

Chapter 30: Imamah and Khilafah

Leadership

The discussion of the question of Imamah may raise certain queries in the mind of our readers. Here we advance our views about these queries. In this respect the main questions are only two.

I. Every nation tries to project the good points of its history, and as far as possible wants to conceal its weaknesses. The events in which an institution or an ideology may take pride are considered to be the signs of its authenticity and veracity, and the unpleasant events of its history create doubts about its genuineness and are regarded as the signs of the weakness of its creative power. Hence the discussion of the question of Imamah and Khilafah, especially the repeated narration of the ugly events of the early Muslim period is likely to diminish the religious zeal and fervor of the new generation, which is already passing through a spiritual crisis. In the past such a discussion might have produced the desired results and diverted the attention of the Muslims from one denomination to another. But in modern times it only weakens faith in the very fundamentals. When others conceal the ugly aspects of their history, why should we, the Muslims try to bring out the ugly aspects of our history and even magnify them?

We do not concur with the above views. We affirm that should the review of history mean to bring out the undesirable events only, the effect will be as disastrous as stated above. But it is also a fact that if we remain contented with portraying only the bright aspects of our history and suppress the unpleasant events, that would mean a distortion of history, not a review of it.

Basically no history is free from ugly and undesirable events. History of every nation, and basically history of mankind, is a bundle of pleasant and unpleasant events. It cannot be otherwise. Allah has created no people free from sins. The difference between the history of various nations, communities and creeds lies in the proportion of the happy and ugly events and not in the fact that anyone of them has only happy or only ugly events.

The Holy Qur'an has very beautifully expressed the fact that man has good as well as bad points. The summary of what it has said is that Allah informed the angels of His intention to create a vicegerent

(Adam). The angels who knew only the weak points of the new being, were astonished and wanted to know what considerations prompted Allah to take such an action. Allah told them that He knew the good and the bad points of that being and that they were not aware of all the characteristics of that being.

If we look at the history of Islam from the view–point of the events manifesting faith and human values, we will find that it has no rival. This history is full of heroic deeds. It is laden with lustre and brilliance and is replete with a display of human qualities. The existence of a few ugly spots does not tarnish its beauty and majesty.

No nation can claim that its history possesses more bright events than the history of Islam, or that the ugly events of Islamic history are more numerous than the ugly events of its own history.

A Jew in order to taunt Imam Ali with the events which took place in the early period of Islam over the question of Khilafat, said: "You no sooner buried your Prophet, than began quarrelling about him.

What a beautiful reply Imam Ali gave! He said: *"You are wrong. We did not differ about the Prophet himself. We differed only as to what instructions we had received from him. But your feet had not dried of sea water when you said to your Prophet: "Appoint a god for us like the gods they have." He said: "You are an ignorant people." (Nahjul Balaghah)*

Imam Ali meant to say: "Our differences did not relate to the principles of Monotheism and Prophethood. What we differed about was whether the Qur'an and Islam foresaw a particular person to be the successor to the Holy Prophet or his successor was to be elected by the people. In contrast you Jews during the very lifetime of your Prophet raised a question which was entirely contrary to your religion and the teachings of your Prophet."

Furthermore, even if it is supposed that in ordinary cases it is permissible to overlook the ugly events of history, how can it be proper to ignore the most basic question affecting the destiny of Islamic, society, that is the question of Islam's leadership. To overlook such a question means overlooking the well–being of the Muslims.

Moreover, if it is a fact that some historical rights have been violated and those to whom these rights were due were the most virtuous personalities of the Muslim Ummah, then overlooking these historical facts would mean nothing but cooperation between the tongue and the pen on the one hand and the sword of injustice on the other.

II. The second objection to the discussion of these questions is that such a discussion is inconsistent with the duty of ensuring Islamic unity. All the misfortunes of the Muslims have been due to the communal differences. It is communal discord and disturbances which has swept away the Muslim power, damaged the Muslims' dignity and made them subservient to alien nations. The most effective weapon in the hand of colonialism, whether old or new, is the enflaming of these old rancours. In all Muslim countries without exception the lackeys of colonialism are busy with creating dissension among

the Muslims in the name of religion and sympathy with Islam. Have we not already suffered enough on account of these old disputes so that we should continue to pursue them? Do not such discussions mean helping colonialism?

In reply to this criticism, we would like to say that there is no doubt that unity is the most important requirement of the Muslims, and that these old rancours are the basic cause of all troubles in the Muslim world. It is also true that the enemy is always ready to exploit these disputes. But it appears that the critic has misunderstood the concept of Muslim unity.

Muslim unity which has been a subject of discussion among the scholars and the broad-minded sections of the Muslims does not mean that the Muslim sects should ignore their principles of faith and articles of acts for the sake of unity, adopt the common features of all the sects and set aside the peculiarities of all. How can this be done when this is neither logical nor practical. How can the followers of any sect be asked to ignore for the sake of preserving the unity of Islam and the Muslims, any of their beliefs or practical principles which they consider to be a part of the basic structure of Islam? Such a demand would mean to overlook a part of Islam in the name of Islam?

There are other ways of persuading people to stick to a principle or to give it up. The most natural of them is to convince others by means of logical argumentation. Faith is not a matter of expedience, nor can it be imposed on any people or taken away from them at will.

We are Shi'ahs and are proud of following the chosen descendants of the Holy Prophet. We do not regard as compromisable any act which has been even slightly commended or condemned by the Holy Imams. In this regard we are not willing to fulfil the expectation of anybody, nor do we expect others to give up any of their principles in the name of expediency or for the sake of Muslim unity. All that we expect and wish is the creation of an atmosphere of good will so that we, who have our own jurisprudence, traditions, scholastic theology, philosophy, exegesis and literature, should be able to offer our goods as the best goods, so that the Shi'ah should no more be isolated and so that the important markets of the Muslim world should not be closed to the fine material of Shi'ah Islamic knowledge.

The adoption of the common Islamic features and the rejection of the peculiarities of all sects is contrary to the compound consensus of opinion among the Muslims and the product of this action will be something absolutely un-Islamic, for the peculiarities of some sect or other must be the basic part of the structure of Islam. Islam bereft of all peculiarities and distinguishing features has no existence.

The most prominent among those who advanced the noble idea of Islamic unity, in our times, have been the late Ayatullah Burujardi among the Shiah and Allamah Shaykh Abdul Majid and Allamah Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut among the Sunnis. But they never had such a view of Islamic unity in their mind. All that these learned men advocated was that the various Muslim sects in spite of their different theologies should on the basis of the large number of common features existing among them, form a common front against the dangerous enemies of Islam. These learned men never proposed under the name of Islamic

unity a religious unity which is not practical.

In fact, there is a technical difference between a united party and a united front. A united party requires that all its members should have a common ideology and a common way of thinking in all matters except their personal affairs, whereas a common front means that various parties and groups, despite their ideological differences should, by means of the common features existing among them, form a common front against their common enemy. The formation of a common front against the common enemy is not inconsistent with defending one's ideology and inviting other members of the front to follow it. The main idea of the late Ayatullah Burujardi was to pave the ground for the dissemination of the knowledge of the Prophet's chosen descendants among his Sunni brethren. He believed that this was not possible without creating good will and understanding. The success he achieved in the publication of some theological books of the Shi'ah in Egypt by the Egyptians themselves, was one of the most important achievements of the Shi'ah scholars.

May Allah reward him for the services he rendered to the cause of Islam and the Muslims!

Anyhow, the advocacy of the thesis of Islamic unity does not demand that we should feel shy of telling the facts. What is to be avoided is to do any thing that may injure the feelings and sentiments of other parties. As for a scientific discussion, it relates to the domain of logic and reason, not to that of sentiments and feelings.

Fortunately in our times there have appeared a good number of Shi'ah scholars who are following this healthy policy, the most prominent of them being Ayatullah Sayyid Sharafuddin Amili, Ayatullah Kashiful Ghita and Ayatullah Shaykh Abdul Husayn Amini, the author of the prominent book, ***Al-Ghadir***.

The events of Imam Ali's life and the policy he pursued, which has now been practically forgotten and is rarely mentioned, provide a good example in this respect.

Imam Ali did not refrain from speaking of his right and claiming it, nor did he hesitate to complain against those who snatched it away from him. His keen interest in Islamic unity did not prevent him from raising his voice frankly. His numerous sermons in Nahjul Balaghah are a testimony to this fact. But all his grievances did not impel him to leave the ranks of the Muslims struggling against their opponents. He took part in the Friday and other congregational prayers. He accepted his share of the booty of that time. He always gave sincere counsel to the Caliphs and was counted as one of their advisers.

During the war of the Muslims against the Iranians the Caliph then intended to take part in the fighting personally. Imam Ali said to him: *"Do not go to the front, for so long as you are in Madina, the enemy thinks that even if the whole Muslim army is wiped out, you will send reinforcement from the centre. But if you personally go to the battlefield, they will say: Here the mainstay of the Arabs is. And then they will concentrate all their forces to kill you, and if they kill you, the Muslims will be totally demoralized"*. (See: Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 146)

That was the regular policy that Imam Ali pursued. But he never accepted any post under the Caliphs. He did not consent to be a military commander, the governor of a province, the Amir of Hajj, nor did he accept any other such appointment for its acceptance would have meant the renunciation of his own well-established claim. In other words, the acceptance of an official post would have been something more than mere cooperation and preservation of Islamic unity. Although he himself did not accept any post, he did not prevent his relatives and friends from accepting such posts, because that did not mean the endorsement of the Caliphate.

Imam Ali's behaviour in this respect was very graceful and a sign of his dedication to the Islamic objectives. While others divided, he united; while others tore apart, he patched up.

Abu Sufyan tried to take advantage of the displeasure of Imam Ali. He pretended to be a well-wisher of him and tried to wreak his own vengeance by showing respect to the Holy Prophet's legate, but Imam Ali was shrewd enough not to be hoodwinked by him. He with his hand struck Abu Sufyan's chest as a sign of rejection of his offer and turned him away. (See Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 5)

Abu Sufyans and Hayy ibn Akhtabs are always busy with their evil designs. Hayy ibn Akhtabs' finger can be seen in many happenings. It is the duty of the Muslims, especially the Shi'ah to keep Imam Ali's traditions in this respect before their eyes and not to be deceived by Abu Sufyans and Hayy ibn Akhtabs.

These were the objections of those who oppose the question of leadership and this is our reply to them.

What is amazing is that some other people raise objections quite contrary to these objections. This group wants the question of Islamic leadership to become rather a regular pursuit. It wants this question to be discussed in season and out of season and repeated like a slogan. But this group is not interested in its being dealt with in a scientific and instructive way. It wants to keep the feelings strained, but is not interested in satisfying intellectual quest or sharpening wits. And that is what the enemy wishes. Otherwise if the question is discussed in a learned manner, there is no reason why it should become a pursuit?

Imamat and Dialectic Logic

An Extract From Notes

Dialectic logic denies that society needs guidance or leadership, According to this logic at the most society needs an intellectual and leader to bring inequities, contradictions and inequalities existing in society to the consciousness of the masses so that dialectic movement may be initiated. As this movement is compulsive, the passage from thesis and anti-thesis to synthesis is unavoidable. Therefore society automatically traverses its course and in the end attains perfection.

The leaflet1 – *Leadership, Imamat, Dialectic*, says: "One of the important questions concerning leadership and Imamat, especially the Islamic conception of Imamat is: What is the role of the so-called

intellectual? Is his duty and responsibility merely to depict the inequities and inequalities, awaken the consciousness of the exploited classes and inculcate the existence of real class contradiction in the mind of the deprived masses? Is it true that once the masses become conscious of the existing contradictions, society moves forward –automatically and dialectically"

The fact is that above all other things society needs leadership, guidance and Imamat. Development is not the essential result of the contradictions. Development is not possible without guidance and leadership. Dr. Ali Shari'ati in the last pages of his booklet, *Wherefrom to Begin* has elaborately discussed this question under the heading, Responsibility and Mission of an Intellectual. He says: "Briefly the responsibility of an intellectual is to transmit the inequities within society to the self-consciousness of the people of that society. Then society performs its own movement."

Anyhow, after a few lines he makes some remarks, which are contrary to the above statement, and support society's need of guidance and leadership.

Dr. Shari'ati says: "It has been supposed that from the point of view of leadership an intellectual has no responsibility. Dialectic contradiction chooses its own way. An intellectual's duty is confined to portraying contradictions and rousing the underprivileged classes against the ruling classes.² " But only after a few lines he talks of "determining a solution and the common ideals of society and of inculcating zeal and a sense of common faith" These remarks are contrary to the theory that society performs its own movement. When Dr Shari'ati speaks of dialectic corollary of the triangle of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis and of compulsory development, he is consistent, but when he makes his subsequent remarks, he speaks against his own postulates.

Leadership and Protection of Faith

The scholastic theologians have greatly emphasized that Imam is the protector and preserver of faith and religion. Probably it is supposed that he protects religion in the same way as a building is first erected and then it is maintained and protected against a possible damage by rain, wind etc. Hence there appears to be no need that a building built by an unrivalled builder should be preserved by a person having almost the same degree of skill as the original builder. For example there has never been felt any need that there should exist some persons of the calibre of those who created the Masjid Shah, Ali Qapu, the dome of Masjid Shaykh Lutfullah, the Bayasanqari inscription of Masjid Gowhar Shad, the writings of Meer and Bayasanqar, the hand-written Qur'ans and other master-pieces.

But the fact is that a damage to religion is not a simple affair. According to psychological and sociological principle as soon as a revolutionary movement succeeds and the enemy despairs of continuing his face to face confrontation, he ceases to resist it openly and on the basis of his assessment of his own advantage, he sometimes even joins the movement, not because he has really been converted to it, but purely with a view to exploit its success. He utilizes the movement for his own ends without having faith in its spirit and objectives. That is what happened during the constitutional

movement of Iran.

The opponents of the constitutional government joined the movement, and pretended to be its staunch supporters. Ayanuddawlah and Sadr ul Ashraf became prime ministers of the constitutional government. Such people not only preserve the external features of the movement, but also try to furnish it with further adornments. Anyhow, they destroy its spirit, its reality and its core, and empty it from within. In the words of Imam Ali in this process, *"Islam is overturned as a pot is overturned."* (See Nahjul Balgha -- Sermon 103)

Thus they divert the movement from its right course, preserving its shape and appearance but altering its content and nature. As most people are only superficial observers and prone to take things for their face value, they remain happy and satisfied, for they find the externalities safe to the utmost extent. They do not realize that the fundamentals have vanished. It is here that mature thinking and deep observation are required. When Imam Ali said: *"In every generation we have irreproachable successors who defend us against the deviation of the fanatics and the pretensions of the liars"*, he might have referred to the Holy Imams themselves or to the honest scholars who keep a watch on the people's belief in the Imams.

It may be mentioned that struggle against innovations in religion is not confined to those cases in which a law is openly violated or something that has nothing to do with religion is intentionally introduced into religion. Sometimes people's way of thinking in regard to religion is so perverted that they begin to have aversion to right thinking. What we mean to emphasize is that there is no fear of any harm being incurred by Islam from outside the Muslim world. The Qur'an says: ***"Those who disbelieve have now despaired of doing any damage to your religion. Therefore do not fear them; but have fear of Me."*** But there exists a definite threat to Islam from inside. In this connection the greatest threat is posed not by those who commit abominable sins out of lust etc., but by the hypocrisy of those who are afraid of opposing Islam openly.

They wear a mask of Islam on their face and try to achieve their nefarious ends under the cover of Islamic way of life, a very heavy cover indeed. They devoid Islam of its content, leaving intact its shape and appearance by changing its course and its goal and altering its meaning. ³ The simple-minded Muslims must be aware of the fraud of this group.

1. Please refer to our footnote of the booklet, *Wherefrom to Begin*, page 39.

2. In one of his footnotes on the booklet, *Wherefrom to Begin*, page 39.

3. In his papers on "Alteration of the Qur'an" the author says that distortion of meaning indicates the retention of the wording of the Qur'an, but expounding it wrongly as, according to a well-known story Muawiyah did when he misinterpreted the wording of the prediction regarding the death of Ammar ibn Yasir. Another case of the distortion of meaning is the misinterpretation of the verse: "There is no hukm (decision, judgement) except by Allah." (Surah Yusuf 12: 90) On the basis of this verse the Khawarij raised the slogan: *La hukma illallah* (There is no decision except by Allah). Commenting on this slogan Imam Ali said: "Right words, wrong meaning". (See Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 40). This intentional or unintentional misinterpretation was disastrous and caused so much damage in the history of Islam. Another case is the misinterpretation

of the tradition: "If you know (Allah), do whatever you like."

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