



ALI 505: Justice in Nahjul Balagha

Session 2: JCC; Seniors' Lounge

Wednesday – Sha'ban 18, 1440/ April
24, 2019

Quranic Āyāt on Justice

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

Q 16:90 *Indeed Allah enjoins justice and kindness,*

وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ ﴿٩﴾

Q 55:9 *Maintain the weights with justice, and do not shorten the balance!*'

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ۗ

Q 57:25 *Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice*

Meaning of 'adl: to act justly, equitably, with fairness, to act with proportion; to compensate. Occurs 28 x in the Quran.

Meaning of qist: to act or deal justly, maintain a balance. In some cases it means acting unjustly or wrongfully (see Q 72:14 & 15). Appears 25 x in the Quran with various derivatives.

A great woman describes Ali عليه السلام

Once Mu'āwiyah asked Darmiyah Hajunyah: why do you love Ali and have animosity towards me.? She said: *Ali was a just person and supported equality whereas you needlessly fought him. Also, he loved the poor whereas I detest you because you shed unwarranted blood, spread dissensions and discords amongst the Muslims, adjudicate oppressively and unfairly, and act in accordance to your carnal desires!* He was infuriated, but asked: “Did you see Ali with your own eyes?” She replied: *Yes. By Allah! I had seen him in a state such that this kingdom and sultanate, which has deceived you and made you heedless had neither deceived him nor made him heedless.* Mu'āwiyah “Have you heard his voice?” She: *Yes. A voice that would burnish the heart and clear the turbidity from it just as olive oil clears away the rust.* He said: “Do you desire anything?” She said: *Give me one hundred red-haired camels.* Mu'āwiyah: “If I give them to you, would you look upon me as you look upon Ali?” Defiantly, she said: *Never.* He still gave her the camels but said: “Had Ali been alive, he would not have given you even one of these.” She responded: *By Allah! He would not have given me even one single hair of these camels, for he considered them to be the property of all the Muslims.* (*Anecdotes for Reflection, 3:143-45*)

Amīrul Mu'minīn (a) on justice

اخْتَرْ أَنْ تَكُونَ مَغْلُوبًا وَأَنْتَ مُنْصِفٌ، وَلَا تَخْتَرْ 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)*

Mutahharī on Imam's saying - 1

The question was about two human qualities. Man has always detested oppression and injustice and but has held in high regard acts of kindness and benevolence without the hoping any return. Apparently the answer to the above question seems both obvious and easy: generosity is superior to justice, for what is justice except observance of the rights of others and avoiding violating them; but a generous man willingly foregoes his own right in favor of another person. The just man does not transgress the rights of others or he safeguards their rights from being violated. But the generous man sacrifices his own right for another's sake. Therefore, generosity must be superior to justice.

In truth, the above reasoning appears to be quite valid when we estimate their worth from the viewpoint of individual morality, and generosity, more than justice, seems to be the sign of human perfection and the nobleness of the human soul. But Imam Ali's reply is contrary to the above answer. Ali (a) gives two reasons for superiority of justice over generosity:

Mutahharī on Imam's saying - 2

Justice puts things in their proper place and generosity diverts them from their (natural) direction. For, the meaning of justice is that the natural deservedness of everybody must be taken into consideration; everyone should be given his due according to his work, ability and qualifications. Society is comparable to a machine whose every part has a proper place and function. It is true that generosity is a quality of great worth from the point of view that the generous man donates to another what legitimately belongs to himself, but we must note that it is an unnatural occurrence. It may be compared to a body one of whose organs is malfunctioning, and its other healthy organs and members temporarily redirect their activity to the recovery of the suffering organ. From the point of view of society, it would be far more preferable if the society did not possess such sick members at all, so that the healthy organs and members may completely devote their activities and energies to the general growth and perfection of society, instead of being absorbed with helping and assisting of some particular member.

Mutahharī on Imam's saying - 3

To return to Ali's reply, the other reason he gives for preferring justice to generosity is: *Justice is the general caretaker, whereas generosity is a particular reliever.* That is, justice is like a general law which is applicable to the management of all the affairs of society. Its benefit is universal and all-embracing; it is the highway which serves all and everyone. But generosity is something exceptional and limited, which cannot be always relied upon. Basically, if generosity were to become a general rule, it would no longer be regarded as such. Deriving his conclusion, Ali (a) says: *Consequently, justice is the nobler of the two and possesses the greater merit.* This way of thinking about man and human problems is one based on a specific value system rooted in the idea of the fundamental importance of society. In this system of values, social principles and criteria precede the norms of individual morality. From Ali's viewpoint, it is the principle of justice that is of crucial significance in preserving the balance of society, and winning goodwill of the public. Its practice can ensure the health of society and bring peace to its soul.

Quotes on Justice

Life has one difficult and thousands of easy paths. The difficult path is that of justice and the thousands of easy paths all deviate from the path of justice to one degree or another. (Aristotle)

Justice means that everyone should be benefited in proportion to his ability and aptitude. When this is the case then society will be well ordered. (Fayd al-Kashani)

For man, justice is the holiest of virtues. At least among the social ideals, such as freedom, democracy and equality it is the most holy since it gives birth to all of them. (Shahid Mutahhari)

The true meaning of justice is to have balance in all things, so that all may receive their rightful due. Thus, in the realm of beliefs, justice means faith in the Truth. In one's actions, it means acting so as to attain felicity and to escape wretchedness. Justice in social affairs is that every person should occupy the position that reason, law and custom dictate, the good are rewarded and the bad are punished, those who have been wronged are avenged and all are equal before the law, etc. ('Allāmah Tabātabā'ī)

Be a leader for doing justice

During the caliphate of Imam Ali Abdullah ibn al-'Abbas came to him. He found the Imam mending his old shoes with his own hand. Turning to Ibn al-'Abbas, Ali asked him, "How much do you think is this shoe worth?" "Nothing," replied Ibn al-'Abbas. Ali said, "*But the same shoe is of more worth to me than authority over you if it were not to me a means for **establishing justice**, recovering the rights of the deprived, and wiping out evil practices*" (NB, Sermon 33).

Imam Ali (a) despised temporal power and political office for being lowly and degrading when it is an instrument of gratification, or having lust for power and for political ambition. He looked down upon it with extreme contempt when it is desired by others as an end-in-itself (Mutahhari).

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)

Imam Ali عليه السلام practiced justice

Read online to see how the Imam acted on justice

The Stranger

<https://www.al-islam.org/anecdotes-pious-men-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/stranger>

Aqeel as a Guest of Ali

<https://www.al-islam.org/anecdotes-pious-men-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/aqeel-guest-ali>

Complaint against husband

<https://www.al-islam.org/anecdotes-pious-men-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/complaint-against-husband>

The Prohibition of water

<https://www.al-islam.org/anecdotes-pious-men-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/prohibition-water>

Note the above stories have been gathered by a renown scholar Shahid Murtadhā Mutahharī in his book Dastan-e Rastan; he would be careful about their veracity.

Deal according to position of people

A father and a son were once guests of Imam Ali (a). Imam received them warmly and arranged for their seating. Then he invited them for a meal. After the meal, Imam's servant brought a basin and a pitcher full of water for washing the guests' hands. Imam took the pitcher himself and asked the father to extend his hands so that he would pour the water. "How is it possible that my Imam serves me? It should be otherwise," the guest said. Imam Ali: *Here is your brother in faith, eager to serve his brother and to earn the pleasure of Allah. Why do you prevent him? But the guest hesitated. Finally Imam (a) said: As your Imam, I request that you allow me the honor of this service. So the guest agreed and the Imam washed the hands thoroughly. When it was the son's turn, Imam instructed his own son Muhammad b. Hanafiyyah, to hold the pitcher and wash the guest's hands. Looking at his son, Imam said: I washed your father's hands. My son washed your hands. If your father had not been my guest today, I would have washed your hands myself. But Allah loves to see that when a father and a son are present in a place, the father enjoys a privilege and a priority.*

<https://www.al-islam.org/pearls-wisdom-stories-and-sayings-infallibles-and-their-noble-companions/guests>

Justice of Ali عليه السلام was for all subjects

Do justice for Allah and do justice towards the people, as against yourself, your near ones and those of your subjects for whom you have a liking, because if you do not do so you will be oppressive, and when a person oppresses the creatures of Allah then, instead of His creatures, Allah becomes his opponent, and when Allah is the opponent of a person He tramples his plea; and we will remain in the position of being at war with Allah until he gives it up and repents.

Also, His Eminence Ali عليه السلام once saw an old Christian chap who was begging people to help him. His Holiness said to the people: “Behold! you people have exploited this Christian chap so much in his youth while you have abandoned him now that he is old and feeble.” Ali عليه السلام then ordered to give the man a pension and provide his needs from the Muslims’ treasury.

(<http://balaghah.net/old/nahj-htm/eng/id/article/64.htm>)

References

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Glimpses of the Nahj al-Balagha, Shahid Murtadhā Mutahhari, Islamic Culture & Relations Organization, 1997.

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The Sayings & Wisdom of Imam 'Ali, Sh Fadhlalla Haeri, Muhammadi Trust, 1992.

<https://www.al-islam.org/anecdotes-pious-men-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>

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

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