

## Right n. 15: The Right of the Possessor of Authority

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فَأَمَّا حَقُّ سَائِسِكَ بِالسُّلْطَانِ فَإِنَّ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّكَ جُعِلْتَ لَهُ فِتْنَةً وَأَنْتَ مُبْتَلَىٰ فِيكَ بِمَا جَعَلَهُ اللهُ لَهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ السُّلْطَانِ وَأَنْ تُخْلِصَ لَهُ فِي النَّصِيحَةِ وَأَنْ لَا تُمَاجِكُهُ وَقَدْ بَسِطَتْ يَدُهُ عَلَيْكَ فَتَكُونَ سَبَبَ هَلَاكِ نَفْسِكَ وَهَلَاكِهِ. وَتَذَلُّ وَتَلَطَّفُ لِإِعْطَائِهِ مِنَ الرِّضَا مَا يَكْفُهُ عَنْكَ وَلَا يَضُرُّ بَدِينَكَ وَتَسْتَعِينُ عَلَيْهِ فِي ذَلِكَ بِاللَّهِ. وَلَا تُعَازِهُ وَلَا تُعَانِدُهُ فَإِنَّكَ إِنْ فَعَلْتَ ذَلِكَ عَقَقْتَهُ وَعَقَقْتَ نَفْسَكَ فَعَرَضْتَهَا لِمَكْرُوهِهِ وَعَرَضْتَهُ لِلْهَلَاكَِةِ فِيكَ وَكُنْتَ خَلِيقًا أَنْ تَكُونَ مُعِينًا لَهُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِكَ وَشَرِيكًا لَهُ فِيمَا أَتَىٰ إِلَيْكَ. وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ.

Then the right of the possessor of authority is that you should know that God has established you as a trial for him. God is testing him through the authority He has given him over you. And you should sincerely provide him with your advice. And you should not quarrel with him while he has full dominance over you, for thereby you cause your own destruction and his, too. And you should be humble and courteous for his gifts to attain his satisfaction with you, so that he will not harm your religion.

And you should seek God's help in this regard. Do not oppose his power and do not resist him. Should you do so, you would have disobeyed him and disobeyed yourself: thus exposing yourself to encounter his evil and expose him to destruction by you. Thus you will deserve to be considered to be his assistant acting against yourself and as his partner in what he does to you. And there is no power but in God.

In this chapter, we review the rights of the leaders of the society as expressed by Imam Sajjad . At first, the rights of the rulers are discussed. Everyone agrees that there must be a ruler in each society in order to run the affairs. Social regulations and laws should be executed under his rule. Social security and

peace should be established and chaos should be avoided so that the people can continue their lives and struggle for further development.

## Imam Ali's Views on the Need for a Ruler

When the “Kharijites”<sup>1</sup> objected to Imam Ali about the issue of “Hakamayn”<sup>2</sup> and claimed that the verdict lies but with God, Imam Ali said:

كَلِمَةٌ حَقٌّ يُرَادُ بِهَا بَاطِلٌ! نَعَمْ إِنَّهُ لَا حُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ، وَلَكِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ يَقُولُونَ: لَا إِمْرَةَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ. إِنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ أَمِيرٍ بَرٍّ أَوْ فَاجِرٍ يَعْمَلُ فِي إِمْرَتِهِ الْمُؤْمِنُ وَيَسْتَمْتِعُ بِهَا الْكَافِرُ وَيُبَلِّغُ اللَّهُ فِيهَا الْأَجَلَ وَيُجْمَعُ بِهِ الْفِيءُ وَيُقَاتَلُ بِهِ الْعَدُوُّ وَتَأْمَنُ بِهَا السُّبُلُ وَيُؤْخَذُ بِهِ لِلضَّعِيفِ مِنَ الْقَوِيِّ حَتَّى يَسْتَرِيحَ بَرٌّ وَيُسْتَرَاخَ مِنْ فَاجِرٍ.

*“The statement is right but what (they think) it means is wrong. Yes, it is true that verdict lies but with God, but these people say that (the function of) governance is only for God. The fact is that there is no escape for men from a ruler, whether good or bad. The faithful persons perform (good) acts in his rule while the unfaithful ones enjoy (worldly) benefits in it. During the rule, God would carry everything to end. Tax is collected by the ruler, enemies are fought with, roadways are protected and the right of the weak is taken from the strong till the virtuous enjoys peace and is allowed protection from (the oppression of) the wicked.”*

Imam Ali stresses the need for a ruler in the society and his role. He points out that a peaceful and strong society is one in which there is a strong rule based upon which security and order is established in the society. Here the Imam stressed the absolute necessity of a ruler in the society.

## Imam Ridha's Views on the Need for a Ruler

Fazl ibn Shazan quoted Imam Ridha's views on the necessity of the existence of a ruler in the society, and the reasons behind it. He then stated that the Imam said:

وَمِنْهَا أَنَّا لَا نَجِدُ فَرَقَةً مِنَ الْفِرْقِ وَلَا مَلَّةً مِنَ الْمَلَلِ بَقُوا وَعَاشُوا إِلَّا بِقِيَمٍ وَرَأْسٍ لِمَا لَا بُدَّ لَهُمْ مِنْهُ فِي أَمْرِ الدِّينِ وَالْدُنْيَا، فَلَمْ يَجُزْ فِي حِكْمَةِ الْحَكِيمِ أَنْ يَتْرَكَ الْخَلْقَ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ لَهُمْ مِنْهُ وَلَا قَوَامَ لَهُمْ إِلَّا بِهِ، فَيُقَاتِلُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّهُمْ وَيُقَسِّمُونَ بِهِ فَيْئَهُمْ وَيُقِيمُ لَهُمْ جَمْعِيَّتَهُمْ وَجَمَاعَتَهُمْ وَيَمْنَعُ ظَالِمَهُمْ مِنْ مَظْلُومِهِمْ.

*“One reason to support this view is that there have been no groups or nations who have been able to continue living without a leader or ruler, since people need a leader for their worldly and heavenly affairs. Therefore, it is not wise for a sage to deprive the people of what they need to continue living. They fight their enemies under his rule. They divide the booties under his supervision. They establish their Friday congregations and other gatherings through him. They seek justice for the weak ones against the oppressors by him.”<sup>3</sup>*

The need for a leader is clearly established from these words expressed by Imam Ridha .

## Just Leaders and Their Characteristics

God has said in the Holy Qur'an that there are two kinds of rulers: just leaders and oppressive rulers. Each one has certain characteristics that we will briefly outline here. Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ

***“And We made them leaders, guiding (men) by Our Command, and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only).” [The Holy Qur'an, al-Anbiya 21:73]***

The characteristics and duties expressed in this verse about leaders appointed by God are as follows:

- 1) Guiding men by God's Command
- 2) Receiving divine inspiration to do good deeds, establish regular prayers, practice regular charity in order to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor
- 3) To constantly serve God, i.e. they must have served God to attain the position of leadership of the society.

## Leadership as a Requirement for Victory

God has clearly stated strength and power as a requirement for a just ruler in the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an cites a few illustrative examples. One such example is the story of Talut that is also expressed in the Bible.<sup>4</sup> Talut was a tall, strong and handsome man. He had strong nerves. He was very wise and intelligent. Some say he was called Talut because he was very tall.<sup>5</sup> Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَإِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّ لَهُمْ ابْعَثْ لَنَا مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

***“Hast thou not turned thy vision to the Chiefs of the Children of Israel after (the time of) Moses? They said to a Prophet (that was) among them: "Appoint for us a king, that we may fight in the cause of God...." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:246]***

Also, consider the following verse:

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

***Their Prophet said to them: "God hath appointed Talut as king over you." They said: "How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority, and he is not even gifted, with wealth in abundance?" He said: "God hath chosen him above you, and hath gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess: God granteth His authority to whom He pleaseth. God careth for all, and He knoweth all things." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:247]***

We see that having a strong and intelligent leader is an important factor in achieving victory and success. This can clearly be seen in this verse where a knowledgeable person is appointed to rule the Children of Israel. They objected to his being poor but God responds with the fact that Talut is gifted with knowledge and bodily prowess.

## **Talut Heads the Army**

Talut headed the army and proved his ability to run the affairs of the army and the country in a very short time. Then he went to fight against an enemy that seriously threatened them. He stressed that only those who were whole-heartedly interested in fighting with the enemy could accompany him. Then the children of Israel finally managed to overcome Jalut's forces under the leadership of a strong leader.

From studying this account, we can see that the most important aspects of leadership are divine appointment, knowledge and power. The leader uses his knowledge to recognize the proper path to progress for the society that he leads. He uses his power to implement his plans. Another point mentioned by Imam Sajjad is that God will test both the leader and his followers. We see an example of this test in the story of Talut as we read the following verse:

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَن شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَن لَّمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ اغْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ قَالُوا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا اللَّهِ كَم مِّن فِتْنَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِتْنَةٌ كَثِيرَةٌ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

***When Talut set forth with the armies, he said: "God will test you at the stream: if any drinks of its water, He goes not with my army: Only those who taste not of it go with me: A mere sip out of the hand is excused." But they all drank of it, except a few. When they crossed the river, – He and the faithful ones with him, – they said: "This day we cannot cope with Goliath and his forces." But those who were convinced that they must meet God, said: "How oft, by God's will, hath a small force vanquished a big one? God is with those who steadfastly persevere." [The Holy Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:249]***

## Good Use of Power by Alexander

Another example of the good use of power is found in the story of Alexander or Zul-qarnain. In this story, Alexander runs into a people who hardly understand but are apparently rich and have an enemy. Consider the following verse in this regard:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَّيْنِ وَجَدَ مِن دُونِهِمَا قَوْمًا لَّا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ قَوْلًا

***“Until, when he reached (a tract) between two mountains, he found, beneath them, a people who scarcely understood a word.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Kahf 18:93]***

This refers to some people who lived in a mountainous region. They were neither Eastern nor Western. They were of a very backward civilization since the Qur’an says that they scarcely understood a word. Alternatively, it may be that they were mentally retarded. This is, of course, less probable. They had ruthless enemies called the people of Gog and Magog. They complained to Alexander about them, and offered to pay him tribute in order to build a barrier between them and the people of Gog and Magog. Consider the following verse in this respect:

قَالُوا يَا ذَا الْقُرْتَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ مُؤْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا آتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ انْفُخُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ آتُونِي أُفْرِغَ عَلَيْهِ قَطْرًا

***“They said: “O Zul-qarnain! The Gog and Magog (People) do great mischief on earth: shall we then render thee tribute in order that thou mightest erect a barrier between them and us?” He said: “(The power) in which my Lord has established me is better (than tribute): Help me therefore with strength (and labor): I will erect a strong barrier between you and them. Bring me blocks of iron.” At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountain-sides, he said, “Blow (with your bellows).” Then, when he had made it (red) as fire, he said: “Bring me, that I may pour over it, molten lead.”” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Kahf 18:94–96]***

It seems that the pathway through which the people of Gog and Magog attacked them was a space between two steep mountainsides. Alexander filled up that space with blocks of iron, had it heated up and then poured molten lead over it to totally block off the passage.<sup>6</sup> Then instead of being haughty for what he had done, he politely stated that his power was that of his Lord’s Mercy on him. The people thanked him. This is one of the characteristics of a strong leader. Imam Ali said:

فَإِنَّ الرَّعِيَّةَ الصَّالِحَةَ تَنْجُو بِالْإِمَامِ الْعَادِلِ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ الرَّعِيَّةَ الْفَاجِرَةَ تُهْلِكُ بِالْإِمَامِ الْفَاجِرِ.

*“The saving of good people depends on their just leader. The destruction of bad people is due to their bad leader.”<sup>7</sup>*

## Recognize Good Leaders and Obey Them

Imam Sadiq narrated that Imam Husayn told his companions:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَلَّ ذِكْرُهُ مَا خَلَقَ الْعِبَادَ إِلَّا لِيَعْرِفُوهُ، فَإِذَا عَرَفُوهُ عَبَدُوهُ، فَإِذَا عَبَدُوهُ اسْتَعْنُوا عَنِ عِبَادَةِ مَا سِوَاهُ

*“O people! God created the people only in order that they get to recognize Him. When they recognize Him, they worship Him, and when they worship Him they have no need of worshipping other than Him.”*

A man said: “O’ May my parents be your ransom! How do we get to recognize God?” Imam Husayn said:

مَعْرِفَةُ أَهْلِ كُلِّ زَمَانٍ إِمَامُهُمُ الَّذِي يَجِبُ عَلَيْهِمْ طَاعَتُهُ

*“For each era the people should recognize their own leader whose obedience is obligatory for them.”*

Thus, we see that the Imam considers getting to know the just leader is the proper way to recognize God.

## Egyptians Were Saved by a Just Leader

We read in the Holy Qur’an that when Joseph was released from jail, and his talents became apparent to the ruler of Egypt, he was offered a high position in the government. Joseph who was an honest man and knew economics well thought that he could save the people of Egypt. He asked to be appointed as the treasurer. Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلَيْمُ

***“(Joseph) said: “Set me over the store-houses of the land: I will indeed guard them, as one that knows (their importance).” [The Holy Qur’an, Yusuf 12:55]***

Joseph ran the affairs of the country and safely led the Egyptian people through the years of famine in such a successful way that the Qur’an considers him one of the best human leaders.

## A Just Ruler Deserves to be Respected

There are many traditions that stress the necessity of respecting a just ruler. We shall mention a few of them here. The Prophet of God said:

وَقَرُّوا السَّلَاطِينَ وَجَلِّوهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ عِزُّ اللَّهِ وَظِلُّهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِذَا كَانُوا عُدُولًا.

*“Respect and revere the rulers since they are the Glory of God and His shadow on earth if they are just.”<sup>8</sup>*

It has been narrated that Umar asked the Prophet of God : “Please inform me of a ruler to whom everyone bows in respect.” The Prophet said:

(هو) ظِلُّ اللَّهِ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَإِذَا أَحْسَنَ فَلَهُ الْأَجْرُ وَعَلَيْكُمْ الشُّكْرُ، وَإِذَا أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهِ الْإِصْرُ وَعَلَيْكُمْ الصَّبْرُ)

*“He is God’s shadow on the earth. Whenever he does some good act, there will be a reward for him and you must be grateful to him. Whenever he does an evil act, he is held responsible for it and you must be patient and persevering.”<sup>9</sup>*

We see that in this tradition the Prophet of God has stressed that we should be grateful to just rulers. It has been narrated that Imam Kazim advised his followers as follows:

لَا تُذَلُّوا رِقَابَكُمْ بِتَرْكِ طَاعَةِ سُلْطَانِكُمْ فَإِنْ كَانَ عَادِلًا فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ بِقَاءَهُ، وَإِنْ كَانَ جَائِرًا فَاسْأَلُوا اللَّهَ بِإِصْلَاحِهِ، فَإِنَّ صَلَاحَكُمْ فِي صَلَاحِ سُلْطَانِكُمْ، وَإِنَّ السُّلْطَانَ الْعَادِلَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْوَالِدِ الرَّحِيمِ فَأَحْبِبُوا لَهُ مَا تُحِبُّونَ لَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَأَكْرَهُوا لَهُ مَا تَكْرَهُونَ لَأَنْفُسِكُمْ.

*“Do not debase yourselves through disobedience to your rulers. If they are just rulers, ask God for their prosperity and lasting rule. If they are oppressive rulers, ask God to guide them. Your righteousness depends on his righteousness. A just ruler is like a kind father. Like for him what you like for yourselves, and dislike for him what you dislike for yourselves.”<sup>10</sup>*

We see that the Imam depicts a just ruler as a kind father. He can direct the society towards progress, development and perfection, just as a kind father raises a good child. The Noble Prophet said:

زَيَّنَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاءَ بِثَلَاثَةٍ: الشَّمْسِ وَالْقَمَرِ وَالْكَوَاكِبِ. وَزَيَّنَ الْأَرْضَ بِثَلَاثَةٍ: الْعُلَمَاءِ وَالْمَطَرِ وَالسُّلْطَانَ الْعَادِلِ.

*“God has adorned the heavens with three things: the sun, the moon and the stars. He has also adorned the earth with three things: scholars, rain and just rulers.”<sup>11</sup>*

## A Just Pagan Ruler or a Muslim Oppressive Ruler

When Hulegu Khan conquered Baghdad in 1258 A.D. he had his agents ask the wise ones in Baghdad whether a just pagan ruler is better or a Muslim oppressive ruler. When the scientists gathered in the Mustansiriyah School and read the question they refused to answer. Razi ad-din Ali ibn Tavoos who was highly respected by the sages in Baghdad was also present there. When he saw that they refused to answer the question, he started to write the answer as follows: “A just pagan ruler is better than an oppressive Muslim ruler. This is supported by a tradition from the Prophet of God , which says:

يَبْقَى الْمُلْكُ بِالْعَدْلِ مَعَ الْكُفْرِ، وَلَا يَبْقَى بِالْجَوْرِ مَعَ الْإِيمَانِ.

*Rule lasts if accompanied by justice, even if it is a pagan’s rule. However, it will not last by oppression even if it is a Muslim’s rule.”<sup>12</sup>*

## Being Informed about Governmental Affairs

Another important characteristic of a good ruler is being informed about governmental affairs. We saw in the story of Talut a manifestation of this principle. He was strong and well-informed as to how to run the affairs. A ruler’s knowledge of the affairs of the government is like a lantern that lights up his way out of darkness. Some wise men have said that if a ruler lacks knowledge, he is like an elephant that runs over and destroys everything when it attacks, since it neither has knowledge nor intellect that are the means which hinder oppression.

## Fear and Piety

Another good characteristic of a just ruler is piety and being God-fearing. These characteristics are a source of good blessings. When a ruler has piety, his people live in security. It is narrated that once Imam Ali called his slave. He did not respond. He called him several times again, but the slave did not respond. Then someone entered the room and told Imam Ali that the slave was standing behind the door, but did not respond.

Then the slave entered the room and Imam Ali asked him if he had heard being called. The slave replied positively. Then the Imam asked why he had not responded. The slave said: “I did not respond because I feel secure that I will not be punished by you.” Then Imam Ali said: “I thank God for establishing me as one whose creatures are secure from.”

## Forgiving and Overlooking

Other good characteristics of a ruler are forgiving and overlooking people’s minor faults as we read in

the following verse:

وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ

***“Let them forgive and overlook, do you not wish that God should forgive you?” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nur 24:22]***

Imam Ali said:

إِذَا قَدَرْتَ عَلَى عَدُوِّكَ فَاجْعَلِ الْعَفْوَ عَنْهُ شُكْرًا لِقُدْرَتِكَ عَلَيْهِ.

*“Forgive your enemy once you have overcome him, so as to be grateful about the blessing of the victory which you have been granted.”<sup>13</sup>*

In Imam Ali’s letter to Malik al-Ashtar, we read:

لَا تَتَذَمَّنَّ عَلَى عَفْوٍ وَلَا تَبْجَحَنَّ بِعُقُوبَةٍ.

*“Never be sorry about forgiving, and never be pleased with punishing.”<sup>14</sup>*

In the same letter, Imam Ali wrote:

فَأَعْطِهِمْ مِنْ عَفْوِكَ وَصَفْحِكَ مِثْلَ الَّذِي تُحِبُّ وَتَرْضَى أَنْ يُعْطِيكَ اللَّهُ مِنْ عَفْوِهِ وَصَفْحِهِ، فَإِنَّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ، وَوَالِي الْأَمْرِ عَلَيْكَ فَوْقَكَ، وَاللَّهُ فَوْقَ مَنْ وَّلَاكَ

*“Forgive the people as you wish God to grant you His forgiveness. Your rank is above them, and the rank of the possessor of the rule is above yours, and God’s rank is above the rank of the one who has granted you your authority.”<sup>15</sup>*

## **Fulfilling His Engagements**

Another important characteristic of a ruler is that he should fulfill his engagements. In this regard, God says:

وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا

***“And fulfill (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of***

Reckoning).” [The Holy Qur’an, Bani Isra’il 17:34]

## Being Informed about the Country’s Affairs

Another good characteristic for a ruler is being well-informed about the affairs of the people and the country. He should know the problems and the insufficiencies that the people are dealing with. He should do his best to pave the way for the elimination of these difficulties and set his nation on the path to progress and development. Imam Ali wrote the following to Malik al-Ashtar in this regard:

وَأَمَّا بَعْدَ هَذَا فَلَا تُطَوِّلَنَّ أَحْتِجَابَكَ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِكَ، فَإِنَّ أَحْتِجَابَ الْأُولَاءِ عَنِ الرَّعِيَّةِ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الضِّيْقِ، وَقَلَّةُ عِلْمٍ بِالْأُمُورِ،  
وَالْأَحْتِجَابُ مِنْهُمْ يَقْطَعُ عَنْهُمْ عِلْمَ مَا أَحْتَجِبُوا دُونَهُ فَيَصْغُرُ عِنْدَهُمُ الْكَبِيرُ، وَيَعْظُمُ الصَّغِيرُ، وَيَفْحِشُ الْحَسَنُ، وَيَحْسُنُ  
الْقَبِيحُ وَيُشَابُ الْحَقُّ بِالْبَاطِلِ.

*“Do not prolong your seclusion from your subjects, for the rulers’ seclusion from their subjects is a kind of limitation and (results in) a lack of knowledge about (their) affairs. Seclusion from them deprives them (the rulers) of the knowledge of what is concealed from them so that what is great becomes small for them and the small becomes great, the good is seen to be ugly and the ugly to be good, and the truth is mixed with falsehood.”*

## Oppressive Rulers

As we said God has set two kinds of leaders: just ones and oppressive ones. The Qur’an says:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ

***“And we made them (but) leaders inviting to the Fire; and on the Day of Judgment no help shall they find.”*** [The Holy Qur’an, al-Qasas 28:41]

Oppressive rulers invite the people who follow them to the Fire of Hell. Now you may wonder how God could set some oppressive rulers while He has sent Prophets to invite man to do good and to lead man to prosperity. The answer is that having an oppressive ruler is a direct consequence of a nation’s acts. Naturally, the fact that is usually expressed as “for every action there is a reaction” is just a divine law. They have set out on a path that leads them to the rule of corrupt people. That is why they are the masters of the residents of Hell, as they were leaders of the corrupt people in this world. Thus they are cursed by God in this world, and in the next to come as God says:

وَأَتَّبَعْنَاهُمْ فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ هُمْ مِنَ الْمَقْبُوحِينَ

***“In this world We made a curse to follow them and on the Day of Judgment they will be among the loathed (and despised).” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Qasas 28:42]***

God’s curse is depriving them of His Mercy. The curse of the angels and the believers will also be always upon them. Divine leaders invite the people to do good deeds, but corrupt rulers invite the people to corruption and the Fire. There is a tradition from Imam Sadiq in this regard. It says that divine leaders give priority to God’s orders over those of the people and their own will.

They consider God’s decrees to be the best ones. However, the second group give priority to their own orders over those of God and consider their decrees to be above His. [16](#) As each leader has some followers in this world, each leader in the Hereafter also has some followers. Bashar ibn Ghalib quoted on the authority of Imam Husayn when asked about the interpretation of the following verse:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ

***“One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams.” [The Holy Qur’an, Bani Israil 17:71]***

Imam Husayn said:

إِمَامٌ دَعَا إِلَى هُدًى فَأَجَابُوهُ إِلَيْهِ وَإِمَامٌ دَعَا إِلَى ضَلَالَةٍ فَأَجَابُوهُ إِلَيْهِ: هَؤُلَاءِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَهَؤُلَاءِ فِي النَّارِ. وَهُوَ قَوْلُهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ.

*“A leader invites to guidance and some people follow him. Another leader invites to corruption and some people accept his invitation. The first group will go to Heaven while the second group goes to Hell. This is what is meant by the Almighty God’s words: ‘... (when) some will be in the Garden, and some in the Blazing Fire’ [Shura 42:7].” [17](#)*

Imam Sadiq said:

إِنَّ فِي وِلَايَةِ الْوَالِي الْجَائِرِ دُرُوسَ الْحَقِّ وَإِحْيَاءَ الْبَاطِلِ كُلِّهِ وَإِظْهَارَ الظُّلْمِ وَالْجَوْرِ وَالْفَسَادِ.

*“Truth is erased, falsehood is revived, and injustice, oppression and corruption become manifest during the rule of an oppressive ruler.” [18](#)*

The Noble Prophet of Islam said:

لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ آفَةٌ يُفْسِدُهُ وَآفَةُ هَذَا الدِّينِ وِلَاةُ السُّوءِ.

“For everything there is a blight that corrupts it. The blight of this religion is evil rulers.”<sup>19</sup>

Imam Baqir said:

ثَلَاثَةٌ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ حُرْمَةٌ: صَاحِبُ هَوَى مُبْتَدِعٌ وَالْإِمَامُ الْجَائِرُ وَالْفَاسِقُ الْمُعْلِنُ فُسُوقَهُ.

“There are three groups of people who are not entitled to respect: those who have a lust for innovations (in religion), those who are oppressive leaders, and corrupt people who manifest their corrupt deeds.”<sup>20</sup>

From the above discussion, we can clearly see the role of oppressive rulers in destroying the truth and making falsehood and corruption prevail in the society.

## An Oppressive Rule: From Light into Darkness

God says in the Holy Qur’an:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ

**“..Of those who reject faith the patrons are the evil ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:257]**

Imam Sadiq said:

لا دِينَ لِمَنْ دَانَ بِوِلَايَةِ إِمَامٍ جَائِرٍ لَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَا عَتَبَ عَلَى مَنْ دَانَ بِوِلَايَةِ إِمَامٍ عَدْلٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ. (قال ابن أبي يعفور) قلت: لا دِينَ لِأَوْلِيَاؤِكَ وَلَا عَتَبَ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ؟ فقال عليه السَّلَامُ: نَعَمْ! لا لا دِينَ لِأَوْلِيَاؤِكَ وَلَا عَتَبَ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ. أَمَا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِ اللَّهِ: اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ.

“Whoever accepts the leadership and rule of an oppressive ruler not appointed by God has no religion, and whoever accepts the leadership of a just leader appointed by God has no blame (on him).” Ibn Abi Ya’foor asked: “No religion for those and no blame on these?” The Imam said: “Yes. No religion for those and no blame on these! Did you not hear God’s statement: ‘**God is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light...**’”[al-Baqarah, 2:257].

## Treacherous Ruler as Viewed by Imam Ali

The following is a part of a letter that Imam Ali wrote to Masqalah b. Hubayrah al-Shaybani, who was his representative in a city in the province of Fars<sup>21</sup> called Ardeshir Khorrah:

بَلَّغَنِي عَنْكَ أَمْرٌ أَنْ فَعَلْتَهُ فَقَدْ أَسْخَطْتَ الْإِهْكَ وَ عَصَيْتَ أَمَامَكَ: إِنَّكَ تَقْسِمُ فِيَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ الَّذِي حَازَتْهُ رِمَاحُهُمْ وَخَيْولُهُمْ وَأُرِيقتُ عَلَيْهِ دِمَائُهُمْ فِي مَنْ اعْتَمَاكَ مِنْ أَعْرَابِ قَوْمِكَ. فَوَالَّذِي فَلَقَ الْحَبَّةَ وَبَرَأَ النَّسَمَةَ لَئِنْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ حَقًّا لَتَجِدَنَّ بَكَ عَلَيَّ هَوَانًا وَتَلْخَفَنَّ عِنْدِي مِيزَانًا، فَلَا تَسْتَهِنَنَّ بِحَقِّ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُصْلِحْ دُنْيَاكَ بِمَحَقِّ دِينِكَ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا.

*“I have heard things about you that, if true, imply that you have raised your Lord’s wrath, and you have disobeyed your leader. I have been notified that you are dividing the properties of Muslims that they have earned with their spears and horses, and for which they have shed their blood, between your Arab relatives who have come to you. I swear by Him Who split the seed and created man, that if this is true then you will find yourself debased in my sight and you will be lowered in my estimation. Therefore do not make light of your Lord’s right, and do not build your world by destroying your religion lest you be of those who are ‘..the greatest losers in their works’” (18: 103).”[22](#)*

Then he continues:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ مِنْ أَعْظَمِ الْخِيَانَةِ خِيَانَةَ الْأُمَّةِ وَأَعْظَمُ الْغِشِّ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْمِصْرِ غِشُّ الْإِمَامِ، وَعِنْدَكَ مِنْ حَقِّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ خَمْسُمِائَةَ أَلْفِ دِرْهَمٍ فَابْعَثْ بِهَا إِلَيْنَا حِينَ يَأْتِيكَ رَسُولِي.

*“Moreover, indeed the greatest form of treachery is that done to a nation, and the greatest form of deceit against the people of the city is the deceit of the leader. You have five hundred thousand Dirhams of dues belonging to the Muslims, so send it to us when my representative comes to you.” [23](#)*

We see how Masqalah who had started to forcefully take away the people’s property is blamed by Imam Ali and his treachery is considered to be the worst possible type by the Imam .

## **Abu-Dharr’s Request was Turned Down**

It has been quoted on the authority of Abu-Dharr: “I told the Prophet of God : Will you not appoint me to a government position?” The Prophet replied:

يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ! إِنَّكَ ضَعِيفٌ وَإِنَّهَا أَمَانَةٌ، وَإِنَّهَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حِزْبِي وَنَدَامَةٌ إِلَّا مَنْ أَخَذَ بِحَقِّهَا وَأَدَّى الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ فِيهَا

*“O Abu-Dharr! You are weak and the rule of a government is a trust. On the Day of Judgment it will be a (cause of) disgrace and remorse except for those who rightfully obtain it, and fulfil what is incumbent on them in it.”[24](#)*

Thus, we see that although Abu-Dharr was one of the special companions of the Prophet , he was denied a government position, and told that he was not able to run the affairs of the government.

- [1.](#) A sect of Muslims who rebelled against the caliphate.
- [2.](#) “Hakamayn” in Arabic means two “hakims”. A “hakim” is a magistrate or one who issues decrees.
- [3.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.386.
- [4.](#) The king of Palestine. Talut is the Arabic name for Saul. Consider the following verses from the Bible:  
“When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. [1 Samuel 10:21–24, King James version].
- [5.](#) Why did the Prophet Muhammad name Saul “Talut”? This is seemingly the only name in the Qur’an for a Biblical figure which seems to have no linguistic connection to its Biblical name. According to the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam it is most probably chosen for poetic reasons to make his name rhyme with Jalut [Goliath, 2:249, 250]. Maybe another reason is that Saul was very tall [1 Samuel 10:21–24], and hence he is called Talut from the Arabic word ‘taala’ (to be long/tall) as suggested in Paret’s commentary on the Qur’an. But this is not directly stated in the Qur’an and thus must remain speculative. The Qur’an does state that he had an impressive physique.
- [6.](#) Tafsir-i-Namunah, v. 12, p.534.
- [7.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.385.
- [8.](#) Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.328.
- [9.](#) Ibid.
- [10.](#) Ibid.
- [11.](#) Ibid. p.383.
- [12.](#) Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, p.385.
- [13.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, Wise saying no.10.
- [14.](#) Ibid. Letter no. 53.
- [15.](#) Ibid.
- [16.](#) Tafsir-i-Namunah, v. 16, p.93; quoted from Tafsir Safi.
- [17.](#) Nur al-Thaqalayn, v.3, p.192.
- [18.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.405.
- [19.](#) Nahjul Fasahat, tradition no.2255.
- [20.](#) Al-Hayat, v.2, p.391.
- [21.](#) In Iran.
- [22.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Fayz al-Islam, Letter no. 43.
- [23.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, v.33, p.416.
- [24.](#) Sharh-i-Risalat al-Huquq, Ghopanchi, v. 1, p.374.

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