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Why did Imam al-Hasan (as) Make Peace while Imam al-Husayn (as) Rose up in Arms?

The issue of the peace treaty of Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) with Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan is one of the subjects about which there is controversy and differing opinions among historians.

Some historians have accused Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) of being unworthy and say that Imam al-Hasan (as) was not fit for the caliphate and Imamate. Some even believe that the Holy Imam (as) did not possess enough strength and fortitude to handle the responsibilities of government affairs.

Other historians say that Imam al-Hasan (as), just like his father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), had the capability for the caliphate, but sensitive circumstances which prevailed during his time demanded that he should make peace. In other words, Imam al-Hasan (as) was forced to make peace and avoid war.

In this topic, we intend to give a clear explanation and description of the events that led to Imam al-Hasan's (as) peace agreement with the people of Sham.

Imam 'Ali's (as) reproach of the people of Kufah

In order for us to understand the conditions of the people of Kufah, the people who pledged allegiance with Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as), it is important to refer to Imam 'Ali's (as) words about them, because he lived with them for many years and was their leader.

1. Addressing the people of Kufah, Imam 'Ali (as) said,

> «الحمد لله على ما قضى من أمر، وقدّر من فعل، وعلى ابتلائي بكم أيتها الفرقة التي اذا امرتُ لم تطع، واذا دعوت لم تُجب...»

"I praise Allah for what He willed and destined. And I praise Him for my entanglement in the troubles

created for me by you, the people of Kufah. O people! You who did not follow any of the orders which I gave! Whenever I called out to you, you did not respond positively…”[1]

2. Elsewhere, Imam ‘Ali (as) says,

«لقد كنت أمس أميراً فاصبحتُ اليوم مأموراً، وكنت أمس ناهياً فأصبحت اليوم منهيّاً، وقد أحببتم البقاء وليس لي أن أحملكم على ما تكرهون...»

“Until yesterday, I was a leader and commander, but today I am the one who is being commanded. Until yesterday, I was the one preventing people from acting in certain ways, but today I am the one who is being prevented. You love staying alive. I cannot force you take a path which you do not like…”[2]

3. After hearing the news that Busr ibn Artat had conqurred Yemen for Mu‘awiyah and become Mu‘awiyah’s representative and official in that land, Imam ‘Ali (as) went on the pulpit and, while complaining about his companions’ shortcomings and opposition, addressed the people in this way,

«انبئت بسراً قد اطلع اليمن وانّي والله لأظنّ انّ هولاء القوم سيدالون منكم باجتماعهم على باطلهم وتفرّقكم عن حقّكم وبمعصيتكم امامكم في الحقّ وطاعتهم امامهم في الباطل، وبأدائهم الى صاحبهم وخيانتكم، وبصلاحهم في بلادهم وفسادكم، فلو ائتمنت احدكم على قعب لخشيت ان يذهب بعلاقته، اللّهم انّي قد مللتهم وملّوني وسئمتهم وسئموني، فابدلني بهم خيراً منهم، وأبدلهم بي شرّاً منّي...»

“News has reached me that Busr ibn Artat has gained predominance over Yemen. I swear upon Allah! I knew that very soon the people of Sham were going to prevail over you because they are united in their support of that which is wrong while you are disunited in defending that which is right. You have disobeyed your Imam every time he ordered you to do what was right, while they have obeyed their leader when he ordered them to commit what was wrong.

They are loyal to their leader while you are treacherous! They are busy trying to build and improve their cities, while you are busy corrupting and destroying yours. You have sunk so low in corruption that I fear to entrust a wooden water carrier to anyone of you because you might steal its leather cord.

O my Lord! I have made these people tired with my incessant advice and counsel, and they too have made me tired with their unceasing disobedience. They have lost their patience with me, and I have lost my patience with them, too. I am heartbroken. O my Lord! Change these people for me with better ones, and change me for them with a worse one…”[3]

4. When he was inviting the people to move towards Sham, he said,

«أفٍّ لكم لقد سئمت عتابكم، أرضيتم بالحيوة الدنيا من الآخرة عوضاً، وبالذلّ من العزّ خلفاً، اذا دعوتكم الي جهاد

«...عدوّكم دارت أعينكم كأنّكم من الموت في غمرة ومن الذهول في سكرة

“Damnation and curses be upon you O people of Kufah! I am tired of reproaching you. Do you prefer the transient life of this world over the everlasting one of the hereafter? Instead of self-respect and honor, have you chosen a life of misery and abjectness? I invite you to fight in *jihad* against the enemies, but your eyes are turning in circles because of fear. It seems that fear of death has hijacked your intellects. Like drunken people who have lost their minds, you are bewildered and disoriented...”[4]

We understand from these statements that Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) was displeased with the contravention of his soldiers and followers. These are the same people who would later pay allegiance to Imam al-Hasan (as) and choose him to be the one in charge of their affairs.

We will now summarize some of the negative circumstances and conditions that existed at the time:

a. A spirit of despotism, mutiny and freedom-seeking existed among the people.

b. Both Imam ‘Ali (as) and his soldiers were tired and impatient of each other.

c. Some of Imam ‘Ali’s soldiers were inclined towards the government of Sham (the government of Mu‘awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan) because of hatred and animosity that they held against Imam ‘Ali (as).

d. The presence of the Khawarij among Imam ‘Ali’s (as) soldiers was another negative factor because they had taken steps that were to the detriment of the Islamic army.

Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) inherited such an army; an army that had behaved treacherously with his father. In such sensitive times, what else could Imam al-Hasan (as) have done?

How was he supposed to handle both the irresolution of his own soldiers and the open enemy under the leadership of Mu‘awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan? Under such circumstances, can it be said that Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) accepted truce and signed an armistice because of negligence of duty or was it because of lack of loyal and obedient followers?

It is clear that Imam al-Hasan (as) was compelled by the circumstances which prevailed at the time to make peace.

Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army

Imam al-Hasan (as) ascended to the leadership of Kufah at a time when Mu‘awiyah was planning to mount a decisive war against the Imam and bring about a final conquest of Kufah.

In some of his letters to his governors and appointed stooges, Mu‘awiyah wrote, “Some of the people of Kufah have written to me asking me for their protection and the protection of their near ones.”[5]

At the same time, Imam al-Hasan (as) was calling on the people of Kufah to go to war and confront the army of Sham. However, Imam al-Hasan's (as) soldiers and followers consisted of people with various beliefs that can be divided into a number of groups:

1. The Khawarij

They were the same people who mutinied against Imam 'Ali (as) and went to war with him.

2. Those inclined to the government of Bani Umayyah

Such people were present among the soldiers of Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as), and can be divided into two groups:

a. Those who did not attain to their earthly desires and aspirations by remaining loyal to the government of Kufah, so they set their covetous eyes on the government of Sham under the leadership of Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan,

b. Those who were opposed to Imam 'Ali (as) and held grudges against Imam al-Hasan's (as) father.

3. The bigoted and prejudiced

This group consisted of people who were drowned in clan and tribal prejudice, and it was for this reason that they joined the army of Imam al-Hasan (as) rather than for Islamic goals.

4. Those that lacked any objective or purpose

Another group of people who took part in Imam al-Hasan's (as) army were those who lacked any aim or purpose in life. In other words, they joined Imam al-Hasan's (as) army just because they saw other people enlisting.

5. The sincere and faithful

There was one sincere group among the followers of Imam al-Hasan (as). This group recognized and acknowledged the rightful status of Imam al-Hasan (as). They followed his orders without complaint or misgiving.

These were the real Shi'ahs who were religious and devoted to their Imam (as). They were ready to sacrifice their lives for Allah following Imam al-Hasan's (as) orders. These were, however, outnumbered by the other irresolute groups.

Awareness about the circumstances which prevailed

Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) was aware of the sensitivity of the circumstances; he knew that the

large numbers of Mu‘awiyah’s army and their sacrifices for him for worldly gain were apt to vanquish the Imam’s small and disloyal army. At the same time, Mu‘awiyah was aware of the weak points of Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army and how to infiltrate it.

That is why Mu‘awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan suggested the peace plan to Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as); the aim was to weaken the spirit of the Imam’s (as) army right from the start so as to reduce their enthusiasm.

Because Imam al-Hasan (as) was also well-aware of Mu‘awiyah’s deceit and previous tricks, he initially sent an army of twelve thousand soldiers under the command of ‘Ubayd Allah ibn ‘Abbas to confront Mu‘awiyah’s army. Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army encountered Mu‘awiyah’s army at a place called “Maskan”.

The Imam (as) was aware of signs of sedition which had begun to appear inside his own army as a result of Mu‘awiyah’s stratagems to attract his soldiers’ attention by sending spies to create conspiracies inside Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army by bribing the soldiers.

For the sake of weakening the spirit of Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army, some people started spreading false rumors and hearsay that the Imam (as) had accepted Mu‘awiyah’s suggestion for peace. They cynically asked, “Why then should we fight against Mu‘awiyah’s army?”[6]

Turmoil and confusion arose inside Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army. Signs of division began to appear. Some confirmed as true the news that Imam al-Hasan (as) had accepted peace while others dismissed the news as false.

Finally, through various intrigues and the payment of great sums of money, and by issuing threats, Mu‘awiyah was able to corrupt the aides and commanders of Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as).

In his letter to ‘Ubayd Allah ibn ‘Abbas, Mu‘awiyah wrote, “Al-Hasan has written a letter to me suggesting peace. He has entrusted the caliphate to me. If you become one of my followers, I will appoint you to be a governor. If you do not follow me, you will remain an ordinary person.” Mu‘awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan sent this letter together with a million *dirham*s for ‘Ubayd Allah ibn ‘Abbas.[7]

In his wars against his enemies, Mu‘awiyah always knew the weak points of his enemies and penetrated them from there.

When ‘Ubayd Allah ibn ‘Abbas thought about the situation, he accepted Mu‘awiyah’s invitation and joined Mu‘awiyah’s army by night. When morning arose, Imam al-Hasan’s (as) army found themselves without a leader and commander. Imam al-Hasan (as) appointed another commander from the tribe of Kindah.

He sent him with four thousand additional soldiers to combat and encounter the army of Mu‘awiyah. When they reached a place called “al-Anbar”, Mu‘awiyah sent five hundred thousand *dirham*s for this

new leader and promised him the governorship of certain cities under Mu‘awiyah’s rule. This new commander too defected and joined Mu‘awiyah’s army together with two hundred people from his clan.

Imam al-Hasan (as) appointed a third commander from the tribe of Murad to go and lead the army into war against Mu‘awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan. He, too, acted treacherously and defected like the previous commanders and joined Mu‘awiyah’s side. He did this after ferverntly swearing before Imam al-Hasan (as) that he was not going to be deceived by Mu‘awiyah’s tricks. Nevertheless, he was seduced by Mu‘awiyah and he, too, betrayed Imam al-Hasan (as).8

Imam al-Hasan (as) made a very firm stand and insisted on fighting against Mu‘awiyah, but he knew at the same time that this was not going to end in the best interests of Islam and the Muslims. He could foresee that a continuation of such a state of affairs was going to end in self-slaughter and suicide for Bani Hashim and the few dedicated Shi‘ahs he had. He had the duty to protect Islam and the Muslims.

In order to test and prove the weaknesses of his own army, Imam al-Hasan (as) made a speech in which he said, “Beware! Mu‘awiyah has invited us to something which is devoid of glory and equity. If you have made up your minds to die, then let us encounter him with the sword and apply Allah’s law on him. However, if you prefer to stay alive, I will agree and make peace with him for your sake and good pleasure.”9

The people shouted from all corners that they preferred life. They called out, “Sign the peace agreement!”

It was after making this speech that Imam al-Hasan (as) knew the real intentions of his army and found them to be weak in spirit. A majority of them preferred a peaceful life to fighting against Mu‘awiyah.

Conditions of the peace treaty

Mu‘awiyah took advantage of this opportunity. He sent a letter to Imam al-Hasan (as) in which he proposed peace. He said Imam al-Hasan (as) was free to demand any conditions for himself, his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) and his Shi‘ahs.

In his reply, Imam al-Hasan (as) inserted demands and asked Mu‘awiyah to act according to his promises. On the surface, Mu‘awiyah accepted whatever demands Imam al-Hasan (as) made, though deep inside he did not believe in any one of the conditions. Actually, he planned to deliberately undermine all these conditions when the right opportunity arose.

Imam al-Hasan’s (as) conditions were as follows:

1. Entrusting the caliphate to Mu‘awiyah on the condition that he would act according to Allah’s Book and the Prophet’s (S) *sunnah*.

2. The caliphate should be handed over to Imam al-Hasan (as) after the death of Mu'awiyah, and in case of Imam al-Hasan's (as) death, the caliphate should be entrusted to his brother Imam al-Husayn (as). Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan agreed not to hand the caliphate over to anyone else.

3. Mu'awiyah agreed to stop cursing and vilifying Imam 'Ali (as). He agreed to stop insulting Imam 'Ali (as) in the supplications he offered at the time of prayers. He even agreed to remind himself and the people about the good works and excellent virtues of Imam 'Ali (as).

4. Mu'awiyah agreed not to claim the money belonging to the public treasury of Kufah. (This money amounted to five thousand *dirham*s.) In addition to that, Mu'awiyah agreed to send one million *dirham*s every year to Imam al-Husayn (as). He recognized the tribe of Bani Hashim to have higher family ties with him than tribe of Bani Shams. Mu'awiyah had to share and divide a million *dirham*s among the children of the people who were martyred in the wars of Jamal and Siffin when he fought against Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as).

5. All Muslims in all corners of the Muslim World, whether in Sham, Iraq, Hijaz or Yemen, would be able to live in peace and enjoy safety. All races and sects would be able to live in safety and no one should follow up on old grudges and seek retribution from the other.

Imam 'Ali's (as) companions were guaranteed to live in peace and safety wherever they might be, and no trouble should be made for his Shi'ahs. Their lives, property, children and women would be left in peace and security and none of them should be persecuted or attacked. Every one of their rights should be observed and respected.

None of their rights should be abused… and never should any aggression, whether openly or secretly, be carried out on Imam al-Hasan (as), Imam al-Husayn (as) and anyone of the Prophets's (S) *Ahl al-Bayt* (as). None of them should be terrorized no matter where they live.

These were some of the conditions which Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) inserted in the peace treaty. If we carefully ponder the conditions which Imam al-Hasan (as) demanded, we realize that he never planned to affirm or stabilize Mu'awiyah's caliphate. On the contrary, these conditions were against the interests of Mu'awiyah. Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) was only trying to buy time to his own advantage.[10]

Two opposing circumstances

Some people, because they lack sufficient knowledge about the position and status of an *imam*, have endeavored to portray Imam al-Husayn (as) as higher in status than Imam al-Hasan (as).

The reason they put forward is that Imam al-Husayn (as) fought the enemies of Allah with very few companions until they all attained martyrdom while Imam al-Hasan (as) chose the way of peace and compromise. However, this belief is a result of misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about the Imam

and his infallibility, because:

Firstly, we believe that the duty of every one of the Imams was previously planned and determined, and was foretold by the Holy Prophet (S). In addition, each of them has executed all the duties they were charged with in the best interests of the Muslims and for the expedience of Islam.

Secondly, with careful consideration of the circumstances of these two Infallible Imams, the decision made by each of them was correct and reasonable (in the interests of Islam and the Muslims). The treachery of the people of Kufah was such that they prepared the ground for Imam al-Husayn's (as) apparent victory and invited him to come with his family and entire household to Iraq, while they had never done such a thing for Imam al-Hasan (as).

Thirdly, it has to be borne in mind that Imam al-Hasan's (as) soldiers broke their allegiance after promising loyalty but the people of Kufah during the time of Imam al-Husayn (as), even though they had invited him in order to pay their allegiance to him, started opposing one another before actually paying their allegiance and going to war. It is for this reason that Imam al-Hasan's (as) soldiers are considered more treacherous than the people of Kufah during the time of Imam al-Husayn (as).

Imam al-Hasan (as) did not have as many loyal people in his army as Imam al-Husayn (as), so it was practically impossible to fight any war against the enemy.

Fourthly, when we consider the ways and stratagems of the enemies of these two Imams in their different times of Imamate, we realize that Imam al-Hasan (as) and Imam al-Husayn (as) faced two different kinds of enemies. These two different kinds of enemies needed to be confronted with two different strategies, one was to make peace and the other was to fight with the sword until martyrdom was attained.

The enemy facing Imam al-Hasan (as) was Mu'awiyah, and the enemy facing Imam al-Husayn (as) was Yazid, the son of Mu'awiyah. These two false caliphs had two different ways of life and handling affairs.

Even though Mu'awiyah was a trickster and a perverted man who did not waste any resources to annihilate the basic teachings of Islam, he nonetheless apparently followed the laws of Islam to some extent. However, Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah was not only an enemy of Islam in his inner being, but also showed his enmity and hatred of Islam and Allah's Prophet (S) publicly.

He did not observe or respect any one of the revered orders of Islam. Although Mu'awiyah apparently showed some respect to Bani Hashim, Yazid did not show any kind of respect for them.

It is for this reason that that the Holy Prophet (S) said,

«الحسن والحسين امامان قاما او قعداً.»

“Al-Hasan and al-Husayn are *imam*s, whether they make peace or rise up.”11

Therefore, we believe that if Imam al-Husayn (as) was in Imam al-Hasan’s (as) position, he would do exactly the same thing which Imam al-Hasan (as) did. And if Imam al-Hasan (as) was in Imam al-Husayn’s (as) position, he too would do what Imam al-Husayn (as) did.

The reason is that they both were sharp at analyzing the times in which they lived and were aware about their circumstances. Whatever decisions they made were for the best interests and expedience of Islam and the Muslims.

1. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 10, p. 67.
2. Ibid., vol. 11. p. 29.
3. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 332.
4. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 189.
5. Ibid., vol. 16, p. 38.
6. Ibid., p. 42.
7. Ibid.
8. A‘yan al-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 22.
9. Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 204.
10. Al-Nasayih al-Kafiyah, pp. 156-157; Tarikh Tabari, vol. 6, pp. 92-97; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 166; Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 26; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 4, pp. 8, 15; A‘yan al-Shi‘ah, vol. 4, p. 43; Tarikh al-Khulafa’, p. 194; Tarikh Ibn Kathir, vol. 8, p. 41; Al-Isabah, vol. 2, p. 12; ‘Umdah al-Talib, p. 52.
11. Ibn Shahr Ashub, Munaqib, vol. 3, p. 394; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 291, hadith 54.

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