qur'an and not by the law of Gospel" (Bukhari, vol. 4, bk. 60, no. 3449).

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- All that said, it is true that Christians are not portrayed in the Qur'an as the crafty, invidious, and inveterate enemies of the Muslims that the Jews are, so Cook and Furnish are generally correct that Muslims may consider tactical alliances with Christians possible - and there are many historical instances of this - but not with Jews. But there is a "metahistorical" element to the Islamic critique of Christians and Christianity, and thus such accords when they are made will always be temporary, and will never replace Islamic triumphalism and supremacism. This is a fact that the leaders of Western states, which are still thought of as Christian in the Islamic world, would do well to bear in mind.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Trifkovic: My analogy to Stalin vs. Trotsky re. Uncle Joe was clearly related to the KSA "Wahhabism Central," which right now is indeed Machiavellian and "optimistic," and not to Sunni Mahdism, which is apocalyptic.
- The Meccan fifth column in the West -- thousands of KSA- financed mosques and Islamic centers -- are busy spreading the message that there must be no terrorism and no threats, lest the hosts belatedly wake up to what's going on.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Of course many of the Mahdist movements have been Sunni, but they are temperamentally and ideologically opposed to the royal kleptocrats' approach, and -- many theological differences notwithstanding -- inherently sympathetic to Ahmadinejad's mindset. Far from being "convinced" that Sunni Mahdism can never be as spasmodic or volcanic as that of the Shi'is, I can see it forging an alliance with the Armageddonists in Tehran. Hence I agree with Furnish's conclusion that the two may converge, and I wouldn't find UBL's presence in Iran shocking at all.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Furnish: Robert Spencer is of course totally correct that Islamic animus towards Christians has deep roots in the theology. But that was historically tempered by the different experience the expanding Islamic state had with its Christian rivals, most formatively the Byzantine Empire, and that influence is still evident in Mahdist writings today (at least in the Sunni Arab ones). For example, some modern works on Mahdism posit a global alliance between the Christian West and the Islamic world--even perhaps between the West and the Mahdi's forces, once he arrives on the scene!--against Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog), often envisioned as the Chinese (and sometimes Russians) and/or against the forces of the Dajjal!

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- In such scenarios, it is only after the evil forces of the East are defeated that the West then turns against the Mahdi and his Muslim followers, whereupon he (of course) defeats the disloyal Christian world. So hudna, or even temporary alliance, with Western Christian powers is a possibility, whereas Jews are always seen (as Robert acknowledges) as misguided at best and evil at worst.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- I discovered a fiendishly original reinterpretation of Daniel 11 in some modern Mahdist books (the "king of the south" passages, describing an evil ruler who will "desecrate the Temple" and "set up the abomination that causes desolation"). Mahdists today (at least the Sunni ones) refer to this figure as "the Zionist Mahdi" (mahdi al-Sahyuni), actually the Dajjal whom Jews will follow instead of the true Mahdi.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- Spencer: Dr. Furnish is correct about the possibility of a Muslim/Christian hudna compatible with Shi'ite eschatology and based on the theological foundations that have been explained here. Christians tempted by such offers should examine that eschatology in its fullness, and beware.

Ahmadinejad's Armageddon

- All this doesn't mean, of course, that the Iranian government has any such plans. While Iranians and other Shi'ites doubtless caught the significance of his setting the date of August 22 to reply to the West's tribute offer, and of his refusal on that date to give up his nuclear program, there are still many ways in which he can act to hasten the coming of the Hidden Imam short of a nuclear attack. But in light of what pious Twelver Shi'ites believe about the Imam Mahdi, I do hope that American authorities will be monitoring events in Iran very closely over the coming months.