

Chapter 13: Being The Leader Of A Congregation Is Not A Sign Of Greatness

During the past fourteen centuries in which scholars have been discussing the issue of leadership after the Prophet, no learned man has ever referred to the Prophet's suggestion for Abu Bakr to be a congregation leader. The Prophet never recommended to the people leadership of his congregation.

The rationale of the Sunnite scholars for the Abu Bakr's caliphate is based on the allegiance between the Mohajirs and the Ansar and their agreement on Abu Bakr's caliphate. It is a general fact that the Prophet had never recommended such a position for him. This is because if such a confirmation had been issued by the Prophet Abu Bakr would have never declared in the Saqifah convention: “قد رضيت لكم هذين الرجلين” I consider them both fit for caliphate and I am content with their election”

Never had he emphasized at the Saqifah meeting the close relationship between Quraysh and the Prophet or their pioneering in adopting Islam if anything concerning Abu Bakr's caliphate had been revealed to the Prophet. In the same way, neither had his close friend brought up the association between Abu Bakr and the Prophet at the the cave or his participation at the congregation prayer.

Abu Bakr himself uttered the following statement on the day of Saqifah meeting, while he was criticizing the Ansar's candidate:

“The Arab community assumes caliphate is suitable only for Quraysh since they are superior to others in their life, location and in their relatedness to the Prophet. If the Prophet had ever uttered a word in favor of Abu Bakr's caliphate, then the latter had delved in it in place of a series of weak and baseless arguments. He would then, have said something like this: o people the Prophet appointed me as his successor on that special date.

How could he have ever been appointed as the Prophet's successor while Abu Bakr on his death bed wished he could have asked the Prophet who could have been the Prophet's successor?

Tabari, a well-known Islamic historian relates the story in the following manner:

While Abu Bakr was on his death-bed, he was being met by Abdul Rahman Ibn Ouf, the famous Quraysh wealthy man. Addressing the audience, Abu Bakr said: I wish I had not done three things and I had asked the Prophet three things. But those three things which I wish I had never done were:

1. I wish I had never entered Fatemah's house even if we had to face confrontation.
2. I wish I had not accepted caliphate on Saqifah day and I wish I had given it to either Umar or Abu Obaydah and instead accepted the position of minister or that of an advisor.
3. I wish I had not put Ayas Ibn Abdullah, the highwayman, on fire and I wish I had killed him with my sword.

And I wish I had asked the Prophet the following three things:

1. I wish I had asked him who could be his successor;
2. I wish I had asked him if Ansar deserved such a position;
3. I wish I had asked the Prophet the heritage of one's aunt and one's neice [1](#).

Abu Bakr being the congregation leader

Some Sunnite schools have referred to Abu Bakr's substitution for the prayer congregation during the time when the Prophet was ill as a special virtue and have used this as a document for the legality of Abu Bakr's caliphate.

They emphatically state that when the Prophet was content with Abu Bakr's substitution for the prayer, people should also be satisfied with his government which is a worldly, mundane affair.

An Answer

But this allegation is wrong for certain reasons:

1. From the viewpoint of history, it is never proved that Abu Bakr's involvement in that prayer was actually with the Prophet's permission.

He might have done that either on his own or due to somebody's suggestion. This can be assumed as Abu Bakr had done the same thing once before without the Prophet's permission. Bukhari, the well-known Sunni narrator, narrates: Once the Prophet was visiting the tribe of Bani Amru Ibn Awf. When it was prayer time Abu Bakr stood in the Prophet's place and became the prayer Imam. When the Prophet arrived at the mosque, he had to break the row of people to stand in front. Then Abu Bakr had to stand

behind the Prophet².

2. Even if Abu Bakr had performed the congregation prayer under the Prophet's permission this still does not authorize him for such a position as the caliphate of Muslims.

To be a prayer leader one needs correct pronunciation and full recognition of the prayer requirements, nothing else is necessary (and in the view of Sunnites, even a belief in God's justice is not necessary). However, leading the Islamic community requires other conditions such as:

- A thorough knowledge of the principles and practical principles of Islam;
- The capability to manage Islamic affairs;
- Immunity against sins.

The tone of the above argumentation reveals that the position of Imamate is not taken seriously and only the usual government is meant. This therefore suggests that since Abu Bakr has been chosen to carry out the prayer, therefore he is suitable to be the Prophet's successor.

This statement reveals the fact that such a view equals the meaning of government with the position of an Islamic leader. However the Prophet's caliph should possess certain spiritual positions which do not exist in a usual governor.

3. If the Prophet had approved of Abu Bakr being the prayer leader then why did the Prophet enter the mosque to perform a prayer while he was extremely ill and had to be carried with the assistance of Ali (as) and Fazl Ibn Abbass and stood next to Abu Bakr to perform the prayer? Such an action on his part was incompatible with his appointment of Abu Bakr for the position as the prayer leader.

4. Some narrations indicate that Abu Bakr had been appointed more than once to perform the congregation prayer. However, this is hard to believe since the Prophet had appointed Usamah Ibn Zayd as the flag bearer in the war against Romans and had ordered everyone to attend the army and had cursed those who did not want to join the army³.

Then how could the Prophet ever allow Abu Bakr to carry out the prayer.

5. Both historians and narrators have accepted that while Abu Bakr wished to act as a prayer leader, the Prophet addressed Abu Bakr's daughter, Ayesha telling her: "فَأَنَّكَ صَوَّاحِبُ يُوسُفَ" meaning "you are like those Egyptian women who were gathering around Joseph. "

Now, let us see what the Prophet had meant by this statement.

This sentence implies that Ayesha had committed a treason, in the same way that the Egyptian women had done so in encouraging Zulaykha to betray her husband. The treason that we might imagine done by Ayesha in this case was her message to her father that the Prophet had consented with Abu Bakr

being the prayer leader.

The Sunnite scholars have another interpretation for this statement by the Prophet. They say: the Prophet insisted on Abu Bakr's performance of the prayer. But, they continue to say, Ayesah was against the idea saying people might interpret such an action as a sign of the Prophet's death approaching.

Now, is this interpretation of the Sunnite scholars compatible with the Prophet's presence at the mosque while he was extremely ill? I ask readers to judge the validity of such an interpretation.

[1.](#) . Tarikh Tabari, vol. 3, p. 234.

[2.](#) . Sahih Bokhari, vol 2, p 25.

[3.](#) . The description in Nahj-ul--Balaghah, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol 6, p.52.

Reported from Kitab Al-Saqifeh, by Abu Bakr Ahmad Ibn Abdol Aziz jouhari.

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