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Letter 3: To the Qadhi (judge) of Kufa, Shurayh b. Haarith when he purchased a costly house

Shurayh bin Haarith had been holding an important post during the previous regimes. Imam Ali (a) had also appointed him as a Qadhi (Chief Judge) of Kufa. It was brought to the notice of Imam Ali (a) that he had purchased a house for himself in the city (rather a costly and expensive house, perhaps more expensive and luxurious than his status demanded and that too rather at a cheaper price).

Imam Ali (a) called him and asked of him: "I am given to understand that you have purchased this house for eighty dinars and a sales deed has also been completed regularizing it with signatures of witnesses".

Shurayh replied, "O Amir al-Mu'minin this is a fact". Hearing this Imam Ali (a) felt annoyed and said to him: "Shurayh be warned that a thing (death) will come to you; it will not take any notice of this sales deed nor will it accept the testimony of the witnesses but it will take you out of this house alone and unattended and will drag you to your grave.

And before such a thing happens, you must think well over the fact whether you have purchased this house with the money which does not belong to you but to somebody else and whether the purchase price was acquired with foul means or it was an ill-gotten wealth, which met its cost, if it was so, then remember that you will part (through death) with this house and in the bargain you will lose your place in Paradise.

If you had come to me prior to this transaction I would have drafted such a sales deed for you that you would not have cared to purchase this property even for a dirham. You know what the transfer deed would have been like, it would have been phrased in the following words:

ومن كتاب كتبه (عليه السلام)

لشريح بن الحارث قاضيه

It is related that Shurayh ibn al-Harith (al-Kindi) who was Amir al-mu'minin's Qadi (judge) at Kufah during his tenure purchased a house for eighty Dinars. When it became known to Amir al-mu'minin he sent for him and said to him: I have come to know that you have purchased a house for eighty Dinars, and that you have written a document for it and put witnessing on it. Shurayh, replied: Yes, Amir al-mu'minin, it is so. Amir al-mu'minin cast an angry look at him and said to him:

روي أنّ شريح بن الحارث قاضي أمير المؤمنين (عليه السلام) اشترى على عهده داراً بثمانين ديناراً،

فبلغه (عليه السلام) ذلك، فاستدعى شريحاً، وقال له:

بَلَّغَنِي أَنَّكَ ابْتَعْتَ دَاراً بِثَمَانِينَ دِينَاراً، وَكَتَبْتَ لَهَا كِتَاباً، وَأَشْهَدْتَ فِيهِ شُهُوداً.

فقال شريح: قد كان ذلك يا أمير المؤمنين. قال: فنظر إليه (عليه السلام) نظر مغضب ثم قال له:

O Shurayh, beware, shortly one body (the angel of death) will come to you who will not look at the document, nor question you about your evidence but take you out of it far away and deposit you in your grave quite alone. Look! O Shurayh, if you have purchased this, house from money other than yours or paid the price from unlawful source, you have incurred loss of this world as well as of the next. If you had come to me at the time of purchase I would have written for you a document on this paper and then you would not have liked to purchase the house even for one Dirham, not to speak of more. That document is this:-

يَا شُرَيْحُ، أَمَّا إِنَّهُ سَيَأْتِيكَ مَنْ لَا يَنْظُرُ فِي كِتَابِكَ، وَلَا يَسْأَلُكَ عَنْ بَيِّنَتِكَ، حَتَّى يُخْرِجَكَ مِنْهَا شَاخِصاً، وَيُسَلِّمَكَ إِلَى قَبْرِكَ خَالِصاً. فَانْظُرْ يَا شُرَيْحُ لَا تَكُونُ

اِبْتَعْتَ هَذِهِ الدَّارَ مِنْ غَيْرِ مَالِكَ، أَوْ نَقَدْتَ الثَّمَنَ مِنْ غَيْرِ حَالِكَ! فَإِذَا أَنْتَ قَدْ خَسِرْتَ دَارَ الدُّنْيَا وَدَارَ الْآخِرَةِ! أَمَا إِنَّكَ لَوْ كُنْتَ أَتَيْتَنِي عِنْدَ شِرَائِكَ مَا اشْتَرَيْتَ لَكَنْتُ لَكَ كِتَابًا عَلَى هَذِهِ النُّسخَةِ، فَلَمْ تَرْغَبْ فِي شِرَاءِ هَذِهِ الدَّارِ بِدَرِهِمْ فَمَا فَوْقُ. والنسخة هذه:

This is about a purchase made by a humble slave (of Allah) from another slave ready to depart (for the next world). He has purchased a house out of houses of deceit in the area of mortals and the place of those liable to perish. This house has four boundaries as follows: The first boundary is contiguous to sources of calamities; the second boundary adjoins the sources of distress; the third boundary adjoins devastating desire; and the fourth boundary adjoins deceitful Satan and towards this opens the door of this house.

هَذَا مَا اشْتَرَى عَبْدٌ ذَلِيلٌ، مِنْ مَيِّتٍ قَدْ أُزْعَجَ لِلرَّحِيلِ، اشْتَرَى مِنْهُ دَارًا مِنْ دَارِ الْغُرُورِ، مِنْ جَانِبِ الْفَانِينَ، وَخِطَّةِ الْهَالِكِينَ، وَتَجَمَّعَ هَذِهِ الدَّارَ حُدُودٌ أَرْبَعَةٌ: الْحَدُّ الْأَوَّلُ يَنْتَهِي إِلَى دَوَاعِي الْآفَاتِ، وَالْحَدُّ الثَّانِي يَنْتَهِي إِلَى دَوَاعِي الْمُصِيبَاتِ، وَالْحَدُّ الثَّلَاثُ يَنْتَهِي إِلَى الْهَوَى الْمُرْدِي، وَالْحَدُّ الرَّابِعُ يَنْتَهِي إِلَى الشَّيْطَانِ الْمُغْوِي، وَفِيهِ يُشْرَعُ بَابُ هَذِهِ الدَّارِ.

This house has been purchased by one who has been waylaid by desires from one who is being driven by death at the price of leaving the honour of contentment and entering into the humility of want and submissiveness. If the purchaser encounters some (evil) consequences of this transaction then it is for him who dismantles the bodies of monarchs, snatches the lives of despots, destroys the domain of Pharaoh like Kistras, 1 Caesars, 2 Tubba`s 3 and Himyars 4 and all those who amass wealth upon wealth and go on increasing it, build high houses and decorate them and collect treasures and preserve them, as they claimed according to their own thinking, for children to take them to the place of accounting and judgement and the position of reward and punishment. When the verdict will be passed *those who stood on falsehood would then be the losers.* (Qur'an, 40: 78)

This document is witnessed by intelligence when it is free from the shackles of desires and safe from the attachments to this world.

اشْتَرَى هَذَا الْمُغْتَرُّ بِالْأَمَلِ، مِنْ هَذَا الْمُزْعَجِ بِالْأَجَلِ، هَذِهِ الدَّارَ بِالْخُرُوجِ مِنْ عِزِّ الْقَنَاعَةِ، وَالْدُّخُولِ فِي ذُلِّ الطَّلَبِ وَالضَّرَاعَةِ، فَمَا أَدْرَكَ هَذَا الْمُشْتَرِي فِيمَا

اشْتَرَى مِنْ دَرَكٍ، فَعَلَى مُبْلِلِ أَجْسَامِ الْمُلُوكِ، وَسَلَابِ نُفُوسِ الْجَبَابِرَةِ، وَمُزِيلِ
مُلْكِ الْفَرَاغَةِ، مِثْلَ كِسْرَى وَقَيْصَرَ، وَتَبَعَ وَحَمِيرَ، وَمَنْ جَمَعَ الْمَالَ عَلَى الْمَالَ
فَأَكْثَرَ، وَمَنْ بَنَى وَشَيْدَ، وَزَخْرَفَ وَنَجَّدَ، وَادَّخَرَ وَاعْتَقَدَ، وَنَظَرَ بِزَعْمِهِ لِلْوَلَدِ،
إِشْخَاصُهُمْ جَمِيعاً إِلَى مَوْقِفِ الْعَرْضِ وَالْحِسَابِ، وَمَوْضِعِ الثَّوَابِ وَالْعِقَابِ، إِذَا
وَقَعَ الْأَمْرُ بِفَصْلِ الْقَضَاءِ، (وَخَسِرَ هُنَا لَكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ)

شَهِدَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ الْعَقْلُ إِذَا خَرَجَ مِنْ أَسْرِ الْهَوَى، وَسَلِمَ مِنْ عِلَاقِ الدُّنْيَا.

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1. Kisra, is the Arabicised form of "Khusraw" which means a King whose domain of rule extends to a vast area. This was the title of the rulers of Iran.
 2. Caesar, was the title of the rulers of Rome, which in Latin means that child whose mother dies before delivery and who is extracted by cutting open her body. Since among the Kings of Rome, Augustus was born like this he was known by this name and after that this word was adopted as the title of every ruler.
 3. Tubba', is an appellation of each of the Kings of Yemen who possessed Himyar and Hadramawt. Their names have been mentioned in the holy Qur'an in chaps. 44:37 and 50:14.
 4. Himyar, originally, an important tribe in the ancient Sabaeen kingdom of south-western Arabia; later the powerful rulers of much of southern Arabia from c. 115 BC to c. AD 525. The Himyarites were concentrated in the area known as Dhu Raydan (later called Qataban) on the coast of present-day Yemen; thus they were probably aided in the overthrow of their Sabaeen kinsmen by the discovery of a sea route from Egypt to India, which deprived the inland Sabaeen kingdom of its former importance as a centre for overland trade. The Himyarites (classical Homeritae) inherited the Sabaeen language and culture, and from their capital at Zafar their power at times extended eastward as far as the Persian Gulf and northward into the Arabian Desert. At the beginning of the 4th century AD the Himyar capital was moved northward to San'a, and later in that century both Christianity and Judaism gained firm footholds in the area. Internal disorders and changing trade routes caused the kingdom to decline, and in 525, after several unsuccessful attempts, Abyssinian invaders finally crushed the Himyarites. A Himyar appeal to Persia for aid led to Persian control in 575. (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica [Micropaedia], vol.5, p.49, ed. 1973-1974)
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