

War and peace

There are many mutual rights enjoyed by the people. One of them is that they should strengthen the ties of love and friendship. The ties should exist between the individuals as well as between the tribes and the nations, because the citizens of all the countries are brother of one another. They are the descendants of one father and their origin is one. They have a common path and their aims and objects are also not different from one another.

Freedom and affluence, prescribed laws and new efforts are all meant for mankind. These are however, useless in the presence of warfare and bloodshed which may destroy human race. All these things are for man. What is the use of all these (amenities and comforts) when human life is not safe?

Every statement which invites people to serve the human beings but does not invite them to peace is false and detestable.

All ideals regarding man and his life are useless unless they promote human brotherhood. How ridiculous those words, acts and ideals appear when the canals are converted into streams of blood, the gardens are destroyed and the palaces fall into ruins! How hopeless these words, acts and ideals seem to be when a man is hurled into the mouth of war and the beauty of his life, his hopes and desires, and his very being are reduced to nothing.

War is the cause of death and destruction, whereas peace is the only means of escaping destruction. This is the object which leads to many other aims and objects. It is only during the time of peace that human beings can utilize all their talents and achieve their common desires by joint efforts.

The principles and methods of Ali apply to all fields in the same manner in which the branches which shoot from a common root spread on all sides He had realized that peace is a high wall surrounding man and life which protects both of them from every calamity. Addressing the people he says: "God has not created you in vain".

As regards Ali's view regarding the purpose for which God has created man he says: "God has created you respectable on His earth, and safe among His creation. His bounties have spread the wings of their

kindnesses on your heads and made the streams of comforts flow for your sake”.

According to Ali love and friendship is the greatest blessing for mankind. He says: “Almighty God has strengthened the tie of love between the human beings. It is the love under whose shadow the people walk about and in whose lap they seek refuge. This love is an invaluable blessing because it is dearer than whatever price is fixed for it, and is greater than every great thing”.

Ali says that every person should establish friendship and love with others so that peace may prevail, because during peace time the atmosphere of a city remains tranquil and the people do not feel any fear. One should avoid warfare, because war is oppression and it is highly indecent and improper to oppress God's creatures. Whether the result of war is victory or retreat it is harmful in both cases. War is ruination and destruction for the victor as well as for the vanquished. War destroys human honour. The victor is considered to be an opponent of intellect and conscience, an enemy of love, who treats human life to be valueless, and one who is defeated is humiliated and his life and property are also destroyed. Ali says: “One who gains victory by evil means is in fact defeated”. “Nothing is worse than fighting and bloodshed”.

Ali has considered looting and plundering which were the preliminaries of war between the tribes during the age of ignorance to be one of the most horrible acts. According to Ali looting and plundering, idol-worshipping, and burying the girls alive, were sins of the same kind and their origin is also one and the same. That origin is that man is not aware of his own value or that of life and there can be no greater ignorance than this. He says: “They had reached the abyss of ignorance. They buried their girls alive, worshipped the idols and robbed and plundered one another”.

He detested fighting so much that he forbade it even during the most difficult circumstances and did not permit that one should challenge another to combat. He says: “Never challenge another person to combat”.

When we study the life and conduct of Ali it becomes abundantly clear that he condemned many characteristics of the people and considered many things in the world to be abominable. As regards the characteristics of the people he first of all condemned inclination towards mischief and bloodshed. As regards the abominable things there was nothing more hateful in his eyes than warfare. This sentence of his deserves to be kept in mind: “This world is the abode of war, plundering and bloodshed”.

Fighting is as much injurious for truth as it is the source of refuge for falsehood. It is by means of truth that man is exalted, the society is strengthened and the world becomes prosperous. Falsehood is the collection of humiliation and disgrace. It is, therefore, evident that there can be nothing worse than war. It is the cradle of all absurdities, because doubt prevails, war and falsehood flourishes, and the voice of truth is subdued; whereas peace is truth itself, and whoever violates truth goes astray.

This was the basis of the view and belief held by Ali about war, and this is not also surprising, because this belief was compatible with his idea of freedom and the reliance which he had on the common man

and the respect which he had for life as well as for those who were alive. It was for this reason that at times, in order to put to end to trouble and to invite his friends to peace he said: “For your enemies this loss is sufficient that they have gone astray”.

Imam Ali used to ask a sinner and a transgressor to express regret for his lapse so that fighting might not take place. As regards the oppressed persons he used to ask him to accept the apology of the transgressor however big his offence might be. He says: “Accept the apology of a person who apologizes to you”.

He also says: “Fight against your worldly desires by means of reason. If you do so the people will continue to love you”. He, therefore, considered it the best quality for his followers that they should desire peace, hate war and seek safety for themselves as well as for others. As to what qualities his followers should possess he says: “When my followers are angry they do not commit injustice. They are a blessing for their neighbours and a source of security for their companions”.

However, hatred for war and unusual inclination towards peace did not mean that Ali should have surrendered before his opponent. Hatred for war and inclination towards peace does not mean that one should shirk one's responsibilities and leave the mischief-mongers free to do what they like, because war is not a detestable thing in itself, but becomes bad on account of the horrors and destruction which it entails, and peace is not a good thing in itself, but becomes good, because it provides security to the people, provides chances for improving the society, and opens the paths of life before those who are living.

In short, whether it be war or peace, neither of them is intrinsically good or bad. Their goodness or badness is determined with reference to other people. If war or peace had any intrinsic value, the revolutionary efforts made by the oppressed people of the world against the oppressive kings and rulers and the colonialists would have been evil and sin, and obedience to those tyrants would have been a blessing, but in fact it is not so.

The real thing which counts is the welfare of the masses. If they are living in comfort and their property and honour are safe, peace is better for them. In case, however, they are leading a miserable life and their rights are being violated, war is a blessing for them until an atmosphere of real peace is created, a peace, which is based on human values and is free from humiliation and helplessness, and subservience to tyranny and injustice. This was what Ali had in view.

What he disliked was the war of Abu Lahab and Abu Sufyan against Muhammad and not the war of Muhammad against Abu Lahab and Abu Sufyan. He disliked the war which was fought by the tyrants against the righteous, and not the war which was fought by the pious and Godly persons against the tyrants and the hypocrites.

Ali wished the people not to become Changez Khan, Halaku, Hitler or Mussolini, but he did not also like them to become like those who were enslaved by Changez, Halaku, Hitler and Mussolini.

There is nothing wrong with a war which is fought to get back the right of an oppressed person from the oppressor, or to protect the honour of the people. In fact it is a social need and something which humanity demands. The condition precedent to such a war is that before it is resorted to, all necessary efforts for peace and reconciliation should be made.

When the followers of Ali became impatient because of his having delayed permission at Siffin to perform jihad he said to them: "As regards your asking whether this delay is due to the fact that I abhor death and wish to escape it, I swear by God that I do not care whether I proceed towards death or death proceeds towards me. And similarly as regards your asking whether I am doubtful regarding the lawfulness of jihad against the people of Syria, I swear by God that I have not delayed the battle even for a day except with the idea that some persons from amongst them may possibly come and meet me and be guided through me and may also see my light with their dazzled eyes. I like this more than to kill them while they are in a state of ignorance, although they themselves will in any case be responsible for their sins".

The second condition for war is that its object should not be only to gain victory. Furthermore, the victor should not become vindictive. He should not torture the enemy and should not maltreat the captive and those who have suffered on account of war. He should not pursue those who fly away, and should not hurt the old men, the women and the children. If he who joins battle thinks that he is on the right, and claims that he is fighting for the sake of justice, and his opponent is an oppressor, and it is necessary to take revenge from him, he should content himself with restoring truth to its place. If this object is achieved after a brief fighting he should withhold his hand from continued warfare.

In all the battles fought by Ali the basic principle followed by him was that bloodshed should not be resorted to unless it was absolutely necessary and there was no alternative other than warfare. He always endeavoured to advise the enemy and make him submit to reason. He used to say: "By God I shall certainly do justice to the oppressed and render advice to the oppressor".

When advice and efforts for peace and reconciliation failed he resorted to threats, because his real object was that if possible not even one drop of blood might be shed. Threatening the people of Nahrawan he says: "I warn you that you will be killed and will fall on the ground on the windings of the canal and its even slopes in such a condition that you will have no sound argument or clear proof to put forth before God as an excuse.

The position is this that you have become homeless and then the Divine decree has a firm grip on you. I had already prohibited you from agreeing to this arbitration but you declined to obey my orders like opposing violators, so much so that I was obliged to agree to what you wished. You are a group whose heads are empty of understanding and intellect. Woe betide you! I have neither involved you in any trouble nor wished ill of you".

Now please read this wonderful supplication of Ali and visualize his sublime morality and the sympathy

which he had in his heart for fell enemies. When the enemy forces in Siffin finally decided to fight and all efforts for peace and reconciliation failed he prayed to God in these words:

“O God! Lord of the earth, which you have made the abode of man, and the place of roaming about of the reptiles, the quadrupeds and other innumerable creatures which can or cannot be seen. O Lord of the strong mountains which you have made to serve as nails for the earth and means of livelihood for your creatures! If you grant us victory over the enemies keep us immune from committing injustice and keep us on the straight path of truth, and if You make our enemies victorious grant us martyrdom and save us from the allurements of life”.

The keenness of the Commander of the Faithful for peace and his efforts for it even a short time before the commencement of the battle is an undeniable fact which is acknowledged by his friends as well as enemies. During his entire life he displayed love for peace and hatred for war. He always tried his best that fighting might be avoided and reconciliation might take place.

When, at the time of the Battle of the Camel, Ayesha, Talha and Zubayr got ready to fight against him he arrayed his companions and said to them: “Do not shoot an arrow and do not strike a spear or a sword so that it may be proved that you have discharged your responsibility”.

However, Ali did not start fighting until the enemies had pierced arrows into the bodies of three of his companions and he had prayed to God thrice to bear witness to their act. He reached before his enemies scores of times empty handed and without any arms or coat of mail although they were fully equipped with arms.

In reply to their harsh words stubbornness, and rough tone he spoke with extreme kindness and tendered them advice in a friendly manner. Standing before him were his enemies who looked like a dark night as they were covered with in coats of mail and shields, but his armour was respect for mankind; his shield was his faith in his being right and in his mode of action being correct, and his sword was his compliance with the commandments of reason and conscience. In fact his kindness to the weak, his support for truth and his peaceableness were as good as thousands of shields for him. It was he who said: “If you feel secure from vexation by someone try to make him your brother”.

Imam Ali was one who disliked enmity and grudge because these two things give birth to discord and destroy individual morals and national attributes. He said: “Refrain from enmity and dispute, because these two things make the heart sick and discord is generated from them”.

Many times he reached before his enemies empty-handed and without any coat of mail or shield. He did this to make them realize that he hated warfare and was keen to solve problems in a friendly and brotherly manner. He said: “Do good to your enemy because this victory is more agreeable and sweet”.

Another object of his approaching his opponents in this manner was that he wanted to make it clear that war is something bad and the benefit which the victor acquires from it is a benefit which is acquired from evil and has no value. He says: “The goodness of a goodness which is acquired through evil is futile and

the affluence which is the result of indigence and adversity has no value”.

Ali eliminated this evil (warfare) by all possible means and tried to improve the conditions of the people without bloodshed and strife. So much so that when the enemies were bent upon waging war and had no aim other than shedding his blood as well as his righteous companions, he advised them and endeavoured his best to obviate fighting. And when these efforts failed and no alternative was left except to join battle, he did not initiate fighting. Fighting was started by the enemies and he only replied to their attacks. And when he took the sword in his hand he stepped forward and now he was Ali son of Abu Talib. If death did not proceed towards him he himself proceeded towards death. He crushed the champions and made brave warriors flee.

Ali desired equity and justice, whereas his enemies craved for injustice and oppression. He wished that mankind might prosper, whereas they wanted to create mischief. He wanted the people to enjoy freedom and comfort, whereas they were keen to keep them in bondage like slaves. He wished that the slaves of God should be strong and respectable whereas his enemies wanted to enslave and humiliate them.

The things which must exist in the society and which are also considered by law of reason to be necessary were in danger. Now in these conditions remaining a silent spectator amounted to laziness, recklessness, and infidelity, and to protect them meant courage and bravery.

About fighting against Mu`awiya he says:–”I have weighed and assessed this matter very carefully and have concluded that only two paths are open before me either I should wage war against Mu`awiya or I become an apostate”.

Just see how he has drawn a picture of the Battle of the Camel in a concise and precise manner and has also explained his own position:” Talha and Zubayr were the first to take oath of allegiance to me. Later they broke that oath without just cause and took the Mother of the Faithful Ayesha to Basra. I was also obliged to take the Muhajirs and the Ansar with me and pursue them. I tried my best that they might take once again the oath which they had broken but they declined to do so. I counselled them much and treated them well”.

While Ali was still on his way and had not yet confronted them he sent his son Hasan and his cousin Abdullah bin Abbas as well as Ammar bin Yasir and Qais bin Sa'd bin Ubada to have talk with them (i.e. Talha and Zubayr) hoping that they might respond to the call of reason and bloodshed might be avoided. They, however, remained intransigent. The Commander of the Faithful says thus in this regard: “I proceeded along with the Muhajirs and the Ansar and stopped near Basra. I invited them to peace and reconciliation, overlooked their lapses and reminded them of the oath of allegiance which they had taken. They however, remained adamant and insisted upon fighting.

I sought help from God and was obliged to get ready for defence against their attacks. The result was that those who were to be killed were killed and others ran away. Now they requested me for the same peace which I had desired before the fighting took place, I accepted the peace proposal and spared

them. I appointed Abdullah bin Abbas their governor and sent Zafar bin Qais to them as the messenger. Now you may approach these two persons to tell you whatever you want to know about us and them”.

Ali was victorious on account of his unusual bravery and perfect and deep faith. He was, however, as much grieved over his victory as his enemies were over their defeat. Tears trickled down from his eyes and he was extremely sad.

Every father loves his children very much. If a child does not conduct himself properly his father has to take corrective measures and punish him although such action also grieves him. Same was the case with Ali. He treated the Muslims like his children. The Prophet of Islam has said: “I and Ali are the fathers of this nation”. Ali loved these children very much. He was obliged to take corrective measures against them on account of their injustice and error but was very much grieved to observe their sufferings.

Ali did not dislike anything more than bloodshed. He was always afraid lest his governors and officers might indulge in unjustified bloodshed. He, therefore, warned them again and again not to indulge in bloodshed. He took care from the moral as well as the political and administrative point of view that blood should not be shed unnecessarily. He forbade it in both the capacities, because he considered that as a consequence of such bloodshed the government might topple down and it was also opposed to the philosophy of government. He did not forgive any officer for a lapse in this regard.

In a letter addressed to a governor he says: “Do not try to strengthen your government by shedding blood without just cause because this will make your government still weaker, rather it will be taken away from you and will reach the hand of someone else. If you are guilty of intentional bloodshed God will not consider this crime of yours pardonable and I, too, will not consider it so”.

Has there been any other ruler in the world, who may have issued emphatic instructions to his governors to appoint as military commander a person who is meek and forbearing, hates bloodshed and murder, can settle matters by mutual discussions, is not guilty of unjustified bloodshed, is kind and magnanimous, is not harsh in getting work done by others and is not accustomed to severity and violence?

In the testament written by him for Malik Ashtar while appointing him as Governor of Egypt Ali says: “Appoint that person as commander of your army whom you consider to be most sincere and superior to others in the matter of meekness and forbearance. He should not be short-tempered and should accept an excuse. He should be kind to the weak and hard upon the powerful. He should not become hot-tempered due to cruelty and should not become helpless due to weakness”.

Thus it is evident that Ali was a peace-loving person. He always recommended peace. He extremely hated war and always prohibited it. He never stepped towards War unless war itself stepped towards him and even if he stepped towards it, it was when he had exhausted all efforts to stop it by means of friendship, love, goodness and kindness. If he was compelled to fight a battle he tried that the least

number of persons should be killed. And when he secured victory over his enemy he forgave him.

He was equally grieved in the event of victory and defeat. Whenever his enemy requested for peace he acceded to his request cheerfully and wholeheartedly. He used to say: "During peace time the soldiers are in comfort, the worries of the people are lesser and an atmosphere of security prevails in the cities.

He sent many orders to the governors and the officers in which he emphatically recommended to them *inter alia* that they should follow his example and should not draw their swords on account of ordinary matters as was done by the people during the age of ignorance.

Imam Ali says: "Do not put your hands and swords in motion like the tongue on account of trivial matters".

"I do not punish anyone merely on account of suspicion".

"I shall not fight anyone until I invite him to peace and thus discharge my responsibility in this behalf. If he repents I shall accept his repentance, but if he declines to do so and is bent upon fighting I shall seek help from God and shall fight against him".

We shall mention in detail later how Ali behaved with his cruel enemies.

It is the duty of every person to abide by the promises made by him. By this means peace is maintained between the individuals and in the society and the chances of warfare are eliminated. A covenant should be honoured whether it is concluded between the followers of the same religion or of different religions, between persons belonging to the same race or to different races and between friends or enemies. This was the principle which was followed constantly by Ali.

As stated above fulfilment of promises is a means of peace and peace ensures maintenance of an atmosphere of security and prosperity and is a great service to the nation. It is so because covenants and laws are the means of national unity and solidarity. Fulfilment of promises is a quality of magnanimous persons and a means of the peace of mind and achievement of high morals for which the Commander of the Faithful endeavoured throughout his life.

Being faithful to one's covenants ensures comradeship and love in all circumstances and is a manifestation of respect for mankind. Both the parties remain satisfied as a result of this faithfulness, and when both of them are satisfied each of them can decide with peace of mind as to how he should conduct his affairs. On the contrary if they are not satisfied, it will not be possible for them to undertake their work freely.

During the period of the caliphate of Ali fulfilment of promises was a rule which it was absolutely necessary for the people to follow. Everyone was expected either to fulfil his promise or to lay down his very life. Ali hated violation of promises as much as he detested falsehood.

In one of his sermons he says: "Fulfilment of promise and truth have always gone hand in hand and so far as I am aware there is no shield better than these to protect a man. Whoever understands the reality of his **"Return"** does not commit treachery. However, our time is such that many persons have supposed treachery and deceit to mean intelligence and wisdom, and the ignorant people have treated their ways and methods to be prudence. May God destroy them! What has happened to them? When a person, who has seen the ups and downs of life and is aware of the vicissitudes of time, makes a plan for himself but finds the divine commandments in his way, he abandons that plan, although he may be able to execute it. On the other hand one whose path is not obstructed by religious feelings avails of the opportunity".

In the testament which he wrote for Malik Ashtar while appointing him as the Governor of Egypt he says: "If you settle some conditions with your enemy or conclude a pact with him you should relieve yourself of its burden by honouring it. You should discharge faithfully the responsibility undertaken by you and should make yourself a shield for the protection of your promise. You should not, therefore, abandon what you undertake to do or dishonour the covenants you make and should not deceive your enemy".

Furthermore, he did not content himself only with emphasizing that deception should not be practised on the enemy but also strictly prohibited making ambiguous agreements with the enemy which might be interpreted in different ways, and it may provide a justification for the violation of the agreement. He also directed that after a covenant was concluded and authenticated, advantage of some verbal error should not be taken to violate it.

Whenever Ali formed an opinion or promulgated an order, he, in the first instance, examined and assessed all its aspects very carefully. As he firmly believed in the fulfilment of promise even the greatest impediments and hardships could not make him deviate from this principle. One of the occasions on which he honoured his promise in spite of very difficult circumstances was that of Siffin. At the time of the Battle of Siffin it was decided to refer the dispute to arbitration.

A pact was concluded between the Commander of the Faithful and Mu`awiya to the effect that until the two arbitrators gave their award the hostilities would remain suspended. After fighting was stopped and the pact was concluded the adherents of the Commander of the Faithful realized that they had been duped. A man named Muhammad bin Harith then approached Ali and said: "O Commander of the Faithful! Can we not ignore the pact and start the war again? I am afraid that this pact will be a source of great humiliation and disgrace for us" The Commander of the Faithful replied: "Should we violate the pact after executing it? No. This is not permissible". And it was also Ali who said: "Stick firmly to the responsibilities which you have undertaken. I am responsible for my words and guarantee their correctness".

The facts narrated above explain that Ali's efforts for the maintenance of peace fully accorded with the wishes of the people on account of their far-reaching consequences. All human beings crave for justice, equality and freedom and Ali's effort for peace was an expression of their desire. In fact it was the

heartfelt desire of Ali himself which he also expressed in his orders and commands.

In the matter of his efforts to ensure that man should love man Ali is on equal footing with the past prophets and benefactors of mankind. What a great resemblance Ali's efforts for peace have with the kind voice of Muhammad who has said: "O slaves of God! Become brothers of one another".

How much his efforts also resembled the words of the Prophet who, when asked as to which act is the noblest, replied: "The noblest act is that one should endeavour for the welfare of the world".

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