



ALI 505: Justice in Nahjul Balagha

Session 1: JCC; Seniors' Lounge

Wednesday – Sha'ban 11, 1440/ April
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Quranic Āyat on Justice

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ ۗ لَا
إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٨﴾

Q 3:18 *Allah bears witness that there is no god except Him – and [so do] the angels and those who possess knowledge – maintainer of justice, there is no god except Him, the Almighty, the All-wise.*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۗ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ
شَنَّانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۗ اْعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا
اللَّهَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

Q 5:8 *O you who have faith! Be maintainers, as witnesses for the sake of Allah, of justice, and ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair. Be fair; that is nearer to taqwā and be wary of Allah. Allah is indeed well aware of what you do.*

QUESTION: please comment on the above verses.

A story on justice

Two persons approached the judge in the kingdom of Shadeed bin 'Aad, who was a Just ruler; one of them said to him: "I had purchased a piece of land from this person and have stumbled across a treasure in it. Despite my repeated requests, this seller is unwilling to accept it."

On his part, the seller said: "(I cannot do so for) I had sold the land to the purchaser together with everything that existed within it."

Conducting his investigations, the judge came to realize that the seller had a son while the purchaser had a daughter and so he ruled: "The purchaser's daughter should be married to the seller's son and the treasure should be given to them, and in this manner, put an end to their dispute." (<https://www.al-islam.org/anecdotes-reflection-part-3-sayyid-ali-akbar-sadaaqat/57-justice>)

commentary on Q 3:18 & Q 5:8

In Q 3:18 Allah testifies upon the Oneness of His Own Essence. The existing harmony and order, in the whole creation, is an evidence to the sovereignty of only One Power. By observing the wonders and greatness of power, angels and the learned bear witness to the Oneness of Allah. Immediately after tawhid, Allah mentions about being standing firm for justice. “The justice of Allah is a witness for itself as well as for His Oneness; His justice is a self-sustaining reality and also proves that Allah is One The system found in the universe is pure justice; if there were any other gods the whole system could not be called all-encompassing justice- the work each god would have been “just” within its own jurisdiction” (*Al-Mizan*, 5:169). Q 5:8 warns Muslims that tribal hatreds and hostilities, or personal accounts, should not stand as a barrier in the way of the execution of justice and should not cause transgression over the rights of others, because justice is something beyond all of them.

Pre-course questions

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

- What is the definition of justice?
- Please quote a Hadith on Justice?
- Do you know any saying or proverb on justice?
- Why is justice important to you?
- Have you tried to render justice between parties having some misunderstanding or quarrel?

Nahjul Balagha and Justice

One of the frequently discussed issues in the *Nahjul Balāgha* is that of government and justice. To anyone who goes through the book, it is evident to what extent Ali (a) is sensitive to the issues related to government and justice. He considers them to be of paramount importance. According to Hadith from the Prophet (s), it says: *If (as few as) three persons go on a journey, they must appoint one out of themselves as their leader.* From this one may infer to what extent the Prophet regarded as harmful the disorder and absence of an authority that could resolve social conflicts and serve as a unifying bond among individuals.

In the Quran establishment of justice is the objective of the mission of all the prophets. Hence, how is it possible that someone like Ali (a), whose duty was to expound the teachings of the Quran and explain the doctrines and laws of Islam, to ignore this issue? (Mutahhari)

Amīrul Mu'minīn (a) on justice

اخْتَرِ أَنْ تَكُونَ مَغْلُوبًا وَأَنْتَ مُنْصِفٌ، وَلَا تَخْتَرِ أَنْ تَكُونَ غَالِبًا وَأَنْتَ ظَالِمٌ

Prefer to be one who is overcome while being just, rather than one who triumphs while being unjust. (The Sayings & Wisdom, p. 90)

اجْعَلْ نَفْسَكَ مِيزَانًا فِيمَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ غَيْرِكَ

Make yourself a balance of justice in what is between you and others (Ibid)

سُئِلَ عَ أَيُّهُمَا أَفْضَلُ: الْعَدْلُ أَوْ الْجُودُ؟ فَقَالَ ع- الْعَدْلُ يَضَعُ الْأُمُورَ مَوَاضِعَهَا وَالْجُودُ يُخْرِجُهَا مِنْ جِهَتِهَا- وَالْعَدْلُ سَائِسٌ عَامٌّ وَالْجُودُ عَارِضٌ خَاصٌّ- فَالْعَدْلُ أَشْرَفُهُمَا وَأَفْضَلُهُمَا

He (a) was asked: which is superior, justice or generosity? He (a) replied: *Justice puts matters in their appropriate place, whereas generosity misplaces them; and justice governs everyone, whereas generosity concerns only a few; so justice is more noble and the superior of the two (NB, Saying 437)*

Reciprocal rights: ruler & subjects

But the most important of the reciprocal rights that God has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the subjects and the rights of the subjects over the ruler. It is a mutual and reciprocal obligation decreed by God for them. He has made it the basis of the strength of their society and their religion.

Consequently, the subjects cannot prosper unless the rulers are righteous. The rulers cannot be righteous unless the subjects are firm and steadfast. If the subjects fulfil their duties toward the ruler and the ruler his duty to them, then righteousness prevails amongst them. Only then the objectives of the religion are realized, the pillars of justice become stable and wholesome traditions become established. In this way, better conditions of life and social environment emerge. The people become eager to safeguard the integrity of the State, and thus frustrate the plots of its enemies. (*Nahjul Balagha*, Sermon 216)

References

The Sayings & Wisdom of Imam 'Ali

Nahjul Balagha

Anecdotes for Reflection, Part 3

<https://www.imamreza.net/old/eng/imamreza.php?id=3315>

<https://www.imamreza.net/old/eng/imamreza.php?id=4440>