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The Companions and the Raziyaat Yawm al Khamis (The Calamity of Thursday)

Briefly the story is as follows:

The Companions were meeting in the Messenger's house, three days before he died. He ordered them to bring him a bone and an ink pot so that he could write a statement for them which would prevent them from straying from the right path, but the Companions differed among themselves and some of them disobeyed the Prophet and accused him of talking nonsense. The Messenger of Allah became very angry and ordered them out of his house without issuing any statement.

This is the story in some details:

Ibn Abbas said: Thursday, and what a Thursday that was! The Messenger's pain became very severe, and he said, "Come here, I will write you a document which will prevent you from straying from the right path." But Umar said that the Prophet was under the spell of the pain, and that they had the Qur'an which was sufficient being the Book of Allah. Ahl al-Bayt then differed and quarreled amongst themselves, some of them agreeing with what the Prophet said, while others supported Umar's view. When the debate became heated and the noise became louder, the Messenger of Allah said to them, "Leave me alone."

Ibn Abbas said: "The disaster was that the disagreement among the Companions prevented the Messenger from writing that document for them."^{[1](#)}

The incident is correct and there is no doubt about its authenticity, for it was cited by the Shi'i scholars and their historians in their books, as well as by the Sunni scholars and historians in their books. As I was committed to consider the incident, I found myself bewildered by Umar's behavior regarding the order of the Messenger of Allah. And what an order it was! "To prevent the nation from going astray", for undoubtedly that statement would have had something new in it for the Muslims and would have left them without a shadow of doubt.

Now let us leave the points of view of the Shi'a, that is that the Messenger wanted to write the name of

‘Ali as his successor, and that Umar realized this, so he prevented it. Perhaps because they do not convince us initially with that hypothesis, but can we find a sensible explanation to this hurtful incident which angered the Messenger so much that he ordered them to leave, and made Ibn Abbas cry until he made the stones wet from his tears and called it a "great disaster"? The Sunnis say that Umar recognized that the Prophet's illness was advancing, so he wanted to comfort him and relieve him from any pressure.

This type of reasoning would not be accepted by simple-minded people, let alone by the scholars. I repeatedly tried to find an excuse for Umar but the circumstances surrounding the incident prevented me from finding an excuse. Even if I changed the words "He is talking nonsense", God forbid, to "the pain has overcome him", I could not find any justification for Umar when he said, "You have the Qur'an, and it is sufficient being the Book of Allah."

Did he know the Qur'an better than the Messenger of Allah, for whom it was revealed? Or was the Messenger of Allah, God forbid, unaware of what he was? Or did he seek, through his order, to create division and disagreement among the Companions, God forbid.

Even if the Sunni reasoning was right, then the Messenger of Allah would have realized the good will of Umar and thanked him for that and perhaps asked him to stay, instead of feeling angry at him and telling them to leave his house. May I ask why did they abide by his order when he asked them to leave the room and did not say then that he was "talking nonsense"?

Was it because they had succeeded in their plot to prevent the Prophet from writing the document, so that there was no need for them to stay any longer? Thus, we find them creating noise and difference in the presence of the Messenger, and divided into two parties: one agreeing with the Messenger of Allah about writing that document, while the other agreed with Umar "that he was talking nonsense."

The matter is not just concerned with Umar alone, for if it was so, the Messenger of Allah would have persuaded him that he could not be talking nonsense and that the pain could not overcome him in matters of the nation's guidance and of preventing it from going astray. But the situation became much more serious, and Umar found some supporters who seemingly had a prior agreement on their stand, and so they created the noise and the disagreement among themselves and forgot, or perhaps pretended to forget, the words of Allah, the Most High:

"O You who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak loud to him as you speak loud to one another, lest your deeds become null while you do not perceive." (Holy Qur'an 49:2)

In this incident they went beyond raising their voices and talking loud to accusing the Messenger of Allah of talking nonsense, God forbid, then they increased their noise and differences until it became a battle of words in his presence.

I think the majority of the Companions were with Umar, and that is why the Messenger of Allah found it useless to write the document, because he knew that they would not respect him and would not abide by the command of Allah by not raising their voices in his presence, and if they were rebellious against the command of Allah, then they would never obey the order of His Messenger.

Thus, the wisdom of the Messenger ruled that he was not to write the document because it had been attacked during his lifetime, let alone after his death.

The critics would say that he was talking nonsense, and perhaps they would doubt some of the orders he passed whilst on his death-bed, for they were convinced that he was talking nonsense.

I ask Allah for forgiveness, and renounce what has been said in the presence of the holy Messenger, for how could I convince myself and my free conscience that Umar ibn al-Khattab was acting spontaneously, whereas his friends and others who were present at the incident cried until their tears wet the stones, and named the incident "the misfortune of the Muslims". I therefore decided to reject all the justifications given to explain the incident, and even tried to deny it so that I could relax and forget about the tragedy, but all the books referred to it and accepted its authenticity but could not provide sound justification for it.

I tend to agree with the Shi'i point of view in explaining the incident because I find it logical and very coherent.

I still remember the answer which al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr gave me when I asked him, "How did our master Umar understand, among all the Companions what the Messenger wanted to write, namely the appointment of 'Ali as his successor, as you claim, which shows that he was a clever man?"

Al-Sayyid al-Sadr said: Umar was not the only one who anticipated what the Messenger was going to write. In fact most of the people who were present then understood the situation the same way as Umar did, because the Messenger of Allah had previously indicated the issue when he said, "I shall leave you with two weighty things: the Book of Allah and the members of my Family (Ahl al-Bayt) and their descendants, if you follow them, you will never go astray after me."

And during his illness he said to them, "Let me write you a document, if you follow its contents, you will never go astray." Those who were present, including Umar, understood that the Messenger of Allah wanted to reiterate, in writing, what he had already said in Ghadir Khum, and that was to follow the Book of Allah and Ahl al-Bayt and that 'Ali was the head of it. It was as if the holy Prophet (saw) was saying, "Follow the Qur'an and 'Ali." He said similar things on many occasions, as has been stated by many historians.

The majority of Quraysh did not like 'Ali because he was young and because he smashed their arrogance and had killed their heroes; but they did not dare oppose the Messenger of Allah, as they had done at the Treaty of al-Hudaibiyah, and when the Messenger prayed for Abdullah ibn Abi al-Munafiq,

and on many other incidents recorded by history. This incident was one of them, and you see that the opposition against writing that document during the Prophet's illness encouraged some of those who were present to be insolent and make so much noise in his presence.

That answer came in accordance with what the saying meant. But Umar's statement, "You have the Qur'an, and it is sufficient, being the Book of Allah" was not in accordance with the saying which ordered them to follow the Book of Allah and the Household (Ahl al-Bayt) together. It looks as if he meant to say, "We have the Book of Allah, and that is sufficient for us, therefore there is no need for Ahl al-Bayt."

I could not see any other reasonable explanation to the incident other than this one, unless it was meant to say, 'Obey Allah but not His Messenger.' And this argument is invalid and not sensible. If I put my prejudices and my emotions aside and base my judgment on a clean and free mind, I would tend towards the first analysis, which stops short of accusing Umar of being the first one to reject the Prophet's Tradition (al-Sunnah) when he said, "It is sufficient for us, being the Book of Allah."

Then if there were some rulers who rejected the Prophet's Traditions claiming that it was "contradictory", they only followed an earlier example in the history of Islam. However, I do not want to burden Umar alone with the responsibility for that incident and the subsequent deprivation of the nation of the guidance. To be fair to him, I suggest that the responsibility should be borne by him and those Companions who were with him and who supported him in his opposition to the command of the Messenger of Allah.

I am astonished by those who read this incident and feel as if nothing happened, despite that it was one of the "great misfortunes" as Ibn Abbas called it. My astonishment is even greater regarding those who try hard to preserve the honor of a Companion and to correct his mistake, even if at the cost of the Prophet's dignity and honor and at the cost of Islam and its foundations.

Why do we escape from the truth and try to obliterate it when it is not in accordance with our whims...why do not we accept that the Companions were human like us, and had their own whims, prejudices and interests, and could commit mistakes or could be right?

But my astonishment fades when I read the Book of Allah in which He tells us the stories of the prophets— may Allah bless them and grant them peace — and the disobedience they faced from their people despite all the miracles they produced. Our God! Make not our hearts to deviate after thou hast guided us aright, and grant us from Your Mercy; surely You are the Most Liberal Giver.

I began to understand the background to the Shi'a's attitude towards the second Caliph, whom they charge with the responsibility for many tragic events in the history of Islam, starting from "Raziyat Yawm al-Khamis" when the Islamic nation was deprived of the written guidance which the Messenger wanted to write for them. The inescapable fact is that the sensible man who knew the truth before he encountered the men seeks an excuse for the Shias in this matter, but there is nothing we can say to convince those who only judge truth through men.

1. Sahih, Bukhari, Chapter: About the saying of the sick, vol 2, Sahih, Muslim, End of the book of al Wasiyyah, vol 5 p 75, Musnad, Ahmed, vol 1 p 335, vol 5 p 116 Tarikh, Tabari, vol 3 p 193, Tarikh, Ibn al Athir, vol 2 p 320

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