

Letter 80

No Consensus

Safar 24, 1330

We say that the meaning of his (S) statements: "My nation's consensus shall never occur regarding anything wrong," and "My nation's word shall never be misleading," is that he (S) negates the error, or the misguidance, of the issue regarding which the nation arbitrates; thus, the nation will be reaching a unanimous endorsement in that issue's regard. This is the meaning of such traditions, and nothing else.

As regarding the matter which is considered by a group of individuals of the nation who decided to carry it out, successfully forcing it even on those who had a say, their carrying it out does not prove its validity. The pledge of allegiance taken at the *saqifa* was not an issue regarding consultation; rather, it was something which was undertaken by the second caliph and by Abu 'Ubaydah and a group of their friends, then they took by surprise those who actually had the authority to do and undo, assisted by contemporary circumstances.

Thus did they finally achieve what they had aspired. Abu Bakr himself declared that the oath of allegiance which he had received was conducted neither in accordance with consultation nor wisdom. He did so when he delivered a sermon at the dawn of his caliphate in which he apologized to the public saying: "The allegiance which I have received is a rash slip from the evil of which Allah has protected us, and there was a presentiment regarding dissension."¹

'Umar testified to the same fact in front of many eye-witnesses when he delivered a sermon from the pulpit of the Prophet's Mosque one Friday shortly before the conclusion of his reign, a sermon the news of which became widely publicized. Al-Bukhari has included it in his *Sahih*,² and I would like to quote it for you here *verbatim*:

"It has come to my knowledge that someone³ has said that if 'Umar dies, he will swear the oath of allegiance to so-and-so; therefore, let nobody hesitate from saying that the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr was a slip that was driven home, for it was exactly so, yet Allah protected us from the evil of its

consequences... Whoever swears the oath of allegiance to someone prior to consulting others, doing so only out of fear of being killed if he did not, then he should not do it at all [and accept death instead]...⁴ One of the rumours circulated about us when Allah took His Messenger (S) away from us is that the Ansar differed from us in their views; they all assembled at the *saqifa* [shed] of Bani Sa'idah; besides them, 'Ali (as) and al-Zubayr, and their followers, differed, too..."

He continued to point out what had happened at the shed, the disputes and differences of opinion, the voices that rose out of concern for the safety of the religion, etc. It was under those circumstances that 'Umar swore allegiance to Abu Bakr.

It is a fact well-known by those who research the events that prevented the members of the Prophet's household (as), the custodians of the Message, from attending the allegiance [inauguration] ceremony. They were detained at 'Ali's house together with Salman, Abu Tharr al-Ghifari, al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad al-Kindi, 'Ammar ibn Yasir, al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, Khuzaymah ibn Thabit, Abu ibn Ka'b, Farwah ibn 'Amr ibn Wadqah al-Ansari, al-Bara' ibn 'Azib, Khalid ibn Sa'd ibn al-'As al-Amawi, and many others.

So, how can it be said that there was a consensus in spite of the fact that all these men, including Muhammad's progeny (as), who are to the nation like the head to the body, the eyes to the face, the descendants of the Messenger of Allah (S) and the custodians of his knowledge, the ones who are peers only to and the companions of the Book of Allah, the arks of the nation's redemption, and the gates of its salvation, the nation's protection against straying, and the standard-bearers of its guidance, as we have proven above...,⁵ did not attend? But their dealing requires no proof if conscientiously discerned.

Both Bukhari and Muslim,⁶ in their *sahih*s, in addition to many other renowned traditionists and historians, have all proven the fact that 'Ali (as) did not participate in the allegiance process, and that he did not reconcile and make peace except after the mistress of the ladies of the world (as) had joined her father (S) [in Paradise], six months thereafter, compelled by the general Islamic interest during those very critical circumstances.

The testimony to these facts comes from 'Ayesha herself who says: "Al-Zahra' (as) boycotted Abu Bakr and did not speak to him after the demise of the Messenger of Allah (S) till she died, and when 'Ali (as) made peace with them, he accused them of depriving him of his place in the caliphate." This hadith, as you can see, does not mention anything about his swearing the oath of allegiance to them. How thought-provoking his statement is when he addresses Abu Bakr thus:

If you had argued with them, kinship claiming,

Then others are closer to the Prophet and more deserving;

And if through consultation you took control,

How so when those with counsel were not there at all?!⁷

Al-'Abbas ibn 'Abdul-Muttalib had used the same argument with Abu Bakr, as Ibn Qutaybah discusses him on page 16 of his book *Al-Imama wal Siyasa*, telling him once: "If you demanded what you demanded through kinship to the Messenger of Allah (S), then you had confiscated our own. If you had demanded it due to your position among Muslims, then ours is a more prestigious than yours. If this affair is accomplished when the believers are pleased with it, then it cannot be so as long as we are displeased therewith."

So; tell me where is the consensus you are talking about, having heard what the uncle of the Messenger of Allah (S), the one who was his father's peer, stated, in addition to the statement of his cousin, brother and executor of his will, as well as the statements of all his household and kin?

Sincerely,

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- [1.](#) This is quoted by Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn 'Abdul-'Aziz al-Jawhari in his book *Al-Saqifa* and by Ibn Abul-Hadid on page 132, Vol. 1, of his *Sharh Nahjul Balaghah*.
- [2.](#) Refer to the sahih, his chapter on the stoning of the woman who becomes pregnant out of adultery if she gets married, page 119, Vol. 4. It is also quoted by several authors of books of tradition and history such as Ibn Jarir and al-Tabari who discuss the events of the year 11 in the tarikh [history] book of each, and it is transmitted by Ibn Abul-Hadid on page 122, Vol. 1, of his *Sharh Nahjul Balaghah*.
- [3.](#) The one who is making a statement is Ibn al-Zubayr, and his statement is: "By Allah! As soon as 'Umar dies, I will swear the oath of allegiance to 'Ali, for allegiance to Abu Bakr was a slip by the nation that safely passed by." 'Umar, therefore, was extremely angry, and he delivered the said sermon. This is stated by many of those who have commented on al-Bukhari. Refer to the explanation of this hadith in al-Qastalani's *Sharh*, page 352, Vol. 11, and you will find the author quoting al-Balathiri with regards to surnames, admitting the authenticity of this hadith according to its endorsement by both shaykhs.
- [4.](#) In his commentary on this hadith, Ibn al-Athir has stated that the statement's gist is that they feared being murdered. The meaning of the whole hadith, therefore, is something like: "The allegiance must come as a result of consultation and consensus; so, if two men split from the group and one of them swears the fealty of allegiance to the other, then they both have departed from the group and consensus. If one receives the oath of allegiance, then he should not be one of them; rather, they both have to be isolated from the group that agrees to distinguish its own Imam from the rest. Otherwise, if one of them receives the oath of allegiance, after having committed a heinous act which caused the group to do without them, then there is no guarantee that both persons will commit murder." It is one of the dictates of the justice described by 'Umar who passed such a judgment on himself and his friend just as he passed it on others. Prior to his said sermon, he had stated the following: "Swearing the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr was a slip against whose evil Allah has protected us; so, you should kill whoever repeats it." This statement became extremely famous, and many narrators of historical events transmitted it, including scholar Ibn Abul-Hadid on page 123, Vol. 1, of his *Sharh Nahjul Balaghah*.
- [5.](#) Refer to Letter No. 6 and its following pages up to the end of Letter No. 12, and you will come to know the prestige meted to Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them.
- [6.](#) Refer to al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, and read the last lines of his chapter on Khaybar's campaign on page 39, Vol. 3. Also refer to Muslim's *Sahih*, to his chapter on the Prophet's statement: "We do not leave behind us anything, for whatever we leave is for charity," in his treatise on holy wars and biographies on page 72, Vol. 2, and you will find the matter as we have detailed it.
- [7.](#) Both of these poetic verses are included in *Nahjul Balaghah*. Ibn Abul-Hadid has said so while explaining them in his *Sharh Nahjul Balaghah*, page 319, Vol. 4, adding, "His statement is addressed to Abu Bakr, for Abu Bakr argued with the Ansar at the saqifa, saying: 'We are the progeny of the Messenger of Allah (S) and his nutshell;,' so, when he argued about

the allegiance, claiming that it was done by those who had a say, 'Ali (as) said: 'As regarding your argument with the Ansar saying that you belong to the progeny of the Messenger of Allah (S) and are among his kin, others are closer in kinship to him than you; as regarding your argument of being elected and that the masses are pleased with you, there many sahaba who were not present there; so, how can it be called consensus?'" Shaykh Muhammad 'Abdoh has made two comments on these verses summarizing what Ibn Abul-Hadid has said while explaining them.

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