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36) Oppression (Injustice)

One of the other pests that disrupts society, destroys the Muslims' unity, and causes division is oppression or injustice to people and even to animals. It is a vice hated by God. Oppression or injustice is the cause of many vices such as backbiting, abusing, theft, inchastitiy, misappropriation, and dishonoring.

God Almighty reproaches injustice in many Quranic verses and introduces the oppressor as a bad human being: ***"...surely the unjust will not be successful."***[1]

In another verse, God says: ***"So the roots of the people who were unjust were cut off; and all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds."***[2]

God also says: ***"...will any be destroyed but the unjust people?"***[3]

On the same topic, God says: ***"... so away with the unjust people."***[4]

In another verse, God Almighty says: ***"And let those fear (in their behaviour toward orphans) who if they left behind them weak offspring would be afraid for them. So let them mind their duty to Allah, and speak justly."***[5]

Abu Abdullah (Imam Sadiq) (AS) has been reported as saying: "Whoever does injustice; God will make someone dominant on him, who will do injustice to him, to his children and to his grandchildren."[6]

The narrator reports: "I asked the Imam: 'Why does God impose an oppressor on the following generation while a certain has done the injustice?' The Imam recited the above-mentioned verse and also this verse: ***"The unjust shall not have any compassionate friend nor any intercessor who should be obeyed."***[7]

The messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported as saying: "Keep away from injustice, for injustice near God is darkness on the Day of Judgment."[8]

The messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported by Imam Ali (AS) as saying: "Allah the Almighty says:

My wrath is great against one who does injustice to someone who has no helper other than me."[9]

In a commentary on this verse ***"...Then be on your guard against the Fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers"***[10], Imam Ali (AS) said: "O our followers, fear Allah! Be careful not to be the fuel of this fire if you are not disbelievers. Be careful not to do any injustice to your brothers in faith."[11]

Imam Ali (AS) has also been reported as saying: "The worst provision for the Day of Resurrection is to do injustice to the servants of Allah."[12]

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported as saying: "O son of Adam! Do what is good and give up what is evil! Injustice is of three kinds; first, the injustice which is not forgiven, like associating anything with God. In this relation, God has said: ***"Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him."***[13] Second, the injustice which is forgiven is like the injustice that one does against himself. Third, it is the injustice which is not forgiven, like the injustice which one does to another one."[14]

Imam Baqir (AS) has been reported by Abu Hamzah ath-Thumali as saying: "When the demise of Imam Sajjad (a.s.) approached, he drew me to his chest, saying: 'My son, I advise you with what my father advised me at his death and what his father had advised him. Then, he said: 'My son, keep away from injustice to one who has no help but Allah against you.'"[15]

Imam Ali (AS) has been reported as saying: "By Allah, I would rather spend the night in wakefulness on the thorns of as-Sa'dan (a plant having sharp prickles) than to meet Allah and His Messenger on the Day of Judgment as an oppressor against any one or a usurper of anything out of the worldly wealth. And how can I oppress any one for the sake of a self that hurriedly goes towards its destruction and shall remain under the earth for a long time....By Allah, even if I am given all the seven districts (or continents) with all there is under their skies that I may disobey Allah in extorting a crust of a barley grain from an ant, I would never do."[16]

Imam Ali (AS) writes the following letter to one of his officers: "Fear Allah and give back to those people their properties. If you do not do so and Allah grants me power over you, I will excuse myself before Allah about you and strike you with my sword with which I did not strike anyone except that he went to Hell. By Allah, even if Hassan and Hossain had done what you did, I would never be a bit lenient to them."[17]

In another letter to Uthman ibn Hunayf, Imam Ali (AS) writes: "O ibn Hunayf, I have come to know that a young man from Basra invited you to a feast and you leapt towards it. Foods of different colors were served for you and big bowels were brought to you. I never thought that you would accept the feast of a people who drive away the beggars and invite the rich. So think of what you bite from this bitten dish (think of the result)...

Remember that every follower has a leader whom he follows and is guided by the light of his knowledge. Realize that your Imam has contented himself with two shabby pieces of cloth out of (the comforts of the) world and two loaves of bread as his meal (all the day). Certainly, you cannot do so, but at least support me in piety, exertion, chastity and uprightness, because, by Allah, I have not treasured any gold out of your world nor amassed any wealth nor collected any clothes other than the two shabby sheets.

Of course, all that we had in our possession under this sky was Fadak, but a group of people felt greedy for it and the other party withheld themselves from it. Allah is, after all, the best arbiter. What shall I do with Fadak or other than Fadak, while tomorrow this body is to go into the grave in whose darkness its traces shall vanish and (even) news of it will disappear. It is a pit that, even if its width is widened or the hands of the digger make it broad and open, the stones and clods of clay will narrow it and the falling earth will close its aperture. I try to keep myself in piety so that on the Day of the Great Fear it will be peaceful and steady in slippery places."[18]

It is worth mentioning that the usurpation of Fadak was injustice done against Lady Fatima (AS), an act of oppression recorded in history. Fadak was gained after the conquest of Khaybar and it was given to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) who donated it to his daughter during his lifetime. A Sunni scholar says: "Shiite Muslims unanimously believe that Fadak was given to Fatima by the Messenger of Allah (SAW) before his departure from this world."[19]

When the verse: ***"And give to the near of kin his due"***[20] was revealed, the Messenger of Allah (SAW) gave Fadak to Lady Fatima (AS). When Abu Bakr took it from her, Lady Fatima in a message to him, said: "Fadak belongs to me.' Ameerul Mo'minin and Umm Ayman testified to that. Abu Bakr asserted: Fadak belongs to the Muslims, but it is in your hands. Lady Fatima (AS) went to the mosque and delivered an excellent speech proving that Fadak belonged to her, but no one listened to her. Fadak fell in the hands of others, but Umar ibn Abdul Aziz gave it back to the children of Lady Fatima (AS). The caliphs repeatedly appropriated it and gave it back.

After telling the story of Fadak, Ali ibn Abi Talib says: "If I wished, I could have taken the way leading towards (worldly pleasure like) pure honey, fine wheat and silk clothes, but it cannot be that my passions lead me and greed takes me to choose good meals while in the Hijaz or in Yamamah there may be people who have no hope of getting a piece of bread or who do not have a full meal. Shall I lie with a satiated belly while around me there may be hungry bellies and thirsty livers? Or shall be as the poet has said:

It is enough for you as a disease

that you lie with your belly full

while around you there are people,

who may be badly yearning (of hunger) for dried meat."[21]

Such is the mentality and performance of Ali ibn Abi Talib as compared to others!

The cursed Hajjaj lived a life of fifty-four, but he oppressed people as long as hundreds of years. He killed as many as a hundred and twenty thousand people. Fifty thousand men and thirty thousand women out of whom sixteen thousand were singles, died in his prisons. Men and women were put into prison in the same place. His prisons were such that prisoners were not safe from sunlight in summers and from cold, rain and snow in winter.

It has been narrated that one day when Hajjaj was riding on his horse towards the Friday Prayer, he heard some moaning. He asked what that moaning was, and he was said: "They are prisoners moaning and complaining of their plight." Hajjaj rode towards the prisoners. People thought that he was going to do something for them, but they saw him saying: "Shut up! Do not say anything!" It is said that he never rode on that horse again and died on the same Friday.

In the history of Ibnul Jouzi, we read: "His prisons had walls but no ceilings. Whenever sunlight fell on the prisoners, they took shelter in the shade of the walls but his cruel jailers threw stones at them, forcing them to leave the shade. Their food was barley bread mixed with salt and ashes. Prisoners would become so suntanned that their parents could not recognize them. The prisoners said: 'We are your children', but they gave a loud cry and left this transient life."[22]

One day, ash-Sha'bi warned al-Hajjaj of oppression, and enjoined him to justice. To make him understand that his domination over people was the result of people's own performance, he weighed a gold Dinar, assayed it and said to Sha'bi: "Take it to the moneychanger and ask about its weight and fineness."

Each moneychanger said a different weight and fineness for it. Sha'bi brought it back to Hajjaj and told him the whole story. Hajjaj said: "Take it to so-and-so market" after giving the address of some man. Sha'bi took the gold coin to that man. As soon as the man looked at it, he said: "It is perfect in weight and fineness. He was asked: Has Hajjaj ever done an injustice to you? He said: no, he has rather warded off others' injustice from me.

Being surprised, Sha'bi came back to Hajjaj and told him the story. Hajjaj said: "Since people do injustice to one another, God has made a man dominant over them to do injustice to them. If they were truthful with God and were pious, I would never gain control over them."

Truly, people's injustice to one another has caused such tyrants as Hajjaj to become dominant on them. About Hajjaj ibn Yusuf ath-Thaqafi, Imam Ali (AS) has said: "Beware! By Allah, a lad from the Banu Thaqeef, who is haughty and proud, shall be empowered over you. He would eat away your vegetation and melt away your fat..."[23]

When Hajjaj became dominant, he oppressed the good and the bad. He did not refrain from oppressing even one like Sa'eed ibn Jobair.

Therefore, Taqwa is needed to be observed to avoid oppression and injustice. There are many Qur'anic verses in this relation including one which is spoken by Prophet Salih: ***"Therefore, guard against*** (***the punishment of***) ***Allah and obey me; And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant who make mischief in the land and do not act aright."***[24]

God Almighty has said: ***"And do not incline to those who are unjust, lest the Fire touch you."***[25]

In the traditions on prohibitions, the Messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported as saying: "Anyone who helps an oppressor in doing an injustice will be a companion of Haman in Hell."

The Holy Prophet (SAW) has also said: "Whoever loves an oppressive enemy, befriends or helps him, when the angel of death comes, shall say to him: 'you are given the good news of the curse of God on you and the fire of Hell which is the worst abode." [26]

Al-Kashshi, in his Rijal, has reported Safwan al-Jammal as saying: "I went to visit Imam Musa ibn Ja'far. The Imam (AS) said: 'O Safwan! Everything about you is good except one thing.' I said: 'what is it, my master?!' The Imam (AS) said: 'giving your camels for rent to this man (Haroon, the Abbasid caliph).' I said: 'I have not given them for idle sport or amusement. They are for the Hajj. I do not even go with them; rather, I send my slaves with them.' The Imam (AS) said: 'Do they pay the rent?' I said: 'yes, they do.' The Imam said: 'Do you like them to be alive so as to pay your rent?' I said: 'yes.' The Imam said: 'Whoever likes their survival, will be from them and whoever is with them will be in fire.'

I sold my camels. This news reached Haroon. He sent for me, saying: 'O Safwan, I was informed that you have sold your camels?' I said: 'Yes, I have.' He said: 'what for?' I said: 'I have grown old and my slaves cannot manage them.' He said: 'Alas, alas! I know who has told you to do so. Musa ibn Ja'far has guided you.' I said: 'What am I to do with Musa ibn Ja'far?' He said: 'Put these words aside! By God, were it not for your good friendship, I would have you killed."[27]

1. Qur'an, 6:21.
2. Qur'an, 6:45.
3. Qur'an, 6:47.
4. Qur'an, 23:41.
5. Qur'an, 4:9.
6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 325.
7. Qur'an, 40:18.
8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, pp. 309, 330.
9. Ibid., p. 311.
10. Qur'an, 2:24.
11. Bihar al-Anwar , vol. 72, p. 316.
12. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 1174.
13. Qur'an, 4:48.
14. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.72, p. 321.
15. Ibid., p. 308.
16. Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 215.

17. Ibid., p. 948.
18. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 956, Letter 45.
19. Nahj al-Balaghah, explained by Muhammad Abdo, vol. 2, p. 79.
20. Qur'an, 17:26.
21. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 961.
22. Safeenat al-Bihar, vol. 1, p. 222.
23. Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 1, p. 355.
24. Qur'an, 26:150-152.
25. Qur'an, 11:113.
26. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 369.
27. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 377.

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