

Some Thoughts On Khums

[A. Khums: a Charity or a Duty?](#)

In our evaluation, we judge a person by his deeds. This is so because we, as human beings, cannot know the motives of the doer. But does Allah judge the people in the same way? Allah will not judge the people by looking at their deeds; He will instead judge by looking at their motives. The Qur'an says,

"Verily Allah accepts (the good deeds) only from the pious people."(5:27)

In the introduction, we mentioned there are two levels by which Islam aims to create and preserve the economic equilibrium in society: individual and collective. Under 'individual level,' we talked about charity which is a voluntary good deed. Under 'collective level,' we talked about the taxes which Islam has made obligatory upon the Muslims.

Khums and zakat come under the second category and, therefore, it should never be looked upon as an act of charity. Rather, it is a duty, an obligation which must be fulfilled whether one likes it or not. In fulfilling this obligation, you must train yourself to pay khums and zakat with the intention of seeking the pleasure of Allah. It should be done *fi sabili 'l-lah*.

We must emphasize that doing a deed is one thing but its acceptance or rejection by Allah is something else. The former does not guarantee the latter. It is the motive which will be crucial in acceptance or rejection of one's deed. To use khums, whether on a personal or organizational levels, as a leverage to promote oneself is very detrimental to the spirit of khums.

I am especially concerned about the emphasis put on accrediting as 'donors' the persons or organizations who give khums for valid Islamic causes.

They should take a moment to think whether the *sihmu 'l-Imam* which they are giving is owned by themselves or Imam Mahdi (upon whom be peace)? If it belongs to the latter, then why insist on getting credit for it as the donor? If any acknowledgment is to be made, should it not go to the Imam?

B. Do Others Also Give Khums?

Another issue is that of pride, or I should say arrogance, in giving khums. There are some who give khums on a regular basis (may Allah increase their numbers), but have also become victim of `ujb. `Ujb means a sense of self-righteousness in which one looks down upon others. Such people think that they are the only ones who pay khums!

This happens because of ignorance about others. `Ujb does not harm anyone but its own victim. Such a person will suffer from a wrong sense of pride and will lose the most important means of spiritual development known as self-criticism.

One should be aware that every country or group of people goes through financial ups and downs. If, today, you are financially on a good footing and give khums, while others are on the receiving end -- this does not mean that those who receive khums have been the same during all times in their history!

The best case in our time is India: After the British colonization of that country, in particular after its independence, the Muslims of India have gone through a very difficult financial crisis. The Shi`ahs have suffered even more. Their present plight should not be taken as a sign that they have always been at the receiving end of charity. There was a time not long ago when the Shi`ahs of India (especially during the Shi`ite Oudh sultanate in North India) were the main financial supporters of the centers of learning in Iraq.¹

The Shi`ahs in the Oudh and even in the southern sultanates of pre-British India had contributed greatly to the growth of their faith and community in that part of the Muslim world.

Train yourself to give khums, zakat and charity without injuring the feelings of the recipients. Allah says,

"O you who believe! Do not nullify your charity by reproach and injury (to the recipient), like the person who spends his wealth to show it to the people..." (2:264)

C. Khums Dependency Syndrome

I would also like to express my thought about the attitude which some of our religious organizations in Europe and North America have adopted to the issue of khums. The Shi`ahs in India, Pakistan and East Africa have built many religious centers in their countries. After migrating to the West, it is pleasing to note that they carried on the tradition and have built religious centers in their adopted homelands.

However, there is one important difference between the immigrant Muslim communities in the West and their ancestors in Asia and Africa. The latter built the centers mainly by the contributions made from their own money. Whereas the former have to large extent built their centers with the khums fund. I do not want to imply or suggest that the use of khums for such purposes is not right; but I am worried about the habitual dependency on khums by our organizations.

I have named this mentality as "the khums dependency syndrome". Whenever we think of a worthwhile project, we immediately look at the siḥmu 'l-Imam as the first and the main source for financing that project. This is not to deny that often the local resources are not sufficient. But it seems to me (and I pray to Allah that I be wrong) that we are gradually forgetting how to give from the remaining 80% of our excess wealth towards worthwhile causes, and are getting into the habit of depending on khums!

D. Those Who do not Pay Their Dues as Seen By Imam `Ali

(A.S.)

Some Shi`ahs take the issue of paying khums lightly; they think that giving some money in charity from time to time absolves them of their duty. Such Shi`ahs apparently do not realize that not paying khums, zakat or fitrah (which are obligatory dues) amounts to misappropriation of the money which rightfully belongs to the Imam (peace be upon him) and the needy, orphan and poor people.

To get the feeling of how Imam `Ali (peace be upon him) looks upon the misappropriation of such funds, I would like to quote some parts of a letter which he wrote to one of his officers about the latter's misappropriation of the public fund. While reading the letter, keep the fact in your mind that the officer addressed in this letter was apparently a cousin of Imam `Ali (a.s.). I would specially like to draw the attention of the respected wakils of the mujtahids of our time to this letter.

Imam `Ali bin Abi Talib wrote:

"As soon as it was possible for you to misappropriate the ummah's trust, you hastened to turn around and attack (them), and made a swift leap to snatch away whatever you could from their property meant for their widows and their orphans as a wolf snatches a wounded and helpless goat. Then, you happily loaded it off to Hijaz without feeling guilty for having misappropriated it...It was as though you were sending to your family what you had inherited from your father and mother!

"Glory be to Allah! Do you not believe in the Day of Judgement, or do you not fear the exaction of account? O' you who were considered by us among the men possessed of mind, how can you enjoy food and drink when you know that you are eating the unlawful and drinking the unlawful. You are...marrying women with the money of the orphans, the poor, the believers and the mujahidin to whom Allah has dedicated this money...Fear Allah and return to these people their properties. If you do not do so and Allah grants me power over you, I shall excuse myself before Allah and strike you with my sword with which I did not strike anyone but that he went to Hell.

"By Allah, even if Hasan and Husayn had done what you did there would have been no leniency with me for them and they could not have won their way with me till I had recovered from them the right and destroyed the wrong produced by their unjust action. I swear by Allah, the Lord of all beings, that I would not be pleased to regard the people's money which you have appropriated as lawful for me and to leave it to my successors by way of inheritance.

"Mind yourself and consider for a while as though you had reached the end of life and had been buried under the earth. Then your actions will be presented to you in the place where the oppressor cries 'Alas' while he who wasted his life yearns for return (to the world), ***but time was none to escape***². "³

¹. See, Cole, J.R.I, "'Indian Money' and the Shi'i Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 22 (1986) No. 4, pp. 461-480.

². Sura Sad, 38:3.

³. Nahju 'l-Balaghah, Letter No. 41.

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