

Examples of Imam Ali's (A.S) Moral Virtues

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Imam `Ali (a.s) Intervenes

Imam `Ali (a.s) was once passing by date sellers when he saw a slave-girl crying. He asked the reason, and she said, “My master sent me with one dirham to buy dates. I bought the dates from this man and took them home. But my master did not like them. I have returned them but this man refuses to take them back.” Addressing the date seller, Imam `Ali said, “O servant of Allah! This is a slave-girl having no authority of herself. Give back her one dirham and take back the dates.” The date seller rose up and gave him a fist.” People said, “What have you done? This is Amir al-Mu`minin.” The man turned pale and started gasping out of fear. He took back the dates and returned the one dirham to her. he then said, “O Amir al-Mu`minin! Be pleased with me.” The Imam said, “The fact that you have amended your conduct has satisfied me. I am pleased only to see that you have given people their due right.”^[1]

A Beautiful Pardon

Amir al-Mu`minin had sent an agent to arrest Labid ibn `Utarad al-Tamimi for having uttered certain words. The agents passed by the alley of Banu-Asad where Nu`aym ibn Dajajah al-Asadi captured Labid. Imam `Ali (a.s) sent agents to arrest Labid. When he was arrested, the Imam ordered a physical punishment. Nu`aym said, “By Allah, to be with you is humiliation and separation from you is atheism!” The Imam said, “I pardoned you. Allah says: ‘Repel evil by what is best (23:96)’. As for your saying, ‘to be with you is humiliation’ it is something bad you have acquired; and as for ‘separation from you is atheism’ it is something good you have acquired. So tit for tat.”^[2]

Another Example Of Pardon

Amir al-Mu`minin (a.s) entered Mecca for some affairs. He saw a Bedouin clutching the curtain of Ka`bah saying, “O Lord of the House! The House is Yours and the guest is Yours. Every host prepares certain means to receive his guest. Tonight, bless me by receiving me.” Addressing his friends, Imam `Ali said, “Are you not listening to this Bedouin?” They said, “Yes, we are.” The Imam said, “Allah is too Great to return His guest empty-handed!”

On the second night, Imam `Ali found the same man clutching the same pillar of Ka`bah saying, “O Almighty! There is no one mightier than You! By Your Honor! Honor me in a way no one knows how! I resort to you by the honor of Muhammad and the Family of Muhammad! Grant me something no one but You can grant and avert from me what none but You can avert!”

Amir al-Mu`minin said to his friends, “By Allah! These words are the chief name of Allah in Syriac. My beloved, Allah’s Messenger, has informed me that tonight this Arab has asked for Paradise from Allah and his prayer was granted and asked for the aversion of Hellfire, which was granted too!”

On the third night, Imam `Ali (a.s) again saw him in the same place saying, “O Allah Who is not contained in a space and no space is devoid of

Him! Give this Arab four thousand Dirhams as sustenance!” Imam `Ali went forth saying, “O Arab! You asked Allah to host you, and He did; you wished Paradise; and it was granted to you; you asked for aversion of fire; and your prayer was granted; tonight, you are asking for four thousand Dirhams?” The Arab said, “Who are you?” The Imam said, “I am `Ali ibn Abu-Talib.” The Arab said, “By Allah! You are the one I desire and you can meet my need!” The Imam said, “O Bedouin! Ask for it.

” The man said, “A Thousand Dirhams for dowry; a thousand for paying my debt; a thousand for purchasing a house; and a thousand for running the affairs of my life!” The Imam said, “You have been fair in asking for your needs. Whenever you left Mecca for Medina, ask for my house.” The Arab stayed in Mecca for a week and then came to Medina looking for Amir al-Mu`minin, shouting, “Who will lead me to the house of the Leader of the believers?” Husayn ibn `Ali who was then a child said, “I will lead you to his house. I am his son.” The Arab asked, “Who is your father?” Husayn said, “Amir al-Mu`minin, `Ali ibn Abi-Talib is my father.” He asked, “Who is your mother?” Husayn said, “Fatimah al-Zahra’, the doyenne of the women of the world is my mother.

” He asked, “Who is your grandfather?” Husayn said, “Allah’s Messenger, Muhammad ibn `Abdullah ibn `Abd al-Muttalib is my grandfather.” He asked, “Who is your grandmother?” Husayn said: Khadijah daughter of Khuwaylid is my grandmother.” He asked, “Who is your brother?” Husayn said, “Abu-Muhammad, Hasan ibn `Ali, is my brother.” the Bedouin said, “You have got the whole world! Go to Amir al-Mu`minin and tell him that the Bedouin whose needs you had guaranteed to meet in Mecca is beside your house.” Husayn entered the house saying, “O father! The Bedouin whose needs you have guaranteed to meet is at the door.” Addressing Fatimah, Imam `Ali said, “Is there any food at home for this Bedouin?” Fatimah said, “No.” Hearing this, Imam `Ali put on his clothes and went outside home saying, “Call Abu-`Abdullah, Salman the Persian.” When Salman came, the Imam said, “O Abu-`Abdullah! Put to sale the orchard whose trees the Holy Prophet planted!” Salman too sold the orchard for twelve thousand Dirhams. Imam `Ali took the money and called for the Bedouin. Four thousand Dirhams were given to him to meet his needs and forty Dirhams for his expenses.

The news spread among the needy in Medina. They too came to Imam `Ali. A man from the Ansar went to Fatimah’s house and informed her of the event. Fatimah said, “May Allah reward you for this news.” `Ali was sitting there giving away handfuls of Dirhams to the needy so much so that there was nothing left for him.”^[3]

Pardoning Talhah

After the Battle of the Camel, Musa ibn Talhah was brought to Imam `Ali who said, “Say three times: I seek forgiveness of Allah and I repent to Him.” Then he was set free. Addressing him, Imam `Ali said, “Go wherever you wish and take for yourself whatever you find of horses and weapons in the camp. But fear Allah in your future life and stay at home.”^[4]

Helping the Orphans

Although Amir al-Mu'minin was aware of the situation in the realm of Muslims and paid special attention to the situation of the orphans, widows and the needy, he would sometimes act like an ordinary person to give lesson to rulers and to the community.

One day, he saw a woman carrying a water-skin on her back. He took the water-skin from her and placed it on his back. When he inquired about her situation, she said, "Ali ibn Abu-Talib sent my husband to the battle where he was killed. Now I am alone with my children and I have to work for others to make the ends meet." Imam `Ali returned home but had no peace of mind during the whole night. In the morning, he took a basket, put some meat, flour and dates in it and set out for the woman's house. Some friends suggested to carry the basket but the Imam said, "Who will carry the heavy load for me on the Judgment Day?" Reaching the woman's house, he knocked at the door.

- "Who are you?"

- "I am the man who brought the water-skin for you. Now I have brought some food for the children."

- "May Allah bless you and judge between us and `Ali."

She opened the door. Entering the house, he said, "I wish to do some good acts. Allow me either to knead the flour and bake it or to look after the children." The woman said, "I will knead the flour."

Imam `Ali too cooked the meat and fed the children with his own hand saying to each child while putting morsel in his mouth, "My son, forgive `Ali if he has failed in his duty towards you." When the bread was ready, the woman said, "O servant of Allah! Put fire in the oven." He did. When flames rose up, he brought his face near the fire and said, "Taste the heat of fire. It is the punishment for those who fail in their duty towards orphans and widows."

By chance, a woman from the neighboring house came in. Recognizing him, she cried at the woman, "Woe to you, don't you recognize the man who is helping you? He is Amir al-Mu'minin!" The widow came forward and shamefacedly cried, "Curse and shame to me. I beg your pardon." The Imam said, "No, I beg your pardon, for I failed in my duty towards you."^[5]

Carrying a Heavy Load

Imam `Ali bought dates from the mart of Kufah putting them in a corner of his cloak. People rushed to him to carry the dates, but he refused, saying, "One who has a wife and children is more deserving of carrying them."^[6]

Bare-Food On Five Occasions

Zayd ibn `Ali reports: `Ali would walk bare-footed holding his sandals in his left hand on five occasions: Feast of fast-breaking (ʿd al-Fitr), Feast of Sacrifices (ʿd al-Aʿha), Fridays, on visiting the sick, and during funeral service. He would say, "These five occasions are the places of Allah and I would like to be bare-footed therein."^[7]

Moral Behavior In The Market

Amir al-Mu'minin would always walk by himself in the market, showing the way to those who had lost their way, helping those who were incapable, reciting the following Qur'anic verse to the shop-keepers while passing by them,

تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

(83)

As for that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief and the good end is for those who guard against evil. (28:83)

Those On Foot Not To Follow Riders

Imam al-Sadiq has reported: Amir al-Mu'minin, once, was riding when his companions started following him on foot out of respect. At this moment, he turned to them saying, "Are you in need of something?" They said, "We would like to accompany you." The Imam said, "Go back, for walking or running on foot along with a rider will be a cause of corruption for the rider and a cause of humiliation for those on foot."^[8]

A Jew Becomes Muslim

During Imam `Ali's caliphate, Shurayh was the judge. The Imam came to the court with a Jew so that Shurayh will judge between them. The Imam said, "The cuirass which is in your hand is mine, for I have neither sold it nor have I given it as a present." The Jew said, "The cuirass is mine and now it is in my hands." Shurayh asked the Imam to present a witness. Imam `Ali said, "Qanbar (his servant) and Husayn testify that the cuirass is mine." Shurayh said, "sons' testimonies for their fathers are not valid nor are these of servants, for they will witness in your favor." Imam `Ali said, "Woe to you, Shurayh! You have certainly made several mistakes. Firstly, I am your leader and you obey Allah because you obey me and you know that what I say is not false. Secondly, you claimed that Qanbar and Husayn witnessed in my favor.

The punishment for this is to judge among the Jew for three days." The Imam sent the judge to a Jewish neighborhood to judge among them and then to come back to his place of work. When the Jew heard that although `Ali had two witnesses but did not misuse his authority and the judge too passed a judgment against him, said, "This is truly the Leader of the believers." Hence he became Muslim; he confessed that the cuirass belonged to Imam `Ali, it had fallen off the Imam's black and white camel during the Battle of Siffin and he had taken it for himself.^[9]

Justice in The Court

Once a plaintiff lodged a complaint before Umar ibn al-Khattab, the Caliph of those days. Both parties of litigation should appear before the court and lay their complaints. The one against whom the complaint was lodged was Imam `Ali (a.s). Convoing both parties, Umar went and sat down on the seat of judgment.

According to the Islamic law, both parties ought to station next to each other and the principle of equality before the Tribunal should be respected. Accordingly, the Caliph called out the plaintiff by name and beckoned him to stand up in a peculiar place before the judge. Then he turned to `Ali and said, "O Abu'l-Hasan! Place yourself next to your plaintiff." On hearing these words, `Ali became apparently angry." The caliph said, "O `Ali, you do not want to stand next to your adversary." `Ali said, "No, that is not the reason for my anger; the reason is that you have not entirely respected the norms of justice, for you called me respectfully by my nickname Abu'l-Hasan but you called the other person by his ordinary name." Umar hugged the Imam and kissed him between the eyes saying, "May my father be your ransom! Allah guided us with your mediation and brought us out of darkness into light through you."^[10]

Contentment

After the Battle of the Camel, when Amir al-Mu'minin was about to leave Basrah for Kufah, said, "O people of Basrah! Why are you displeased with me?" Referring to his shirt and cloak, the Imam said, "By Allah, I paid the price of this shirt and cloak through spinning. So why are you trying to find fault with me?" Referring to the purse which he held in his hand, the Imam said, "By Allah! The money in this purse is from selling what I have produced in Medina. If there is anything with me more than this, I will be a traitor."^[11]

Generosity

Being a child, some children of my age and I went to Rahbah one day. We saw `Ali standing beside a pile of gold and silver coins, pushing the people backward. He, then, divided the coins among them and took nothing home!

When I returned home, I said to my father, "Today I have seen the wisest and the most unwise person in my life." My father asked, "Who is he?" I said, "He is Amir al-Mu'minin..." As I told him the whole story, my father said, "O son! You have seen the best man."^[12]

No Desire For Wealth

Qanbar, Imam `Ali's servant, asked his master to go to a room where he had hidden bags full of gold and silver vessels. The Imam asked, "What are these?" Qanbar said, "You always divide every thing among people but I have reserved all these for you." Imam `Ali asked, "Would you like to bring fire to my house?" Being angry, he drew his sword and broke those vessels into pieces ordering him to divide them among people. He further said, "O Gold and silver! Deceive anyone but me."^[13]

Justice

Fuṣayl ibn al-Ja'd reports: The main reason the Arabs did not support Imam `Ali was the wealth. He never preferred an Arab to a non-Arab or an aristocrat to an ordinary man. He never compromised with the chiefs of tribes nor with the kings. That is why the people abandoned `Ali and joined Mu`awiyah. `Ali complained to Malik Ashtar of his companions, failure to

support him and the escape of some of them to Mu`awiyah. Malik Ashtar too would say, “O Amir al-Mu`minin! Some people cannot tolerate your justice, for they are the people of the world! May Allah pave the way for your justice, oppress your enemies, disperse them, foil their plan and break their unity against you: Surely He is Aware of what they do.”

In response, `Ali said, “As for our just acts, Allah says:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَاحِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ (46)

Whoever does good, it is for his own soul, and whoever does evil, it is against it; and your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants. (41: 46)

As for your opinion that justice is hard for them hence they abandoned us, Allah knows that they did not leave us for any injustice. They left us for worldly riches, a world which they will leave and on the Judgment Day. They will be questioned whether they fought for the world or Allah! As for saying that we do not give away to them from the public fund, we cannot give them more than what they deserve. Allah says:

كَمْ مِنْ فِئَةٍ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتْ فِئَةً كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ (249)

How often has a small party vanquished numerous hosts by Allah's permission, and Allah is with the patient. (2:249).

Allah commissioned Muhammad as a prophet with a small number of people around him but they increased in number and honored them while they were humiliated before. If Allah wills, He will support us, remove our problems and sorrows. I approve of your union which pleases Allah. You are the most benevolent and trustworthy of them with me, Allah willing.”^[14]

Public Fund

One night Imam `Ali entered the house of public fund for apportioning the funds. At this time, Talhah and Zubayr came to him. The Imam put out the torch before him and ordered to bring another torch from his house. They asked the reason. The Imam said, “The oil in that torch belonged to the public fund and it was not right to speak to you under its light.”^[15]

Old Garment

Quoting his father, Harun ibn `Antarah reports: I went to the presence of `Ali at Khawarnaq. He was wearing a coarse old garment shivering from cold. I said, “O Amir al-Mu`minin! You and Ahl al-Bayt, like others, have a share in the public fund. So why aren't you using your share?” The Imam said, “By Allah, I do not take anything from the public fund. The garment I am wearing is the same I brought from Medina and I have no garment other than this.”^[16]

No Love Of Wealth

`Aqil ibn `Abd al-Rahman reports: My aunt, wife of `Aqil ibn Abi-Talib, came to see `Ali in Kufah while he was sitting on a packsaddle. At this time, a wife of `Ali, from Banu-Tamim, entered. I said, “Woe to you! Your house is full of goods and here Amir al-Mu`minin is sitting on a packsaddle!” She said, “Do not blame me! By Allah! He put everything which is unfamiliar to him in the public fund.”^[17]

Giving Clothes To The Naked

One day when Imam `Ali (a.s) was in the presence of the Holy Prophet, he was found with a worn-out garment. So Allah's Messenger said, "What happened to the good garment I gave you?" `Ali said, "O Allah's Messenger! I saw one of your companions complaining of his own nakedness and of his wife. So I gave it away knowing that Allah will give me a better one."^[18]

Charity

Once Imam `Ali (a.s) had four Dirhams. He divided them into four. He gave away one dirham for the sake of Allah by night and one dirham by day. He gave away the third dirham secretly and the fourth openly. The following holy verse was revealed on the same occasion,

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (274)

As for those who spend their property by night and by day, secretly and openly, they shall have their reward from their Lord and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve (2:274)

Charity Changes People

On the above-mentioned story, ibn `Abbas, commenting on the following holy verse, "Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allah... without measure (24:37-38)" says: The occasion of the revelation was that one day the Holy Prophet gave `Ali three hundred Dinars, which they had given to him as gift. `Ali said: I took the money and said to myself by Allah, I will give such a charity with these Dinars that Allah will accept. When I completed the night prayer with Allah's Messenger, I took a hundred Dinars and left the mosque. On my way, I came across a woman to whom I gave one hundred Dinars. The following day, people said, "Ali has given charity to a corrupt woman!" It was a great sorrow for me. The night of that day, I performed the night prayer, took a hundred Dinars in my hand, left the mosque and said to myself, "By Allah! I will give a charity which will be accepted by my Lord. I saw a man and gave away the one hundred Dinars to him." The following day, the people of Medina said, "Ali has given away a hundred Dinars to a thief." Again a great sorrow came to me but said to myself, "By Allah! I will give a charity tonight that Allah will accept from me."

So, I performed my night prayer with Allah's Messenger and then left the mosque having a hundred Dinars with me. I saw a man to whom I gave the money. The next day, the people Medina said, "Last night, `Ali gave a hundred Dinars to a rich man." Again, a great sorrow came to me. I went to Allah's Messenger and told him the story. The Holy Prophet said: O `Ali! Gabriel says to you: Allah has accepted your charity and purified your acts: The one hundred Dinars you gave as charity was put at the disposal of a corrupt woman who repented to Allah and used the money as earnings for her living. She also intends to get married with this money. The charity of the second night went to a thief who repented thereafter and used the money

for running business. The charity of the third night went to a rich man who had not paid alms for years. He went home and blamed himself saying, “How miser I am! This is `Ali ibn Abu-Talib who gave away a hundred Dinars to me while he has nothing whereas I am a rich man who has not paid his obligatory alms!” So, he reckoned his alms and put it aside. It was for this reason that Allah revealed the above-mentioned verses.^[19]

Altruism

Both Shi`ite and Sunni scholars report: One day `Ali was extremely hungry so he asked for food from Fatimah who said, “There is no food except the one I preferred to give to you than to myself as well as Hasan and Husayn two days ago.” `Ali asked, “Why didn’t you tell me to prepare a food for you?” Fatimah said, “O Abu’l-Hasan! I was ashamed to charge you with what is not in your power!” `Ali left the house, went to the Holy Prophet and borrowed one Dinar to buy food. On his way, he met al-Miqdad who said, “Whatever Allah wills (will come to pass)!” `Ali gave his one Dinar to him, went to mosque, lay down and went to sleep! Allah’s Messenger went to the mosque and found `Ali in that position.

Awakening him, the Holy Prophet asked, “What did you do?” `Ali told him the story and then prayed with the Holy Prophet. When Allah’s Messenger completed his prayer, he asked, “O Abu’l-Hasan! Do you have any food to share with you?” `Ali kept silent and gave no answer out of shame. Allah revealed to the Holy Prophet to have the dinner with `Ali that night. So they both set out for `Ali’s house. When they entered the house, Fatimah was engaged in prayer and behind her was a big bowl steaming. Fatimah brought that big bowl which was replete with food and placed it before her father and her husband. `Ali asked. Where has this food come from? She said: From Allah’s Favor and Benevolence,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَزُزُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ (37)

Surely, Allah gives to whom He pleases without measure (3:37)

The Holy Prophet put his hand between the two shoulders of `Ali saying, “O `Ali! This is in lieu of your Dinar.” Then he was choked with tears saying, “Thanks Allah that I have not died to see in my daughter what (Prophet) Zachariah saw in (Saint) Mary.”^[20]

An Extraordinary Example of Altruism

The Battle Of Camel

Imam `Ali (a.s) made his utmost effort not to enter battle so that no one would be killed. When he was informed in Medina that the leaders of the Camel Army have left Mecca for Basrah, he quickly left Medina to hold talks with them. He sent them a letter through Sa’sa’ah, a great man of Basrah. In that letter, he gave them advice with the utmost degree of kindness and magnanimity. Once again, he sent Ibn `Abbas to al-Zubayr to talk to him saying, “Do not go or speak to Talhah, for it will be useless. Speak to al-Zubayr who is softer. Tell him, your cousin says: In Hijaz you were my friend. How come you have become my enemy in Iraq?” Then, he sent a letter to Talhah and al-Zubayr through `Imran al-Khuza`i which reads,

“Though people may deny, but I did not go to people rather they came to me to pledge allegiance with me.

Their allegiance with me was not out of fear, force or allurement. If your allegiance has not been out of fear, repent quickly and turn to Allah. You claim that I have killed `Uthman! I leave the judgment to unbiased people. Anyone who is condemned should be punished. You two elderly men of Quraish! Stop behaving like this before this disgrace will be accompanied with Hellfire.” When Imam `Ali arrived in the land of Zaviah on his way to Basrah, he performed a four-Rak`ah prayer saying, “O Lord of heavens and what cast shadow on them! O Lord of the earths and what they have on shoulders! O Lord of the Great Throne! This is Basrah! I ask You to put the good of this people in my hand and I seek refuge in You from their evil. O Lord! These people have disobeyed me, rebelled against me and broken allegiance with me. O Lord! Preserve the blood of Muslims and let not any blood be shed!”

When `Ali was placed against the army of Basrah, he called, “O people! Do not make haste!” Then the Imam called Ibn `Abbas ordering him to go to Talhah, al-Zubayr and `A`ishah and call them to Allah. Then `Ammar ibn Yasir, the great companion and elderly man of truth, stood between the two armies, addressing the army of Basrah as such, “O people! It is not fair that you have kept your wives behind curtains while you have brought the Holy Prophet’s wife to be faced with arrows and swords.” Then he went to `A`ishah, asking, “What do you want?” `A`ishah said, “I am here to seek the revenge of `Uthman!” `Ammar said, “May Allah on this day kill the oppressor, perish the rebel and destroy falsehood.”

Then, addressing the army of Basrah he cried out, “O people! Do you know which of the two parties has had a hand in killing `Uthman?” The arrows were coming towards `Ammar. The answer was arrows! `Ammar came to `Ali saying, “O Amir al-Mu`minin: What are you waiting for? They have no goal but killing arrows showered on the army of `Ali. There was no permission for battle yet!” Imam `Ali (a.s) addressed his army as such, “Who is here to take this Qur’an to the people and call them to it? Whoever does this will be killed but I will guarantee his going to Paradise.” A young man by the name of Muslim rose up, saying, “O Amir al-Mu`minin: I will take the Qur’an to them and do what you said.” He took the Qur’an, went to the enemy and called them to the Qur’an. They pierced his body with spear. He fell on the ground and was martyred. Was killing with spear an answer to logic?

`Ali told his army to be prepared for battle but not start it. Ibn Badil, a brave soldier, brought the dead body of his brother saying: O Amir al-Mu`minin! Until when should we wait? Should they kill us and we look on?” The dead body of another soldier was brought to `Ali but he still did not give the permission to fight. He just said, “O Lord! You are the Witness.” Then, he turned to his army saying, “Have mercy on the people!” Then, he took off his armor, rode on the mule of the Holy Prophet, went to the battlefield and cried out, “O Zubayr! Come to me.” Al-Zubayr came to the field with full arms. Seeing that `Ali called al-Zubayr to the field, `A`ishah said to herself, “Woe to me, my sister Asma’—al-Zubayr’s wife—

will became a widow!” When `A`ishah was told that `Ali has come to the battlefield without arms, she calmed down.

In the battle field, `Ali hugged al-Zubayr, saying, “Why have you rebelled against me?” Al-Zubayr said, “I have come to take the revenge of `Uthman!” `Ali said, “May God kill either of us who has had a hand in the killing of `Uthman.” Then he spoke softly to him reminding him of Allah’s Messenger, who had said, “You will fight `Ali and you will be the wrong party.” Al-Zubayr said, “I seek Allah’s forgiveness. If I had not forgotten this word, I would not have rebelled.” The Imam said, “Zubayr! Now, go back.” Al-Zubayr said, “How can I go back? My going back would be considered as fear, a disgrace which cannot be washed away.” The Imam said, “Go back before disgrace is accompanied with Hellfire.

” Al-Zubayr went back and as soon as he intended to go out of the Army of the Camel, his son `Abdullah cried out, “Where are you going?” Al-Zubayr said, “My Son! `Ali reminded me of something I had forgotten.” The son said, “This is no the case, you are afraid of the swords of the Hashimites!” The father said, “No, I remembered what the time had made me forget. Are you blaming me for fear?” He took the spear and attacked the right wing of `Ali’s army. Addressing his soldiers, `Ali said, “Let no one fight him. Open the way for him. They have provoked him!” Al-Zubayr so attacked both sides of the army. No one fought him or resisted against him. Returning to his army he said to his son, “Does a timid man act like that?” Then he took his way and left.

`Ali’s kindness towards the enemy made a hero of him in the battlefield. Did the Army of the Camel realize that what the Holy Prophet had foreseen was not particular to al-Zubayr alone but everyone who fought `Ali would be a wrongdoer?

Again `Ali came to the battlefield and called Talhah saying, “Why did you rebel against me?” Talhah claimed that he wanted to take the revenge of `Uthman. `Ali said, “May Allah kill either of us who has had a hand in killing `Uthman. Haven’t you heard the words of the Holy Prophet saying: (O God) Befriend one who befriends `Ali and bear enmity to one who bears enmity to `Ali. Were you not the first man who swore allegiance with me and breached your allegiance? Allah says:

فَمَنْ نَكَتْ فَإِنَّمَا يَنْكُتْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ

Whoever breaks his faith, he breaks it only to the injury of his own soul (48:10)”

Expressing his regret, Talhah said, “I seek Allah’s forgiveness.” He went back. Sensing that Talhah intends to leave the battlefield, Marwan ibn Hakam threw an arrow towards him. Talhah died immediately without having a chance to inform the people of Basrah of their treacherous and unjust act which he and al-Zubayr had planned.

Addressing his army, `Ali said, “When you defeat the Army of the Camel, do not kill the wounded and the captives, nor follow the deserters, nor expose people’s private parts, nor cut anyone’s ears or noses, nor loot anyone’s property except what they leave in the battlefield.”

The enemy's defeat was certain. Yet, no order of attack was issued. The Army of the Camel attacked the right wing of `Ali's army, pushing them back. It was at this moment that the order of attack was issued and the Army of the Camel suffered a disgraceful defeat, this is `Ali's kindness towards the enemy and his mercy on people in the battlefield. Does history remember a ruler to have behaved like this towards the rebels?

The Battle of Siffin

Siffin was a region by the river Euphrates. When the army of `Ali reached it, he was told to block the army of Mu`awiyah from having access to the river, but `Ali did not accept the idea. Mu`awiyah took advantage of this situation, seized all the ways leading to the river and blocked the army of `Ali from having access to the river. By his command, the army opened ways to the river. To retaliate, Imam `Ali's companions decided to block Mu`awiyah's army from access to river, but again `Ali did not permit. The Battle of Siffin lasted for eighteen months. The offensive by `Ali's army was started hoping that the Syrians would give up and less blood would be shed!

The Battle Of Nahrawan

The best definition we can use in describing the Kharijites is that they were people afflicted with the disease of enmity with `Ali and they did not stop this enmity until they killed him. If we use the word disease, it is because enmity with anyone needs a reason. A person bears enmity to someone for personal reasons, for being jealous of that person's position, for having been hurt or harmed by that person, for having experienced a tyranny, a family feud or religious differences. None of those reasons existed for those who were hostile to `Ali. They simply could not see `Ali alive and victorious.

These people were in the army of `Ali in the Battle of Siffin but when he overcame the enemy, they drew their swords against him and deprived him of victory. They did not accept the intelligent arbiter Imam `Ali had chosen and selected the arbiter who was `Ali's enemy! They were the enemies of Mu`awiyah too but unknowingly assisted him and compelled `Ali to accept the mediation of the arbiters.

When the treachery of mediation became clear, they started to disagree with `Ali so much so that they disrespected him in his presence and absence. `Ali too had left them to themselves showing no reaction to what they said and did.

`Ali's friends who could not tolerate hearing their sarcastic and insulting remarks would often ask `Ali to suppress and imprison them or check their activities. However, `Ali would not agree, saying, "As long as they do not do anything against us, we will not harm them nor will we cut their stipend from the public fund. We will allow them to come to the mosque but if they kill anyone, we will retaliate."

The inner disease of Kharijites was being intensified. Hence, they could not stay in Kufah, for they saw `Ali there. So, they left it for Nahrawan. Still `Ali let them act freely and had nothing to do with them. When he set out to suppress Mu`awiyah, he wrote a letter as such, "We are going to suppress

your enemies, a common enemy; come long with us.” The Kharijites did not accept the offer and declared war against him! Still `Ali did not go to them and set off for Syria. `Ali was asked to put an end to the enmity of Kharijites first and then set out for Syria. It was not accepted and the order to move to Syria was issued.

`Ali’s army was on the way to Syria when news reached that the Kharijites have become active, forcing people to curse `Ali and anyone who does not comply with it, is killed. `Ali headed for Nahrawan, the Kharijites base. He still refused to enter battle against them. So, he started to admonish and guide them. He managed to dissuade many of them from fighting though they refused to assist `Ali in suppressing Mu`awiyah. Those Kharijites who were dissuaded to fight `Ali returned to Kufah but remained `Ali’s enemies.

The seeds of Kharijites in the history of Islam were sown by some people and the rest did not accept any option but fighting and preferred death to living with `Ali. So they attacked `Ali’s army with the motto of ‘we are going to Paradise’. Still no order of counterattack was issued until one of `Ali’s soldiers was killed. It was then that Imam `Ali said, “It is now the right time to fight them.” `Ali’s army started its attack which put the Kharijites to flight.^[21]

A Light Diet

Suwayd ibn Ghafalah reports: I went to see Imam `Ali while he was in governor’s seat. Before the Imam was a bowl of sour yoghurt the smell of which I could feel. A loaf of bread of barley the husk of which I could see was in his hand. The Imam was breaking the dry bread either with his hand or with his knee!

At this time, I said to Fiqmah, his slave-girl who was standing by him, “Don’t you fear Allah for treating this old man as such? Don’t you sieve the barley flour?” Fiqmah said, “He has asked me not to sieve the flour.” `Ali asked, “What are you talking about?” I told him the story. At this time, `Ali said, “May my parents be ransom for the one for whom the flour was not sieved, nor did he eat fill bread of wheat for three straight days until he passed away.”^[22]

One Of The Days

Abu-Matar, one of the inhabitants of Basrah, reports: I was coming out of Kufah Mosque when suddenly a man called from behind, “Hold up your garment which makes it last longer and cut your hair short, if you are a Muslim.”

I followed him while he had covered himself with a cloak and held a lash in his hand like a Bedouin, “Who is this man?” He said, “I find you a stranger in this city!” I said, “Yes, I am a man from Basrah.” He said, “This is `Ali, the Leader of the believers.”

I followed him until he reached the neighborhood of Banu-Mohit which was the camels’ market-place. There, he said, “Sell but do not take oath, for it will destroy goods and blessing.” Then, he went to date sellers. There, he found a slave-girl crying. He asked the reason. She said, “This man sold me date for one dirham but my master did not like it and he does not take it

back.” The Imam said, “Take back your date and give her back the one dirham, for she is a slave and has no authority.” He pushed back the Imam! I said, “Do you know this man?” He said, “No.” I said, “He is `Ali ibn Abi-Talib, the Leader of the believers.” The man took back the date and gave back her money.

Then, the man said, “I hope you are pleased with me.” He said, “Now that you have given people’s right, I am pleased with you.” Then while passing through the date sellers, he said, “Give of these dates to the needy so that Allah will bless your business.” Then he went to fish mongers telling them to be careful not to sell the fish which has died in water! Then, he went to the market of canvas sellers and visited an old man selling canvas and said, “I want a shirt for three Dirhams.” As soon as the man recognized him, he refused to sell anything to him. He went to another seller but since he too recognized the Imam, he did not buy from him until he came to a young man. He bought a shirt for three Dirhams, put it on while praying as such to Allah,

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي رَزَقَنِي مِنَ الرِّيشِ مَا أَجْمَلُ بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ وَأَوَارَى بِهِ عَوْرَتِي.

“Praise be to Allah who provided me with a good garment to adorn myself and to cover my private parts with.”

He was asked whether these were his words or he had heard it from Allah’s Messenger. He said, “I heard from the Holy Prophet saying it while he was wearing a garment.”

Amidst this, the father of the young man arrived. He was told that his son sold a shirt for three Dirhams to Amir al-Mu’minin. Turning to his son, he asked, “Why did you charge more than two Dirhams?” The father took the one dirham and came to Amir al-Mu’minin who was now sitting with Muslims at the gate of Rahbah, saying, “O Amir al-Mu’minin! Take this one dirham!” The Imam asked about the story of this dirham. The man said, “The price of the shirt was two Dirhams.” The Imam said, “He sold it with consent and I bought it with consent.”^[23]

Recompense

In the eighth year after Hijrah, Mecca was conquered by Allah’s Messenger. The House of Allah was purified from the filth of idols with `Ali’s idol-breaking act. Allah’s Messenger sent groups to propagate Islam and to invite people to monotheism. He did not declare war. One of these persons was Khalid ibn Walid who was dispatched not as fighter but as propagator. On his way Khalid came to a tribe one of whom had killed his uncle in the pre-Islamic era and had looted whatever belonged to him. When Khalid was alight near the water sources of Banu-Judhaymah, they took arms. Khalid said, “Put aside your arms, for people have become Muslims.” He had their hands tied and killed whomever he wished. When the news came to Allah’s Messenger, he raised his hands saying, “O Lord! I seek immunity from what Khalid has done!” Then, the Holy Prophet sent `Ali with money to look into their affairs. `Ali gave them back whatever Khalid had taken from them.

He paid the blood money for all and the extra money which `Ali had with him was paid to them by the command of the Holy Prophet. When `Ali

came back, the Holy Prophet said that what he had done was good and right. On the words of Ya`qubi, the Holy Prophet said, “What you have done is better than the red camels.” It was at this time addressing `Ali, Allah’s Messenger said, “May my father and mother be your ransom.”^[24]

The Blazing Iron Bar

Mu`awiyah asked `Aqil to tell him the story of the blazing iron bar. `Aqil said: Life had become extremely hard for me. I pleaded with my brother `Ali but he took no heed of it. One day, I took my children in whose appearance poverty and indigence could be seen to `Ali. He said, “Come at night so that I will give you something.” At night, when one of my sons was holding my hand led me to `Ali. I said to my son, “Go and sit at a distance.” Having this impression that `Ali was going to give me a purse of money, I stretched out my hand. But what I touched was a blazing iron bar. I withdrew my hand with a loud cry. At this moment `Ali said, “This is the iron bar blazed by the fire of the world. How will be our situation on the Judgment Day when we are fastened with the chains of Hell?” Then he recited this verse:

إِذِ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ وَالسَّلَاسِلُ يُسْحَبُونَ (71)

When the fetters and the chains shall be on their necks; they shall be dragged (40:71)

Imam `Ali (a.s), commented, “You have no right on me except what Allah has made obligatory for you. Go back home!”

Mu`awiyah was extremely amazed and said, “Alas, alas! Women are barren to give birth to his peer.”^[25]

An Extraordinary Example of Piety

Imam al-Sadiq has been reported by Mu`awiyah Ibn `Ammar as saying:

If there were two options for `Ali to do something for the sake of Allah, he would choose the harder. O people of Kufah, you all know that when he was ruling in this city, he used his income in Medina for living. He would put the roasted flour he ate in a bag and seal it not be mixed with anything else. Who was more pious than `Ali in the world!^[26]

Dry Bread And Sour Yoghurt

`Aqabah ibn `Alqamah is reported by Na`r ibn Mansur as saying: I went to `Ali’s house in Kufah, finding before him a bowl of sour yoghurt which harmed me as well as several pieces of dry bread. I said, “O Amir al-Mu`minin! Are you eating such a food?” He said, “Allah’s Messenger ate from bread drier than this.” Referring to his garment, `Ali said, “Allah’s Messenger would wear a garment with a more rough texture. If I do not follow his example, I fear not to join him.”^[27]

Self-Sacrifice and Generosity

In the Battle of the Camel, the soldiers who fought along with him were twelve thousand in number. When the fighting came to an end with the defeat of the enemies, Amir al-Mu`minin had the public fund divided with each person having five hundred Dirhams as a share. `Ali took the same amount of dirham for himself. Addressing the public fund, he said,

“Deceive anyone but me.”

After the division of the public fund, a man came about saying, “O Amir al Mu’minin! My heart was with you though I could no take part in the battle. Do me a favor by giving something to me.” The Imam gave his share to him, going back home empty-handed.”^[28]

Pardon

One day, Amir al-Mu’minin was in the gathering of his companions. While a biased man of Kharijites was present, the Imam was admonishing his friends. His heavenly words were so charming which impressed that blind-hearted man but because of his inner enmity to `Ali, he impudently said, “May Allah kill him for his unbelief. How knowledgeable he is!”

Hearing such insolence, the companions of the Imam made an attempt to kill him but Imam `Ali said, “Grant a respite; calm down; either curse against curse or pardon against sin.”^[29]

A Model Of Generosity

An indigent man came to Imam `Ali saying, “I am suffering from three diseases: body, poverty, and ignorance.” The Imam said, “O Arab brother! You should see a physician for your physical disease, a wise man for ignorance and a generous person for poverty.” The Arab said, “You are a physician, a wise man, and a generous man at the same time.” Amir al-Mu’minin ordered to give three thousand Dirhams from the public fund, saying, “Spend one thousand Dirhams on your physical disease, one thousand Dirhams on your poverty and one thousand Dirhams on your ignorance.”^[30]

Favoring A Servant

When Amir al-Mu’minin ruled over the vast Islamic territories, he along with Qanbar (his servant) went to a draper, asking, “Do you have two shirts for five Dirhams?” The young draper said, “Yes, but one is better than the other; one costs three Dirhams and the other costs two Dirhams.” Imam `Ali said, “Bring both of them.” When the young man brought the two shirts, the Imam said to Qanbar, “Take the shirt which costs three Dirhams.” Qanbar said, “O Amir al-Mu’minin! You go up the pulpit and deliver sermons for people. You take the better one.” The Imam said, “Qanbar! You are young and have the desires of a young man. I am ashamed before Allah to count myself superior to you! I heard Allah’s Messenger saying:

Whatever you wear, let your servant wear too and whatever you eat let your servants eat too.” Then, the Imam put on the shirt which cost two Dirhams realizing that the sleeves were too long so he said to the draper, “Cut the sleeve short a little bit.” He did so and said, “Let me fold it, old man!” The Imam said, “Let it be as it is. There is no time for such a thing.”^[31]

Guidelines to rulers

Reporting Imam al-Sadiq (a.s), `Abd al-Rahman ibn Sulayman says: Amir al-Mu'minin sent a man to the desert of Kufah to collect alms, saying:

O servant of Allah! Fear Allah and do not prefer the world to the Hereafter. Be careful about what I have trusted you. Guard Allah's right until you reach such and such tribe. Place yourself in their region with out residing near their houses. Then proceed towards them solemnly so as to be among them. Greet them and say: O servants of Allah! The friend of Allah has sent men to you to receive what is due to Allah from you. Is there anything due to Allah in your property to pay to the friend of Allah? If anyone them of answers negatively, say no more. If a rich man answers affirmatively, go with him, without intimidating him. Do not promise (of anything) but good to him until you reach his camels and cattle. Do not go among them unless you are given permission, for most of them belong to him. Say to him: O servant of Allah! Will you permit me to go among them? If he says yes, do not go among the camels and the cattle like a rough man who has an upper hand.

Divide them into two halves. Then let him choose the one he likes. Do not protest him for his choice. Divide the remaining into two. Keep on this division until what is due to Allah will remain and then collect it. If he asks you to cancel the division, accept it. Mix them altogether and so the same as you have done before until you collect of the camels and cattle what is due to god. Then take for yourself an agent who is benevolent, Muslim, sympathetic, trustworthy and a safe keeper who does not treat them roughly. Therefore send to me immediately whatever you collect of each of the tribes to be put in a place Allah has commanded.

If your emissary brings them here, advise him not to hide the young camel from its mother, nor milk it fully so as to harm the young camel, nor tire it by riding but to ride them equally, to take them to a place to drink water, not to push them from pasture to the plain road when they are having rest and at times it is hard for them, to make use of them softly so that Allah willing, they will come to us fat and fleshy, not tired out or exhausted so that they will be divided according to the Book of Allah and the tradition of Allah's Messenger.

This attitude will make your reward greater and is closer to your interest. Allah will look at them, you, your endeavor and sympathy with the one who has sent you and the ones who need the alms.

Allah's Messenger has said: Allah favors an agent who does his best to obey his leader with sympathy.^[32]

Fighting Oppression

Imam al-Baqir has reported: One Day when Amir al-Mu'minin was returning home, found a woman waiting. Seeing him, she came near and said, "I am in trouble. My husband oppresses me. He has turned me out form the house and has threatened to beat me. If I go to him, he will beat me. I request you to do justice between us." Amir al-Mu'minin said, "O Servant of Allah! It is too hot now. Wait until it cools down in the afternoon. Then I shall come with you and redress your grievances." The

woman said, “If I stay out too long, I am afraid it may increase his anger.” For a moment he bowed his head and then raised it up saying to himself:

By Allah, justice to the oppressed should not be delayed. The right of the oppressed should certainly be taken from the oppressor; and every fear should be taken out from her heart so that she may stand boldly before the oppressor and demand her right.

The Imam further asked where her house was and she told him. He accompanied her to her house, stood at the door and called loudly, “O master of the house! Peace be upon you.” A young man came out. He was her husband. He did not recognize the Imam; he found that an old man of about sixty years had accompanied her and assumed that she had brought him for support and mediation, but he kept silent. At this moment `Ali said, “This lady has a complaint against you. She says that you have done injustice to her and turned her out of the house. Besides you have threatened to beat her. I have come here to tell you to fear Allah and be kind to your wife.”

The man said, “In what way does it concern you if I have not treated my wife well? Yes, I had threatened to beat her, but now, since she has brought you to plead for her, I shall throw her into fire and burn her alive.”

`Ali was disturbed by the impudence of the man. Drawing out his sword, he said, “I am admonishing you from bad deeds but you are replying me in such manner clearly saying to burn this woman in fire! Do you think there is no authority in this world?” His loud voice drew the attention of the passers by and a huge crowd gathered. Whoever came saluted him respectfully saying, “Peace be on you Amir al-Mu`minin.” When the rude young man realized as to whom he was talking, he trembled and supplicated, “O Amir al-Mu`minin! Forgive me. I confess my faults and promise that henceforth I shall obey my wife.” `Ali turned to the woman and told her to go to the house and cautioned her not to behave in such a manner that her husband had to be angry again.^[33]

Notes

- [1] Al-Manaqib: 1112/2.
- [2] Al-Kafi: 268/7, H 40.
- [3] Al-Amali: 467, H 10.
- [4] Al-Manaqib: 114/2.
- [5] Al-Manaqib: 115/2.
- [6] Bihar al-Anwar, 54/41, H 1.
- [7] Al-Manaqib: 104/2.
- [8] Al-Mahasin: 629/2, 12, H 104.
- [9] Hilyat al-Awliya': 139/4.
- [10] Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah: 65/17.
- [11] Al-Manaqib: 98/2.
- [12] Al-Gharat: 35/1.
- [13] Al-Gharat: 36/1.
- [14] Al-Gharat: 46/1.
- [15] Ihqaq al-Haqq; 539/8.
- [16] Kashf al-Ghummah: 173/1.
- [17] Al-Manaqib: 97/2.
- [18] The Path of `Ali: 42.
- [19] Al-Manaqib: 74/2.
- [20] Al-Manaqib: 76/2.
- [21] The path of `Ali: 53.
- [22] Kashf al-Yaqin: 86.
- [23] Kashf al-Ghummah: 163/1.
- [24] Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah: 430/2.
- [25] Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah: 253/11.
- [26] Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah: 201/2.
- [27] Al-Gharat: 55/1.
- [28] Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah: 249/1.
- [29] Nahj al-Balaghah: 880, Maxim, 412.
- [30] Jami` al-Akhbar: 138.
- [31] Al-Gharat: 65/1.
- [32] Al-Gharat: 75/1.
- [33] Al-Manaqib: 106/2.

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