**The Great and the Ordinary**

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An old cliché reads: “Some are born great; some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” There are several determinants that set them apart, the great and the ordinary.
In the Islamic truism, it is not lineage, social status, colour, caste, or creed that makes one great. The character distinguishes one from the other.
The human behaviour in prosperity or adversity, while in power or having lost it, is one criterion. The nobility of character or its bankruptcy stands out.
To guard against nature’s traps, truthful introspection is advised. But it often turns into wishful thinking. That is why shura or mutual consultation is emphasised. Consultation with subordinates on crucial issues could also be fatal. It has to be all inclusive encompassing the mainstream scholars, thinkers, experts and opinion makers.
Some seek guidance from the holy book to judge their own actions or plans. This is often done without catering for the basics. General Zia-ur-Rehman of Bangladesh fell into this grave error. He had according to his own statement done the istekhara (seeking guidance) from the Quran. In his understanding, the answer was in the affirmative. That’s why he had gone about slaughtering thousands of West Pakistanis, including women and children. Guidance is sought from the Quran in legitimate matters not for committing sin or indulging in an unlawful activity. Zia-ur-Rehman was guilty of both.
A great leader is true to himself, God, his cause and mission. Lust and greed destroy the soul. Ego kills the man and gives birth to the devil in him. A leader bids farewell to wisdom as soon as ‘How dare you’ enters his mind. According to Imam Ali (RA), “The fountainhead of merit is the overcoming of anger and the eradication of desire”. Pride in one’s ability to destroy the weak constitutes arrogance, which is direct defiance of the Almighty. It invites God’s wrath and brings disgrace. Tempting fate too often ends in grief. The history brings to mind the departure of Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the most successful ruler Pakistan has ever had. The people kicked him out shouting ‘Death to the dog Ayub’.
Great leaders can rise above the mundane. Living in the present is illusory. Dreaming of the past is futile. A true leader places himself in the eye of the storm with a vision well into the future. That is how he excludes the routine hullabaloo and can concentrate and focus objectively. He must imagine himself sitting on the fence. While in the midst, impulses, emotions, and obsessions be-fog the judgement, mistakes abound, and soul-gnawing remorse becomes inevitable.
God’s consciousness is another essential. According to the last Mughal king, Bahadur Shah Zafar, “he is not to be considered a human being who ignores God in luxury and disregards the fear of God in anger”. The Sovereignty belongs to Allah. The usurpation of power by force or fraud earns curses of the present and future generations. The Ordinary is overwhelmed by overblown ego, power, and greed. When power is usurped to oblige a foreign power, friend, or foe, it becomes treachery. Those empowered by the people turning against the interest or will of the people are like the dogs in the animal kingdom turned against the lion king.
There is no room for corruption in the realm of leadership. The corrupt should never be categorised as leaders. They remain thieves only wherever they might belong. In the world of Islam, it is called the betrayal of trust which is inexcusable and unforgivable. The Prophet (PBUH) is also firm about the gifts received by a government official. All such gifts belong to the public exchequer. The recipients, big or small, are obliged to declare and deposit the gifts in the government treasury. The thieves steal from the government treasury, and the rightful follow the procedures. Here is another difference between the ordinary and the great.
The greats are endowed with the gift of generosity. The ordinary continues to fall into the abyss of meanness. The pursuit of across-the-board justice is not mean even if the criminals abound. Oppression, excesses, and persecution of the innocent are meanness. The Prophet (PBUH) had forgiven all when they were completely at his mercy. He forgave his own enemies and those of his family including the killer of his dear uncle and friend Hamza and even the woman who had ordered the mutilation of his dead body to chew his heart. That is the pinnacle of generosity, while Saddam executing his own sons-in-law in revenge is the nadir of disgrace. While Omer bin Abdul Aziz is known as a mujaddid of his century, Hajjaj bin Yusuf will remain as the icon of satanic force.
The Constitution is the mother of all laws. Extra Constitutional acts are unlawful, shorn of God’s grace and support. These acts bring shame, disrepute, and eternal curse. The Constitution lays down individual and group responsibilities, obligations, rights, and privileges. It is an umbrella that keeps all the segments of society together under its protective fold. It charters the course of political development and nurtures a political culture. When the Constitution is violated, it does not only disrupt the course of political development, but it also withdraws the umbrella leaving the society fragmented and prone to dismemberment. Pakistan’s Constitution should be treated with utmost sanctity. The great do that with religious zeal. George Washington, when offered, flatly refused the third term as the US President.
A great leader, like the chief judge, must base his judgment on the facts of law. He is responsible to God alone, in here and the Hereafter.
The key word is Taqwa or God-consciousness. When I meet my God, said Jinnah, I would want to hear, “Well done Ali”. All great leaders must aspire to hear the same. The ordinary do not have the brains to understand the subtleness of the idea.