

THE EMPHASIS ON JUSTICE IN *NAHJUL BALAGHAH*

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ABSTRACT: Justice (*'adl*), according to the Shi'a school of thought,¹ is one of the principles of religion; anything God has said and any right He has given over anyone is based on justice. The Quran places emphasis on justice and the Prophet of God was a perfect manifestation of justice. The repetition of the term 'justice' appears more so in *Nahj ul-Balaghah* than in the Quran and Sunnah. This is because, on the one hand, after the Prophet's demise, streams of revenues to the treasury of the Muslims began to flow; on the other, there was the caliph's discrimination in their distribution of revenues among the social classes. Thus, drastic class differences overcame society. Imam Ali was faced with two facts: 1) He was himself a man of justice and piety, and 2) he was faced with people who were unacquainted with the Sunnah and *sira* of the Prophet, and who had not observed a trace of justice in the Muslim community. Therefore, a separation was placed between society and justice, and it was Imam Ali who put forth his greatest effort in implementing justice.

¹ Or Imamiyyah, "... a title for those who believe in the necessity of Imamate and its continuity in all ages, and that every Imam must be explicitly designated, and must also be infallible and perfect." (al-Mufid, p. 36)

Introduction

Justice (*‘adl*) means to divide something equally, or to establish balance and equilibrium among all, whether a material matter or spiritual one. Relating to the second meaning, the Prophet said, “The heavens and the earth have stood with justice”² meaning all of the components of the universe have been established with equilibrium such that if a fraction of it were out of place or disproportionate, the global system would fall apart.

According to the Shi‘a school of thought, it is important for justice to be among the fundamentals of religion. That is, to acknowledge that anything God says and any right He gives over anyone is founded on justice.

Justice is an important pillar in Islam. In the Quran, being just is to achieve piety:

اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى

*Be fair; that is nearer to Godwariness.*³

Throughout his blessed life, the Prophet – a perfect exemplar of justice – invited others to be just and not one-sided. When the Prophet, in order to help in paying the blood money of two individuals from Bani Sulaym,⁴ went to Bani Qurayzah, they secretly conspired to kill him. God made their plot known to the Prophet and the following verse was revealed:

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَتَاؤُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ آلَا تَعْدِلُوا

*...and ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair.*⁵

In other words, do not unjustly harm someone out of an aversion you hold in your heart for those who wronged you.

² بالعدل قامت السموات و الارض [Tafsir Safi, Commentary on the verse 7 of Chapter al-Rahman]

³ The Table (*al-Ma'idah*) [5:8].

⁴ An agreement was signed between the Jews and the Messenger of God to help one another in paying the blood money.

⁵ The Table (*al-Ma'idah*) [5:8].

When the Prophet sent Khalid ibn al-Walid for propagation (*tabligh*), Khalid senselessly killed many people from the tribe of Bani Jadhimah. In response, the Prophet raised his hands in prayer and said, "O Allah, I loathe Khalid." He then sent Ali to pay the blood money to the families of those who were killed, and to return any stolen property.

Those who are familiar with the Prophet's life (*sira*) know that when he lived in Mecca, the polytheists would severely agitate him. In Medina also, he was not spared from verbal abuse and malice. However, he did not get angry or curse them on account of their persecutions. Instead, from time to time he would ask God to guide them. When dividing the spoils of the Battle of Hunayn, a man from the tribe of Tamim named Thu al-Khuwaysara told the Prophet, "Be just; you have deviated from justice." The Prophet was visibly upset and rejected their accusations saying, "Woe to you, if I do not act justly, who will?"

Without a doubt, Islam is a just religion and the Prophet is the enforcer and embodiment of justice. He would exercise justice to the point where during the last days of his life, in the mosque of Medina, he said, "Whoever I am indebted to, come and demand it" as the Quran initially ordered him to say:

امنت بما انزل الله من كتابٍ وامرت لاعدل بينكم

*I believe in whatever Book Allah has sent down. I have been commanded to do justice among you.*⁶

This is similar to what the Muslims were commanded to do:

وَ إِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ

*...and, when you judge between people, to judge with fairness.*⁷

⁶ Consultation (*al-Shura*) [42:15].

⁷ Women (*al-Nisa*) [4:58].

Implementing justice has been urged more than ten times in the Quran – justice with the self, justice between the self and people, and justice between the self and God.

This was a brief mention regarding justice and its implementation during the Prophet's age wherein we can ascertain its importance in Islam. However, in Imam Ali's speeches, sermons, letters, and short sayings, we see more than triple the amount of times where he instructs the people to exercise justice as well as instructing governors and agents to apply justice and refrain from partiality. Why is justice emphasized in Imam Ali's speeches more than the Quran? By understanding Islamic society in the year 35 AH onward the reason becomes clear. And those who are familiar with Arabian history back then can understand this era.

One of the reasons for injustice is the increase of money and longing for status. In the Prophet's time, money was not enough to fight over and the little money people acquired would be distributed equally amongst everyone. Moreover, they would not take a wage for the work they vowed to do. Rather, there was no wage to take; by committing to work, they wanted God's satisfaction in serving the people. This changed, however, after the Prophet's death.

On the one hand, streams of income from the opened lands flowed into the state treasury; on the other, when it came to using the state treasury, Muslims were categorized into those who accepted Islam earlier and who those accepted it afterwards. As a result, one group would attain greater advantages without having done anything for it.

During the first years of the second caliph's administration, the harm of creating social classes was not yet revealed. Over time, its effects became apparent; that is to say, a deep social gap among the people emerged. Achieving piety, which during and shortly after the Prophet's era was recognized as an admirable principle, was now replaced with attaining the material world. Conversely, family rivalry and racial competition that was hidden beneath the ashes of Islamic equality flared. Tamimi would pride

over Makhzumi and Umawi over them both and all three would pride over Yamani. In such a society, Ali assumed the caliphate, and what an unfitting time it was!

Knowing all too well the unfavorable situation, he said, "Leave me and seek someone else. We are facing a matter that has several facets and colors in which neither the hearts can bear nor can intelligence accept."⁸

Ali was a man of justice and piety; as with the rest of his virtues, these two were acquired from the Prophet. He wanted justice to rule over the people, most of whom had only heard of the name justice and had not seen any indication of piety; people who had neither seen the Prophet nor knew his Sunnah well. From the day they entered society, they became acquainted with fighting and obtaining spoils of war.

Ali was the example of justice when the world could not tolerate it. They killed Ali, thus removing justice and replacing it with oppression which continues until the day universal justice will be established.

Bibliography

1. al-Mufid, Shaykh Muhammad b. M. b. Nu'man (1413 A.H.), *Awa'il al-Maqalat* (Qum: Kungereh-e Sheykh-e Mufid, 1413). In this edition the main text starts on page 33
2. *Nahj al-Balaghah*

⁸ *Nahj ul-Balagha*, Sermon 92:

دَعُونِي وَالْتَمِسُوا عَيْرِي؛ فَإِنَّا مُسْتَحْتَبُونَ أَمْرًا لَهُ وَجْهٌ وَالْوَأْنُ؛ لَا تَقُومُ لَهُ الْقُلُوبُ، وَلَا تَثْبُتُ عَلَيْهِ الْعُقُولُ

