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Lesson 7: The Silence of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a)

Now, let us examine why after the event of Saqifah and the commencement of Abubakr's rule, 'Ali ('a) did not insist on claiming his indisputable right, and why after obtaining certainty on the ineffectiveness of some months of arguments and proofs, he did not resort to armed struggle.

In view of the fact that a number of the Prophet's (S) great Companions were his staunch supporters and that the common Muslims had also no opposition to him, it can be said in general that the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a) took into account the interest of Islam and the Muslims and preferred to keep silent. As he ('a) says in his *Khutbah ash-Shaqshaqiyyah*,

فَسَدَلْتُ دُونَهَا ثَوْبًا، وَطَوَيْتُ عَنْهَا كَشْحًا، وَطَفِئْتُ أَرْتِي بَيْنَ أَنْ أَصُولَ بَيْدَ جَذَاءٍ، أَوْ أَصِيرَ عَلَى طَخِيَةِ عَمِيَاءٍ، يَهْرُمُ فِيهَا الْكَبِيرُ، وَيَشْيِبُ فِيهَا الصَّغِيرُ، وَيَكْدَحُ فِيهَا مُؤْمِنٌ حَتَّى يَلْقَى رَبَّهُ. فَرَأَيْتُ أَنَّ الصَّبْرَ عَلَى هَآئِنَا أَحْجَى، فَصَبَرْتُ. وَفِي الْعَيْنِ قَذَى، وَفِي الْحَلْقِ شَجَا، أَرَى تُرَائِي نَهْبًا

I put a curtain against the caliphate and kept myself detached from it. Then I began to think whether I should assault or endure calmly the blinding darkness of tribulations wherein the grown-up are made feeble and the young grow old and the true believer acts under strain till he meets Allah (on his death). I found that endurance thereon was wiser. So I adopted patience although there was pricking in the eye and suffocation (of mortification) in the throat. I watched the plundering of my inheritance...¹

Of course, keeping 'Ali's ('a) speech in view, other secondary factors concerning his silence can be pointed out.

1. The Discord among Muslims

The Commander of the Faithful ('a) says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَّا قَبَضَ نَبِيَّهُ اسْتَأْثَرَتْ عَلَيْنَا قُرَيْشٌ بِالْأَمْرِ وَدَفَعْتَنَا عَنْ حَقِّ نَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِهِ مِنَ النَّاسِ كَافَّةً فَرَأَيْتُ أَنَّ الصَّبْرَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ تَفْرِيقِ كَلِمَةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَ سَفْكِ دِمَائِهِمْ وَ النَّاسُ حَدِيثُ عَهْدٍ بِالْإِسْلَامِ وَالَّذِينَ يُمَخَضُّ مَخَضَ الْوُطْبِ، يُفْسِدُهُ أَدْنَى وَهْنٍ وَ يَعْكُسُهُ أَقْلٌ خُلْفٍ.

When God took the soul of His Prophet, the Quraysh self-centeredly considered themselves superior to us and deprived us—who were the most deserving for the leadership of the *ummah*—of our own rights. But I saw that patience and forbearance with respect to this affair is better than the dissension of Muslims and shedding of their blood. It is because the people then had newly embraced Islam and the religion was like a goatskin full of milk which has frothed and the least sluggishness and negligence would spoil it and the most trivial difference would turn it upside down.²

2. The Danger Posed by the Apostates {murtaddin}

After the demise of the Prophet (S), a large number of the Arab tribes that had accepted Islam during the last years of the Prophet's (S) life turned back from the religion and became apostate, and this danger always seriously threatened Medina. As such, in order not to weaken the government in Medina in front of them, 'Ali ('a) was forced to keep silent. 'Ali ('a) says:

فَوَاللَّهِ مَا كَانَ يُلْقَى فِي رُوعِي، وَلَا يَخْطُرُ بِبَالِي، أَنَّ الْعَرَبَ تُزْعِجُ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ عَنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ، وَلَا أَنَّهُمْ مُنَحُوهُ عَنِّي مِنْ بَعْدِهِ فَمَا رَاعَنِي إِلَّا انْتِيَالُ النَّاسِ عَلَى فَلَانٍ يُبَايِعُونَهُ، فَأَمْسَكْتُ يَدِي حَتَّى رَأَيْتُ رَاجِعَةَ النَّاسِ قَدْ رَجَعَتْ عَنِ الْإِسْلَامِ، يَدْعُونَ إِلَى مَحْقِ دِينِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ فَخَشِيتُ إِنْ لَمْ أَنْصُرِ الْإِسْلَامَ وَ أَهْلَهُ أَنْ أَرَى فِيهِ تَلْمَازًا أَوْ هَذْمًا، تَكُونُ الْمُصِيبَةُ بِهِ عَلَيَّ أَعْظَمَ مِنْ فَوْتِ وَلَايَتِكُمْ الَّتِي إِنَّمَا هِيَ مَتَاعٌ أَيَّامٍ قَلِيلٌ، يَزُولُ مِنْهَا مَا كَانَ، كَمَا يَزُولُ السَّرَابُ، أَوْ كَمَا يَتَفَشَّعُ السَّحَابُ، فَتَهَضَّتْ فِي تِلْكَ الْأَحْدَاثِ حَتَّى انْزَاحَ الْبَاطِلُ وَزَهَقَ وَاطْمَأَنَّ الدِّينُ وَتَنَهَّاهُ.

I swear by Allah that at that juncture it could not even be imagined that the Arabs would snatch the seat of the caliphate from the family and descendants of the Holy Prophet (S) and that they would be swearing the oath of allegiance for the caliphate to a different person. At every stage, I kept myself aloof from that struggle of supremacy and power-politics till I found the heretics had openly taken to heresy and schism and were trying to undermine and ruin the religion preached by our Holy Prophet (S).

I felt afraid that, even after seeing and recognizing the evil, if I did not stand up to help Islam and the Muslims it would be a worse calamity to me than my losing authority and power over you, which was only a transient and short-lived affair. Therefore, when I stood up amidst the sweeping surge of

innovations and schism the dark clouds of heresy dispersed, falsehood and schism were crushed and the religion was saved.[3](#)

Imam al-Hasan (‘a) also writes in a letter to Mu‘awiyah: “Since we were afraid that the hypocrites and the other Arab parties could render a blow to Islam, we ignored our right.”[4](#)

Even a number of those in whose heart faith had not entered, as testified by the Qur’an, and had accepted Islam out of compulsion, as demanded by their inner hypocrisy, they did not accept the guardianship {*wilayah*} of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). They even complained about this guardianship during the Prophet’s (S) lifetime. On the commentary of the Qur’anic verse, “*An asker asked for a punishment bound to befall,*”[5](#) Tabarsi has thus narrated from Imam as-Sadiq (‘a):

After the event of Ghadir Khumm, a nomadic Arab by the name of Nu‘man ibn al-Harith al-Fihri came to the Prophet (S) and said: “You commanded us to testify that there is no deity but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah. You ordered us to perform *jihad*, fast, pray, and pay *zakah* and we obeyed. But you are not satisfied with all this and you raised your cousin by your hand and imposed him upon us as our master by saying “Ali is the master {*mawla*} of whom I am *mawla*.’

Is this imposition from Allah or from you?” The Messenger of Allah (S) said: “By Allah who is the only deity! This is from Allah, the Mighty and the Glorious.” On hearing this reply Nu‘man ibn al-Harith turned back and proceeded toward his she-camel saying: “O Allah! If what Muhammad said is correct then fling on us a stone from the sky and subject us to severe pain and torture.” He had not reached his she-camel when Allah flung at him a stone which struck him on his head, penetrated his body and left him dead. It was on this occasion that Allah, the Exalted, caused to descend this verse.[6](#)

In the event of Saqifah, these people were also siding with the Quraysh. As narrated by Abu Mikhnaf, a number of nomadic Arabs, who had to the vicinity of Medina for transactions and were present in Medina during the demise of the Prophet (S), had actual physical role in urging the people to pay allegiance to Abubakr.[7](#)

3. The Safety of the Progeny of the Prophet (S)

The original inheritors of the Prophet (S) and the upright adherents of the religion are the members of the Prophet’s (S) family. They were the partner of the Qur’an, the second previous legacy of the Prophet (S) and the interpreters of the religious laws, and they showed to the people the pristine and genuine Islam after the Prophet’s (S) demise. Their extinction would be an irreparable loss. The Commander of the Faithful said:

فَنَظَرْتُ فَإِذَا لَيْسَ لِي مُعِينٌ إِلَّا أَهْلُ بَيْتِي فَضَنَنْتُ بِهِمْ عَنِ الْمَوْتِ

“Then, I looked and found that there is no supporter for me except my family {*ahla bayti*}, so I refrained from thrusting them unto death.”⁸

The Concrete Political Formation of the Shi‘ah after the Event of Saqifah

Although ‘Ali (‘a) distanced himself from the political scene with the formation of Saqifah, the Shi‘ah in the form of a particular group with a particular political orientation was formed after the event in Saqifah and were collectively or individually defending the truthfulness of ‘Ali (‘a).

They first gathered in Fatimah’s (‘a) house and refused to pay allegiance (to Abubakr) as they faced the onslaught of the Saqifah architects.⁹ But since ‘Ali (‘a) was not pleased to act violently against them for the sake of the preservation of Islam, he challenged them to a debate and argumentation. Bara’ ibn ‘Azib thus narrates:

I missed the cases regarding Saqifah. As I went to the Mosque of the Prophet (S) {*Masjid an-Nabi*}, I saw Miqdad, ‘Ubadah ibn Samit, Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr, Hudhayfah, and Abu’l-Haytham ibn Tayyiham were talking about the event that took place after the demise of the Prophet (S). He went together to the house of Ubayy ibn Ka‘b who said that his view is the same with whatever Hudhayfah would say.¹⁰

Finally, on that Friday, the Shi‘ah of ‘Ali (‘a) went to the Prophet’s (S) Mosque to debate with and condemn Abubakr. In this regard, Tabarsi thus narrates:

Aban ibn Taghlib asks Imam as-Sadiq (‘a): “May I be your ransom! When Abubakr sat in the place of the Messenger of Allah (S), was there anyone who protested?” The Imam (‘a) said: “Yes; there were twelve persons from among the *Muhajirun* and the *Ansar* such as Khalid ibn Sa‘id; Salman al-Farsi; Abu Dharr; Miqdad; ‘Ammar; Buraydah Aslami; Abu’l-Haytham ibn Tayyihan; Sahl ibn Hanif; ‘Uthman ibn Hanif; Khuzaymah ibn Thabit Dhu’sh-Shahadatayn; Ubayy ibn Ka‘b; and Abu Ayyub al-Ansari.

They gathered in a certain place and discussed together the event in Saqifah and were thinking of a solution. Some said: “We shall go to the mosque and let Abubakr come down from the pulpit. Some others did not agree with this idea, considering it inadvisable. They then came to ‘Ali (‘a) and said: “We will go and pull Abubakr down from the pulpit.”

The Imam (‘a) said: “They are many. Once you go ahead with this and act violently, they will come and say: “You pay allegiance otherwise we shall kill you.” Instead, you have to go to him and tell him what you have heard from the Messenger of Allah (S) and this is all of the proof. They came to the mosque and the first person among them who spoke was Khalid ibn Sa‘id al-Umawi, saying: “O Abubakr! You are aware that after the Battle of Banu Nadhir, the Holy Prophet (S) said: ‘You have to know and keep my will. After me, ‘Ali shall be my caliph and successor among you. My Lord has thus ordered me’.”

After him, Salman stood up and made his famous statement in Persian language: “*Kardid, nakardid.*”^{[11](#)}

After their argumentation, Abubakr descended from the pulpit, went to his house and did not go out for three days until such time that Khalid ibn Walid, Salim Mawla Abu Hudhayfah and Mu‘adh ibn Jabal along with many others went to Abubakr’s house and gave him will power. ‘Umar went along with this group to the mosque entrance and said: “O Shi‘ah and supporters of ‘Ali! Be aware that if you would utter these words again, I will behead you.”^{[12](#)}

Similarly, a number of those Shi‘ah from among the Companions who, at the time of the Prophet’s (S) demise, were on a mission outside Medina, such as Khalid ibn Sa‘id and his two brothers, Aban and ‘Amru, protested against Abubakr after their return from their place of mission. As a sign of protest, all the three brothers did not continue their function which was collection of *zakah*, saying: “We shall not work for someone else after the Prophet (S).”^{[13](#)}

In addressing ‘Ali (‘a), Khalid ibn Sa‘id said: “Come forward so that I could pay my allegiance to you as you are the most deserving person in the position of Muhammad (S).”^{[14](#)}

Throughout the 25 years of the three caliphs’ rule, The Shi‘ah from among the Companions were always introducing ‘Ali (‘a) as the caliph and commander of the faithful in truth. ‘Abd Allah ibn Mas‘ud used to say, “Based on the injunction of the Qur’an, there are four caliphs, viz. Adam (Adam), Dawud (David), Harun (Aaron), and ‘Ali.”^{[15](#)}

Hudhayfah also used to say: “Anyone who wants to witness the Commander of the Faithful in truth shall meet ‘Ali.”^{[16](#)}

Harith ibn Khazraj, the standard-bearer of the *Ansar* in the battles of the Prophet (S), used to narrate that the Holy Prophet (S) said to ‘Ali (‘a): “The inhabitants of the heavens have called you ‘Commander of the Faithful’ {*Amir al-Mu‘minin*}’.”^{[17](#)}

Ya‘qubi writes:

After the six-man council proposed by ‘Umar and the selection of ‘Uthman, some were showing inclination toward ‘Ali and speaking against ‘Uthman. A certain person thus narrates: “I entered the Mosque of the Prophet {*Masjid an-Nabi*}. I saw a man sitting on his two knees so impatiently as if he was shouldering the entire world, and while being taken by them, he was addressing the people: ‘How surprising the Quraysh are!’

They took out the caliphate from the family of the Prophet while among this family was the first believer, cousin of the Messenger of Allah, the most learned and knowledgeable of people about the religion of God, and most insightful of people to the right course and the Straight Path {*Sirat al-Mustaqim*}. They took the caliphate from the Imam of guidance, the guided {*mahdi*}, pure {*tahir*} and chaste {*naqi*}, and their objective was not for the reformation of the *ummah* and religiosity. They rather preferred the world

to the hereafter’.”

The narrator says: “I approached and asked him: ‘May Allah be merciful to you! Who are you? And who is the person you are talking about?’ He said: ‘I am Miqdad ibn ‘Amru and that person (I am referring to) is ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.’ I said: ‘You stage an uprising and I will help you.’ Miqdad said: ‘My son, this work cannot be done by just one or two persons’.”[18](#)

During the caliphate of ‘Uthman, Abu Dharr al-Ghaffari also used to stand by the door of the Mosque of the Prophet (S) and say:

Anyone who knows me has recognized me and anyone who does not know me should then know that I am Jundab ibn Junadah, Abu Dharr al-Ghaffari... Muhammad (S) is the inheritor of the knowledge of Adam (Adam) (‘a) and all virtues of the prophets (‘a), and ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) is the successor of Muhammad (S) and the inheritor of his knowledge.

O confounded and wandering *ummah* after the Prophet (S)! Be aware that if you would have made superior the person who had been made superior by God and have fixed the *wilayah* {guardianship} on the family of your Prophet, blessings from above and below will be bestowed on you and every matter you would want the information about which will be obtained from them from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet. But now, you did something else, you would see the consequences of what you have done.[19](#)

Yes, the group of the first Shi‘ah and its formation had been initiated by the great Companions of the Prophet (S), and through these same Shi‘ah from the Companions that Shi‘ism was transferred to the next generation of the *Tabi‘un* {Followers}. And it was the result of their efforts that at the end of the rule of ‘Uthman, from the political perspective, the ground for ‘Ali’s (‘a) caliphate was paved.

Lesson 7: Summary

1. Hadrat ‘Ali (‘a) overlooked his right and kept silent for the sake and interest of Islam. Keeping in view his statements in this regard, the following factors can be identified:

- a. The discord among Muslims;
- b. The danger posed by the apostates {*murtaddin*}; and
- c. The safety of the progeny of the Prophet (‘a).

2. After the event of Saqifah, Shi‘ah was formed as a special group with a particular political orientation, and they individually and collectively defended the truthfulness of ‘Ali (‘a).

They gathered in the house of Fatimah (‘a), interpolated Abubakr in the mosque, and for the period of 25 years, they used to persistently introduce ‘Ali (‘a) as the rightful caliph to the people.

Lesson 7: Questions

1. List the reasons for the silence of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a).

2. After the event of Saqifah, at what stage were the Shi‘ah in?

- [1.](#) Najh al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 3 {Khutbah ash-Shaqshaqiyyah}.
- [2.](#) Ibn Abi’l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 1, p. 308.
- [3.](#) Najh al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Letter 62.
- [4.](#) ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 65.
- [5.](#) Surah al-Ma‘arij 70: 1.
- [6.](#) Abi ‘Ali al-Fadhl ibn al-Hasan Tabarsi, Majma‘ al-Bayan, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah Li’t-Tiba‘ah wa’n-Nashr, 1408 AH), vol. 10, p. 530.
- [7.](#) Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn an-Nu‘man Mufid, Al-Jamal, 2nd edition (Qum: Maktab al-A‘lam al-Islami (Central Publication), 1416 AH), pp. 118–119.
- [8.](#) Najh al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 26.
- [9.](#) Ahmad ibn Abi Ya‘qub ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, p. 126.
- [10.](#) Ibn Abi’l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 2, p. 51.
- [11.](#) Kardid, nakardid: Literally, “You did; you didn’t.” That is, “You determined the caliphate but you did not do the right thing.”
- [12.](#) Abi Mansur Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib Tabarsi, Al-Ihtijaj (Tehran: Intisharat-e Usweh, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 186–200.
- [13.](#) ‘Izz ad-Din Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad Abi’l-Kiram Ibn Athir, Asad al-Ghabah fi Ma‘rifah as-Sahabah (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ at-Turath al-‘Arabi, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 83.
- [14.](#) Ahmad ibn Abi Ya‘qub Ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi, 1st edition (Beirut: Manshurat Mu’assasah al-A‘lami Li’l-Matbu‘at, 1413 AH), vol. 2, p. 11.
- [15.](#) Regarding Adam (Adam) (‘a), God, the Exalted, says: “Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on earth” Surah al-Baqarah 2:30. Concerning Dawud (David) (‘a), God, the Exalted, states: “Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth” Surah Sad 38:26. With regard to Harun (Aaron) (‘a), God, the Exalted, says through the tongue of Musa (Moses) (‘a): “Be my successor among my people” Surah al-A‘raf 7:142. As regards ‘Ali (‘a), God, the Exalted, says: “Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors” Surah an-Nur 24:55. Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani, Manaqib Al Abi Talib (Beirut: Dar al-Adhwa’, 1405 AH), vol. 3, pp. 77–78.
- [16.](#) Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Jabir Baladhuri, Insab al-Ashraf (Beirut: Ma’assasah al-A‘lami Li’l-Matbu‘at, 1394 AH), vol. 3, p. 115.
- [17.](#) Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani, Manaqib Al Abi Talib (Qum: Mu’assasah Intisharat-e ‘Allameh, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 54.
- [18.](#) Ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi, vol. 2, p. 57.
- [19.](#) Ibid., p. 67.

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