

The First Discussion: Denial, Neglecting the Question of Succession

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Based on such an attitude, the Prophet would have assumed a stance of denial with respect to the Mission of Islam, being content to pursue his own leadership role and to direct the Mission only while he lived. He would thus have abandoned it to circumstance and chance. But such a position of denial cannot be assumed for the Prophet, because it would have to arise from one of two issues that fail to apply to him.

First Issue

This consists of the belief denial and neglect cannot affect the fate of the Mission, and that the *Ummah* that would soon inherit the Call of Islam was capable enough to assume the responsibility of protecting it and ensuring against its distortion.

In fact, this belief has absolutely no basis. Rather, the pattern of events was such as to point to something else. This is because the Call – being from the outset a mission for revolutionary change aimed at constructing an *Ummah* and at eradicating every root of pre-Islam from it – would become exposed to the worst dangers if the stage were suddenly voided of its leader, or abandoned by him without any pre-arrangements.

Firstly, there are the inherent dangers engendered by trying to confront this vacuum without any advance planning, and by the urgent need to take a makeshift position while still under the massive shock of having lost the Prophet.

If the Messenger had abandoned the stage without planning the course of the Islamic Mission, the *Ummah* would for the first time have faced the responsibility of managing the most serious problems of its mission without a leader but brandishing not the slightest prescription. The situation called for

immediate and swift application – despite the gravity of the underlying problem – because a vacuum cannot persist.^{[2](#)}

Indeed, a hasty measure was taken at a moment of shock for the *Ummah*, reeling as it was from the loss of its leader. This was the shock which, by its very nature, was to upset the course of thinking in Islam, leaving it in such disarray that its effects induced a well-known Companion to announce that the Prophet neither has nor will die.^{[3](#)} But such a measure could not but entail danger, with the most undesirable consequences.

Second are the dangers emanating from a message that is not consummated at a level that could allow the Prophet to be certain of anticipating the actual procedures soon to be taken, and to keep within the fold of the Islamic Call. That would not have enabled him to prevail over latent dissensions that continued to survive in crevices deep inside the hearts of the Muslims, which dissensions were based on the divisions between the *Muhajirun* (those who migrated to the City of Medina) and the *Ansar* (native Medinans); the Quraysh and the rest of the Arab tribes; Mecca and Medina.^{[4](#)}

Third, there are dangers arising from that segment of society which passes under the cover of Islam; but against which it used to conspire during the Prophet's lifetime. This is the group that the Qur'an collectively calls the "Hypocrites."^{[5](#)}

If we add to them a good number of those who embraced Islam after the taking of Mecca, who were more resigned to the new order of things than open to truth as such, we can then assess the threat posed as all these elements seized their opportunity for a broad initiative, doing so just when – the stage being cleared of the leader as the custodian – a large vacuum had existed.^{[6](#)} Hence, the gravity of the situation after his departure was not something that could have been hidden from any leader seasoned in doctrinal matters, let alone the Seal of the Prophets.^{[7](#)}

It might well be true that Abu Bakr, moreover, had no intention of leaving the scene without a positive intervention ensuring the future of political authority, on the argument that there was need of precaution under the circumstances.^{[8](#)} It may also be true that people rushed to `Umar, when he was wounded, imploring him: "O Commander of the Faithful, if you would only nominate someone."^{[9](#)}

This was done out of fear of the vacuum that the Caliph would soon leave behind, notwithstanding the political and social solidity which the Islamic Mission had attained a decade after the passing away of the Prophet. Also, `Umar may well have named six persons^{[10](#)} in his will in deference to the latter's presentiment of danger. He must have seen the depth of this perilous situation on the Day of the Saqifah and what Abu Bakr's Caliphate would bring in its train, in view of its doubly improvised appearance, since he declared that "Abu Bakr's oath-taking was an oversight from whose evil God has shielded us."^{[11](#)}

Abu Bakr himself regretted his hasty acceptance to become the sovereign as he bore the heavy responsibility that went with it, in that he became aware of the seriousness of the situation and the need

to venture some quick solution. When he was censured for accepting to be sovereign, his words were: “God's Messenger has died, and the people only recently were in a state of faithless ignorance. I took alarm that they might be beguiled, but my companions charged me with the task.”[12](#)

If all of the above is valid,[13](#) at any rate, it stands to reason that the Prophet and exemplar of the Call to Islam would have been the most aware of the danger of denial,[14](#) most perceptive and farsighted in his understanding of the nature of the situation and the exigencies of the change he pursued in an *Ummah* newly emerging from faithless ignorance, in the words of Abu Bakr.[15](#)

Second Issue

The second issue which could explain why the leader would have disavowed the fate of the Mission, or its progress, after his death goes as follows. Despite his awareness of the danger of the situation, he did not attempt to fortify the Mission of Islam against this danger, supposedly because he was mindful of the advantages. And so, his only concern was to protect the Mission while he lived in order to benefit from it and to enjoy the gains, caring little to secure its fate beyond his own lifetime.

This explanation cannot hold true for the Prophet, even if we should refuse to describe him as a Prophet dedicated to God through everything connected to the Message, making him out instead to be a leader with a message no different from any other. Yet, in the entire history of message-bearing leaders no one matches Muhammad in his earnestness toward the Call or, to his last breath, in his devoted sacrifice for its furtherance. His whole life proves it. Even as he lay on his deathbed, his illness worsening, he was concerned about a battle he had earlier planned. Preparing to deploy Usamah's forces, he repeated: “Make ready the army of Usamah, send it forth, send off Usamah!” as he fainted now and then.[16](#)

If the Prophet's attentiveness toward a single problem of military interest relating to the Call could go to that length, as he slowly expired on his deathbed; if knowing that he will die before plucking the fruit of victory did not prevent him from tending to the battle; in short, if he could maintain active interest while drawing his last few breaths of life – how, then, could one possibly think that the Prophet did not lived through moments of anxiety over the fate of the Call? How could he not have planned for its welfare in the face of anticipated dangers?

Finally, there is one record in the Prophet's life, during his last illness, which is sufficient to refute the entire case for the “first path.” It shows that nothing was more remote for such an outstanding leader as our Prophet Muhammad than to assume the position of denial with respect to the future of the Call, simply because of a lack of sensitivity to the dangers or to a disinterest in its nature.

This record, upon whose line of transmission all fair-minded Muslims – whether Sunni or Shi'i –without exception agree upon, is as follows. With certain men present in the house where he was about to face death, including `Umar b. al Khattab, the Prophet made a request: “Bring me the inkwell and tablet[17](#) that I may write you an epistle. After this you shall never stray.”[18](#)

This attempt by the leader – the soundness and authoritative transmission of whose account, once again, is roundly accepted – points unequivocally to the fact that he did reflect on the future. He saw clearly the necessity to provide a plan by which the *Ummah* can be fortified against deviation and the Mission of Islam protected from dissolution or ruin.

Hence, it is not possible to presuppose a position of denial¹⁹ for the Prophet.

^{1.} The titles given to the three discussions in both the first and the second chapters were construed from Imam Sadr's own statements, but are not part of the original text.

^{2.} It is well recognized that a head of state's empty seat engendered countless perils and dangers, particularly in the absence of clearly stipulated constitutional provisions for quickly filling the vacancy. See Dr. al-Rayyis, *al Nazariyyat al-siyasiyyah al-islamiyyah*, p. 134.

^{3.} See al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wal-nihal* I:15, where he states: 'Umar b. al-Khattab: 'Whosoever says that Muhammad has died I shall slay with this mine own sword. He has ascended to Heaven.'" Cf. Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-Tabari* II:233: "He said that Muhammad indeed did not die and that he would go over to the one spread rumour of his death and cut off his hands and smite him at the neck..."

^{4.} On this state of affairs, there is no lack of evidence. For example, al-Bukhari, Muslim and al-Tirmidhi (in *Kitab al-tafsir*) recount, on the authority of Jabir b. 'Abdullah: "We were on an expedition, when a Muhajir struck someone from the Ansar. The Ansari called out, 'O Ansar [help me]!' while the Muhajirun called out, 'O Muhajirin [help me]!' The Prophet heard all this and said 'What pagan cry is this?' Ibn Sallul was also heard saying. 'They have done it. By God if we return to Medina the stronger will drive out the weaker'" (al-Shaykh al-Nasif, *al Tajj -al jami li1-usul* 1V:263).

^{5.} During the Prophet's lifetime, the "Hypocrites" as a group sought to play a menacing role through plots against Islam, the Messenger of God himself and the Muslims. See the previous note, for instance, for the statement by Ibn Sallul, who headed the "Hypocrites." They happened to stir up all manner of falsehoods and to disseminate disruptive rumours, as in the Battles of Uhud and Ahzab. Consequently, God revealed the "Surah of the Hypocrites" in the Qur'an, in which He exposed this malicious group, informing His Messenger of their designs and whatever they sought to hide. See, for example, al-Fakhr al-Razi's *Tafsir* First ed.VIII: 157 (Cairo: al Khayriyyah, 1308 AH); al-Zamakhshari *al-Kahshaf* IV:811

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^{7.} Ibid.

^{8.} Regarding the story of Abu Bakr's appointment of 'Umar b. al-Khattab as his successor, there are the following words uttered by Abu Bakr: "If you have accepted my command while I live, it would be unbecoming that you should differ after me..." (Mukhtasar *Ta'rikh Ibn Asakir* XVIII:308-09); *Ta'rikh al-Tabari* II:245, 280.

^{9.} *Ta'rikh al-Tabari* II:580 – Imam. Ibn Manzur, *Mukhtasar Tarikh Ibn Asakir* XVIII:312.

^{10.} *Tarikh al-Tabari* II:581 – Imam

^{11.} *Tarikh al-Tabari*, ed Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim II:205; *ibid*, II:581.

^{12.} Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-balaghah*, ed. Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim II:42 – Imam. *Tarikh al-Tabari* II:353. Abu Bakr said: "Would that I had not accepted it..."

^{13.} 'Umar wished the deliberations would have ended and a Caliph selected before his wounding, so that he might die a tranquil death knowing that Islam would progress after him..." (Dr. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *al-Faruq 'Umar* II:313-314).

^{14.} The Prophet Muhammad, during his blessed calling, earnestly desired for the unity of the *Ummah* and the progress of Islam, no doubtless more intensely than any of his Companions. For God has declared: "...a beloved friend taking to heart that ye should suffer adversity, ardently concerned for you, and to the, faithful most kind, compassionate" (*Qur'aan*, 9: 128 "al-Tawbah"). What is important is that his concern for the *Ummah*, his teaching of the Companions the necessary

avoidance of discord, and his practical experience in this hardly need proof, especially as the Qur'an is replete with tens of ayat calling for the repudiation of all dissension, its causes and motives. How can one then imagine that this compassionate Prophet could have passed over the chief cause of strife (namely, the question of leadership) without setting up what is likely to obstruct and to bar its baleful effects; the more so that this same perception impelled the first and second Caliphs themselves to appoint successors, as is clear. Cf. Tarikh al-Tabari II:580.

[15.](#) Ibid.

[16.](#) Ibn al-Athir, Ta'rikh al-Kamil II:318 – Imam. See also Ibn Sad, al-Tabaqat al-kubra II:249.

[17.](#) Literally, a “shoulder blade,” on which important documents used to be written. It must be recalled that this was the period just before the Muslims had introduced a new paper substance as a mass commodity, for the first time in history – Translator.

[18.](#) Sahih al-Bukhari I:37; Kitab al-`ilm 8: 161; Kitab al-i'tisam. See also Sahih Muslim V:76 (Ch. “al-Wasiyyah”) (Cairo: Matba'at Muhammad 'Ali Sabih); Musnad al-Imam Ahmad I:355; cf Ibn Sa'd, al-Tabaqat al-kubra II:242–44 – Imam.

[19.](#) Every Muslim believes in the preeminence of the Messenger's personality as a leader, let alone as a Prophet–Messenger, which discounts unconditionally the presupposition stated above. Indeed, the Muslim usually holds such a presupposition to be illegitimate with respect to the Prophet for at least two reasons. One, it would be contrary to the Prophet's familiar life–conduct unanimously acknowledged by the entire community. His noble life abounds with goodly works and continuous struggle for change, construction and salvation of the Ummah. Second, the presupposition runs contrary both to those hadiths which have numerous, uninterrupted lines of transmission and to what he taught the Ummah with respect to diligence – indeed, to the point of declaring: “Whosoever wakes without a care for the affairs of the Muslims is not one of them” (Usul al-kafi II: 131). His disinterest in the fate of the Call and of the Ummah would have actually make him derelict in his obligations and trustworthiness.

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