

Obligations of the Rulers

All over history, rulers, according to their qualifications, have played influential roles in the development and retardation of nations. The ideal, sincere ruler is he who governs his subjects on bases of leniency, justice, and equality.

The absolute ruler, on the other hand, is he who enslaves, humiliates, and exploits the subjects for his own interests:

The Prophet (S) said: “On the Day of Resurrection, a caller will cry out: where are the unjust rulers and their supporters, including those who provided them an inkpot, those who untied one of their bags, and those who sharpened a pencil for them. Join all these individuals to those rulers¹.”

The unjust rulers will sooner or later suffer punishments that befit their acts of oppression. History is full of stories showing the bad results of the absolute rulers.

Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yousuf ath-Thaqafi is the most hideous example of the unjust rulers. He ruled for twenty years during which he killed 120,000 individuals besides those whom were killed during his campaigns. In his cells, there were fifty thousand men and thirty thousand women etc. Finally, this dictator was affected by canker and severe frost until he perished.

[Rights of Subjects against Rulers](#)

[\(A\) Justice](#)

The absolute authority of the unjust rulers, in most cases, is the result of people's rebellion against and disobedience to the Lord:

The Prophet (S) said: “Allah says: I am Allah. There is no god but I. I have created the kings whose hearts are in My hand. I will make the hearts of the kings full of mercy towards the people who obey Me, but I will make them full of rancor towards the people who disobey Me. Do not engage yourselves in

reviling at the kings. You must repent to Me so that I will make their hearts full of compassion towards you.”

(B) Righteousness

Because most people try to imitate them, it is obligatory upon rulers to be characterized by righteousness and well behavior so as to act as good examples for their subjects. Likewise, the rulers' deviation and misconduct push most people towards deviation.

(C) Lenience

Rulers are required to govern people with means of lenience and avoid persecution because despotism is the most disreputable manner of the rulers and the most injurious act towards the subjects.

The Prophet (S) said: “Lenience will beautify anything it accompanies and will disfigure anything it leaves².”

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: “Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them. Do not stand over them like greedy beasts who feel it is enough to devour them, since they are of two kinds, either your brother in religion or one like you in creation. They will commit slips and encounter mistakes. They may act wrongly, willfully, or by neglect. So, extend to them your forgiveness and pardon, in the same way as you would like Allah to extend His forgiveness and pardon to you, because you are over them and your responsible Commander (Imam) is over you while Allah is over him who has appointed you through what He has given to you of the knowledge of His Book and the practices of His Prophet (S).”

Imam as-Sadiq (a) said: “The lenient can win anything he wants from people³.”

Lenience is of no value unless it is done to the virtuous people. The evildoers who disturb the social peace do not deserve any sort of lenient treatment.

Aspects of Lenience

Aspects of lenience can be shown through the words and deeds of the rulers. Hence, the ruler must use good wording and avoid obscenity. He must treat the subjects with kindness through sympathizing with their pains and tragedies and hurrying for helping them in misfortunes and crises. Finally, the ruler must try his best to save the subjects from heavy taxes.

Results of Lenience

Lenience creates the subjects' love for their rulers and save them from the need for flattering and hypocrisy.

God praised His Messenger Muhammad (S) for his lenience:

“Only through the Divine Mercy have you (Muhammad) been able to deal with your followers so gently. If you had been stern and hardhearted, they would all have deserted you a long time ago. (3: 159)”

(D) Selection of the Retinue

A ruler, no matter how well-qualified he is, cannot dispense with supporters who help him do his duties properly. Such supporters, in fact, have a great effect in guiding and conditioning the ruler's morals and opinions. From this cause, it is important for the ruler to select well-qualified and decent retinue so that they will positively help him and contribute in achieving the subjects' pleasure.

(E) Settlement with the Officials

Because most of them take pride in their authorities, officials usually challenge and treat people arrogantly and neglect their duties. Such behaviors will surely dissatisfy people with the ruling authorities. From this cause, it is necessary for rulers to supervise and call the officials to accounts so as to reward the dutiful and punish the negligent. By doing so, each individual will perform his duty towards the society properly, tragedies and varieties of flattering to the official will be eradicated, and all the social affairs will be prevailed by justice.

(F) Achievement of Social Happiness

The ruler is responsible for the moral and material development of the subjects. This happiness can be achieved when the ruler supervises the subjects, pays attention to their interests, secures their rights of security, justice, and luxury, raises their scientific, physical, social, moral, and structural levels, cares for the industrial, agricultural, and commercial development, and encourages the talents and abilities.

Rulers' Rights against Subjects

The ruler, in his capacity as the pioneer or the national development and civilization, enjoys definite rights imposed upon the subjects.

In the following words, Amirul-Mu'minin (a) refers to the rights of the rulers:

“The ruled cannot prosper unless the rulers are sound, while the rulers cannot be sound unless the ruled are steadfast. If the ruled fulfill the rights of the ruler and the ruler fulfils their rights, then right attains the position of honor among them, the ways of religion become established, signs of justice become fixed and the Sunna gains currency. In this way time will improve, the continuance of government will be expected, and the aims of the enemies will be frustrated.

But if the ruled gain sway over the ruler, or the ruler oppresses the ruled, then difference crops up in every word, signs of oppression appear, mischief enters religion and the ways of the Sunna are forsaken. Then desires are acted upon, the commands (of religion) are discarded, diseases of the spirit become numerous and there is no hesitation in disregarding even great rights, nor in committing big wrongs. In such circumstances, the virtuous are humiliated while the vicious are honored, and there are serious chastisements from Allah onto the people⁴.”

(1) Obedience

Rulers enjoy the right of obedience against their subjects in the fields that achieve satisfaction of God. Obedience encourages rulers to treat their subjects sincerely while rebellion and disappointment are detestable manners that excite the rulers’ rage and punishment.

Imam al-Kadhim said: “O Shia, do not humiliate yourselves by acting disobediently to the rulers. You should pray to Allah to perpetuate the just rulers and rectify the unjust. Your rectification will be achieved when your rulers are rectified. The just ruler is as same as the compassionate father. Hence, you should love for him that which you love for yourselves and reject for him that which you reject for yourselves⁵.”

(2) Support

A ruler cannot dispense with the support of his subjects who help him do his duties properly by means of intellectual and mental efforts.

(3) Advice

People of reason are encompassed by the duty of providing advices to the rulers when they tend to despotism enthralling the subjects. If such advices prove futility, then the intellectuals are not blamed.

The Prophet (S) said: “The ruler is Allah’s shadow on this earth and the shelter of the wronged. If the ruler governs with justice, he will be rewarded and the subjects must thank. If the ruler governs unjustly, he will be punished and the subjects must show tolerance until they are relieved⁶.”

Nowadays, the rulers have no longer accepted advices; therefore, the civilized governments have permitted criticizing the rulers by way of parliaments, press media, and memoranda.

¹. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara; 218 (as quoted from Thawab ul-A'mal).

². Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 86 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

³. Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 87 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

⁴. Quoted from Nahj ul-Balagha.

⁵. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara page 218 (as quoted from al-Amali).

⁶. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara page 214 (as quoted from al-Amali).

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