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There is no dispute about the fact that Amir al-Muminin, *'alaihi al-salam*, was the most competent in justice dispensation among all the Sahabah. In fact, he is the best judge in our whole *Ummah* till the Day of *al-Qiyamah* after its Prophet, *sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi*. On a specific level, he was better – in terms of justice dispensation – than Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman. So, what is the direct implication of this?

In Islam, justice dispensation is based squarely upon the Qur'an and Sunnah:

فاحكم بينهم بما أنزل الله

So, judge between them **by what Allah has revealed**.¹

The Qur'an itself, in its entirety, is described as “a judgment” by its Master:

وكذلك أنزلناه حكما عربيا

And thus We have sent it down as **a judgment** in Arabic²

As such, complete knowledge of everything in it is required for effective justice dispensation.

Moreover, the Sunnah is the divinely inspired explanations of this “judgment” called al-Qur'an:

وأنزلنا إليك الذكر لتبين للناس ما نزل إليهم

And We have sent down unto you (Muhammad) *al-Dhikr* (i.e. the Qur'an) **that you may explain clearly** to mankind what is sent down to them.³

Apparently, a person does not know the Book of Allah until he has known its explanations by the Messenger of Allah. These explanations, according to the same Book, only originated from the Lord as well:

وما ينطق عن الهوى إن هو إلا وحي يوحى

He (Muhammad) never speaks of (his own) desire or caprice. **It is nothing but a *wahy* that is revealed (to him).**⁴

It is obvious. If anyone were more knowledgeable of the Qur'an and Sunnah than 'Ali in this *Ummah*, he ('Ali) would not have been its best judge. It is simply unfathomable that Allah and His Messenger would have conferred upon him such a rank while there was/is another – in the *Ummah* as a whole – who was/is more competent with the tools of justice dispensation than he was!

It is noteworthy that knowledge of the revelations of Allah surpasses mere knowledge of *al-halal* (the permissible) and *al-haram* (the prohibited). It covers everything from the Lord to humanity. Most importantly, merely knowing the legal status of a thing is not enough for justice dispensation. The judge must equally be fully aware of the penalties (if any) prescribed for it, and the best ways and circumstances to exercise personal discretion in different cases in line with the Wish of Allah. None, apparently, is as competent in these fields as 'Ali.

At this point, it is apposite to quote this groundbreaking *riwayah* referenced by al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H):

قال شعبة بن الحجاج ، عن سِمَاك ، عن خالد بن عَرَعَرَةَ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ عَلِيًّا وَشُعْبَةَ
أَيْضًا ، عن القاسم بن أَبِي بَزَّةَ ، عن أَبِي الطُّفَيْلِ ، سَمِعَ عَلِيًّا . وَثَبِتَ أَيْضًا مِنْ
غَيْرِ وَجْهِ ، عن أمير المؤمنين علي بن أبي طالب : أَنَّهُ صَعِدَ مِنْبَرِ الْكُوفَةِ فَقَالَ :
لَا تَسْأَلُونِي عَنْ آيَةٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ ، وَلَا عَنْ سُنَّةٍ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ، إِلَّا أَنْبَأْتُكُمْ بِذَلِكَ .

Shu'bah b. al-Hajjaj, from Simak, from Khalid b. 'Ar'arah that he heard 'Ali; and Shu'bah again narrated from al-Qasim b. Abi Barrah from Abu al-Tufayl that he heard 'Ali; and IT IS ALSO AUTHENTICALLY TRANSMITTED through many chains that Amir al-Muminin 'Ali b. Abi Talib climbed the pulpit of Kufah and said, **"You will not ask me about ANY verse in the Book of Allah, or about ANY Sunnah from**

the Messenger of Allah, except that I will inform you about that.”⁵

None of the Sahabah was *ever* able to make a similar claim!

Secondly, justice must be administered with utmost fairness and equity:

وإن حكمت فاحكم بينهم بالقسط

If you judge, judge between them with fairness and equity.⁶

This verse allows the use of personal discretion in the administration of justice, especially in all cases where no divinely fixed penalties or judgments are available. But even then, it also reiterates the notion that the judge must know everything in the Qur’an and the Sunnah! Full knowledge of both is required to determine whether or not there is a fixed penalty or judgment concerning a particular case. If there is none, then the judge uses his discretion. Where the judge does not know whether Allah has already fixed the judgment for the issue before him – due to an insufficient knowledge of the Book and the Tradition – he is most likely to effect a miscarriage of justice, without even realizing it!

Moreover, the judge must give his judgments with the best interests of fairness and equity at heart. This is the second message of the above verse. Where there is a divinely fixed penalty or judgment, he must apply it in the fairest and most equitable manners. Where there is no such fixed penalty or judgment, then he equally must adopt his personal discretion in ways that best ensure a completely fair and equitable dispensation of justice.

Amir al-Muminin has been declared the best judge by Allah and His Messenger. Apparently, he is the one, within Islam, with the best knowledge and practice in justice dispensation. Most importantly, he is the fairest and the most equitable among us all – including the Sahabah – in the application of Allah’s Fixed Verdicts and in the just administration of personal discretion.

The most crucial part of this discourse, probably, is stated in this verse:

يا داوود إنا جعلناك خليفة في الأرض فاحكم بين الناس بالحق

O Dawud! We have appointed you a *khalifah* over the earth. Therefore, judge between mankind with the truth.⁷

First and foremost, it is clear from this verse that justice dispensation is the job of the *khalifah*, to the exclusion of all others. He is the judge of “mankind”. Every single other human beings comes under his

juridical authority. Of course, he might appoint subordinate judges to assist him, under his close supervision. However, the job belongs to him alone. Therefore, whoever is the most qualified to be judge is also the most qualified for the *khilafah*!

Besides, the competent judge is he who is able to discern the truth, and who judges with the truth. Judgment with the truth involves the objective application of Allah's Fixed Verdicts over relevant issues, as well as the selfless administration of personal discretion in deserving cases. The judge therefore must be very intelligent and completely truthful. Application of personal discretion to reach true justice requires an extremely high level of intelligence, selflessness, sincerity and honesty. An unintelligent person cannot be expected to skillfully detect the truth from a clog of complex arguments and proofs before him. Moreover, a corrupt or self-serving fellow cannot be expected to judge others with the truth, or to apply his personal discretion fairly. With these facts in mind, one can then safely conclude and proclaim that Amir al-Muminin – being the best judge in this *Ummah* – was the most qualified for the *khilafah* immediately after the Prophet. In addition, he is the most truthful, the most intelligent, the most selfless, the most sincere, the most honest, and the best in recognizing and applying the truth in this *Ummah* after the Messenger.

1. Qur'an 5:48

2. Qur'an 13:37

3. Qur'an 16:44

4. Qur'an 53:3-4

5. Abu al-Fida Isma'il b. 'Umar b. Kathir al-Qurshi al-Dimashqi, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim (Dar al-^{Bay}aybah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'; 2nd edition, 1420 H) [annotator: Sami b. Muhammad Salamah], vol. 7, p. 413

6. Qur'an 5:42

7. Qur'an 38:26

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