

Chapter 11: The Sad Story Of Saqifah Bani Saedah

[The Prophet's worry about the regression of the Ommah](#)

The Quranic verses and historic clues all indicate that the dearest prophet of Islam was extremely worried about the future of the Islamic community, and besides the hidden inspirations, the undesirable occurrences caused the Prophet to assume that some groups of Muslims might, upon his death, resume their ignorance and forget divine traditions altogether.

This probability became stronger in his mind when he saw most of the Muslims desert the war zone in the Holy war of Uhud in which the rumor of the assassination of the Prophet was spread by the enemy. Those Muslims fled to the mountains and distant places and even some of them tried to ask Abu Sufyan for amnesty through the leader of the hypocrites, Abdullah bin Abi. Their religious ideology became so weak and shaky that they even became suspicious of the existence of God and let their minds retreat to the age of idolatry. The Holy Quran reveals this secret in the following verse:

﴿ وَ طَائِفَةٌ قَدْ أَهَمَّتْهُمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ يَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ ظَنَّ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَقُولُونَ هَلْ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ﴾

“And there was another party whose souls had become anxious; they entertained about Allah thoughts of ignorance quite unjustly saying “we have no hand in the affair”¹

Elsewhere, the Holy Quran implicitly reveals the disagreements and discrepancies among the Prophet's followers:

﴿ وَ مَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَ مَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ ﴾
﴿ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئاً وَ سَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴾

“And Muhammad is no more than an apostle; other apostles have already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed, will you turn your back upon your heels? And whoever turns back upon his heels, he will by no means do harm to Allah in the least; and Allah will reward the grateful”²

By dividing the Prophet's followers into two groups of ‘skeptics’ and ‘constant believers’, this Quranic verse says implicitly that after the Prophet's demise Muslims would divide into the above-mentioned two groups.

Does our wisdom lead us to the assumption that the Prophet of Islam could ever leave alone such an Ummah who was on the verge of disintegration and who could not care about their future Imam?

The Prophet could never leave such people without a politically and socially competent Imam. The Prophet's care made him think about these people's future so that they might not disintegrate.

The Prophet of Islam was well aware that his Ummah was prone to disintegration just like the ones before it. His predictions are well known in this regard:

“سَتَفْتَرِقُ أُمَّتِي عَلَى ثَلَاثٍ وَسَبْعِينَ فِرْقَةً، فِرْقَةٌ نَاجِيَةٌ وَالباقون في النار”.

“My Ummah will divide into seventy three branches; only one group of these is on the right path; the rest will end up in hell ³.

How could the Prophet then submit the issue of the leadership of the Ummah to such unreliable people?

The Islamic community consisted of different groups each of which had some special aspirations.

Ansar consisted of Aus and Khazraj; and the group of Muhajir was composed of bani Hashim, bani Umayyah, and the Taym and Adi tribes. Each group tried to prevail over the other.

With such opposing groups, could there be any unity or stability among different factions of Muslims. The right path is, first, to uproot the main obstacles from the way of unity between the Muslims and then expect the realization of such a dream.

The main obstacle in the way of Muslim unity after the Prophet's death was the very idea of how to select the Islamic ruler.

If Muslims could think unanimously regarding the issue of leadership, many problems could easily be solved. But the disagreements over such a significant issue were the source of many consequent wars and calamities. As a result a united Ummah ended up in dispersed groups and nations.

The logic of the members of Saqifah

The Holy Quran forbids the Prophet's close followers to disperse and to regress back to the ideology of the age of Ignorance.

A research on the psychology of the members of the Saqifah convention would reveal their complexes and hidden hatred and animosity while they manifested their tribal aggressions and ideologies from the age of Ignorance. Islamic education had not yet penetrated into their souls and Islam and faith were used only as covers over the abominable figure of the age of Ignorance.

A research on this historical event clearly shows that the objectives behind those lectures and aggression were nothing but self interest and worldly gains. Every body tried to put on the garment of caliphate despite the fact that such a position belonged to the most knowledgeable and sincere follower of the Prophet. What was considered in that convention was anything but the interest of the Islamic community.

A research in to the Saqifah event clearly indicates that the conspirators of this meeting were after their own interests.

Now let us enter into the details of this historic event:

The Prophet's body was not yet buried and members of Bani Hashim and some of the Prophet's close followers were starting to prepare for the burial ceremony when the group of Ansar gathered under a shade called Saqifah Bani Saeda, close to the Prophet's home, to settle the issue of the Prophet's successor. To them this topic seemed more urgent than the Prophet's burial.

While Imam Ali (as) together with Bani Hashim and a group of Muhajiran were working hard for the burial and prayer ceremony, Omar, who was outside the Prophet's home, became aware of the Saqifah convention. He immediately sent a message to Abu Bakr to leave the house.

Unaware of Omar's intention, Abu Bakr excused himself saying that he was busy and unable to meet with him, but Omar insisted they meet. Omar, therefore, had to leave the burial ceremony. When he became aware of the event, he forgot about the ceremony and headed for Saqifah, taking Abu Obaydah Ibn Jarrah with them.

Now let us pay attention to the logic of both parties who tried to justify their own tribe for the position of caliphate.

The representatives of the Ansar were, Saad Ibn Ebadah and Habab Ibn Mundhir and representatives for the Muhajiran, Abu Bakr, Omar and Abu Obaydah. At the end of the session two members of Ansar talked against Saad Ibn Ebadah. Now here is the text of their speech:

Saad (addressing Ansar): “you have a virtue which others do not have. The dear prophet propagated the principle of monotheism among his own relatives, but except for a few nobody accepted his religion. And this few lacked the capacity to defend the Prophet. But you Ansar believed him and defended him and his close friends and you fought his enemies until they converted to Islam. It was your swords which defeated the Arabs. When the Prophet was passing away, he was content with you. Thus you deserve the right to lead people [4](#).”

The logic behind Ibn Saad’s statement was the following: since they had protected the Prophet and his friends in wars they deserved the leadership more than others.

As for the logic of the Muhajirin.

Abu Bakr: “Muhajirin were the first group who accepted the Prophet's religion and were honored in this regard. They had been patient with regard to the hardship they suffered and were not disturbed by the small number of believers. They had tolerated the enemy's tortures, but had not abandoned their religion.

We would never deny your virtues and sacrifices and you are definitely not second rate compared to Muhajiran. For this reason, Muhajiran will be ministers and we will be the governors; we will do nothing without consulting with you [5](#).”

The Muhajiran intentionally emphasized the fact that they had been the first to have accepted the new religion.

Habab Ibn Mundhir: “O Ansar! Accept the rein of our government. Others will live under your protection, and nobody will dare to oppose you.

You have power because your number is great.

Never divide since you would be disintegrated.

And if the Muhajiran insist on having the power, the issue should be solved through the “two–governor approach”. They would have a governor; so would we [6](#).”

The Ansar's logic in this dispute was based on the greater number of their members and their grand political power.

Omar: “Two swords could never be in one sheath.

I swear to God, Arabs would never yield to you.

The Arabs would surrender to a governor who belonged to the Prophet's tribe. We are among Muhammad's close friends; so we deserve the caliphate.”

In this discussion, Omar relied on his relationship with the Prophet. For this reason in his view the Muhajir and Quraysh deserved such a position more than others [7](#).

Relying once more on Ansar's power, Habab Ibn Mundhir said: "O Ansar! Ignore Omar and his associates! They would curtail your power. If they refuse to accept your view, expel them. You deserve power more than others. It was due to your swords that people accepted this religion."

Omar: "may God destroy you".

Al-Habbab: "may God destroy you".

Abu Obaydah: (bribing the Ansar, he confirmed the Muhajir taking power in the following manner): "O Ansar! You were the first group who helped the Prophet. It would never do to be the first to change his tradition".

Now, a member Ansar group called Basher Ibn Saad, who was Saad Ibn Ebadeh's relative (the candidate of half of the population of Ansar for caliphate) stood up, and while he was expected to vote in favor of Ansar due to his enmity towards Saad Ibn Ebadeh, confirmed Omar's view. Addressing his relatives, he said:

"Muhammad is of the Quraysh and his relatives deserve caliphate more than others. Never try to confront them".

The two parties expressed their views but could not convince each other. Then, taking advantage of the occasion, Abu Bakr, like an experienced diplomat an option.

He decided to select two candidates so that people could ally with one of them, noticing that the Ansar were not united and what is worse, Basher Ibn Saad was against Saad Ibn Ebadeh (the head of Khazraj).

For this reason, he hypocritically put an end to the discussions by saying:

"Please keep united, I want the best for you. It is better for you to curtail your talks and ally with one of the two: Omar and Abu Obaydah".

But both Omar and Abu Obaydah declared:

"While you are present, we will not accept such a mission. Among the Muhajirin no one can excel you in virtue. You were the Prophet's companion in the cave of Thur; it was you who prayed in the Prophet's place and beside him. Furthermore, you are better than us financially. Now, let us shake your hand in allegiance."

At this moment, Abu Bakr, without uttering a word extended his hand and it became clear that Omar and Abu Obaydah's candidacy was just a political maneuver in order to pave the way for his own political

advantage.

Before Omar shook Abu Bakr's hand, Basher Ibn Saad hurried in shaking hands with Abu Bakr to utter his allegiance. Then the two shook hands with Abu Bakr as the successor to the Prophet. Now a severe disagreement appeared within the Ansar sector consequently the Ansar had to withdraw from power having observed Bashir's allegiance, who belonged to the Ansar, Habab Ibn Mundhir became agitated and yelling at Bashir, said: "You are my uncle's son and could not tolerate his caliphate".

Bashir replied: "It is not true! I did not want to rise against a right which God has bestowed upon the Muhajir".

Asid Ibn Hazair, the head of Ous tribe, who had not forgotten his enmity towards the head of the Khazraj tribe, addressed the Ous tribe members, who were present at the meeting, and said: "Stand up and ally with Abu Bakr because if Saad becomes the caliph, the Khazraj would be superior. For this reason the tribe of Ous, also, allied with Abu Bakr due to the command of their representative.

Those members of the community, who followed their representative blindly, began to shake hands with Abu Bakr and their stampede crushed Saad under their feet. This sign of disrespect made Omar very happy and said: "May God destroy him because nothing is better for us than allegiance with Abu Bakr".

Later on, when discussing the event of Saqifah, Omar described his Allegiance with Abu Bakr in the following manner:

"If we had left the meeting with no result, the Ansar might have come to an agreement in electing a caliph".

The Saqifah, thus, came to an end while Abu Bakr was elected and Abu Bakr headed for the mosque of the Prophet while he was surrounded by Omar, Abu Obaydah and a group of the Ous tribe members. Then Saad left for home with all his followers⁸.

¹ . Quran 3: 154.

² . Quran 3: 144.

³ . Sahih Ibn Majeh, the section on conspiracies, etc.

⁴ . Al-Emamat va Al-Syasat, vol. 1, p. 5.

⁵ . Op. cit, p. 7.

⁶ . By accepting the project of " two-governor approach " Ansar dug their own tombs and formally surrendered power to their rivals and in this way confessed to their weakness vis-à-vis Muhajirin. For this reason, when the head of khazraj heard Habab 's statement, he sadly observed.

⁷ . In our next discussion, you will see Ali's criticism of this kind of reasoning.

⁸ . The account of the Saqifah Event was adopted from Tarikh Tabari (vol. 3, the events of the eleventh year).And Al-Emamat Bab Al-Syasat, written by Ibn Qotayebah Dinbary (vol. 1) and Sharh Ibn Abi Al-Hadid (vol.2, pp. 22-60).

<https://www.al-islam.org/leading-ummah-jafar-subhani/chapter-11-sad-story-saqifah-bani-saedah#comment-0>