

Letter 19: To one of his officers

The following is a letter to one of his governors. It speaks volumes about the ways of Divine Rule. It shows how Imam Ali (a) was training the Muslims to behave tolerantly towards other religions, how minority was to be treated and what should those who hold a different creed, expect of a Muslim ruler.

ومن كتاب له (عليه السلام)

إلى بعض عماله

Now, the cultivators 1 (dahaqin, plural of dihqan) of your city have complained of your strictness, hard heartedness, humiliating treatment and harshness. I thought over it and found that since they are unbelievers they cannot be brought near nor kept away or treated severely because of the pledge with them. Behave with them in between strictness and softness and adopt for them a mingling or remoteness and aloofness with nearness and closeness if Allah so wills.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ دَهَاقِينَ أَهْلَ بَلَدِكَ شَكَوْا مِنْكَ غِلْظَةً وَقَسْوَةً، وَاحْتِقَاراً وَجَفْوَةً،
وَنَظَرَتْ فَلَمْ أَرَهُمْ أَهْلًا لَأَنْ يُدْنَوْا لِشِرْكِهِمْ، وَلَا أَنْ يُقْصَوْا وَيُجَفَّوْا لِعَهْدِهِمْ، فَالْبَسْتُ
لَهُمْ جَلْبَاباً مِنَ اللَّيْنِ تَشْوِبُهُ بِطَرْفٍ مِنَ الشَّدَّةِ، وَدَاوِلُ لَهُمْ بَيْنَ الْقَسْوَةِ وَالرَّأْفَةِ،
وَأَمْزُجُ لَهُمْ بَيْنَ التَّقْرِيبِ وَالْأَدْنَاءِ، وَالْأَبْعَادِ وَالْأَقْصَاءِ، إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ.

1. These people were Magians (majus). That is why the treatment of Amir al-mu'minin's officer with them was not the same

as with Muslims. Disgusted with this they wrote a letter of complaint to Amir al-mu'minin and spoke of the Officer's harshness. In reply, Amir al-mu'minin wrote to his officer that he should meet out treatment to them in which there should be neither harshness nor such leniency which they may exploit to create mischief because if they are let loose they get involved in machinations against the government and disturb the country's administration by creating one mischief or the other, while a wholly repressive policy cannot be justified because they are counted among the subjects and their rights as such cannot be ignored.

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