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6. The Redeemer

The rapid increase of the number of Muslims in Medina heartened the Medinites and encouraged them to invite the Prophet to move to their city pledging to defend him with all their power. Upon this pledge the Holy Prophet accepted their invitation. The Meccan pagans knew about what took place.

They conferred secretly and reached the conclusion that the death of Muhammad was the only means to stop the spread of Islam. From each clan in Mecca a strong and courageous man was selected to attack Muhammad at an appointed night. Thus all the Meccan clans would be participants in his murder.

The Almighty revealed to His Messenger the news of the conspiracy and ordered him to depart from Mecca at the appointed night. His departure while under their surveillance was expected to put him face to face with danger.

Like other Meccan houses the house of the Prophet was not sight proof. An outsider could see its inside. The bed of Muhammad therefore should not be unoccupied; otherwise the enemies would discover his departure and block the roads and search the houses to find him. But whoever occupied Muhammad’s bed at that night should be ready to die for the attack was surely coming.

The Messenger revealed to ‘Ali the news of the conspiracy and asked him to lie on his bed. As expected ‘Ali neither declined the dangerous invitation nor did he think of his own fate. He only thought of one important thing: The fate of the Prophet. "Messenger of God " he asked:

"Will you be safe?" When the Prophet replied in the affirmative ‘Ali went down to the earth prostrating thanking God for the safety of His Messenger.

The Holy Prophet commissioned ‘Ali with another mission: He asked him to deliver to the Meccans in the following days their trusts which were in the possession of the Prophet. The Messenger was the trustee of the Meccans friends arid enemies alike. He was to them the Trustworthy.

No one should deliver those trusts on behalf of the Prophet other than his trustee and representative ‘Ali.

The recorders of the hadith reported that the Messenger commissioned ‘Ali with a third mission that night. Al-Hakim reported that ‘Ali said that the Messenger accompanied him to the Kaaba (on the night of the Hijrah) to try to destroy Quraish's biggest idol.

The Messenger mounted the shoulders of ‘Ali in order to reach the roof of the Kaaba but he found some weakness in ‘Ali. He went down and told ‘Ali to mount his shoulders and he did. And the Messenger rose up. ‘Ali felt that if he wanted to reach Heaven he could. ‘Ali went up to the roof of the Kaaba.

He shook the largest idol which was made of copper being bound to the roof. When he took hold of the idol the Prophet told him to throw it down. He did and the idol was broken.[1]

It seemed that this mission was completed before the conspirators surrounded the house of the Prophet and that the Prophet and ‘Ali came back to the house after fulfilling this mission; then the Prophet left when the enemies were surrounding his house. ‘Ali remained to fulfill the other two great missions: Occupying the bed of the Messenger and delivering to the Meccans their trusts.

Ibn Al-Athir in his history (Al-Kamil) reported that Gabriel came to the Prophet and told him not to lie on his bed that night and that the Prophet ordered ‘Ali to lie on his bed. He also commissioned him to deliver what was in his possession of the trusts to the Meccans and informed him that the enemies would not harm him.

The Prophet took a handful of soil and threw it on the heads of the enemies who were surrounding his house and left unnoticed reciting the chapter of Yasine. Seeing the bed of the Prophet occupied the enemies believed that Muhammad was sleeping on his bed. They waited until morning and when ‘Ali rose from the bed they recognized him. "Where is Muhammad ?" they asked. "I do not know "

‘Ali replied. "You ordered him to leave and he left." They beat ‘Ali up brought him to the Mosque detained him for one hour then freed him. [2]

It is also reported that when the dawn drew nigh they dashed into the house and were surprised to find that the occupier of the bed was ‘Ali rather than Muhammad. ‘Ali stood up and they asked him: "Where is Muhammad?"

He denied any knowledge about his whereabouts. Violence erupted and ‘Ali pressed the hand of their leader making the sword of the man fall from his hand. Seizing upon the sword he was able to drive them out.

The chiefs of Mecca realized that their conspiracy was abortive. The Meccans in groups went in every direction trying to find Muhammad. One group led by a tracker took the right direction until they approached the Cave of Thour.

Hearing the rumble of their feet Abu Bakr who was hiding with the prophet was extremely frightened and sweating. As they came to the mouth of the Cave Abu Bakr whispered in the ear of the Prophet: "If one

of them looks under his feet he will see us." The Prophet calmly replied: "Be not afraid God is with us."

The Almighty protected His Prophet from his enemies and the historical Hijrah by which the faith of Islam and the Muslims were transferred from a state of weakness to a state of dignity and strength commenced.

The Magnitude of The Mission

Let us try to evaluate ‘Ali's sacrifice and the magnitude of his mission. When the Prophet accepted the invitation of the Muslims of Medina the Muslims in Mecca numbered about 150. The Prophet permitted or rather urged these Muslims to migrate to Medina. He did that in spite of his awareness of the new danger which resulted from his covenant with the Medinites. He knew that the Meccans would not let him depart from their city safely.

He could have kept a number of prominent Muslims around him to shield him against the imminent danger. He could also commission any one of them to occupy his bed at such a time. But he did not do that; instead he urged them to leave Mecca ahead of him and kept ‘Ali for the hard task. He chose ‘Ali because he knew that an occupant of his bed that night must have the following qualities:

1. His love to God His Messenger and His religion should be stronger than his love to himself.

2. He must be endowed with a courageous spirit that would enable him to face death for the Divine cause with satisfaction.

3. He should have an indomitable spirit with which he would not be frightened by his aloneness while facing the violent wrath of the Meccan community because he foiled their plot against the Prophet. In addition to this he had to be patient enough to withhold all information about the Prophet regardless of what he might face of torture.

It was extremely difficult if not impossible to find a person other than ‘Ali ready to perform such a role and do it so calmly without fear.

Here we may understand the meaning of the ministry and assistance which ‘Ali promised the Prophet ten years before the time of this event.

Significance of the Delivery of the Trusts

It is worthy to note that the Prophet commissioned ‘Ali with the delivery of the trusts to the Meccans. This clearly put in action what he promised ‘Ali of executorship. The Messenger could have commissioned someone other than ‘Ali to deliver the trusts. ‘Ali's survival was highly in doubt because of his dangerous mission.

The rest of the Muslims were in no danger; thus the Prophet would be expected to commission Abu Bakr or another companion with the delivery of the trusts rather than ‘Ali. Yet he chose ‘Ali in spite of the dangers with which he was surrounded.

A Miraculous Prophecy

Choosing ‘Ali to deliver the trusts proves that ‘Ali was the only person representing the Prophet. Deputizing ‘Ali by itself was a unique prophecy. God revealed to Muhammad that ‘Ali would pass the crisis safely and that he would be in a position to deliver the trusts. Had the Prophet not been certain that ‘Ali would survive the crisis he would have commissioned someone other than ‘Ali with the trusts.

Their delivery was a duty whose imperativeness compelled the Prophet to choose the surest way in delivering them. Thus it was the duty of the Messenger to choose for such a mission a person who was expected to survive rather than a person who was expected to die.

Value Undiminished

The reader may think that ‘Ali was certain of his survival and his certainty came from information of the Holy Prophet and from his being commissioned by him to deliver the trusts for this indicates that the Prophet was sure of ‘Ali's survival. If this were the case the event would lose its importance for the occupant of the bed of the Prophet would not be harmed regardless of the magnitude of the danger.

The fact is that the Messenger of God commissioned ‘Ali with the delivery of the trusts after he accepted the mission of redemption without hesitation or concern with what would happen to him during that night. It was equal to ‘Ali to stay alive or to die as long as the Prophet was safe. ‘Ali was the one who used to seek martyrdom as an ultimate goal. He believed that martyrdom is the great gain and the highest form of victory.

We know the truth of this when we read what is recorded in Nahjul-Balaghah where he speaks about the revelation of the following verse: "Do men think that they will be left alone saying: 'We believe ' without being tested?".

The Imam tells us that when this verse was revealed he reminded the Prophet of a statement he made when the Imam was saddened because he did not obtain martyrdom which many other Muslims obtained at the Battle of Uhud.

The Prophet told him at that time: "Be cheerful martyrdom is coming to you." The Prophet confirmed his previous statement saying: "That will be so. How will your patience be at that time?" The Imam retorted: "Messenger of God this will not be a place of patience. It will be a place of cheerfulness and thanks."[3]

The Almighty informed the Messenger when he was migrating to Medina that he would come back to Mecca: "Certainly the one who commanded you to deliver the message of the Holy Qur'an will bring you

back...."

This revelation was a promise from God to His Prophet to make him survive all difficulties until he returns him to Mecca regardless of any battles he attends. Thus the Prophet had attended numerous battles while he was certain of his safety. This did not diminish the value of his endeavor for he was determined to do that even if he were not promised with a Divine protection.

This is true also concerning ‘Ali. His belief in his survival until he delivered the trusts does not diminish the magni tude of his sacrifice because he was ready to make that sacrifice and to redeem the Prophet whether he was informed of his survival or his martyrdom The history of ‘Ali after the Hijrah substantiates this conclusion.

The Prophet did not inform ‘Ali that he would survive the battle of Uhud but that did not prevent him from staying with the Messenger protecting him by himself and combating the regiments one after another and forcing them to retreat after all companions ran away.

The Almighty protected His Messenger from the Qureshite conspirators and enabled him to arrive in Medina safely where he found strength and support. But Quraish was not expected to adopt a peaceful attitude or to sleep while Muhammad was alive.

To them his very existence was a tremendous danger threatening their religion and influence. They expected his power to grow by the passage of time and that he would come back accompanying an army that Quraish could not face.

Certainly the survival of the Messenger made the Qureshites more eager and determined to kill him and more violent in combating him. They were expected to wage a long war against him and his followers.

They were ready to use whatever they had of power and influence to fight him and to stir up the pagans and non-pagan tribes against him. They wanted to succeed in accomplishing by confrontation what they could not accomplish through attempts of assassination.

‘Ali's redemption of the Holy Prophet at the night of the Hijrah was a fulfillment of the pledge which he made at the conference of the House where he promised the Holy Prophet to be his minister. The events which followed the Hijrah demanded from ‘Ali assistance to the Prophet much more and greater in size and magnitude year after year until the victory of the Heavenly message was realized.

The Faith of Islam could not have continued and spread unless the followers of Islam were liberated from fear and enabled to enjoy religious freedom. This could not be realized unless a powerful state based on the principles of the new faith is established. Such a state could not be established unless the evil forces which were threatening the faith are defeated.

We shall see in the following pages that ‘Ali was that unique minister who was great enough to assist the Prophet to achieve these goals.

Thus ‘Ali earned the two honors of being the Redeemer of the Final of the Prophets and the honor of being the executor of the Prophet (in action) whom he deputized to deliver to the Meccans what was in his possession of their trusts. Both honors were unique.

When his two missions were so successfully fulfilled ‘Ali set out towards Medina. As he arrived to Qoba he found the Holy Prophet waiting for him to enter with him the city which was destined to be the capital of Islam.

1. Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak Part 3 p. 5.
2. Ibn Al-Athir in his history Al-Kamil Part 2 p.72.
3. Nahjul Balaghah Part 2 p.5.

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