

A glance over history

If you lend ear to the history of the world you will hear the news of a great event the like of which has not happened even after a passage of more than ten centuries. If you reflect carefully about the various happenings in the world you will be fascinated by a grand personality before whose high thinking everything appears to be trivial. The world and its life, and the children, the kinsmen, wealth and rulership do not enjoy any importance in his eyes.

This personality is too great to be placed in the row of ordinary people and his insight is so keen that it resembles the reasoning of common people only in name.

If you hear with the ears of your heart, history will narrate to you that story of the martyrs in the path of truth and justice with whose blood the border of the sky is covered. If you look at the horizon you will observe two kinds of redness; one the natural redness and the other that of the blood of the martyrs in the path of truth and justice.

Have a look at the history of the East and find out that great power of comprehension and understanding which is the centre of every circle of high thinking, and the origin of every true reasoning and logic. Every modern research and new idea about the life of this world and the Hereafter is related to him. The opinions which may have come to your notice with regard to human system and laws, principles of civilization and rules of morality has originated from this spring. These rules and principles are based on the mutual relations, co-operation and partnership of humanity.

Which reflective power¹ has invented a new policy and a new method in philosophy and placed it at the disposal of the people who have passed it on to the posterity? Everyone has benefited from it according to his understanding, but none has so far reached its real philosophy and its depth. It is necessary that other brains and intellects should make new discoveries from what he has said.

Who is that enlightened person who himself is involved in suffering and pains but others are blessed and happy because of him? He who has prepared and continues to prepare the path for his friends as well as enemies! A scholar who is prepared whole-heartedly to explain things for others after discussing the cause and effect of everything!

Who is that subtle scholar who has pondered over everything and there is nothing about which he is not well-informed? So much so that he knows even those things which the people have not done but have only thought about them. He possesses such a powerful intellect that the knowledge which appeared in the East after him is also associated with him; in fact it is he who is the foundation and the fountain-head of all such sciences.

Have you ever observed so perfect an intellect as should have recognized the greatest reality? And that reality is the basis for social relations, the cause for everyone pursuing his own particular path. It tells why one group follows the right path and the other wrong path.

This reality which was understood by Ali thirteen hundred years ago has been made the new subject of discussion by the scholars of the East and the West. By this I mean the need for the necessities of life, to acquire which the people are following different paths. One group has transgressed its limits. It has ignored the rules of justice and is endeavouring to mislead the people. In order to achieve their nefarious ends deception is being practised and illogical things are being spread by the capitalists to accumulate wealth, by government officers to get things done gratis and to keep the masses under control and by the innovators to collect obedient followers.

Do you recognize that great sage who established more than a thousand years ago a reality which superseded thousands of superstitions and extravagant ideas and said: "If a person starves it is due to the fact that his share has been taken by another" and added: "I have not seen any excessive bounty which is not associated with a right which has been violated".

As regards hoarding he wrote to one of his governors: "Prohibit the people from hoarding, because it is something which entails loss to the public and brings a bad name to the rulers".

A great and enlightened person realized the real secret of humanity more than a thousand years ago and concluded that those persons who had no value in the eyes of the kings and the rulers were endowed with virtues and good morals, and every kind of oppression practised upon them was considered by them (i.e. by the rulers) to be permissible.

The Italian sculptor Raphael prepared an image of the Virgin Mary in the shape of an Italian farmer woman and made all good human qualities visible in it. Tolstoy, Voltaire and Goethe also recommended and approved with their mental labour and imagination the same thing which had been indicated by Raphael in the image. However, Ali clarified this concept centuries ago. He campaigned against the aristocrats, the ruling class, the profiteers and the selfish persons, opposed their wrong and absurd way of thinking about the oppressed and said: "By God! I shall realize the right of the oppressed person from the oppressor and shall pull the oppressor to the fountain-head of truth by putting a caviar in his nose, even though he may not like it".

The things which he said about the people of his time go to show that he had understood them very well. They consisted on the one hand of the worthless aristocrats and others who were holding high positions

notwithstanding their inefficiency, and on the other hand of persons who were helpless and oppressed and who had no alternative but to obey. He therefore, said briefly: “Your down-trodden are honourable and your powerful ones are base and mean”.[2](#)

By these words he means that the subordinate people cannot display their good morals and talents due to their helplessness and oppression by the powerful class and the persons holding high position keep their defects hidden under their costly dress.

He told the people that truth and virtue are established and eternal things which have always been and will remain forever. In the heart of his hearts every human being believes in this, although different persons may interpret it in different ways. Even the oldest nations have flourished under the protection of this belief although they may not have known it. They have inherited their views and beliefs from their ancestors and adopted them because by doing so they have been saved from the trouble of investigation and research. Imitation has thus become their second nature.

The basis of all the beliefs and thoughts is this that there is an absolute reality which should be the starting point of all discussions and opinions.

The qualities of his head and heart enabled Ali to realize this fact and he believed whole-heartedly that anything which is based on truth does not become shaky. He was a perfect specimen of steadfastness and found himself successful in the event of victory as well as defeat. In the battlefield as well as in the arena of politics it was immaterial for him to win or lose, because he knew that the reality was with him and it was he himself who was the standard for distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

Throughout the history of the world it is not possible to find a man with such a firm determination that he should not waver in any circumstances and the flames of revolt should not make him tremble. No other thing can shake the faith of a man than this that the enemies should be accusing him of worst offences and even deviation and heresy. And nothing can make a man more unsettled than the threat of death or attack on one's faith which is worse than death. However, Ali did not waver in any circumstances and nothing could make him deviate from his path. He did not give up his efforts for the enforcement of Islam and did not crave for wealth or position as a reward for these efforts. His only reward was the success of the faith.

Have you seen in the history of the world a magnanimous person with a kind and loving heart encircled by greedy, rebellious and revengeful, stone-hearted persons, keen to exploit one another, but he may be inviting them to peace and welfare and they may still be joining hands to fight against him?

There are many sayings which people repeat verbally or in writing and every person selects one of them according to his nature to serve as his motto. However, have you seen any other person who may be the embodiment of purity and modesty in its true sense?

Amongst the great personalities of the world Ali was foremost in the matter of love and sincerity.

Sincerity was his habit and nature, and his heart and soul were imbued with it. He loved the people but did not associate love with his own self. He kept his promises. Sincerity was the essence of his being. By his natural and profound intelligence he found out that freedom is the most sacred thing. The entire world craves for it and does not consider any other blessing to be equal to it.³

Only the free persons possess power of correct thinking and good habits, and true love and pure sincerity are also not possible without freedom. He, therefore, said: “The worst brother is he with whom you have to observe formalities”. Hence, the best man is he who is not of this type.

Do you know any ruler who never ate his fill because many persons amongst his subjects did not get sufficient food to fill their bellies, or did not wear fine clothes because many persons wore coarse dress, or did not accumulate wealth because there were many poor and needy persons?

Ali recommended to his children and friends to follow in his footsteps. He declined to give as much as one dinar to his brother, because he was not entitled to it. He took severe action against his companions, subordinates, and officials, if they took even a loaf of bread as bribe. He warned a person against breach of trust in respect of public property in these words: “I swear by God that if you commit breach of trust in respect of public property I shall take such severe action against you that you will become poor, burdened and disgraced”. And he addressed another person in these eloquent words: “I have been given to understand that you have swept the earth clean, have appropriated whatever was under your feet and have spared nothing. You should, therefore, send your account to me”.

He also admonished in these words a person who became rich by taking bribes: “Fear God and return the property of the people to them. If you do not do so and God provides me hold over you I shall perform the duty which I owe to God with regard to you and shall strike you with the sword which has dispatched to Hell every one whom it has struck”.

Have you ever heard about a monarch who used to grind the grains with his own hands and prepared for himself the bread, which could be broken only by pressing it with the knee? He who mended his shoes himself? He who did not accumulate any worldly wealth, because he had no object in view except to help the afflicted and the oppressed, so that he might realize their rights from the oppressors and make them happy?

He who never cared for his food and never thought of sound sleep, because some persons in his country had to starve. He who uttered this eloquent sentence: “Should I content myself with this that people call me 'Commander of the Faithful' and I should not share the hardships of life with them?”

If government and sovereignty do not serve the purpose of establishing truth and eliminating falsehood they are the worst things of the world in the eyes of Ali.

Which person out of those who are famous for their justice is such that even if all the inhabitants of the world combine against him it must be said that he is truthful and all his opponents are false. It was Ali

who possessed this qualification, because his truthfulness and justice were not acquired but inherent and from them others learnt lessons.

His laws were not formulated on account of the exigencies of government and politics but government and politics were based on those laws. He purposely did not adopt a path which might lead him to rulership, but adopted that which might enable him to make his place in the pure hearts. Justice was a part of his soul and was ingrained in his heart and it had combined other virtues also with itself. It was not possible for him to deviate from justice and from the demands of his nature.

Justice was an element which was entwined in his entire body and ran in his veins like blood.

Have you seen any brave man in the pages of history who was opposed by a group of self-seekers which also included his kinsmen and then a battle took place, and those persons were victorious and he was defeated, and even then he dominated over them? It so happened in the case of Ali and he dominated over them, because they were devoid of human qualities and had risen in the capacity of oppressors using the weapons of deceit, bribery, covetousness and fraud, whereas he sacrificed all gains and even his life in the path of human excellence, justice and protection of the rights of others. It was for this reason that the victory of his enemies was in fact their defeat and his defeat was a great success for human virtues.

Have you come across a great warrior in the pages of history who should love even his enemies and wish to see them endowed with human qualities?

Ali was such a person. He was so kind to his enemies that he recommended to his companions: "Do not take the initiative in fighting with them. When they are defeated by the will of God do not pursue or kill those who run away. Do not kill the helpless and the wounded and do not molest the women".

The army of the enemy consisting of eleven thousand persons, who were keen to shed his blood blocked his approach to water so that he might die of thirst. However, when he regained control over water he said to them: "We are quenching our thirst with water. The birds are also availing of it. You too should come and carry away water to meet your needs".

Imam Ali used to say: "If a person is killed while performing jihad in the path of God his spiritual reward is not more than one who can take revenge, but refrains from doing so, because such a person is one of the angels of God".

When a wicked person struck on his head and as a result of it, he was departing from the world he said to his companions: "In case you forgive him your action will be nearer to piety and virtue".

He was a great warrior, who had combined his valour with kindness. He reprovved only verbally the enemies, who had gathered to oppose him, although he could curb their power with his sword. Even when he went to admonish them he was bare-headed and without any armour, whereas they were

armed so heavily that their faces could hardly be seen through their helmets and coats of mail. Then he reminded them of old brotherhood and friendship and wept much on account of their having adopted the wrong path.

However, even when he realized that the advice was not having any effect on them and they were bent upon shedding his blood he did not commence fighting himself but delayed it till they themselves started it. At that moment he drew his sword for the sake of the oppressed and launched an attack which scattered them like the particles of sand in the desert. After the spiteful oppressors who openly displayed enmity and rebellion were killed and he himself gained victory he wept on their dead bodies, notwithstanding the fact that they had met this fate on account of their selfishness and worst greed.

Have you heard about any king who was well-equipped with all means of sovereignty and wealth which were not available to others, but he chose sufferings and pains for himself? Of course, Ali made such a choice. He was of noble descent but he said: "No dignity is greater than humility and meekness".

He said to some persons who loved him: "Whoever loves me should prepare a robe of poverty for himself".

A group of persons went to the extreme in the matter of love for him. Thereupon he said: "Persons of two kinds got involved in destruction in connection with me – the friends who went to the extreme, and the spiteful enemies".

Ali severely punished a group which considered him to be their deity. He advised like brothers a group of persons who were inclined favourably towards him. Some persons abused him. His adherents did not tolerate this and abused those people in reply. Thereupon he said: "I do not like that you who are my friends should become persons who use abusive language".

Some people were inimical to him. They harmed and slandered him and rose in opposition to him. In spite of this he used to say: "Punish your brother with goodness and improve his nature with prizes and honours". Ali also said: "Your brother is not more powerful than you in breaking the bonds of love and friendship, provided that you try to cement them, and is not quicker than you in doing harm if you behave well with him".

Some persons suggested to him to behave towards the oppressors kindly and leniently so that his government might be strengthened. He said in reply: "Your friend is he who prevents you from doing evil, and your enemy is he, who induces you to do evil". He also said: "Adopt truth even though it may be harmful to you and refrain from telling lies even though you may derive benefit from it".

Ali had done good to a person. Once the same person came to fight with him. Ali then said addressing himself: "If a person is not thankful to you for your goodness this should not mean that you should discontinue your goodness".

Once, the blessings of the world were being discussed in his presence. Ali said: "Out of the worldly blessings good morals are sufficient blessings".

When some persons suggested to him to use all possible means like the kings to achieve victory Ali said: "A person whose heart is overcome by sin is not a victor, and he who dominates by means of bad deeds is actually the vanquished person".

Ali overlooked those bad deeds of his enemies of which only he was aware and said repeatedly: "Among the most exalted acts of a noble person is that he ignores what he sees".

If his enemies or the simpletons among his friends said something which he did not like he used to say: "If you hear something from someone and there is a possibility of its being good do not be suspicious about it".

Do you know any religious leader who has given directions to his officials in these words: "The people are either your brethren-in-faith or equal to you in the matter of creation. You should, therefore, overlook their shortcomings in the same manner in which you wish God to overlook yours".

Do you know any king who may have forsaken his kingdom to establish truth? And have you seen any wealthy person who may have contented himself with only a loaf of bread to sustain his life, and life in his eyes should mean doing good to mankind and he should have told the 'world' not to deceive him but someone else?

Amongst the monuments of the East have you read Nahj al-Balaghah (The English version of the glorious book has been published by Islamic Seminary) and seen how eloquent and impressive its sentences are? It deals with various matters and also provides information about the other world. It is like the events of the world which cannot be altered, and if even one word is removed from its place the entire purport will undergo a change.

This book will continue to remain attractive so long as man and his intellect and sentiments exist. Its eloquence surpasses every other eloquence. It contains all the attributes of the Arabic language which existed at that time and were introduced later. Hence, it has been said that it is lower than the word of God and higher than that which has been said by God's creatures.

Great wisdom, knowledge of the highest standard, unparalleled eloquence, perfect valour and unlimited love and kindness were all combined in Ali. If a person possesses even one of these attributes it is sufficient to dazzle others and when they are combined in one person his greatness is evidently beyond comprehension.

At times it so happened that this philosopher, man of letters, scholar, administrator, ruler and commander sequestered himself from the world, and did not have any dealings with others. He then desired only to stimulate human qualities and rouse the sentiments, and made these nice and pure

words, which are the proof of love and intense feelings, reach the ear of the hearts gently:

- "To lack friends is tantamount to poverty".
- "Do not express joy on the adversity of others".
- "Bring people nearer to you by means of gentleness and munificence".
- "Forgive one who oppresses you".
- "Do not deprive of your munificence a person who deprives you of his munificence".
- "Establish new relations with the person who cuts off his relations with you".
- "Be friendly towards one, who is inimical towards you".

He was a great man, who surpassed the philosophers of the world in high thinking, the righteous of the world in beneficence, the scholars of the world in the matter of vast knowledge, the researchers of the world in the matter of deep insight, all the philanthropists as regards love and kindness, all the pious persons in the matter of abstemiousness, and all the reformers of the world in the matter of reformatory views. He shared the sorrows of the helpless and helped the oppressed in their distress. He taught the literary persons of the world the art of literature and trained the brave men in the methods of warfare. He was always prepared to sacrifice his life for the establishment of truth. He went higher than the highest stage of human virtue and perfection. He displayed these qualities equally in his words and actions.

He was so great that the domination of his enemies over him was meaningless and their victory carried no importance, because at that time everything had turned upside down. The right hand was on the left side and the left hand was on the right side. High and low, light and darkness, the earth and the sky, had all assumed a reverse shape.

It makes no difference in the position of Ali whether or not history recognizes him and whether his eminence appears greater or lesser. Notwithstanding this, history has testified that he was the deepest stage of human thought. He sacrificed his life for the sake of truth and reality. He was the father of the martyrs and the proclaimer of justice. He was the unique man of the East, who will live forever!

1. In fact the knowledge of Ali should not be treated to be the outcome of reflection because it was derived from divine inspiration and was communicated to his heart through the prophet. The knowledge which was possessed by him or even a small part thereof cannot be acquired by reflection and reasoning however profound and extraordinary it may be.

2. Here the Commander of the Faithful has referred to the trouble which was created during the period of his caliphate and which did irreparable harm to the Muslim nation. Although these words do not carry the meaning inferred by the writer still it is an established fact and is evident from his other remarks. As a matter of fact the greatest object of the appointment of the prophets to their mission and the means of their success was this that they introduced freedom of the individual and freedom of thought as opposed to the policy of the tyrants like Nimrud and Pharaoh who controlled the lives and property of the people and kept their power of thinking paralysed.

3. Man loves freedom. In case, therefore, a person is put in a prison and all amenities of life are provided to him he will

even then prefer freedom to the prison life. The prophets campaigned against the tyrants and succeeded, because they declared that man is entitled to possess control on his own activities and property whereas the despotic rulers deprived the people of this right and subjected them to all sorts of torture and tyranny.

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