

Ohutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, July 8, 2006

Alhamdu lillah, wa ash hadu ala ila ha ill lallah

Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim

[4:59] O you who believe, you shall obey GOD, and you shall obey the messenger, and those in charge among you. If you dispute in any matter, you shall refer it to GOD and the messenger, if you do believe in GOD and the Last Day. This is better for you, and provides you with the best solution. [4:80] Whoever obeys the messenger is obeying GOD. As for those who turn away, we did not send you as their guardian. From these verses we understand that we have to be obedient to God first, then the messenger and finally to those in authority among us. However, this Quranic edict has been misconstrued and misinterpreted by most Muslims as well as people of other religions. Often, we see alien, unpopular and unelected rulers making their people suffer at one time or the other.

In this context, it is vital while choosing those who should be in authority (ulil amri) and who should rule should not be by “divine right” but by mutual consensus and should be worthy of the powerful political position conduct wise. However, situations could be different as in the past - [2:247] Their prophet said to them, "GOD has appointed Taloot (Saul) to be your king." They said, "How can he have kingship over us when we are more worthy of kingship than he; he is not even rich?" He said, "GOD has chosen him over you, and has blessed him with an abundance in knowledge and in body." GOD grants His kingship to whomever He wills. GOD is Bounteous, Omniscient.

Incidentally, the prophet mentioned here is Samuel (11th century B.C.) – the first Hebrew prophet and the last “Judge”. Saul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel. His name in Arabic is Taloot derived from “*tala*” denoting “*he or it was tall*”. 1 Samuel 10:23 - *And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.*

The Only Criterion For Distinguishing Among The People [49:13] O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another. The best among you in the sight of GOD is the most righteous. GOD is Omniscient, Cognizant. Hence, good conduct and piety (taqwa) rank higher than mere merit and personal ability to govern.

The ideal government is not meritocracy or government by those who are really or apparently able. The model would be rule by correctly guided persons who have knowledge, wisdom and sympathy. Fine behavior is a very all-inclusive term that is wide in its implication and should not be mistaken only for piousness, adherence to religious rituals, abstinence from sin and seclusion from the worldly affairs of society.

[42:37] They avoid gross sins and vice, and when angered they forgive. [42:38] They respond to their Lord by observing the Contact Prayers (Salat). Their affairs are decided

after due consultation among themselves, and from our provisions to them they give (to charity). [42:39] When gross injustice befalls them, they stand up for their rights.

When a fish turns stale it starts decomposing from the head. This is the situation with humans too throughout the ages. [17:16] If we are to annihilate any community, we let the leaders commit vast corruption therein. Once they deserve retribution, we annihilate it completely. So in any kind of political system, it is the head of the government and all those in authority below and besides him who should conform to the standards of morality and decency in public as well as in private, if the citizens of the state want to escape the justifiable obliteration. We have seen in history the crumbling of vast empires as well as the decadence of modern-day failed states.

Thus, it is the collective concern of the nation that their rulers should have good conduct and consequently it should be a combined and resolute effort, through all peaceful means, to see that their rulers do so and the untrustworthy and useless among them are weeded out. [3:104] Let there be a community of you who invite to what is good, advocate righteousness, and forbid evil. These are the winners.

The public should be aware and keep a vigilant eye (without being suspicious) on the behavior and character on their rulers and thus be enabled to take effective action against any offenders. The Quran does prescribe the function of a good government. *Reconcile The Believers* [49:9] If two groups of believers fought with each other, you shall reconcile them. If one group aggresses against the other, you shall fight the aggressing group until they submit to GOD's command. Once they submit, you shall reconcile the two groups equitably. You shall maintain justice; GOD loves those who are just.

The Real Family [49:10] The believers are members of one family; you shall keep the peace within your family and reverence GOD, that you may attain mercy. *Honesty & Justice Advocated* [4:58] GOD commands you to give back anything the people have entrusted to you. If you judge among the people, you shall judge equitably. The best enlightenment indeed is what GOD recommends for you. GOD is Hearer, Seer.

These verses are also covered by a very general exhortation in [3:110] You are the best community ever raised among the people: you advocate righteousness (maroof) and forbid evil (munkar), and you believe in GOD. If the followers of the scripture believed, it would be better for them. Some of them do believe, but the majority of them are wicked.

The government has to enforce values that are recognized as excellent and forbid those which are objectionable and detestable. A government that can enforce good and forbid evil could not be a dictatorship foisted on the people. But to be able to do this successfully, they themselves have to act on Quranic precepts that encompass social justice, individual liberty, equality before law and fraternity. These were expounded by the Grace of God, more than a 1,000 years before the epoch making 17th Century French Revolution where the cry was: *liberty, equality and fraternity*. But the French forgot what God did not: accountability. [58:6] The day will come when GOD will resurrect them all,

then inform them of everything they had done. GOD has recorded everything, while they have forgotten it. GOD witnesses all things.

Accountability is a law of nature – cause-effect interaction. As the adage goes – *sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*. Right and wrong arise from human behaviour, not from heavenly ordained fate or human made legislation. It is also known as *poetic justice* – ideal administration of reward to the righteous and punishment to the villain. [34:50] Say, "If I go astray, I go astray because of my own shortcomings. And if I am guided, it is because of my Lord's inspiration. He is Hearer, Near."

Accountability is inevitable on the Day of Judgment. [45:28-29] You will see every community kneeling. Every community will be called to view their record. Today, you get paid for everything you have done. This is our record; it utters the truth about you. We have been recording everything you did. This accountability will be, in fact, the reaction of one's own action – good or bad - [20:15] "The Hour (end of the world) is surely coming; I will keep it almost hidden, for each soul must be paid for its works.

Most religions have a consensus among their adherents that every human being will be subjected to answerability in the Hereafter. The Quran justifies the afterlife reckoning. [47:31] We will certainly put you to the test, in order to distinguish those among you who strive, and steadfastly persevere. We must expose your true qualities. [6:165] He is the One who made you inheritors of the earth, and He raised some of you above others in rank, in order to test you in accordance with what He has given you. Surely, your Lord is efficient in enforcing retribution, and He is Forgiver, Most Merciful. However, accountability is an ongoing life long process as long as one is alive on earth too. [2:210] Are they waiting until GOD Himself comes to them in dense clouds, together with the angels? When this happens, the whole matter will be terminated, and to GOD everything will be returned. This makes it evident that accountability will not always be kept pending till the Day of Reckoning when God, surrounded by His angels, will sit in judgment over every soul's deeds and misdeeds.

Our self-criticising conscience takes note of all our actions be they good or bad. It is a God given gift to make it act as an in-built mechanism for self-accountability. [75:12-15] To your Lord, on that day, is the final destiny. The human being will be informed, on that day, of everything he did to advance himself, and everything he did to regress himself. The human being will be his own judge. No excuses will be accepted.

Thus, our present day rulers have to transform into practice what they have been moralizing about equality of social status, equality before law and equality of opportunity. They have to remember this when they make speeches at pre-election rallies and meetings. When it comes to enacting a law or judging a case, they have to voluntarily surrender all their VIP distinctions, privileges and exemptions and stand on the same footing as the common man who clapped, whistled and cheered at their meetings and voted for them in the elections.

The Quran pronounces in clear terms that all humans be they rulers or the ruled are on trial. *The Purpose of Our Life* [67:2] The One who created death and life for the purpose of distinguishing those among you who would do better. He is the Almighty, the Forgiving. We flunked badly earlier. [14:10] He invites you only to forgive your sins, and to give you another chance to redeem yourselves."

Since leaders are responsible not just for their own conduct but also to ensure that those over whom they have authority also conduct themselves in the right manner, they are thus doubly answerable – to God primarily who has allowed them a position of authority and to the people in whose place they are charged.

The Quran shows the way in which they should rule to please both the real Sovereign and their countrymen too. [16:90] GOD advocates justice, charity, and regarding the relatives. And He forbids evil, vice, and transgression. He enlightens you, that you may take heed.

There are various kinds of punishments, penalties and atonements specified in the Quran for various kinds of legal and moral offences. The government has to award what is prescribed in the Quran bearing in mind that there can be no compulsion in matters of theological and even sectarian belief.

[2:256] There shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way. Anyone who denounces the devil and believes in GOD has grasped the strongest bond; one that never breaks. GOD is Hearer, Omniscient.

Such matters of faith should best be left to the Almighty for reckoning in the Hereafter. [9:102] There are others who have confessed their sins; they have mixed good deeds with bad deeds. GOD will redeem them, for GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful.

[9:103] Take from their money a charity to purify them and sanctify them. And encourage them, for your encouragement reassures them. GOD is Hearer, Omniscient.

GOD BE PRAISED!