

An Essay On Kingdom And Its Place In Society

An Essay On Kingdom And Its Place In Society



**Sayyid Muhammad Husayn
Tabataba'i**

Al-Islam.org

Article

[1] [1]

SHARES

Authors(s):

[Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i](#) [2]

An Essay On Kingdom And Its Place In Society

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i

Al-Mizan, Vol. 5, Under Commentary of Surah 'Aali-'Imran: Verses 26 – 27

An Essay On Kingdom And Its Place In Society

It has already been explained that possession and property are among those conventional but essential concepts which man cannot do without – it makes no difference whether he lives alone or in a society. Possession basically is a recognized relationship between the owner and the property.

Likewise, kingdom is a conventional, nevertheless essential, concept; a subjective institution which man cannot do without. But it is as a member of society, not as an individual, that man needs this institution. No sooner do the people establish a society than they start disputing with one another; everyone wants what is in the other's hands even if it means trespassing the limits and crushing other's rights under his heels. This tendency leads to chaos and conflict. The society which was established to ensure happy and peaceful life, becomes a source of misery and disorder; the medicine turns into a poison.

This anomaly cannot be removed except by creating an overall authority which could compel each member to remain within the limits – thus curbing the reckless ambitions of the oppressor and giving new hope and vigour to the oppressed. That authority, which is called kingdom or rulership, lets everyone enjoy his due rights and keeps every member in his proper place.

Exploitation of weaker sections has been a constant feature of human history. In ancient times some strong persons imposed their will on the society and subdued their compatriots to accept them as their overlord or king. Although such kings and their officers themselves were mostly epitome of oppression and injustice, still their presence was of some benefit to the society. They, in their own interest, did not allow any section to oppress the others – because they did not want anyone to become strong enough to rise one day against their own authority. In this way peace reigned in the society; everyone was afraid of

the autocratic king and no one had any opportunity or inclination to think about the general welfare of the society. If an individual ruler was less oppressive, the subjects sang his praise; if he was unjust beyond their tolerance, they complained and cried.

Sometime a king or ruler was killed or overpowered; and the subjects experienced chaos and disorder, to prevent which they made some strong and able man to take the rein of power in his hands, and he ascended the throne; and thus began the same story of oppression and injustice.

This continued for a long time. Ultimately, society was fed up with the autocratic and dictatorial monarchy. In order to restrain the king's hands, people devised constitutions, delineating the mutual rights and duties of the ruler and the ruled, and somehow or other forced the king to agree. The autocratic monarchy thus became a constitutional one. Yet, it was a hereditary institution.

Then the public became aware of another big defect: Once a king ascended the throne, there was no way to remove him, no matter how unjust or unfit he might prove. Another defect was its hereditary nature; the first-born child of a king got the kingdom, irrespective of his physical, moral and intellectual abilities. They found the answer in republic. Now they had an elected president for a fixed period instead of a hereditary king who ruled for life.

Various nations invented various other system to restrain their rulers; and future might be holding various hitherto unimagined systems in store for us.

All these attempts throughout the world, to regulate the functions of the ruler, prove one thing, if nothing else. Humanity really needs the institution of rulership, no matter by what name it is called in a certain country at a certain time. One overriding authority must subdue all other people's individual ambitions and aims; otherwise, society will suffer from discord, conflict and disorder. That is why we said at the outset that kingdom is an essential concept of the society. And like all other such concepts, society is constantly trying to perfect it by removing from it the harmful elements.

The institution of prophethood has played the most important part in this process. When an idea spreads in the public – especially if it is in accord with the nature, and satisfied the human expectations – it becomes the strongest bond to unite the differing groups, to unify the divergent views and to turn the individuals into a well-disciplined society, which no power can defy.

Prophethood since its earliest days calls the people to do justice and to abstain from injustice; it teaches them to worship Allah and to submit only to Him; and it forbids them to follow the arrogant pharaohs and exploiting Nimrods. This cry has constantly been raised generation after generation, in one nation after another, exhorting the big bosses to submit to the rule of justice, and encouraging the weaker sections to stand up for their rights. It is impossible for such a powerful factor to remain active in the society for so many centuries and not to affect the human psychology, not to mould mankind's way of thinking.

The Qur'an often quotes revelations to this effect sent to the previous prophets, Nuh ('a) is quoted

complaining before his Lord:

“My Lord! surely they have disobeyed me and followed him whose wealth and children have added to him nothing but loss” (71:21).

“And they have planned a very great plan” (71:22).

“And they say: ‘By no means leave your gods...’” (71:23).

The same thing appears in his disputation with the big bosses of his people:

“They said: ‘Shall we believe in you while the meanest follow you?’” (26: 111).

“He said: ‘And what knowledge have I of what they do?’” (26: 112).

“Their account is only with my Lord, if you could perceive” (26: 113).

Likewise, Hud (‘a) admonished his people:

“Do you build on every height a monument? Vain is it that you do” (26: 128).

“And you make strong fortresses that perhaps you may abide” (26: 129).

“And when you lay hands [on men] you lay hands [like] tyrants” (26: 130).

And Salih (‘a) advised his people:

“Therefore, guard against (the punishment of) Allah and obey me” (26: 150).

“And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant” (26: 151).

“Who make mischief in the land and do not act right” (26: 152).

In the same way Musa (‘a) stood up against Pharaoh to oppose his tyranny and to defend and liberate the Israelites; the same stance was taken by Ibrahim (‘a) against Nimrod; and by ‘Isa (‘a) and other Israelite prophets vis-a-vis the oppressors of their times. All of them condemned and attacked the arrogance and injustice of their kings and rulers, and called their people to throw away the yokes of tyranny and stand boldly against the exploiters and transgressors.

So far as the Qur’an is concerned, it is no secret how it exhorts the people not to yield to the transgressors, not to surrender to the oppressors; it encourages the oppressed to stand up boldly against the oppressor to safeguard his self-respect and human dignity; and it warns the arrogant of the bitter fruits of haughtiness, of the chastisement that awaits the oppression and injustice. For example:

“Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with ‘Ad” (89:6).

“[the people of] Iram, possessors of many columned buildings” (89:7).

“The like of which were not created in the cities” (89:8).

“And [with] Thamud, who hewed out the rocks in the valley” (89:9).

“And [with] Pharaoh, the lord of stakes” (89:10).

“Who transgressed in the cities” (89:11).

“So they made great mischief therein?” (89:12).

“Therefore, your Lord let fall upon them the whip of chastisement” (89:13).

“Most surely your Lord is on watch (89:14).

The Qur’anic comment, at the end of the story of Talut, is in itself enough to prove that the kingdom (or rulership) is essential for the mankind:

“And were it not for Allah’s repelling some men with others, the earth would certainly be in a state of disorder; but Allah is Gracious to the creatures” (2:251).

We have shown in its commentary how it confirms this institution in a general way.

Many verses in the Qur’an talk about kingdom, guardianship and obligation of obedience etc. Some of them count the kingdom as a bounty and gift from Allah:

“...and We have given them a grand Kingdom” (4:54).

“...and made you kings and gave you what He had not given to any other among the nations” (5:20).

“...and Allah grants His Kingdom to whom He pleases...” (2:247).

Nevertheless, it is an honour only when it is accompanied by piety. Piety is the only basis of honour, to the exclusion of all other illusory sources of respect. Allah says:

“O you people! surely We have created you of a male and a female and made you nations and tribes that you may recognize each other; surely the most honourable of you with Allah is the most pious of you...” (49:13).

But it is only Allah Who decides the worth of a servant’s piety. Consequently, no one should use his piety as a lever to hoist himself over his compatriots. Nobody should boast about anything whatsoever: If the cause of boasting is some worldly thing, then it is obviously worthless; if it concerns the next world, then it is in the hands of Allah. In any case, a Muslim, who is given this grace of Allah which we call

Kingdom, has nothing to boast about, nor any reason to think himself as superior to the others. All he has got for himself is an unenviable burden of responsibilities of the state. What brightens this gloomy picture is the hope that his Lord will give him great reward in the next life if he manages the affairs of the state with justice and piety.

This is the spirit which animated the whole lives of the true friends of Allah. We shall write later on, Allah willing, on this topic, looking at the lives of the Prophet and his purified progeny; we shall describe, with the help of the correct traditions, what they gained for themselves from their kingdoms: “nothing”; their only interest in the kingdom and authority was to use it to crush the tyrants, to cut the root of mischief in the earth, to bring the arrogants and transgressors back within the limits of religion. And that is the only worth of the kingdom.

The Qur’an treats the kingdom as a tool which is necessary for running the affairs of society – just as education and martial power is necessary for its intellectual and defence needs. Kingdom is an instrument of society; it is not the foundation upon which the society stands. The Qur’an does not invite the Muslims to unite to establish an empire to shame the Byzantine and Iranian empires; it calls them to unite in Islam, and admonishes them not to differ in religion. This unity in religion is the foundation which the Islamic society is built upon. Allah says:

“And (know) that this is My path, the straight one, therefore follow it; and follow not (other) ways, for they will scatter you away from His way” (6: 153).

“Say: ‘O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you, that we shall not worship any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah’; but if they turn back, then say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims’” (3:64).

Clearly, the Qur’an calls the people to surrender to no one except Allah; the society which it recognizes is the one that is based on religion. It demolishes all other loyalties; a Muslim is not to submit to anyone besides Allah; he is not to bow down before any magnificent palace or grandiose castle; he is not to humiliate himself before any Caesar or Khusraw.

Consequently, the Qur’an does not recognize the artificial boundaries which have cut the earth of Allah into small pieces which they call countries, nor the resulting “nationhood” that divides the humanity into territorial segments, putting one group against the others.

A Philosophical Discourse On Attribution Of Kingdom And Other Abstracts Concepts To Allah

The Creator, as the Essential Being, is the ultimate Cause of all that is there in the universe; the relationship between Him and the universe (the whole as well as its components) is that of the cause

and effect. It is a proved axiom of philosophy that causality governs the existence only – the real existence of the effect emanates from the existence of its cause; other things, for example, quiddity, are outside the domain of the cause. Consequently, that which has no real existence, does not come within the system of the cause and effect; and as it is not the effect of any cause, it has no chain of causality reaching up to the ultimate Cause.

Problem arises about the abstract ideas and imaginary concepts, which have no real existence outside the imagination. Being devoid of real existence, they cannot be said to be caused by the ultimate Cause, that is, Allah. But one of those imaginary concepts, is the Shari'ah with its commandments and prohibitions, its rules, principles and conventions. So are the kingdom, the honour, the sustenance etc. Should not these things be attributed to Allah? If the answer is yes, then how?

Reply: These concepts, although devoid of real existence, leave in their track some effects which are inseparable from them; and these effects have real existence. As these effects can be, and are, attributed to Allah, the concepts from which they emanate can as easily be attributed to Him. Kingdom, for example, is an imaginary concept, which has no real existence outside our imagination; we have established this institution to achieve a real benefit.

It is through this abstract idea of kingdom that we try to curb the unscrupulous offenders of the society, to rein the unrestrained designs of the transgressors, and to avenge the oppressed from the oppressor. These are real facts and they can, and are, attributed to Allah. As these effects of kingdom are ascribed to Allah, so can be the kingdom itself, by association.

The same applies to the honour, the rules of the Shari'ah and its principles etc.

In short, all such abstract ideas and concepts may be attributed to Allah, by attributing their effects to Him, in a way that is in keeping with the sanctity of His name.

[Get PDF](#) [3] [Get EPUB](#) [4] [Get MOBI](#) [5]

Topic Tags:

[Qur'anic Exegesis \(Tafsir\)](#) [6]

[Society](#) [7]

[God \(Allah\)](#) [8]

Source URL:

<https://al-islam.org/articles/essay-kingdom-its-place-society-sayyid-muhammad-husayn-tabatabai>

Links

[1] <https://www.addtoany.com/share>

[2] <https://al-islam.org/person/sayyid-muhammad-husayn-tabatabai>

[3] <https://al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/171206>

[4] <https://al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/171206>

[5] <https://al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/171206>

[6] <https://al-islam.org/tags/tafsir>

[7] <https://al-islam.org/tags/society>

[8] <https://al-islam.org/tags/god>