

The Weighty Burden of Accountability

Positions of power have always attracted people. The ability to command, to influence others and to have authority can seem appealing. Yet the Prophet (saw) teaches us to look beyond the attraction of power and see the burden that comes with it. The Prophet (saw) said, «إِنَّكُمْ سَتُحْرِصُونَ عَلَى الْإِمَارَةِ وَإِنَّهَا سَتَكُونُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حَسْرَةً وَنَدَامَةً فَنِعْمَتِ الْمُرْضِعَةُ وَبِئْسَتِ الْفَاطِمَةُ» **“You are eager for leadership and it is truly a regret and a sorrow on the Day of Judgement. What a good wet nurse and what an evil weaner.” (Bukhari)**

Imam Ibn Hajar Al-Asaqalani mentioned in his Sharh of Bukhari, قوله (فنعمة المرضعة وبئست الفاطمة) قال الداودي: نعم المرضعة أي الدنيا ، وبئست الفاطمة أي بعد الموت ، لأنه يصير إلى المحاسبة على ذلك ، فهو كالذي يطم قبل أن يستغني فيكون في ذلك هلاكه. وقال غيره : نعم المرضعة لما فيها من حصول الجاه والمال ونفاذ الكلمة وتحصيل اللذات الحسية والوهمية حال حصولها ، وبئست الفاطمة عند الانفصال عنها بموت أو غيره وما Regarding his saying “An excellent nursemaid (wet nurse), yet a wretched weaner,” Al-Dawudi stated, “An excellent nursemaid” refers to the worldly life, while “a wretched weaner” refers to the state following death—for one is then held to account for that life. It is akin to a child being weaned before becoming self-sufficient, leading to its destruction. Others have interpreted it thus: it is an excellent nursemaid due to the status, wealth, influence, and the attainment of both sensory and imagined pleasures it affords while one possesses it; yet it is a wretched weaner at the moment of separation—whether through death or otherwise—and due to the consequences that follow in the Hereafter.”

Likewise, every ruler will one day be separated from their position, whether by time or by death. The authority they once enjoyed will remain behind, but the record of how they used it will not. That is why the Prophet (saw) describes the “weaning” as difficult. It is the moment when the comforts of power end, and a leader stands before Allah to answer for every trust, every decision and every right that was placed in their hands.

This meaning becomes even clearer in the next hadith. The Prophet (saw) said, «يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ إِنَّكَ ضَعِيفٌ وَإِنَّهَا أَمَانَةٌ وَإِنَّهَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ خِزْيٌ وَنَدَامَةٌ إِلَّا مَنْ أَخَذَهَا بِحَقِّهَا وَآدَى الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ فِيهَا» **“O Abu Dharr, you are weak, and it is an Amanah (trust), and on the Day of Judgement it will be a disgrace and a regret except for those who take it by its right and perform its duties correctly.” (Muslim).** When the Prophet (saw) told Abu Dharr (ra), “You are weak,” meaning unable to bear the burden of such a role. It appears he was referring to a lack of aptitude for judgment and administration rather than physical weakness; that is, you cannot shoulder the heavy burdens and demands of governorship. Leadership is a trust that Allah the Almighty has placed in His servants’ care; it is a momentous. It is an amanah, a trust that demands justice, wisdom and the ability to fulfil the rights of others. The Prophet (saw) warns that this trust can become a source of humiliation, disgrace and regret on the Day of Resurrection for those who fail to fulfil it. The honour of leadership in this world can quickly become a burden in the next. It is therefore not a position to be fought over or

sought for its prestige, but one whose immense responsibility should make a person hesitate before desiring it.

These ahadith paint a picture of leadership that stands in stark contrast to much of what we see today. Today, positions of power are pursued, fiercely contested and held tightly, because of the authority, prestige and influence and wealth they bring. The rulers today often ignore the accountability that accompanies their position, or they manipulate and corrupt the situation to avoid being held accountable by the people.

The Prophet (saw) reminds us that every position of authority is an amanah, and that every leader will ultimately stand before Allah to answer for how they fulfilled the trust placed in their hands.

This difference is reflected in the well-known words attributed to Umar ibn al-Khattab (ra), «لَوْ هَلَكَ حَمَلٌ مِنْ وَلَدِ الضَّائِنِ ضَيَاعًا بِشَاطِئِ الْفُرَاتِ خَشِيتُ أَنْ يَسْأَلَنِي اللَّهُ عَنْهُ» “If a lamb were to perish lost on the banks of the Euphrates, I would fear that Allah would hold me accountable for it.” (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah 34486)

Such words capture the depth of accountability that characterised the spirit of the Caliphate/Khilafah, where leadership was viewed not as a privilege, but as a trust for which one would answer before Allah (swt).

However, this immense responsibility is also an opportunity for immense reward. The Prophet (saw) does not discourage leadership itself. Instead, he teaches that when authority is accepted by one who is capable, and it is exercised with justice, and fulfilled with sincerity, it becomes a means of earning the pleasure of Allah. The warning is therefore not against holding positions of power, but against pursuing their temporary appeal while forgetting the grave accountability that remains long after the authority itself has come to an end.

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