

Value of life and Ali

We have learnt that Ali was grieved on account of the privations of the oppressed. He helped them to acquire their rights and made them recognize what was due to them. He also shared hardships with the indigent and the deprived, so that the value of justice might be known and its standard might be elevated.

We have studied his method of eliminating oppression, and the principles which he followed in the capacity of a ruler and it has become known that his principles and laws enjoy a very high position amongst the principles enunciated by the great sages of the East and the West. We have already mentioned his contributions to the language, philosophy, and science and have explained that he was the base and origin of these branches of knowledge. We have hinted at the extraordinary power which he possessed to activate the natural inclinations and morality for the people and the wonderful eloquence with which he described their qualities and desires. His inherent powers and personal virtues were intermingled and with their help he planted, on every occasion, a new tree and provided it with leaves and flowers to perfect the knowledge of mankind.

He laid a new foundation through his literary and other works on which Arabic language, jurisprudence, and social sciences, are based, and the fact is that the theories expounded by others are the offshoots of the same knowledge which he has handed down to us.

This voluminous book about the cognition of man cannot be compiled unless the author describes the nature of human beings, finds out the effects of the vicissitudes of time on their nature, directs his intellect and natural inclinations towards their welfare and then takes a decision according to their individual and collective nature and the spirit of the time. Imam Ali adopted this method in his sayings and precepts, which are unmatched after the sayings and precepts of the Prophet.

In some of his precepts Ali has addressed theoretical logic. In others he has addressed practical logic. And in many of them he has addressed both. The precepts referring to theoretical logic mean as to how a fact should be found out and those which relate to practical logic mean as to what should be done to acquire prosperity.

As regards the first kind of precepts it may be said that Ali found out the true nature of facts. With a subtle intellect he observed the good and evil of the time, arrived at correct conclusions after making necessary experiments, and made those conclusions known to the people. [1](#)

His precepts are so judicious and exact that it may be said that they have been deduced by means of geometrical calculations. They have been stated in such a beautiful manner that from the point of view of their meanings as well as their interpretation they form the foundation of the Arabic literature. All the thoughts and opinions of the Imam collected in Nahj al-Balaghah are of this standard.

In the precepts in which the Commander of the Faithful has addressed theoretical logic, he has left the people free in the matter of their reason and views so that they may find out the factual position and act according to their understanding and comprehension.

Such precepts are not in the form of orders, prohibitions or desires. On the contrary they are philosophical remarks in which the nature and habits of the friends and the enemies, the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish, the generous and the miserly, the oppressor and the oppressed etc. have been fully explained. He has also explained many scientific laws with logical reasoning. Some of them will be mentioned later.

As regards his precepts which relate to practical logic, or both practical logic and theoretical logic, it may be stated as follows:

Those who think that only the laws, rules, regulations and system of government are sufficient for the administration of public affairs are mistaken, because one should take responsibility for the protection and observance of these principles and laws after due explanation of human rights. Just as it is necessary that one who enacts these laws should be wise, experienced and righteous, it is also necessary that one who implements them should possess these qualities and should obtain the desired results. This is so because the administration of public affairs depends very much on the good and bad qualities of those who promulgate the laws and is also related to the wisdom and attention of the people for whom those laws have been enacted.

In spite of all this it has to be admitted that the various new rules and laws which have been formulated are mostly different from one another. Owing to the differences which exist between the countries it is not possible to enforce all these laws without force and coercion and the law-enforcing authorities are permitted to avoid enforcing them to some extent. The rules and laws of the old governments were mostly compatible with the habits and morals of those who enforced them. This was for reasons which are beyond the scope of our present discussion. [2](#)

Let us suppose that it is possible for human beings to enact useful laws and to compel the people to act according to them. However, if the responsibilities are not carried out according to the dictates of conscience and faith, they do not carry much value. We believe that any act which is not performed by man with the confirmation of practical logic, personal desire, and firm determination, and without

coercion, cannot be treated to be a human act. The greatest and the most precious human action is that which is prompted by one's conscience.

The rules and laws formulated by a government are not at all sufficient to improve human relations unless the theoretical and practical wisdom makes man contented with them. In that event the determination and good deeds of the people will harmonize with each other and make the individuals and the groups reach their destination through the path of civilization, because such persons do not desire anything except good deeds.

Whatever we have said about the individuals and groups is very well known to the intellectuals and the philosophers as well as to the past ulema and research scholars, and we believe that conscience and faith obliged them to serve.

When we study carefully the history of those who served mankind and civilization, we come to know that though wisdom alone was their guide for understanding every matter, yet it was not alone in the history of their lives. The power of theoretical knowledge is stagnant and dry. By itself it can do nothing. It must have companions and friends of different kinds along with their quantities and numbers. This power shows you the path but not the speed and does not compel you to walk on the path. The thing which brings you to the stage of action is enthusiasm and inclination.

Marconi (an Italian scientist who invented wireless) liked it, on account of his enthusiasm and inclination, not to enjoy the amusements of the world and to remain in seclusion to serve mankind and civilization, for otherwise why did he choose seclusion for himself, if practical wisdom and enthusiasm did not prompt him to serve humanity? The same thing could be said about some other great men. Thus the noble-minded servants of mankind did good deeds with great enthusiasm and devotion.

As the wicked and unlucky persons were devoid of true practical wisdom and good intentions they could not do any service to humanity in spite of their theoretical wisdom. To this category belong Adolf Hitler, Hajjaj bin Yusuf, Changez Khan, Alexander of Macedonia and many great scientists of our own age who utilized their experiments in respect of man. All of them possessed power of intellect like the servants of mankind but in spite of this their performance was nothing but bloodshed, lack of regard for human life, destruction of the achievements of human civilization, and death and annihilation of innumerable innocent men and women. This was due to the fact that their theoretical wisdom and thoughts were not linked with practical wisdom and good sentiments. If these two things (viz. practical wisdom and good sentiments) are not present theoretical wisdom is useless and is in fact very harmful.

I do not mean to say that the different powers possessed by man viz. theoretical wisdom, practical wisdom, and inclination, are separate from one another. In fact these powers assist and influence one another. What I mean to say is that the theoretical wisdom comprehends the things themselves, connects causes and effects with each other and provides unalterable limits and rules which do not change on account of changes which take place in the morals and the nations, but the practical wisdom

and sentiments are different according to differences in the people.

Theoretical wisdom is present in every person and comprehends a matter correctly. It is necessary that it should contain inclination and the practical wisdom should make it proceed on the path of goodness and prosperity. Failing this the person concerned will spend his wisdom on making discoveries which will become the cause of destruction of the human beings as well as of his own bad luck.

This is as true in the case of the law-giver as for those for whom the law has been enacted. Their conscience and inclination should be desirous of obeying the laws based on equity and justice and mere intellectual admission of their goodness is not sufficient. Their hearts should be free from impurities to ensure the perfection of human prosperity so that they may make efforts with enthusiasm for the welfare of the nation. Furthermore, it is necessary that they should possess moral virtues, because the merits of a man protect the laws and orders from the evil-doers and the sinners like a fortress.

It was for this reason that Imam Ali awakened good inclinations in the hearts of the people and delivered sermons to promote good morals. In his sermons, testaments and conversations he always addressed the conscience of the people, because he knew that for the administration of the affairs of the people and their good relations it is necessary that they should possess good morals. Self-purification ensures human perfection and also supports justice, and protects its frontiers. Furthermore, it leads towards the sentiments and desires of the people which culminate prosperity and happiness.

Ali possessed unusual competence to counsel and refine the people and his words deeply impressed everyone. He knew their nature and their way and manners. He compared their good and bad qualities and embodied their realities in his statements. He explained their different kinds. He ordered the people to do certain things and forbade them from doing evil things.

He had a very favourable opinion about the conscience of the people being able to make distinction between good and evil. This favourable opinion of Ali about the conscience of human beings resembled a similar opinion held by other great benefactors of humanity (like Christ) and Muhammad who had enlightened minds and kind and affectionate hearts, and whose love for mankind knew no bounds. Every light became insignificant before that which was kindled in their hearts. Ali has based his precepts on this very favourable opinion and his addressing human conscience in his counsels and sermons is also on account of the good opinion which he held about human nature.

As Ali held a favourable opinion about the people, in spite of all the hardships which he had to suffer at their hands, he always endeavoured to inculcate good morals in their hearts. He knew that both goodness and evil are present in the nature of man. However, it behoves a forbearing person to turn his heart towards goodness and nourish it. He educated the people through examples as well as by his good conduct, because this method of education is more effective.

Imam Ali stressed the people time and again to hold a good opinion about human conscience. He has said: "If a person holds a good opinion about you try to prove his opinion to be correct". He has also

said: "If someone does something do not hold a bad opinion about it so long as it is possible to draw a good conclusion from it".

If he has criticized some actions of treacherous and unjust persons it was because he considered their reformation possible by means of censure and advice, although it might necessitate a good deal of effort and time.

A righteous person rewards those who do good deeds, but punishes the evil-doers because he hopes that by this means it will be possible to correct them. If Imam Ali had not expected this he would not have tolerated the unbearable hardships caused by the wicked persons.

Ali said about the world and the worldly people: "The worldly persons growl at one another like dogs and ferocious animals. Their strong ones devour the weak and the big ones humiliate the small ones". He said this because he had suffered much on account of the usurpation and disobedience of the corrupt persons, and was very much vexed on account of the trouble caused by them. By saying these things he fought against the unjust, the cruel and the tyrants in the same way in which a physician fights against the germs for the welfare and health of a patient. He preferred death to life and hoped for the salvation of mankind.

Ali respected life, because it is a great blessing of God. He considered living beings to be respectable so that a specimen of the traces of creation might remain secure in their existence. He had a very favourable opinion about the conscience and the purity of nature of man and was very hopeful for the prosperity of mankind. He wished that men might remain as free as he ought to be.

In the absence of this favourable opinion and hope he would not have behaved so well with the people and would not have said: "If you hear something from someone do not hold a bad opinion about it so long as it is possible to draw a good conclusion from it". In that event he would not also have addressed the conscience of the people kindly like the Prophets, and would not have guided them with a heavy heart, to goodness with his sermons and admonitions. He wished to protect the morals of the people with his sermons and precepts, and to rear up human enthusiasm in them so that they might do good deeds with the assistance of their own wisdom and intellect.

In every work Imam Ali appointed certain spies from among the people themselves to keep an eye on them and declared that the limbs of their body were sitting in ambush for them. As he had faith in their own assessment he said: "O people! Remember that your own self is sitting in ambush for you and your limbs are your spies who keep an account of your deeds and even your breathing".

On account of his faith in the conscience of man and respect for his life he told the people of his time that human life cannot be kept in bondage, and cannot be kept in the cradle of childhood for long. It should not be kept in imprisonment lest it should become impure and be consequently annihilated.

In another chapter we shall quote some unique sayings of Ali which will remain alive so long as

righteous persons live on the earth. Those sayings will last forever. We have selected these sayings from Nahj al-Balaghah and they relate to the acquisition of excellent morals and good character and to the purity of man.

1. According to Shiite belief whatever the Imam said was based on inspiration and celestial power i.e. the spirit of Imamate and it is not possible to acquire all the knowledge possessed by him by means of intellect and experience.

2. The author has proved here that it is the duty of the people to consider law to be a bounty for themselves. They should have faith in it and should hold themselves responsible to obey it, instead of the government being wholly responsible to enforce it and the people obeying it for fear of punishment. The Muslim scholars have explained this point in their books at length and all the Muslims know that man-made laws are not sufficient to ensure happiness in this world and salvation in the world hereafter. As regards the celestial law it is necessary that the Prophet should enforce it through inspiration and the people should obey it as an article of faith.

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