

Sermon 13: You are a woman's army ...

*Condemning the people of Basrah [after the battle of Jamal]*¹

(ومن كلام له (عليه السلام

[في ذم البصرة وأهلها] بعد وقعة الجمل

You were the army of a woman and in the command of a quadruped. When it grumbled you responded, and when it was wounded (hamstrung) you fled away. Your character is low and your pledge is broken. Your faith is hypocrisy. Your water is brackish. He who stays with you is laden with sins and he who forsakes you secures Allah's mercy. It is as though I see your mosque prominent, resembling the surface of a boat, while Allah has sent chastisement from above and from below it and everyone who is on it is drowned.²

كُنْتُمْ جُنْدَ الْمَرْأَةِ، وَأَتْبَاعَ الْبَهِيمَةِ رَغَافًا جَبْتُمْ، وَعُقْرِفَهْرَيْتُمْ. أَخْلَاقُكُمْ دِقَاقٌ وَعَهْدُكُمْ شِقَاقٌ، وَدِينُكُمْ نِفَاقٌ، وَمَاؤُكُمْ زُعَاقٌ
الْمُقِيمُ بَيْنَ أَظْهُرِكُمْ مُرْتَهَنٌ بِذَنْبِهِ، وَالشَّاخِصُ عَنْكُمْ مُتَدَارِكٌ بِرَحْمَةِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ. كَأَنِّي بِمَسْجِدِكُمْ كَجَوْجُؤِ سَفِينَةٍ قَدْ بَعَثَ
اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا الْعَذَابَ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَمِنْ تَحْتِهَا، وَغَرِقَ مَنْ فِي ضِمْنِهَا

Another version

By Allah, your city would certainly be drowned so much so that as though I see its mosque like the upper part of a boat or a sitting ostrich.

:وفي رواية

وَأَيُّمُ اللَّهِ لَتَغْرَقَنَّ بِلَدُّكُمْ حَتَّى كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى مَسْجِدِهَا كَجَوْجُؤٍ سَفِينَةٍ، أَوْ نَعَامَةٍ جَائِمَةٍ

Another version

Like the bosom of a bird in deep sea.

:وفي رواية أخرى

كَجَوْجُؤٍ طَيْرٍ فِي لُجَّةٍ بَحْرِ

Another version

Your city is the most stinking of all the cities as regards its clay, the nearest to water and remotest from the sky. It contains nine tenths of evil. He who enters it is surrounded with his sins and he who is out of it enjoys Allah's forgiveness. It seems as though I look at this habitation of yours that water has so engulfed it that nothing can be seen of it except the highest part of mosque appearing like the bosom of a bird in deep sea.

:وفي رواية

بلادكم أنتن بلاد الله تربة: أقربها من الماء و أبعدھا من السماء . و بها تسعة اعشار الشر، المحتبس فيها بذنبه ، و الخارج بعفو الله . كأني أنظر الى قريتكم هذه قد طبَّقها الماء ، حتَّى ما يرى منها إلَّا شُرْفُ المسجد ، كأنه جَوْجُؤ طير في لجة بحر.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 13

- (1) Al-Dinawari, al-'Akhbar, 153;
- (2) al-Mas'udi, *Muruj*, II, 377;
- (3) Ibn Qutaybah, *Uyun*, I, 217;
- (4) Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd*, IV, 328;
- (5) al-Majlisi, *Bihar*, VIII, 447;
- (6) 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, *Tafsir*, 655;

(7) al-Tusi, *al-'Amali*, * 78;

(8) al-Mufid, *al-Jamal*, 210, 203.

1. Ibn Maytham writes that when the Battle of Jamal ended then on the third day after it Amir al-mu'minin said the morning prayer in the central mosque of Basrah and after finishing it stood on the right side of the prayer place reclining against the wall and delivered this sermon wherein he described the lowness of character of the people of Basrah and their slyness, namely that they got enflamed at others' instigation without anything of their own and making over their command to a woman clung to a camel. They broke away after swearing allegiance and exhibited their low character and evil nature by practising double facedness. In this sermon woman implies `A'ishah and quadruped implies the camel (Jamal) after which this battle has been named the Battle of Jamal.'

This battle originated in this way that when although during the life time of `Uthman, `A'ishah used to oppose him and had left for Mecca leaving him in siege and as such she had a share in his assassination details of which would be stated at some suitable place but when on her return from Mecca towards Medina she heard from `Abdullah ibn Salamah that after `Uthman allegiance had been paid to `Ali (as Caliph) she suddenly exclaimed, "If allegiance has been paid to `Ali, I wish the sky had burst on the earth. Let me go back to Mecca." Consequently she decided to return to Mecca and began saying, "By Allah `Uthman has been killed helplessly. I shall certainly avenge his blood."

On seeing this wide change in the state of affairs Abu Salamah said, "What are you saying as you yourself used to say "Kill this Na`thal ; he had turned unbeliever." Thereupon she replied, "Not only I but everyone used to say so; but leave these things and listen to what I am now saying, that is better and deserves more attention. It is so strange that first he was called upon to repent but before giving him an opportunity to do so he has been killed." On this Abu Salamah recited the following verses addressing her:

You started it and now you are changing and raising storms of wind and rain.

You ordered for his killing and told us that he had turned unbeliever.

We admit that he has been killed but under your orders and the real Killer is one who ordered it.

Nevertheless, neither the sky fell over us nor did the sun and moon fall into eclipse.

Certainly people have paid allegiance to one who can ward off the enemy with power and grandeur, does not allow swords to come near him and loosens the twist of the rope, that is, subdues the enemy.

He is always fully armed for combat and the faithful is never like the traitor.

However, when she reached Mecca with a passion for vengeance she began rousing the people to avenge `Uthman's blood by circulating stories of his having been victimised. The first to respond to this call was `Abdullah ibn `Amir al-Hadrami who had been the governor of Mecca in `Uthman's reign and with him Marwan ibn al-Hakam, Sa'id ibn al-`As and other Umayyads rose to support her. On the other side Talhah ibn `Ubaydillah and az-Zubayr ibn al-`Awwam also reached Mecca from Medina. From Yemen Ya'la ibn Munabbih who had been governor there during `Uthman's caliphate and the former governor of Basrah, `Abdullah ibn `Amir ibn Kurayz also reached there, and joining together began preparing their plans.

Battle had been decided upon but discussion was about the venue of confrontation. `A'ishah's opinion was to make Medina the venue of the battle but some people opposed and held that it was difficult to deal with Medinites, and that some other place should be chosen as the venue. At last after much discussion it was decided to march towards Basrah as there was no dearth of men to support the cause. Consequently on the strength of `Abdullah ibn `Amir's countless wealth, and the offer of six hundred thousand Dirhams and six hundred camels by Ya'la ibn Munabbih they prepared an army of three thousand and set off to Basrah. There was a small incident on the way on account of which `A'ishah refused to advance further.

What happened was that at a place she heard the barking of dogs and enquired from the camel driver the name of the

place. He said it was Haw'ab. On hearing this name she recalled the Prophet's admonition when he had said to his wives, "I wish I could know at which of you the dogs of Haw'ab would bark." So when she realised that she herself was that one she got the camel seated by patting and expressed her intention to abandon the march. But the device of her companions saved the deteriorating situation. `Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr swore to assure her that it was not Haw'ab, Talhah seconded him and for her further assurance also sent for fifty persons to stand witness to it. When all the people were on one side what could a single woman do by opposing. Eventually they were successful and `A'ishah resumed her forward march with the same enthusiasm.

When this army reached Basrah, people were first amazed to see the riding animal of `A'ishah. Jariyah ibn Qudamah came forward and said, "O' mother of the faithful, the assassination of `Uthman was one tragedy but the greater tragedy is that you have come out on this cursed camel and ruined your honour and esteem. It is better that you should get back." But since neither the incident at Haw'ab could deter her nor could the Qur'anic injunction: "Keep sitting in your houses" (33:33) stop her, what effect could these voices produce. Consequently, she disregarded all this.

When this army tried to enter the city the Governor of Basrah `Uthman ibn Hunayf came forward to stop them and when the two parties came face to face they drew their swords out of the sheaths and pounced upon each other. When a good number had been killed from either side `A'ishah intervened on the basis of her influence and the two groups agreed that till the arrival of Amir al-mu'minin the existing administration should continue and `Uthman ibn Hunayf should continue on his post. But only two days had elapsed when they made a nightly attack on `Uthman ibn Hunayf, killed forty innocent persons, beat `Uthman ibn Hunayf, plucked every hair of his beard, took him in their custody and shut him up. Then they attacked public treasury and while ransacking it killed twenty persons on the spot, and beheaded fifty more after arresting them.

Then they attacked the grain store, whereupon an elderly noble of Basrah Hukaym ibn Jabalah could not control himself and reaching there with his men said to `Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr, "Spare some of this grain for the city's populace. After all there should be a limit to oppression. You have spread killing and destruction all round and put `Uthman ibn Hunayf in confinement. For Allah's sake keep off these ruining activities and release `Uthman ibn Hunayf. Is there no fear of Allah in your hearts?" Ibn az-Zubayr said, "This is vengeance of `Uthman's life." Hukaym ibn Jabalah retorted, "Were those who have been killed assassins of `Uthman? By Allah, if I had supporters and comrades I should have certainly avenged the blood of these Muslims whom you have killed without reason." Ibn az-Zubayr replied, "We shall not give anything out of this grain, nor will `Uthman ibn Hunayf be released." At last the battle raged between these two parties but how could a few individuals deal with such a big force? The result was that Hukaym ibn Jabalah, his son al-Ashraf ibn Hukaym ibn Jabalah, his brother ar-Ri'l ibn Jabalah and seventy persons of his tribe were killed. In short, killing and looting prevailed all round. Neither anyone's life was secure nor was there any way to save one's honour or property.

When Amir al-mu'minin was informed of the march to Basrah he set out to stop it with a force which consisted of seventy of those who had taken part in the battle of Badr and four hundred out of those companions who had the honour of being present at the Allegiance of Ridwan (Divine Pleasure). When he stopped at the stage of Dhiqar he sent his son Hasan (p.b.u.h.) and `Ammar ibn Yasir to Kufah to invite its people to fighting. Consequently, despite interference of Abu Musa al-Ash`ari seven thousand combatants from there joined Amir al-mu'minin's army. He left that place after placing the army under various commanders.

Eye witnesses state that when this force reached near Basrah first of all a contingent of ansar appeared foremost. Its standard was held by Abu Ayyub al-Ansari. After it appeared another contingent of 1000 whose commander was Khuzaymah ibn Thabit al-Ansari. Then another contingent came in sight. Its standard was borne by Abu Qatadah ibn ar-Rabi`. Then a crowd of a thousand old and young persons was seen. They had signs of prostration on their foreheads and veil of fear of Allah on their face. It seemed as if they were standing before the Divine Glory on the Day of Judgement. Their Commander rode a dark horse, was dressed in white, had black turban on his head and was reciting the Qur'an loudly. This was `Ammar ibn Yasir. Then another contingent appeared. Its standard was in the hand of Qays ibn Sa'd ibn `Ubadah.

Then an army came to sight. Its leader wore white dress and had a black turban on his head. He was so handsome that all

eyes centred around him. This was `Abdullah ibn `Abbas. Then followed a contingent of the companions of the Prophet. Their standard bearer was Qutham ibn al-`Abbas. Then after the passing of a few contingents a big crowd was seen, wherein there was such a large number of spears that they were overlapping and flags of numerous colours were flying. Among them a big and lofty standard was seen with distinctive position. Behind it was seen a rider guarded by sublimity and greatness. His sinews were well-developed and eyes were cast downwards. His awe and dignity was such that no one could look at him. This was the Ever Victorious Lion of Allah namely `Ali ibn Abi Talib (p.b.u.h.).

On his right and left were Hasan and Husayn (p.b.u.t.). In front of him Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah walked in slow steps carrying the banner of victory and glory, and on the back were the young men of Banu Hashim, the people of Badr and `Abdullah ibn Ja`far ibn Abi Talib. When this army reached the place az-Zawiyah, Amir al-mu'minin alighted from the horse, and after performing four rak`ah of prayer put his cheeks on the ground. When he lifted his head the ground was drenched with tears and the tongue was uttering these words: O' Sustainer of earth, heaven and the high firmament, this is Basrah. Fill our lap with its good and protect us from its evils.

Then proceeding forward he got down in the battle-field of Jamal where the enemy was already camping. First of all Amir al-mu'minin announced in his army that no one should attack another, nor take the initiative. Saying this he came in front of the opposite army and said to Talhah and az-Zubayr, "You ask `A'ishah by swearing in the name of Allah and His prophet whether I am not free from the blame of `Uthman's blood, and whether I used the same words for him which you used to say, and whether I pressurised you for allegiance or you swore it of your own free will." Talhah got exasperated at these words but az-Zubayr relented, and Amir al-mu'minin turned back after it, and giving the Qur'an to Muslim (a young man from the tribe of `Abd Qays) sent him towards them to pronounce to them the verdict of the Qur'an. But people took both of them within aim and covered this godly man with their arrows.

Then `Ammar ibn Yasir went to canvass and convince them and caution them with the consequences of war but his words were also replied by arrows. Till now Amir al-mu'minin had not allowed an attack as a result of which the enemy continued feeling encouraged and went on raining arrows constantly. At last with the dying of a few valiant combatants consternation was created among Amir al-mu'minin's ranks and some people came with a few bodies before him and said, "O' Commander of the faithful you are not allowing us to fight while they are covering us with arrows. How long can we let them make our bosoms the victim of their arrows, and remain handfolded at their excesses?"

At this Amir al-mu'minin did show anger but acting with restraint and endurance, came to the enemy in that very form without wearing armour or any arm and shouted, "Where is az-Zubayr?" At first az-Zubayr hesitated to come forward but he noticed that Amir al-mu'minin had no arms he came out. Amir al-mu'minin said to him "O' az-Zubayr, you must remember that one day the Prophet told you that you would fight with me and wrong and excess would be on your side." az-Zubayr replied that he had said so. Then Amir al-mu'minin enquired "Why have you come then?" He replied that his memory had missed it and if he had recollected it earlier he would not have come that way. Amir al-mu'minin said, "Well, now you have recollected it" and he replied, "Yes." Saying this he went straight to `A'ishah and told her that he was getting back.

She asked him the reason and he replied, "Ali has reminded me a forgotten matter. I had gone astray, but now I have come on the right path and would not fight `Ali ibn Abi Talib at any cost." `A'ishah said, "You have caught fear of the swords of the sons of `Abd al-Muttalib." He said, "No" and saying this he turned the reins of his horse. However, it is gratifying that some consideration was accorded to the Prophet's saying, for at Haw'ab even after recollection of the Prophet's words no more than transient effect was taken of it. On returning after this conversation Amir al-mu'minin observed that they had attacked the right and left flanks of his army. Noticing this Amir al-mu'minin said, "Now the plea has been exhausted. Call my son Muhammad." When he came Amir al-mu'minin said, "My son, attack them now."

Muhammad bowed his head and taking the standard proceeded to the battle-field. But arrows were falling in such exuberance that he had to stop. When Amir al-mu'minin saw this he called out at him, "Muhammad, why don't you advance?" He said, "Father, in this shower of arrows there is no way to proceed. Wait till the violence of arrows subsides." He said, "No, thrust yourself in the arrows and spears and attack." Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah advanced a little but the

archers so surrounded him that he had to hold his steps. On seeing this a frown appeared on Amir al-mu'minin's fore-head and getting forward he hit the sword's handle on the Muhammad's back and said, "This is the effect of your mother's veins."

Saying this he took the standard from his hands and folding up his sleeves made such an attack that a tumult was created in the enemy's ranks from one end to the other. To whichever row he turned, it became clear and to whatever side he directed himself bodies were seen falling and heads rolling in the hoofs of horses. When after convulsing the rows he returned to his position he said to Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah, "Look, my son, battle is fought like this." Saying this he gave the standard to him and ordered him to proceed. Muhammad advanced towards the enemy with a contingent of ansar. The enemy also came out moving and balancing their spears. But the brave son of the valiant father convulsed rows over rows while the other warriors also made the battle-field glory and left heaps of dead bodies.

From the other side also there was full demonstration of spirit of sacrifice. Dead bodies were falling one over the other but they continued sacrificing their lives devotedly around the camel. Particularly the condition of Banu Dabbah was that although their hands were being severed from the elbows for holding the reins of the camel, and bosoms were being pierced yet they had the following battle-song on their tongues: a) To us death is sweeter than honey. We are Banu Dabbah, camel rearers. b) We are sons of death when death comes. We announce the death of `Uthman with the edges of spears. c) Give us back our chief and there is an end to it.

The low character and ignorance from faith of these Banu Dabbah, can be well understood by that one incident which al-Mada'ini has narrated. He writes that in Basrah there was a man with mutilated ear. He asked him its reason when he said, "I was watching the sight of dead bodies in the battle-field of Jamal when I saw a wounded man who sometimes raised his head and sometimes dashed it back on the ground. I approached near. Then the following two verses were on his lips: a) Our mother pushed us into the deep waters of death and did not get back till we had thoroughly drunk. b) By misfortune we obeyed Banu Taym who are none but slave men and slave girls.

"I told him it was not the time to recite verses; he should rather recall Allah and recite the kalimat ash-shahadah (verse of testimony). On my saying this he saw me with angry looks and uttering a severe abuse and said, "You are asking me to recite kalimat ash-shahadah, get frightened at the last moment and show impatience." I was astonished to hear this and decided to return without saying anything further. When he saw me returning he said, "Wait; for your sake I am prepared to recite, but teach me." I drew close to teach him the kalimah when he asked me to get closer. When I got closer he caught my ear with his teeth and did not leave it till he tore it from the root. I did not think it proper to molest a dying man and was about to get back abusing and cursing him when he asked me to listen one more thing. I agreed to listen lest he had an unsatisfied wish. He said that when I should get to my mother and she enquired who had bitten my ear I should say that it was done by `Umayr ibn al-Ahlab ad-Dabbi who had been deceived by a woman aspiring to become the commander of the faithful (head of the state)."

However, when the dazzling lightning of swords finished the lives of thousands of persons and hundreds of Banu Azd and Banu Dabbah were killed for holding the rein of the camel, Amir al-mu'minin ordered, "Kill the camel for it is Satan." Saying this he made such a severe attack that the cries of "Peace" and "Protection" rose from all round. When he reached near the camel he ordered Bujayr ibn Duljah to kill the camel at once. Consequently, Bujayr hit him with such full might that the camel fell in agony on the side of its bosom. No sooner than the camel fell the opposite army took to heels and the carrier holding `A'ishah was left lonely and unguarded. The companion of Amir al-mu'minin took control of the carrier and under orders of Amir al-mu'minin, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr escorted `A'ishah to the house of Safiyyah bint al-Harith.

This encounter commenced on the 10th of Jumada ath-thaniyah, 36 A.H., in the afternoon and came to an end the same evening. In it from Amir al-mu'minin's army of twenty two thousand, one thousand and seventy or according to another version five hundred persons were killed as martyrs while from `A'ishah's army of thirty thousand, seventeen thousand persons were killed, and the Prophet's saying, "That people who assigned their affairs (of state) to a woman would never prosper" was fully corroborated. (al-Imamah wa's-siyasah; Muruj adh-dhahab; al-Iqd al-farid; at-Tarikh, at Tabari)

[2.](#) Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has written that as prophesied by Amir al-mu'minin, Basrah was flooded twice – once in the days of al-

Qadir Bi'llah and once in the reign of al-Qa'im bi Amri'l-lah and the state of flooding was just this that while the whole city was under water but the top ends of the mosque were seen about the surface of the water and looked like a bird sitting on the side of its bosom.

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