

Ethical Pillars of Islamic Politics

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By giving nobility and validity to ethics and with the belief in the oneness of ethics and politics, Ima-m Khomeini- (r) endeavored in the course of various admonitions to the employees and officials of the [Islamic] system, to present a portrayal of his ideal ethical politics, or in other words, the Islamic politics.

During the first decade of the Islamic Revolution in Iran it rarely happened that he did not emphasize, in his speeches and messages, the centrality of ethics in politics. In fact, this ethical view on politics is the continuation of the same tradition he had in his Sharh-e Chehel Hadi-th—that is, reformation of the society is only possible through inner reformation and it is only through self-purification and constant supervision of the self that a righteous society can emerge and the foundation of authentic politics be laid down.

He used to point out to the statesmen on various occasions that every one has a 'Pharaoh' within him and there is a kind of dictatorship in one's inner self. But one should always be vigilant not to let this 'Pharaoh' acquire power and this dictator to gain in strength. All these emphases that man is always in the presence of God stem from his view on the place of ethics.

He used to enumerate innumerable moral attributes and qualities for the statesmen, and reckon them as requisites for ethical politics. Among them, we will selectively identify three features here and discuss them so as to find out the Ima-m's outlook on them. Of course, this choice does not imply inattention to the importance of other moral features of ethical politics; it is, rather, merely a selection among many other choices. These three features are as follows:

.Sincerity; Openness to criticism; and Simple living

Sincerity

As a moral virtue, truthfulness [sida-qah] has been always cherished and lauded among all the peoples throughout history. There is hardly a place where this virtue has been spoken of unfavourably.

When mentioning one of the prophets ('a), the Glorious Qur'an points to this same truthfulness as one of his characteristics, stating: "And make mention in the Scripture of Ishmael. Lo! He was a keeper of his promise [as-sa-diq al-wa'd]." [1]

Similarly, the Glorious Qur'an identifies the truthful ones along with the prophets ('a).[2] But, what is truthfulness? Truthfulness means honesty but in reality it is beyond that. Truthfulness is the opposite of lying but it is the opposite of treachery as well. Indeed, truthfulness [sidq] and treachery [khiya-nah] are diametrically in opposition to one another.[3]

In this sense, truthfulness is synonymous with trust [ama-nah]. Hence, truthfulness in politics means veracity, being honest with the people, abiding by contracts and promises, and trustworthiness. The truthful statesman is he who moves in the direction of truth and righteousness, for truthfulness [sidq] means concordance and harmony with the truth.[4]

The truthful statesman is true to his commitments, shows himself to the people as he really is, and refrains from any sort of deceit. Anyone who nourishes this moral quality and attribute in his self never exploits the people's confidence in him and is not afraid of acknowledging his mistakes. He views this [acknowledgment] not as a sign of weakness but as the result of self-confidence. The concept of truthfulness [sidq] itself embodies the meanings of uprightness, perseverance, tenacity, and power, and it is far higher than mere honesty.

After a precise analysis of this term, Tuchihiro Izutsu says: The term truthfulness [sidq] takes the implicit meanings of sincerity, perseverance, uprightness, and trust. As such, we encounter so many cases of the real function of the term sidq in the Glorious Qur'an as well as in other places all of which can never satisfactorily be substituted by the word 'truthfulness'.[5]

The broader meaning of the word, sa-diqa, in the lexicon of the Qur'an is such that at times it is used in contradistinction to the words muna-fiqa [hypocrite] and ka-fir [disbeliever].[6]

Well, the truthfulness that is discussed in politics is this general meaning of the term. Therefore, the truthful politician should possess all these qualities in order to be deemed ethical. In the practical aspect this truthfulness goes to the extent of the politician regarding himself as the servant of the people—not their administrator—and wherever he commits a mistake, he fearlessly and courageously expresses it.

So, if we had committed a mistake before, then we should explicitly say that we erred. Deviation ['udu-l] among the jurists [fuqaha-] from one edict [fatwa-] to another has exactly the same meaning... The jurists of the Council of Guardians[7] [Shu-ra--ye Nigahba-n] and members of the Supreme Judicial Council[8] [Shu-ra--ye 'A-li--ye Qadai-] should also be like this so that, in case they erred in any matter, they should say so categorically and recant their views; we are, after all, not infallible.

Before the Revolution I used to imagine that once the Revolution triumphed there were pious people who would do the works in accordance with Islam... Later I found out that it was not so; most of them were impious individuals. I realized that what I had said was not true, and so I

explicitly announced that I had made a mistake.[9]

According to the Ima-m, therefore, confession of one's mistake, apart from not being considered a flaw, is a value and a form of the politician's truthfulness in relation to himself as well as to others.

Karl Popper[10] describes his ideal democracy in the following manner: At the time of the election campaign, instead of enumerating the list of his accomplishments the candidate for a seat in the parliament courageously announces that the previous year he has discovered thirty-one mistakes committed by him, and has tried to compensate for thirteen mistakes while his election rival has only discerned twenty-seven of his mistakes.[11]

That is, it is a value in itself that the politician, before letting others find out his mistakes, himself, steps forward, and dauntlessly and truthfully enumerates his own faults one by one. From the Ima-m's viewpoint dictatorship starts when man commits an error and after realizing it, instead of admitting and rectifying it he importunately sticks to it and continues with his crooked ways.

You mention an issue and in case you realize that it is a mistake, you are ready to say that you erred, you committed a mistake, or you want the same mistake to be carried out to the end. Among the corruptions that dictatorship has and with which the dictator is afflicted, is that he opens a subject and then he cannot, that is, he has no power over himself that this subject he has opened if it is against expediency... He cannot renounce his statement... This is the greatest dictatorship with which man is afflicted.[12]

From this aspect, admitting one's fault, apart from not being a sign of weakness, is a sign of power over one's self and occasions one's greatness and increase in popularity. "If you realize that you have erred in something, you must admit it. This confession of yours makes you great in the eyes of the nation; not that it humiliates you. Persisting in one's mistake greatly debases a person."[13]

Hence, confession of one's fault which is the result of truthfulness is a human virtue and excellence and is considered a manifestation of ethical politics. Thus, the Ima-m emphatically says: You should know and do know that man is not free from fault and error. As soon as you commit a mistake, turn away from it and admit it. In this lies human perfection, whereas justifying and persisting in a wrong action is a defect and the work of Satan.[14]

The point worthy of consideration is that some politicians think that if they express their faults, the people's confidence in them will diminish and the people will think them to be incapable. So, instead of admitting their faults they prefer to cover them with yet another mistake, and under the excuse of preserving the people's confidence and by relying on them they commit

other errors. But the answer to this illusion is that the justification itself, in the words of the Ima-m, is of the guiles and tricks of Ibli-s (Satan) and is considered as part of the defense mechanism of internally inept individuals in avoiding facing the truth.

On the other hand, people's confidence itself stems from truthfulness and does not exist absolutely; rather, it depends on the observance of truthfulness and sincere practices of the politicians. Once the people notice a degree of untruthfulness in them, their confidence in them diminishes twofold. Confidence is, indeed, a tree that matures and grows by means of the water of truthfulness of the rulers, and dries up by their lies and untruthfulness. So, one cannot rely too much on the withered confidence since it is fragile and, in the words of Bertolt

Brecht,[15] "People's confidence wanes once it is relied upon." [16]

The confidence of the people is no excuse for the rulers to commit mistakes and take refuge in it. It is, in reality, a kind of emotional reserve which should always be augmented and not spent indiscriminately and without any backing.

A truthful politician is one who remains in the political sphere so long as he feels that he is useful. But whenever and for whatever reason he feels that he can no longer perform his duties, then, instead of continuing with his previous ways and concealing his impotency, he relinquishes his responsibility heroically. In doing so, he adds another golden page in his record and places another virtue alongside his other ones.

Anytime anybody feels that he is inadequate for whatever position he holds—be it inadequacy in management or will-power—he should, with courage and dignity, submit his resignation to the competent authorities which is, in itself, a pious and devotional act.[17] Therefore, truthfulness is not a mere individual moral virtue. Rather, it is a social and political value and has various facets. The truthful politician presents himself to the people as he really is; he knows himself, his capabilities well and makes proper use of them. He talks to the people truthfully and fulfills his commitments. Just as he views political tasks and activities as values, in times of necessity he views resignation as a value as well. He tries not to commit a mistake. Once he commits a mistake, instead of concealing or justifying it, which is itself another mistake, he courageously admits it. He regards this as an indication of the greatness of his .soul and the reason for his courage; not weakness and lethargy

Openness to criticism

The truth of the matter is that we have dual attitudes with respect to the term 'criticism'. We like it and regard openness to criticism a kind of perfection and value, while at the same time we are very afraid of it. So, usually we invite our friends to criticize us and our actions. But we

immediately put up a shield against the flood of criticisms and reject them one by one in various ways. For this purpose we usually first make it clear as to what type of criticism we wish to face.

Through the addition of such modifiers as 'constructive', 'guidance-giving', 'reformatory' and the like, we specify the type of criticism we have in mind.

Finally, if the criticism leveled against us was not to our liking, we practically neutralize its effect and protect our personality through the use of such clichés as bias of the critic, weakening motive, falsity of the criticism, and others.

An anecdote of this type of facing criticism and reacting to it calls to mind the story of a man who, pretending to be a champion, went to a tattooist and asked him to tattoo his shoulder with the image of a lion. As the tattooist started his work, the man became restless due to the intensity of the pain of the needles that penetrated his body. He asked the tattooist which part of the lion he was tattooing. He replied that he had started from the tail. The 'champion' said that there was no need for the tail and that he should start with another part. The tattooist started again from the other part, but the pain persisted.

Again the question was asked and the answer was that he had started from the mane. Again the request of the 'champion' was to abandon the mane and to start with another part. These questions and answers, and complaints about the pain thus continued until finally the tattooist got angry over this situation, flung the needles to the ground and said: Who (ever) saw a lion without tail and head and belly? God Himself did not create a lion like this.^[18]

Our attitude toward criticism is more than this. We welcome criticism and sometimes insist on it. But once we experience its sting, we evade from it and in order to cover up our evasion, we assign various labels to it. We brand it as the venting of complexes, vengeance, accusation, and injustice. This duality in words and in deeds is so vivid to obviate the need for description. Criticism is looked upon as a gift in our religious culture, and to present an 'offering of faults' is deemed a value and, at times, a duty so much so that Ima-m as-Sa-di-q ('a) says: "The most beloved of my brothers is he who presents me an offering of my faults."^[19]

However, in cultures, there is practically nothing worse than criticism and unethical than criticizing, the reason being that we try not to criticize and, in case we have no alternative, we strive to make it very mild and practically ineffective; while leveling it apologetically and reticently. Even then, instead of thanks, an immediate storm of wrath, calumny and misunderstanding confronts us in that motive, purpose, malice, envy, and the like have compelled us to make this criticism. In short, criticism is not welcome in our culture.

Nevertheless, the truth must be accepted that, in life, we cannot escape from criticism. Even

supposing that we promise ourselves not to criticize anybody and to be true to our commitments, we cannot prevent the flood of criticisms of others to be cast on ourselves. So, another option must be sought and our view on criticism be changed since there is no absolute way of eliminating criticism. "The reality is that so long as you have relations with others, that is, so long as you are alive, you will hear criticism and need it."^[20]

This fact is more vivid in the political arena and political function is always subject to criticism. Therefore, anyone who enters the political arena must learn how to confront criticisms and make good use of them. Criticism, particularly in the political arena, is the most basic channel of communication between the citizens and government officials, and through which they realize the effectiveness or otherwise of their policies and their repercussions. As such, criticisms are a mirror in which the politicians see the impact of their actions and the strengths and weaknesses thereof.

In spite of this, individuals and organizations practically dodge criticism and see it as a personal attack on them. Consequently, in most cases, instead of accepting the purport of criticism they rebut it in a sense and consider it unfair. It is because criticism is undertaken on the presumption that the characteristic, attitude, action, or speech of the person being subjected to criticism is not correct. This for some means bringing into question their entire existence and the shattering of their personalities.

As if to say the critic has come to wage war against the personality of the person being criticized and he, in turn, has no alternative but to fight and protect his integrity. The reason for this is that the nature of man is such that he deems himself, his attitude and intellect as perfect and flawless. In as much as it is possible for anybody not to complain about the scarcities in his life, it has, however, not been seen for a person to whine over his own imperfection and lack of intelligence. Sa'di- describes this mental condition in this manner: Everyone thinks his own wisdom perfect and his child beautiful.^[21]

Then, he slyly concludes: If wisdom were to cease throughout the world, No one would suspect himself of ignorance.^[22]

Descartes,^[23] the French philosopher, describes this state in a satirical manner thus: "Among the people intellect has been divided better than anything else, although every person thinks he has such a complete portion of it that the people who are hard to please in anything, do not wish to have an intellect more than they already possess."^[24]

This is the reason why everybody, immediately upon hearing a criticism, imagines that his wisdom and intellect has been insulted, and so he tries to dispel this insult through the use of weapons and answer his critic or rival; the beginning of the fall of man from the ethical aspect

being this very attitude. As was discussed before, man is a mixture of good and bad dispositions and is in need of inner nourishment and spiritual purification. Therefore, apart from not being fearful of criticism anyone yearning for perfection also seeks it earnestly. Dodging criticism means claiming perfection and flawlessness; this is peculiar only to God. Anyone with such pretensions is claiming partnership with God and, as a result will, all at once, be expelled from His Presence. It is through this approach that the Ima-m admonishes thus: Nobody, no establishment and no individual can claim, 'I have no defect whatsoever.' If one claimed so, his gravest flaw then, is this very claim. No one can say, 'I have no flaw anymore ...' We do not have a flawless one in this world. We should always pay attention to these flaws of ours.[25]

Basically, from the viewpoint of the Ima-m anyone who is in pursuit of advancement and perfection should be pessimistically and critically in search of his flaws and faults, and not see what virtues he has. In our ethics and ethical literature it is propounded that man should refrain from critical observation and should have an optimistic view of others. Hence, Ha-fiz says:

Look well with love, and not at the filth of sin.

He who is artless (always) looks at the defects (of others).[26]

But this issue is different from the one we are currently discussing. The first issue is that we should refrain from pessimistic and critical views on others while the other issue is that we should judiciously, critically and meticulously evaluate ourselves. This is not only ethical, but also a requisite for man's growth and perfection.

In the view of the Guardian of the Pious and Commander of the Faithful ['Ali- ibn Abi- T&a-lib] ('a) one of the attributes of the pious is that they always indict and scrupulously call themselves to account. According to Karen Harney, a contemporary psychoanalyst, As long a person is proud of a certain state, propensity and attribute, and considers them as virtues, it is natural for him not only to exert no efforts for their elimination, but also, because he feels himself worthy due to them, he defends it and tries to preserve them.[27]

Thus, the first condition for seeking perfection is that man should consciously strive for his exaltation, and critically assess himself. The man who would like to work for God and reach the station of humanity should constantly be in pursuit of uncovering his own shortcomings. He should not be after identifying his virtues. As a person wants to know his faults, it might make him think of eliminating them, while being in pursuit of finding out his virtues veils his eyes by which he cannot see his faults.[28]

In this manner, offering criticisms constitutes the grounds for the growth of individuals, particularly the politicians who seek to secure the interests of the public.

Another point is that reforming the society is basically dependent on making criticisms and their assessment. So as to know whether the state organizations are functioning properly, or have had shortcomings at times, everybody should put forth whatever criticism he has to offer and, in doing so, participate in the reformation of the society.

Hence, from the Ima-m's viewpoint, "There should be criticism; without criticism a society cannot be reformed. This is also true with faults. Man is defective from head to foot and these defects must be stated. Criticisms must be stated so as to reform the society." [29]

It is true that the nature of man is such that he does not like being criticized. But if man goes beyond the level of instincts and nurtures himself, he welcomes criticisms with open arms no matter how acrimonious and harsh they may be. "If man builds himself, he will not dislike a peasant criticizing him. He does not dislike it at all. He does not mind being criticized." [30]

In spite of this, since most men have not yet reached this extent of perfection to welcome criticism and take advantage of it, they have an inappropriate attitude toward it and prevent it in various ways. The totality of these reactions that the individual shows in protecting himself against the reality of criticism can be classified under the general heading of 'defense mechanisms'. "Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies through which the person preserves himself from the more unmerciful aspects of reality." [31]

Thus, when facing the bitter reality of criticism man engages in self-deception. Through falsification of reality and ignorance in relation to it, he conceals the reality from himself. If this act happens rarely it is perhaps admissible. But if man, particularly in the political arena, makes it a habit of always adopting one of these mechanisms vis-à-vis criticisms, it is then that his relation to reality is completely severed and he will pass his days in the cocoon of his illusions. Some of these defense mechanisms, which, unfortunately, most of the people including the politicians utilize, are the rejection of criticism, reading the critic's motive, corresponding criticism, humiliating the critic, coining justification, belittling the criticism, evasion and reversion, blaming others, and classifying criticisms as 'constructive' or 'destructive'. Sometimes, in facing the criticism against him, the person denies the basis of criticism and deems it a calumny. At other times, instead of reflecting on the concept of criticism and its acceptance, he tries to uncover the treacherous motive of the critic, defaming him and proving that the critique stems from the malevolence and bad faith of the critic. Sometimes also, instead of answering the criticism the person reciprocally criticizes the critic and answers blow by blow.

On occasion, he humiliates the critic and does not consider him to be qualified to offer criticism. Every so often instead of sincerely acknowledging the criticism he reckons it a trivial

and worthless issue, needing no investigation at all. Sometimes, he becomes furious and since his worth has remained unrecognized and his kindness has been reciprocated with criticism, he is offended and is indignant of the 'ungrateful' people. At times, he attributes to his critic whatever is in his own heart as well as his motives and ideas, and unbelievably thinks of him based on his own religion.

Occasionally, he acknowledges the basis of criticism but instead of assuming his accountability in this context, he blames the circumstances and time, and shows himself as being entirely innocent. Finally, he sometimes classifies any criticism as constructive or destructive, true or false, justifiable or unjustifiable. These mental classifications relieve him of acknowledging the criticism and reforming himself, and he leaves the matter unsolved.

All the above mechanisms are, in reality, the promptings of the carnal self and delusions of Satan. They are the curtains that blind the truth-seeing eyes of man, prevent him from understanding himself correctly and impede his growth and perfection. Anyone wanting to enter the arena of politics and ethically practicing it should listen sincerely to all criticism, evaluate it dispassionately and utilize it for his reformation. He should not adopt any of the aforementioned mechanisms, and instead of classifying criticism as proper or not, should entertain every criticism and make good use of it for his development. It was with this view that Ima-m, in addressing Dr. 'Ali- Akbar Wila-yati-, the then Foreign Minister, said: "You and our friends in the Foreign Ministry should bear criticism, whether justified or not."^[32]

In this context, Ima-m goes to the extent of saying that, basically, criticism from the enemy should be heard and heeded. It is because friends are usually indifferent to our flaws, and even if they do notice, they do not mention them. So, for us friends are not good teachers; whereas our enemies who inconsiderately notice our shortcomings and mention them unsparingly—albeit with spiteful motives—can be our best teachers. Therefore, that man should not only expect criticism from friend and foe alike, but should also be prepared to receive and solicit it from everybody.

Man should come to a person who is his enemy and see what his judgment on him is so as to enable him to realize his faults. He cannot learn from his own friends; he should learn from his enemies. When he says something, he should know what the enemies say and should think that the enemies understand his faults. Although you and I might have flaws, friends...say: 'How eloquently you delivered your speech!'... Man's friends are his real enemies while his enemies are his real friends. Man should learn from those who find his faults. He should know that those who extol him, this tongue, the tongue that admires an affair which is supposed to be criticized, is the very tongue of Satan.^[33]

Therefore, from the viewpoint of the Ima-m one of the fundamental values and pillars of ethical politics is the element of the politicians' openness to criticism. As far as they can, they should make use of the enemies even for understanding their own flaws and treat them as their own teachers. This element of openness to criticism not only leads to the spiritual loftiness of the politicians but also makes them more successful in the political arena. It is because they will recognize better the strength and weakness of their own actions, and on the basis of the

criticisms that have been expressed they can reform their own policy and give direction to it. Besides, the channels of communication between them and the people will remain open. Indeed, these criticisms, however bitter they are, are the best expression and exhibition of the people's notions on the political practices of the politicians. If a politician is responsibly in pursuit of improving his own practice and function, he should regard their existence as booty and make use of them for the reformation of the society. The existence of criticism, from the Ima-m's viewpoint, makes the concerned officials perform each of their duties and no one would go beyond the ambit of their prerogatives.

In other words, the existence of the spirit of criticism and openness to criticism hinders the growth of dictatorship. "If I did something wrong, all of you would rush to say, 'Why are you doing this?' [Thus] I will sit in my own place (I will perform my duty properly). All of you are responsible; all of us are responsible."[\[34\]](#)

It is possible for some people to imagine that criticism is incompatible with compliance and wherever criticism is offered the pillars of compliance are weakened. Because of this, criticism must be avoided as far as possible especially in religious governance. This notion is based on the proposition that compliance implies blind allegiance and adherence, whereas criticism connotes noticing and mentioning faults and defects. In answer to this notion it should be stated that in Islamic governance there is no place for absolute compliance.

Compliance must be conscious and based on accountability. Every citizen is duty-bound to comply with the authority while at the same time he is obliged to check its deviation. The Ima-m's slogan, 'All of you are responsible; all of us are responsible,' refers to this point. In reality this saying is a paraphrase of the statement of the Most Noble Messenger (s) who said: "All of you are responsible and you will be asked about the things you have been in charge of."[\[35\]](#)

Thus, we cannot speak of unrestrained, unconditional and absolute compliance in the political arena and prevent criticism from being made. The consequences of whatever happens in the Islamic society involve both the citizens and rulers. So, all are equal and accountable with respect to social responsibilities. It is from this perspective that Shahi-d Mut*ahhari- says: "Laudable and legitimate imitation does not mean allegiance and turning a blind eye. It is

opening the eyes and being watchful. Otherwise, it is accountability and participation in crime and sin.”[36] He goes beyond this point and believes, “Islam does not allow for deafness and abstention from sin for anybody even for the person of the Most Noble Messenger (s).”[37] Then, in a bid to express his opinion he narrates the story of Hadrat Mu-sa- (‘a) and a pious servant who, based on our tradition, has been identified as Prophet Khidr (‘a), and concludes: The story of Moses and the pious servant which has been mentioned in the Holy Qur’an is an amazing one.[38]

One point of the story that can be utilized is that the follower and adherent is submissive, obedient and compliant so long as he does not break and violate the principles, bases and law. If he notices that the act of obedience is performed contrary to the principles and bases, he cannot remain silent... Why did Moses not remain patient and kept on objecting although he would promise and suggest himself not to object, and again kept on raising objections and criticizing? Moses’ fault was not in objecting and criticizing.

It was because he was not conscious of the absolute secret and essence of actions... Some have said that if the practice of the pious servant is repeated up to the Day of Resurrection, Moses will also not cease objections and protestations.[39]

Basically, if one day criticism and openness to criticism is to be forgotten on the excuse of obedience, the Islamic society will experience a crisis and all will become afflicted with irreparable flaws. As such, Mut’ahhari- strongly emphasizes the necessity for criticism at all levels: “I did and do believe that every non-infallible position which is not liable to criticism is dangerous to the holder of the position as well as to Islam.”[40]

Hence, obedience and compliance with the religious rule and following the authorities do not imply indifference to their policies and non-criticism. Of course, undoubtedly, there are individuals who use criticism as a means of settling their personal accounts, and instead of criticizing they are actually taking revenge. There are also those who, in the name of criticism give vent to their inner complexes as well as those who, again in the name of criticism, intend disgracing others. But nothing can justify improper behaviour of politicians toward these people and such criticisms. Here we are facing two separate issues. One is those who take unfair advantage of the weapon of criticism.

By way of advice, the Ima-m emphasizes to such people that the language of criticism should be polite and courteous, and it is in this context that he says, “If they have criticism, they should have a brotherly criticism; it should be prudent and sensible.”[41]

Or he stresses that the language of admonition is different from that of disgracing individuals. “The language of admonition is different from the language of disgracing and damaging the

reputation [of others].”[42] From the viewpoint of the Ima-m as a neutral observer, most of the criticisms made in the political arena and encountered by politicians stem from resentment, self-love and injustice, and they cannot be doubted.

But the second issue is that none of these realities can be the grounds for the politicians to evade criticisms or to decide on determining which criticism is justified or not; in good faith or hostile. It is because his nature will persuade him in a bid to preserve his personality and prevent its destruction, to reject whatever he does not accept as done in bad faith, destructive, detrimental, unfair, and the like. Thus, in order to distinguish the honest from the spurious from among the criticisms, we need a third party, which is actually the public opinion.

The politician performs his task while the critic criticizes. It is the duty of the politician to listen to criticism and to heed it as much as possible. But with regard to their correctness or otherwise, it is the public opinion that determines and classifies them.

In the final analysis, from the Ima-m’s viewpoint openness to criticism is among the human perfections. It draws man from the existential sphere of instinct and egoism to the status of the lofty and God-loving human being, and obliterates his flaws.

This is due to the fact that the God-loving man removes his weaknesses by means of these criticisms and makes good use of this effective tool. Instead of asking for the basis of criticism he pays attention to its spirit, and it is in this context that he is grateful for the criticisms of his enemies and considers them as his sympathetic teachers.

This kind of attitude calls to mind a story that Mawla-na- narrates: Contrary to convention, a preacher would pray for his enemies every time he ascended the pulpit. Because the people found fault with this practice—of his praying for the bad ones in place of the good ones, He replied, “I have seen (experienced) goodness from these folk: For this reason I have chosen to pray for them.

They wrought so much wickedness and injustice and oppression That they cast (drove) me forth from evil into good.[43]

We will read a more explicit one in the poem of Abu- Hayya-n Andalusi-, an Arab poet, who considers himself beholden by, and debtor to, his own enemies, deems their existence as necessary, and says: For me enemies are favour and grace. O God, take not these enemies from me. They are so painstakingly in search of my slip. Thus, I evaded it. And they are in competition with me. As an outcome, I attained excellent qualities.[44] Therefore, instead of wasting time in finding out the motive of the critic and adopting the unscrupulous defense mechanisms, it is better for us to consider every type of criticism as a favour, blessing and in .the words of Ima-m as-Sa-diq (‘a) a gift, and to benefit from it in the political arena

Simple living

Simple living in the individual's life is a moral virtue. But in the political arena and for the Islamic statesmen, it is, apart from this, a political necessity. What is meant by simple living is what has been referred to in our religious culture as zuhd [asceticism]. Of course, throughout history this term has been laden with negative connotations and usually the term za-hid [ascetic] gives the impression of a disheveled man, impudent, crowd-evading, anti-social, reclusive, narrow-minded, and without activity.

Even now, if one is asked to describe a za-hid man, most probably he will describe him in this manner: a thin and pale person, clothed in a patched garment, wearing disheveled hair, dirty body, detached from social responsibilities, indifferent toward the fate of his fellow human beings, and lurking in the corner of prosperity.

Although this notion is not much to our liking, numerous historical testimonies affirm it. The truth of the matter is that zuhd at the advent of Islam, and in the words of the Infallibles ('a) was described in a certain manner while in the our Sufi culture, it has been expressed in yet another fashion, which is actually a metamorphosis of the real meaning and function of this term.

Notes:

1. Su-rah Maryam 19:54.
2. For example, Su-rah an-Nisa-' 4:69: "All who obey Allah and the Messenger are in the Company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah, of the Prophets (who teach) [an-nabiyyi-n], the Sincere (lovers of Truth) [as-siddi-qi-n], the Witnesses (who testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! What a beautiful Fellowship!" ('Abdulla-h Yu-suf 'Ali-'s translation) [Trans.]
3. See Tuchihiro Izutsu, Mafa-hi-m-e Akhla-qi--Di-ni- dar Qur'a-n-e Maji-d [Ethical-Religious Concepts in the Glorious Qur'an], trans. Fari-du-n Badreh-i- (Tehran: Farza-n, 1378 AHS), p. 197.
4. Ibid., p. 198.
5. Ibid., p. 184.
6. Loc. cit.
7. Council of Guardians: the council constituted for the safeguarding of Islamic laws and the Constitution and verifying the compatibility of legislation passed by the Islamic Consultative Assembly (the Iranian Majlis or Parliament) with them. Composed of six competent and just jurists and six other legal experts in various branches of the law, the council members are elected by the Leader for a period of six years. See Articles 91-99 of the Constitution of the

8. Supreme Judicial Council: the council constituted to carry out the responsibilities of the judiciary. After the amendment of the Iranian Constitution ratified on July 26, 1989, this highest judicial body is vested in a single person. Article 157, as amended, stipulates: "The Leader shall appoint a mujtahid, possessing integrity and administrative and problem-solving abilities, and well-versed in judicial affairs as the Head of the Judiciary for a period of five years, to carry out the judicial, administrative and executive responsibilities of the judiciary. His will be the highest judicial office." [Trans.]

9.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 18, p. 241.

10. Sir Karl Raimund Popper (1902-): Austrian-born English philosopher, best known for his theory of falsification in the philosophy of science. Popper contends that scientific theories are never more than provisionally adopted and remain acceptable only as long as scientists are devising new experiments to test (falsify) them. He attacks the doctrine of historicism (presuming to understand phenomena entirely through their development) in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957).

11. Karl Popper, *At-Tasa-mih wa'l-Mas'u-liyyah al-Fikriyyah: Majmu-'ah Maqa-la-t at-Tasa-mih bayn ash-Sharq wa'l-Gharb: Dira-sa-t fi- at-Ta'a-yish wa'l-Qabu-l bi'l-A-khar*, trans. Ibra-hi-m al-'Ari-s (Beirut: Da-r as-Sa-qi-, 1992), p. 99.

12.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 14, p. 92.

13.Ibid., p. 93.

14.Ibid., vol. 18, p. 7.

15. Bertolt Brecht (Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht; 1898-1956): German Marxist playwright and poet, who revolutionized modern theater with his production techniques and concept of epic theater. He left Nazi Germany in 1933, returning to East Berlin in 1948 to found the Berliner Ensemble. His plays include *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), *The Life of Galileo* (1938), *Mother Courage* (1939), and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. [Trans.]

16. Bertolt Brecht, *Andi-sheha--ye Ma-ti- [Matthew's Ideas]*, trans. Behra-m Habi-bi- (Tehran: A-ga-h, 1377 AHS), p. 88.

17.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 19, p. 157.

18.Mathnawi-, Book One, vol. 1, p. 144.

In the Mathnawi- the tattooist continues to say: O brother, endure the pain of the lancet, That you may escape from the poison of your miscreant self [nafs], For sky and sun and moon bow in worship To the people who have escaped from self-existence. Any one in whose body the miscreant self has died, Sun and cloud obey his command.

Since his heart has learned to light the candle (of spiritual knowledge and love), The sun cannot burn him. God hath made mention of the rising sun as turning aside— Like that—from their cave.

The thorn becomes entirely beautiful, like the rose, In the sight of the particular that is going toward the Universal. What is (the meaning of) to exalt and glorify God?

To deem yourself despicable and (worthless) as dust.

What is (the meaning of) to learn the knowledge of God's Unity?

To consume yourself in the presence of the One.

If you wish to shine like day, Burn up your night-like self-existence.

Melt away your existence, as copper (melts away) in the elixir, In the Being of Him who fosters (and sustains) existence.

You have fastened both your hands tight on (are determined not to give up) "I" and "we": All this (spiritual) ruin is caused by dualism. Nicholson, Book One under How the man of Qazwin was tattooing the figure of a lion in blue on his shoulders, and (then) repenting because of the (pain of the) needle-pricks, vol. 1, p. 325. [Trans.]

19.. " Mi-za-n al-Hikmah, vol. 3, p. 2207.

20. Hendry Waissinger, Hi-chkas Ka-mil Ni-st [Nobody is Perfect], trans. Pari-chehr Mu'tamad-Garchi- (Tehran: Fi-ru-zeh, 1378 AHS), p. 123.

21. Golesta-n-e Sa'di-, p. 175.

Gladwin, chap. 7, Rules for Conduct in Life, Tale xxx, p. 357. [Trans.]

22. Loc. cit. The whole tale is as follows: Everyone thinks his own wisdom perfect and his child beautiful. A Jew and a Muslim were disputing in a manner that made me laugh. The Muslim said in wrath, "If this deed of conveyance is not authentic, may God cause me to die a Jew!" The Jew said, "I make oath on the Pentateuch, and if I swear falsely, I am a Muslim like you." If wisdom was to cease throughout the world, no one would suspect himself of ignorance. [Trans.]

23. René Descartes (1596-1650): French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher, often referred to as 'the father of modern philosophy.' A dualist who believed the world was composed of 2 basic substances (matter and spirit), he ignored accepted scholastic philosophy and stated a person should doubt all sense experiences; but if a person can think and doubt, he or she therefore exists. Descartes stated his belief in his famous phrase, cogito, ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am.") This skeptical philosophy is called Cartesianism and is detailed in Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy (1641). His other major works include the Discourse on Method (1637) and Principles of Philosophy (1644). Descartes also

- attempted to explain the universe in terms of matter and motion and invented analytic geometry. [Trans.]
24. Quoted in Muhammad-'Ali- Faru-ghi-, Si-r-e Hikmat dar Uru-pa- [Trend of Wisdom in Europe] (Tehran: Zuva-r, 1360), vol. 1, p. 213.
- 25.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 17, p. 246.
- 26.Sa-yeh, Ha-fiz (Tehran: Ka-rna-meh, 1375), p. 181.
27. Karen Hurney, 'Asabiyyat va Rushd-e A-dami- [Prejudice and Human Growth], trans. Muhammad-Ja'far Musaffa- (Tehran: Behjat, 1373 AHS), p. 95.
- 28.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 17, p. 246.
- 29.Ibid., vol. 14, p. 401.
- 30.Ibid., vol. 13, p. 198.
- 31.Frank Bruno, Farhang-e Tu-si-fi--ye Ist*ila-ha-t-e Rava-nshina-si- [Descriptive Dictionary of Psychological Terms], trans. Muhshi-d Ya-sa-'i- and Farza-neh-ye T&a-hiri- (Tehran: T*arh-e Nu-, 1373 AHS), p. 297.
- 32.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 21, p. 20.
- 33.Ibid., vol. 14, pp. 145-146.
- 34.Ibid., vol. 8, p. 512.
35. "" Biha-r al-Anwa-r, vol. 72, p. 38. [Pub.]
36. Murtada- Mut*ahhari-, Dah Gufta-r [Ten Sayings] (Tehran: Intisha-ra-t-e Sadra-, n.d.), p. 93.
- 37.Ibid., p. 94.
38. See Su-rah al-Kahf 18:60-82. [Trans.]
- 39.Loc. cit.
40. Murtada- Mut*ahhari-, Mas'aleh-ye Hija-b [The Islamic Modest Dress] (Tehran: Intisha-ra-t-e Sadra-, n.d.), p. 71.
- 41.Ibid., p. 40.
- 42.Sahi-feh-ye Ima-m, vol. 20, p. 36.
- 43.Mathnawi-, Book Four, vol. 4, p. 12.
- Nicholson, Book Four under The story of the preacher who at the beginning of every exhortation used to pray for the unjust and hardhearted and irreligious, vol. 4, p. 15.
44. It is based on the explanations of the late Dr. Muhammad Khaza-'ili- on Golesta-n as .quoted by Ghula-m-Husayn Yu-sufi- in the explanations of Golesta-n-e Sa'di-, p. 44