

The Tragedy of Thursday

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

On a Thursday, just three days before the demise of Prophet (S), the Messenger of Allah asked for pen and paper in order to state his last will and repeat the declaration/assignment of his successor for his Ummah. Major Sunni sources including Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim mentioned that an opposition group among the companions whose leader was Umar, accused prophet of talking non sense (May Allah protect us) in order to prevent this writing. They questioned the rationality of Prophet to discredit the his will. Below is some of the traditions concerning this tragic episode:

It is narrated in Sahih Muslim that:

Ibn Abbas said: "Thursday! And how tragic that Thursday was!" Then Ibn Abbas cried severely so that his tears flowed to his cheeks. Then he added Prophet said: "Bring me a flat bone or a sheet and an ink so that I could write (order to write) a statement that will prevent you people to go astray after me." They said: "Verily the messenger of Allah is talking no sense."

Reference: Sahih Muslim, Chapter of "Kitabul-Wasiyyah" in section "Babut-

Tarkil-Wasiyyah", 1980 Edition, Arabic version (Saudi Arabia), v3,

P1259, Tradition (#1637/21).

Here is the original Arabic text of above Hadith given by Sahih Muslim:

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، أَنَّهُ قَالَ: يَوْمُ الْخَمِيسِ وَمَا يَوْمُ الْخَمِيسِ . ثُمَّ جَعَلَ تَسِيلُ دُمُوعَهُ حَتَّى رَأَيْتُ عَلَى خَدَيْهِ . قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ " ائْتُونِي بِالْكَتِفِ وَالِدَّوَاةِ - أَوْ اللَّوْحِ وَالِدَّوَاةِ - أَكْتُبُ لَكُمْ كِتَابًا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدَهُ أَبَدًا " . فَقَالُوا إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَهْجُرُ .

The other version is given by al-Bukhari and Muslim which indicates the role of Umar in that

catastrophe:

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadiths: 9.468 and 7.573

Narrated Ibn 'Abbas:

When the time of the death of the Prophet approached while there were some men in the house, and among them was 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the Prophet said: "Come near let me write for you a writing after which you will never go astray." 'Umar said: "The Prophet is seriously ill, you have the Qur'an, so Allah's Book is sufficient for us."

The people in the house differed and disputed. Some of them said, "Come near so that Allah's Apostle may write for you a writing after which you will not go astray," while the others said what 'Umar said. When they made much noise and quarreled greatly in front of the Prophet, he said to them, "Go away and leave me." Ibn 'Abbas used to say, "It was a great disaster that their quarrel and noise prevented Allah's Apostle from writing a statement for them.

لما حضر النبي وفي البيت رجال فيهم عمر قال النبي: هلم أكتب لكم كتاباً لاتضلون بعده. قال عمر: إن النبي قد غلب عليه الوجع وعندكم القرآن، فحسبنا كتاب الله

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The above tradition can also be found in Sahih Muslim, Chapter of "Kitabul-Wasiyyah" in section "Babut-Tarkil-Wasiyyah", 1980 Edition, Arabic version (Saudi Arabia), v3, p1259, Tradition (#1637/22).

As you see in the above traditions, the Prophet (S) was accused of talking no sense by an opposition group among the companions whose leader was Umar. In the above tradition, Ibn Abbas mentioned Umar and his company prevented Prophet from writing his will which could prevent people from going astray after him. So the conclusion from the above tradition is that the writing it did NOT take place. In the following tradition, however, Sa'id Ibn Jubair alleged that the Prophet said three things but he has forgotten the third one which was beneficial for Muslims:

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 4.393

Narrated Said bin Jubair:

I heard Ibn 'Abbas saying, "Thursday! And you know not what Thursday is? After that Ibn 'Abbas wept till the stones on the ground were soaked with his tears. On that I asked Ibn 'Abbas, "What is about Thursday?" He said, "When the condition (i.e. health) of Allah's Apostle deteriorated, he said, 'Bring me a bone of scapula, so that I may write something for you after which you will never go astray.' The people differed in their opinions although it was improper to differ in front of a prophet, They said, 'What is wrong with him? Do you think he is talking no sense (delirious)? Ask him (to see if he is talking no

sense). The Prophet replied, 'Leave me, for I am in a better state than what you are asking me.'

Then the Prophet ordered them to do three things saying: 'Turn out all the pagans from the Arabian Peninsula, show respect to all foreign delegates by giving them gifts as I used to do.' The third order was something beneficial which either Ibn 'Abbas did not mention or he mentioned but I forgot!

Sa'id Ibn Jubair claims that Prophet said three things but he has forgotten the third one which was beneficial for Muslims. It is interesting to see that the narrators who used to memorize thousands of traditions, simply forgot the last will of Prophet (S). Now if you look at the two things that the sub-narrator allegedly attributed to the Prophet, i.e.,

1. Expelling pagans from Arabian Peninsula
2. respecting foreign delegates

One can see that these are not the things that if Muslim do, they will NEVER go astray after Prophet. The matter should be much more important that would Guarantee the salvation of Muslims, and it could be no less important than the subject of leadership. Moreover such claim contradicts the saying of Ibn Abbas (in the early mentioned traditions) who claimed that the quarrel of the companions prevented the prophet from stating his will. Here is the last tradition I would like to mention in this regard.

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 5.716

Narrated Ibn Abbas:

Thursday! And how tragic that Thursday was! The ailment of Allah's Apostle became worse (on Thursday) and he said "Bring me something so that I (order) to write for you something after which you will never go astray."The people (present there) quarreled in this matter, and it was not right to quarrel in front of prophet. They said, "What is wrong with him? (Do you think) he is talking no sense (delirious)?"

Here is the original Arabic text of above Hadith (5.716) given by al-

Bukhari:

قال ابن عباس: يَوْمُ الْخَمِيسِ وَمَا يَوْمُ الْخَمِيسِ . إِشْتَدَّ بِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ وَجَعُهُ فَقَالَ: اسْتُونِي أُكْتُبُ لَكُمْ كِتَابًا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدَهُ أَبَدًا. فَتَنَازَعُوا وَلا يَنْبَغِي عِنْدَ النَّبِيِّ تَنَازُعٌ. فَقَالُوا: مَا شَأْنُهُ أَهْجَرَ .

The above tradition is also in Sahih Muslim, Chapter of "Kitabul-Wasiyyah" in section "Babut-Tarkil-Wasiyyah", 1980 Edition, Arabic version, (Saudi Arabia), v3, pp 1257-58, Tradition (#1637/20).

More addresses for similar traditions:

Sahih al-Bukhari, in the chapter named "The Book of Knowledge"

(Kitabul-Ilm), also in the chapter named "The Book of Medicine"

(Kitabut-Tib), also in the chapter named "Kitabul Itisam bil Kitab was-Sunnah".

Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v1, pp 232,239,324f,336,355.

And much more...

Also as indicated above (Sahih al-Bukhari Hadiths: 9.468 and 7.573), Umar said: "The Prophet is seriously ill, and you have the Qur'an, so Allah's Book is sufficient for us." Umar and those who supported him prevented prophet from writing (ordering to write) that statement, by accusing him of talking no sense. As I have mentioned in the discussion about "Qur'an and Ahlul-Bayt", prophet clearly indicated that we should follow both Qur'an AND Ahlul-Byte in order not to go astray. So Qur'an alone is not sufficient as opposed to what Umar said above.

There is a bizarre commentary in the footnote of above traditions in Sahih Muslim (1980 Edition, Arabic version). It says: The above incident shows the high virtue of Umar, since he knew that people might not follow what prophet would write, and as a result, people would go to hell because of their disobedience of the order of prophet. So Umar prevented Prophet from writing, in order to save people from going to hell!

Also in the footnote of the same section of Sahih Muslim it is mentioned that Prophet possibly wanted to assign a Caliph on that Thursday, and the matter might have been the matter of successorship which caused such dispute.

In fact, most of the people who were present there, understood the intention of prophet, the same as what Umar did. Because prophet had previously indicated the issue when he said several times that: "I shall leave for you two precious Symbols: The book of Allah, and my progeny, that is my family (Itrat & Ahlul-bayt). If you follow them, you will never go astray after me." (Sahih al-Tirmidhi; a close version is also given in Sahih Muslim), and also they were present in Ghadir Khum where prophet said: "Whoever I am his master, 'Ali is his master." (see Sahih al-Tirmidhi; Sunan Ibn Maja; Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal; al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim; Khasa'is, by al-Nisa'i).

So when prophet during his illness said that "Let me write something that you never go astray after me", those people who were present, including Umar, quickly understood that prophet wants to repeat what he had already mentioned, but this time in writing. A few Qur'anic verses should also be mentioned here. Allah said in Qur'an:

***"O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of prophet ... lest your deeds become null while you do not perceive."* (Qur'an 49:2).**

Allah also said:

***"Nor does he (prophet) speak out of his desire. (What he says) is nothing but revelation that is revealed."* (Qur'an 53:3-4).**

He, Exalted, also said:

***"Whatever apostle tells you accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back."*(Qur'an 59:7).**

He, Exalted He is, also said:

But no by thy Lord! They can have no Faith until they make thee judge in ALL disputes between them and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions but accept them with the fullest conviction. (Qur'an 4:65)

So when such a prophet, three days before his death, wished to write a document of his will to save the Muslims from going astray, he was accused of talking no sense (paranoid)!

The reason that prophet did not repeat his request (if it is true) was that he already was discredited by his companions and was accused of talking no sense. So even if he would say something, those people would not believe in him and would say such instruction has been given while he was talking no sense (paranoid). So Umar made it easy, and by saying that prophet is talking nonsense, ended it up.

There are few Sunni traditions which allege that prophet was confused to assign which person as his successor and finally failed to assign any body as his successor and left it to people to decide. Some even claim that prophet was willing to assign Abu Bakr, but he left it to people.

If Umar have ever heard of such sayings (that prophet was willing to assign Abu Bakr as his successor), he would never stop prophet from stating his will, and would never accuse him of talking no sense. Rather he would let prophet tell his will and assign Abu Bakr as his successor. We all know, the main support in "Saqifah Bani Sa'idah" for the secret nomination of Abu Bakr for Caliphate, was Umar. So if Umar have not heard of such traditions (the tendency of Prophet to assign Abu Bakr), there is a great possibility that those traditions were fabricated later.

Also it contradicts several authentic Sunni traditions regarding the assignment of 'Ali-Ibn-Abi-Talib as prophet's successor. As you know there are a huge number of fabricated traditions which was created by several pay-rolled scholars in support of some rulers, and mainly to justify what happened.

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention the importance and seriousness of the tragedy:

1- Notice that any person utters his most important wishes when he wants to write the statement of his will at the end of his life.

2- Notice the importance of the person who wants to write the will, who is the last Prophet of God, the best mankind ever. No human in the world was more enthusiastic than him about his community. The person who Allah has ordered us in Qur'an to follow him unconditionally.

3- Notice that prophet said this statement would be the key element in the destiny of Muslims according

to the above traditions. They will never go astray if they abide it.

In such critical moment, people who claimed to be his sincere companions, stopped/insulted him. Those companions are responsible for misleading the Muslims throughout history and the generations to come.

Side Comments

Reading the article, a Sunni brother commented that: How could Umar prevent the manifestation of a Divine Commandment? If writing the will was the order of Allah to his Prophet, then how could be possible that Allah fails to manifest His own wish?

This brother has confused two different issues. Umar was able to prevent the manifestation of divine commandment since he was a human and was gifted some free will. Yet, Umar or any other human can NEVER prevent what Allah foreordained (Taqdir) and what Allah wills (Mashiyyah).

Please take a note of this: There is a difference between the commandment of Allah (which people can disobey) and the will of Allah (which people have no ability to go against). It was the commandment of Allah to write that statement, yet the Will of Allah was what happened.

Another brother mentioned that Prophet Muhammad never wrote a single commandment or teaching of his during his 23 years of ministry. Then how could he order people to bring pen and paper to write something for them? Yes, the messenger of Allah did not write in public, because he used to dictate writing. However, this does not mean that he did not know how to write. It is also true that the Prophet was "Ummi", but this does not necessarily mean he did not know how to read and write.

It rather means that Prophet did not have any human teacher to teach him how to read and write since the time he was born to his mother ("Ummi" derived from "Umm" meaning mother). His only teacher was Allah. And this is why Qur'an is a true miracle from a person who did not have a teacher and he who did not go to school. I would say, clearing doubt about the Qur'an as God's revelation was the only reason that the Messenger of Allah was not ordered attempt to write in public or claim as such.

Reading and writing not only in Arabic but also in all other languages, as well as the knowledge of language of all other creatures are not a lot to claim for the master of all messengers when we see in Qur'an that Prophet Sulayman and David knew the language of the animals.

Again, all such knowledge could be released to the Prophet when he really needed, by the permission of Allah. But to the time it is not necessary, he would act as if he does not have such knowledge. It is like having access to the database rather than having all the knowledge within oneself.

About the Tragedy of Thursday, however, what the Prophet (S) meant by "writing" was the common sense of "ordering to write", and people were aware of it and was not the first time they have heard of it. Based on the traditions no body even said at that time that how he wants to write.

Moreover, even we suppose that Prophet wanted to write by himself and people did not know about his ability to write, they could have given him the benefit of doubt (!!) to see if he can do such miracle (!?) beside all the miracles he has had already shown. Were they suspicious to his miracles?

This is the same Prophet that God said about him "laa yantqu anil Hawaa"(he does not talk of his own desires)? Never mind verses 33:36, 59:7, 4:80, 4:59, etc., and yet to justify a disobedience by some companions can we accuse him of rave? Did God know that there would be a time that His prophet could not stand to the above standard, and still going ahead and revealing such verses in his honor?

Another brother mentioned that if the Prophet intended to appoint 'Ali as the Imam, why did he not do so in the presence of the whole people and not in his house few days before his demise? The Prophet had already declared the appointment Imam 'Ali as Imam in many occasions from his first open preach in Mecca (see al-Tabari English, v6, pp 88-92; Ibn al-Athir, v2, p62; Ibn Asakir, v1, p85; al-Durr al-Manthoor, by al-Suyuti, v5, p97) to his last open sermon in Ghadir Khum (see Sahih Tirmidhi, v2, p298; Sunan Ibn Maja, v1, pp 12,43; Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal; al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim; Khasa'is, by al-Nisa'i). Note that it was not Prophet who appointed him on his own, but it was rather Allah who appointed him.

What the messenger of Allah wanted to do in his last will was to write (or order to write) what he has already said. But, as quoted earlier, some people around him shamelessly reduced him to the level of insanity. What happened on that thursday is a proof by itself that the Prophet ALREADY assigned a successor, otherwise, there was no point of disobedience!

Another person mentioned the verse "Today I have perfected your religion and completed my bounty upon you, and I was satisfied that Islam be your religion (Qur'an 5:3)" which was revealed 2 months before the death of the Prophet shows that there was no new religious command is going to come thereafter. Otherwise, if that important statement the prophet was going to dictate to his followers would have been something which was forgotten, would make the verse untrue.

Perhaps the above brother would be surprized to know that many Sunni commentators of Qur'an have confirmed that the above verse (5:3) was revealed in Ghadir Khum AFTER the Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever I am his leader, 'Ali is his leader. O' God, love those who love him, and be hostile to those who are hostile to him." (See the article titled "Ghadir Khum" for extensive references). This means the perfection of the religion was due announcing the successor of the Prophet (S).

In fact what prophet wanted to do on that Thursday (three days before his death) was just to repeat, to remind, and to emphasize the things that has been revealed before. He didn't want to add any thing new. No Muslim ever claimed that the position of prophethood has been taken from Muhammad sometime before his death.

We do not have such case about other prophets either. Even let's suppose he was not prophet any more, or he wanted to say something new. Do you think you can find any man better or more

enthusiastic than him about the destiny of his community?! Do you think his last wish was against the prosperity of his people?! How much should they have been rude that even they didn't let him talk!!!

The Prophet (S) said:

و لولا أنت يا علي لم يعرف المؤمنون بعدي

"Have you not been there O' 'Ali, the believers would not have been recognized after me."

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