

Abu Bakr's Leading Of Prayer

When the Holy Prophet (S) became fatally ill, a difference arose between him and his followers in two matters viz. one in the form of 'the story of the paper' (Qissa Qirtaas) and second in the matter of the army of Usamah as both things have been briefly narrated earlier. But it is not improper to mention here that the Prophet had become very displeased due to these matters.

The proof is that when Muslims made a request that they be allowed to have a last look at him. But in reply, according to Abul Fida, the Holy Prophet (S) sent a word that: "The trouble of my illness is less than your presence." It appears certain that the Prophet was very much unhappy about his community at the time of his departure. What could be more displeasing than that in his last moments, he neither allowed Muslims to see him nor did he like to get any service from them?

Though historians have not given the names of those who had made such request (permission to see him at the last moment). Yet reason can tell us who such fellows could be, who had made him unhappy. Apparently, it seems that they must be those who were connected with the story of paper and Usamah's army. A look at the last days of the Holy Prophet (S) gives a hint that had he lived for few more years, Muslims of those days might have openly disobeyed him. The political disobedience had begun when his order about joining Usamah's army was defied. No one can say to what extent they had opposed the wish of the Prophet, but it looks very likely that the defiance would have gone increasing.

Anyway, the matter of leading prayers during the last illness of the Holy Prophet (S) is also one of the events through which Ahlul Sunnat try to justify the Caliphate of Abu Bakr. Knowledgeable people know what weightage is there in this matter. Ahlul Sunnat say that when the Prophet became too weak to go to the mosque and lead prayer, the latter did so; so this qualified him to become his successor. It is for the wise and learned people to decide whether or not leading a prayer looks disputable.

Only Ibn Khaldun says that Abu Bakr led the prayers. All others like Tabari, Asim Kufi, the author of *Manaqib* and Murtazavi, author of *Hayatul Quloob*, all differ with Ibn Khaldun on this account. The summary of what Ibn Khaldun has written is that when Abu Bakr got the order of the Prophet to lead prayers, he began to lead; that he was still leading when the Prophet felt somewhat good and he came to the Masjid; Abu Bakr intended to draw back but the Prophet caught hold of his shoulder, which made

it impossible for Abu Bakr to move from his place; the Prophet sat beside Abu Bakr and completed the prayer.

This narration does not appear quite convincing, because at that time, the Prophet was so weak that he was unable to walk and therefore he was brought to the mosque with the help of two persons. It is very difficult to believe that he was thus brought only to pray behind Abu Bakr.

More unconvincing is that, despite such extreme weakness he was able to press Abu Bakr's shoulder. The Prophet's praying behind Abu Bakr seems more unlikely due to the fact that the latter had not obeyed the former's command to join Usamah's army and the command was not withdrawn. Ibn Khaldun must explain why the Prophet followed Abu Bakr in prayer? What is understood from his writing is that there was some very special reason because of which the Prophet had to come to the Masjid, taking assistance of two men and that it was not the Prophet's longing to pray behind Abu Bakr.

Apparently, it does not seem likely that the Prophet took such trouble to follow Abu Bakr in prayer. Rather, it appears that he undertook all this hardship to prevent Abu Bakr from leading the prayer. What Tabari has written about this fully supports the view of the writer. He says: "When the Holy Prophet (S) entered the Masjid, not only the worshippers broke their intention of praying behind Abu Bakr but Abu Bakr himself discontinued his prayer."

This shows that Abu Bakr did not get any order from the Prophet to lead prayers. Had he got such a command, why he should have discontinued the prayer? The writing of Murtazavi, author of *Manaqib*, supports this view. He writes, "If the order to lead prayer was issued by the Prophet, he would not have come out of his room." This opinion is also supported by the author of *Hayatul Quloob* who says, "A'ysha prevented Abu Bakr from joining Usamah's army because of the Prophet's illness."

Thereafter, this learned author writes: "When Abu Bakr went to the mosque, people asked him as to who had sent him? Bilal said: "Just wait, I will soon inquire and return." Bilal went and met Fazl bin Abbas. Fazl asked him whether Abu Bakr did not join Usamah's army? Thereafter, the Prophet came to know what had happened. So he also came to the mosque. Asim Kufi is also of the view of the aforementioned authors. Obviously, the statements of all these writers seem convincing and authentic. Lastly, this author is of the opinion that 'A'ysha was guiltless regarding all allegations about prayer leading. If she had, owing to her particular interests, prevented her father from joining Usamah's army and had sent her father to lead prayer in Masjid, she did not do anything against nature. The son is a son and man is a man, not Allah. 'A'ysha is a mother of the faithful. It is our duty not to reduce the respect, which was given to her by the Prophet.

Regarding the leading of prayers by Abu Bakr, it is totally unreasonable and unwise to consider it his right to Caliphate. Those who do so, follow the proverb, 'a drowning man clutches at the straw'. Even if the Prophet had asked Abu Bakr and he too followed him in prayer, how can it justify his claim to Caliphate? A look at *Madarijun Nubuwwah* and *Muwattah*¹ shows that the Holy Prophet (S) had prayed

behind Abdur Rahman bin Auf also. If such praying was a justification then Abdur Rahman should have preceded Abu Bakr as the Caliph.

Now the writer quotes below some traditions and comments on them:

It is mentioned in Sahih Bukhari² that as narrated by Anas bin Malik, Abu Bakr led the Morning Prayer on Monday, thinking that the Holy Prophet (S) was too weak to attend the mosque; then he (Prophet) suddenly lifted the door curtain and looked into the mosque. Abu Bakr imagined that the Holy Prophet (S) intended to come for Prayer and so he thought of leaving the line but the Prophet signaled him to continue the prayer and to conclude it. This narration thus only gives a hint that Abu Bakr led the prayer of his own. Had he done so as per the Prophet's order, why he should have thought of leaving the prayer row?

A narration of Sahl bin Saad Saaidi, in Sahih Bukhari³ states that Abu Bakr led the Asr prayer and that the Prophet followed the former in it, but when Abu Bakr came to know that the Prophet was behind him, he intended to withdraw, but the Prophet signaled him to continue.

Just note, what is mentioned in this tradition appears to be contrary to what is written in the six canonical Sunni tradition books (Sihah Sitta) according to which, the leader (in prayer) must be more gracious than the follower (whereas in this tradition it is said that the Holy Prophet (S) followed Abu Bakr). Then how was it proper and in order? Moreover, according to this tradition, the Holy Prophet (S) corrected a mistake of Abu Bakr's recitation. Then how could the Imam make a mistake? How strange to observe that Abu Bakr could not perform even the prayer properly; that he was unaware of the difference between the prayer of a male and a female!

And despite all this, Suyuti, quoting the Holy Prophet (S), says that Abu Bakr was, "My most learned and pure companion." O Ali! O Ali! Verily the ignorance of those so-called scholars who, leaving aside you (Ali), say that Abu Bakr was most honorable and knowledgeable! Please also note that this tradition says that it was the Afternoon Prayer, which was led by Abu Bakr and in the earlier tradition, it was stated that it was the Morning Prayer! The tradition written in Nasai⁴ is similar to that of Sahih Bukhari.

It is seen in Sahih Bukhari⁵ that 'A'ysha says that when the Holy Prophet (S) said during his last illness: "Ask Abu Bakr to lead the prayer, I said that Abu Bakr is very soft-hearted and hence he will not be able to recite properly due to grief, so please ask Umar to lead the prayer." Then 'A'ysha asked Hafasa to advise the Holy Prophet (S) in this matter and she did so. But the Holy Prophet (S) replied: "In the matter of talking and insistence, you are like the women of Yusuf. Just tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer."

Now, please note that the narrator of this tradition is only 'A'ysha and none else, which also is very strange. It is mentioned in Sahih Bukhari⁶ that 'A'ysha said that she was very often requesting the Holy Prophet (S) to make her father the former's successor. This tradition gives a clear idea of the intention of 'A'ysha. So, the above narration about his prayer appears far from reason.

It must be noted that there is much difference about the time of the prayer, which is said to have been led by Abu Bakr. Seeratul Halabiyah⁷ and Tarikh Khamis⁸ mention that it was Night (Isha) Prayer. Also remember that Bukhari mentions many conflicting statements.

Some say that the Holy Prophet (S) followed Abu Bakr and some say he did not. One says, Abu Bakr followed the Holy Prophet (S) and another says the congregation followed Abu Bakr. Thus, two Imams and two follower groups have been mentioned. Then there is a difference in the day of the passing away of the Holy Prophet (S) too.

Most mention Monday, but a tradition of Sahih Bukhari says it was Tuesday. According to a narration of Sahih Bukhari, the time of the Holy Prophet's departure was at night but Sahih Tirmidhi says it was noontime! Again, one of the narrations of 'A'ysha (in Sahih Bukhari) states that the Prophet, due to serious illness, performed prayer in his room, not in the mosque, and followers followed him in it. This renders the matter of the Prophet's following the prayer of Abu Bakr meaningless. In short, the statements of Sahih Bukhari themselves are full of contradictions.

Now look at Pg. 285 in Vol. 2 of Sunan Abu Dawood. Abdullah bin Zama is reported to have said that the Prophet said: "Ask someone to lead the Prayer." So Abdullah went to the people and saw Umar there, while Abu Bakr was not there. Abdullah asked Umar to lead the Prayer, so Umar led the prayer. When the Prophet heard Umar's harsh tone, the former asked where was Abu Bakr? Abu Bakr came after Umar concluded the prayer. He led the prayer afresh. How strange is the narration that first the Holy Prophet (S) said: "Ask anyone to lead," but when Umar led, Abu Bakr was called and so he led the prayer!

Anyhow, this tradition of Tirmidhi⁹ narrated by Salim shows that the Prophet ordered Abu Bakr to lead the prayer but at that time the condition of the former was very serious; that he was almost fainting. Abu Bakr led the prayer, but the Prophet could not join the congregation and expired. It is mentioned in Qastalani¹⁰ that Abu Bakr and Umar were not present near the Prophet at that time, but had left Medina with Usamah's army. What is then the meaning of Abu Bakr or Umar leading that prayer?

On the other hand, Kitabul Maghazi¹¹ shows that the Holy Prophet (S) asked the people to tell Umar to lead the prayer. So they went to Umar and said: "The Prophet wants you to lead the prayer." Umar replied: "It is not possible for me do so in the presence of Abu Bakr." Then Bilal went back to the Prophet and reported Umar's reply and also told that Abu Bakr was standing at the door. The Prophet said: "All right, whatever be their opinion. Tell Abu Bakr to lead the Prayer." So Abu Bakr led the Prayer for eight days. Obviously, this narration too does not fall in line with that of Abu Dawood (Ref. above). In short, there are contradiction and difference in the above narrations and they are:

(1) In one narration, the day on which Abu Bakr led prayer is Monday and in another, Tuesday.

(2) In some, the time of prayers is reported to be morning, in another noon and in yet another, night.

(3) Some say Abu Bakr followed and some say the Holy Prophet (S) followed.

(4) In one report, Abu Bakr led the prayer with the permission of the Prophet and in another, it was without his permission.

(5) In some, it is mentioned that Umar led the prayer.

(6) There is difference in the position of standing and sitting of the leader who led the prayer.

(7) The place of prayer is also not the same. In some, it is said that it was held in the room and as per another, it was in the Masjid.

(8) One narration shows that the Holy Prophet (S) attended the mosque taking help of His Eminence, Ali (a.s.) and Abbas due to his weakness. Now, when the Prophet wanted Abu Bakr to lead, why should he have gone to the mosque?

(9) Some narrations mention that Abu Bakr led the Prayer without the Prophet's permission. Only one narration, which is of 'A'ysha, says that it was done with his permission; but this tradition does not appear to be true because 'A'ysha always wanted her father to become the Caliph, as has been shown above through her own word.

It is really very strange that only one person i.e. 'A'ysha has reported about the permission and no one else at all said so, though it was a congregational prayer and owing to the Prophet's illness, most near and dear ones and the companions used to remain with him during those days. At least someone of them should have said what 'A'ysha has said. In such circumstances, how can a solitary report be accepted, and that too of such a kind?

(10) The Holy Prophet (S) has said that the standing and sitting of the one performing prayer depends on the standing and sitting of the leader (Imam). Now when the Prophet leads the prayer sitting and the followers could not sit because of the standing of Abu Bakr, what kind of prayer was it? Qastalani has also raised this objection quite properly.

(11) Most biographers have mentioned that the two Caliphs were made to go with Usamah's army, as has also been mentioned by Qastalani, then what about the reports regarding their leading prayers?

(12) In one narration, it is said that Abdullah bin Umar led the prayer and was ousted. Some say that Abu Bakr led the prayer with the Prophet's permission and the Prophet came to the mosque. Yet another tradition says that the Prophet made Abu Bakr stand behind him. Another narration says Abu Bakr became the reciter of Allaahu Akbar (Takbeer). Another reports says that he stood silently aside. In short, is it the matter of Abu Bakr's leadership or a lawless exercise?

The only aim of all this is that the Caliphate assumed by Abu Bakr be regarded as legal, proper and just. But when the Prophet had also followed Abdur Rahman bin Auf in Prayer, what was the fault of the latter

that he was deprived of Caliphate?

It is also very strange that according to Ahlul Sunnat the matter of leading a prayer and leading a society has no importance as any good or evil man can get it. They write “offer prayer behind any man, good or bad.” So even if it is accepted that Abu Bakr led the prayer or the Prophet made him lead or he followed himself; what is graceful in it? As per their opinion, any good or bad person can lead the prayer and thus leading is no proof of somebody’s honor or prestige.

But we have said that this happening is surprising because, in it either leadership of prayer could not prove nobility or the same leadership turned into a justification for holding the high office of the Caliph! Very puzzling indeed!

- [1.](#) Pg. 12
- [2.](#) Vol. 6, Pg. 38
- [3.](#) Vol. 10, Pg. 206
- [4.](#) Vol. 1, Pg. 234
- [5.](#) Vol. 10, Pg. 257 and Vol. 2, Pg. 37, 38, 39.
- [6.](#) Vol. 6, Pg. 379
- [7.](#) Vol. 3, Pg. 459
- [8.](#) Vol. 2, Pg. 163
- [9.](#) Pg. 31
- [10.](#) Pg. 358, Vol. 6
- [11.](#) Vol. 1, Pg. 17

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