

Criticizing the Supreme Leader

Question: Can the Supreme Leader be criticized? Who has the right to do this and under what conditions can he do this?

It is permissible to criticize the Supreme Leader, however in doing so, the following points must be observed:

1. Islamic etiquette must be observed at the time of criticizing and in this regards, the Supreme Leader is the same as all other believers.

It must be noted that the conditions of criticizing include the following:

- a. Before criticism, the original subject matter, defect or shortcoming must be definite. This means that it must not be based on rumor or information which cannot be relied upon. It must also not be based upon one's supposition and without any sort of research such that something is unjustly attributed to an individual and is then used to bring about objections and criticism upon him.
- b. The criticism must be done in order to bring about a reformation and improvement – not that one becomes a fault picker and one who seeks to disgrace people.
- c. The criticism must be done because one feels sympathy and consideration for the other party and not because he wishes to be thought of as being greater than the other person.
- d. The criticism must be done with no insult or abuse. Rather, it must be carried out with complete etiquette and by observing the status which the person holds. In reality, such criticism must be presented to the individual as a gift.

Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad as-Sadiq (AS) has said:

أَحَبُّ إِخْوَانِي إِلَيَّ مَنْ أَهْدَى إِلَيَّ عَيْوَبِي.

“My most beloved brother to me is the one who offers me my shortcomings as a gift.”¹

In addition to what was mentioned above in regards to a respected individual (and how he should be treated) – especially the leader of the Islamic system, there are also other issues which must be kept in mind.

Certainly there is clear difference when it comes to a person criticizing his friend; a wife censuring her husband; a child pointing out the slips of his father or a student noting the errors of his teacher, than there is in criticizing a religious leader and authority.

The child and a student both owe a certain level of respect to their father and teacher, however above these people is the respect and honor which the Imam (AS) and his representative deserve.

3. The third point in regards to criticizing the Supreme Leader is that one must keep the enemies (of Islam) in mind. Criticizing the Supreme Leader must be planned out with intelligence so that the enemies do not make ill use of such a thing.

Seeing as how it is necessary to observe this point when it comes to criticizing the Supreme Leader, we see that there is a commission referred to as the ‘Assembly of Experts’ whose task is to oversee the actions of the Supreme Leader and when necessary, inform him of their review (of him). In fact, this group of investigators was put into place by the advice of the Supreme Leader himself!

The Best Way to Appraise the Supreme Leader

In our opinion, in order to comply with the mentioned principles, the best path to follow in airing one’s criticisms is to write a letter to the Secretary General of *The Assembly of Experts for the Supreme Leadership* [Majlis-e-Khubragan-e-Rahbari] explaining the issue at hand.

Criticizing others in the establishment (the Parliament, Judicial System, etc...) has been mentioned in principle number 90 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran which reads:

“Whoever has a complaint concerning the work of the Assembly, executive power or the judicial power can forward his complaint in writing to the Assembly. The Assembly must investigate his complaint and give a satisfactory reply. In cases where the complaint relates to the executive or the judiciary, the Assembly must demand proper investigation in the matter and an adequate explanation from them, and announce the results within a reasonable time. In cases where the subject of the complaint is of public interest, the reply must be made public.”

1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 78, pg. 249, no. 108, sec. 23

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