

Part 2: The Power of Repulsion in 'Ali

How 'Ali Made Enemies

We shall restrict our discussion to the period of his somewhat more than four-year caliphate. 'Ali was all the time a two-powered personality; 'Ali always had the powers both of attraction and repulsion. In fact, we see right from the beginning of the Islamic age one group who gravitated more round 'Ali, and another group who did not have such a good connection with him and who were occasionally pained by his existence.

But the period of 'Ali's caliphate, and similarly the times after his death, that is to say the period of the appearance of the "history" of 'Ali, were the age of the greater manifestation of attraction to, and repulsion from, him; to the same extent as before the caliphate his links with the society were fewer, and also his attraction and repulsion less.

'Ali was a man who made enemies and gave people displeasure, and this, too, is another one of his great glories. Every principled man who has an aim and struggles towards it, particularly the revolutionary who pursues the putting into practice of his sacred goals and who is referred to by the words of Allah:

يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ

Who struggle in the way of Allah, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher. (5:54)

Makes enemies and leaves dissatisfied people. So if his enemies did not number more than his friends, especially in his own times, they were no fewer and nor are they now.

If 'Ali's personality were not distorted today, but were presented just as it was, many of those who pretend to be his friends would take a stand alongside his enemies.

The Prophet sent 'Ali as a commander of an army to the Yemen. On his return he set out for Mecca to meet the Prophet, and, on reaching the environs of Mecca, he appointed one of the soldiers in his place and himself hurried on to present the account of his expedition to the Messenger of Allah. That person divided up the garments which 'Ali had brought along with them among the soldiers, so that they could enter Mecca in new clothes.

When 'Ali returned, he objected to this action, and reproved that man for lack of discipline, because no decision should have been taken about the garments before orders had been received from the Prophet about what to do with them. In the eyes of 'Ali, such an action was in fact a kind of expropriation from the *baytu 'l-mal* (the Treasury of the Muslims) without giving notification to, and obtaining permission from, the leader of the Muslims.

For this reason 'Ali gave the order that they should take off the garments and put them in a particular place, until they could be delivered to the Prophet and he himself could make a decision about them. Because of this, 'Ali's soldiers became disgruntled, and, as soon as they had gone in to see the Prophet, they complained about 'Ali's harshness over the garments. The Prophet addressed them, and said:

يَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ لَا تَشْكُوا عَلَيَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ إِنَّهُ لَأَخْشَنُ فِي ذَاتِ اللَّهِ مِنْ أَنْ يُشْكَى

Oh men, do not grumble about 'Ali. I swear by Allah that he is more intensely in the way of God than that anyone should complain about him.[1](#)

Ali had no concern for anyone in the way of God. Rather, if he showed interest in someone or was concerned about him, it was because of God. Naturally, such an attitude makes enemies, and it causes offence to souls full of greed and craving and brings them pain.

None of the companions of the Prophet had devoted friends like 'Ali did, just as no-one had such bold and dangerous enemies as he did. He was someone who, even after his death, had his corpse attacked by enemies. He was himself aware of this and foresaw these things, and so he left as his will that his grave should be hidden and unknown to all but his sons, until after about a century had passed and the Umayyids had been overthrown, the Khawarij overthrown too, or made all but impotent, and vendettas and avengers had become few, and Imam as-Sadiq indicated the sacred soil of his resting place.

In the period of his caliphate, 'Ali expelled three groups from beside him and rose up to do battle with them: the people of (the battle of) Jamal, whom he himself named the Nakithun (those who break their allegiance); the people of (the battle of) Siffin, whom he called Qasitun (those who deviate); and the people of (the battle of) Nahrawan, the Khawarij, whom he called the Mariqun (those who miss the truth of the religion).[2](#)

'Ali said:

وَمَرَقَتْ أُخْرَى ، وَفَسَقَ [وَقَسَطَ] آخَرُونَ. فَلَمَّا تَهَضَّتْ بِالْأَمْرِ نَكَتَتْ طَائِفَةٌ ،

When I took up the reins of government one party broke their allegiance (*nakathah*), another missed the truth of the religion (*maraqah*), and another deviated (*qasatah*).³

The Nakithun were of a money-worshipping mentality, people of covetousness and displays of prejudice. 'Ali's speeches about justice and equality were more for the attention of this group.

However the mind of the Qasitun belonged to politics, deception and sedition; they killed so as to take the reins of government into their own hands, and to topple the basis of 'Ali's government and his governorship. Some people advised him to come to a compromise with them and to give them, to a certain extent, what they were after, but he did not accept because he was not a person to do this kind of thing. He was ready to fight injustice, not to give his signature to it. On the one hand, Mu'awiyah and his clique were against the basis of 'Ali's government, and then the Qasitun wanted to occupy the seat of the caliphate of Islam themselves. In reality 'Ali's war with them was a war with sedition and double-dealing.

The third group, which was the Mariqun, had a spirit of inadmissible fanaticism, sanctimoniousness and dangerous ignorance. In relation to all these people, 'Ali was a powerful repeller and they lived in a state of non-conciliation.

One of the manifestations of 'Ali's completeness and his being a perfect individual was that, when it was called for, he faced the various factions and deviations and fought against all of them. Sometimes we see him on the scene, fighting with those who were devoted to money or to this world, and sometimes too on the scene fighting with professional politicians of the most hypocritical type, and sometimes with ignorant and deviationist men of false piety.

Our discussion is oriented towards the last group, the Khawarij. Although they have been overthrown and are no more, they present an instructive and admonitory little history. Their thinking has taken root among the Muslims, and consequently their spirit has always existed, and still does, in the shape of sanctimonious persons, all the way down these fourteen centuries, even though the individual Khawarij and even their name have disappeared, and they can be counted as a grave hindrance to the advancement of Islam and the Muslims.

How The Khawarij Came Into Existence

The word "*khawarij* ", that is, "rebels", comes from "*khuruj*"⁴ which means "revolt" and "insurrection". This group came into being during the process of arbitration.

The battle of Siffin, in its last day of fighting, was turning out in 'Ali's favour; Mu'awiyah, in consultation with 'Amr ibn al-'As, conceived a skilful stratagem. He had seen that all his pains had produced no

result, and that he was only one step away from defeat. He saw that there was no way to save himself except by having recourse to the creation of confusion, so he ordered that Qur'ans should be raised up on the points of spears to show that they were people of prayer and the Qur'an, and that the Book should be used to arbitrate between the two sides. It was not the first time that this had been done, for it was the same thing that 'Ali had done before but which had not been accepted. Even now they had not accepted it; it was a subterfuge for them to find a way to save themselves and rescue themselves from a sure defeat.

'Ali cried out: "Strike at them! They are using the pages and the paper of the Qur'an as a ruse, they want to protect themselves behind the words and writing of the Qur'an and afterwards carry on in their same old anti Qur'anic way. When opposed to its truth, the paper and binding of the Qur'an is of no value and worthy of no respect; it is I who am the reality and the true manifestation of the Qur'an. They are using the paper and the writing of the Qur'an as an excuse to destroy its truth and meaning! "

A group of indiscriminating, unknowing and sanctimonious persons, who formed a sizeable proportion, gesticulate to each other. What does 'Ali mean? They called out: "Should we fight against the Qur'an?" Our battle is to reestablish the Qur'an, and now they have submitted to the Qur'an, so what are we fighting for?"

"I also say I am fighting for the Qur'an," said 'Ali. "But they have no connection with the Qur'an. They have put up the words and writing of the Qur'an as a means to save their own souls."

There is a question in Islamic law, in the section on *jihad*, concerning the situation of unbelievers shielding themselves behind Muslims. The problem is that if the enemies of Islam put a group of Muslim prisoners of war at the front of their ranks as a shield, and they themselves are busy with their activities, making headway behind this front, so that if the Islamic forces try to defend themselves, or attack them and halt their advance, there is no alternative but to also eliminate, through necessity, their Muslims brothers who have become a shield; that is, if there is no possibility of access to the combating and attacking enemy apart from through the killing of Muslims, then in this situation the killing of a Muslim for the vital interests of Islam, and so as to save the lives of the rest of the Muslims, becomes permissible in Islamic law..

In fact, they too are soldiers of Islam and will have become martyrs in the way of God. However, blood money must be paid for them from the Islamic treasury to their surviving relatives. This is, of course, not only a particularity of Islamic law, but there is a quite definite law among the international rules and regulations of war and military action that if the enemy wishes to use your own forces, you can eliminate those forces so as to reach the enemy and force them back.' "If, when there are real, live Muslims," continued 'Ali, "and Islam says 'Attack!' so as to ensure a Muslim victory, then there can be no objection made to the paper and bindings of books. Respect for pages and writing is because of their meaning and contents. Today the fighting is for the contents of the Qur'an, but these people have set up the pages as a means for the destruction of the meaning and contents of the Qur'an."

However, the ignorant and uninformed drew down a black curtain in front of their minds and kept out the truth. "In addition to the fact that we will not fight with the Qur'an," they said, "we know that fighting with it is itself a sin, and we must kill so as prevent this. We will fight with those who fight against the Qur'an." Only an hour was needed to secure a victory; Malik al-Ashtar, who was a brave, devoted and unselfish officer, had thus gone out to destroy the pavilion of Mu'awiyah's command and to clear the path of Islam of obstacles. At this very moment, this group pressured 'Ali by saying they would attack from behind. 'Ali urged them not to, but they increased their protest, and, what is more, showed that they would be completely obstinate.

'Ali sent a message to Malik to stop the fighting and to return from the place where the fighting was.

He sent an answer back to 'Ali that if he were to give his permission for a few moments more the battle would be finished and the enemy destroyed. But the Khawarij drew their swords and threatened to hack 'Ali to pieces unless he called him back.

Then again word was sent to him that if he wanted to see 'Ali alive, he should stop the battle and come back. He returned, and the enemies were jubilant that their stratagem had proved efficacious.

The fighting stopped so that they could leave arbitration to the Qur'an. An arbitration committee was set up, and arbitrators selected from the two sides to rule on the basis of what was agreed on by both sides in the Qur'an and *sunnah* and to bring an end to hostilities; or else they would add another difference to the already existing differences and cause the situation to deteriorate.

'Ali said that they should choose their arbitrator, and then he would detail his own. Without the slightest dispute, they unanimously chose 'Amr ibn al-'As, the deviser of the stratagem. 'Ali proposed 'Abdullah ibn al-'Abbas, who was versed in politics, or Malik al-Ashtar, a self-sacrificing, clear sighted man of faith, or else someone like them. But those fools were looking for someone of their own kind, and they chose a man of the like of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, a man of no perspicacity who was not on good terms with 'Ali. However much 'Ali and his friends sought to enlighten these people that Abu Musa was not the man for the job and that such an appointment was not suitable for him, they said that they would not agree to anyone else. Then he said that since things had got to that point, they should do whatever they wanted. So, in the end, they chose this Abu Musa as the arbitrator from the side of 'Ali and his companions.

After months of consultation, 'Amr ibn al-'As said to Abu Musa that it would be better for the interests of the Muslims if neither 'Ali nor Mu'awiyah were caliph, that they should choose a third one, and that there was no one else they could choose but 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Abu Musa's son-in-law. Abu Musa said that that was right and asked what they should do. 'Amr ibn al-'As said: "You should remove 'Ali from the caliphate, and I will do the same with Mu'awiyah. Then the Muslims will go and elect a worthy person who will surely be 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar. Thus the roots of sedition will be destroyed."

They terminated on this matter and announced that the people should gather together to listen to their

conclusions.

The people assembled. Abu Musa turned towards 'Amr ibn al-'As to stand up and announce his opinion. 'Amr ibn al-'As said: "Me? You are the respected, white-bearded man, a companion of the Prophet. Never would I presume such a thing as to speak before you!"

Abu Musa moved from his place to rise and speak. Now everyone's heart was beating fast, Ali eyes were staring, each person held his breath, waiting to see what the result had been. He started to speak: "After due deliberation on what was in the interests of the community, we saw that neither 'Ali nor Mu'awiyah should be caliph. More than this it is not for us to say, for the Muslims themselves know what they wish." Then he took his ring from the finger of his right hand and said: "I have removed 'Ali from the caliphate, just as I remove this ring from my finger."

When he had finished he stepped down. Then 'Amr ibn al-'As got up and said: "You have Ali heard the speech of Abu Musa saying that he has removed 'Ali from the caliphate. I too remove him from the caliphate, just as Abu Musa has done." Then he took his ring off his right hand and then put it onto his left hand, and said: "I set up Mu'awiyah in the caliphate, just as I put this ring on my finger." When he had said this he stepped down.

The meeting lapsed into commotion. The people began to attack Abu Musa, and some beat him with their whips. He fled to Mecca, and 'Amr ibn al-'As went to Damascus.

The Khawarij, who had brought about this sequence of events, saw the scandal of this arbitration with their own eyes, and realized their mistake. But they could not understand where exactly their error lay. They did not say that their mistake lay in falling for Mu'awiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'As' scheme and bringing the war to a halt; nor did they say that after the setting up of the arbitration they had blundered in choosing their "referee", in putting up Abu Musa as 'Amr ibn al-'As' counterpart. No; instead they said that in putting up two human beings to arbitrate and be "referees" in the matters of the religion of God they had gone against the divine law and had done an act of unbelief, for the judge is only God, not man.

Then came to 'Ali and said: "We did not understand. We chose a man as an arbitrator. You have become an unbeliever, and so have we. But we repent; you too should repent. Otherwise, the tragedy will be repeated."

"In any situation," said 'Ali, "repentance is good. We are always repenting for our sins." But they said this was not enough, and that he had to confess that arbitration was a sin, and that he repented of that sin. But he said that it had not been he that had brought about the affair of arbitration, it had been them, and that they had seen the result themselves. What was more, how could he declare as a sin something that Islam had made lawful, or confess to a sin which he had not perpetrated.

From this point on, they set to work as a religious sect. At the beginning they were a rebellious and

mutinous group, and it was for that reason that they were called "Khawarij", but they gradually drew up basic beliefs for themselves and created a "party" that only had a political coloring to begin with but which step by step assumed the form of a religious group, taking on a religious coloring. Afterwards the Khawarij moved into action as a vehemently propagandist group as supporters of a religious sect. They eventually got the idea that they had discovered a worldly, corrupt root in Islam, and they came to the conclusion that 'Uthman, 'Ali and Mu'awiyah were all in error and sin. They decided that they had to struggle against this corruption that had come into existence, and they gave it the name of "bidding to good and forbidding evil." Thus the Khawarij sect came into existence under this banner.

Now, "bidding to good and forbidding evil" has, before anything else, two fundamental principles: one is a profound and knowledgeable insight into the religion, and the other is a profound insight into how to act. If there is no profound knowledge of religion, as we learn from *ahadith* (traditions), the loss that will be incurred in doing this will be greater than its benefit. And a profound insight into the correct way to act depends on two conditions which are called, in Islamic jurisprudence, *ihimalu't-ta'thir*, that is, the possibility of effective action, and *'adamu tarattub-i 'l-maf'sadatin alayh*. That is, the absence of any resulting cause of evil, and this can only come about by the exercising of reason in these two duties.

The Khawarij had neither a profound knowledge of religion, nor a profound insight into prudent action; they were people of ignorance, lacking in any profound knowledge. In fact, they rejected any kind of profound knowledge of how to act, because they understood this duty to be a matter of obedience and they claimed that it should be performed blindly.

Moreover, the purpose in the legal (in Islamic terms) basis of this activity is that what is of advantage should be carried out. Thus it must obviously take place in a situation where there will not result any greater disadvantage. The requisite for these two conditions, then, is a thorough understanding of how to act correctly. A man who is lacking in this knowledge cannot foresee whether the desired result of this action will follow or not, or whether some greater evil will be produced or not. This is why the corruption resulting from ignorant inciting to good will be greater than its benefit, just as has been related in *hadith*.

In the context of other duties, it has not been laid down as a condition that there must exist the possibility of their producing a useful result, and that if there is that possibility they become obligatory, otherwise not. Although something useful and of benefit manifests itself in every duty, the recognition of that benefit is not the responsibility of people. It has not been said about prayer, for example, that if you see that it is useful then pray, and if you do not, then do not pray.

Neither is it said about fasting that if it contains the possibility of producing something beneficial then fast, and if it does not have that possibility then do not fast (only in fasting it is said that if you see there is harm in it, then do not fast), and likewise in *hajj* or *zakat* or *jihad* there is no such restriction. But such a restriction does exist in the matter of bidding to good and forbidding evil, that one must look to see what kind of result, and what kind of reaction will be produced, and whether the action is in the interests of Islam and Muslims or not. That means that the discernment of the benefit is the responsibility of the

very people who carry out this duty.

Everyone has a share in this duty, but it is necessary that he introduces reason, intelligence, knowledge of how to act correctly and attention to its benefit, and these latter things are not merely a matter of religious obligation.

This condition that it is necessary to exercise knowledge of effective action in bidding to good and forbidding evil is unanimously agreed upon by all the sects of Islam except the Khawarij. Because of their particular inflexibility, rigidity and fanaticism, they said that bidding to good and forbidding evil is an absolute religious obligation; it has no condition of the possibility of a useful result or the absence of any corrupting influence; one must not sit down and think about it. It was in accordance with this belief that they rose up and terrorized the lands knowing that they would be killed and their blood would be wasted, and knowing that no useful result would come out of their uprising.

The Basis of the Opinions of the Khawarij

The underlying root of Khawarijism is formed from the following four things:

- a) They regarded 'Ali, 'Uthman, Mu'awiyah, the fighters at the battle of Jamal and those who accepted arbitration all as infidels, except those who voted for arbitration but afterwards repented.
- b) They regarded as infidels those who did not believe in the heresy of 'Ali, 'Uthman and the others mentioned in (a).
- c) Faith was not for them only sincere belief, but putting the commands into action and desisting from the prohibitions was also part of faith. Faith was a compound thing made up of belief and action.
- d) There was an unconditional necessity to revolt against an unjust governor or leader. They believed that "bidding to good" and "forbidding evil" are not conditional on anything, and that in all circumstances this divine command must be carried out.

According to these opinions, these people started their existence from the recognition that all men on earth were infidels, whose blood was of no value and who were all condemned to the Fire.

What They Believed About The Caliphate

The only idea of the Khawarij's that could be interpreted favorably by the modern thinkers of today is their theory about the caliphate. They had a quasi-democratic concept of it, and said that the caliph must be chosen by free election, and that the worthiest person was he who had merit as far as faith and piety were concerned. He could be from the Quraysh or not, from a distinguished and famous tribe, or from an insignificant and backward one, Arab or non-Arab.

If, after his election and after everyone had sworn allegiance to him, he took steps in a direction against the interests of the community of Islam, he should be removed from the caliphate, and if he refused, he should be fought with until killed.

In the matter of the caliphate they took a position opposite to that of the Shi'ah, who say that it is a divine office and that the caliph can only be someone who is nominated by God. They were also in opposition to the Sunni, who say the caliphate belongs to the Quraysh and who hold firmly to the principle "*inna ma 'l-a'immatu min qurayshin*" – "but the leaders are from the Quraysh:"

Apparently their opinion about the caliphate was not something they had arrived at when they first came into existence. For, according to what their famous slogan "*la hukma illa li 'llah*" – "no authority except Allah's" – tells us, and also according to what we glean from *Nahju 'l balaghah*⁵, they believed, in the beginning, that the people and the society did not need a leader or a government, and that the people should put the Book of God into practice on their own.

However, afterwards, they turned back on this belief and firmly swore allegiance to 'Abdullah ibn al-Wahab.⁶

They recognized the caliphates of Abu Bakr and 'Umar to be rightful, because they believed that these two persons had been rightfully elected and that they had not deviated from the way of the best interest, nor perpetrated anything against this best interest. They also recognized the election of 'Uthman and 'Ali to be rightful; however they said that towards the end of the sixth year of his caliphate, 'Uthman changed his direction and ignored the best interest of the Muslims.

So he should have been deposed from the caliphate, but since he continued in office he was killed as an unbeliever and his killing was a religious duty. As for 'Ali, since he accepted the arbitration, but did not subsequently repent, he was killed as an unbeliever and his killing was a religious duty. Thus they denounced the caliphate of 'Uthman after its seventh year, and that of 'Ali after the arbitration.⁷

They also abhorred the rest of the caliphs, and were always at war with them.

[The Decline of the Khawarij](#)

This group came into existence towards the end of the fourth decade of the first century of the Hijrah as the result of a dangerous piece of misrepresentation, and before one and half centuries were over, as the result of hysterical temerity and recklessness, they became the object of pursuance by the caliphs, which ended up with their own, and their sect's, annihilation and extermination, and at the beginning of the 'Abbasid rule they had become totally non-existent.

It was their relentless and spiritless logic, the severity and harshness of their behavior, the incompatibility of their ways with real life, and, ultimately, their impetuosity (which even did away *taqiya* [dissimulation]⁸ in its true and reasonable sense) which caused their ruin and destruction. The Khawarij

sect was not one which could in any real sense survive, but its after-effect has remained; the thinking and beliefs of Khawarij have had an effect on the rest of the sects of Islam. Even today, "Nahrawanis" are to be found in abundance, and, just as in the age and time of 'Ali, these are the most dangerous of Islam's internal enemies. Just as there always have been and always will be Mu'awiyahs and 'Amr ibn al-'As's, who will use the existence of the "Nahrawanis" when the time is opportune, even if they are counted as their enemies.

Just a Motto?

To turn the discussion of Khawarijism and the Khawarij into a discussion about a religious sect is pointless and to no effect, for there is no such religious sect in existence in the world today. However, a discussion about the Khawarij and the reality of what they did is nevertheless instructive for us and for our society, because, although the Khawarij sect has become extinct, their spirit has not died. The spirit of Khawarijism has been incarnated in the campaigns of many of us.

I should start with an introduction. It is possible that some sects may die as far as their motto is concerned, but live in spirit, just as the opposite may also happen: an ideology may live as a motto but be completely dead in spirit. Thus it is possible that one or several individuals may be counted as followers and adherents of some sect in name but not be followers of that sect in spirit, and *vice versa*, that is, some people may follow some sect in spirit although they do not accept the motto and slogans of that sect.

To give an example well-known to Ali, right at the beginning, after the death of the Prophet, the Muslims divided up into two groups, Sunni and Shi'ah; the Sunni believe in one motto and one frame-work of beliefs, and the Shi'ah in another.

The Shi'ah say that the caliph immediately after the Prophet is 'Ali, and that he designated 'Ali for the caliphate and as his successor by divine decree. This position is thus 'Ali's by special right after the Prophet. But the Sunni say that as far as the legislation of Islam is concerned, it has no special provisions in the matter of the caliphate or the Imamate, rather the matter of choosing a leader was handed over to the people themselves. The most that can be said is that the choice should be made from among the Quraysh.

The Shi'ah have some criticisms to make of many of the Prophet's companions who are counted as great personalities, distinguished and famous men, while the Sunni take a position complete opposed to that of the Shi'ah in this matter; they regard every person who was called a "companion" with an amazingly extravagant deference. They say that all the companions of the Prophet were just and upright men. The *raison d'être* of Shiite Islam is to work through criticism, research, putting forth objections and exactitude⁹; the *raison d'être* of Sunni Islam to work through finding the most convenient solution, justification after the act and trust in providence."

In the day and age in which we live, is it enough for us to recognize a man as a Shi'ah that he says: " 'Ali is the caliph immediately after the Prophet", without requiring anything more from him? No matter what spirit or what kind of way of thinking he may have?

However, if we were to return to the advent of Islam, we would meet with a particular way of thinking which would be the way of thinking of Shiite Islam, and it would be only those who thought in that way who could unreservedly accept the successor ship to the Prophet as belonging to 'Ali without being subject to any doubt or wavering. Opposed to this spirit and this way of thinking was another spirit and way of thinking which, by a kind of justification, explanation or interpretation, ignored the successor ship to the Prophet while having complete faith in him.

In fact, this Islamic "schism" sprung from here, for one group, who were, of course, the majority, only looked at the superficial aspect, not being sufficiently sharp-sighted or penetrating to reach the depth and truth of every reality. They saw what was most apparent and found the most convenient solution. They said that some of the great men, the companions and elders, those who had served Islam for a long time, took a certain way, and it cannot be said that they were in error. But another group, who were the minority, said at the same time that they would respect anyone who respected the truth; however, where they saw that the fundamentals of Islam were violated at the hands of these very people who had served Islam for a long time, they would no longer respect them. They said they were partisans of the principles of Islam, not partisans of the personalities of Islam. Shi'ism came into existence in this spirit.

When, in the history of Islam, we follow in the tracks of Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, al-Miqdad al-Kindi, 'Ammar ibn Yasir and the such like, and look to see what had persuaded them to gather round 'Ali and leave the majority, we find that they were men of principle, who knew the fundamentals – that they both knew the religion and practiced it. They said that they were not going to give their seeing and understanding into the hands of others, so that when these people made mistakes they themselves would also make mistakes. In reality the spirit of these people was a spirit over which principles and truths held command, not individuals and personalities.

One of 'Ali's companions was badly seized by doubt during the battle of Jamal. He looked round about himself, and saw on one side 'Ali and great figures of Islam who were gathered round him striking away with their swords; and on the other side he saw the wife of the Prophet, 'A'ishah, about whom the Qur'an said: *And his wives are as their mothers*. Gathered round 'A'ishah he saw Talhah, one of the forerunners in Islam, a man with a good past record, an expert fighter in the field of battle for Islam, a man who had done valuable services for Islam; and he saw az-Zubayr, too, a man with an even better past record than Talhah, who had even been among those who had gathered in 'Ali's house on the day of Saqifah."

This poor man was in a state of great bewilderment. What was going on! Are 'Ali, Talhah and az-Zubayr not among the forerunners of Islam, the most devoted men, the strongest forts of Islam? Now they are fighting face to face. Who is the nearer to the truth? What must be done in this conflict?

But take care: this man must not be blamed too much in his confusion. Perhaps if we found ourselves in the same situation as he had found himself, the personalities of Talhah and az-Zubayr would also dazzle our eyes.

Now that we see 'Ali and 'Ammar, Uways al-Qarani and others face to face with 'A'ishah and az-Zubayr and Talhah, we do not feel any hesitation, for we were the second group as people with the look of criminals, that is, the effects of evil and treachery are evident on their faces; and when we look at the faces and their characters we guess that they are people of the Fire. But if we had lived in those times, and had known their pasts from close-up, perhaps we would not have been immune from doubt.

Today, when we know that the first group were for truth and the second group for falsehood, it is because we have come to know 'Ali and 'Ammar, on the one hand, and az-Zubayr, Talhah and 'A'ishah, on the other, as a result of history's passing and the clarification of the facts, and in this context we have been able to judge correctly. Or, at any rate, if we are not researchers and students of history, we have been inculcated with the idea that things were like this, right from our infancy. But in those days, neither of these factors existed.

Anyway, this man was able to come up to Amir al-Mu'minin and say: "Is it possible that Talhah and az-Zubayr and 'A'ishah are gathered together for falsehood? How can personalities like these great companions of the Messenger of God err, and follow the way of falsehood? Is such a thing possible? "

In his reply, 'Ali said something about which Taha Husayn, the Egyptian scholar and writer has said that no more forceful or greater thing has been said. He wrote that after the revelation had ceased and the call from heaven had come to an end, words with such greatness as these were not heard. [10](#)

'Ali said: "It is you who have been cheated; truth has become an error for you. Truth and falsehood are not to be known by the measure of the power and personality of individuals. It is not right that you should first measure up the personalities, and then weigh truth and falsehood according to these weights: this is true because it accords with this, and that is false because it does not accord with this. No, individuals must not be made the criteria for truth and falsehood. It is truth and falsehood which should be the standards for individuals and their personalities."

This means that one should be a knower of truth and falsehood, not a knower of individuals and personalities; one should measure individuals, whether they be great personalities or small, according to truth – if they accord with it, then accept their personalities, if not, then leave them. Then there is no question as to whether Talhah, az-Zubayr and 'A'ishah are with falsehood or not.

Here 'Ali establishes truth itself as the criterion of truth, and the spirit of Shi'ite Islam is none other than this. In fact, the Shi 'ah sect is born from a special perspicacity and a granting of importance to principles, not from individuals and persons. It is natural that the Shi'ah were the first believers and idol-breakers.

After the death of the Prophet, 'Ali was thirty-three years old with a small group less than the number of the fingers on one's hands; opposing him were old men of sixty years with a large and numerous majority. The logic of the majority was that this was the way of the leaders and the Shaykhs, and they do not make mistakes, so their way must be followed. The logic of the minority was that that which does not err is the truth; the elders must accord themselves with the truth. And for this reason it can be understood how numerous are the people whose motto is the motto of Shi'ite Islam, but whose spirit is not the spirit of Shi'ite Islam.

The way of Shi'ism is just like its spirit: the discernment of truth and the pursuance of it. And one of the greatest effects of this is attraction and repulsion. Not any attraction or any repulsion – we have said that attraction is sometimes attraction to falsehood, evil and crime, and repulsion is sometimes repulsion from the truth and human virtues – but attraction and repulsion of the like of attraction and repulsion to 'Ali. Because the true Shi'ah is a copy of 'Ali's conduct; the Shi'ah must also, like 'Ali, have two sides to his character.

This introduction was so that we should know that a religious sect may be dead, but its spirit lives on among other people who apparently are not followers of that sect but who deem themselves opposed to it. The Khawarij sect is dead, that is to say that today, on this earth, there is no observable group with the name of Khawarij which a number of persons, with that name, follow; but is the spirit of the Khawarij dead too? Has this spirit not incarnated itself, for example (may God forbid it), among us, especially among those of us who are, so to speak, pretenders to piety?

This is a matter which must be investigated separately. If we can truly recognize the Khawarij spirit, we can perhaps answer this question. This is, indeed, the value of a discussion about the Khawarij. We must know why 'Ali "repelled" them, that is to say, why his attraction did not pull them, but, on the contrary, his power of repulsion pushed them away.

It is certain, as we shall afterwards see, that not all the spiritual elements which had an effect on the personality of the Khawarij and the formation of their way of thinking were such as to be subject to the pressure and rule of 'Ali's force of repulsion. A good many bright distinctions and positive points are also to be found in their way of thinking, which, if they had not been there together with a series of dark points, would have been subject to the power and effect of 'Ali's power of attraction. But the dark side of their spirit was so strong that they took their place in the ranks of 'Ali's enemies.

'Ali's Sense of Democracy

'Ali acted towards the Khawarij with the utmost degree of liberality and democracy. He was the caliph and they were his subjects; every kind of punitive action was within his power, but he did not put them into prison, neither did he flog them; he did not even cut off their quota from the treasury (*baitu 'l-mal*). He looked upon them in the same way as upon other individuals.

This matter is no exception in the history of 'Ali's life, but it is something of which there are few examples in the world. Everywhere they were free to express their opinions, and 'Ali and his companions freely opposed them with their own opinions and spoke to them. The two sides put forth their reasoning, and countered their opponent's reasoning.

Maybe such a degree of freedom is without precedent in the world, in which a government acts towards its opponents with such a degree of democracy. They came into the mosques and disrupted 'Ali's speeches and sermons. One day, 'Ali was speaking from the *minbar* when a man came forward and asked a question, and 'Ali gave an impromptu answer. A Khawarij who was among the people called out: "May God kill this man; what a knowledgeable man he is!" The others wanted to hold him back, but 'Ali ordered them to release him, saying: "It was only me he insulted."

The Khawarij would not pray behind 'Ali in communal prayers because they considered him a disbeliever, but they went to the mosque and refused to let 'Ali alone, sometimes molesting him. One day, 'Ali had stood up to pray and the people had stoop up behind him, when one of the Khawarij whose name was Ibn al-Kawwa' shouted out, and read a verse from the Qur'an in allusion to 'Ali:

وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكَتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

This verse was addressed to the Prophet:

And indeed it has been revealed to thee and to those (prophets) before thee, "If thou associates (other gods with Allah), thy work shall surely fail and thou wilt be among the losers." (az-Zumar, 39:65)

Ibn al-Kawwa' wanted to insinuate about 'Ali by reciting this verse that: "Yes, we know your past history in Islam! First you were a believer, the Prophet chose you as a brother, your selflessness shone out on the night of the Prophet's escape from Mecca (*laylatu 'l-mabit*) when you slept in the place of the Prophet in his bed, you put yourself forward as a lure for swords.

Truly your service for Islam cannot be denied. But God also said to His Prophet: 'If you associate (others with God) your work will come to naught.' Now that you have become a disbeliever you have cancelled out your past deeds."

What could 'Ali do, faced with this, with this man's voice shouting out the Qur'an? He remained silent until the man reached the end of the verse; and when he finished, 'Ali continued with the prayer. Then Ibn al-Kawwa' repeated the verse, and meanwhile 'Ali fell silent again. He kept silent because it is a Qur'anic command that:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا

And when the Qur'an is recited, give you ear to it and be silent. (al-A'raf, 7:204)

And this is the proof for the fact that when the prayer leader is reciting the Qur'an, believers must be silent and listen.

After he had repeated the verse several times, wanting to disrupt the prayer, 'Ali recited this verse:

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَا يَسْتَخِفُّكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُوقِنُونَ

So be thou patient: surely Allah's promise is true; and let not those who have not sure faith make thee unsteady. (ar-Rum, 30:60)

Then he paid no more attention and continued with his prayer. [11](#)

In the beginning, the Khawarij were peaceable, and contented themselves with merely criticizing and speaking openly. 'Ali's behavior with them was also just as we noted before, namely, he never caused them any trouble, not even cutting off their wages from the treasury (*baitu 'l-mal*). However, as they began to despair of 'Ali ever repenting, their activities gradually changed. They decided to bring about a revolution, so they gathered in the house of one of their brethren, who gave an aggressive and provocative speech in which he invited his friends to rise up in the name of "bidding to good and forbidding evil." He said (after praise to God):

I swear by God that it is not worthy of a group which has faith in a Merciful God and which adheres to the command of the Qur'an that the world should seem dearer to them than "bidding to good and forbidding evil" and speaking the truth, even though these (activities) may bring loss and involve danger; for everyone who incurs loss and danger in this world will be rewarded on the Day of the Resurrection with the felicity of God and the eternity of Paradise. O brothers! Let us go out from this city where injustice dwells (and go) to mountainous places or some other towns so that we can take a stand against these misguided innovations and put a stop to them.

With this morale-raising and fiery speech, they became even more fiery and went out from that place to try to bring about an uprising and a revolution. They threatened the security of the highways and took to marauding and sedition. Their aim was to weaken the government by this means, and to bring down the then existent rule.

Now it was no longer the time to leave them at liberty, for it was not a matter of the expression of beliefs, but of sabotage against public security and an armed uprising against the legal government. Thus 'Ali pursued them and met them face to face on the banks of the Nahrawan. He made a speech in which he advised them and gave them an incontrovertible proof. Then he put the flag of true faith into the hands of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari as a sign that everyone who gathered round it was a true believer. Out of twelve thousand men, eight thousand turned back from Khawarijism while the remainder showed their

obstinacy. They were severely beaten, and apart from a very small band none remained.

The Distinguishing Features of the Khawarij

The spirit of the Khawarij is a very special one. They were a mixture of the ugly and the beautiful, and, as a whole, were such as to take their place in the end among the enemies of 'Ali. 'Ali's personality "repulsed" them, it did not "attract" them.

We shall mention both the positive and beautiful aspects and the negative and ugly aspects of their spirit which, when combined, made them dangerous and even horrifying.

1. They had the spirit of struggle and self-sacrifice, and they strived valiantly in the way of their beliefs and ideas. In the history of the Khawarij, we find completely altruistic men who have few equals in the history of mankind, and their altruism and self-sacrifice was the life of their bravery and their power.

Ibn 'Abdu Rabbih said about them: "Among all the sects, none were more convinced or exerted more effort than the Khawarij, and also none could be found more ready to die than them. One of them was once hit by a spear and the spear had gone deep into him. Even then, he rushed towards his killer saying: 'O God! I am hurrying towards you so that you may be pleased.' "

Mu'awiyah sent a man after his son who was a Khawarij so as to bring him back, but the father was unable to make his son change his mind. In the end, he said: "My son, I will go and bring your infant child that the sight of him together with your fatherly instincts may bring you to your senses and force you to give this up." The son replied: "I swear by God, I am more eager for sword-thrusts than for my son!"

2. They were people of worship and devotion; they spent their nights in prayer and were without any desire for the world and its charms. When 'Ali sent Ibn 'Abbas to admonish the people of the battle of Nahrawan, he came back and described them as twelve thousand men whose foreheads had been calloused by an excess of prostration, whose hands had become hard like camels' feet from being so frequently pressed to the dry, burning ground and from striking the dust before their Lord, whose shirts were tattered and worn down to their skins, but who were unwavering and determined.

The Khawarij were strictly obedient to the laws and outward practices of Islam; they never put their hands to anything they considered a sin. They had their own principles and standards, and they never mixed these with principles against their own; they showed their disgust with anyone who was tainted with sin. Ziyad ibn Abih killed one of them and then sent for the man's slave and enquired of him what kind of a man he had been. The slave said that he had never brought food for him during the day, nor laid out his bedding at night; during the day he had fasted and he had spent the nights in prayer.

Wherever they placed their footsteps, they referred back to their beliefs and they were devout in all their actions. They would kill to forward their beliefs.

'Ali (as) said of them:

Do not kill any Khawarij after me, because one who seeks the truth and errs is not the same as one who seeks falsehood and finds it. [12](#)

He meant that they were different from those around Mu'awiyah, for they wanted truth, but had fallen into error,

Whereas those around Mu'awiyah were imposters from the start whose way was that of falsehood. Thus if they were to kill the Khawarij after 'Ali had gone it would be to the advantage of Mu'awiyah who was worse and more dangerous than them.

It is necessary; before we go on to describe the other particularities of the Khawarij, to remember one point, since we are talking about their pretension to devotion, piety and asceticism. One of the wonderful, distinctive and extraordinary points in the history of the life of 'Ali, whose like cannot be found, is his courageous and brave stand when fighting against these fossilized and haughty pietists.

In front of people who clung to, and adorned themselves with, the externals of devotion, and whose faces affected truth, whose clothes were in tatters and who were professional worshippers, 'Ali drew his sword and subjected them Ali to its sharp edge.

Surely, if we had been in the place of his companions and had seen the face of these people, our feelings would have been moved, and we would have remonstrated with 'Ali about drawing swords against such people.

This story of the Khawarij is one of the most edifying lessons for the history of Shi'ism in particular, and for the world of Islam in general.

'Ali was himself aware of the importance and the exceptional nature of what action he took in these circumstances, as he recounted when he said:

عَيْنَ الْفِتْنَةِ، وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لِيَجْتَرِيَءَ عَلَيْهَا أَحَدٌ غَيْرِي بَعْدَ أَنْ مَاجَ غَيْبُهَا، وَاشْتَدَّ كَلْبُهَا فَإِنِّي فَقَأْتُ

I have put out the eye of revolt. No-one had the daring to do this except me when its gloom had surged up and its rabidity had become severe. [13](#)

Amir al-Mu'minin (as) gives two interesting expressions here. One is its "gloom", which causes doubt and uncertainty. The manner of the external saintliness and piety of the Khawarij was such that every believer with strong faith became again uncertain; and in this sense a dark and vague atmosphere was created, a space which became filled with doubt and hesitation.

The other is that he likened the condition of these pietists to rabies, that is to hydrophobia, the madness

which exists in dogs so that they bite anyone they come across. Since such a dog is a carrier of an infectious microbial disease, when the fangs of the dog penetrate the body of any man or animal, and something enters the blood of the man or animal from its saliva, this man or animal after a short while becomes afflicted with this disease; he too becomes rabid and bites and makes others rabid.

This is why wise people will immediately kill a rabid dog; so that at least they can save others from the danger of rabies. 'Ali said that they behaved like rabid dogs; they were not curable; they bit and infected and regularly added to the number of cases of rabies.

Alas, for the condition of the Muslim community of that time. A pietistic, one-gearred, ignorant and uninformed group were walking around on one foot and falling on this soul or that. What power could stand up against these charmed snakes? Where was the strong and powerful spirit that would not waver before these ascetic and pious faces? Where was the hand which would raise itself to bring down a sword on their heads without trembling? This is what 'Ali meant when he said that no-one had the daring to do this except he. Apart from 'Ali and his insight and firm faith, no-one of the Muslims, who believed in God, the Prophet and the Resurrection dared to unsheathe their swords against them. Only someone who did not believe in God and Islam could have dared to kill this kind of people, not the ordinary believer.

It was this that 'Ali mentioned as a kind of great honor for himself: It was I, and only I, who realized the great danger that was pointing from the direction of these pietists towards Islam. Neither their calloused foreheads, nor the ascetic-like clothes, nor their forever God-remembering tongues, nor even their strong and steadfast beliefs, could become an obstacle to my insight into them. It was I who understood that if they got a footing everyone would be afflicted with their blight that the world of Islam would become inflexible, adhering to the external aspects, superficial and fossilized, that Islam's back would become bent. Is it not this that the Prophet mentioned: Two groups will break my back – those who know but act recklessly, and those who are ignorant but profess piety.

'Ali wanted to say that if he had not fought against the Kharijite movement in the Islamic world, no other person would have come forward and dared to fight against them. Apart from him there was no-one who saw that those whose foreheads were calloused by excessive prostrations were pious and religious men but a barrier in the way of Islam, people who saw themselves as working to the advantage of Islam, but who were in fact the real enemies of Islam; there was no-one to fight against them and spill their blood. Only he could do that.

What 'Ali did smoothed the path for the subsequent caliphs and rulers so that they could fight against the Khawarij and kill them; so that the soldiers of Islam also would obey them without any why or wherefore; for 'Ali had fought with them. In fact, 'Ali's conduct also opened the way for others so that they could, without fear, fight against any group that showed itself to be outwardly pious, to have pretensions to saintliness and to be religious, but who were really fools.

3. The Khawarij were ignorant and unknowing people, and because of their ignorance and lack of knowledge they could not understand realities, and wrongly interpreted events. Gradually this warped understanding of things took the form of a religion or faith in the process of establishing which they exerted themselves to their greatest self-sacrifices. In the beginning, the Islamic precept of forbidding evil shaped them into the form of a party whose only aim was to revive an Islamic practice.

Here it is necessary to pause and reflect more carefully on a point from Islamic history. When we refer back to the life of the Prophet, we see that in the whole of the thirteen year Meccan period he never gave permission for *jihad* or even for defensive warfare to anyone, to the point that the Muslims really got into straits, and, with the Prophet's permission, a group emigrated to Abyssinia. However the rest remained and suffered persecution; it was only in the second year in Medina that permission was given for *jihad*.

In the Meccan period the Muslims saw the teachings; they became acquainted with the spirit of Islam. The Islamic way of life penetrated into the depths of their spirits, with the result that after their entering Medina each one of them was a true emissary for Islam, and the Prophet of Islam, who sent them all over the region, was able to employ them to advantage. Also, when they were sent to do *jihad*, they knew what they were fighting for. In the words of Amir al-Mu'minin (as):

حَمَلُوا بِصَائِرِهِمْ عَلَى أَسْيَافِهِمْ

They linked their profound understanding with their swords.

Their swords were thus tempered and the men so well instructed that they could accomplish their mission within the limits set by Islam. When we read history and see what these men said who, till a few years previously, had known nothing but the sword and the camel, we are overwhelmed and amazed by their lofty ideas and their profound practice of Islam.

In the time of the caliphs, most regretfully, more attention was directed towards conquests, ignoring the fact that, along with opening wide the gates of Islam towards others, and pointing them in the direction of Islam, when anyhow they were attracted by the monotheism of Islam and its justice and equality towards Arab and non-Arab, it was necessary to teach Islamic culture and its way of life and make people thoroughly aware of the spirit of Islam.

The Khawarij were mostly Arabs, although there were also several non-Arabs; but all of them, Arab or not, were ignorant of the principles, and unacquainted with the culture, of Islam. They wanted to redress all their shortcomings by emphasis on prostration. 'Ali (as) described their morale in these words:

People who are crude, lacking lofty ideas or subtle feelings; people who are feeble, like slaves, rogues assembled from every corner, come together from all quarters. They are people who should first of all be instructed, taught Islamic behavior, and who should acquire skill in how to live as true Muslims. A

guardian should rule over them and take them by the hand; they should not be left free, to keep swords in their hands, and to voice their opinions about Islam. They are neither émigrés (from Mecca) who have fled from their homes for Islam nor Ansar (of Medina) who welcomed the émigrés among themselves.

The appearance of an ignorant stratum of the community with beliefs affecting false piety, of which the Khawarij were a part, was to Islam's great cost. Forgetting, for the moment, the Khawarij, who, with all their drawbacks, were endowed with the virtues of bravery and self-sacrifice, another group came into existence from this pietistic trend that did not have these virtues.

These people pulled Islam towards monasticism and retreat from the world; they were responsible for the widespread occurrence of pretension and sanctimoniousness. Since they did not possess the above virtues with which they could wield the steel sword against those in power, they wielded the sword of words against those who possessed learning. They made it a custom to call the learned unbelievers, immoralists and irreligious.

At any rate, one of the most evident distinguishing features of the Khawarij was their ignorance and lack of knowledge, and one of the manifestations of their ignorance was their inability to distinguish between the outward nature of the Qur'an, that is, its writing and binding, and its meaning, and thus it was that they fell for the trick of the easy ruse of Mu'awiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'As.

With these people, ignorance and worship went hand in hand. 'Ali wanted to fight against their ignorance, but how could he separate the ascetic, pious and devotional side of them from their aspect of ignorance, since their devotion was the very same as their ignorance? For 'Ali, whose acquaintance with Islam was of the first degree, worship hand in hand with ignorance was of absolutely no value. Therefore he destroyed them, and they could not use their asceticism, piety and devotion as a shield between themselves and 'Ali.

The danger of the ignorance of this kind of people, and the more so of this kind of group, is the way in which they become tools and instruments in the hands of the cunning, and a barrier to the way which is in the higher interests of Islam. Irreligious hypocrites can always incite simple pietists against the interests of Islam; they become swords in these people's hands, and arrows in their bows.

'Ali explained this characteristic of theirs in a very sublime and subtle way, when he said:

إِنَّكُمْ أَنْتُمْ شِرَارُ النَّاسِ، وَمَنْ رَمَى بِهِ الشَّيْطَانُ مَرَّ امِرَّةً، وَضَرَبَ بِهِ تَبَهُهُ

Thus you are the worst of people; you are arrows in the hand of Satan which he uses to strike his target, and through you he casts people into confusion and doubt.

We have said that in the beginning the Kharijite party came into existence to keep alive an Islamic tradition, but that lack of insight and unknowing dragged them to the point where they misinterpreted the

verses of the Qur'an. It was from here that they began to take on a religious coloring and become delineated as a sect and as a way. There is a verse in the Qur'an which says:

إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ يَفْصِلُ الْحَقَّ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْفَاصِلِينَ

***The judgement (hukm) is Allah's alone, He relates the truth and He is the Best of deciders.
(Qur'an, 6: 57)***

In this verse, *hukm* has been explained as one of the special attributes of God's essence, but it is necessary to see what the meaning of *hukm* is.

Without doubt, the meaning of *hukm* (judgement) here is the law and order of man's life. In this *ayah*, the right to lay down the law has been denied to: any other than God and this has been recognized as one of the degrees of God's essence (or of a person who has been given authority by God). But the Khawarij took *hukm* in the meaning of *hukumah* (government), which also contains the idea of *hakamiyah* (arbitration), and made their own slogan: *la hukma illa li'llah* – government and arbitration is Allah's alone.

Their intention was that government (*hukumah*), arbitration (*hakamiyah*) and leadership too, just as lawgiving, was the special right of God, and that, apart from God, no-one had the right to-arbitrate among, or govern, people, just as they had no right to create laws.

Once Amir al-Mu'minin was at prayer (or maybe addressing people from the *minbar*) when they called out and addressed him: *la hukma illa li'llah, la laka wa li ashabik* – O 'Ali, governing is only for God. It is not for you or your friends to govern or arbitrate!

In reply, he said:

The sentence is right but what (*they think*) it means is wrong. It is true that law-giving (*hukm*, judgement) is God's alone, but these people say that governance is God's alone. The fact is that men need a governor, a ruler, whether he is good or (maybe) bad. Under (the shadow of) his rule, the believer performs good actions while the disbeliever profits from his worldly life; and God brings everything to its end. Through the ruler, taxes are collected, enemies are fought, the roads are kept safe, and the rights of the weak are taken from the strong, so that the virtuous enjoy peace and are given protection from the wicked.

In short, the law does not get put into practice all by itself; there must be someone, or some group, who tries to put it into practice.

4. They were narrow-minded and short-sighted people whose thought evolved below very inferior horizons; they enclosed Islam and the Muslims within the four walls of their own limited ideas. Like all

other narrow-minded people they claimed that everyone else had misunderstood, or had not understood at all; all had taken the wrong way and were destined for Hell.

The first thing that this kind of narrow-minded person does is that he gives his narrow-mindedness the form of a religious belief; he restricts God's mercy, make Him sit forever on a throne of wrath, waiting for his slave to make some error so that He may cast him into eternal punishment. One of the fundamental beliefs of the Khawarij was that the perpetrator of any great sin, for example lying, backbiting or drinking alcohol, was a disbeliever (*kafir*) and was beyond the pale of Islam, eternally condemned to the Fire.

Thus, apart from a very limited number of people, everyone was condemned to the Fire. Religious narrow-mindedness was a special characteristic of the Khawarij, but we see this once again among the Muslims today. It is for this reason that we said that the banner of the Khawarij is dead and gone but the spirit of their religion still lives on, to a greater or lesser extent, among similar individuals and groups.

We can find some bigots who look on all the people in the world except themselves and a very small number of people like themselves as disbelievers and infidels; they deem the number of those included within Islam and the Muslims to be very limited indeed.

We mentioned, in the previous chapter, that the Khawarij were not acquainted with the spirit of Islamic culture but that they were courageous. Since they were ignorant, they were narrow-minded; and since they were narrow-minded, they were quick to condemn people as infidels and iniquitous, to the point where they restricted the meaning of Islam and Muslim to themselves, and marked other Muslims who did not subscribe to their beliefs as infidels. Since they were courageous, they often came up to those in power and, according to what they imagined, subjected them to "bidding to good and forbidding evil", but then were killed themselves. We also said that in the subsequent periods of Islamic history their inflexibility, ignorance, pietism and pretensions to sanctity were inherited by others, but without their bravery, heroism and self-sacrifice.

The non-heroic Khawarij, that is, the cowardly sanctimonious ones, put their steel swords on one side, dispensing with "bidding to good and forbidding evil" as far as those in power were concerned, who were a danger to them, and then fell upon the learned with the sword of words. They brought some kind of accusation against every learned person so that few are the learned persons in Islamic history who have not been the target of the accusations of this group.

They would call one a denier of God, another; a denier of the Resurrection; a third they would call a denier of the bodily ascension of the Prophet (*mi'raj-a jismani*), a fourth a dervish, a fifth something else, and so forth. In this way, if the opinions of these half-wits were taken as a criterion, no real scholar could ever have been a Muslim.

When 'Ali was charged with being an infidel, the position of others is clear. Ibn Sina, Nasiru 'd-Din at-Tusi, Mulla Sadra, Fayd al-Kashani, Sayyid Jamalu 'd-Din al-Asadabadi (al-Afghani), and, more recently, Muhammad Iqbal are a few of those who have tasted the bitter draught of this cup. Ibn Sina

wrote, in connection with this matter

Calling me an infidel is no easy exaggeration,

For there is no faith stronger than mine.

If at one time there is only one like me and he an infidel.

Was there ever a Muslim in any period

Khawajah Nasiru'd-Din at-Tusi, who was accused of being an infidel by a person by the name of Nizamu'l-'Ulama' (the one who puts order among the learned) said:

If the "Organiser" who lacks order call me an infidel,

I can console myself that the lamp of falsity will never shine bright.

I shall call him a Muslim, for there is

No answer to a lie except a lie.

Anyway, one of the special characteristics of the Khawarij was narrow-mindedness, and it was their short-sightedness which called everyone irreligious. Against this short-sightedness, 'Ali argued that it was a very mistaken way of thinking which they followed. He said that the Prophet would punish someone and then read the burial prayers over his corpse, whereas if the committing of a great sin made one an infidel, the Prophet would not have done this; for it is not permissible to recite prayers over the corpse of an unbeliever, being something which the Qur'an has prohibited. [14](#)

He gave lashes to the drinker of alcohol, cut off the hand of the thief, whipped the unmarried adulterer, and then gave them all a place in Muslim meetings, did not cut off their wages from the treasury (*baytu 'l-mal*), and married them to other Muslims.

The Prophet meted out Islam punishments as they were due, but he never crossed the names of the punished off the list of the Muslims. 'Ali asked the Khawarij to suppose that he had gone wrong, and that, as a result of that he had become an infidel. But why then did they condemn the Muslim community as infidels? Did that mean that because someone had gone astray the others too were necessarily lost and in error and should be called to account? He asked them why they carried their swords on their shoulders, and subjected the sinless and the sinners alike to the edge of their swords. [15](#)

Here Amir al-Mu'minin objected to them on two accounts; his "repelling" repulsed them on two sides. One was that they had generalized the sin to those who were guiltless, and had taken them to account for it, and the other was that they deemed the perpetrator of sin as necessarily an infidel and outside of Islam, that is, they had restricted the extent of Islam and said that anyone who stepped beyond the limits of some of the prescriptions of Islam had stepped out of Islam.

‘Ali condemned the narrow-minded and the shortsighted, and in reality the struggle of ‘Ali with the Khawarij was a struggle with this way of thinking not a struggle with individuals. For, if these individuals had not thought in this way, ‘Ali would not have behaved with them in the way he did and split their blood so that these ideas would die with them, that the Qur’an would be correctly understood, and the Muslims would understand Islam and the Qur’an as they are and as their Law-maker wished.

The result of this short-sightedness and crooked thinking was that they were taken in by the politics of holding the Qur’an up on spears, and thereby created the greatest of dangers for Islam. And ‘Ali, who had gone to dig out the root of hypocrisy and destroy Mu’awiyah and his plotting once and for all, had to turn back and deal with them. What an ominous event it was which happened to the Muslim community on that occasion. [16](#)

As a result of their short-sightedness, the Khawarij practically refused to recognize other Muslims as Muslims, refused to recognize the animals they slaughtered as lawful food, recognized the spilling of their blood as lawful and marriage with them as prohibited.

* * *

The Khawarij started an inflexibility and stagnation that was completely opposed to this way of teaching of the Qur’an which wanted Islamic knowledge (*fiqh*) to remain forever moving and alive. They conceived Islamic education as something deadening and motionless and dragged solid forms and shapes into Islam.

Islam has never been concerned just with forms, shapes and the outward manifestations of life; Islamic teachings are all directed to the spirit and meaning and the way in which man can reach that goal and these meanings. Islam has taken as part of its domain these goals and meanings and the guidance to the way to reach these goals, while it leaves man free in what is other than this, and thus it steers clear of any clash with the development of civilization and true culture.

No material means or outward form can occur in Islam with a "sacred" side which Muslims could regard it their duty to preserve. And this avoidance of collision with the outward forms of scientific or cultural development is one reason why the conformity of the religion of Islam with the requirements of the times has been made easy, and any great obstacle to its continuing survival removed.

It is this very mixture of intellection and religiosity which has, on the one hand, been taken as the foundation, and which, on the other hand, divorces this latter from forms. It gives us universal considerations, and these universalities can take on a number of different outward manifestations without the changing of these manifestations causing any change in the truth.

However the harmonization of the truth with its outward manifestations and referents is not such an easy matter that anyone can do it, for it needs penetrating perception and genuine understanding. The Khawarij were people congealed in their thinking, distant from what they heard, and lacking the ability to

understand. Thus when Amir al-Mu'minin sent Ibn 'Abbas to argue with them, he said to him:

"Do not reason with them by the Qur'an, because the Qur'an has many sides to it: you will speak and they will speak. But reason with them by the *sunnah*, because they cannot find any escape from that."¹⁷

He meant by this that the Qur'an is concerned with universalities, and in disputation one side will take one thing as its referent and reason according to that, while another Side will take another thing and use that in arguing and disputing; this will naturally give no result. The Khawarij, he wanted to say, did not have enough understanding that they could perceive something true in the Qur'an and harmonize it with its real applications.

Thus he advised Ibn 'Abbas to speak with them following the *sunnah* which is particular, and has pointed out the applications. 'Ali pointed here to the inflexibility and mental ossification in their religiosity which showed their inability to harmonize intellection and religion.

The Khawarij were just a growth of ignorance and stagnation. They had no power to examine and analyze, and they were unable to differentiate between the universal and its application; they imagined that since the arbitration had gone wrong in this instance, its whole foundation must have been null and void, even though there existed the possibility that it would have been well-established and firm, only its application in this instance being incorrect. Thus we see three stages in the story of this arbitration:

- i) On historical evidence, 'Ali was not happy to have arbitration; **he knew** the proposal of Mu'awiyah's companions to be a trick and a deception, He strongly insisted on this point and refused to be moved.
- ii) He said, once it had been decided to form an arbitration council, that Abu Musa was a man without foresight and had no competence for the job; a competent man had to be chosen, and he himself recommended Ibn 'Abbas or Malik al-Ashtar.
- iii) The basis of arbitration is correct and is not dangerous. 'Ali also insisted on this point.

In *al-Kamil fi 'l-lughah wa 'l-adab*,¹⁸ the author, Abu 'l-'Abbas al-Mubarrad writes:

"'Ali had personally pleaded with the Khawarij, and had said to them: 'By God, were any of you, like me, against arbitration?'"

"'By God,' they replied, 'you are witness that none of us were!'"

"'Did you not encourage me,' he said, 'to accept?'"

"'By God,' they replied, 'you are witness that we did!'"

"'So why,' he continued, 'are you against me now, and why have you ostracized me?'"

"'We have committed a great sin,' they went on, 'and we must repent. We have repented, and you must

repent.'

"Hereupon 'Ali said: *astaghfiru 'llah min kulli dhanbin* – O God, I ask your forgiveness for every wrongdoing. Then these people, who were about six thousand, returned and said that 'Ali had repented and that they were ready for his order to march on Damascus. al-Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kind came to 'Ali and said: 'The people say that you recognize arbitration to be an error, and keeping to it to be disbelief in Islam.'

"Ali went up on the *minbar* and delivered a speech in which he said: 'Anyone who imagines that I have gone back on the arbitration imagines mistakenly, and anyone who thinks that arbitration is an error is himself in greater error.'

"Then the Khawarij left the mosque and once again rebelled against 'Ali."

'Ali had said that in this case there had been a mistake, in the sense that Mu'awiyah and his companions had wished to resort to deceit, and in the sense that Abu Musa had been inefficient even though 'Ali had from the beginning said that he should not have been chosen. But that was not to be taken to mean that the basis of arbitration was void.

* * *

As for any difference between the rule of the Qur'an and the rule of individual people, no differentiation was made. The acceptance of the rule or governance of the Qur'an means that in all events whatever the Qur'an exhorts us to do should be done, whereas the rule or governance of individuals means following the decisions and opinions of these persons. Now, since the Qur'an cannot speak, its truth must be derived by the implementation of particular applications, and that would be impossible without individual persons. On this matter 'Ali said

"We did not name people as arbitrators, but we named the Qur'an as arbitrator. The Qur'an is a book, bound, between two covers, and it does not speak. It therefore needs an interpreter. Only men can be such interpreters. When these people invited us to name the Qur'an as arbitrator between us, we could not let ourselves be the party which turned away from the Book of Allah. since He has said:

فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ

And then, if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Prophet. (an-Nisa', 4:59)

"Reference to Allah means that we should decide according to the Qur'an, while reference to the Prophet means we should follow his *sunnah*. Now, if arbitration were truly implemented through the Qur'an, we should be the most rightful of people to receive it (the caliphate); and if the arbitration is through the *sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah, we should be the first of them to receive it. "[19](#)

There is a problem here concerning the harmonization of the beliefs of the Shi'ah and the person of Amir al-Mu'minin²⁰. Ruler ship and Imamate in Islam is by divine designation and according to textual bases (*nass*), so why did 'Ali submit to the decision of arbitration and afterwards firmly defend it?

We can very well understand the answer to this objection from the preceding words of the Imam, for, as he said, if the consideration and judgement were correctly made through the Qur'an, no conclusion could be derived apart from his right to the caliphate and the Imamate, and the *sunnah* of the Prophet gives the same conclusion.

The Influence of Islamic Sects on Each Other

The study of the lives of the Khawarij is profitable for us in so far as we can understand to what extent they have had an effect in Islamic history, from the aspect of politics, from that of beliefs and disposition, and from the legal or prescriptive aspect.

However much various sects and groups may differ from each other in their slogans and principles, it may sometimes happen that the spirit of one sect will penetrate into another one, and the latter, although it may be an opponent of the first, will absorb its spirit and soul. The nature of man is a thief; sometimes one can find people who, for example, may be Sunni, but who, in spirit and soul, are Shi'ah, and sometimes the other way round.

Sometimes someone is naturally very dogmatic, legalistic and outward, but spiritually he is a Sufi, and *vice versa*. Similarly it is possible that some people are Shi'ah by imitation and by their speech, but spiritually and practically Kharijite. This is both true of individuals, and of communities and nations.

When social groups are associated with each other, even though each of them try to preserve their beliefs, these will spread from one to the other, just as, for example, "*qam-a zani*" [striking the head with a sword in order to self-inflict wounds, a practice among the common people, like the following two, associated with processions during the mourning ceremonies in the month of Muharam] and the beating of drums and blowing of horns, penetrated Iran from the Orthodox Christians of Caucasia [at one time part of Iran] , and since the spirit of the people was receptive to these customs, they spread like wild-fire.

For this reason, the spirit of each sect must be uncovered. Sometimes sects are born from a willingness to see the good in certain events or persons to "look upon your brother's deed in the best light"; for example, the Sunni, who were born of a favorable predisposition towards certain personalities. And some sects may be born from a kind of special perspective and emphasis on the principles of Islam, not from individuals and personalities. And occasionally they will be critical people, like the early Shi'ahs. A sect may be born of an emphasis on the inward spirit and the interpretation of this inwardness, like the Sufis, and a sect may be born of an emphasis on bigotry and inflexibility, like the Khawarij.

When we have come to understand the spirit of a sect and its first historical circumstances, we are in a better position to judge what ideas passed from this sect to other sects in subsequent centuries, and who adopted their spirit as well as the slogans and the framework of stock phrases. In this respect, beliefs and ideas are like words when, without there being any intention, they enter from the language of one people into the language of another.

For example, after the Muslim conquest of Iran, Arabic words entered the Persian language, and, in the opposite direction, some thousand Persian words entered the Arabic language. There is a similar influence of Turkish on the Arabic and Persian languages; as for example with the Turkish of the time of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, and the Turkish of the Seljuqs and the Mongols; and it is the same story with the rest of the world's languages. Such examples could easily be extended to fashions and tastes.

The way of thinking and the spirit of the ideas of the Khawarij – the inflexibility of their minds and the disengagement of intellection and religiosity in their thought – have leaked into the Islamic community down through the history of Islam in various forms. However many other sects may have considered themselves opponents of them, we can still see the spirit of the Kharijism in their ways of thinking; and the only reason for this is the result of what we said: the nature of man is a thief, and it is easy to keep company with this thief.

A number of the Khawarij have always believed that their slogans should battle with anything new. They even give a holy aura to the means of life, about which we spoke when we said that no material means or external form has been sanctified in Islam, and they consider the use of every new means as disbelief in Islam and atheism.

Among Islamic schools of beliefs and sciences, and in law too, we see those which were born from the spirit of the disengagement of intellection from religion, and such schools of thought are a perfect example of Kharijite thought. They completely repudiate the use of the intellect in discovering reality and in deriving secondary laws; they call the following of the intellect innovation and ungodliness, even though in many verses the Qur'an summons man in the direction of his intellect and establishes human insight and understanding as the cornerstone of the Divine call.

The Mu'tazilah, who came into existence at the beginning of the second century of the Hijrah, took their origins in the wake of the discussion of, and investigation into, the interpretation of belief and unbelief, as to whether commission of the larger sins necessarily resulted in the sinner becoming a disbeliever or not; and naturally their coming into existence was connected with the Kharijites. The Mu'tazilah were people who wanted a degree of free thinking, and to create an intellectual life. Although they did not benefit from any kind of scientific basis or origin, they managed to investigate, and think about, Islamic problems, to a certain extent quite freely. They critically evaluated *ahadith* to a certain degree, and they only followed those ideas and opinions which had been researched according to their own beliefs.

From the beginning, the Mu'tazilah took a stand against the disputes and opposition from those who

based everything on *ahadith*, and from the exoterists. These latter, who only recognized the outward meaning of *ahadith* as evidence, and who would have nothing to do with the spirit or inner meaning of the Qur'an and *ahadith*, did not believe that any clear judgments could follow from the intellect. However much the Mu'tazilah valued intellectual reflexion, these people considered that value could be attached only to outward meanings.

In the space of the one and a half centuries that passed in the life of this intellectual school of dissent, amazing ups and downs befell them, till, in the end, the Ash'arites came into being, and once again the value of sheer intellectual thinking and reflexion and the reckonings of pure metaphysics were denied.

These Ash'arites claimed that it was necessary for Muslims to believe in the exoteric meanings of traditional explanations and not to think or reflect upon their deeper meanings; every kind of question and answer, or why and wherefore, was an innovation for them. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who was one of the four Imams of the Sunnis, was strongly opposed to the way of thinking of the Mu'tazilah, to such an extent that he went to prison for his opinion and was tortured, but he still affirmed his opposition.

In the end, the Ash'arites were the winners, and the school of intellectual thinking closed down; and this victory dealt a great blow to the intellectual life of Islamic sciences.

The Ash'arites thought the Mu'tazilah innovators, and one of the Ash'arite poets wrote after their victory:

The reign of the people of innovation has come to an end.

Their yarn has become brittle and has broken;

The party which the Devil formed from them

Have warbled away to each other till they became split up.

O Companions in thought! Did they have a jurist

Or an Imam to lead them in their innovations?

The Akhbari School was also a kind of dissociation of intellection and religion. They were a Shiite school of jurists, and they reached the height of their powers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries of the Hijrah (18th century A.D.). They had a lot in common with the exoteric school and the traditionalists among the Sunnis. In their way of deriving laws, both schools followed the same method, their only difference being in which *ahadith* they chose to follow.

The Akhbaris completely shut down the work of the intellect, and denied any value or power of proof to the perceptions of the intellect in the derivation of the rulings of Islam from their texts. They considered the following of the intellect to be absolutely forbidden, and in their writings they led a campaign against the Usulis, who were the followers of the other Shiite school of legal thought. They said that the only

sources of proof were the Qur'an and the *sunnah*. Of course, they also said that the power of proof of the Qur'an was by way of the exegesis given by the *sunnah* and *ahadith*; so, in fact, they virtually disregarded the Qur'an as a source of proof and only recognized the outward meaning of *ahadith* to be trustworthy.

Now we are not planning to go into a discussion of the ways in which various currents of Islamic thought differ from each other, and consider in detail those schools which have adopted the split between intellection and religion, which is what we have called the spirit of Kharijism.

This would be a very lengthy discussion. Our only aim was to show what the influences of the sects have been on each other, and that the Kharijite sect, although it did not last long, continued to manifest its spirit in every century and age of Islam up to the present when a number of contemporary writers and "intellectuals" of the Islamic world have produced their way of thinking in a modern and up to date form by associating it with empirical philosophy.

The Politics of "Using" The Qur'an

It is now some thirteen centuries that the politics of "holding the Qur'an upon a spear" has been more or less prevalent among the Muslims. It becomes especially rife among those who wish to profit from it whenever sanctimoniousness and exotericism increases and it becomes fashionable to display one's piety and asceticism. There are two lessons to be learnt from this.

Firstly, whenever the ignorant, the unknowing and the uninformed put on a show of sanctity and piety, and people take them to be the symbol of the practicing Muslim, an excellent tool is available for unscrupulous schemers. Such schemers always turn these people into an instrument for their own ends, and make their presence a strong hindrance to the ideas of real reformers. It is quite common to see anti-Islamic elements making quite open use of this means, that is to say, setting the power of Islam itself to work against Islam.

Western colonialism has had much experience in the use of this means, and has in its turn profited from deceitful arousal of the sentiments of the Muslims, especially in the field of the creation of schisms between them. What a disgrace it is when, for example, afflicted Muslims plan to drive out foreign influence, and then see the very people they wanted to save turn into a barrier in their path in the name, and under the banner, of religion. Indeed, if the masses of the people are ignorant and uninformed, hypocrites will use the fortress of Islam itself.

In Iran, where the people have the honour to love and follow the Household of the Prophet (*Ahlu'l-bayt*), hypocrites are creating a fortress against the Qur'an, Islam and the Household of the Prophet to help the usurping Jews, out of the holy fortress of love of the Household of the Prophet, and in their sacred name, and this is the most abominable part of the injustice against Islam, the Qur'an, the Prophet and his Household. The Prophet said:

إِنِّي مَا أَخَافُ عَلَى أُمَّتِي الْفَقْرَ وَلَكِنْ أَخَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ سُوءَ التَّدْبِيرِ

I am not anxious about the incursion of poverty among my community; that about which I am afraid for them is crooked thinking. That which poverty of thought will bring my community is much worse than that which economic poverty will bring them.

Secondly, we must try to make our methodology of derivation from the Qur'an a true one. The Qur'an is a leader and a guide when it is subjected to true reflection, when it is interpreted wisely, when guidance is taken from the people who really know the Qur'an, who are firmly rooted in the sciences of the Qur'an. As long as our methodology is wrong, and as long as we do not learn how to benefit from the Qur'an, we shall not drive any profit from it. Profiteers or ignorant people sometimes read the Qur'an, and then follow up an incorrect possibility. Just as you have probably heard in the words of *Nahju 'l-balaghah*, "they say the word "truth", and then set their minds of falsehood!" This is not practicing the Qur'an or bringing it to life, this is putting it to death. The Qur'an is put into practice when it is understood with a true understanding.

The Qur'an always presents its project in a general and fundamental form, but the deduction and harmonization of the particular to the universal depends on our correct understanding and conceptualization. For example, we do not find written in the Qur'an that in a war that took place on a certain day between 'Ali and Mu'awiyah, 'Ali was in the right; all we find in the Qur'an is that:

وَإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّى تَفِيءَ إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ

If two parties of believers fight, put things right between them; then, if one of them is insolent against the other, fight the insolent one till it reverts to Allah's commandment. (al-Hujarat, 49:9)

This is the Qur'an and its way of explanation; but it does not say in such-and-such a war so-and-so was in the right and the other was in the wrong.

The Qur'an does not spell out names; it does not say: after forty years, more or less, a man called Mu'awiyah will appear who will fight with 'Ali, and you should fight in that war for 'Ali. And neither should it enter into particulars. The Qur'an's task is not to make a list of subjects and point out which is right and which is wrong; such a thing would be impossible.

The Qur'an came to stay forever, so it has to make fundamental and universal things clear, so that falsehood can take its place face to face with truth in every age and people can act according to the criterion of these universalities. It is therefore a duty for people to open their eyes to the basic advice: "If *two parties of believers fight*. . . ", and distinguish between the party doing the terrorizing and the one that is being terrorized; and to accept if the unruly party ceases to be unruly.

But if they stop, and try to be cunning so as to save themselves from defeat, and prepare themselves for a new attack, and become unruly again, and, in the words of the Qur'an, "if *one of them is insolent against the other*", be firm, and do not give way to their cunning.

It is up to the people themselves to discriminate in all these matters. The Qur'an seeks that the Muslims should be intellectually and socially mature, and a necessary consequence of such intellectual maturity is the ability to differentiate between the just man and the unjust man. The Qur'an did not come to be always for people like a guardian over a juvenile, to carry out the particular details of their lives like a personal protector, and to specify each special case by a material sign and indicator.

Actually, knowing people, the degree of their competence, the limits to their fitness for, and relationship to, Islam and Islamic realities is itself a duty, and frequently we neglect this duty.

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

أَنْتُمْ لَنْ تَعْرِفُوا الرُّشْدَ حَتَّى تَعْرِفُوا الَّذِي تَرَكَهُ

You will never know truth and follow the right way unless you know the person who has abandoned it.[21](#)

Knowing the principles and the generalities is alone not enough unless their correspondence and reference to particulars has been found, for it is possible that, through an error of judgement concerning persons and individuals or through ignorance of the situation, one will act in the name of truth and Islam and under the banner of Islam against Islam and truth and for falsehood.

Injustice and the unjust, justice and the just are mentioned in the Qur'an, but their applications must be sought out. We must not mistake injustice and justice for injustice, and then cut off the head of justice and truth in the name of what we imagine to be a universal principle and the judgement of the Qur'an.

[The Necessity of Fighting Hypocrisy](#)

The most difficult struggle is the one against hypocrisy, for it is the struggle against the cunning who use the stupid as their weapon. This fight is several degrees more difficult than the fight with unbelief, because, in the battle with unbelief, the struggle is against an unconcealed, open and unhidden current, while the struggle against hypocrisy is in fact a struggle against concealed unbelief.

Hypocrisy has two faces: one is the outward, face – Islam and Muslim; the other inward – unbelief and evil. It is very difficult for the ordinary people to spot this latter aspect, and sometimes impossible; and thus the struggle with hypocrisy ends in failure because the great majority of people cannot extend the reach of their perception beyond outward forms and the hidden does not become apparent. They do not have a long enough range to penetrate the depths of the inward nature of things.

Amir al-mu' minin (as) wrote in the letter he sent to Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr:

The Messenger of Allah said to me: "I do not fear for my community from the believer or the unbeliever. As the believer, Allah will protect him because of his belief, and, as for the unbeliever, Allah will humiliate him because of his unbelief. But I fear about every one of you who is a hypocrite in his heart and learned in speech. He speaks what you can accept, but he does what you cannot accept."[22](#)

The Prophet here points out the danger in hypocrisy and the hypocrite, because the majorities of people are uninformed and unaware, and are taken in by outward appearances.[23](#)

Care must be taken over the fact that with every bit that stupidity increases, the way opens further for hypocrisy. The struggle with the stupid and stupidity is the struggle with hypocrisy too, for the stupid are the tools in the hands of the hypocrites. Naturally, the struggle with the foolish and with foolishness is to disarm the hypocrites, and take the sword out of their hands.

* * *

When al-Ma'mun ar-Rashid, the 'Abassid Caliph famous in the history of rulers for his epicurianism and extravagance, saw that the 'Alawis were on the ascendance, he put on a change of clothing and showed himself in public in a new light. Then Abu Hanifah al-Iskafi, who neither took a penny from him, nor benefited from him, praised him for this and composed the following panegyric:

O Ma'mun, the like of whom among the rulers of the State of Islam

Has never been seen, by Arab or by simple peasant,

Wore a coat of fur for so long

That it became old, worn and tatty.

His close companions were amazed at this excess

And asked him for the reason for this.

He said: "Tales are left behind by kings

Among the Arabs and the non-Arabs, not by fine cotton and linen! "

And so on, each in his way excelling in the well-tried and oppressive politics of "holding the Qur'an up on spears", and defeating all effort and self-sacrifice, nipping each new resurgence in the bud. This is nothing but the ignorance and unknowing of people, which does not know how to distinguish between slogans and reality, thus closing the way of resurgence and reformation to themselves, and then realizing that all the preparatory work has been cancelled out and that they must start at the beginning again.

Of all the great points we learn from the life of 'Ali, we see that this kind of struggle is not confined to any special group, but that everywhere that a group of Muslims, or those who are got up in the garb of religion, become a tool for the advance of non-Muslims and the progress of colonialism, and the colonialists, for the protection of their own interests, give them cover, and then use them as their shield, so that it becomes impossible to fight them without doing away with the shields, then it is necessary to begin by fighting with these shields and destroying them so as to remove the obstacle in the way and be able to attack at the heart of the enemy. Perhaps the machinations of Mu'awiyah had something to do with the Khawarij's sabotage, and therefore even on that day Mu'awiyah, or at least people like al-Ash'ath ibn al-Qays, and other elements in the sabotage and disturbances, gave cover to the Khawarij.

The history of the Khawarij teaches us the fact that in every resurgence the "shields" must first be got rid of and the fools fought with, just as 'Ali, after the events of the arbitration, first of all attacked the Khawarij and then intended to follow upon the tracks of Mu'awiyah.

['Ali, the True Imam and Leader](#)

In all aspects of 'Ali's existence, of his history and biography, of his dispositions and habits, of his character and behaviour, of his words and speech, there is instruction, examples to follow, teaching and leadership.

Just as 'Ali's "power of attraction" taught us and instructed us, so also does his "power of repelling". Usually in ziyarat²⁴ to 'Ali and the other Pure Ones we claim we are "the friend of your friend and the enemy of your enemy". Another way of putting this would be to say: "We will go towards that point which is in the lines of force of attraction to you and which you attract, and we will choose to be far from that point which you repulse."

What we have said in this book is an intimation of 'Ali's powers of "attraction and repulsion and our brevity is particularly apparent in the case of his "repulsion". However, it is clear from what we said that 'Ali strongly repelled two groups – artful hypocrites, and stupid ascetics.

These two lessons are sufficient for those who claim to be his "party" – the Shi'ahs – to open their eyes and not be duped by hypocrites, to keep their vision acute and dismiss the outward aspect of things, two things with which the Shi'ah community is now sorely afflicted.

¹ Ibn Ishaq, The Life of Muhammad (transl., A. Guillaume) p. 650.

² Before 'Ali, the Prophet called these people by these names when he said to him: "After me, you will fight with the nakithun, the qasitun and the mariqun." This tradition is narrated by Ibn Abi'l Hadid in his commentary on Nahju 'l-balaghah (vol. 1, p.201), where he says that it is one of the proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad since the tradition is quite explicit about the future and the unknown (ghayb), and there is no kind of hidden interpretation or ellipsis in it.

³ Nahju 'l-balaghah – Sermon 3 "ash-Shiqshiqiyah".

⁴ If the word "kharuj" is used with an indirect object introduced by 'ala, it has two meanings which are near to one another. One is to stand up in a position for battle or war, and the other is disobedience, insubordination and revolt. The Arabic dictionary al-Munjid says that "kharaja" with an indirect object introduced by 'ala means to come forward to fight someone,

or it can be used for subjects rebelling against the king: insurrection.

The word "khawarij", meaning revolt, comes from "khuruj" in the second sense. That group which evidence the command of `Ali and rebelled against him is called the Khawarij. Since they based their disobedience on a belief and on a religious ideology, they became a sect, and the name came to be used especially for them; and so it was not used for any other people who rose up after them and rebelled against the ruler of their times. If they had not had a particular creed and belief, they would have been like other rebels of the periods after them, but they did have a belief and later on this very belief found some kind of independent existence. Although they never managed to form a government, they did manage to create a school of law and a literature of their own.

There were individuals who never got around to actual rebellion, although they believed in it, as it is said of `Amr ibn `Ubayd and other Mu'tazilah. It was said of some of the Mu'tazilah who had beliefs similar to the Khawarij about "bidding to good and forbidding evil", or about the matter of those Muslims who are guilty of moral sin still finding a place in paradise, that "they thought like the Khawarij".

Thus there is a degree of commonality between the lexical meaning of the word and its particular reference.

[5.](#) See sermon no.40, and also the commentary of Ibn Abi 'I-Hadid, vol.2, p.308

[6.](#) See Ibn Kathir, al-Kamil fi 't-tarikh.

[7.](#) See ash-Shahrastani, al-Milal wa 'n-nihal, Cairo, 1961

[8.](#) On this doctrine, see `Allamah S. M. H. Tabataba'i: Shi'ite Islam (transl. S. H. Nasr) pp. 223 – 225. (tr.)

[9.](#) The original reads: "looking for a hair in their yogurt." (tr.)

[10.](#) In 'Ali' wa banuh (`Ali and His Sons), p. 40.

[11.](#) Sharh, Ibn Abi 'I-Hadid, vol.6, p.311.

[12.](#) Nahju 'l-balaghah, Sermon no.60.

[13.](#) ibid., Sermon no.92

[14.](#) Surah at-Tawbah, 9:84

[15.](#) For the text of this sermon see Nahju 'l-balaghah, Sermon no. 126.

[16.](#) In the assessment of most people, the most serious misfortunes that have befallen the world of Islam have been the spiritual blows which have fallen on the Muslims. The Qur'an established the foundation of the call to Islam on true understanding and thinking, and itself recommends the way of striving after understanding (ijtihad) and intellectual perception:

But why should not a party of every section of them go forth to acquire understanding (yatafaqqahu) in religion? (At-Tawbah, 9: 122)

"tafaqqaha" (to acquire understanding) is not used for easy understanding, but it is rather understanding through exercising effort and perspicacity.

If you fear Allah, He will grant you a distinguishing (light). (al-Anfal, 8:29)

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

But those who struggle in Our cause, surely We shall guide them in Our ways. (al-Ankabut, 29:69)

[17.](#) Nahju 'l-balaghah, Letter no. 78

[18.](#) Egyptian ed., vol.2, p.134

[19.](#) Nahju 'l-balaghah, Sermon no. 124

[20.](#) See the end of sermon no. 2 in Nahju 'l-balaghah

[21.](#) Nahju 'l-balaghah, Sermon no. 146.

[22.](#) ibid. Letter no.27.

[23.](#) Thus we see throughout the history of Islam that every time a reformer arises on behalf of the people to reform the state

of their society and religion, and the interests of the unjust and the profiteers are endangered, these latter immediately don the disguise of sanctity, and display their piety and religion.

[24](#). A kind of supplication addressed to one or all of the fourteen ma'sum (immaculates) – the Prophet, his daughter Fatimah, and the twelve Imams. (tr.)

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