

Introduction

The caravan returning from the Hajjatul-Widdah (The Final Pilgrimage) of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and his progeny was halted unexpectedly. The archangel Jibreel (Gabriel) had come with the message from Allah:

‘O Apostle! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people’ (Qur’an 5:67).

The place where the Muslims had stopped was at Ghadir Khumm. The Prophet then delivered a sermon and appointed Imam Ali, peace be upon him, as his successor. His words were:

“O Muslims! Who is more worthy (in the eyes of) the believers than their own selves?”

The audience replied: “Allah and His Messenger know better.”

Hearing this, the Prophet declared: “I am the Master (Mawla) of the faithful and I have rights over them even more than what they have over themselves. Therefore of whomsoever I am the Mawla (this) Ali is his Mawla.”

The first to congratulate Imam Ali was Umar ibn al-Khattab who said: “Excellent! How fortunate you are O Abul Hasan! Now you have become my master as well as of all the Muslims”.

This all happened 1,400 years ago.

But alas! The events following the death of the Prophet took a different turn and Imam Ali was by-passed as the mawla or the leader of the Muslims. Various reasons have been given for this, including:

1) By mawla the Prophet meant 'friend'. It is difficult to accept this. Would the Prophet have stopped the whole caravan to declare his friendship with Imam Ali and to make friendship to Imam Ali obligatory?

And,

2) The Prophet did not appoint anyone and expected the Ummah to make a decision for itself.

How can this be? Did the person who foresaw the fall of Khusrow and Caesar not see the plight of his Ummah after he was gone and not appoint a successor? And what of the occasions when he said: “whoever helps me today will be my successor” and “tomorrow I will give the standard of the army to the one who will be my successor”? There is far too much evidence to show that the Prophet did indeed appoint his successor. However, history took its own course and what happened cannot be undone now.

As a result, we have two major schools of thought – Sunnis and Shi'as. The followers of the two schools of thought are Muslims and this cannot be denied or challenged. The ways and means of co-existence have to be identified. There has to be a healthy discussion between the two schools of thought with a view to increasing understanding between them. The declaration of kufr does not help the cause of understanding.

The Muslims have far too many enemies. Let us make sure that our enemies do not use our differences, such as they are, to thwart our unity. The event of Ghadir has to be looked at from a positive perspective. Ghadir should provide a means of uniting the Muslim Ummah and teach us lessons in leadership which are essential if Muslims are to once again achieve the position of eminence.

Let the Eid of Ghadir that we so enthusiastically celebrate the world over, be our pivot towards Islamic unity and leadership. Let our Sunni brethren present their viewpoints keeping in mind the two principles of Islam – unity and leadership.

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