

Letter 1: Addressed to the people of Kufa before proceeding for the Battle of Jamal

Addressed to the people of Kufah at the time of his march from Medina to Basrah. 1

من كتاب له (عليه السلام)

إلى أهل الكوفة، عند مسيره من المدينة إلى البصرة

From the servant of Allah, `Ali, the Commander of the faithful, to the people of Kufah who are foremost among the supporters and chiefs of the Arabs.

مِنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلِيِّ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِلَى أَهْلِ الْكُوفَةِ، جَبْهَةَ الْأَنْصَارِ وَسَنَامِ الْعَرَبِ.

Now, I am apprising you of what befell `Uthman so (correctly) that its hearing may be like its seeing. People criticised him, and I was the only man from among the muhjdjirun (immigrants) who asked him to seek to satisfy (the Muslims) most and to offend them the least. As for Talhah and az-Zubayr, their lightest step about him was hard and their softest voice was strong. `A'ishah too was in a rage with him. Consequently, a group overpowered him and killed him. Then, people swore allegiance to me, not by force or compulsion but obediently and out of free will.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنِّي أَخْبِرُكُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِ عُثْمَانَ حَتَّى يَكُونَ سَمْعُهُ كَعَيْنَانِهِ إِنَّ النَّاسَ طَعَنُوا

عَلَيْهِ، فَكُنْتُ رَجُلًا مِّنَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ أَكْثَرَ اسْتِعْتَابِهِ، وَأَقْلَّ عِتَابِهِ، وَكَانَ طَلْحَةَ
وَالزُّبَيْرَ أَهْوَنُ سَيْرِهِمَا فِيهِ الْوَجِيفُ، وَأَرْفَقُ حَدَائِمَهُمَا الْعَنِيفُ، وَكَانَ مِنْ عَائِشَةَ
فِيهِ فَلْتَةٌ غَضَبٌ، فَأُتِيحَ لَهُ قَوْمٌ فَقَتَلُوهُ، وَيَا بَعِي النَّاسُ غَيْرَ مُسْتَكْرَهِينَ وَلَا
مُجْبَرِينَ، بَلْ طَائِعِينَ مُخِيرِينَ.

You should know that Medina has been vacated by its residents and they have abandoned it. It is boiling like a huge cooking pot and rebellion is fixed on its axis moving with full force. So, hasten towards your amir (commander) and proceed forward to fight your enemy, if so wills Allah to Whom belongs Might and Majesty.

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ دَارَ الْهَجْرَةِ قَدْ قَلَعَتْ بِأَهْلِهَا وَقَلَعُوا بِهَا، وَجَاشَتْ جَيْشَ الْمَرْجَلِ،
وَقَامَتِ الْفِتْنَةُ عَلَى الْقُطْبِ، فَاسْرِعُوا إِلَى أَمِيرِكُمْ، وَيَادِرُوا جِهَادَ عَدُوِّكُمْ، إِنْ شَاءَ
اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

1. Ibn Maythman writes (in Sharh Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, vol.4, p.338) that when on hearing about the mischief-mongering of Talhah and az-Zubayr, Amir al-mu'minin set off for Basrah, he sent this letter to the people of Kufah through Imam al-Hasan and `Ammir ibn Yasir from al-Ma' al-`Adhb, while Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has written (in Sharh Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, vol. 14, pp.8, 16; at-Tabari, vol. 1, p.3139; and Ibn al-Athir, vol.3, p.223) that when Amir al-mu`minin camped at ar-Rabadhah, he sent this letter through Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Tilib and Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr. In this letter Amir al-mu`minin has clearly thrown light on the point that the assassination of `Uthman was the result of the efforts of `A'ishah, Talhah and az-Zubayr, and that it was they who took a prominent part in it. In fact, `A'ishah went beyond her bounds and exposed his shortcomings in public meetings and ordered that he should be killed. Thus, ash-Shaykh Muhammad `Abdub has written:

Once `Uthman was on the pulpit when Umm al-mu`minin `A'ishah took out the shoes and the shirt of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and his descendants) from under her veil and said: "These are the shoes of the Messenger of Allah and his shirt, not yet decayed, while you have altered his religion and changed his sunnah." Upon this, hot words followed between them when she said, "Kill this Na'thal," symbolising him as a long bearded Jew (of that name). (Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, printed in Egypt, vol.2, p.3; also see Ansab al-ashraf, vol.5, p.88; Abu'l-Fida', vol. 1, p. 172).

People were already displeased with `Uthman, so this event increased their boldness and they surrounded him so that he might mend his ways or abdicate from the caliphate. In these circumstances, there was serious apprehension that if he did not accept either of the two alternatives he would be killed. All this was observed by `A'ishah, but she paid no heed to it and, leaving him in the siege, decided to leave for Mecca, although on this occasion Marwan ibn al-Hakam and `Attab ibn Asid did say to her, "If you postpone your departure it is possible his life may be saved and this crowd may disperse" whereupon she said that she had decided to go for hajj (pilgrimage) and that that could not be changed. Then Marwan recited this couplet by way of a proverb:

Qays set fire to my cities, and when they came into flames he slipped away saving himself clear of it.

Similarly, Talhah and az-Zubayr were (also) in rage against him and they were ever forward in fanning this fire and intensifying the opposition. From this angle they were, to a great extent, taking part in his assassination and responsible for

his blood. Other people also knew them in this perspective and regarded them as his murderers, while their supporters too were not able to offer any explanation (for absolving them). Thus, Ibn Qutaybah writes that when al-Mughirah ibn Shubah met `A'ishah at Awtas he asked her:

"O' Umm al-mu'minin, where are you bound for." She replied, "I am going to Basrah." He inquired for what purpose and she replied, "To avenge `Uthman's blood." He said, "But his assassins are with you." Then he turned to Marwan and enquired where he was going. He replied that he too was going to Basrah. He enquired the purpose and the reply was "to avenge `Uthman's blood." Then he said, "Uthman's assassins are with you. These Talhah and az-Zubayr have killed him." (al-Imamah was `siyasah, vol. 1, p.60)

In any case, when, after laying the blame on Amir al-mu'minin, this group who had killed `Uthman reached Basrah, Amir al-mu'minin also rose to quell this mischief and wrote this letter to the people of Kufah to seek their support. Upon this their combatants and warriors rose in large numbers and enlisted in his army. They faced the enemy with full courage which Amir al-mu'minin also acknowledged. Thus, the letter hereafter is in acknowledgement of this very fact.

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