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Lesson 3: The Conditions and Special Qualities of the Imams

Before anything else, in the discussion of this issue, we must note one necessary point and that is that:

It can clearly be seen in the Holy Quran that the position of leadership is the highest station that a human being can possibly attain and that it is even higher than the station of prophethood and having a Divine mission because in the story of Abraham, the idol destroyer, peace be upon him it says,

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۖ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

"And remember that Abraham was tried by his lord with certain commands which he fulfilled: He said, 'I will make thee a leader to the nations.' He pleaded, 'And also (Imams) from my offspring?" He answered, 'But my promise is not within the reach of evil-doers.'" (***2: 124***)

In this way, Abraham, after moving through the Station of prophet hood and his Divine mission and victory in the various Divine tests made of him, is then given tile valuable position of external and internal, material and spiritual leadership of the people.

The Prophet of Islam, peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants, also, in addition to the position or station of prophethood and mission, has the station of leadership and imamate as well. Others among the prophets also had this station. This is one point to note.

On the other hand, we know that the conditions and qualities necessary for the receiving of any position relates to the duties and responsibilities which a person must perform in that position or station. That is, however much the station is elevated, the responsibilities are heavier and greater, in the same proportion, the conditions and qualities necessary for the position are greater.

For instance, in Islam, a person who has the responsibility to judge and even to bear witness and becomes the congregational prayer leader, must be just. Wherever the necessity for bearing witness arises or the duty to recite the surah hamd and another verse in the congregational ritual prayer, justice is necessary. It is clear what conditions are honored in order to reach the position or station of imamate, with the extraordinary importance which it has.

In general, the following conditions are vital for an Imam:

Infallibility or Being Free From Sin and Error

An Imam, must, like a Prophet, have the station of purity, that is, be free of sin and error, otherwise he cannot lead and be a model for the people and receive the trust of society.

The Imam must consume the heart and soul of the people and his command be accepted without questioning. A person who has sinned can never receive such trust and from all points of view, be trusted and confirmed.

How can a person who in his daily life, commits errors, have his opinions be relied upon in the work of society, and be followed without questioning?

Doubtlessly, the Prophet must be immaculate and this quality is necessary for the Imam as well, as we pointed out above.

This can be proven in another way as well. That is the 'law of kindness' which the existence of the Prophet and Imam rely upon requires the infallibility of the Prophet or the Imam and the mission which we pointed out in the last lesson, will be incomplete.

Overflowing with Knowledge

The Imam, like a Prophet, is a place of refuge of knowledge for the people. He must know all principles and practices of the religion, the external and internal meanings of the Holy Quran, the Traditions of the Prophet and whatever relates to Islam, and, in a complete way, be aware because he is the preserver and guardian of the Divine Law as well as the leader and guide of the people.

A person who when a complicated issue is presented either becomes conscious or asks another person for the answer, their knowledge and information will not answer the needs of an Islamic society. They can never be given the position or station of imamate and leadership of the people.

In conclusion, the Imam must be the most aware and most knowledgeable person in relation to the religion of God after the death of the Holy Prophet who does not allow Islam to deviate.

Courage

The Imam must be the bravest individual of Islamic society because without that courage of the leader, it is not possible to accept him as leader. He must have courage in face of the difficult events of life and sudden and unexpected happenings, courage before those who use coercion and who are oppressive and courage before external and internal enemies of Islam.

Austerity

We know that those who are captives of the gold and attractions of this world, are easily deceived and it is possible that they deviate from the way of truth and justice.

Sometimes this happens by way of greed and sometimes by way of threats, whereby this captive of this world is deviated from the straight path.

The Imam must be above the possibilities of gifts of this world and not be a captive to it.

He must be free from any chains or bonds of the material world, from all whims and lusts, from any ambition, from wealth and position so that he cannot be deceived and influenced and he then surrender and compromise because of these desires.

Ethical or Moral Attractions

The Holy Quran says about the Holy Prophet,

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ ۖ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ

"It is part of the Mercy of God that you deal gently with them. Were you to be severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee."(***3:159***)

Not only the Holy Prophet, but the Ima m and any leader of society is in need of goodness so that the people are magnitized towards him.

Without doubt, any kind of harshness and evil intentions towards the people for the Prophet and the Imam is a great defect and they are free from any such defect, otherwise, many of the philosophies of existence would not be fulfilled.

These are the most important conditions which the great 'ulama have mentioned for the Imam to have.

Of course, in addition to these five qualities mentioned above, there are other qualities in the Imam as well, but we have just mentioned the most basic ones.

Think and Answer

1. Why is the station of leadership of the highest station of a human being?

2. Why do the Prophet of Islam and other prophets who brought a divine law have the station of leadership or imamate?

3. If the Imam is not immaculate, what problem will arise?

4. What is an abundance of knowledge necessary for the Imam to have?

5. For what reason must the Imam be brave, austere and the most pure from the point of view of attracting the ethics of the people?

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