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Letter 17: In reply to a letter from Mu'awiyah

In reply to a letter from Mu'awiyah 1

ومن كتاب له (عليه السلام)

إلى معاوية، جواباً عن كتاب منه

As for your demand to me to (hand over) Syria, I cannot give you today what I denied you yesterday. As regards your saying that the war has eaten up Arabia save its last breath, you should know that he whom right has eaten up goes to Paradise and he whom wrong has eaten up goes to Hell. As for our equality in (the art of) war and in (numbers of) men, certainly you cannot be more penetrating in doubtfulness (of belief) than I am in certainty (of belief), and the people of Syria are not more greedy for this world than the people of Iraq are for the next world.

وَأَمَّا طَلَبُكَ إِلَيَّ الشَّامَ، فَإِنِّي لَمْ أَكُنْ لِاعْطِيَكَ الْيَوْمَ مَا مَنَعْتُكَ أَمْس. وَأَمَّا قَوْلُكَ: إِنَّ الْحَرْبَ قَدْ أَكَلَت الْعَرَبَ إِلاَّ حُشَاشَات أَنْفُس بَقِيَتْ، فَمَنْ أَكَلَهُ الْحَقُّ فَإِلَى الْجَنَّةِ،مَنْ أَكَلَهُ الْبَاطِلُ فَإِلَى النّارِ. وَأَمَّا اسْتِوَاؤُنَا فِي الْحَرْبِ والرِّجَال، فَلَسْتَ بِأَمْضَى عَلَى الشَّكِّ مِنِّي عَلَى الْيَقِين، وَلَيْسَ أَهْلُ الشَّامِ بِأَحْرَصَ عَلَى الدُّنْيَا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْعِرَاقِ عَلَى الاْخِرَةِ.

As for your saying that both of us are sons of 'Abd Manaf, it is no doubt so, but Umayyah cannot be like Hashim, nor Harb like Abd al-Muttalib, nor can Abu Sufyan be like Abu Talib. The muhajir (immigrant)

cannot be a match for him who was set free (on the day of fall of Mecca), nor can one of pure descent be a match for him who has been adopted, nor the pursuer of truth be a match of the adherent to wrong, nor a believer be a match for a hypocrite. How bad are the successors who go on following their predecessors who have fallen in the fire of Hell!

وَأَمَّا قَوْلُكَ: إِنَّا بَنُو عَبْدِ مَنَافٍ، فَكَذلِكَ نَحْنُ، وَلكِنْ لَيْسَ أُمَيَّةُ كَهَاشِمَ، وَلاَ حَرْبٌ كَعَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ، وَلاَ أَبُوسُفْيَانَ كَأَبِي طَالِبٍ، وَلاَ الْمُهَاجِرُ كَالطَّلِيقِ، وَلاَ الصَّرِيحُ كَاللَّصِيقِ، وَلاَ الْـمُحِقُّ كَالْمُبطِلِ، وَلاَ الْمُؤْمِنُ كَالْمُدْغِلِ، وَلَبِئْسَ الْخَلَفُ خَلَفٌ يَتْبَعُ سَلَفاً هَوَى فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ.

Besides that, we also have the distinction of prophethood among us, by virtue of which we subdued the strong and raised up the down-trodden. When Allah made Arabia enter (the fold of) His religion, and the people submitted to it willingly or unwillingly, you were among those who entered the religion either from greed or from fear, at a time when those who had gone first had preceded and the first muhajirun had acquired their (peculiar) distinction. Now, do not allow Satan have a share with you nor let him have his sway over you; and that is an end to the matter.

وَفِي أَيْدِينَا بَعْدُ فَضْلُ النُّبُوَّةِ الَّتِي أَذْلَلْنَا بِهَا الْعَزِيزَ، وَنَعَشْنَا بِهَا الذَّلِيلَ. وَلَمَّا أَدْخَلَ اللهُ الْعَرَبَ فِي دِينِهِ أَفْوَاجاً، وَأَسْلَمَتْ لَهُ هذِهِ الاُمَّةُ طَوْعاً وَكَرْهاً، كُنْتُمْ مِمَّنْ دَخَلَ فِي الدِّينِ: إِمَّا رَغْبَةً وَإِمَّا رَهْبَةً، عَلَى حِينَ فَازَ أَهْلُ السَّبْقِ بِسَبْقِهِمْ، وَذَهَبَ الْمُهَاجِرُونَ الاَوَّلُونَ بِفَضْلِهِمْ. فَلاَ تَجْعَلَنَّ لِلشَّيْطَانِ فِيكَ نَصِيباً، وَلاَ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ سَبِيلاً، وَالسَّلاَمُ.

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1. During the battle of Siffin, Mu'awiyah thought of again demanding the province of Syria from Amir al-mu'minin and to play such a trick as to succeed in his designs. In this connection, he consulted 'Amr ibn al-'As. But the latter did not agree with this idea and said, "O' Mu'awiyah, think a little, what effect will this writing of yours have on 'Ali? How can he fall in this trap by your persuasion." On this Mu'awiyah said, "We are all descendants of 'Abd Manaf. What difference is there between 'Ali and me that he may score over me and I may not succeed in deceiving him?" 'Amr ibn al-'As said, "If you think so, then write and see (the outcome)." Mu'awiyah therefore wrote a letter to Amir al-mu'minin wherein he made a demand for Syria and also wrote: "We are descendants of 'Abd Manaf. There is no distinction of one over the other among us." Then, Amir al-mu'minin wrote this letter in reply and mentioning his own predecessors along with those of Mu'awiyah disproved his contention of equality. Although the origin of both was the same and the paternal chain of both joined at 'Abd Manaf, the progeny of 'Abd Shams was the source of all evil in morality and character and was involved in heresy and vice whereas the house of Hashim was the worshipper of one God and kept aloof from idolatory. If the branches growing out of the same

root bear both flowers as well as thorns, then both cannot be deemed equal. Consequently, it does not need any detailed explanation to show that Umayyah and Hashim, Harb and 'Abd al-Muttalib and Abu Sufyan and Abu Talib were not match of each other from any angle. This is not denied by any historian nor by any biographer. In fact, after this reply even Mu'awiyah did not dare refute it, because the fact could be concealed that after 'Abd Manaf it was Hashim alone who possessed conspicuous prestige among the Quraysh, and the most important positions with relation to the Ka'bah namely siqayah (i.e., the superintendence of the water-supply, especially with a veiw to the needs of pilgrims) and rifadah (provisioning of pilgrims) was assigned to him. As such, at the time of hajj, caravan after caravan used to come and stay with him and he was such a generous host to them that those who partook of his generosity and benevolence would praise him for long thereafter.

The worthy son of this very large-hearted and courageous father was 'Abd al-Muttalib whose name was Shaybah and surname was Sayyidu'l-Batha' (the Chief of the Valley of Mecca). He was the successor to the distinction of Abraham's line and owner of the greatness and chiefdom of Quraysh. The high courage and far-sightedness showed by him before Abraham is a shining star of the family of 'Abd Manaf.'Abd Manaf was a pearl and 'Abd al-Muttalib was the lustre of the pearl.

'Abd al-Muttalib's son was Ahu Talib whose lap served as the cradle for 'Abdullah's orphan child and the training place of the Prophet. He brought up the Prophet in his care, and shielded him against his enemies. To compare Abu Sufyan, Harb and Umayyah with them or to regard them as their matches is the same as to close one's eyes to the lustre of light and to regard it as darkness.

After recounting this geneological difference the next point of distinction that Amir al-mu'minin has described is that he himself is a muhajir (immigrant from Mecca) while Mu'awiyah is a taliq (i.e., one of those whom the Prophet had spared on the day of fall of Mecca). Therefore, when the Prophet entered Mecca victorious he enquired from the Quraysh how they thought he would deal with them, and all said that being a generous son of a generous father they expected only good from him, whereupon the Prophet said, "Go away, you have all been spared." That is, "you did deserve to be detained as slaves but as a mark of obligation you have been left free." These spared ones included Mu'awiyah and Abu Sufyan also. Thus, Ibn Abi'l-Hadid and ash-Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh have recorded the following note in their annotations to this letter "Abu Sufyan and Mu'awiyah both were among the spared ones." (Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, vol.17, p.119;'Abduh, vol.3, p.17)

The third point of distinction is that Amir al-mu'minin's lineage is pure and clear and there is no doubtful point anywhere. As against this, for Mu'awiyah he has used to the word "lasiq". Men of letters have given lasiq to mean "One who is attributed to other than his father." In this connection, the first doubt that is entertained about Umayyah is whether he was the son of 'Abd Shams or only his slave who began to be known as his son because of having been brought up by him. Thus, al-'Allamah al-Majlisi has related from Kamil al-Baha'i that: Umayyah was a Byzantinian slave of 'Abd Shams. When he found him intelligent and sagacious he freed him and adopted him as hisson, as a result of which he began to be called Umayyah son of 'Abd Shams, as Zayd (ibn al-Harithah) was called Zayd ibn Muhammad before the verse was revealed (to prohibit it).(Bihar al-anwar, 1st ed., vol.8, p.383)

The second doubt in the Umayyad lineage is whether Harb who is known as the son of Umayyah was really his son or a slave brought up by him. In this connection, Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has quoted from Abu'l-Faraj al-Isbahani's book that:

Mu'awiyah enquired from the lineage expert Daghfal (Ibn Hanzalah) whether he had seen 'Abd al-Muttalib and he replied in the affirmative.He further enquired how he found him and Daghfal replied, "He was prestigious, handsome and a man of open forehead, while his face bore the brightness of Prophethood." Then, Mu'awiyah enquired whether he had seen Umayyah ibn 'Abd Shams also, and he replied that he had seen him too. He enquired how he found him and he replied, "Weak bodied, bent stature and blind in the eyes. In front of him was his slave Dhakwan who led here and there." Mu'awiyah said it was his son Abu 'Amr (Harb) whereupon he said, "You say so but the Quraysh only know that he was his slave." (al-Aghani, vol.1, p.12; Sharh Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, vol.17, pp.231-232)

In this connection, the third doubt is about Mu'awiyah himself. Thus Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has written that:

Mu'awiyah's mother Hind led a life of vileness and immorality. az-Zamakhshari (Abu'l-Qasim Mahmud ibn 'Umar [467/1075-538/1144]) has written in his book Rabi'u 'l-abrar that Mu'awiyah's parentage was traced back to four persons who were: Musafir ibn Abi 'Amr, 'Umarah ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah, al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib and as-Sabbah (a singer for 'Umarah). (Sharh Nahjul Balaghah al-balaghah, vol.1, p.336)

The fourth point of distinction that Amir al-mu'minin has stated is that he himself was the devotee of right while Mu'awiyah was the devotee of wrong and this fact needs no proof, for the whole life of Mu'awiyah was spent in suppressing right and hankering after wrong. No where is his step seen advancing towards right.

The fifth distinction that Amir al-mu'minin has mentioned is that he himself was a believer whereas Mu'awiyah was a mischief-monger and a hypocrite. Just as there can be no doubt about Amir al-mu'minin's belief, there can be no doubt about Mu`awiyah's mischief-mongering and hypocricy. Thus, Amir al-mu'minin has exposed his hypocricy in the earlier writing in these words.

These people had not accepted Islam but they had secured safety by verbally professing it and had hidden their misbelief. Consequently, when they found helpers for their mischief they disclosed it.

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