

Sermon 227: May Allah reward such and such man....

About a companion who passed away from this world before the occurrence of troubles.

(ومن كلام له (عليه السلام

يريد به بعض أصحابه

May Allah reward such and such man ¹ who straightened the curve, cured the disease, abandoned mischief and established the *sunnah*. He departed (from this world) with untarnished clothes and little shortcomings. He achieved good (of this world) and remained safe from its evils. He offered Allah's obedience and feared Him as He deserved. He went away and left the people in dividing ways wherein the misled cannot obtain guidance and the guided cannot attain certainty.

لله بلادُ فلان، فلقد قَوَّمَ الْأَوْدَ، وَدَاوَى الْعَمَدَ، وَأَقَامَ السُّنَّةَ، وَخَلَّفَ الْفِتْنَةَ! ذَهَبَ نَفْيُ النَّوْبِ، قَلِيلَ الْعَيْبِ، أَصَابَ خَيْرَهَا، وَسَبَقَ شَرَّهَا، أَدَّى إِلَى اللَّهِ طَاعَتَهُ، وَاتَّقَاهُ بِحَقِّهِ، رَحَلَ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي طُرُقٍ مَتَشَعِّبَةٍ، لَا يَهْتَدِي بِهَا الضَّالُّ، وَلَا يَسْتَيَقِنُ الْمُهْتَدِي.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 227

(1) Al-Rawandi, *al-Da'awat*;

(2) al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, V, 47;

(3) see also the commentaries of Ibn Abi al-Hadid, III, 92 and Ibn Maytham al-Bahrani, IV, 97.

¹ Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has written (in Sharh Nahjul Balagha, vol. 14, pp. 3-4) that the reference here is to the second Caliph

`Umar, and that these sentences have been uttered in his praise as indicated by the word 'Umar' written under the word 'such and such' in as-Sayyid ar-Radi's own hand in the manuscript of Nahjul Balaghah written by him. This is Ibn Abi'l-Hadid's statement, but it is to be seen that if as-Sayyid ar-Radi had written the word 'Umar' by way of explanation it should have existed, as other explanations by him have remained, in those versions which have been copied from his manuscript. Even now there exists in al-Musil (Iraq) university the oldest copy of Nahjul Balaghah written by the famous calligraphist Yaqut al-Musta'simi; but no one has afforded any clue to this explanation of as-Sayyid ar-Radi. Even if the view of Ibn Abi'l-Hadid is accepted it would be deemed to represent the personal opinion of as-Sayyid ar-Radi which may serve as a supplementary argument in support of an original argument but this personal view cannot be assigned any regular importance.

It is strange that two and a half centuries after as-Sayyid ar-Radi namely in the seventh century A.H., Ibn Abi'l Hadid makes the statement that the reference here is to Caliph `Umar and that as-Sayyid ar-Radi himself had so indicated, as a result of which some other annotators also followed the same line, but the contemporaries of as-Sayyid ar-Radi who wrote about Nahjul Balaghah have given no such indication in their writings although as contemporaries they should have had better information about as-Sayyid Ar-Radi's writing. Thus, al-`Allamah `Ali ibn Nasir who was a contemporary of as-Sayyid ar-Radi and wrote an annotation of Nahjul Balaghah under the name of A`lam Nahjul Balaghah writes in connection with this sermon:

Amir al-mu'minin has praised one of his own companions for his good conduct. He had died before the troubles that arose after the death of the Prophet of Allah.

This is supported by the annotations of Nahjul Balaghah written by al-`Allamah Qutbu'd-Din ar-Rawandi (d. 573 A.H.). Ibn Abi'l-Hadid (vol. 14, p. 4) and Ibn Maytham al-Bahrani (in Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, vol. 4, p. 97) have quoted his following view.

By this Amir al-mu'minin refers to one of his own companions who died before the mischief and disruption that occurred following the death of the Prophet of Allah.

Al-`Allamah al-Hajj al-Mirza Habibu'llah al-Khu'i is of the opinion that the person is Malik ibn al-Harith al-Ashtar on the ground that after the assassination of Malik the situation of the Muslim community was such as Amir al-mu'minin explains in this sermon.

al-Khu'i adds that:

Amir al-mu'minin has praised Malik repeatedly such as in his letter to the people of Egypt sent through Malik when he was made the governor of that place, and like his utterances when the news of Malik's assassination reached him, he said:

"Malik! who is Malik? If Malik was a stone, he was hard and solid; if he was a rock, he was a great rock which had no parallel. Women have become barren to give birth to such as Malik." Amir al-mu'minin had even expressed in some of his utterances that, "Malik was to me as I was to the Holy Prophet." Therefore, one who possesses such a position certainly deserves such attributes and even beyond that. (Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, vol. 14, pp. 374-375)

If these words had been about Caliph `Umar and there was some trustworthiness about it Ibn Abi'l-Hadid would have recorded the authority or tradition and it would have existed in history and been known among the people. But here nothing is found to prove the statement except a few self-concocted events. Thus about the pronouns in the words "khayraha" and "sharraha" he takes them to refer to the caliphate and writes that these words can apply only to one who enjoys power and authority because without authority it is impossible to establish the sunnah or prevent innovation. This is the gist of the argument he has advanced on this occasion; although there is no proof to establish that the antecedent of this pronoun is the caliphate. It can rather refer to the world (when Amir al-mu'minin says, "He achieved good [of this world] and remained safe from its evils.") and that would be in accord with the context. Again, to regard authority as a condition for the safeguarding of people's interest and the propagation of the sunnah means to close the door to prompting others to good and dissuading them from evil, although Allah has assigned this duty to a group of the people without the condition of authority:

And that there should be among you a group who call (mankind) unto virtue and enjoin what is good and forbid wrong; and these are they who shall be successful. (Qur'an, 3: 104)

Similarly it is related from the Prophet:

So long as people go on prompting for good and dissuading from evil and assisting each other in virtue and piety they will

remain in righteousness.

Again, Amir al-mu'minin, in the course of a will, says in general terms: Establish the pillars of the Unity of Allah and the sunnah, and keep both these lamps aflame.

In these sayings there is no hint that this obligation cannot be discharged without authority. Facts also tell us that (despite army and force, and power and authority) the rulers and kings could not prevent evil or propagate virtue to the extent to which some unknown godly persons were able to inculcate moral values by imprinting their morality on heart and minds, although they were not backed by any army or force and they didn't have any equipment save destitution. No doubt authority and control can bend heads down before it, but it is not necessary that it should also pave the way for virtue in hearts. History shows that most of the rulers destroyed the features of Islam. Islam's existence and progress has been possible by the efforts of those helpless persons who possessed nothing save poverty and discomfiture.

If it is insisted that the reference here should only be to a ruler, then why should it not be taken to mean a companion of Amir al-mu'minin who had been the head of a Province such as Salman al-Farisi for whose burial Amir al-mu'minin went to al-Mada'in; and it is not implausible that Amir al-mu'minin might have uttered these words after his burial by way of comments on his life and way of governance. However, to believe that they are about Caliph `Umar is without any proof. In the end, Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has quoted the following statements of (the historian) at-Tabari in proof of his hypothesis:

"It is related from al-Mughirah ibn Shu`bah that when Caliph `Umar died Ibnah Abi Hathmah said crying. "Oh `Umar, you were the man who straightened the curve, removed ills, destroyed mischief, revived the sunnah, remained chaste and departed without entangling in evils." (According to at-Tabari) al-Mughirah related that "When `Umar was buried I came to `Ali and I wanted to hear something from him about `Umar. So, on my arrival Amir al-mu'minin came out in this state that was wrapped in one cloth after bathing and was jerking the hair of his head and beard and he had no doubt that the Caliphate would come to him. On this occasion he said, "May Allah have mercy on `Umar." Ibnah Abi Hathmah has correctly said that he enjoyed the good of the Caliphate and remained safe from its evils. By Allah, she did not say it herself but was made to say so." (at-Tabari, vol. 1, p. 2763; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, vol. 12, p. 5; Ibn Kathir, vol. 7, p. 140)

The relater of this event is al-Mughirah ibn Shu`bah whose adultery with Umm Jamil, the Caliph `Umar's saving him from the penalty despite the evidence, and his openly abusing Amir al-mu'minin in Kufah under Mu`awiyah's behest are admitted facts of history. On this ground what weight his statements can carry is quite clear. From the factual point of view also, this story cannot be accepted. Al-Mughirah's statement that Amir al-mu'minin had no doubt about his Caliphate is against the facts. What were the factors from which he made this guess when the actual facts were to the contrary. If the caliphate was certain for any one, it was `Uthman. Thus, at the Consultative Committee `Abd ar-Rahman ibn `Awf said to Amir al-mu'minin: "O `Ali! do not create a situation against yourself for I have observed and consulted the people and they all want `Uthman." (at-Tabari, vol. 1, p. 2786; Ibn al-Athir, vol. 3, p. 71; Abu'l-Fida', vol. 1, p. 166)

Consequently, Amir al-mu'minin was sure not to get the caliphate as has already been stated on the authority of at-Tabari's History, under the sermon of the Camel's Foam (ash-Shiqshiqiyah), namely that on seeing the names of the members of the Consultative Committee, Amir al-mu'minin had said to al-`Abbas ibn `Abd al-Muttalib that the caliphate could not be given to anyone except `Uthman since all the powers had been given to `Abd ar-Rahman ibn `Awf and he was `Uthman's brother-in-law (sister's husband) and Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas was a relative and tribesman of `Abd ar-Rahman. These two would join in giving the caliphate to him.

At this stage, the question arises as to what the reason was that actuated al-Mughirah to prompt Amir al-mu'minin to say something about `Umar. If he knew that Amir al-mu'minin had good ideas about `Umar, he should have also known his impression; but if he thought that Amir al-mu'minin did not entertain good ideas about him then the purpose of his asking Amir al-mu'minin would be none other than that whatever he may say he would, by exposing it, create an atmosphere against him and make the members of the Consultative Committee suspicious of him. The views of the members of the Consultative Committee are well understood from the very fact that by putting the condition of following the conduct of the first two Caliphs in electing the caliph they had shown their adherence to them. In these circumstances when al-Mughirah tried to play this trick Amir al-mu'minin said just by way of relating a fact that `Umar achieved the good (of this world) and remained safe from its evil. This sentence has no connection with praise or eulogy. `Umar did in his days enjoy all kinds of advantages while his period was free from the mischiefs that cropped up later. After recording this statement Ibn Abi'l-Hadid writes:

From this event the belief gains strength that in this utterance the allusion is towards `Umar.

If the utterance means the word uttered by Ibnah Abi Hathmah about which Amir al-mu'minin has said that they are not her own heart's voice but she was made to utter them, then doubtlessly the reference is to `Umar, but the view that these words were uttered by Amir al-mu'minin in praise of `Umar is not at all established. Rather, from this tradition it is evidently shown that these words were uttered by Ibnah Abi Hathmah. Allah alone knows on what ground the words of Ibnah Abi Hathmah are quoted and then it is daringly argued that these words were uttered by Amir al-mu'minin about `Umar. It seems Amir al-mu'minin had uttered these words about someone on some occasion, then Ibnah Abi Hathmah used similar words on `Umar's death and then even Amir al-mu'minin's words were taken to be in praise of `Umar. Otherwise, no mind except a mad one can argue that the words uttered by Ibnah Abi Hathmah should be deemed a ground to hold that Amir al-mu'minin said these words in praise of `Umar. Can it be expected, after (a glance at) the sermon of the Camel's Foam, that Amir al-mu'minin might have uttered these words. Again, it is worth consideration that if these words had been uttered by Amir al-mu'minin on `Umar's death, then at the Consultative Committee when he refused to follow the conduct of the (first) two Caliphs it should have been said to him that only the other day he has said that `Umar had established the sunnah and banished innovations, so that when his conduct was in accord with the sunnah what was the sense in accepting the sunnah but refusing to follow his conduct.

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