

Rights and Duties of Muslim Leaders



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All praises and thanks are due to Allâh Whose Favor directed the believers to guidance, and because of His justice, the wicked were misguided. He is never asked about what He does, while they all will be asked. I thank and praise Him and testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allâh Alone, without partners, and that Muhammad ﷺ is His slave and Messenger. May Allâh's peace and blessings be on Muhammad, his progeny, Companions and all those who followed him.

O Allâh's slaves! Islam came to honor mankind and as a mercy for them. Islam came to organize mankind's affairs in life, whether material or spiritual, and establish them on firm grounds of reform and on strong foundations. Islam came to explain to people the causes of wickedness and evil, so that they avoid them and the causes of safety, so that they embrace them.

Among the aspects that Islam explained, is one's relationship with his Lord, Prophet, Leaders and Commanders. Allâh said:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأَطِيعُوا أَوْلِيَ الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ﴾

“O you who believe! Obey Allâh and obey the Messenger (Muhammad ﷺ), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority.” (4:59)

Those in authority, is in reference to those who are responsible for public duty, whether a Grand Imam, scholar of the religion, commander, president of the people and so forth.

Allâh, Owner of the Mighty Power, has ordained great rights for those Muslims who are in authority, in this *Āyah*. Fulfilling these rights ensures tranquillity, peace and harmony for the Muslim *Ummah* (Nation). Allâh, Who has ordained these rights, is the All-Knower of the secrets of this universe and the nature of mankind, that require the presence of leaders and the absence of disputes and uprisings. Tranquillity ensures a stable social life and protects the nation from

disarray that is stirred by the ignorant and the foolishness of the wicked. Allâh ordained these rights for Muslim Leaders and made them a part of His worship that should be fulfilled in times of hardship and times of ease, in times of activity and times of relaxation, and even under the rule of tyranny. This is always the case, unless one is ordered to do what he cannot bear or to disobey Allâh, in which case, there is no hearing or obedience in the disobedience of Allâh. The Messenger of Allâh ﷺ said:

«وَعَلَى الْمَرْءِ الْمُسْلِمِ السَّمْعُ وَالطَّاعَةُ فِيمَا أَحَبَّ وَكَرِهَهُ، إِلَّا إِذَا أُمِرَ بِمَعْصِيَةٍ
فَلَا سَمْعَ وَلَا طَاعَةَ.»

“A Muslim person is required to hear and obey with regards to what he likes or dislikes, unless he is ordered to commit Allâh’s disobedience, then there is no hearing or obeying.”

A decision that Allâh has ordained and from which He brings great benefits in this life and tremendous rewards in the Hereafter is worthy for the Muslim to embrace and adhere by.

Referring to what Allâh has revealed for judgment, establishing Allâh’s Law, directing people to worship Allâh Alone and abandoning all other deities are some of the best and most significant duties, ordained on Muslim Leaders. Fulfilling these duties will bring about all that is good and righteous, so that Allâh’s blessings will descend on the Muslim *Ummah* at large.

Fear Allâh, O Allâh’s slaves, and seek the means of approach to Him by fulfilling His Commandments. Obey your Muslim Leaders, invoke Allâh for them, help them in *Birr* (righteousness) and *Taqwa* (piety) and practice patience with them, as long as they obey Allâh and His Messenger and establish Allâh’s religion. Know that whenever an uprising against leaders starts, the devil shakes the hand that started it, and thus, that person will be exposed to various trials and lures in life and religion. In this case, one will die in a state of *Jahiliyyah* (the term that described the pre-Islamic era of ignorance). In contrast, wise persons are aware of the danger of disobeying Muslim Leaders and the

mischievous caused by rising and rebelling against them. Only Allâh knows the extent of evil that uprisings cause, and this is why the Prophet, who was sent as a guide for mankind, said the following *Hadith*, so that Muslims avoid this evil and protect themselves against it.

«مَنْ خَرَجَ مِنَ الطَّاعَةِ، وَفَارَقَ الْجَمَاعَةَ فَمَاتَ، فَمِيتَتُهُ مِيتَةُ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ.»

“Whoever reneges regarding obedience (to Muslim Leaders) and abandons the *Jama'ah* (the community of the believers) then died, then his death is one of *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance).”

In addition, the Prophet ﷺ said:

«اسْمَعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا وَإِنْ تَأَمَّرَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَبْدٌ حَبَشِيٌّ كَانَ رَأْسُهُ زَبِيَّةً.»

“Hear and obey, even if an Ethiopian slave whose face looks like a raisin was appointed your commander.”

Further, *Al-Bukhâri* and *Muslim* narrated that ‘Ubadah bin As-Samit رضي الله عنه said:

بَايَعْنَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ عَلَى السَّمْعِ وَالطَّاعَةِ فِي مَنْشَطِنَا وَمَكْرَهِنَا وَعُسْرِنَا وَيُسْرِنَا وَلَثْقَةِ عَلَيْنَا، وَأَلَّا نُنَازِعَ الْأَمْرَ أَهْلَهُ، قَالَ - يَعْنِي رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - «إِلَّا أَنْ تَرَوْا كُفْرًا بَوَاحًا عِنْدَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِيهِ بُرْهَانٌ» .

“We gave our pledge of allegiance to the Messenger of Allâh to hear and obey in times of vitality and times of relaxation, times of hardship and times of ease, even if we were not preferred with things as others are, and to refrain from disputing with lawful leaders.” The Messenger of Allâh continued, “Unless you witness clear, unequivocal *Kufr* (from the leader) for which you have evidence from Allâh.”

O Allâh’s slaves, those who have any type of authority or responsibility! Know that Allâh, the Just Ruler of all that exists, has ordained for you rights on those under your responsibility and commanded that these rights be respected. Likewise, Allâh has ordained duties on you for those who are under your authority and

responsibility. Allâh has made you aware of the seriousness and importance of your job by the words of His Messenger ﷺ:

«كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ» .

“Each one of you is responsible and each will be asked about his (or her) responsibility.”

Fear Allâh with regards to the responsibility that Allâh has entrusted you. Fulfill your duties towards your subjects and those whom Allâh allowed you to be responsible for. This way, you will be among the best *Imam* (Leaders), just as Allâh’s Messenger ﷺ said:

«إِنَّ خَيْرَ أئِمَّتِكُمُ الَّذِينَ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُصَلُّونَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيُصَلُّونَ عَلَيْكُمْ» .

“Your best Imams are those whom you love and they love you, for whom you invoke Allâh (for mercy and pardon), and they invoke Allâh for you (for mercy and pardon).”

Also, this way you will avoid those, whom the Prophet ﷺ described in his statement:

«وَشَرَّارُ أئِمَّتِكُمُ الَّذِينَ تُبْغِضُونَهُمْ وَيُبْغِضُونَكُمْ وَتَلْعَنُونَهُمْ وَيَلْعَنُونَكُمْ» .

“The worst of your Imams are those whom you hate and they hate you and you curse them and they curse you.”

Know that ruling Muslims with justice and being compassionate and lenient with them, are among the duties Muslim Leaders have towards their subjects. Allâh the Exalted said:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ﴾

“Verily, Allâh commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice.” (4:58)

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ﴾

“Verily, Allâh enjoins *Al-‘Adl* (i.e., justice and worshipping none but Allâh Alone — Islâmic Monotheism) and *Al-Ihsân* [i.e., to be patient in performing your duties to Allâh, totally for Allâh’s sake and in accordance with the *Sunnah* (legal ways) of the Prophet ﷺ in a perfect manner].” (16:90)

And:

﴿وَأَخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

“And be kind and humble to the believers who follow you.”
(26:215)

Know that those whom you are responsible for also have the right on you to be sincere with them, to advise them with their benefits and to fend off harm from them. Beware of all actions and statements that might enrage the subjects or cause division and enviousness between them, including preferring yourselves with the delights of ruling, while treating them with harshness and heavy-handedness. Do not require them to perform what is beyond their capabilities and what they cannot bear, for all this will lead them to dislike your rule and dispute with you in this life, thus exposing themselves to painful torment in the Hereafter. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«مَا مِنْ عَبْدٍ يَسْتَرْعِيهِ اللَّهُ رَعِيَّةً يَمُوتُ يَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَهُوَ غَاشٌّ لِرَعِيَّتِهِ، إِلَّا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ.»

“Any slave whom Allâh has entrusted with responsibility and authority and dies, when it is time for him to die, while deceiving his subjects, then Allâh will forbid Paradise for him.”

In another narration, the Prophet ﷺ said:

«مَا مِنْ أَمِيرٍ يَلِي أُمُورَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ، ثُمَّ لَا يَجْهَدُ لَهُمْ وَيَنْصَحُ، إِلَّا لَمْ يَدْخُلْ مَعَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ.»

“Every *Amir* (Leader, Commander) who is entrusted with authority over Muslims and refrains from giving them his best

efforts and from being honest with them, will not enter Paradise with them.”

It was reported that ‘Ā’idh bin ‘Amr, رضى الله عنه, went to ‘Ubaidullah bin Ziyad and said to him, “Son! I heard Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ say:

«إِنَّ شَرَّ الرُّعَاةِ الحُطَمَاءُ، وَإِيَّاكَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مِنْهُمْ».

“The worst leaders are the harsh, hardhearted. Do not be among them!”

This type of leaders, who are hard and lack compassion and kindness, should be aware that he whose supplication to Allāh is accepted said:

«اللَّهُمَّ مَنْ وَلِيَ مِنْ أُمَّتِي شَيْئًا فَشَقَّ عَلَيْهِمْ فَاشَقُّ عَلَيْهِ، وَمَنْ وَلِيَ مِنْ أُمَّتِي شَيْئًا فَفَرَّقَ بِهِمْ فَارْفُقْ بِهِ».

“O Allāh! He who assumes a type of leadership over my *Ummah* (Muslims) and becomes hard with them, then be hard with him. He who assumes a type of leadership over my *Ummah* and is kind with them, then be kind with him.”

I say these words and ask Allāh to direct Muslim Leaders, who are supposed to be protectors of Islam and Muslims, to succeed in bringing about their own religious benefit, as well as the religious benefit of their subjects. Verily, He is the best of those who are sought, Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.¹

¹ *Ahadith Al-Jumu‘ah*, p. 39-41