

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah and the Foundational Principles of the Khārijite Renegades (G): The Psychology and Underlying Motivation of the Khārijite Renegade

In the various works of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (728H) is a very insightful, detailed and elaborate analysis of the Khārijite doctrine and the underlying reasons for its appearance. The Khārijites are primarily motivated by worldly considerations and grievances pertaining to wealth and positions of authority which they may have been prevented from. Then they see sins and shortcomings of the rulers and their primary grievance causes them to exaggerate these sins and oppression. Thereafter, they make takfīr, contend for rulership and take to violence, thinking and claiming that they are fighting for the sake of Allāh, when in reality they were motivated by the world and pursuing an objective. This was the reality of the very first Khārijites who revolted against ‘Uthmān and then ‘Alī, and likewise the father of all Khārijites, Dhul-Khuwayṣarah al-Tamīmī, who revolted against the Prophet (ﷺ), resentful about not receiving a share from the distribution of wealth.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمته الله) provides an excellent analysis of the psychology of the Khārijite mind. He states: “From that which is desirable to know is that the causes of these tribulations are shared. Certain states pass over the hearts which prevent the hearts from knowing and desiring the truth. They resemble the state prior to Islām of ignorance wherein there was neither knowledge of nor desire for the truth. Islām came with beneficial knowledge (al-‘ilm al-nāfi’) and righteous action (al-‘amal al-ṣāliḥ). It came with knowledge of and desire for the truth. [So what happens] is that some of the rulers oppress [their subjects] by self-indulgence (al-isti’tḥār)¹. The souls are

¹ This refers to the rulers not fulfilling the rights of the subjects and privileging themselves in terms of wealth and other personal interests, thereby acting selfishly.

unable to show patience towards his oppression and are unable to repel his oppression except with what leads to even greater corruption than it. However, due to a person's love for acquiring his right and repelling oppression from himself, he does not look at the general corruption that will result from his action.

For this reason, the Prophet (ﷺ) said: ‘You will face after me the selfishness [of the rulers] so show patience until you meet me at the drinking-pool (ḥawḍ).’² ...” [Ibn Taymiyyah cites numerous other versions of this ḥadīth with similar wording] “... Likewise it is established from him in the Ṣaḥīḥ that he said: ‘Upon a Muslim man is to hear and obey in times of ease and difficulty, in times of pleasure (willingness) and displeasure (unwillingness) and when [the ruler displays] selfishness towards him.’³ And in the Ṣaḥīḥ, from the Prophet (ﷺ) from ‘Ubādah who said: ‘We pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) upon hearing and obeying in times of ease and difficulty, in times of pleasure (willingness) and displeasure (unwillingness) and when [the ruler displays] selfishness towards us, that we do not contend [for authority] with those who possess it, that we speak and stand with the truth wherever it is, not fearing the blame of anyone in [the path] of Allāh.’⁴

Thus the Prophet (ﷺ) ordered the Muslims to show patience when selfishness is displayed towards them, that they obey those in authority over them and that they do not contend for power. Many of those who revolt against the rulers – or the majority of them – do so in order to contend with them whilst the [rulers] display selfishness [towards them], and they [the revolters] are not able to show patience towards this selfishness. Then there are other sins that the ruler may

² Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

³ Related by al-Bukhārī.

⁴ Related by al-Bukhārī.

have causing his hatred of the ruler's selfishness to magnify those other sins. Thus, the one fighting against the ruler remains thinking that he is fighting him so that there is no more tribulation and that the religion is only for Allāh, whereas the greatest [motivating factor] that mobilised him into this was pursuing his objective, whether that is a position of authority or some wealth. Just as the Exalted said, **'If they are given from them, they approve; but if they are not given from them, at once they become angry.'** (9:58)⁵ and in the Ṣaḥīḥ from the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) that he said: "Three Allāh will not speak to, nor look at, nor purify on the Day of Judgement and they will have a tormenting punishment: ... a man who did not give the pledge of allegiance to the ruler except for the world such that if he is given from it he is pleased and if he is prevented from it he is angry..."⁶

So if the misconception (shubhah) and desire (shahwah) from this angle [as it relates to his personal motivation] unites with the desire and misconception from this angle [as it relates to the rulers sins], tribulation arises... and the Khārijites and the Rāfiḍah and others possessing desire were taken from this angle."⁷

In the above statement Ibn Taymiyyah has explained how the Khārijite mind has been taken by circumstances in the absence of

⁵ Note that this verse was revealed in connection to Dhul-Khuwayṣarah al-Tamīmī and his associates. Allāh the Exalted said: **"And among them are some who criticize you concerning the [distribution of] charities. If they are given from them, they approve; but if they are not given from them, at once they become angry."** (9:58). As this entire passage relates to the Hypocrites, Ibn Taymiyyah explained that this man, Dhul-Khuwayṣarah was a hypocrite. And when we consider the modern-day Khārijites such as Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī and others, there is no doubt that they have the psychology and mentality described here by Ibn Taymiyyah. They have worldly grievances which are their primary motivations and subsequently clothe them with religious rhetoric as a means of recruiting and using others to help fulfil their objectives.

⁶ Related by al-Bukhārī.

⁷ Refer to Minhāj al-Sunnah (1406H) 4/538-542.

sound knowledge and curbing of one's desire. The selfishness of the ruler leads a person to become determined in acquiring his right, which may be in relation to wealth or a position of authority or some other matter. He develops hatred of the ruler on account of these affairs – and in all of this he is thinking of his own objectives, and not of the wisdoms in the Sharīah, in the Prophetic guidance relating to the rulers and how to behave with them in situations like these. The Sharīah came with sound knowledge and beneficial righteous action. This guidance is for the benefit of all the subjects and for the society at large. So thinking of justice for himself and attaining his right and already hating the ruler, the ruler may have many other sins, and when this person sees those other sins, it causes him to hate the ruler even more and makes him believe that is justified in his activities. He then thinks that he is contending with and fighting the ruler for a just cause and for the sake of Allāh, when in reality, the greatest underlying motivating factor behind everything what that he was initially prevented either from wealth or from a position of authority or some other material matter. So mixed in all of this is ignorance (jahl) and desire (hawā) as it relates to himself and his personal motivations and ignorance and desire as it relates to his behaviour with the ruler, his selfishness and sins. Greater corruption then arises when the ruler perceives that the subjects are a threat to him, and so this leads to further polarisation between the ruler and subjects and repression. Over time and given the right circumstances and events the situation can worsen whereby even the basic functioning of the society such as transportation, travel, trade and so on can become hampered because of these types of issues and the welfare of the society has been affected. All because an individual or group of individuals were not able to show patience as they had been commanded.

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