History has witnessed many social movements, efforts, and governments where a group of people work together towards a common goal. At times, the purpose of such organization was to maintain society; on other occasions, their efforts called for a cultural or structural change. Regardless of the situation, there is a consequential need to rally behind a chosen leader to champion their mission.

What is the purpose of selecting a leader? Why is this concept apparent in different cultures, different races, different religions, and throughout history? Despite their differences, the majority of religions mention a leader who will arrive at the end of time, when all attempts to organize society have failed, and mankind has been brought to its knees.

It is this very need to be saved in times of great distress that necessitates the emergence of a savior: a leader who champions a common mission, and promises to save, guide, and rescue humanity in its darkest hour.

Whenever people gather together, regardless of the situation, there is a psychological tendency to rally behind a “leader”. While there may be debates as to which individual should be assigned the leadership role, most agree that that each situation requires someone to lead, or organize, a particular effort.

This final leader, who has been awaited since the dawn of time, is known by many names in different regions and religions of the world. In Arabic, this leader is simply translated as “Imam Mahdi.”

Countless civilizations have struggled to prepare themselves for his return, yearning to be lead by this infallible leader.

But who is the Mahdi, and how will he save mankind from its own damages and devices?
Empires have been raised, destroyed, and reborn numerous times throughout history, but there are a few core concepts that unify these divergent cultures. One of these is the belief in a final savior that will come at the end of the world. This common faith in a just leader who will bring truth and justice to a world of chaos and corruption is widely observed in various cultural and faith traditions, especially in those of the Abrahamic traditions. The difference lies in who this character is, and what circumstances will precipitate his arrival. In Islamic eschatology, this refers to the leadership of Imam Mahdi, the messiah who will guide humanity to the path of truth and consciousness.

Born in 868 AD, Imam Mahdi has several titles, but he is generally known as the Mahdi, or the rightly guided spiritual leader. Imam Mahdi entered a period of divine hiding that would protect him from his enemies. He will return when he is called forth by Allah to fulfill his mission by restoring peace and balance on earth in a time of great tyranny and chaos. As a harbringer of benevolence, Imam Mahdi represents the justice of Allah on earth, and he will answer the cries of the helpless, oppressed, and downtrodden.

The Prophet of Islam proclaimed, “Listen to the good news about the Mahdi! He
will rise at the time when people will be faced with severe conflict and the earth will be hit by a violent quake. He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. He will fill the hearts of his followers with devotion and will spread justice everywhere.” One does not need to look any further than the daily newspaper to see how this promise translates to our current social and political climate. Each day brings another wave of stories thick with genocide, dictators, poverty, and oppression. Overwhelmingly, these events create a feeling of helplessness and despair.

We can begin to understand the magnitude of Imam Mahdi’s arrival in the context of history. The efforts of great souls such as Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. illustrate the impact that a single, conscientious leader has on a social movement, but the coming of Imam Mahdi will go beyond anything we have ever witnessed. Imam Mahdi will do more than oppose wicked oppressors; he and his followers will destroy the very root of exploitation and injustice, and establish instead a new system of governance that will eternally protect human life and dignity. This holistic form of governance will address every wrong in our society, such that there will be no room for any transgression of Allah’s justice. In short, the purpose of the Mahdi is to usher in a golden era of peace and tranquility like never seen before.
The concept of the Awaited Savior has its origins in many monotheistic religions. Judaism and Christianity have very similar beliefs to Islam with regards to messianic tradition, which is not unusual because Islam is derived from Judeo-Christian philosophy. Each of the three religions ascribe particular significance to the coming of a Leader, especially in relation to the Day of Judgment, which marks the end of the word. Islamic tradition, like its Jewish and Christian counterparts, claim that an “Imam” or Leader will lead God’s true believers to salvation. He will be the leader of the Kingdom of God in this world and in the hereafter, and will aid in the battle to defeat the ultimate evil: the anti-Christ, or Dajjal in Arabic. Each religion also promises a subsequent messianic age, heralding a period of peaceful co-existence and prosperity amongst all human beings and animals.

In the Christian faith, it is believed that the second coming of Jesus Christ will free mankind of all its sins. Muslims also await the arrival of Jesus on the Day of Judgment, but they hold Imam Mahdi as their Savior and view Jesus as his companion. In Conservative and Orthodox Jewish tradition, the Messiah, or Moshiach (meaning “anointed one” in Hebrew), is a fundamental aspect of the Jewish faith. The coming of the messiah is mentioned in Jewish prayers, particularly for his deliverance of all Jews to the Promised Land. The Moshiach will be from the line of King David, and he will be made King at the End of Days. Similarly, Muslims hold that the Mahdi will descend from the progeny of the Prophet, and he is the twelfth and final successor to Prophet Muhammad. The Mahdi went into a period of hiding in approximately 873 AD, and will reappear in a manner that is similar to the second coming of Christ, when the world is ready for him.

The quintessential belief that unifies these prophesied figures is that the Messiah will be a leader to the people of faith. In Christian tradition, Jesus Christ, is the savior who sacrificed himself to save man from their sins. Jewish ideology states that the Messiah will be a king who will gather the Jews to Israel and herald a time of peace. While some religions exclusively promise salvation to its followers, Muslims consider the Messiah to be the leader of all mankind under one unified banner of faith.

There are also different schools of thought regarding the Messiah within each faith. Orthodox and Conservative Jews place great importance on the Messiah, while Reformist and Reconstructionists call for a less personal messianic age, at times disregarding it altogether. Mainstream Christian belief holds that Jesus will be born again at world’s end, but there are fragmented sects that consider Jesus to have already risen for the second time. Sunni and Shi’a Muslims have some differences on the logistics for the Mahdi, but both agree that Jesus will play a large role in the Day of Judgment.
Understanding Imam Mahdi’s Purpose
How different religions comprehend their idea of a savior, and how Jesus relates to the Mahdi

When discussing Imam Mahdi and his role as a Messiah, one cannot avoid Jesus’ role in Islamic eschatology. Muslims regard Jesus as a prophet who will play an incredibly significant part on the Day of Judgment, for he and Imam Mahdi will work together and be united in their battle against tyranny.

According to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Mahdi will appear to the people of Islam and the people of the world to herald the messianic period prior to the Day of Judgment. In fact, Prophet Muhammad once said: “How would it be with you when the son of Mary will descend among you, and you will have an Imam (leader) raised from among you?”

This leader raised from among the Muslims is the Mahdi. In the time following Imam Mahdi’s reappearance, Jesus will reveal himself to believers and nonbelievers, and vanquish the anti-Christ. Imam Mahdi and Jesus will fight an epic battle, and only with the aid of Christ can the anti-Christ be defeated. Jesus will join Mahdi in establishing God’s kingdom on earth, and in the hereafter. The Mahdi will then lead Jesus and all living creatures in prayer. Jesus and Mahdi will fight side by side to bring justice, harmony, and faith to mankind, and strive to eliminate tyranny and wrongdoing.

It is thought that this final reunion of Imam Mahdi and Jesus symbolizes the final reunion of the two lines of Abraham’s progeny—Isaac’s line of Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, which led to the birth of Jesus, and Ishmael’s line which gave rise to Prophet Muhammad and Imam Mahdi.
Who this Savior is to Muslims? Who is Imam Mahdi?

Imam Mahdi holds a special place for many Muslims around the world, for he is not only a descendant Imam Ali, who was the successor and son-in-law to Prophet Muhammad, but he will be the savior for all mankind. The Imam went into a state of divine hiding into from his father’s home many years ago, but he is said to be living amongst us now. He is wherever God wants him to be, and he is witness to the people surrounding him, although they might not recognize him. For this reason, many Muslims are particularly vigilant of the Imam, for they believe that he could be standing amongst them at any moment.

Imam Mahdi is not just a leader to look forward to in the future; he is very much alive today, and dwells within the hearts of the believers. He has been attributed to performing miracles for his true believers. Special supplications for the Imam’s aid have been recorded as somehow mysteriously, and perhaps miraculously, being answered, and thousands of accounts of Mahdi’s benevolent intercession have been documented. While there is no way to substantiate these stories, it is widely believed that such miracles, like the healing of the sick and the rescuing of those in need, are the work of God through Imam Mahdi, his living ambassador to earth. The love that grows for the Mahdi only increases when Muslims suffer great trials and tribulation, for they know that he will come to them and they will have their recompense. While many people have claimed to be the Mahdi, or even the messiah of other religions, none have lived up to the high expectations that Muslim place on the savior who will bring them final salvation.