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Electing Imam Ali for the Islamic Caliphate

Fatimah (s.a.) witnessed all the events that took place after the conquest of Mecca. She saw people, groups by groups embrace Islam which prevailed over the Arabic East and other areas in the world. However, the most wonderful thing that she saw was the entering of the people of Quraysh into Islam unwillingly and submissively. They were low and mean then whereas they had tried their best to put out the light of Islam and do away with the messenger of Allah. They left no way of terror and violence against the Prophet (S). They led great armies and parties to fight him until Allah made him defeat them all and afflict them with lowness and meanness. Then, the Prophet (S) purified the House of Allah (the Kaaba) from the idols and then the call of "Allahu Akbar" rose high in all sides of the Inviolable Mosque and the rule of the Qur'an prevailed in the land that was a stage for the superstitions and bad traditions of the era of ignorance.

This period was the most important one in Fatimah's life where she saw her father after his great victory caring for something very important concerning the welfare of his nation that would save the nation from deviation and going astray. This thing was the appointment of the leader after him.

The caliphate after the Prophet (S) was the most important position in Islam because it was the continuity of the Prophet's rule and the continuity of his Sharia. Because the Prophet (S) paid great attention to the matter of caliphate, he said, 'He, who dies while he does not know the imam of his time, will die as an unbeliever.'

The Prophet (S) was very careful of his nation's affairs. He was very kind and loving to his people. Therefore, he suffered disasters and calamities in order to reform his nation and make it the first in civilization and progress. Was it reasonable that he would leave his nation as a victim for his enemies or to be tossed about by the waves?

It was not true at all that the Prophet (S) had ignored the matter of caliphate and given vent to anarchy after him. This contradicted the goal of his mission which was to spread Islam and its high ideals and great morals among all peoples.

If the Prophet (S) ignored the matter of the rule after him, this would lead to the destruction of the social pillars which Islam had built and the destruction of the general life of Muslims. The crises and misfortunes that the nation faced throughout its ages were, undoubtedly, the result of keeping the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) away from the caliphate. It was the political avidities and the greediness of authority that prevented from fulfilling the Prophet's recommendations and wills concerning his family.

Anyhow, the nation suffered and is still suffering much because of separating the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) from the rule. Muhammad al–Keilani says, 'The people disputed on the position of caliphate in a way that was unequalled in other nations. They committed for the sake of that what we ourselves refrain from nowadays. And consequently, many souls were ruined, towns were destroyed, villages were torn down, houses were burnt, women were made widows, children were made orphans and great masses of Muslims were killed.'1

Allah had sent the Prophet (S) as mercy for mankind. Hence, would he leave his nation in anarchy after him without choosing a leader to lead it after his death? Let us see who that leader was!

The Prophet Nominates Ali

The caliphate was not to be determined due to desires and fancies because it was from the fatal matters of the nation and on it all the nation's goals and affairs depended.

The certain thing due to the scientific studies and the serious pondering on the Prophet's conducts and the sources of the Islamic history make it clear that the Prophet (S) had nominated Imam Ali (a.s.) for the caliphate and made him the imam of Muslims after him. Many true mutawatir2 traditions confirmed this fact. The Prophet (S), on many occasions, praised Imam Ali (a.s.) and showed his high position. Once he said that Imam Ali (a.s.) was the gate of his town of knowledge, another once he said that Imam Ali (a.s.) was with the truth and the truth was with him; third, Ali was with the Qur'an and the Qur'an was with Ali, and that he was to the Prophet (S) as Aaron was to Moses. All these facts were proved on the day of al–Ghadeer when the Prophet (S) gathered the Muslims and announced the caliphate, emirate and guardianship of Imam Ali (a.s.) over the Muslims, and then the Prophet's companions and his wives paid homage to the Imam. Umar bin al–Khattab congratulated him saying, 'Congratulations O son of Abi Talib! You have become my guardian and the guardian of every believing man and believing woman.' The homage to Imam Ali (a.s.) on the day of al–Ghadeer was a part of the mission of Islam and whoever denied it was not reasonable.

Why the Prophet Nominated Ali

Many people ask why the Prophet (S) had nominated Imam Ali (a.s.) for the caliphate and preferred him to all his cousins and companions. We give the answer by the following points:

1. Allah the Almighty had ordered his messenger to appoint Imam Ali (a.s.) a caliph after him and take

the homage of Muslims to him on the day of Ghadeer Khum. Allah had revealed to his messenger this verse,

"O Messenger, deliver what bas been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people." 5:67

After this warning, the Prophet (S) gathered the hajjis, who were coming back from the hajj, in the desert of Ghadeer Khum and declared to them what Allah had ordered him to do. He announced to them that Imam Ali (a.s.) would be, according to Allah's decree, the general leader over the Muslim community, and so all Muslims paid allegiance to him as we have mentioned before.

- 2. The Prophet (S) had compared the prophethood to the caliphate when he invited his family to faith and to believe in his mission saying to them, 'Which of you supports me to be the caliph after me?' No one responded to him except Imam Ali (a.s.) who was too young then. The Prophet (S) put his hand on Ali's neck and addressed his family saying, 'This is my brother and caliph (successor). You have to listen to and obey him.' The Prophet's care for the caliphate did not come at the last days of his life, but it was since the beginning of his mission.
- 3. The Prophet (S) looked thoughtfully at his family and companions and he did not find anyone who was worthy of this position after him except Imam Ali (a.s.) who believed the Prophet (S), believed in his mission, and understood his values and goals. The Prophet (S) himself had educated Imam Ali (a.s.) and fed him with the deep faith in Allah, the ideals of Islam, and the noble values. It is completely untrue to say that the Prophet (S) had chosen Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) for the position of caliphate just because he was the closest one to him and the father of his two grandsons, because the matter of prophethood is too far above that.

The Prophet (S) had chosen Imam Ali (a.s.) as the general leader over his nation because Imam Ali (a.s.) had qualifications and abilities that no one else ever had.

A. Imam Ali (a.s.) was the most knowledgeable among all the Prophet's companions and the most aware of the rulings and the affairs of the religion especially in judgment. The Prophet (S) said, 'Ali is the best judge of you all.' Umar said, 'Were it not for Ali's existence, Umar would perish.' There was no one at all equal to him in judgment. We have mentioned some examples of his judgments in "the Encyclopedia of Ameerul Mo'minin" under the title of "The Imam's judgment (is) from the treasures of the Islamic intellect".

As the Imam was the most aware of all Muslims in the rulings of judgment, he was also the most aware in the political and administrative affairs besides the systems of government. Imam Ali's document of instructions to Malik al–Ashtar was a clear proof on that. This political document is a full constitution that no other constitution whether in Islam or other than Islam is like it in its comprehensiveness. In this document, Imam Ali (a.s.) deals with the government's duties towards the subjects and its responsibility for protecting them from poverty, oppression and persecution. He also determines the duties of rulers,

statesmen and officials, and the qualifications that they must have such as fitness, loyalty and awareness of the affairs that they would undertake, besides that they should have high morals and manners and be pious and bound by their religion especially toward the wealth of the state. This document has many other important points showing the depth of Imam Ali's policy.

Moreover, his letters to his governors and officials are a source of intelligent policies and they show that he was too expert in the political affairs. As Imam Ali (a.s.) was the most expert in the political affairs, he was also the most aware of all Muslims in the other branches of knowledge such as theology, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, jurisprudence, linguistics and others.

Prof. Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad says, 'He (Imam Ali) opened many doors in knowledge that were more than thirty sciences. With these huge treasures of knowledge that the Imam had, how would the Prophet (S) not choose him for the position of caliphate which was the most sensitive position in the Muslim society and which the dignity, independence and safety of his nation depended on?'

The infinite scientific powers that the imam had, make reason determine with no doubt that he was to be nominated for the caliphate other than anyone else. Allah says,

"Say: Are those who know and those who do not know alike?" 39:9

It is nonsense to say that it is possible to prefer the good one to the better one as some people believe, because it contradicts the Islamic values which make it obligatory to prefer the knowledgeable people to others and regard their high position and rank. Of course, keeping knowledgeable people away from their real position is aggression against knowledge and full destruction to the values of the nation.

B. Imam Ali (a.s.) was the bravest and the most courageous one at all. His unique courage had astonished all. He had said, 'If all the Arabs gathered together to fight me, I would not run away from them.' Islam had succeeded by his sword and based on his jihad. He was the man of the memorable situations and famous days; the battles of Badr, Hunayn and al-Ahzab when he harvested the heads of the polytheists, destroyed their notables and filled the houses of the tribes of Quraysh, that declared war against Allah and His messenger, with sorrow and mourning.

Every sedition ever rose against Islam was put out by Imam Ali (a.s.). The Prophet (S) preferred him to all his companions and family, and entrusted him with the general leadership of his armies. He entered no war unless he was the victor. It was he who subjugated the Jews and conquered their firm forts.

Courage is from the fundamental characteristics that a leader of a nation must have. It is natural that if a leader is weak and coward, the nation will face many crises that a weak leader cannot stand against. Courage existed, physically and morally, in Imam Ali (a.s.), and this was one of the reasons that made the Prophet (S) choose no other than him for the leadership of the nation. Imam Ali (a.s.), due to his unequaled courage and his other unique virtues, had been chosen (by Allah) for the leadership of the nation even if (supposedly) there was no text from the Prophet (S) on choosing him for this position.

C. One of the most important and most distinguished features that a leader of a nation must have is self-denial and altruism. A leader must prefer the interest of the nation to everything else and must preserve its wealth. This feature was the most prominent one in Imam Ali's personality. When he assumed the leadership of the nation, he was ascetic towards all pleasures of life and he denied all enjoyments. All historians agreed on that he spared neither for himself nor for his family any of the worldly pleasures. He was very careful in the state wealth. He did spend nothing from that wealth on himself or his family. He ruled the people with utmost justice and equity, and regarded all the citizens equal in rights and duties.

Definitely, the Arabic East and elsewhere had never known a just ruler like Imam Ali (a.s.) in his self denial, altruism, and not using the authority for personal interests and political purposes.

D. And from the prominent features in Imam Ali's personality was his perfect piety and devotedness to Allah. He was the head of monotheists and the imam of the pious. He said, 'By Allah, if I am given the seven continents with all what there is under their horizons in order to disobey Allah in an ant that I plunder from it a crust of barley, I will never do.'

Due to the consensus of the nation, Imam Ali (a.s.) was the greatest propagandist to Allah after his brother and cousin Prophet Muhammad (S). When Umar bin al-Khattab was killed, Abdurrahman bin Ouf insisted on Imam Ali (a.s.) to accept the caliphate on condition that he would rule the nation according to the policy of Umar and Abu Bakr, but Imam Ali (a.s.) refused and insisted on that he would rule according to the Book of Allah, the Sunna of His prophet and his own opinion. If he was eager to gain authority, he definitely would have accepted this position and then he would rule as he liked, and if Abdurrahman objected to him, he could imprison or exile him.

Humanity, in all its history, did not see a ruler like Imam Ali (a.s.) in piety, truthfulness and fairness away from all kinds of favoritism. He spared no effort in applying pure justice among all people and not to hear the moan of any wronged, deprived or poor one.

After all that, would the Prophet (S) nominate other than the imam for the caliphate and guardianship after him? And if we accept the principle of kinship which the Muhajireen adopted in the conference of al-Saqeefa, then Imam Ali (a.s.) was worthier of the Prophet (S) than anyone else because he was his cousin, son-in-law and the father of his two grandsons.

(Sedeo) says, 'If the principle of heredity was acknowledged, it would be for the benefit of Ali since the beginning, and the keeping to it would prevent the crises and disputes that sank Islam into blood. The husband of Fatimah had the right of heredity as a legal heir of the Prophet (S) and had the right of election.3

Impartial pondering determines with no doubt that the Prophet (S) had declared the imamate of Imam Ali (a.s.) and appointed him as the leader for his nation not according to the principle of heredity, kinship, or any other consideration, but because of Ali's high personality, perfection, and unequalled virtues. It is not

true to say that the Prophet (S) had ignored the matter of caliphate and left it undetermined. This was too far from the Prophet (S) who was very careful for the happiness and development of his nation and to keep it safe from deviation and declination.

- 1. The Influence of Shiism in the Arabic Literature, p. 15.
- 2. Mutawatir is a tradition that comes successively and is ensured by many chains of transmission.
- 3. Rooh (spirit of) al-Islam, p.292.

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