

Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) on the Accountability of the Ulama and Rulers

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Abstract: This article critically examines the accountability of the A'amil (state functionary) through the governance ethic articulated by Amir al-Mumineen Ali b. Abi Talib (as), with particular attention to the administrative vision reflected in "Nahj al-Balagha" and corroborative historical reports. It begins from a realistic premise: officials can be constructive or destructive, and even the honest remain fallible. Accordingly, appointment is not the end of governance; it triggers a continuing duty of supervision. Ali (as) refused blind trust: he monitored conduct, scrutinized the lifestyles of his representatives, and audited the Bayt al-Maal through regular attention to cash inflows and outflows. He commended sound performance and rebuked negligence, and when informed of possible misappropriation he publicly invoked Allah as witness that such appointments were made to serve the Ummah (community) and uphold divine rights, not to harm the people. The study then treats white-collar crime as a principal site of governance breakdown. Embezzlement, bribery, and patronage-based allocations are analyzed as breaches of fiduciary duty and as moral injuries that corrode legitimacy. Episodes such as the recovery of substantial cash from a governor's baggage, the instruction that an official is merely a "treasurer" of Allah's wealth until it is delivered, and orders requiring immediate reporting and verification, exhibit an accountability model that is restorative and deterrent. It combines restitution, proportionate sanction, and, where proven, termination of office and imprisonment. Termination, on this reading, is not personal hostility; it is institutional hygiene necessary to prevent recurrence and to signal that public funds are inviolable. A further claim advanced here is that accountability becomes hollow if confined to lower administration alone. Functionaries operate within an ecosystem shaped by senior leadership, incentives, and impunity. When public-interest complaints meet institutional silence, "justice delayed" becomes justice denied; resentment deepens and authoritarian habits take root. Nahj al-Balagha's insistence that distance cannot excuse unaddressed injustice grounds a standard of active, informed responsibility, while its emphasis on equal treatment and impartial conduct resist nepotism and the politics of favour. It equally emphasizes humility, courteous speech, and open access, so authority never hardens into tyranny. The article concludes that integrity and transparency are structural necessities of Islamic governance: continuous oversight, accessible complaint mechanisms, timely audits, equal citizenship in public funds, and decisive action against proven corruption together constitute minimum conditions for lawful authority and durable public confidence.

Keywords: A'amil; Nahj al-Balagha; accountability; integrity; transparency; Bayt al-Maal; audit and oversight; white-collar crime; restitution; public-interest complaint; termination for misconduct; Islamic governance ethics.

1). Policy of accountability of A'amil by Moula Ali al-Murtada (as)

The functionaries of the state/system can be both constructive and destructive in their action and attitude. With their constructive actions, the state/system develops and prospers. If they adopt a contrary attitude however, it would certainly be harmful for the state/organization. The head of a state needs to monitor the activities of the functionaries and should not relax after assigning them their tasks. However honest and trustworthy the functionaries maybe, they are fallible human beings. They might get attracted to luster and lucre and stray from the right path if left to their own scruples for long. They might indulge in bribery, misappropriation of funds and other such destructive activities. Instead of serving the people, they might turn self-serving.

Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) knew the futility of the human nature very well. He did not believe in blindly trusting people. Besides, some of the functionaries of the previous administration had convinced him of their reliability and were continuing in service, for example: Abu Musa al-Ashari, al-Ashath ibn Qays and Masqalah ibn Hubayrah. It was necessary that all their activities were monitored and the cash inflows and outflows audited. Therefore, Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as) kept an eye on every minute detail, especially the lifestyle of his representatives. He praised them for good performance and reprimanded them if he found any oversights, fault or negligence of duty in their activities. He used to check the account of Bayt al-Maal regularly. If he received reports of misappropriation by any functionary, he used to lift his eyes towards the sky and say:

“O Allah! You know that I have placed them over Your creatures not to harm them and defy Your Rights.”

al-Isti'ab, vol iii, P.48

2). White-collar crimes of A'amil:

Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) used to audit and punish the top-officials according to the seriousness of their white-collar crimes. From various top-officials he used to recover the embezzled funds and also imprisoned them for their crimes. Some reports of professional misconduct and crimes came about al Ashath ibn Qays, who was the governor of Azerbaijan since the times of the 3rd Khalifah. After the Battle of Jamal, Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) sent an order to him:

“You are the treasurer of all the funds of Allah that are in your trust until you hand them over to me!”

Al Ashath understood that he was about to be dismissed. He gathered whatever he could and told some of his friends about Amir al-Mumineen Ali's letter and that he intended to go under the protection of Muawiyah. His friend told him that it was not proper for him to leave behind his tribe and go to Syria. Hearing this, he changed his plan. Ali (as) sent Hujr ibn Adi (ra) to him, who somehow brought him to Kufah. When his baggage was searched, they recovered 400,000 Dirham in cash. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) gave him 30,000 Dirham as a compensation for his services and the rest was transferred to the Bayt al-Maal.

3). Termination of corrupt A'amil is necessary:

i). Furthermore, al-Mundhir b. al-Jarud al-Abdi appointed as the A'amil of Amir al-Mumineen Ali in Istakhr was accused of misappropriation and breach of trust. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) removed him from office and directed him to present himself immediately. In Nahj al-Balagha (Letter 71), the Imam rebukes him for "making this world by ruining [his] next life".

"I have been informed that you are losing your Hereafter to make this world! You are breaking your link with the Faith and doing favors with your relations! You do not deserve to be in a position of trust or to be depended on for protecting others from misappropriation. Therefore, as soon as you get this letter, come and report to me!"

When al-Mundhir came, his accounts were audited. It was found that he was short of 20,000 Dirhams, which he denied having to do anything with. Ali (as) asked him to make the statement under oath, which he refused. He was then sent to jail. After some time he was released at the bound of Sayyidi Sasaah ibn Sawh'an al-Abdi (ra).

ii). Moreover, reports of corruption came about Ziyad ibn Sumayyah (L), who was on a deputation in place of Ibn Abbas (ra), at Basrah. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) sent explicit instructions to him:

"If I find that you have misappropriated Bayt al-Maal (funds of public) and you have committed malpractice in anything big or small, I shall give you such punishment that will make you empty handed, weak and discredited among people!"

iii). Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) also issued a warning notice to the governor of Ardshir, Maslamah ibn Hubayrah:

"The funds that were earned through the tips of the Muslims' lances and the hoofs of their horses, for which they had shed their blood and sweat, you are distributing to the Bedouin of your tribe. If this is proved right, you will come down in my estimation! In this fund, the Muslims who are with me here and those who are with you there are equal partners!"

iv). When someone from Banu Tamim complained about the harsh treatment of Ibn Abbas (ra), Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) sent directions towards him:

"May Allah be kind on you! Whatever good or bad that comes from your mouth and the hands about the people, do not hasten in doing that! Remember, we are both equal partners in whatever you do!"

v). In another instance, Amir al-Mumineen, Ali (as) instructed to the governor of Halwan, al-Aswad ibn Qatbah:

"When a person in authority has different attitudes towards different persons, then mostly it may not be a just act! Therefore, justice demands that all people must be equal in your consideration! Protect your mind and protect the people to the best of your ability!"

4). Reason of corruption:

Rude attitude of an A'amil who is appointed for the public service, explains his dictatorial mentality and how he treats the people as if they are slaves. It is the right of the public to lodge complaint against the A'amil as "Public Interest Complaint" against his inexcusable misdeeds. It

is very disappointing for complainant when “No-action” has been taken against the transgressions of the A’amil and his team by the “Concerned authority”. Definitely it increases disappointment and resentment in public and it considered to allow an opportunity to the A’amil to exercise with “free hands” as lawbreaker and spoil and ruin the funds and harassing and threatening public in the name of ruler. “Justice delayed is justice denied” is a legal maxim. It means that if legal redress or equitable relief to an injured party is available, but is not forthcoming in a timely fashion, it is effectively the same as having no remedy at all. In the absence of accountable institution, certain authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies have deeply penetrated the community ruled by autocratic dictators, not familiar with the notions like good governance, public service, accountability, transparency etc. Nevertheless, the policy of Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) to serve as the guiding beacon for each Muslim rulers and governors remains through the ages. Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) says in one of his sermons: “If something wrong happens in East while you are in the West your excuse would never be accepted that you are unaware of that injustice.”

Only accountability of A’amil has no value and point of consideration, actually top functionaries have been successfully playing this game of hate deflection for a long time, all the subordinates’ functionaries are produced by whom? Under whose authority do they operate? They derive their power from whom? What is the source of their power? The functionaries and their deeds are symptoms of a disease, root cause is someone else. For years these functionaries feed and train these special breed from varied regions and background. These functionaries apparently look neat and clean but within runs a deep rot a dark world which only those who have experienced are aware of those with good character and sincerity are thrown into abyss of non-significant positions while those of questionable and vile character are inducted in position of influence, with absolute power.

These functionaries in turn support and promote the policies and ideology of the ruling class at every level and create the eco system that feeds their greed and lust. Common public has virtually zero access to the system and top controlling authorities has to believe to be a demigod by the commoners through successful propaganda ran by paid touts who were fed and groomed by regular salaries with several purges that was extorted by various taxes of commoners. The Aqidah of Islam is not like to that of catholic Christians, therefore wrong ideology of Jannah should be removing, it is only dream of mad to think develops the character needed for revolutionary changes in the corrupt system. The philosophy of Shahadat of Moula al-Husayn Ibn Ali (as) is not similar to the Christian beliefs of Essa (as) - Jesus. Moula Abi Abdillah al-Husayn (as) sacrificed his precious life not for the forgiveness of sins of bunch of people. Therefore, creed which creates hindrance in revolutionary thinking and movement is not recommended by the Talim of Qur’an and Saheb al-Qur’an.

However, people get kicked and mistreated everyday lower administration and they have to hold only them accountable, but forget their hero leadership which is not equally but solely responsible of the corruption. Islamic history is available and show us several hundred precedents that Khalifah and A’amil both are responsible and accountable before public. This concept is repugnant to the Qur’an and Islam that someone is not answerable before public. True enemy of the public is not functionaries alone but false ideology implemented by the top

leadership that has been sold to them, like Bani Israel are victims of Tahrif and Tabdil in religion and ultimately destroyed spiritually.

5). Concluding Suggestion:

It is very sad to say that there are highly arrogant, conceited and above all ignorant from religious as well as secular Knowledge also appointed as A'amil (functionary with authority). An educated will behave always in a dignified manner, it's a shame that most of the functionary with authority think too much of themselves, and they are just acting as if they are ruler or master. Please take note and heed our warning! Be humble, talk and smile to everyone not only with richest and earn some respect for your tenure of office, so that when you retire or transfer from one office to another you will leave behind your pleasant smile, good nature and take with you some Dua beside "value able gifts" under undue influence for yourself and your family. Do not be like a Demon, or Zalim, with high demands. By refusing to accept the voluntary-contribution for community affairs, funds, and refusing to allow any person to continue with his Rights granted by the Constitution of the country, A'amil should not falsely alleged or addressed to any person in dishonorable manner and/or defame him. In case of ill behavior, falsely allegations of A'amil in the presence of any person(s) or treat dishonorable manner, words and conduct consider malicious, defamation suit should be file by injured person. Such criminal conduct of A'amil is clearly calculated to disparage member of community and as a result, member of community have suffered considerable embarrassment and loss. Therefore, A'amil is liable to pay damages, in case of legal proceedings.

In the absence of accountable institution, certain authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies have deeply penetrated the community ruled by autocratic dictators, not familiar with the notions like good governance, public service, accountability, transparency etc. Nevertheless, the policy of Amir al-Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) to serve as the guiding beacon for each Muslim rulers and governors remains through the ages. Public office is a trust (Amanah): the A'amil holds delegated authority, not personal dominion. Oversight is a duty, not a suspicion: monitoring and auditing are governance obligations rooted in human fallibility. Financial integrity is non-negotiable: misappropriation of Bayt al-Maal warrants restitution and proportionate sanction. Removal of proven corruption is protective: termination safeguards the system and restores public confidence. Accountability must be vertical and systemic: rulers and senior leadership remain answerable for the ecosystem they create. Civility and equal treatment operationalize justice: humane conduct, impartiality, and accessible complaint mechanisms are part of transparency, not mere etiquette.

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