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Letter 84

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I. Compromising the Text's Accuracy With Their Truthfulness

1) Our legacy of traditions, which has been left to us by those companions, indicates that the latter adhered to all texts as long as they were relevant to the faith, concerned about the matters related to the Hereafter, such as his (S) hadith regarding the obligatory fast during the month of Ramadan rather than any other month, facing only the *qibla* while performing the obligatory prayers, the number of obligatory prayers during the day or the night, the number of rak'at [prostrations] in each, as well as how to perform them, his hadith that the ceremonial *tawaf* around the House [Ka'ba] is seven times, and such ahadith aiming at the achievement of divine rewards in the life to come.

As regarding his texts that deal with political matters such as succession, government, administration, legislation, invasions, etc., they did not see that they had to follow or adhere to them in all circumstances; rather, they allowed themselves to practice a measure of research, discretion, and *ijtihad*. If they saw in opposing such texts a promotion of their cause, or an advantage to their power, they would oppose them. They may even seek to please the Prophet by doing just so.

They were convinced that the Arabs would neither accept 'Ali's rule nor follow a text in such a matter, since he pressured them a great deal while enforcing the Will of Allah in their regard, spilling their blood with his sword in while promoting the Word of Allah, dismantling all their masks while defending the truth, till Allah's Will became dominant in spite of every infidel. So, they would not obey him willingly, nor would they follow such texts except by force, having attributed to him the spilling of all blood in the way of Islam during the life-time of the Prophet (S), according to their custom of retaliation in such circumstances, for they saw him as the only candidate upon whom they would seek revenge, especially since seeking revenge is usually done to the best among the foe's tribesmen, and the choicest of its clans.

They knew that he was the best among the Hashimites, after the Messenger of Allah (S), without any doubt or dispute. For this reason, the Arabs waited for a chance to annihilate him; they sought means to deal with him, and they bore a great deal of grudge against him and his descendants, till they leaped

over them in a way that became well-known everywhere, and its shame filled the earth and the skies.

There is another reason: Quraysh in particular and the Arabs in general used to criticize ‘Ali's might in dealing with the enemies of Allah, the forcefulness of his method of dealing with those who trespass the limits of Allah or permit what He prohibited.

They feared his enjoining right and forbidding wrong; they dreaded his justice in dealing with the subjects and his equity in every public issue. Nobody hoped for his concession nor dreamed of his compromise. The mighty and powerful are weak till he executes justice on them, and the weak and downtrodden are strong and dignified when he grants them what is rightfully theirs. So, how can the Arabs willingly submit to a man like that while

"They are the foremost in disbelief and hypocrisy, so much so that they ought not know the limits of what Allah has revealed unto His Messenger (***Qur'an, 9:97*****),"**

and

"Among the people of Medina are those who are stubborn in hypocrisy; you [***O Our Prophet Muhammad***] ***do not know them; We know them*** (***Qur'an, 9:101*****),**

and among them are those who do not hesitate to commit anything insane.

There is still another reason. Quraysh in particular and Arabs in general used to envy him for the favours Allah bestowed upon him. He has been uplifted by Allah, His Messenger and the wise, to a sublime status due to his knowledge and feats; peers fall short of their attainment; those qualified hesitated to attempt to compete with him.

He has, through his feats and attributes, won a status from Allah and His Messenger coveted by the hopeful, and a prestige unattainable by the most ambitious. For these reasons, jealousy filled the hearts of the hypocrites. The spiteful, ungrateful, and unequitable hypocrites, in addition to opportunists, all agreed not to discharge their responsibility towards him; therefore, they left these texts behind their backs, entrusting them to oblivion.

It was what it was, I shall never discuss the views;

So, entertain good thoughts; do not ask about the news.

Also, Quraysh and all other Arabs had by then coveted political dominance for their own respective tribes, and their ambition extended thereto. For this reason, they decided to discard the covenant and were determined to ignore the will. So, they all collaborated to forget the text, pledging not to mention it at all.

They all agreed to divert the caliphate, since its inception, from its rightful candidate, who was assigned

to it by their Prophet, and make it through election and choice, so that each one of their quarters might have a justification for hoping to attain it, though after a while. Had they followed the text and advanced ‘Ali to succeed the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his progeny, such caliphate would never have left his purified progeny, since he had equated his progeny on the Ghadir Day, as well as on other occasions, to the perfect Book of Allah, describing them as models for the wise till the Day of Judgment.

The Arabs would not have been able to tolerate the confinement of caliphate to one particular dynasty, especially when all their tribes coveted it, and it was sought by all those who wanted it for their own camps.

It has, indeed, withered, weakened, and waned:

A skeleton unwanted even by one whose funds drained.

Also, whoever knows the history of Quraysh and the Arabs at the dawn of Islam would come to know that they did not yield to the Hashimite Prophethood except after being annihilated, being powerless; so, how could they have agreed that Hashim's descendants should monopolize both prophethood and caliphate? ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab once said to Ibn ‘Abbas in a dialogue between them: "Quraysh hated that both prophethood and caliphate should be confined to your household for fear you might oppress other people."[1]

II. Rationalizing the Imam's Reluctance to Demand his Right

2) The good ancestors then could not force those folks to implement the spirit of the text for fear they might rebel if they did, and in apprehension of the dire consequences of disputing regarding such an issue. Hypocrisy surfaced immediately after the demise of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his progeny, and the might of the hypocrites increased by such a loss.

The dark souls of the infidels grew darker, the foundations of the faith weakened, and the hearts of the Muslims waned, so much so that they became like frightened cattle in a winter night, surrounded by wolves and ferocious beasts. One group among the Arabs reneged, while another contemplated doing so, as we explained in Letter No. 82 above.

Under such circumstances, ‘Ali (as) feared dire consequences resulting from rushing matters if he took upon himself to take charge, knowing how people's hearts were, as we have described, with the hypocrites being what they were, biting their fingers in rage, and the renegades as we have clarified, while the polytheist nations were just as we have previously indicated.

The Ansars had differed and deviated from the Muhajirun, saying, "Let us choose our ruler and you choose yours, etc." His concern about the faith prompted him to refrain from demanding the caliphate for himself and overlooking certain matters, knowing that demanding the caliphate under such circumstances would endanger the nation and jeopardize the safety of the faith; so, he opted to refrain

just in preference of the interest of Islam and that of the common welfare, of the good of the future to that of the present.

He, therefore, remained at home, refusing to give his allegiance till he was forced to leave, just to silently enforce his own right, silently defying those who forsook him. Had he rushed to give his allegiance, he would have had neither argument nor pretext, but he, by doing so, safeguarded both religion and his own right to rule the believers, thus proving the originality of his mind, his overwhelming clemency, his patience and preference of the public interest to that of his own. Any soul that gives so much while facing so much affliction is sure to be rewarded by Allah with divine rewards. His objective was indeed to seek the pleasure of Allah in that epoch as well as in the epochs to come.

As regarding the three caliphs and their supporters, these have interpreted the text regarding his succession in the manner which we have indicated above. This should not surprise us at all once we come to know how they interpret and personally comprehend other texts of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, regarding issues such as succession, government, administration, legislation, etc. They probably did not consider them to be religious issues; so, it was easy for them to practically oppose them.

When they finally took charge, they stuck to a policy of overlooking such texts, promising to punish those who would mention or even allude to them. When they succeeded in enforcing order, the dissemination of the religion of Islam, the invasion of nations, and the acquisition of wealth and power, they did not become corrupt in their own personal desires, and that elevated them and caused them to win people's respect, confidence, and love.

People followed suit in forgetting about that text, and when Banu Omayyah succeeded them, the latter's main objective became the extinction and annihilation of the Prophet's household. In spite of all this, a few correct texts have reached us and have been protected in authentic books of traditions; these suffice for proof; praise be to Allah, Wassalam.

Sincerely,

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1. This is quoted by Ibn Abul-Hadid on page 107, Vol. 3, of Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, while discussing an issue worthy of the attention of researchers which is also discussed by Ibn al-Athir near the conclusion of ‘Umar's biography on page 24, Vol. 3, of his Al-Kamil before discussing the story of the "consultation."

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