

CHAPTER 15

Clarion 10

February 22, 1861¹

More on the Moral Gains of the Homeland

Countrymen,

One of the moral gains of the homeland that resulted from the recent unrest is becoming aware of many issues. First of all, the rulers realize they need to attend more closely to their reign in order to be able to anticipate problems before they occur and not to neglect them lest they become too overwhelming to solve. Had the initial perpetrator of the crime been punished, or the landed tax farmer or district officer where the first murder had taken place been held responsible, it would have served as a lesson and deterrent for others. Such actions would have been one of the best ways to end incitement before it spread and deepened. However, if no one is held accountable for the murders or if the murderer falls into the hands of authorities and they dismiss the case through money, reconciliation, or temporary imprisonment, then life becomes expendable and bloodletting inconsequential for those with evil and corrupt intentions. They would commit more crimes and atrocities; matters would

only get worse until the entire the country and its people are once again ruined.

Second, rulers and governors need to be faithful to the state, the country, and the people. These rulers must be qualified and strong-willed; they must be capable personally and militarily to impose legislations and discipline on the wrongdoers, while steering clear of sowing the kind of divisions through their action that have been handed down from darker ages. Of course, agitators and corrupt hoodlums exist in every age, period, and country. But it saddens us to say that the permissiveness and extreme lenience on the part of the government in our country have increased their numbers in the hinterland. Their existence prevents the country from enjoying a sense of ease, security, and success.

Third, the will of the sultan and his sublime authority needs to be carried out. Ottoman subjects in all communities ought to give him his due respect on religious and political grounds. They should not challenge him, nor should any official of any rank dodge or ignore implementing his eminent ordinances. It is no secret that the imperial decrees that are issued by him, whom God has granted the throne of the sultanate, are intended for the comfort of the people, the prosperity of their livelihood, and the security of their income. If his decrees were tailored to the various whims and prejudices of local officials, they would lose their binding sense for some and imply preferential treatment for others. This is why either imperial decrees should be totally revoked in the same way they were promulgated, i.e., publicly, or they should be applied in full to reflect the letter of their issuer's will. The former hypothetical revocation is impossible; the latter is a duty and a necessity. For anyone who is not blinded by prejudice and deafened by fanaticism is aware that half-hearted implementation of the decrees will shake the foundations of the

law, confuse the people, foster disagreement among them, and obstruct their commercial and other transactions. It will simply place everyone in a state of suspicion or illusion.

Fourth, authority needs to be delegated based on merit and qualification, not on nationality or family lineage, wealth or high social status. In today's world, the most successful and progressive empires are those that observe this principle, which applies to spiritual as well as political office. The reason is this: anyone who counts on being promoted to higher ranks by virtue of birthright or by belonging to a certain race, tribe, or lineage that rose to a privileged status thanks to fate, the ignorance of past generations, or the activity and toil of its founding father is unlikely to exert the efforts necessary for the evolution and progress of those who do not yet enjoy the honorable privilege he forged for himself.

This is especially the case if they belong to the fourth generation or thereafter of a noble lineage. Being so distant from the founder of a family's glory, their attributes lag far behind those of their forefathers—much as an imitator lags behind an inventor. They also lose and belittle the traits necessary to preserve his and their glory because they succumb to the illusion that what their forebears built was not the fruit of long and hard work but, rather, some self-evident reality. It follows that latter generations become aloof. They develop a sense of scorn toward others and entitlement over them with little regard to their welfare. If it so happened that some of the founder's qualities are still in them, they would be in a state of decline and degeneration.² They would not be worthy of the position they hold, nor could they rise to their tasks. It is one's heart and speech, not origin, that determines one's worth. Would it not be ideal if one possessed both, merit and noble descent?

Fifth, it is necessary to erect a barrier between leadership or spiritual authority, on the one hand, and politics or civil authority, on the other. This is because the former is linked—by itself and by nature—to interior and fixed matters that do not change with time and circumstance, whereas the latter is related to external matters that are not fixed but can change and be reformed depending on place, time, and circumstance. The two are distinct and incompatible. It is well nigh impossible to reconcile both in one person. Without separating both types of authority, it is no exaggeration to say that no civilization can exist, live, or grow.

Given their distinct and contradictory spheres of action, combining both can lead to many negative consequences. It will harm and undermine religious creeds as well as political deliberations. Each authority would annul the other's effects and benefits, which, when applied correctly, would supply the best means to serve the intended recipient of both authorities, that is, their shared subject: the human being on the inside in relation to religion and on the outside in relation to politics. Combining both authorities can also encourage many to pursue spiritual office not out of love but out of greed for the temporal privileges, civil authority, and sway that the position undeservingly bestows on them. Conversely, matters of political nature could be handed over to those whose temperaments are ill suited or who were not educated to handle such tasks. Politicians need to be aware of the specificities of their surroundings and the concrete laws governing them. Spiritual leaders, by contrast, are trained in meditation of the mind and abstract judgment, which are necessarily removed from the specific circumstances of a certain object, an individual, a generation, a nation, or type of people.

Since politics has a strong hold on the self and its temperament, it can distract these people from performing the duties ordained by their spiritual office. Spiritual duties are in themselves sublime; they are more virtuous, important, and honorable since they are directed toward the better part of the human being, the inner self. The dereliction of their ordained duty results in the people's loss of faith in religion. They start acting like sheep without a shepherd. They refrain from honing their political craftsmanship and rely instead on the judgment of their spiritual leaders. These leaders only seem to agree to disagree, and if they happen to agree, their agreement is only at face value, short-lived, and inconsequential. This is how differences between their leaders become essential and then eternally entrenched among the people. We do not single out leaders of a specific sect. Rather we speak of the leaders of all the many sects of our country: Muslims, Christians, Druze, 'Alawis, Isma'ilis, Yazidis, Jews, and Samaritans, not to mention their various schools of thought and their offshoots.

Civilized countries have long realized the damage resulting from combining the two authorities. They have drawn a clear line between the spiritual and political realms, not allowing the one to interfere in the interests of the other. The stronger the separation, the greater the success and peace of mind. There is no doubt that this separation should also please legitimate spiritual leaders. It relieves them of many temporal burdens and from their pangs of conscience since political preoccupation unavoidably leads to negligence of the spiritual duties to which they dedicated their lives and teachings. Now, should this separation and the measures it entails be carried out gradually or abruptly? That depends not only on place, time, existing mood, and circumstance, but also on the informed opinion and the judicious will of those entitled to rule.

Sixth, it is necessary to take strong, effective measures to completely secure people's most cherished goods, as well as their trade, skills, and knowledge. Whoever compares the successful cultivation of the many fertile plains in Syria with its rocky and hard-to-plough mountains realizes the virtue of security. It makes all the difference as to whether a fertile plain turns arid or fertile. And whoever compares Syria's current ratio of harvests to population to that of ancient times will notice that its productivity, the wealth of its people, and its government can be increased manifold based on its natural resources. Given the current security deficit, the impoverishment of the people, and the injustices of the governors and local rulers, today's unusually low agricultural production is no surprise.

Eighth [*sic*], rulers and regional governors need to look after their subjects, and care for the worthy among them. They need to maintain their subjects' comfort, well-being, and professional success. There is no doubt that this conduct will increase the love and trust that subjects hold toward their rulers. It will also convince the subjects not to place their commerce and interests under foreign control and protection. All of this is more obvious than a fire on a hilltop.

Countrymen,

We have thus enumerated the moral gains even though we and other compatriots wish they had not come at such cost and damage to the homeland. There are many other gains we did not dwell on because they either were referred to previously, or are self-evident, or are related to the future, which makes them near impossible to anticipate or predict. Despite the ongoing trepidation, unrest, and fragmentation, we still hope that these thick clouds will be followed, God willing, by ample rain and bountiful harvests. Through the perseverance of its guardians,

a new era will dawn upon Syria. Signs of this age and its advancing armies can be discerned from the imminent opening of the carriage way, the introduction of railway lines, and the expansion of schools and hospitals.³

How we wish to see our compatriots, spiritual leaders, and political rulers compete constructively to contribute to these works! We believe that they are capable of it. Moreover, we wish that foreigners, who want to contribute to the welfare of the country rather than their own self-interest, follow the example of those who know best about this country and its people and thereby teach the countrymen in the language of the country. Using Arabic as a language of instruction benefits the language itself. On the one hand it makes the educated more productive and compassionate toward their country, on the other it makes them more acceptable to their fellow countrymen. Those who claim it is not possible to advance on the ladder of civilization using the Arabic language may not realize the merits of this language. Its reform is more feasible and effective than the attempt to civilize Arabs using various foreign languages. Otherwise, we will have to accept regretfully and gloomily that Syria is also bound to become the Babel of languages, customs, and ideologies on top of being the Babel of religions, races, and confessions that it already is.

Countrymen,

You have been well known for generosity, gallantry, zeal, alertness, chivalry, and tolerance. You are now riding the wave of the nineteenth century's generation of knowledge and illumination, of invention and discovery, of culture and learning, of arts and crafts, of progress and civilization.⁴ Do not let those intense seditious acts of civil war lead you away from these good

traits of yours. Rather, you should rise up, be aware and awake, and roll up your sleeves of verve and vigor.

Behold morals and civilization, means of unity and concord hailing from every direction crowding your doors, knocking with might and urgency, demanding entry into your adorned and coveted cities, your proud mountains, your valleys, deserts, and plains, which nature has so beautifully arranged with all its pleasant ornaments and dazzling power. So rid yourselves of your religious fanaticisms, confessional factionalism, sectarian enmities, and selfish prejudices! Open the gates to such noble guests like morals and civilization. Welcome them, extend them a united hand to shake, and accept them with delight and joy. It will fill your country with comfort, prosperity, and peace and cover your quarters with happiness, elegance, and pride.

From a patriot