

Sūrat al-Baqarah Verse 246 – Part 1

أَمْ تَرَى إِلَى الْمَلَأِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّهِمْ ائْتِنَا مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ
اللَّهِ مَقَالَ هَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَاتِلُوا قَالُوا وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ
أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا وَأَبْنَائِنَا فَلَمَّا كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ

2:246 *Have you not considered the chiefs of the children of Israel after Mūsā, when they said to their Prophet, 'Appoint for us a king that we may fight in the way of Allah.' He said, 'May it not be that you will not fight if fighting were prescribed for you?' They said, 'Why should we not fight in the way of Allah, when we have been expelled from our homes and separated from our children?' But when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned back except a few of them, and Allah knows well the wrongdoers.*

Note: The first part discusses the following part of the verse only:

Have you not considered the chiefs of the children of Israel after Mūsā, when they said to their Prophet, 'Appoint for us a king that we may fight in the way of Allah' He said, 'May it not be that you will not fight if fighting were prescribed for you?'

Questions for Reflection

- 1) Look at the first two words of the verse, where else have you seen them in the Quran? (Q14:24, Q 89:6, Q 105:1..., tells you this is an important lesson/point to reflect over)
- 2) What does the request of the people show about their respect for the Prophet?
- 3) What aspect of good leadership is conveyed in this verse?

Commentary

The Banū Israel had faced many difficulties and losses in battles. They were tired of their defeats and wanted a king who would lead them to victory. They came to the Prophet of their time – Prophet Shamul – and asked him to appoint a king for them.

The word '*mala'a (min Bani Israel)*' refers to things or people that fill the eye or draw attention. It can refer to a large group of people that have one goal and vision or it can also refer to a small group of distinguished leaders of a community. In this verse it refers to a large group of people who came to the Prophet with their united request.

The people looked to their Prophet for a solution to their problems. A Divine leader is a source of unity and assistance in a society. He is the authority and can help society to overcome difficulties and progress. That is why it is necessary to have a leader who is appointed by Allah and is sincere and knowledgeable. That is the only way society can move forward. The Prophets, and the Imams after them, are divinely appointed leaders who guide mankind. They are the experts, the teachers, the concerned advisors, who lead people towards God and success in the world and the hereafter.

Asking the Prophet to appoint a king also shows that religion covers all aspects of life. It is not only restricted to spiritual acts. Politics and management of daily affairs is all part of the journey towards God and must be under Divine guidance. The people did not choose anyone they wished as a king because they wanted one who was worthy and could lead them to success.

The reason the people wanted a king was because the powerful oppressors of the time had defeated the Banū Israel and taken over their lands and properties. Their children had been taken as prisoners. They themselves had become humiliated. This weakening of the Banū Israel was due to their increased heedlessness and indulgence in sins. Now they were seeking a solution. These oppressors were the people of Palestine. Jālūt was part of the army, a strong warrior who people were afraid of.

According to some narrations Prophet Shamul had been with the people for forty years. When the issue of the Palestinians and Jālūt came up the people turned to him for help. A Prophet would be able to choose the right king for them and would also guide the king in his leadership, based on revelation he would get from Allah.

They said they want to fight *in the way of Allah*. This could mean the following:

- 1) Fighting to get back what belongs to you and is your right can be considered as fighting in the way of Allah. Allah has granted freedom to human beings and to fight against oppression is to fight in His way.
- 2) The fight against the Palestinians was against those who rejected the belief in One God. It thus had a religious significance to it.

The Prophet did not respond in the affirmative right away. He wanted to test their resolve and get a pledge from them that they would follow his answer to their request. It shows the foresight of the Prophet who anticipated the consequences and wanted to clarify things from the beginning. A concerned leader does not just give in to the demands of the people. It is necessary to discuss and make the people commit to the solution they seek.

Connecting verse: Criteria for leadership – Q10:35

Historical Connection

- 1) Imam Ali (a) as a leader who knew the weaknesses of his people. Imam knew that the people were too corrupt to accept his strong standards of leadership. They were also unwilling to support him. See: *Nahjul Balāgha*, sermons 27, 34, 92
- 2) Imam Hasan (a) did not have people who would support him while Imam Husayn (a) had a small group of dedicated and loyal people who stood with him till the end. See: [https://en.wikishia.net/view/Peace_Treaty_of_Imam_al-Hasan_\(a\)#People_Refused_to_Support_Imam_al-Hasan_.28a.29](https://en.wikishia.net/view/Peace_Treaty_of_Imam_al-Hasan_(a)#People_Refused_to_Support_Imam_al-Hasan_.28a.29)