

30. Did the Imam Exercise His Rule as a Preacher?

Some of the students of history think that one of the main reasons for the difficulties which the Imam encountered in his caliphate is that he did not exercise his rule as a ruler. He rather exercised his rule as a preacher. He was not firm with his opponents. He allowed them to oppose him and he was so lenient with them that they felt safe to confront him and disobey him.

Abdullah Ibn 'Umar and Saad Ibn Abu Waqass and others from the companions in Medina refused to elect him and he did not force them to change their vote as the Caliphs before him did. None of the three Caliphs allowed any companions to refrain from giving their allegiance to the Caliph. Al-Zubayr was forced to give his allegiance to Abu Bakr and Abu Bakr and his minister 'Umar applied a tremendous pressure on 'Ali himself to give his allegiance to Abu Bakr.

When Al-Zubayr and Talhah left Medina to Mecca pretending that they were going for Omrah (a mini pilgrimage) to visit the House of God the Imam knew that they were going to join the rebellious group in Mecca.¹ In spite of knowing that he did not prevent the two companions from leaving Medina. It would have been wise on his part to jail the two companions until the situation became clear. Had he done that he would have spared himself and the Muslims many difficulties and sacrifices.

When he came back to Kufa after the battle of Siffin he should have punished Ashaath after he witnessed a great deal of evidence indicating the insincerity of Ashaath and his co-operation with his enemies. He did not do that and surrendered to Ashaath's pressure time after time. He postponed the return to the Battle of Siffin and entered into the Battle of Nahrawan under Ashaath's pressure.

It would have been wise to keep Ashaath outside the battlefield from the beginning. When the Imam was elected Ashaath was still in his post in Persia as one of Uthman's appointees. When the Imam was about to leave to Siffin he dismissed Ashaath from his post. He according to some reports required Ashaath to pay some of the funds which he took from the public treasury then he accompanied him after he reformed him. Had Ashaath been left in his post the fanatic readers (of the Holy Qur'an) who called

for acceptance of the arbitration would not have been able to impose arbitration.

A Winner of Three Wars Is Not Unfirm

It is absurd to say that the Imam did not exercise his rule as a ruler or that he exercised his rule as a preacher and that he did not seriously attempt to keep his authority after he obtained it. It is absurd to say that when we know that the Imam waged three wars against his opponents and defeated them completely at Basra annihilated his opponents at Nahrawan and confronted and almost crushed Muawiya and his army at the biggest battle the history of Islam ever witnessed until that day. A ruler who treated his enemies with such firmness should not be accused of practicing his rule as a preacher.

Why Did He Not Force Some Companions to Elect Him?

It is true that the Imam did not force Ibn 'Umar Saad Ibn Abu Waqaas and a number of companions to pledge their allegiance to him and allowed them to take a neutral position. But this is what the Islamic justice demands. It is not permissible for any elective government to force individuals to elect it. Election means authorization by choice. Thus pledging loyalty by force is the opposite of election. Therefore Islam declares that allegiance taken by force is forbidden and unbinding. It is one of the natural rights which the faith of Islam sanctifies that every human being has the right to exercise his political freedom and this is what the most advanced governments in this century sanctify.

When Al-Zubayr was forced to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr 'Ali considered such a coercion contrary to the principle of justice. Individuals and minorities have the right to disagree with the majority and the majority does not have the right to pressure the minority unless the minority attempts to prevent the majority from exercising its administration.

Should a minority try to prevent the majority from administering the affairs of the nation the majority would be duty-bound to subdue the minority when the election is sound. Saad and Ibn 'Umar and others did not try to prevent the Imam from exercising his rule as a caliph.

Why Did the Imam Not Prevent Talhah and Al-Zubayr from Leaving Medina?

The Imam did not prevent the two companions from leaving Medina though he knew that they were going to declare an armed rebellion against him and he was right in doing that. It was not in the interest of the Imam to be accused of preventing two outstanding companions from offering a devotional visit to the House of God or to jail them for attempting to do that.

Ayeshah was ready to tell that to the Muslim World and to use such an action on the part of the Imam as an additional excuse for revolting against him.

Furthermore keeping the two companions in Medina would not prevent the Mother of Believers from starting a revolt against the Imam. Ayesha was ready to start that revolt with or without the two companions.

She started her rebellion as soon as she received the news of the Imam's election and without knowing the attitude of the two companions toward him.² She had a large amount of funds and a good number of men to do that. The Umayyads and their followers were at her disposal and anxious to cooperate with her.³

Why Did He Not Continue the War in Siffin?

It is not fair to criticize the Imam for the discontinuation of the battle after the copies of the Holy Qur'an were hoisted. Had the majority of his army remained healthy and obedient to him such a criticism would have been justifiable. He could have been blamed if he had been among those who were deceived by the hoisting of the copies of the Holy Qur'an. But the Imam was the first to tell his army: "Go on with all your determination to fight your enemy."

He declared to them that hoisting the Holy Qur'an is only a deception and conspiracy. Muawiya and his supporters wanted to avoid a crushing defeat. He told them that he knew the leaders of the opposite camp as men and as children and they were the worst children and the worst men. They were not people of religion or Qur'an.⁴

He told them all that but they were already deceived and they were unable to see the truth. They defied him and threatened to do to him what they did to Uthman or to take him as a captive and deliver him to Muawiya. When they did that no voice in the army with which he was surrounded was raised against them. Thus the Imam was forced to withdraw Al-Ashtar and his division.⁵

Had the Imam continued the war a battle among elements of his army would have started instead of a battle between them and the enemy. As a matter of fact that battle was about to start between Al-Ashtar and the people of anti-war movement. He cursed them and they cursed him and they hit with their rods the face of his horse and he hit with his rod the faces of their horses but the Imam stopped their arguments.⁶

Had such a battle started among the elements of the Imam's army it would have ended with a hastened catastrophe in which thousands of them would have perished. The hostility among the survivors of the expected battle would have been inflamed leaving no room for reuniting them to fight the enemy again.

Had the Imam insisted on continuing the war and refused to withdraw Al-Ashtar and his division from the battle all evidence indicated that the fanatics who surrounded the Imam were ready to assassinate him or hand him to Muawiya. This could have happened without the knowledge of Al-Ashtar and his division.

Had the Imam been killed at that time or at a battle that would have started afterwards between the two

elements of his companions the catastrophe would have been much greater than we could imagine.

Why Did He Not Punish Ashaath?

I do not see any logical justification for criticizing the Imam because he accompanied Ashaath to Siffin or because he did not punish him when his insincerity and collaboration with the enemy became evident.

The Imam is a human being. He cannot know the future nor would he be able to foresee that Ashaath would conspire against him if he were in the army. To keep Ashaath away from the battlefield would not prevent the crisis of the arbitration.

The Seceders who were the main factor in the crisis were not from the followers of Ashaath. Thousands and thousands of fighters shared with the readers of the Qur'an their opinion believing that turning down the invitation of the arbitration was a major sin. Ashaath was not the only hypocrite among the followers of the Imam.

The Imam did not punish Ashaath after his insincerity became evident for two reasons: 1. Ashaath was an intelligent hypocrite. He was able to cover up his hypocrisy showing no evidence that would prove his conspiracy. There was at the time of the Messenger many hypocrites who declared Islam prayed and fasted and heard from the Messenger. (There is in the chapters of Al-Ahzab and Bara-ah the clearest evidence on that).

The Messenger knew a number of them. He did not punish the ones whom he knew because he did not find evidence that convicts them or because he hoped that they will reform and become good Muslims. Had he punished them a dispute among his followers might have erupted.

Therefore he preferred to leave them alone for the sake of unity among his companions.

Ashaath was not the only hypocrite in the Imam's camp. Probably there were hundreds and thousands of hypocrites who were feigning loyalty to the Imam and at the same time concealing hostilities towards him.

Ziyad Ibn Abee Shibth Ibn Rib-i and the hundreds from those who fought with the Imam then participated after that in fighting his son Al-Hussein represent physical evidence of the existence of a great number of hypocrites in the camp of the Imam.

The authority of the Imam after the Battle of Siffin was shrunk to a great degree. The rebellion of the majority against him after Muawiyah's camp hoisted the copies of the Holy Qur'an represented a military coup which left him authority in name only.

Had the Imam tried to punish Ashaath for his opposition to the continuation of the battle a large portion of the inhabitants of Kufa (who for one reason or another had attitudes similar to that of Ashaath) would

have opposed the Imam.

Had the Imam punished Ashaath he would have offended thousands from the tribe of Kindah who used to consider Ashaath their leader. As a matter of fact Ashaath's punishment was expected to alienate the majority of the Kufites because they were of the Yemenites and so was Ashaath. The Imam after Siffin was not in need of more enemies and difficulties.

Why did the imam bind himself with a document which was forced upon him?

There are two important questions which demand answers:

All evidence indicates that the Imam did not stop the war and sign the document of arbitration willingly. He was forced to do that and it is known in the religion of Islam that a forced action is nil. A divorce or marriage or election by force would not be sound. And the rule is the same concerning the Pact of Arbitration.

This means that the document of arbitration was not binding to the Imam and that he had the right to disregard it. Furthermore his duty was to cancel it when its cancellation was expected to benefit the camp of truth. Since the Seceders reversed their attitude and tried to return to the battlefield the Imam should have returned to the war without waiting for the decision of the two arbiters.

As to the validity or invalidity of a pact I would like to say that a pact signed by a coerced person is nil if the signer signed it as an individual. When the coerced signer is a head of state and he signs a pact on behalf of Muslims he represents the pact would not be unsound unless the people whom he represented were coerced to accept the pact.

When they are the seeker of the pact the pact would be binding as soon as it is signed. The pact has to be honored even if a portion of the representees reverse their attitude towards the pact.

It is well known that the majority of the Imam's camp including the Seceders were not coerced to discontinue the fight and accept the arbitration. On the contrary they were the advocates of both. Repudiation of the pact by the Seceders after it was signed does not relieve the Imam of his responsibility.

Furthermore reversal of the Seceders' attitude towards the contents of the pact does not necessarily make its breaching in the interest of the Imam or his camp.

The majority of the advocates of the pact continued their attitude thinking that obeying it is a duty and that they had to wait for the outcome of the arbitration. Had the Imam breached the pact which he signed he would have faced from the supporters of the document an opposition more violent than that of the Seceders and his position would have become more difficult than it was before signing the

document. For the Imam to go back on a document he signed would only add to the Muslims' confusion.

It would have given Muawiya an argument against the Imam which the Imam would not be able to defeat. The history which today judges categorically in favor of the Imam would have hesitated or strayed in its judgment if the Imam had done that.

Why Did the Imam Prolong the Period of Arbitration?

The other question which seriously demands an answer is the following: We believe that the Imam was forced to accept the invitation for discontinuing the war and accepting the arbitration and accepting Abu Musa Al-Ashari and Ibn Al-Aws as arbiters. We know all that but what made the Imam prolong the period of arbitration for several months?

It was possible for the two arbiters to meet and to issue their judgment within a week or one month. It was possible for the Imam to stay with his army in Siffin until the two arbiters issued their decision. Had the Imam done that he would have prevented the development of the dispute and the difference between him and the Seceders who repented for their discontinuation of the war.

Had he shortened the period of arbitration he would have been able to return to the battle while accompanying the Seceders as soon as the two arbiters issued their decision. We should add to this the fact that the Imam was certain that their verdict would not be in his interest because the two arbiters were hostile to him.

The Seceders asked the Imam: Why did you prolong the period of arbitration? He answered: "We wanted to give the ignorant time so that he may know the facts. We wanted to give the one who knows the facts time so that he may become firmer in his belief. And we hoped that God may rectify the affairs of this nation (then the nation would not need to go back to war)."

Nevertheless it was possible for the affairs of the nation to be rectified and the nation would not have needed to go back to war if the two arbiters were expected to validate what the Holy Qur'an validates and to invalidate what the Holy Qur'an invalidates and if Muawiya were of those who surrender to the rule of the Holy Qur'an.

But Muawiya fought the Imam knowing that his fight was a fight against the Holy Qur'an and against the prophet to whom the Holy Qur'an was revealed. Yet one of the two arbiters was as hostile to the Imam as Muawiya was. The other one (Abu Musa) was very ignorant and unfriendly towards the Imam. Neither of them was expected to say the truth.

Prolonging the time of the armistice could have added to the firmness of the faithful and enlightened the ignorant. For it gave people a longer time to think without being under the pressure of the events and the influence of emotion. But prolonging the armistice would also prolong the arguments among people escalate differences of the disputing elements in the Imam's camp relieve the enemy for a longer time

and enable him to make a new mobilization for a new battle.

The question seems to assume that the Imam at the time of signing the armistice was aware of the future repentance of the Seceders for the guilt of discontinuation of the war and that he knew that they will change their attitude and call for the return to the war against Muawiya. Had the matter been so the Imam would not have needed to accept the invitation for arbitration and the whole event of arbitration would not have taken place.

This was not the case. The Seceders were very serious in demanding the cessation of hostility and acceptance of arbitration and they continued this way until the document was executed. They and others from the bigot readers were the power which forced the Imam to stop the war. They did not change their attitude until the document was signed by the two parties and became a pact in full.

The Seceders were not expected to change their attitude with such speed and move within three days from the extreme left to the extreme right. In the first two days they believed that continuation of war and rejection of arbitration represented a disbelief in the religion of God. Then they reversed themselves on the third day and believed that discontinuation of war and acceptance of arbitration represented a disbelief in the religion of God.

The Imam responded to their first demand which seemed to be the position of the majority of his camp. He executed the document and he was right in giving them and the rest of the nation a respite that continued a few months with which the matter could become clear to them after they were deceived and confused.

It was logical to expect that the situation would become clear to the Seceders and to others during the months of the armistice and particularly after the two arbiters issued their unjust and contradictory verdict. The Seceders however were not logical neither at the beginning nor at the end. It was impossible for any human mind to predict their extreme and fast changes of thinking. The Imam was not to be blamed because he could not predict the unseen future.

Suppose the Imam had shortened the period of the armistice for one month and stayed with his army in Siffin until the two arbiters issued their verdict then he called upon his army to return to war. Would that have satisfied the Seceders and reunited the Imam's camp?

The subsequent events make us expect the Seceders to refuse to return to war and that their attitude if they had stayed in Siffin would be similar to the attitude which they took in Iraq. The Imam actually called upon them to rejoin him in resumption of war after the two arbiters issued their verdicts. They refused to rejoin him accusing him of wanting to return to the war in order to avenge for himself because the verdict of the two arbiters did not come in his favor.⁷

Had the Imam shortened the time of armistice and remained in Siffin then tried to go back to war after the end of the arbitration the Seceders could have returned to Iraq waging a campaign of terror cutting

the supplies of his army and killing whoever disagreed with them.

This was what they did after coming back from Siffin.⁸ No doubt the danger to the inhabitants of Iraq during his absence would have been greater than it was in his presence.

Thus prolonging the time of armistice and the return to Iraq was less dangerous than shortening it and staying in Siffin and returning to war without security forces to protect the innocent civilians of Iraq and the roads of supplies against the Seceders' attacks.

It was only rational on the part of the Imam to expect those who demanded cessation of hostility and the acceptance of arbitration to continue with their opinion and wait until the two arbiters issued their verdicts. Had they done that the screen of deception would have been removed when the two arbiters strayed from the right road and invalidated what the Holy Qur'an validated.

This would have motivated them to renew the war with a stronger determination clearer sight and bigger preparation. Had they done that it would not have been difficult for them while they were under the bravest leadership to defeat Muawiya and liberate Syria from his rule. Had they done that they could have secured for themselves the nation and its future generations the brightest future in which justice would be prevalent and the truth would be triumphant.

^{1.} Al-Tabari his History part 4 p.491 and p.444.

^{2.} Al-Tabari his History part 4 p. 459.

^{3.} Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 106.

^{4.} Al-Tabari his History part 5 pp. 48-49.

^{5.} Al-Tabari his History part 5 pp. 48-49.

^{6.} Al-Tabari his History part 5 pp. 48-49.

^{7.} Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p.171.

^{8.} Al-Tabari his History part 5 pp.81-82.

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