

Fast 22: Qualities for leadership – 2

- An example of the same law of the land applying to leaders as to ordinary people is provided in the story of Joseph in the Quran. The King (Pharaoh) of Egypt had him brought out of unjust imprisonment and told him that he was now a dignified person. Joseph said to the king:

“Place me (in authority) over the treasures of the land; surely I am a good keeper and have knowledge.”
(12:55)

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٥﴾

Joseph told the truth on his CV (so to speak) and the King appointed him minister of finance. The Quran says of his position:

“And thus did We give to Joseph power in the land — he had mastery in it wherever he liked.” (12:56)

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَتَّبِعُوا
مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاءُ ﴿٥٦﴾

Later, when his brothers came to Egypt from the neighbouring country to get corn during a famine, and they did not know that it was Joseph, Joseph did not want the younger brother Benjamin to return with them but to keep him with him in Egypt. But the law of Egypt did not allow this:

“He could not take his brother under the king’s law, unless Allah pleased.”
(12:76)

مَا كَانَ لِيَأْخُذَ أَخَاهُ فِي دِينِ الْمَلِكِ إِلَّا أَنْ
يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ﴿٧٦﴾

Joseph who, as the Quran said above, “had mastery in the land wherever he liked”, did not try to use his powerful position to subvert or circumvent the law. He could have done this, especially as the King held him in high regard, and he had served the country very ably and loyally. This kind of abuse of power is commonplace today by people in high positions in all countries of the world. **But Joseph abided by the law.** It so happened that a missing property of the government was found in that brother’s bag and he was arrested and thus detained in Egypt, which made him safe from any possible scheming by the other brothers. This is what is referred to in the words “unless Allah pleased”.

- A ruler’s duty is to do justice between the strong and the weak. Two men in a dispute took their case to the prophet-king David. The account runs:

“(they said we are) two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other, so decide between us with justice, and do not act unjustly, and guide us to the right way. This is my brother. He has ninety-nine ewes (female sheep) and I have a single ewe. Then he said, Make it over to me, and he has prevailed against me in dispute. He (David) said: Surely he has wronged you in demanding your ewe (to add) to his own ewes. And surely many partners wrong one another except those who believe and do good, and very few are they!” (38:22–24)

خَصْلَيْنِ بَغَى بَعْضُنَا عَلَى بَعْضٍ
فَاحْكُم بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَشْطِطْ
وَاهْدِنَا إِلَى سَوَاءِ الصِّرَاطِ ﴿٢٢﴾
إِنَّ هَذَا أَخِي لَهُ تِسْعٌ وَتِسْعُونَ
نَعْبَةً وَلِي نَعْبَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَقَالَ
أَكْفُلْنِيهَا وَعَزَّنِي فِي الْخِطَابِ
﴿٢٣﴾ قَالَ لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ
نَعْبَتِكَ إِلَى بَعِيضِهِ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا
مِّنَ الْخُلَطَاءِ لَيَبْغِي بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى
بَعْضٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ وَقَلِيلٌ مَّا هُمْ

Many baseless, and indeed shameful, stories have been made up about the prophet David to elaborate upon this incident. What it really shows is that those who possess plenty are not content to see others having even a little, but want to grab that as well. Since this refers to “partners”, we may say that in the field of business large corporations want to use their power to take over and absorb small businesses to eliminate competition. The duty of the rulers of the land, according to this example in the Quran, is to do justice between the big and the small, the strong and the weak.

- The above example also shows that rulers must be accessible to the people. The Holy Prophet Muhammad and his early successors were always accessible to the people, without any guards to keep people out. The following incident shows this:

The Prophet passed by a woman who was sitting by a grave crying. He said (to her): “Fear Allāh and be patient.” She said to him: “Go away, for you have not been struck by a calamity like mine.” And she did not recognise him. When she was informed that it was the Prophet, she went to his house and **there she did not find any guard at his door.** She then said (to him): “I did not recognise you.” He said: “Truly, patience is shown when the calamity first strikes.” (Bukhari, h. 1283)

One point to be noticed here is that the Holy Prophet quietly accepted the woman’s rude reply and walked away. **He did not reply:** Don’t you know who I am? Who do you think you are talking to? Later, people told her that it was the Prophet. When she

went to his house to apologise, she had access because there was no guard at his door. Maulana Muhammad Ali comments on this as follows:

“This hadith also establishes that there was no doorman at the Holy Prophet’s house. That did not mean that people could enter his house without permission, since the Holy Quran itself requires people to seek permission before entering any house. . . . It means that there was no such doorman at the door of the Holy Prophet’s house as government officials and important people keep at their doors, preventing needy persons from access to those in authority.”