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15) The Sahabah And The Ahl Al-Bayt: Remembering The Tragic Thursday

After making the public declarations at 'Arafat and Ghadir, and possibly at other places too, the Messenger, sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi, decided to put everything down in black and white during the last few days of his blessed lifetime. Imam al–Bukhari (d. 256 H) records how his attempt failed:

حدثنا قبيصة حدثنا ابن عيينة عن سليمان الأحول عن سعيد ابن جبير عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما أنه قال يوم الخميس وما يوم الخميس ثم بكى حتى خضب دمعه الحصباء فقال :اشتد برسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم وجعه يوم الخميس فقال ائتوني بكتاب أكتب لكم كتابا لن تضلوا بعده أبدا . فتنازعوا ولا ينبغي عند نبي تنازع فقالوا هجر رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم قال دعوني فالذي أنا فيه خير مما تدعونني إليه . وأوصى عند موته بثلاث :أخرجوا المشركين من جزيرة العرب وأجيزوا الوفد بنحو ما كنت أجيزهم . ونسيت الثالثة

Qubaysah – Ibn 'Uyaynah – Sulayman al-Ahwal – Sa'id b. Jubayr – Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them both:

"Thursday! And what a Thursday it was!" Then, he (Ibn 'Abbas) wept till the stones on the ground were soaked with his tears. Then, he said, "The illness of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, became severe on Thursday, and he said, 'Bring me a sheet of paper so that I may write a document for you after which you will never go astray'. They differed, and it is not proper to differ in front of a prophet. So, they said, 'The Messenger of Allah is raving mad.' He replied, 'Leave me, as I am in a better state than what you are calling me towards.' Then, he ordered them, when he was about to die, to do three things: 'Expel the idolaters from the Arabian Peninsula and show respect to all foreign delegates by giving them gifts as I used to do.' And I forgot the third."1

Dr. al-Bagha defines the word used by the Sahabah to describe their Prophet:

(hajara), meaning: he is saying unintelligible things due to the severity of his illness.2

Imam Muslim (d. 261 H) also documents:

حدثنا إسحاق بن إبراهيم أخبرنا وكيع عن مالك بن مغول عن طلحة بن مصرف عن سعيد بن جبير عن ابن عباس أنه قال يوم الخميس وما يوم الخميس ثم جعل تسيل دموعه حتى رأيت على خديه كأنها نظام اللؤلؤ قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم ائتوني بالكتف والدواة أو اللوح والدواة أكتب لكم كتابا لن تضلوا بعده أبدا فقالوا إن رسول الله عليه و سلم يهجر

Ishaq b. Ibrahim – Waki' – Malik b. Maghwal – Talhah b. Musarrif – Sa'id b. Jubayr – Ibn 'Abbas:

"Thursday! What a Thursday it was!" Then, tears began to flow until I saw them on his cheeks as if they were the strings of pearls. "The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said, 'Bring me a shoulder-blade and an inkpot or a tablet and an inkpot, so that I may write for you a document after which you will never go astray'. They said: 'The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, is raving mad.'"3

Imam Ahmad (d. 241 H) too has this riwayah:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثني أبى ثنا سفيان عن سليمان بن أبى مسلم خال بن أبى نجيح سمع سعيد بن جبير يقول قال بن عباس يوم الخميس وما يوم الخميس ثم بكى حتى بل دمعه وقال مرة دموعه الحصى قلنا يا أبا العباس وما يوم الخميس قال اشتد برسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم وجعه فقال ائتوني اكتب لكم كتابا لا تضلوا بعده أبدا فتنازعوا ولا ينبغى عند نبى تنازع فقالوا ما شأنه اهجر قال سفيان يعنى هذى

'Abd Allah (b. Ahmad) – my father (Ahmad b. Hanbal) – Sufyan – Isma'il b. Abi Muslim, uncle of Ibn Abi Najih – Sa'id b. Jubayr – Ibn 'Abbas:

"Thursday! What a Thursday it was!" Then, he wept until his tears moistened the pebbles. We said, "O father of al-'Abbas! What was the Thursday?" He replied, "The illness of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, became severe. So, he said, 'Come to me so that I may write for you a document after which you will never go astray'. But, they disagreed, and it is not proper to disagree in front of a prophet. Then they said, 'What is his problem? He is raving mad." Sufyan (a sub-narrator) said (concerning the word used by the Sahabah): "It means 'RAVING MADNESS".4

Al-Arnaut says:

إسناده صحيح على شرط الشيخين

Its chain is sahih upon the standard of the two Shaykhs.5

Imam al-Bukhari is back again:

حدثنا محمد حدثنا ابن عيينة عن سليمان الأحول سمع سعيد ابن جبير سمع ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما يقول: يوم الخميس وما يوم الخميس ثم بكى حتى بل دمعه الحصى قلت يا أبا عباس ما يوم الخميس؟ قال اشتد برسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم وجعه فقال ائتوني بكتف أكتب لكم كتابا لا تضلوا بعده أبدا .فتنازعوا ولا ينبغي عند نبي تنازع فقالوا ما له أهجر استفهموه فقال ذروني فالذي أنا فيه خير مما تدعونني إليه .فأمرهم بثلاث قال أخرجوا المشركين من جزيرة العرب وأجيزوا الوفد بنحو ما كنت أجيزهم .والثالثة خير إما أن سكتن عنها وإما أن قالها فنسيتها .قال سفيان هذا من قول سليمان

Muhammad – Ibn 'Uyaynah – Sulayman al-Ahwal – Ibn Jubayr – Ibn 'Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them both:

"Thursday! What a Thursday it was!" Then, he wept until his tears moistened the pebbles. So I said, "O father of 'Abbas! What was the Thursday?" He replied, "The illness of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, became severe. So, he said, 'Bring to me so a shoulder–blade that I may write for you a document after which you will never go astray'. But, they disagreed, and it is not proper to disagree in front of a prophet. Then they said, 'What is wrong with him? He is raving mad. Ask him questions to confirm'. He said, 'Leave me, for that in which I am is better than that towards which you are calling me.' Then, he commanded them to do three things: Expel the idolaters from the Arabian Peninsula, and show respect to all foreign delegates as I used to do." The third (instruction) was the best. He either kept quiet about it or he said it but I forgot it. Sufyan said: "This was from the statement of Sulayman."6

It was such a disastrous day – so much that Ibn 'Abbas, radhiyallahu 'anhu, wept abnormally when he remembered it. It was the day the Sahabah of Muhammad first openly accused him of raving mad, of saying unintelligible things due to severe illness, in his holy presence! We often see some Sunnis desperately trying to downplay the shock of what the Sahabah said by mistranslating or misinterpreting the key words – hajara (فجر) and ahajara (أهجر) [and their nominal form is al-hujr (اللهجر)] – in the hadith as simply "to become unconscious" or "to faint". However, one of their earliest classical grand Imams – Sufyan b. 'Uyaynah (d. 198 H) – had longed closed the door in their faces. He was explicit that the Sahabah literally intended that the Prophet of Allah was "raving mad", that the words they used meant exactly that. This matter is equally confirmed by other classical 'ulama of the Ahl al–Sunnah. Imam al–Shami (d. 942 H), for instance, states:

الهجر :بالضم :الهذيان وقول الباطل ويطلق على الكلام الفاحش.

Al-Hujr: is raving madness and irrational talk, and it is (also) used to refer to obscene, immoral talk.7

The ace Sunni linguist, Ibn Manzur (d. 711 H), says as well:

.والهجر :الهذيان

Al-Hujr: is raving madness.8

Imam Ibn Salam (d. 224), an ancient, leading Sunni hadith expert, has this submission too:

As for al-hujr in statements, it is raving madness.9

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-'Asgalani (d. 852 H) does not say anything different either:

Al-Hujr is raving madness 10

At this point, we want to focus on the second term used by the Sahabah: ahajara (أهجر). As pointed out by Sufyan b. 'Uyaynah, it – along with hajara (هجر) – means "to rave mad". However, there is a second definition for it which must be taken into account. Imam Ibn Salam comes in again:

Al-Kisai – and part of it is from al-Asma'i and others: al-hujr is to say obscene things and to use obscene language. It is said from it: the man ahajara, yahjur, ihjaran.11

So, to say that someone is saying obscene things or using obscene language, the verb to use is either ahajara or yahjur. Interestingly, both terms were among those used by the Sahabah to describe their Prophet:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, is raving mad.

And:

Then they said, 'What is wrong with him? He is raving mad.

We have translated both words as "raving mad" – which is one of their definitions anyway, influenced heavily by the commentary of Ibn 'Uyaynah. But then, the translations could also be these:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, is saying obscene things.

And:

Then they said, 'What is wrong with him? He is saying obscene things.

Qadi 'Iyad (d. 544 H), for instance, has given both meanings to ahajara – one of the words used by the Sahabah to qualify the Rasul. He even specifically refers to the hadith itself:

It is said "the man ahajara" when he says obscene things. His statement "the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, ahajara" – which is the correct form with fathah of the al–ha (i.e. pronounced as ahajara) – means raving madness; and al–hujr means raving madness. 12

Abu 'Ubayd al-Bakri does the same too:

Al-Hujr is obscenity in statements. It is said from it: ahajara when he says obscene things. It is also said that he hajara in his sleep if he says irrational things. It is said that an ill person hajara or ahjara when he raves mad; and Ibn 'Abbas said, "The ILLNESS of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, became severe, and he said, 'Bring to me a paper so that I may write for you what will prevent you from going astray after me.' But they said: 'What is wrong with him? He hajara.'"13

In any case, the implication is still the same, either way. The Sahabah would not have accused their

Prophet of saying obscene things unless they considered him – rightly or wrongly – to be raving mad, especially during his illness.

Imam Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 H) also has this input:

They say "the man ahajara" when he makes obscene statements. 14

Ibn Faris (d. 395 H), a well-known classical linguist, caps it:

Al-Hujr is raving madness. It is said that the man hajara (i.e. to mean that he is suffering from al-hujr). Al-Hujr also means obscenity in language. It is said that the man ahajara in his language (i.e. to mean that he uses obscene language). 15

This clarification by Ibn Faris – and, of course, by others too – would establish that the Sahabah accused the Messenger of both types of al-hujr:

So, they said, 'The Messenger of Allah is raving mad (hajara).'

And:

They said: 'The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, is raving mad (yahjur)."16

And:

Then they said, 'What is wrong with him? He is raving mad (ahajara).'

And finally:

Then they said, 'What is wrong with him? He is saying obscene things (ahajara).'

But, how did the situation get to that level?! How did things become so rotten? Why did those Sahabah flare up so badly after hearing the harmless request of the Prophet? Imam al-Bukhari records a report which sheds some light:

حدثنا إبراهيم بن موسى أخبرنا هشام عن معمر عن الزهري عن عبيد الله بن عبد الله عن ابن عباس قال الما حضر النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم قال وفي البيت رجال فيهم عمر بن الخطاب قال هلم أكتب لكم كتابا لن تضلوا بعده .قال عمر إن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم غلبه الوجع وعندكم القرآن .فحسبنا كتاب الله .واختلف أهل البيت اختصموا فمنهم من يقول قربوا يكتب لكم رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم كتابا لن تضلوا بعده ومنهم من يقول ما قال عمر فلما أكثروا اللغط والاختلاف عند النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم قال قوموا عني قال عبيد الله فكان ابن عباس يقول إن الرزية كل الرزية ما حال بين رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم وبين أن يكتب لهم ذلك الكتاب من اختلافهم ولغطهم

Ibrahim b. Musa - Hisham - Ma'mar - al-Zuhri - 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Abd Allah - Ibn 'Abbas:

When the time of the death of the Prophet, peace be upon him, approached, and there were some men in the room, and among them was 'Umar b. al-Khattab. He (the Prophet) said, "Come near. Let me write for you a document after which you will never go astray." 'Umar said, "Verily, the illness has now fully possessed the Prophet, peace be upon him. And you have the Qur'an. So, the Book of Allah is sufficient for us."

The people in the room disputed. Among them were those who said, "Come near so that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, may write for you a document after which you will never go astray." And among them were those who were repeating what 'Umar said. When their noise and dispute became very rowdy in the presence of the Prophet, peace be upon him, he said, "Stand up and leave me."

Narrated 'Ubayd Allah: Ibn 'Abbas used to say: "It was a great disaster that their dispute and noise prevented the Messsenger of Allah, peace be upon him, from writing that document for them." 17

So, it was all started by 'Umar. He described the Messenger of Allah as having been fully possessed by his illness. In other words, it was the illness that now owned, controlled and dictated what he thought, heard, saw, said or did! He himself was no longer in charge of anything of himself – his brain, his senses, his body. It was this heavy statement that caused the uproar in the room; and those who accused the Prophet of raving madness were also only "repeating what 'Umar said". Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) explains what 'Umar's "dilemma" was in that incident:

والمرض جائز على الأنبياء ولهذا قال ماله أهجر فشك في ذلك ولم يجزم بأنه هجر والشك جائز على عمر فإنه لا معصوم إلا النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم لا سيما وقد شك بشبهة فإن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم كان مريضا فلم يدر أكلامه كان من وهج المرض كما يعرض للمريض أو كان من كلامه المعروف الذي يجب قبوله

As for 'Umar, it was not clear to him whether the statement of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was from the severity of the illness or from his intelligent statements. Illness was possible for prophets too. This was why he ('Umar) said, "What is wrong with him? He is raving mad (or he is saying obscene things)". So, he doubted in that, and did not explicitly state that he was raving mad. Of course, it was permissible for 'Umar to doubt – since none is infallible except the Prophet, peace be upon him – especially as he doubted due to confusion. This was because the Prophet, peace be upon him, was ill. So, he ('Umar) did not know whether his statement was from the sparkle of the illness as it happens to ill people or from his intelligent statements which must be accepted. 18

Well, ignoring the blatant incoherence of the submissions, there are nonetheless pieces of misinformation in them. First and foremost, 'Umar expressed no doubt in his statement. He was direct, explicit and firm:

'Umar said, "Verily, the illness has fully possessed the Prophet, peace be upon him. And you have the Qur'an. So, the Book of Allah is sufficient for us."

Secondly, this is what our Shaykh has attributed to 'Umar:

This was why he said, "What is wrong with him? He is raving mad (or he is saying obscene things)." So, he doubted in that, and did not explicitly state that he was raving mad.

However, it was not 'Umar who uttered those words:

Then THEY said, 'What is wrong with him? He is raving mad. Ask him questions to confirm'.

Other people did. The words of 'Umar himself are undisputed. He proclaimed that the Messenger of Allah had totally lost control of himself – including his brain and senses – to his illness. He did not express doubt in the matter, but was instead firm on it. In fact, the fact that 'Umar openly and boldly

countermanded the order of the Prophet is enough evidence that he ('Umar) believed – or at least pretended to have believed – that the Messenger was indeed raving mad. After all, this is what our Shaykh himself says:

So, he ('Umar) did not know whether his statement was from the sparkle of the illness as it happens to sick people or from his intelligent statements which must be accepted.

If he had accepted that the Prophet was making intelligent statements, he would have obeyed. But, he opposed the command. This means that he thought – or pretended to have thought – that the Messenger of his Lord was talking irrationally, or saying obscene things, due to illness.

So, we ask: what exactly in the instruction of the Prophet to his Sahabah sounded "irrational" to warrant the attack on his mental health by them? In reality, there was no such thing. His statement was perfectly sensible, reasonable and intelligent:

Bring me a sheet of paper so that I may write a document for you after which you will never go astray.

At this point, this author recalls an incident which took place in early 2007, some months after his conversion to Shi'ism. He was investigating the statements of 'Umar and his group, which called into question the mental health of the Messenger of Allah. This author asked a Sufi brother his opinion on what they did. "Of course," he replied, "they had a point! The Prophet was unlettered. He was Ummi, as the Qur'an has called him. Yet, he was asking for pen and paper to write!" This author was very shocked. "You mean", he asked the Sufi, "the Prophet was indeed raving mad as they claimed?!" He strangely, however, refused to answer that question. It was obvious nonetheless. If he had believed that the Messenger of Allah was mentally healthy, he would have stated so in reply. By keeping quiet, he silently hinted a "yes" to this author's question.

There are millions of Muslims, especially from the Ahl al–Sunnah wa al–Jama'ah, who strongly believe that the Prophet was unlettered throughout his lifetime. They mostly base their position on the fact that he has been called "the Ummi Prophet" in the Book of Allah, and on this verse:

Neither did you (O Muhammad) read any book before it, nor did you write any book with your right hand. In that case, indeed, the followers of falsehood might have doubted. 19

Well, the word ummi has several meanings. An unlettered person is an ummi in truth. But, every person of Makkan origin is also an ummi. Another name for Makkah is Umm al–Qura20. So, linguistically, anyone from the blessed city may either be called a Makkan or an Ummi. As such, there is no conclusive evidence from that term for the alleged illiteracy of the Messenger of Allah. It could go either way. Besides, the above ayah seems to undermine – rather than strengthen – the Sunni claim: Muhammad never wrote or read any book before the Qur'an. This suggests that he actually wrote and read after the start of its descent. In fact, this is explicitly confirmed in the Book itself:

A Messenger from Allah, reading purified pages. In them are correct and straight laws.21

An unlettered fellow never "reads" any pages, does he?

Another clear proof of the literacy of the Prophet (since the start of the Qur'an) is this report of al–Bukhari of what happened at al–Hudaybiyyah, four years before he was accused of raving madness by his Sahabah:

حدثنا عبيد الله بن موسى عن إسرائيل عن أبي إسحاق عن البراء رضي الله عنه قال :اعتمر النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم في ذي القعدة فأبى أهل مكة أن يدعوه يدخل مكة حتى قاضاهم على أن يقيم بها ثلاثة أيام فلما كتبوا الكتاب كتبوا هذا ما قاضى عليه محمد رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فقالوا لا نقر بها فلو نعلم أنك رسول الله ما منعاك لكن أنت محمد بن عبد الله قال أنا رسول الله وأنا محمد بن عبد الله .ثم قال لعلي امح رسول الله .قال لا والله لا أمحوك أبدا فأخذ رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم الكتاب فكتب هذا ما قاضى عليه محمد بن عبد الله لا يدخل مكة سلاح إلا في القراب وأن لا يخرج من أهلها بأحد إن أراد أن يتبعه وأن لا يمنع أحدا من أصحابه أراد أن يقيم .بها

'Ubayd Allah b. Musa – Israil – Abu Ishaq – al-Bara, may Allah be pleased with him:

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, intended to perform 'Umrah in the month of Dhi al-Qa'dah, the people of Makkah did not let him enter Makkah till he settled the matter with them by promising to stay in it for three days only. When they wrote the document (of treaty), they wrote: "These are the terms on which Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, agreed". They said, "We will not agree to this, for if we believed that you are the Messenger of Allah, we would not prevent you, but you are Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah." He said, "I am the Messenger of Allah and also Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah." Then, he said to 'Ali, "Rub off (the words) 'the Messenger of Allah." He ('Ali) replied, "No, by Allah, I will never rub you off." So, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, took the document AND WROTE, "This is what Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah has agreed upon: No arms will be brought into Makkah except in their cases, and nobody from the people of Makkah will be allowed to go with him even if he wished to follow him and he will not prevent any of his companions from staying in Makkah if the latter wants to

How could an unlettered person have achieved such a feat?!

In any case, the problem of 'Umar and his supporters with the instruction of their Prophet was only the bold phrase below:

Bring me a sheet of paper so that I may write a document for you after which you will never go astray.

We have drawn this conclusion from 'Umar's own reply to it:

'Umar said, "Verily, the illness has seized total control of the Prophet, peace be upon him. And you have the Qur'an. So, the Book of Allah is sufficient for us."

Meanwhile, just a few weeks before, the Rasul had proclaimed at 'Arafat:

O mankind! I have left behind over you that which if you hold fast to it you will never go astray: the Book of Allah AND my offspring, my Ahl al-Bayt."

A few days later, at Ghadir Khumm, he repeated the call:

I have left behind over you that which if you hold fast to it you will never go astray: the Book of Allah – one end of which is in His Hand and the other in your hands – AND my Ahl al-Bayt."

It was certain that the Prophet of Allah was going to write – either in his own handwriting or through dictation – this same order of his to all humanity. He wanted it to be his written decree to the Ummah till the Hour; and we in our generation could have had a glance of it. 'Umar caught wind of his intention – which was obvious anyway considering the similarities in his wordings. Then, he ('Umar) delivered a preemptive response to the Messenger: "we do not want your offspring with the Qur'an; we want the Book of Allah alone"!

'Umar's issue was not whether the Prophet was literate or illiterate. In fact, he raised absolutely no objection on that point – which reinforces the conviction that the Rasul was literate later in life. Rather, he and his group were not prepared at all to accept the Ahl al-Bayt over them alongside the Book of Allah as masters and guides after the Prophet.

In order to ensure their success, the 'Umarists placed a question mark on the mental competence of the Messenger of the Rabb before he was able to write anything. So, even if he had proceeded with his plan, the document would have been rejected after his death by the 'Umarist movement – who would have named it the product of an deranged mind. In fact, this could have had a counterproductive effect on his earlier public pronouncements on the same matter.

Therefore, in his great wisdom – and, obviously, in accordance with a new decree from his Lord – Muhammad abandoned the idea and left everything to the Judgment of Allah. Meanwhile, as history would later confirm, it was on that calamitous Thursday, in that sad room, and at that fateful hour, that Sunni Islam was born, under the leadership of 'Umar b. al–Khattab. Since that Thursday, Sunni Muslims have never ceased to reject the offspring of the Prophet, his Ahl al–Bayt, as the inseparable partner of the Qur'an in providing leadership and guidance to the Ummah in particular, and to humanity in general.

- 1. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 3, p. 1111, # 2888
- 2. Ibid
- 3. Abu al-Husayn Muslim b. al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi, Sahih Muslim (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Fuad 'Abd al-Bagi], vol. 3, p. 1257, # 1637 (21)
- 4. Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muasassat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu'ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 1, p. 222, # 1935
- 5. Ibid
- 6. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 3, p. 1155, # 2997
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