

## ALI 435 - Readings #2

### Duties of the Ruler and Rights of the people

The needs of a human being are not summarized in the phrase 'food, clothing, and housing.' It may be possible to keep an animal happy by satisfying all its bodily needs; but in the case of man, spiritual and psychological factors are as important as the physical ones. Different governments following a similar course in providing for the material welfare of the public might achieve differing results, because one of them fulfils the psychological needs of society while the other doesn't.

Faith and belief in God are considered conducive to establishment of justice and realization of human rights. The truth is that, firstly, the belief in God is the foundation of the idea of justice and inalienable human rights; it is only through acceptance of the existence of God that it is possible to affirm innate human rights and uphold true justice as two realities independent of any premise and convention; secondly, it is the best guarantee for their execution in practice.

The approach of the Nahj al-balaghah to justice and human rights rests on the above-mentioned foundations. In sermon 216, from which we have quoted before, 'Ali (a) says:

'Allah has, by encharging me with your affairs, given me a right over you and awarded you a similar right over me. The issue of rights, as a subject of discourse, is inexhaustible, but is the most restricted of things when it comes to practice. A right does not accrue in favour of any person unless it accrues against him also, and it does not accrue against him unless that it also accrues in his favour.'

As can be noticed from the above passage, God is central to 'Ali's statement about justice, rights, and duties.

In the same sermon 'Ali (a) says:

'No individual, however eminent and high his station in religion, is not above needing cooperation of the people in discharging his obligations and the responsibilities placed upon him by God. Again, no man, however humble and insignificant in the eyes of others, is not too low to be ignored for the purpose of his cooperation and providing assistance.'

In the same sermon, 'Ali ('a) asks the people not to address him in the way despots are addressed:

'Do not address me in the manner despots are addressed [i.e. Do not address me by titles that are used to flatter despots and tyrants]. In your attitude towards me do not entertain the kind of considerations that are adopted in the presence of unpredictable tyrants. Do not treat me with affected and obsequious manners.

Do not imagine that your candour would displease me or that I expect you to treat me with veneration. One who finds it disagreeable to face truth and just criticism, would find it more detestable to act upon them. Therefore, do not deny me a word of truth or a just advice.'

In the Nahj al-balaghah, which is the subject of our discussion, the main topics are tawhid and 'irfan; throughout the talk is about God, whose Name occurs repeatedly everywhere in its pages. Nevertheless, it not only does not neglect to discuss the rights of the people and their privileges vis-a-vis the ruler, in fact regarding the ruler as the trustee and protector of their rights, but also lays great emphasis on this point.

According to the logic of this noble book, the imam and the ruler is the protector and trustee of the rights of the people and responsible to them. If one is asked as to which of them exists for the other, it is the ruler' who exists for the people and not vice versa.

It is incumbent on the imam to rule according to the decrees revealed by God, and to discharge the trusts that he has been charged with. When he does that, it is incumbent upon the people to pay attention to the Divine command (about obeying the wali al-'amr), to obey him and respond to his call. The Holy Qur'an considers the ruler and the head of the State as a trustee and a guardian; it regards just government as a fulfillment of a trust entrusted to the ruler.

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