

Discourse 2

On the Piety of Shah 'Abbas

The ancestors of Shah 'Abbas were distinguished by their descent from *seyyeds* and by their spiritual authority. These attributes, coupled with the poverty, self-discipline, and the inner struggle against the carnal soul which they made their rule of life, earned their acceptance among the mystics, shaikhs, and holy men of their day; supernatural phenomena were constantly associated with them. Shah 'Abbas inherited these great gifts. Despite his preoccupation with the material affairs that are inescapably linked with government and administration, and despite the lure of the trappings of kingship, which are a test of a man's character, many supernatural phenomena were observed to derive from him. But it would take too long to relate these in detail.

Shah 'Abbas was never remiss in seeking to approach God's throne; when he prayed, he was so absorbed in his devotions that he appeared to have left his material body. In all affairs of state, he would seek an augury from the Koran, and he would take no action in the realm of government without asking God's advice. If the text of the Koran expressly forbade something, he would respect God's wise counsel and refrain from taking that action, even though it was desirable in order to gain some material advantage.

Discourse 3

*On Shah 'Abbas's Judgment, His Divinely Given
Wisdom, and the Excellence of His Policies,
Which Are in Conformity with the Divine Will*

Without wishing to wax lyrical in praise of Shah 'Abbas, that monarch is endowed with an unusual degree of understanding, shrewdness, acumen, native sagacity, and learning, and possesses a sound judgment in the everyday problems of this life. When he came to the throne, he set a new standard among the princes of the world in administration, in the conduct of war, in the management of armies and tactics in battle, and in the dispensation of justice. His excellent decrees were accepted as a model by other princes. Although he has wise and experienced officers in his service, in all the battles, sieges, and conquests in which he has been involved from his youth up to the present time, his judgment has been superior to theirs, and it has been his wisdom which has, in the long run, solved all the knotty problems of state affairs. Any course of action on which he has decided has proved to be in conformity with the divine will. Policies his counselors have considered to be a mistake have in the long run been proved to be right. Therefore it is apparent to all that, in all matters affecting his subjects, both great and small, or inescapably associated with government and conquest, the Shah is guided by divine inspiration, and by that alone.

When Shah 'Abbas undertook the personal direction of affairs of state, despite his youth, the multiplicity of his enemies, and the paucity of his helpers, by the grace of God, by good fortune, and by the exercise of his own divinely given intelligence and mother-wit, he succeeded in restoring such order to the state that men stood in amazement at it. It should not be forgotten that Iran had been without a strong king for more than ten years. As a result, the ignorant military, the army officers and the leading men of the tribes, had formed two factions and blotted their scutcheon by treachery and mad ambition. Their actions rent the fabric of the state and gave their enemies the opportunity to attack Iran on two fronts; every year, some new province was lost.

Shah 'Abbas took steps to remedy the situation: first, he judged it

better to deal with his domestic foes. One by one, he got into his power and destroyed those seditious emirs and army officers who had risen to the rank of emir, sultan, or khan, whether by virtue of seniority or corrupt practices, and had then proceeded to stir up trouble between the *qezelbāš* tribes. In their place, he appointed to the highest offices, and to the emirate, promising officers who owed their rise to himself alone. Gradually, as the former class of officer faded into oblivion, he managed to reduce the dissension among the *qezelbāš*, and the king's commands were once more obeyed by the army. He was thus enabled to regain the territory that had been lost, and even to acquire some new. But this will be described in the proper place in Book II.

Discourse 4

On Shah 'Abbas's Good Fortune

It will not have escaped the notice of perspicacious persons that the title of *šāheh-qerān* (lord of the auspicious conjunction of planets) has, in the past, frequently been bestowed on princes by secretaries wishing to flatter their masters. In the case of Shah 'Abbas, however, it is verifiable by fact. From the time of his birth up to the present day, there has occurred the conjunction of various celestial bodies, the prognostications of which corroborate events in the life of Shah 'Abbas. According to the calculations of astrologers, each of these conjunctions foretell the appearance of a powerful and fortunate prince. Skilled astrologers, who have gone deeply into these matters, declare that the signs predict that his reign will be a stable one, and that his nature will reflect the influence of these conjunctions—particularly the conjunction of the planets which occurred in the station of Sagittarius, in the form of a fire, in the year 1012/1603-04.

The predictions astrologers have made in the past—for instance, those of Mowlānā Mohyī al-Dīn Anār-o-pīāzi,¹ who was a master of the science of astrology—have come to pass in every particular. He predicted the appearance of a fortunate ruler, in whose reign there would be troubled times marked by the fluctuating fortunes of various religions; he predicted that some provinces would be devastated, and there would be killing and looting and taking prisoners.² This prediction has been fulfilled in its entirety during the reign of Shah 'Abbas in Azerbaijan, Širvān, and Georgia, where various vain religions that found currency in the course of time have been smitten by his shining sword. As a result of the passage of armies, some parts of the lands of Islam have been devastated, and many people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, have been displaced from their homes and scattered throughout other cities and regions. Finally, great slaughter and looting has taken place in Georgia, and many thousands of Georgian women and children, non-Muslims, have been taken prisoner and brought within the fold of Islam.

¹Lit.: he of the pomegranate and onion! I assume that the Mowlānā used these articles in making his astrological predictions.

²Needless to say, the Mowlānā's "remarkable" prediction was sufficiently vague to be applicable to almost any period of history!

Discourse 5

On Shah 'Abbas's Justice, Concern for the Security of the Roads, and Concern for the Welfare of His Subjects

The greater part of governing is the preservation of stability within the kingdom and security on the roads. Prior to the accession of Shah 'Abbas, this peace and security had disappeared in Iran, and it had become extremely difficult for people to travel about the country. As soon as he came to the throne, Shah 'Abbas turned his attention to this problem. He called for the principal highway robbers in each province to be identified, and he then set about eliminating this class of people. Within a short space of time, most of their leaders had been arrested. Some of them, who had been driven by misfortune to adopt this way of life, were pardoned by Shah 'Abbas and their troubles solved by various forms of royal favor. Overwhelmed by this display of royal clemency, these men swore to serve the king and to behave as law-abiding citizens. Others, however, were handed over to the *šahna* (a police official) for punishment, and society was rid of this scourge. With security restored to the roads, merchants and tradesmen traveled to and from the Safavid empire.

The welfare of his people was always a prime concern of the Shah, and he was at pains to see that the people enjoyed peace and security, and that oppression by officialdom, the major cause of anxiety on the part of the common man, was totally stamped out in his kingdom. Substantial reductions were made in the taxes due to the *divān*: first, the tax on flocks in Iraq, amounting to nearly fifteen thousand Iraqi *tomān*, was remitted to the people of that province, and the population of Iraq, which is the flourishing heart of Iran and the seat of government, by this gift was preferred above the other provinces. Second, all *divān* levies were waived for all Shi'ites throughout the empire during the month of Ramaẓān. The total revenues for one month, which according to the computation of the *divān* officials amounted to some twenty thousand *tomān*, were given to the people as alms. The object was that they should be free from demands for taxes during this blessed month, which is a time to be devoted to the service and worship of God.

Shah 'Abbas was constantly trying to alleviate the hardships of the poor and to ensure that none of his subjects should live in want. He also helped some descendants of the Prophet and other notables, who over the years had fallen on hard times, by granting them a lump sum from the royal treasury so that they might live their days without financial anxiety, and not fall into the clutches of usurers. On many occasions, he allocated substantial sums as subsistence allowances to the poor and to true believers. He also gave alms to these persons, and obtained the reward of these two good works. These are the charitable works the Shah has performed up to the time of writing; may he be spared to perform many others!

Discourse 6

On Shah 'Abbas's Authority and Despotic Behavior, Which are Divine Mysteries

From birth, the Shah has been inclined toward despotic behavior and has had a quick temper; he has never been slow to punish wrongdoers. The punishment of wrongdoers constitutes a major part of the command of armies, the government of empire, and ministry to one's people, and Shah 'Abbas has never been diverted, by worldly motives or by respect for rank, from inflicting punishment. The knowledge that this was the case has had a salutary effect from the early days of his reign. Reports of his sternness and severity have had a restraining influence on those who oppressed their subordinates, and have meant that his orders were carried out without delay. For example, if a father were commanded to slay his son, the order would be obeyed instantly; if the father procrastinated out of compassion, the order would be reversed; and if the son hesitated in his turn, another would be sent to put them both to death. His writ therefore became law, and no one dared to oppose his orders for an instant.

Before 'Abbas came to the throne, the *qezelbaş* tribes were frequently slow in answering a mobilization call, and many men drew their pay but stayed at home. If this was the case with the regular troops, it was more so with the irregulars. Shah 'Abbas therefore conducted an inquiry into the state of the army and issued orders that, whenever there was a call to arms, all men, whether regulars or irregulars, should report without delay out of zeal for their faith, and to save their honor and that of their tribe. If any one failed to answer a mobilization call, he would be put to death forthwith if he could not show cause for his absence, and his property would be made over to the person who reported him to the authorities. If his tribe took his side and concealed his offense, the whole tribe would be punished. After a few men had been executed and their property handed over to informers, mobilization orders were obeyed with alacrity.

Discourse 9

On Shah 'Abbas's Concern for the Rights of His Servants and His Avoiding Laying Hands on Their Possessions

One of the most agreeable qualities of this monarch is his compassionate treatment of his servants, which is coupled with a concern that faithful service should receive its just reward. His record in this regard is so outstanding that it is not matched by that of any other chivalrous¹ prince. As long as his servants are constant in their loyalty, the royal favor is lavished upon them, nor is it withdrawn for any trifling offense committed out of ignorance or from negligence. If any of his servants dies from natural causes, or gives his life in battle in the defense of the faith and the state, the Shah is generous in his treatment of their dependents. In the case of officeholders, even if their sons are too young at the time of their father's death to be fit for office, nevertheless, in order to resuscitate their families, he confers the same office on the sons out of his natural generosity and magnanimity.

Moreover, since the Shah considers the possessions and treasures of this world of little value, even if the deceased has left substantial sums of money, such is the Shah's magnanimity and concern to follow the precepts of canon law that he (unlike the majority of princes) does not lay covetous eyes on the inheritance, but divides it among the heirs in the proportions ordained by God. This is regarded by some as his most praiseworthy characteristic, for most of the princes of the world consider it impossible for them to show greater appreciation for their servants than by following this practice, which brings with it heavenly rewards.

¹Persian, *arbāb-e fotovvat*. *Fotovvat*, strictly speaking, is "conduct worthy of a gentleman."

Discourse 10

On Shah 'Abbas's Breadth of Vision, and His Knowledge of World Affairs and of the Classes of Society

After he has dealt with the affairs of state, Shah 'Abbas habitually relaxes. He has always been fond of conviviality and, since he is still a young man, he enjoys wine and the company of women. But this does not affect the scrupulous discharge of his duties, and he knows in minute detail what is going on in Iran and also in the world outside. He has a well-developed intelligence system, with the result that no one, even if he is sitting at home with his family, can express opinions which should not be expressed without running the risk of their being reported to the Shah. This has actually happened on numerous occasions.

As regards his knowledge of the outside world, he possesses information about the rulers (both Muslim and non-Muslim) of other countries, about the size and composition of their armies, about their religious faith and the organization of their kingdoms, about their highway systems, and about the prosperity or otherwise of their realms. He has cultivated diplomatic relations with most of the princes of the world, and the rulers of the most distant parts of Europe, Russia, and India are on friendly terms with him. Foreign ambassadors bearing gifts are never absent from his court, and the Shah's achievements in the field of foreign relations exceed those of his predecessors.

Shah 'Abbas mixes freely with all classes of society, and in most cases is able to converse with people in their own particular idiom. He is well versed in Persian poetry; he understands it well, indulges in poetic license, and sometimes utters verses himself. He is a skilled musician, an outstanding composer of rounds, rhapsodies, and part-songs; some of his compositions are famous. As a conversationalist, he is capable of elegant and witty speech.

Discourse 11

On Shah 'Abbas's Public Works and Building Achievements

Shah 'Abbas has been responsible for many public works, and has a natural inclination toward charitable activities. He has constituted as lands held in mortmain all the estates he has either inherited or acquired, the fair market value of which amounts to one hundred thousand *tomān*, and has made them over as endowments to the shrines of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. The net proceeds of these endowments, after all necessary deductions have been made, amount to seven or eight thousand *tomān*. These funds are allocated to pensions and stipends for the '*olamā*, holy men in general, and residents of the shrines. The Shah has constituted all his private possessions into a *vaqf*, and is extremely careful in his own personal spending. This practice is peculiar to Shah 'Abbas among princes, and has rarely been followed either before or since.

In most provinces of the empire, he has left splendid monuments such as mosques, theological seminaries, pious foundations, and charming residences and gardens. Although a detailed description of each of these will be given at the appropriate point, I will list here the principal achievements, at the risk of prolixity: At Mašhad, the extension of the shrine complex, including lofty porticos and the buildings around them; the painting and decoration of the sanctuary; the building of new roads, and the construction of a water channel in the middle of the street; the construction of the large cistern within the main courtyard. This cistern is always brimming with water, and pilgrims to and residents of the shrine return grateful thanks for its existence; the construction of the dome over the tomb of Kāja Rabī' al-Koşeym, which is outside the city and is of peerless beauty and form; the buildings of the Qadam-gāh¹ of the Sasanian monarch Šāhpūr, and the ancillary buildings connected with this, together with the construction of a cistern and fountains fed by water led down from the mountains, and the planting of trees indigenous to the region—truly a site to gladden the eye of the beholder.

¹A *qadam-gāh* is a shrine built around a site containing the footprint of some holy man or other notable personage.

At Ardabīl, the shrine of Shaikh Jebrā'īl, the ancestor of Shah 'Abbas; a gold railing round the dais, opposite the tomb; a silver railing and other adornments of the sacred enclosure; the restoration of the tomb of Shaikh Zāhed-e Gilānī, the rehabilitation of that of Shaikh Šehāb al-Dīn Ahārī, and the designing of the beautiful garden around the tomb.

At Isfahan, the Masjed-e Jāme', situated on the south side of the Naqš-e Jahān Square. People who have traveled widely say they have rarely seen marblework to equal that on the walls of this mosque; the building of another extremely fine mosque, opposite the royal court;² the building of a theological seminary; a hospital; public baths; the Qeyṣariya,³ and rows of shops flanking the Meydān, with apartments over; excellent caravanserais; the five-storied royal palace, and private apartments decorated in gold and named Sarvestān (the cypress grove), Negārestān (the picture gallery), Goldasta (the posy of roses), and the like; other five-storied buildings; reservoirs; the main avenue known as the Čahār Bāg, approximately one *farsaḡ* in length, and the gardens flanking the avenue on each side—not to mention the fine mansions erected in each garden, too numerous to specify; the magnificent bridge, consisting of forty arches,⁴ situated in the middle⁵ of the Čahār Bāg avenue and spanning the Zāvanda-rūd—a bridge without equal in the world; the suburb of 'Abbāsābād on the west side of Isfahan, built to provide housing for the colony of Tabrizis; and, outside the city, the Bāg-e Kowma; the Bāg-e Vohūš (zoo); the Gāvkānī inn, and another inn in the Kargūšī plain, between Varzana in the Isfahan district and Nadūšan in the Yazd district—a place where there always used to be great danger from highway robbers, but which is now safe.

At Qazvin, the capital, the royal palace, and the two-storied private apartments, decorated with gold, known as the New Building; the splendid caravanserai and the Jahān-nomā buildings situated both east and west of the Sa'ādat Square.

²The reference is to the Masjed-e Shaikh Lotfollāh, opposite the 'Alī Qāpū (or Ala Qāpū) palace.

³The huge bazaar complex at Isfahan.

⁴There are actually thirty-three. This bridge was named for Shah 'Abbas's celebrated commander in chief, Allāhverdi Khan, who rose from the ranks of the *golāms*. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, ii, 45, observes: "A priori, one would hardly expect to have to travel to Persia to see what may, in all probability, be termed the stateliest bridge in the world."

⁵After Safavid times, the portion of the Čahār Bāg south of the bridge fell into disrepair.

At Kashan, the palace complex, comprising several mansions and gardens; the public bath; the caravanserai; the Qohrūd dam; the Rebāṭ-e Sangīn inn; the Sīāh-kūh inn; and the roadbed between Namakšār and Stāhkūh, which was consolidated with rock and lime over a distance of several *farsaḡs*, at a cost of about ten thousand *tomān*—a work for which the traveler offers a prayer of gratitude.

In Māzandarān, the construction of the summer palace at Farahābād,⁶ near the shores of the Caspian Sea. A stream called Tejina-rūd runs through the grounds, and Shah 'Abbas built the magnificent bridge and highway that connects Farahābād with Sārī, a distance of some four *farsaḡs*, and is constructed of solid blocks of stone. Each garden in the grounds has its own mansion, and the palace complex includes bathhouses, markets, and pleasure gardens. Because it is such a beautiful place, the bourgeoisie and artisans aspired to reside there. Over the years, thousands of houses belonging to Muslims and non-Muslims from all parts of the empire sprang up in the palace grounds. Today, it is doubtful whether there is another city of its size within the confines of the Islamic world.

Shah 'Abbas has also constructed residences and gardens at Sārī and Āmol, and the lake and mansions at Bār-forūš-deh, and at Ašraf,⁷ another palace complex, with gardens and springs, and silver basins on the balconies of the mansions, which are cunningly fed with water brought from a point higher up the slopes of the mountains. Only half a *farsaḡ* from Ašraf, at a place called Bāḡāt, which lies at a higher elevation, there is another group of gardens, baths, and mansions equipped with halls and porticos. In the grounds, there are artificial lakes and fountains that beggar description. The whole way from Isfahan to Ašraf, at distances of four *farsaḡs*, Shah 'Abbas has constructed overnight accommodations consisting of guest rooms, workshops, and gardens, most equipped with bathhouses. Each lodging house is designed to provide anything the Shah may require on his overnight stay.

At Astarābād, the palace complex. At Naṭanz, the Bāg-e Tājābād, with court buildings, upper chambers, bathhouses; the Bāg-e 'Abbāsābād between Naṭanz and Kashan. At Tabriz, construction of the tombs of 'Eyn-e 'Alī and Zeyn-e 'Alī, and the restoration of the mosque of Shah Tahmasp. In the Hamadan region, near Šahr-e Now

⁶See my article in *EP*.

⁷See my article in *EP*.

Book I, Discourse 11: Shah 'Abbas's Public Works

Čamčāl, on the slopes of the Bīsotūn mountain, a hospice for the use of pilgrims visiting the local shrines. Let us hope that each of the public works will bring the Shah victory and prosperity, and that these achievements will continue to be remembered in ages to come.

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