

## Imam Ali (A) the Herald of Unity

### Part II

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In the previous part, we discussed Imam Ali's (A) view about the significance of "unity" in continuing the mission of the holy Prophet (S). We saw that criticizing disunited nations, Imam Ali (A) mentions that division leads to destruction of dignity and honour while unity leads to the descent of divine blessings. Referring to Imam's words in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, we argued that he (A) has been the greatest herald of unity of Islamic community and he (A) constantly made efforts to achieve and preserve it. We studied Imam Ali's (A) theoretical view on unity and its fruits and then we referred to the factors which create unity in Islamic community. In this part, we will study disunity and its roots to see how it can be avoided.

#### Imam Ali (A)'s theoretical position on division and its roots

The following describes the reasons for division and its roots.

##### 1. Disbelief and deviation from truth

Imam Ali (A) believed that one of the causes of ideological disputes is "disbelief" and not being steadfast in the belief. Regarding this issue, Imam (A) wrote to Mu'āwīyah that:

Now then, certainly, we and you were on amiable terms as you say but difference arose between us

and you the other day, when we accepted belief (*imān*) and you rejected it. Today the position is that we are steadfast (in the belief) but you are creating mischief.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Worldliness

“*Dunyā*” (world) in Islamic sciences and in the statements of religious leaders is sometimes praised and sometimes criticized. The praised world is a place for living in which mankind could make use of its blessings to achieve happiness in the hereafter. From this point of view, the world is a holy place for prophets’ missions, angels’ functions, servants’ worship and the blessings bestowed by Allah (s.w.t), while the reproached world is the one which itself and its manifestations such as wealth, power, family and comfort are the ultimate goals for those who live in it and they do anything and commit any crime to achieve them. Imam Ali (A) described the world as follows:

This world is a place for which destruction is ordained and for its inhabitants departure from here is destined. It is sweet and green. It hastens towards its seeker and attaches to the heart of the viewer. So depart from here with the best of provision available to you and do not ask herein more than what is enough and do not demand from it more than subsistence.<sup>2</sup>

He (A) pointed out the features of the world and warned people against being attached to it:

I warn you of the world, for it is the abode of the unsteady. It is not a house for foraging. It has decorated itself with deception and deceives with its decoration. It is a house which is low before Allah. So He has mixed its lawful with its unlawful, its good with its evil, its life with its death, and its sweetness with its bitterness. Allah has not kept it

clear for His lovers, nor has He been niggardly with it towards His foes. Its good is sparing. Its evil is ready at hand. Its collection would dwindle away. Its authority would be snatched away. Its habitation would face desolation. What is the good in a house which falls down like fallen construction or in an age which expires as the provision exhausts, or in time which passes like walking? Include whatever Allah has made obligatory on you in your demands.<sup>3</sup>

It is recorded in history that the holy Prophet (S) passed away in early morning on Monday, but the issue of Caliphate caused some people to pay no attention about the holy Prophet's (S) burial and instead they engaged in choosing the Caliph in Saqifah of banī Sā'idah and it was only after the Caliph was chosen that they thought of the holy Prophet's (S) burial.<sup>4</sup> According to some historians, the body of the holy Prophet (S) remained unburied for three days.<sup>5</sup> However, it is evident that at least from Monday morning until Tuesday night his holy body remained unburied.<sup>6</sup>

This was the first cause of dispute among Muslims which arose after the holy Prophet's (S) death and the following conflicts among Muslims have had their roots in this matter and also the enemies of Islam have taken advantage of the dispute and have attempted to add fuel to the fire; as Abū Sufyān, the sworn enemy of Islam, knew the matter of Caliphate as a great sedition and said: "I see a storm which nothing but blood can make it calm." He wanted to engage in a civil war with Imam Ali (A) but Imam (A) was aware of his evil intention and kept him away from himself. Ṭabari writes:

Imam Ali (A) blamed him and stated: 'Your intention is nothing but exciting sedition. You have been the enemy of Islam for a long time. I do not need your advice and your troops and pedestrians.'<sup>7</sup>

As a peacemaker, Imam Ali (A) had to keep silent to preserve unity, although the endurance of silence was as hard as having pricks in the eye and a piece of bone in the throat and drinking bitter poison.

Worldliness and considering this world as the goal is one of the main causes of division and disunity and the Islamic community should avoid it.

### **3. Lawbreaking**

Another cause of division and disunity which results from attachment to the world is oppression and lawbreaking of the ruler or the ruled. For, if the ruled do not fulfil the rights of the just ruler and do not obey him or the ruler turns away from justice and abuses his power and oppresses the ruled, then the unity will be destroyed and disputes and conflicts will replace it. Regarding this issue, Imam Ali (A) has stated:

If the ruled fulfil the rights of the ruler and the ruler fulfils their rights, then right attains the position of honour among them, the ways of religion become established, signs of justice become fixed and the Sunnah gains currency. In this way times will improve, the continuance of government will be expected, and the aims of the enemies will be frustrated. But if the ruled gain sway over the ruler, or the ruler oppresses the ruled, then differences crop up in every word, signs of oppression appear, mischief enters religion and the ways of the Sunnah are forsaken.<sup>8</sup>

### **4. Ruling based on arrogance**

One of the divisive factors is ruling based on the culture of arrogance. The nation who accepts the rule of arrogance or surrenders to it loses its national and religious identity and that is when it will become like the arrogant and obtains animal characteristics and habits and then vices and corruptions spread in the society.

Imam Ali (A) introduced this factor which creates disunity and described such a society as follows:

The people of this time would be wolves, its rulers beasts, the middleclass gluttons and the poor (almost) dead. Truth would decrease, falsehood would overflow, affection would be claimed with tongues but people would be quarrelsome at heart.<sup>9</sup>

To stay away from the domination of arrogance, Imam (A) admonished Muslims from feeling proud of their vanity and boasting over ignorance and stated:

(You should fear) Allah! Allah! in feeling proud of your vanity and boasting over ignorance, because this is the root of enmity and the design of Satan.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. Disputes and spitefulness

A human being is a social creature and needs others' assistance and services, and naturally wherever the interests of people depend on each other, everyone may seek more benefits for himself and conflicts arise, and the only solution for these disputes is establishing national and universal laws and applying them. However, those who have not practiced religious and moral virtues harbour a grudge against others whenever they do not meet their wishes, receive more benefits or see others superior to themselves. Imam Ali (A) introduced spitefulness as a cause of division and considered it as a sign of impure nature and bad conscience:

You are brethren in the religion of Allah. Impure natures and bad conscience have separated you. Consequently you do not bear burdens of each other nor advise each other, nor spend on each other, nor love each other.<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion

All cultures and nations have been constantly trying to create unity to enjoy its benefits and the establishment of unity in some periods has provided them with benefits. In Islam and Islamic nations, because of having many things in common, such as believing in one God, the prophethood of the holy Prophet (S) and the Qur'an, unity can be created easily, even though Muslims live in different geographical regions. The origin of the unity among Islamic community is the religion of Islam which has been propagated by all the prophets (A) throughout the history and its comprehensive version has been delivered by the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad (S). The practical conduct and speech of Imam Ali (A) can be used as a role model for conduct which can create the real unity among Muslims and quench the thirst of human beings for justice.

Imam Ali (A) is one of the distinguished characters and leaders of Islamic world who has left great legacy in both practical management and leadership of Islamic society and theoretical explanation of theological and moral issues related to unity. When we study the works and the life of Imam Ali (A), we learn that he (A) considered unity as the gift of the holy Prophet's (S) mission which put all enmities aside and caused the divine blessings to embrace mankind. From Imam Ali's (A) point of view, the factors which can create unity among the Islamic community are preserving good traditions, satisfying reasonable demands of people and making appropriate use of people's emotions. These factors have healed divisions among Muslims in many critical conditions. Imam Ali (A) views rejection of faith, worldliness, lawbreaking, being under the rule of the arrogant and disputes and enmity as factors which can create disunity and Muslims must avoid them.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghab*, Letter no. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabawīyah*, vol. 4, p. 314; Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 3, p. 211.



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<sup>6</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 273; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh ibn Khaldūn*, translated by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Āyatī, Tehran, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1996, 2nd Ed., vol. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 3, p. 209.

<sup>8</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon no. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 192.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 113.

