

Home > Nahjul Balagha Part 2, Letters and Sayings > Letters of Imam 'Ali Amir Al-Mu'minin, Peace Be On Him > Letter 28: In reply to Mu'awiyah, and it is one of his most elegant writings

Letter 28: In reply to Mu'awiyah, and it is one of his most elegant writings

ومن كتاب له (عليه السلام)

إلى معاوية جواباً

وهو من محاسن الكتب.

Now, your letter 1 has reached me wherein you recall that Allah chose Muhammad (S) for His religion and helped him through those companions who helped him. Strange things about you have remained concealed (by the irony of fate) from us, since you have started telling us of Allah's trials for us and His bounties to us through our Prophet. In this matter, you are like the person who carries dates to Hajar, or who challenges his own master to a duel in archery.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَقَدْ أَتَانِي كِتَابُكَ تَذَكُّرُ [فِيهِ] اصْطِفَاءَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مُحَمَّدًا (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) لِدِينِهِ، وَتَأْيِيدَهُ إِيَّاهُ بِمَنْ أَيْدَهُ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ، فَلَقَدْ خَبَأَ لَنَا الدَّهْرُ مِنْكَ عَجَبًا، إِذْ طَفِقْتَ تُخْبِرُنَا بِبَلَاءِ اللَّهِ عِنْدَنَا، وَنِعْمَتِهِ عَلَيْنَا فِي نَبِيِّنَا، فَكُنْتَ فِي ذَلِكَ كَنَاقِلِ التَّمْرِ إِلَى هَجَرَ، أَوْ دَاعِي مُسَدِّدِهِ إِلَى النَّضَالِ

You think that so – and– so are the most distinguished persons in Islam. You have said such a thing which if it be true, you have nothing to do with it, but if it be not so, then its defect will not affect you. And what are you to do with the question of who is better and who is worse, or who is the ruler and who is the ruled. What have the freed ones and their sons to do with distinguishing between the first muhajirun and determining their position or defining their ranks. What a pity! the sound of an arrow is being produced by what is not a real arrow, and he against whom the judgement is to be passed is sitting in judgement. O man, why do you not see your own lameness and remain within bounds, and why do not you realize the shortness of your measure and stay back where destiny has placed you. You have no concern with the defeat of the defeated or the victory of the victor.

وَزَعَمْتَ أَنَّ أَفْضَلَ النَّاسِ فِي الْأَسْلَامِ فُلَانٌ وَفُلَانٌ، فَذَكَرْتَ أَمْرًا إِنْ تَمَّ اعْتَزَلَكَ كُلُّهُ، وَإِنْ نَقَصَ لَمْ يَلْحَقْكَ ثَلْمُهُ، وَمَا أَنْتَ وَالْفَاضِلَ وَالْمَفْضُولَ، وَالسَّائِسَ وَالْمَسُوسَ! وَمَا لِلطُّلُقَاءِ وَأَبْنَاءِ الطُّلُقَاءِ، وَالتَّمْيِيزِينَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ الْأَوَّلِينَ، وَتَرْتِيبَ دَرَجَاتِهِمْ، وَتَعْرِيفَ طَبَقَاتِهِمْ! هِيَاهُتَ لَقَدْ حَنَّ قِدْحُ لَيْسَ مِنْهَا، وَطَفِقَ يَحْكُمُ فِيهَا مَنْ عَلَيْهِ الْحُكْمُ لَهَا! أَلَا تَرَبُّعُ أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى ظُلْعِكَ، وَتَعْرِفُ قُصُورَ ذَرْعِكَ، وَتَتَأَخَّرُ حَيْثُ أَخْرَكَ الْقَدَرُ! فَمَا عَلَيْكَ غَلْبَةُ الْمَغْلُوبِ، وَلَا لَكَ ظَفَرُ الظَّافِرِ!

You are wandering in bewilderment and straying from the right path. Do you not realize it? I am not giving you any news: I am just recounting Allah's bounty, namely that a number of people from among the muhajirun (immigrants from Mecca) and ansar (helpers) fell as martyrs in the way of Allah the Sublime, and that each of them is distinguished (on that account), but when one of us secured martyrdom he was named the Chief of all martyrs, and the Messenger of Allah (S) gave him the peculiar honour of saying seventy takbir (Allahu Akbar) during his funeral prayer.

Do you not know that a number of people lost their hands in the way of Allah, and that everyone is distinguished (on that account), but when the same thing occurred to one of us he was given the name "the flier in Paradise"; and "the two winged". If Allah had not forbidden self-praise, the writer would have mentioned numerous distinctions which the believer knows full well and which the ears of hearers do not wish to forget.

وَإِنَّكَ لَذَهَابٌ فِي التَّيِّهِ، رَوَّاعٌ عَنِ الْقَصْدِ. أَلَا تَرَى - غَيْرَ مُخْبِرٍ لَكَ، لَكِنْ بِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ أُحْدِثُ - أَنَّ قَوْمًا اسْتَشْهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ، لِكُلِّ فَضْلٍ، حَتَّى إِذَا اسْتَشْهَدَ شَهِيدُنَا قِيلَ: سَيِّدُ الشُّهَدَاءِ، وَخَصَّهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) بِسَبْعِينَ تَكْبِيرَةً عِنْدَ صَلَاتِهِ عَلَيْهِ! أَوَلَا تَرَى أَنَّ قَوْمًا قُطِّعَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ -

وَلِكُلٍّ فَضْلٌ - حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُعِلَ بِوَاحِدِنَا كَمَا فُعِلَ بِوَاحِدِهِمْ، قِيلَ: الطَّيَّارُ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَذُو الْجَنَاحَيْنِ! وَلَوْ لَا مَا نَهَى اللَّهُ عَنْهُ مِنْ تَزْكِيَةِ الْمَرْءِ نَفْسَهُ، لَذَكَرَ ذَاكَرٌ فَضَائِلَ جَمَّةً، تَعْرِفُهَا قُلُوبُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، وَلَا تَمُجُّهَا آذَانُ السَّامِعِينَ.

Better leave those whose arrows miss the mark. We are the direct recipients of our Lord's favours while others receive favours from us after that. In spite of our old established honour and our well-known superiority over your people, we did not stay away from mixing with you and married and got married (among you) like equals although you were not so. And how could you be so when (the position is that) among us is the Prophet while among you is the opposer, among us is the lion of Allah while among you is the lion of the opposing groups, among us are the two masters of the youth of Paradise 2 while among you are the children of Hell, among us is the choicest of all the women of the worlds 3 while among you is the bearer of firewood, and many more distinctions on our side and shortcomings on your side.

فَدَعُ عَنْكَ مَنْ مَالَتْ بِهِ الرَّمِيَّةُ، فَإِنَّا صَنَائِعُ رَبِّنَا، وَالنَّاسُ بَعْدُ صَنَائِعُ لَنَا. لَمْ يَمْنَعْنَا قَدِيمُ عِزِّنَا وَلَا عَادِي طَوْلِنَا عَلَى قَوْمِكَ أَنْ خَلَطْنَاكُمْ بِأَنْفُسِنَا، فَانْكَحْنَا وَأَنْكَحْنَا، فِعْلَ الْأَكْفَاءِ، وَلَسْتُمْ هُنَاكَ! وَأَنَّى يَكُونُ ذَلِكَ كَذَلِكَ وَمِنَّا النَّبِيُّ وَمِنْكُمْ الْمُكَذِّبُ، وَمِنَّا أَسَدُ اللَّهِ وَمِنْكُمْ أَسَدُ الْأَحْلَافِ، وَمِنَّا سَيِّدَا شَبَابِ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ وَمِنْكُمْ صَبِيَّةُ النَّارِ، وَمِنَّا خَيْرُ نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ وَمِنْكُمْ حَمَّالَةُ الْحَطَبِ، فِي كَثِيرٍ مِمَّا لَنَا وَعَلَيْكُمْ!

Our Islam is well-known and our (greatness in the) pre-Islamic period too cannot be denied. Whatever remains has been mentioned in the words of Allah the Glorified, the Sublime:

And blood relations have the better claim in respect of one to the other, according to the Book of Allah... (Qur'an, 33:6)

He (Allah) the Sublime, also says:

Verily, of men the nearest to Abraham are surely those who followed him and this (Our) Prophet (Muhammad) and those who believe; and verily, Allah, is the Guardian of the faithful. (Qur'an, 3:68)

فَإِسْلَامُنَا مَا قَدْ سُمِعَ، وَجَاهِلِيَّتُنَا لَا تُدْفَعُ، وَكِتَابُ اللَّهِ يَجْمَعُ لَنَا مَا شَذَّ عَنَّا، وَهُوَ قَوْلُهُ سُبْحَانَهُ: (وَأُولُو الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ)، وَقَوْلُهُ تَعَالَى:

(إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ)،

Thus, we are superior firstly because of kinship and secondly because of obedience. When at Saqifah (of Banu Sa'idah) the Muhajirun contended kinship with the Messenger of Allah (S) against the Ansar, they scored over them. If that success was based on kinship then the right would be ours better than yours. Otherwise, the Ansar's contention stands. You think that I have been jealous of every caliph and have revolted against them. Even if this be so, it is not an offence against you and therefore no explanation is due to you.

"This is a matter for which no blame comes to you".

فَنَحْنُ مَرَّةً أَوْلَى بِالْقَرَابَةِ، وَتَارَةً أَوْلَى بِالطَّاعَةِ. وَلَمَّا احْتَجَّ الْمُهَاجِرُونَ عَلَى
الْأَنْصَارِ يَوْمَ السَّقِيفَةِ بِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) فَلَجُّوا عَلَيْهِمْ، فَإِنْ يَكُنُ
الْفَلَجُ بِهِ فَالْحَقُّ لَنَا دُونَكُمْ، وَإِنْ يَكُنْ بغيرِهِ فَالْأَنْصَارُ عَلَى دَعْوَاهُمْ.

وَزَعَمْتُ أَنِّي لِكُلِّ الْخُلَفَاءِ حَسَدْتُ، وَعَلَى كُلِّهِمْ بَغَيْتُ، فَإِنْ يَكُنْ ذَلِكَ كَذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ
الْجِنَايَةُ عَلَيْكَ، فَيَكُونُ الْعُذْرُ إِلَيْكَ.

"وَتِلْكَ شَكَاةٌ ظَاهِرَةٌ عَنْكَ عَارُهَا"

You have said that I was dragged like a camel with a nose string to swear allegiance (to Abu Bakr at Saqifah). By the Eternal Allah, you had intended to revile me but you have praised me, and to humiliate me but have yourself been humiliated. What humiliation does it mean for a Muslim to be the victim of oppression so long as he does not entertain any doubt in his religion, nor any misgiving in his firm belief! This argument of mine is intended for others, but I have stated it to you only in so far as it was appropriate.

وَقُلْتُ: إِنِّي كُنْتُ أَقَادُ كَمَا يُقَادُ الْجَمَلُ الْمَخْشُوشُ حَتَّى أَبَايَعُ، وَلَعَمْرُ اللَّهِ لَقَدْ
أَرَدْتُ أَنْ تَذُمَّ فَمَدَحْتَ، وَأَنْ تَفْضَحَ فَاِفْتَضَحْتَ! وَمَا عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِ مِنْ غَضَاظَةٍ

فِي أَنْ يَكُونَ مَظْلُومًا مَا لَمْ يَكُنْ شَاكًّا فِي دِينِهِ، وَلَا مُرْتَابًا بِبَيْقِينِهِ!

وَهَذِهِ حُجَّتِي إِلَى غَيْرِكَ قَصْدُهَا، وَلَكِنِّي أَطْلَقْتُ لَكَ مِنْهَا بِقَدْرِ مَا سَنَحَ مِنْ ذِكْرِهَا.

Then you have recalled my position vis-a-vis 'Uthman, and in this matter an answer is due to you because of your kinship with him. So (now tell me), which of us was more inimical towards 'Uthman and who did more to bring about his killing; or who offered him his support but he made him sit down and stopped him; or who was he whom he called for help but who turned his face from him and drew his death near him till his fate over took him? No, no; by Allah:

Indeed knoweth Allah those who hinder others among you and those who say unto their brethren "Come hitherunto us", and they come not to fight but a little. (Qur'an 33:18)

ثُمَّ ذَكَرْتَ مَا كَانَ مِنْ أَمْرِي وَأَمْرِ عُثْمَانَ، فَلَا أَنْ تُجَابَ عَنْ هَذِهِ لِرَحِمِكَ مِنْهُ، فَأَيْنَا كَانَ أَعْدَى لَهُ، أَهْدَى إِلَى مَقَاتِلِهِ! أَمْ مَنْ بَدَلَ لَهُ نُصْرَتَهُ فَاسْتَقْعَدَهُ وَاسْتَكَفَّهُ، أَمْ مَنْ اسْتَنْصَرَهُ فَتَرَاخَى عَنْهُ بَثُّ الْمُنُونِ إِلَيْهِ، حَتَّى أَتَى قَدْرُهُ عَلَيْهِ، كَلَّا وَاللَّهِ (لَقَدْ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ الْمُعْوِقِينَ مِنْكُمْ وَالْقَائِلِينَ لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ هَلُمَّ إِلَيْنَا وَلَا يَأْتُونَ الْبَأْسَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا).

I am not going to offer my excuse for reproving him for (some of) his innovations, for if my good counsel and guidance to him was a sin then very often a person who is blamed has no sin and “sometimes the only reward a counsellor 4 reaps is suspicion (of evil)”.

I desired naught but reform what I am able to (do); and my guidance is not but with Allah; On Him (alone) do I rely, and unto Him (alone) do I turn. (Qur'an, 11:88)

وَمَا كُنْتُ لِاعْتَذَرُ مِنْ أَنِّي كُنْتُ أَنْقِمُ عَلَيْهِ أَحْدَاثًا، فَإِنْ كَانَ الذَّنْبُ إِلَيْهِ إِرْشَادِي وَهِدَايَتِي لَهُ، فَرُبَّ مَلُومٍ لَا ذَنْبَ لَهُ

"وَقَدْ يَسْتَفِيدُ الظَّنَّةَ الْمُتَنَصِّحُ"

وَمَا أَرَدْتُ إِلَّا الْأَصْلَاحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ).

You have mentioned that for me and for my followers you have only the sword. This makes even a weeping person laugh. Did you ever see the descendants of 'Abd al-Muttalib running away from battle, or being frightened by swords? "Wait a little till Hamal 5 joins the battle" shortly, then he whom you are seeking will seek you and he whom you think to be far away will approach near you. I am (shortly) speeding towards you with a force of Muhajirun and Ansar and those who follow them in virtue. Their number will be great and their dust will spread all round. They will be wearing their shrouds and their most coveted desire is to meet Allah. They will be accompanied by the descendants of those who took part in the battle of Badr, and they will have Hashimite swords whose cut you have already seen in the case of your brother, maternal uncle, your grandfather and your kinsmen.

Nor are they far distant from the unjust ones. (Qur'an, 11:83)

وَذَكَرْتُ أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ لِي وَلَا لِأَصْحَابِي عِنْدَكَ إِلَّا السَّيْفُ، فَلَقَدْ أَضْحَكْتَ بَعْدَ اسْتِعْبَارِ!
مَتَى أُلْفَيْتَ بَنُو عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ عَنِ الْأَعْدَاءِ نَاكِلِينَ، وَبِالسُّيُوفِ مُخَوِّفِينَ؟! " فَ لَبِثُ
قَلِيلًا يَلْحَقُ الْهَيْجَا حَمَلٌ"

سَيَطْلُبُكَ مَنْ تَطْلُبُ، وَيَقْرُبُ مِنْكَ مَا تَسْتَبْعِدُ، وَأَنَا مُرْقِلٌ نَحْوَكَ فِي جَحْفَلٍ مِنَ
الْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارِ، وَالتَّابِعِينَ [لَهُمْ] بِإِحْسَانٍ، شَدِيدِ زِحَامُهُمْ، سَاطِعِ قِتَامُهُمْ،
مُتَسَرِّبِلِينَ سَرَابِيلَ الْمَوْتِ، أَحَبُّ الْإِلْقَاءِ إِلَيْهِمْ لِقَاءُ رَبِّهِمْ، قَدْ صَحَبْتَهُمْ ذُرِّيَّةَ بَدْرِيَّةٍ،
وَسُيُوفُ هَاشِمِيَّةٍ، قَدْ عَرَفْتَ مَوَاقِعَ نِصَالِهَا فِي أَخِيكَ وَخَالِكَ وَجَدِّكَ وَأَهْلِكَ،
(وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٍ)

1. This letter of Amir al-mu'minin's is in reply to Mu'awiyah's letter which he sent to Kufah through Abu Umamah al-Bahili, and it also contains replies to some points which Mu'awiyah had written in the letter sent through Abu Muslim al-Khawlani.

In Abu Umamah's letter, Mu'awiyah had mentioned the deputation of the Prophet and his ascension to the position of revelation and wrote in such a manner as though it was a matter not known to or not understood by Amir al-mu'minin and that he was in need of being informed and told of it. This is just like a stranger who may draw the map of a house for the guidance of those who dwell in it and apprise them of things already known to them. That is why Amir al-mu'minin has compared him to the man who carried dates to Hajar which was itself noted for abundant growth of dates.

This is a proverb employed when someone beings to tell a person matters which he already knows better. The basis of this

proverb is that a man of Hajar, which is a town near Bahrain (Persian Gulf), went to Basrah to sell goods and make purchases. After finishing the sale, he looked about the market to make his purchases and found nothing cheaper than dates. He therefore decided to purchase dates, and when he reached Hajar with his load of dates their plenty and cheapness there did not leave him any alternative but to store them so as to sell them later when their price had risen. The price however continued to fall day by day till all of them became rotten leaving to him nothing except their stones. In short, after referring to the Prophet's ascension to prophethood Mu'awiyah recounted the distinction and merits of the three Caliphs according to his view and wrote:

The most distinguished among the companions and the highest ranking in the view of the Muslims was the first Caliph who collected all the Muslims under one voice, removed their disunity and fought those who were forsaking Islam. After him is the second Caliph who won victories, founded cities and humiliated the unbelievers. Then comes the third Caliph who was the victim of oppression. He propagated religion and spread the word of Allah far and wide. (Siffin, al-Minqari, pp.86–87; al-'Iqd al-farid, vol.4, pp.334–335; Sharh Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, vol. 15, p. 186)

Mu'awiyah's purpose behind in bringing up these pointless warblings was to injure Amir al-mu'minin's feelings and to rouse his temper so as to make him produce such words through his tongue or pen which would so disparage the caliphs that he would instigate the people of Syria and Iraq against him by exploiting them. In fact, he had already set it in the minds of these people that Amir al-mu'minin had instigated the people against 'Uthman, had got Talhah and az-Zubayr killed, had turned 'A'ishah out from her house and had shed the blood of thousands of Muslims. Being unaware of the real facts they were convinced of these baseless allegations, yet to strengthen the opposition, he thought it advisable to make them believe that Amir al-mu'minin did not recognize the achievements of the three caliphs and bore enmity and malice towards them, and to produce Amir al-mu'minin's writing in evidence, and also to use it for rousing the people of Iraq, because their majority was much impressed with the environment created by the caliphs and with their greatness. But Amir al-mu'minin guessed his intention and gave him such a reply which put a knot in his tongue and which he could not dare show to anyone.

So, Amir al-mu'minin exposed his lowness by referring to his enmity towards Islam and his accepting subjugation under force, and advised him to keep within his bounds, and warned him against fixing grades of distinction among those muhajirun who were in any case superior to him in so far as they had been the preceders in hijrah (immigration from Mecca). Whereas since Mu'awiyah himself was only one of those whose life had been spared (on the day of fall of Mecca), he had not the remotest connection with the muhajirun. Consequently, in the matter under discussion Amir al-mu'minin has put Mu'awiyah's position as that of a false arrow among real arrows. This is a proverb which is employed when a man boasts over persons with whom he has no connection. As regards his statement that so – and – so is greater in distinction, Amir al-mu'minin has, by using the word "you think", shown that it is his personal opinion which has not the remotest connection with fact, because this word is used when a false or unreal statement is made.

After refuting this claim of being the most distinguished, Amir al-mu'minin has referred to these qualities and distinctions of Banu Hashim which show conspicuously the high degree of their attainments. Thus, the people who took part in jihad with the Prophet and secured martyrdom attained high positions but the distinction that fell to Hamzah by virtue of his high performance was not secured by anyone else. The Prophet gave him the title of Master of the Martyrs and said his funeral prayer fourteen times whereby the number of takbir (Allahu akbar) rose to seventy. Similarly, in various battles the hands of the fighters were cut off. For example, in the battle of Badr the hands of Khubayb ibn Isaf al-Ansari and Mu'adh ibn Jabal and in the battle of Uhud those of 'Amr ibn al-Jamuh as-Salami and 'Ubayd ('Atik) ibn at-Tayyihan (brother of Abu'l-Haytham at-Tayyihan) were cut off, but when in the battle of Mu'tah the hands of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib were cut off, the Prophet singled him out by naming him "the flier in Paradise" and the "two-winged". After recounting the peculiar achievements of Banu Hashim, Amir al-mu'minin has referred to his own attainments with which the histories and traditions are replete and which could not be tarnished with doubts and misgivings. Thus, traditionists like Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164/780–241/855), Ahmad ibn 'Ali an-Nasa'i (215/830 – 303/915) and others say that: The number of traditions that have been related through reliable sources in regard to the distinctions of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib have not been related about any other companion of the Prophet. (al-Mustadrak, vol.3, p. 107; al-Isti'db, vol.3, p. 1115; Tabaqat al-hanabilah, vol. 1, p.319; al-

An important distinction out of these particular distinctions of Ahlul Bayt (the Household of the Holy Prophet) is the one to which Amir al-mu'minin has referred in these words that "We are the direct recipients of Allah's favours while others receive favours from us." This is the height of distinction that even the highest personality cannot reach its sublimity and every other distinction looks small before it. Acknowledging the greatness and supremacy of this sentence, Ibn Abi'l-Hadid writes:

Amir al-mu'minin intends to convey that we are not under obligation of any person since Allah has bestowed all blessings on us directly, there being no intermediary between us and Allah, while all other people are under our obligation and protection, being the intermediary between them and Allah, the Glorified; this is a high position indeed. Its apparent meaning is what the words show but its real sense is that the Ahlul Bayt are the obedient servants of Allah and the people must be their obedient followers. (Sharh Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, vol. 15, p. 194)

Now, since these people are the first recipients of the bounties of Allah and the source of bounties for the rest of the people, no one from among the people can be compared with them, nor can anyone be regarded as their equal on the basis of social contacts with them, much less than those individuals who were in direct contrast to the attainments and characteristics of these people, and used to oppose truth and right on every occasion. Amir al-mu'minin places both the sides of the picture before Mu'awiyah and says:

The Prophet was from us while your father Abu Sufyan was foremost in opposing him. Hamzah was from us and the Prophet gave him the title of "Lion of Allah" while your maternal grandfather, 'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah was proud of being the "lion of swearers (against the Prophet)."

When in the battle of Badr, Hamzah and 'Utbah ibn Rabi'ah came face to face, Hamzah said, "I am Hamzah son of 'Abd al-Muttalib; I am the lion of Allah and the lion of His Prophet," whereupon 'Utbah said, "I am the lion of swearers (against the Prophet)." In another version, the word "Asadu'l-ahlaf" has been recorded. The meaning is that he was the Chief of the allying parties. The story of swearing is that when Banu 'Abd Manaf acquired a distinct position among the Arab tribes they thought they should take over from Banu 'Abdi'd-Dar the offices relating to the Ka'bah and to depose them from these offices. In this connection, Banu 'Abd Manaf allied with themselves the tribes of Banu Asad ibn 'Abdi'l-Uzza, Banu Taym, Banu Zuhrah and Banu al-Harith, and concluded an agreement with them. In order to solemnize this agreement they drenched their hands in tib (perfume) and swore that they would help each other. For this reason, these tribes were called: "Tribes of sworn chaste parties".

On the other side the tribes of Banu 'Abdi'd-Dar, Banu Makhzum, Banu Sahm and Banu 'Adi also swore that they would resist Banu 'Abd Manaf and their allies. These tribes are called the "allies". 'Utbah has deemed himself the head of the allying parties. Some commentators have taken the word Asadu'l-ahlaf to mean Abu Sufyan, because he made different tribes swear against the Prophet in the battle of the Trench, while some commentators take it to mean Asad ibn 'Abdi'l-Uzzah, but this interpretation does not carry weight because here Amir al-mu'minin is addressing Mu'awiyah and this interpretation does not hit Mu'awiyah since Banu 'Abd Manaf were a party to this alliance. Then Amir al-mu'minin says, "they have among themselves the masters of the youth of Paradise". Referring to the Prophet's saying, "al-Hasan and al-Husayn are the masters of the youth of Paradise", while the boys of the other side are in Hell. This reference is to the sons of 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt, about whom the Prophet has said, "For you and your sons is Hell". Then Amir al-mu'minin says that among them is the chief of all the women of the worlds, namely Fatimatu'z-Zahra' (p.b.u.h.), while in the other party is the bearer of the wood which refers to Umm Jamil, the sister of Abu Sufyan. This woman used to spread thorns in the path of the Prophet. She has been mentioned in the Qur'an along with Abu Lahab, in these words:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful May perish both the hands of Abu Lahab, may perish (he himself); Shall avail him not his wealth nor what he earneth; Soon shall he burn in the flaming fire; And his wife, the bearer of the firewood; Upon her neck shall be a halter of twisted rope. (Qur'an, 111)

2. It is narrated from Amir al-mu'minin, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Hudhayfah ibn Yaman, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Abu Hurayrah,

etc., that the Holy Prophet (may Allah bless him and his descendants) said:

Verily, Fatimah is the Supreme Lady of the women of Paradise, and al-Hasan and al-Husayn are the two Supreme Youth of Paradise. But their father ('Ali) is Superior to them. (al-Jami'as -sahih, at-Tirmidhi, vol.5, pp.656, 661; al-Musnad, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol. 3, pp.3,62,64, 82; vol.5, pp.391, 392; as-Sunan, Ibn Majah, vol. 1, p. 56; al-Mustadrak, al-Hakim, vol.3, p. 167; Majma' az-zawa'id, vol.9, pp. 183, 184,201; Kanz al-'ummal, al-Muttaqi, vol.13, pp. 127, 128; al-Isti'ab, vol.4, p. 1895; Usd al-ghabah, vol.5, p.574; Tarikh Baghdad, vol.1, p. 140; vol.6, p.372; vol.10, p.230; at-Tarikh, Ibn 'Asakir, vol.7, p.365).
3. It is narrated from 'Imran ibn al-Husayn and Abu Tha'labah al-Khushni that the Holy Prophet (S) said to Fatimah (p.b.u.h.):

"O' my little daughter, are you not satisfied that you are verily the Supreme Lady of all women in the worlds?" She said, "O' father, then what about Maryam (Mary) daughter of 'Imran?" He said, "She was the Supreme Lady of her age, and you are the Supreme Lady of your age. Truly, by Allah, I married you to one who is the Master in this world and the hereafter. No one hates him save a hypocrite." (Hilyah al-awliya', vol.2, p.92; al-Isti'ab, vol.4, p. 1895; al-Isabah, vol.4, p.275)

Also, A'ishah narrated that the Holy Prophet (S) said:

O' Fatimah, will you not be satisfied to be the Supreme Lady of the women of the worlds (or) to be the Supreme Lady of all women of this ummah (community) or of the women believers? (as-Sahih, al-Bukhari, vol.8, p.79; as-Sahih, Muslim, vol.7, pp. 142-144; as-Sunan, Ibn Majah, vol. 1, p.518; al-Musnad, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol.6, p.282; al-Mustadrak 'ala as-sahihayn, al-Hakim, vol.3, p.156)

4. The meaning is that the person who goes too far in counselling others will be thought to have his personal ends in so doing, even though his counsel may well be based on sincerity of intention and selflessness. This line is used as a proverb on such occasions. The whole couplet runs as follows:

How often a good counsel I offered you, but sometimes the only reward a counsellor reaps is suspicion.

5. This line is of Hamal ibn Badr. The full couplet runs thus:

Wait a bit till Hamal reaches the battlefield; How pretty is death when it comes.

The story behind it is that Malik ibn Zuhayr threatened Hamal ibn Badr with battle and in reply he recited this couplet and then attacked Malik and killed him. When Malik's brother saw this, he killed Hamal and his brother Hudhayfah in revenge. Then, he described this in his following couplet:

I appeased my heart by killing Hamal ibn Badr and my sword appeased me by killing Hudhayfah.

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