

THE MARTYRDOM OF IMAM HUSSAIN

By Syed Abul Ala Moududi.

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THE OBJECTIVE OF BEARING WITNESS

(مقصد شہادت)

Every year, in the month of Muharram, millions of Shi'as and Sunnis alike, mourn Imam Husayn's martyrdom. It is regrettable, however, that of these mourners very few focus their attention on the objective for which the Imam not only sacrificed his life but also the lives of his kith and kin. It is but natural for his family members and those who foster feelings of love, respect and empathy for his family to express their grief over his martyrdom. The nature of this sadness and grief is apparent universally and also from those who bear relations with them. The moral appreciation and futility of this sentiment with the persona of this individual is nothing more than the love that bears out as a natural consequence with his relatives and sympathizers of his kin. But the question is, what is so particular about Imam Husayn that even though 1320 years have elapsed our grief is afresh? If his martyrdom was not for a sacred objective, the mere continuation of this remembrance on a personal level is meaningless. And in the eyes of Imam Husayn, what value would this mere personal love and devotion hold? If his own self were dearer than the objective, then he would not have sought sacrifice. His sacrifice bears witness that he held the objective more dear than his own self. Therefore, if we do not work for this objective and to the contrary work against it, our mere continuity of lamentation and the cursing of his killers will not earn us an appreciation from the Imam on the day of resurrection, nor should we expect that our actions will hold value with God.

Now, we are to ask, what was that objective? Did the Imam affirm his claim to authority and rule by virtue of personal right, for which he staked his life to vindicate his claim? Anyone who knows the high moral standard of Imam Husayn's household cannot harbor the vile notion that they would cause bloodshed among the Muslims to gain political power. Even for a moment if we consider this viewpoint acceptable – the opinion that this family held a personal right to rule- a glance at the fifty year history from Abu Bakr to Amir Muawiyah bears evidence that waging war and causing bloodshed merely to seize power had never been their motive. As a logical corollary, one has to admit that the Imam's keen eye discerned symptoms of decay and corruption in the system of Muslim society and the Islamic state, and thus he felt impelled to resist these forces –even if it required treading a path of war which he not only considered to be legitimate but an obligation as well.

CHANGE IN THE STATE'S TEMPERAMENT, OBJECTIVE AND RULE

(ریاست کے مزاج ، مقصد اور دستور کی تبدیلی)

What was that imminent change? Obviously people had not changed their religion. All people including the ruling class had faith in God, the Prophet and the Qur'an in the same manner as they did in the past. Laws for the state had not changed. Judicial courts carried out decisions of matters in the light of the Qur'an and tradition of the Prophet [sunna] during Bani Umayya's reign, as they were carried out prior to their reign of government. As a matter of fact, no legal change ever took place in any Muslim state in the world prior to the 19th century. Some people highlight Yazid's personal character, giving currency to a common misunderstanding that the stance taken by Imam and his uprising was to prevent the ascension to power of a man of reprehensible character. But in spite of presenting the worst possible picture of Yazid's character, and its acceptance thereof, still prevents us to accept, that even if the state is founded on correct principles, the ascension of a man of reprehensible character to the position of governance, is not a matter of concern, that would incur an impatience attitude from Imam Husayn: a man of wisdom, foresight and knowledge of the Shari'a. It is for this reason that the persona of the individual is not the correct reason for the mental perturbation of the Imam. A deep study of history will bring to our realization that Yazid's nomination as his father's successor, and his later coronation as king, marked a radical change in the object and conduct of the Islamic Constitution. Although the consequences of this change were not apparent at that instant, a farsighted person could easily comprehend the nature of the change, and the eventuality of the course it embarked upon. It was this change and the catastrophe towards which the Islamic State was heading that Imam foresaw, and he resolved to stake his life to prevent it.

POINT OF DEVIATION

(نقطہ انحراف)

In order to fully understand this situation, we have to find out the characteristic feature of the constitution that had been guiding the state administration for a period of forty years under the leadership of the Prophet and the rightly-guided caliphs. Further, what were the main features of the administrative system of a new Muslim state taking birth under the aegis of the Umayyad, Abbasid and subsequent dynasties right up from the time of Yazid's nomination? With this comparative study we shall be able to establish the course of its development, and what course it took after this point of deviation. Also from this comparative study we shall understand why a person who was brought up and trained under the guidance of the Prophet, Sayida Fatima and Hazrat 'Ali, and who shared the companionship of the best of the companions from his infancy to adulthood, would take a stand and resist the new change –irrespective of the consequences when the point of deviation was setting in.

BEGINNING OF KINGSHIP

(انسانی بادشاہی کا آغاز)

The first and foremost feature of the Islamic State would reflect that rather than mere oral assent, a conviction from the heart and conformity of deeds with actions attests and bears witness to the faith (in the following propositions): that the sovereignty of the Muslim state is wholly vested in the Supreme Being; the people are God's subjects; the rulers are accountable to God; the government does not exercise power over its subjects, nor are the subjects its slaves. The rulers are first to exercise their servitude and bondage to God and then to implement the divine laws among their subjects. Yazid's nomination as successor marked the beginning of that type of kingship in which the concept of God's sovereignty was reduced to mere oral assent. Practically, he adopted the same view that has always been maintained by monarchs, i.e. sovereignty is vested in the monarch and his family, and he is the undisputed master of the life, property, honor and every tangible and intangible entity of his subjects. The Divine Law, if instituted in his kingship, was enforced on the subjects; the King, his family, the nobles and the officials were exempted from it.

NEGLECT OF THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO ENJOIN WHAT IS RIGHT AND FORBID WHAT IS WRONG

(امر بالمعروف و نهى عن المنكر كما تعطل)

The objective of the Islamic State was to establish those virtues and their propagation that are dear to God, and to suppress and eradicate those evils that are disliked by Him. But after having chosen the path of monarchy, the objective of the state was none other than indulging in the possession of land, self-aggrandizement, the collection of tribute and the gratification of sensual desires. The monarchs were rarely inclined to serve the purpose of living up to the sacrament of witnessing [the shahada]. The monarchs, their nobles and their officials were instrumental in propagating vice than virtue. Most of the godly persons who contributed their mite to the promotion of good, suppression of vice, preaching the religion of Islam, compiling books on religion and carrying research work in Islamic studies –incurred the displeasure of the rulers and were hardly ever patronized. Despite the opposition of the state authorities they continued to adhere to their mission. Despite these efforts, the mode of life and the policy of the rulers, officers and their subordinates continuously led the Muslim society to moral degradation. For their own personal sake they even surpassed the limits, and did not hesitate to create obstacles in the propagation of Islam, and the worst example of this practice being the imposition of tax on the revert Muslims [those who revert back to Islam after being raised in a state other than submission].

The soul of the Islamic State rests in piety and fear of God, and it's witnessing is born by the head of the state. The state's employees, judges and military officers are imbued with this spirit, and in turn they infuse it into the society. But once they tread the path of monarchy, the Muslim states and their rulers adopted the pomp and pageantry of Caesar. Oppression and injustice overruled justice. Instead of righteousness, profligacy and luxury had come into vogue. The failure to distinguish between the lawfulness and unlawfulness of affairs, rendered in a lack of character and actions of the rulers. Politics was no longer cogent with morality. The rulers kept their subjects under fear instead of instilling the fear of God; and instead of awakening their faith and conscious they bought them by virtue of briberies.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ISLAMIC CONSTITUTION

(اسلامی دستور کے بنیادی اصول)

Such was the deplorable change in the spirit, purpose and character of the Muslim rulers. A similar change also appeared in the fundamental principles of the Islamic constitution. While the constitution was based on certain important principles, each of them underwent a transformation.

1. Free Election

(آزادانہ انتخاب)

A government is to be established on the free consent of the masses and this is the foundation of the Islamic constitution. [This was meant to ensure that] No individual by his struggle be able to secure power for himself, and that the masses should entrust power to best among the candidates after mutual consultation. Allegiance should not be secured based on rulership but be a consequence [of assuming power]. There should be no maneuvering to secure allegiance [or oath of fealty] on the individual's behalf. Everyone should be free to exercise their right to pay allegiance or to refuse it. Unless the oath of allegiance is secured, no one should seize power; and when confidence is lost [in his rule], no longer should the individual be in a position to rule. Each of the righteous successors to the Prophet came to power according to this prescribed article. In the case of Amir Muawiyah his position [of claim to succession] became dubious. This is the reason why he was not included among the righteous successors [of the Prophet], despite of his being a companion [of the Prophet]. And, eventually it was the drastic event of Yazid's nomination [as Muawiyah's successor] that overturned the [validity] of these articles. This resulted in the beginning of a chain of hereditary monarchy –and every since, the Muslims have not been able to revert back to the [principle of] electing a caliph. Now individuals had assumed rule not by virtue of free and consultative deliberations of the masses but by their dint of power. Allegiance was secured through power instead of securing power through allegiance. The masses were not free in giving or holding back their oaths of allegiance. Securing allegiance was no longer a prerequisite of acquiring power. In the first place, people had no option to refuse allegiance to the ruling individual. And even if people refused to give allegiance, the person ruling did not part with it [rule]. When Imam Malik during the reign of Mansor Abbasi committed the offense of asking the caliph to abstain from coercive method of securing allegiance, he was flogged and his arms were amputated.

2. Principle of Consultation

(شورائی نظام)

The second important article of this constitution was the establishment of a consultative system of government, where advice should be sought from individuals of learned, pious disposition [also possessing] sound judgment, who enjoy the confidence and trust of the masses. During the period of the righteous successors, members of the consultative council were not elected. By modern day standards they were elected by the consent of the people. They were not

appointed as advisors by the caliphs because they would serve as “yes men” or [men who would] serve their interests. As a matter of fact, they chose the best persons from amongst the community with all sincerity and an unbiased attitude, who were expected to uphold the truth; express their opinion according to the dictates of their conscience with integrity. There was not the least suspicion that they would permit the government to astray. Had elections been held in this time in accordance with the existing norms, the general Muslims would have reposed confidence in the same persons only. With the advent of the monarchy, the consultative system underwent a transformation. The monarchical administration was based on autocratic and despotic methods. The princes, sycophants, courtiers, provincial governors and military commanders served in council as members. Adviser’s positions were assumed only by those persons who, if opinion polls had been taken in their case, would have scored thousands votes of censure against one vote of confidence. The truth loving, the learned and the God fearing persons who enjoyed public confidence had no value in the eyes of despotic rulers. Instead, they incurred the king’s wrath or were looked upon with suspicion.

3. Freedom for Expression of Opinion

(اظہار رائے کی آزادی)

The third principle of the constitution provided for the freedom of expression. The furtherance of virtue and suppression of evils have been enjoined by Islam not only as the right of Muslims, but as an obligation. Freedom of conscience and speech was the pivot on which the Islamic society and state administration functioned in the right direction. The people must have the liberty to find fault with the most prominent among the Muslims in case they went astray and be outspoken in all matters. During the tenure of the righteous caliphs, the rights of the people were not only protected, but the caliphs regarded it as their duty and encouraged the people in the discharge of such a duty. Freedom of speech, giving a warning and demanding an explanation from the Caliph himself was not restricted only to the members of the consultative council, but this was enjoyed by each and every individual Muslim. If they exercised this right, they were not taken to task. On the other hand, their bold step was extolled and applauded. This freedom was not a gift of the ruler, but it was a constitutional right bestowed upon them by Islam and they regarded it as their duty to pay due respect to it [i.e. the masses exercising their rights]. The use of this privilege for the vindication of truth was an obligation entrusted on every Muslim by God and his apostle, and its very purpose served to keep the atmosphere of the society and state congenial for the fulfillment of this obligation, which [upholding this right] was considered to be an integral part of the function of the Caliphate.

With the beginning of monarchy, the voice of conscience was stifled and freedom [for expression of opinion] was denied. Now the norm in session was that if any one had to voice their opinion, it should be in the favor of the ruler, or else they should maintain silence if the urge of conscience was so powerful that one could not desist from declaring the truth, they had to be prepared for the imprisonment or loss of life. This policy, slowly and gradually led the Muslims to a [moral] decay and they became discouraged, turned coward and time servers. The number of individuals who could risk their life by adhering to truth began to diminish. Flattery and wickedness loomed at large in the society and adherence to principles of truth and rectitude lost

their value. Highly qualified and honest persons severed their relations with the government. People disliked the monarchical government so much that their hearts held no desire to uphold it. When a new regime emerged to displace the old one, people did not move in support of the later. One regime succeeded another. People witnessed the incoming and out going spectacle as passive spectators without evincing any interest therein.

4. Accountability before the Creator and His Creation

(خدا اور خلق کے سامنے جوابدہی)

The fourth principle, closely related to the third principle [freedom for expression of opinion], was that both the Caliph and his government are accountable before God and God's creation. As far as the sense of this responsibility is concerned, it kept the righteous caliphs restless day and night. And in relation to the accountability before [God's] creation, each of them considered himself accountable before the masses. It was not necessary that the caliph should be questioned before the consultative council only after raising a call motion. They faced the public five times, every day in the congregational prayer at the mosque. Every week on Fridays, the caliphs acquainted the masses with the affairs of the state and also lent them ears. They moved about in the marketplace without being escorted with body-guards and mixed with the people unprotected by a security force. The portals of the government buildings were open and the caliph was accessible to everyone. On all such occasions, one could solicit questions and seek replies. They [the caliphs] had to be ready to be questioned by anyone, at any time. The right to submit questions [to the caliph] was not restricted to the representatives alone, but was enjoyed and exercised by every individual. Caliphs assumed power with the consent of the masses and they [masses] were the supreme authority competent to remove a caliph and elect another in his place. The elected caliph did not, therefore anticipate any threat in meeting the masses, and neither were they afraid of being removed from the office. The monarchist government was devoid of the concept of accountability [before God or His creation]. For them the accountability to the Creator was a mere oral assent and was rarely translated into action. And as to accountability to the masses, nobody had the courage to ask them for an explanation [of their deeds]. Caliphs exercised absolute authority over them. They had acquired power by the dint of force, and their slogan was a challenge: to those who had the might, to wrestle power from their hands. How can such individuals face the masses, and how can they have access to them? Even when they offered prayers, it was done either in well guarded mosques in special locations, or if in an open place, they were generally surrounded by their close associates. Whenever they went in vehicles, they had an armed police guard both in front and behind to keep the way clear of traffic. There was scarcely any chance of their coming across the public.

5. The Public Treasury, a Trust

(بیت المال - ایک امانت)

The fifth principle of the Islamic constitution laid down that the public treasury was God's property and a trust from the Muslims. Nothing should be received except through lawful means, and nothing should be spent on except lawful purposes. The Caliph enjoyed only so much jurisdiction over it as a trustee has over the property of a minor orphan under his custody, as

[the Qur'an says IV:6 Whoever is rich, let him abstain altogether, and whoever is poor, let him eat reasonably. The Caliph was to be accountable for its income and expenditure and the Muslims held every right to ask the caliph for its distribution as well. The righteous Caliphs meticulously followed this principle. Whatever was deposited in the treasury was done so according to the principles of Islamic law, and whatever was spent was done so for due needs. Whoever was well-to-do, performed honorary services without drawing a single penny from the public treasury towards his remuneration. Moreover, he never hesitated to spend out of his pocket for the nation. Those who could not serve without emoluments, they took the minimum to meet the essential requirements of life. Every reasonable person would admit that the remuneration they took was far less than what was actually due. Even a hostile critic would not dare to criticize it. Every Muslim had the right to demand the accounts of the income and expenditure of the public treasury, and the Caliphs were always prepared for accountability. A common man could submit a question to the Caliph: how he was able to prepare such a lengthy tunic for himself although the dimensions of the sheets of the cloth received from Yemen could not make one of so big a size? But when the Caliphate degenerated into monarchy, the public treasury became the exclusive property of the monarch instead of the Divine and of the masses. Money was being received both through lawful and unlawful resources and squandered in legal and illegal ways. No one dared to hold them accountable. The entire revenue of the state was a source of enjoyment which was being exploited by everyone from an ordinary letter bearer right up to the state administrator, according to their capabilities. They were completely unmindful of the fact that authority over administration was not a license for misappropriating the public trust. They were fully convinced that they could continue to devour the public treasury and no one would hold them accountable [for their deeds].

6. Rule of the Law

(قانون کی حکمرانی)

The sixth principle of this constitution was that the country will be governed by law (i.e. the law of God and His prophet). Nobody should be over-and-above the law, nor should they transgress the limits demarcated by law. There should be uniform legal provision for all from a common man to the head of the state, and its enforcement should be for all without discrimination. Partiality should not be allowed to intrude into matters of justice and equity, and the courts of law should be free from being influenced. The righteous Caliphs had set the best example of adherence to this principle. In spite of enjoying more power than monarchs, they strictly adhered to this Divine Law. Friendship and nepotism never induced the Caliphs to ignore the prescribed rules and regulations, nor their displeasure caused harm to any one against the canons of the Islamic law. If any one happened to infringe their right, the matter was referred to court, just like an ordinary citizen. In case some one had a complaint against them, grievances were addressed in the court of law. Similarly the governors and commanders in chief were held in the grip of law, and no one dared influence the judge in the judicial matters. Anyone who contravened the provisions of the law had no chance of escaping the legal consequences. No sooner the Caliphate was converted to monarchism, this article [of the constitution] was consigned to oblivion. Not only the kings, princes, nobles, officials and commanders, but even favorite valets and maid servants connected with the palace were considered over and above

the law. People were physically and morally at their mercy. There were two balances of justice: one for the strong weak and second for the influential. Pressure was brought to bear on the judges' decisions in the courts, and those who observed integrity in deciding cases had to pay a heavy price for their integrity and scrupulous regard for justice. The God-fearing jurists preferred bearing torture and imprisonment to becoming instrumental in perpetrating aggression and high-handedness, lest they fall prey to Divine chastisement.

7. Complete Equality in Rights and Status

(حقوق اور مراتب کے لحاظ سے کامل مساوات)

The seventh principle of the Islamic Constitution pertained to complete equality in rights and status, which was completely assured in the early period of the Islamic State. There was no distinction among the Muslims on the basis of race, language and place of birth. No one enjoyed superiority over another on the basis of clan, family and race. There was equality in the rights and status of all those who believed in God and His Apostle. If preference was to be accorded, it was accorded based on character, capability attitude and service. When the Caliphate was replaced with monarchism, the demons of prejudice and bigotry raised their heads. The tribes related to the monarchs were assigned position of advantages over other tribes. Prejudice and distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs was revived and conflicts emerged. History bears witness to the extent of damage caused to the Islamic entity by these factional wranglings.

IMAM HUSAYN'S CHARACTER AS A BELIEVER

(امام حسین رض کا مومنا نہ کردار)

These were the changes that appeared in the wake of converting the Islamic Caliphate into a monarchy. No one can deny that Yazid's nomination as successor to his father was the starting point of all these transformations. It cannot be gainsaid that after a short span of time from the point of origin, all the corrupt practices mentioned above came into existence. At the time when this revolutionary step was taken, even though these evils had not yet surfaced, a man of vision could have predicted these inevitable consequences of such a beginning. And predicted that the reforms introduced by Islam in the administrative and political phases of the state would be rendered null and void by these changes. This is the reason why Imam Husayn could not remain indifferent, and he decided to stem the tide of the evil forces by taking the risk of confronting the worst consequences by rising in revolt against an established government. The consequences of this bold stand are known to every one. The fact which the Imam wanted to emphasize, by plunging himself into grave danger and enduring its consequences heroically, was that the fundamental features of an Islamic State are valuable assets. It would not be a bad bargain if a believer sacrificed his life and had his family members slain in return for this valuable objective. A believer should not hesitate to sacrifice all that he possesses for preventing the changes which constitutes a danger to the religion of Islam and the Muslim community which is a custodian of the principles mentioned above. One is at liberty to contemptuously disregard it as merely a maneuver for securing political power, but in the eyes

of Husayn Ibn 'Ali, it was primarily a religious obligation. He therefore laid down his life in this cause gaining the crown of martyrdom.

Translation

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