

Sermon 128: O Ahnaf!....

About important future events in Basrah

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

وهو ممّا كان يخبر به عن الملاحم بالبصرة

O Ahnaf! It is as though I see him advancing with an army which has neither dust nor noise, nor rustling of reins, nor neighing of horses. They are trampling the ground with their feet as if they are the feet of ostriches.

يَا أَهْنَافُ، كَأَنِّي بِهِ وَقَدْ سَارَ بِالْجَيْشِ الَّذِي لَا يَكُونُ لَهُ غُبَارٌ وَلَا لَجَبٌ، وَلَا قَعْقَعَةٌ
لُجْمٌ، وَلَا حَمَمَةٌ خَيْلٌ، يُثِيرُونَ الْأَرْضَ بِأَقْدَامِهِمْ كَأَنَّهَا أَقْدَامُ النَّعَامِ.

As-Sayyid ar-Radi says: Amir al-mu'minin pointed to the Chief of the Negroes, (*Sahibu'z-Zanj*).¹

يوميء بذلك (عليه السلام) إلى صاحب الزنج.

Then Amir al -mu'minin said:

Woe to you (the people of Basrah's) inhabited streets and decorated houses which possess wings like the wings of vultures and trunks like the trunks of elephants; they are the people from among whom if

one is killed he is not mourned and if one is lost he is not searched for. I turn this world over on its face, value it only according to its (low) value, and look at it with an eye suitable to it.

ثم قال (عليه السلام): وَيَلِّسِكُمْ الْعَامِرَةَ، وَدُورَكُمْ الْمُزْخَرَفَةَ الَّتِي لَهَا أَجْنَحَةٌ
كَأَجْنَحَةِ النُّسُورِ، وَخَرَاطِيمُ كَخَرَاطِيمِ الْفَيْلَةِ، مِنْ أَوْلِيكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُنْدَبُ قَتِيلُهُمْ،
وَلَا يُفْقَدُ غَائِبُهُمْ. أَنَا كَابُ الدُّنْيَا لِوَجْهِهَا، وَقَادِرُهَا بِقَدْرِهَا، وَنَاطِرُهَا بِعَيْنِهَا.

A part of the same sermon referring to the Turks (Mongols)

منه: ويومئ به إلى وصف الأتراك

I can see a people whose faces are like shields covered with rough-scraped skins. They dress themselves in silken and woollen clothes and hold dear excellent horses. Their killing and bloodshed shall take place freely till the wounded shall walk over the dead and the number of runners-away shall be less than those taken prisoner:

كَأَنِّي أَرَاهُمْ قَوْمًا كَأَنَّ وَجُوهَهُمُ الْمَجَانُّ الْمَطْرَقَةُ، يَلْبَسُونَ السَّرَقَ وَالْدِيْبَاجَ،
وَيَعْتَقِبُونَ الْخَيْلَ الْعِتَاقَ، وَيَكُونُ هُنَاكَ اسْتِحْرَارُ قَتْلِ، حَتَّى يَمْشِيَ الْمَجْرُوحُ عَلَى
الْمَقْتُولِ، وَيَكُونُ الْمُقْتُلُ أَقَلَّ مِنَ الْمَأْسُورِ!

One of his companions said to him: O Amir al-mu'minin, you have been given knowledge of hidden things. Whereupon Amir al-mu'minin laughed and said to the man who belonged to the tribe of Banu Kalb:

فقال له بعض أصحابه: لقد أعطيت يا أمير المؤمنين علم الغيب! فضحك (عليه
السلام)، وقال للرجل - وكان كلبياً - :

O brother of Kalb! This is not knowledge of hidden things (*ilmul-ghayb*), 3 these matters have been acquired from him (namely in Prophet) who knew them. As regard knowledge of hidden things, that means knowledge of the Day of Judgement, and the things covered by Allah in the verse:

“Verily, Allah is He with Whom is the knowledge of the Hour; He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die..” (Qur'an, 31:34)

Therefore, Allah alone knows what is there in the wombs, whether male or female, ugly or handsome, generous or miserly, mischievous or pious, and who will be the fuel for Hell and who will be in the company of the Prophets in Paradise. This is the knowledge of the hidden things which is not known to anyone save Allah. All else is that whose knowledge Allah passed on to His Prophet and he passed it on to me, and prayed for me that my bosom may retain it and my ribs may hold it.

يَا أَخَا كَلْبٍ، لَيْسَ هُوَ بِعِلْمٍ غَيْبٍ، وَإِنَّمَا هُوَ تَعَلَّمَ مِنْ ذِي عِلْمٍ، وَإِنَّمَا عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ
عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ، وَمَا عَدَدَهُ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ بِقَوْلِهِ: (إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ
الْغَيْثَ، وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ، وَلَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مِمَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا، وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ
بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ..). الْآيَةُ. فَيَعْلَمُ سُبْحَانَهُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْثَى، وَقَبِيحٍ
أَوْ جَمِيلٍ، وَسَخِيٍّ أَوْ بَخِيلٍ، وَشَقِيٍّ أَوْ سَعِيدٍ، وَمَنْ يَكُونُ فِي النَّارِ حَطْبًا، أَوْ فِي
الْجَنَّةِ لِلنَّبِيِّينَ مُرَافِقًا؛ فَهَذَا عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ الَّذِي لَا يَعْلَمُهُ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ، وَمَا سِوَى
ذَلِكَ فَعِلْمٌ عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ نَبِيَّهُ (صلى الله عليه وآله) فَعَلَّمَنِيهِ، وَدَعَا لِي بِأَنْ يَعِيَهُ
صَدْرِي، وَتَضَنَّتْ عَلَيْهِ جَوَانِحِي.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 128

- (1) Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, VI, 48;
- (2) Ibn al-'Athir, *al-Nihayah*, (b.j.r);
- (3) al-Saduq, *al-'Amali*;
- (4) al-'Amidi, *Ghurar*, 329;
- (5) al-Karajiki, *Ma'dan*, 226;
- (6) al-Bayhaqi, *al-Mahasin*, 41;
- (7) al-Jahiz, *al-Hayawan*, II, 90.

1. `Ali ibn Muhammad was born in the village of Warzanin in the suburbs of Ray and belonged to the Azariqah sect of the Kharijites. He claimed to be a sayyid (descendant of the Holy Prophet) by showing himself the son of Muhammad ibn

Ahmad al-Mukhtafi ibn `Isa ibn Zayd ibn `Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn `Ali ibn Abi Talib, but the experts on lineality and biographers have not accepted his claim to being a sayyid and have given his father's name as Muhammad ibn `Abd ar-Rahim instead of Muhammad ibn Ahmad. The former was from the tribe of `Abd al-Qays and had been born of a Sindi maid-slave. `Ali ibn Muhammad rose as an insurgent in 255 A.H. in the reign of al-Muhtadi Billah and associated with him the people from the suburbs of Basrah on promise of money, wealth and freedom. He entered Basrah on the 17th Shuwwal, 255 A.H. killing and looting, and in only two days he put to death thirty thousand individuals, men, women and children, and displayed extreme oppression, bloodshed, savageness and ferocity. He dismantled houses, burnt mosques, and after continuous killing and devastation for fourteen years, was killed in the month of Safar, 270 A.H. in the reign of Muwaffaq Billah. Then people got rid of his devastating deeds.

Amir al-mu'minin's prophecy is one of those prophecies which throw light on his knowledge of the unknown. The details of his army given by Amir al-mu'minin namely that there would be neither neighing of horses nor rustling of weapons therein is a historical fact. The historian at-Tabari has written that when this man reached near al-Karkh (a sector of Baghdad) with the intention of insurrection, the people of that place welcomed him, and a man presented him a horse for which no rein could be found despite a search. At last he rode it using a rope for the rein. Similarly there were at that time only three swords in his force – one with himself, one with `Ali ibn Aban al-Muhallabi, and one with Muhammad ibn Salm, but later they collected some more weapons by marauding.

2. This prophecy of Amir al-mu'minin is about the attack of the Tartars (Mongols) who were inhabitants of the Mongolian desert in the north west of Turkistan. These semi-savage tribes lived by marauding, killing and devastating. They used to fight among themselves and attack neighbouring areas. Each tribe had a separate chief who was deemed responsible for their protection. Chingiz Khan (Temujin) who was one of the ruling chiefs of these tribes and was very brave and courageous had risen to organise all their divided tribes into one, and, despite their opposition he succeeded in overpowering them through his might and sagacity. Collecting a large number under his banner he rose in 606 A.H. like a torrent and went on dominating cities and ruining populations till he conquered the area upto North China.

When his authority was established he offered his terms of settlement to `Alau'd-Din Khwarazm Shah, ruler of the neighbouring country of Turkistan, and through a deputation concluded an agreement with him that the Tartar traders would be allowed to visit his country for trade and their life and property would not be subject to any harm. For some time they traded freely without fear but on one occasion `Alau'd-Din accused them of spying, seized their goods and had them killed by the Chief of Atrar. When Chingiz Khan learnt of the breach of the agreement and the killing of Tartar merchants his eyes cast forth flames and he began trembling with rage.

He sent word to `Alau'd-Din to return the goods of the Tartar merchants and to hand over to him the ruler of Atrar. `Alau'd-Din, who was mad with power and authority, did not pay any heed, and acting short-sightedly killed even the plenipotentiary of Chingiz Khan. Now Chingiz Khan lost all patience and his eyes filled with blood. He rose with his sword in hand, and the Tartar warriors leapt towards Bukhara on their speedy stallions. `Alau'd-Din came out with four hundred thousand combatants to face him but could not resist the incessant assaults of the Tartars, and having been vanquished only after a few attacks ran away to Nishapur across the river Jaxartes (Sihun). The Tartars smashed Bukhara and razed it to the ground. They pulled down schools and mosques, burning to ashes the houses and killing men and women without distinction. Next year they assaulted Samarqand and devastated it completely. After the flight of `Alau'd-Din, his son Jalalu'd-Din Khwarazm Shah had assumed the reins of government The Tartars chased him also, and for ten years he fled from one place to the other but did not fall in their hands. At last he crossed over the river out of the boundaries of his realm. During this time the Tartars did their utmost to ruin populated lands and to annihilate humanity. No city escaped their ruining and no populace could avoid their trampling. Wherever they went they upset the kingdom, overthrew governments, and in a short time established their authority over the northern portion of Asia. When Chingiz Khan died in 622 A.H. his own son Ogedei Khan succeeded him. He searched out Jalalu'd-Din in 628 A.H. and killed him. After him Mongka Khan, the son of the other son of Chingiz Khan, occupied the throne. After Mongka Khan, Qubilai Khan succeeded to a part of the country and the control of Asia fell to the share of his brother Hulagu Khan. On the division of the whole realm among the grandsons of Chingiz Khan, Hulagu Khan was thinking of conquering Muslims areas when the Hanafite of Khurasan in enmity with the Shafi'ite invited him to attack Khurasan. He therefore led an assault on Khurasan, and the Hanafite, thinking themselves to be safe from the Tartars, opened the city gates for them. But the Tartars did not make any distinction

between Hanafite and Shafi`ite and killed whoever fell to their hands. After killing most of its population they took it in occupation. These very differences between the Hanafite and the Shafi`ite opened for him the door of conquest upto Iraq. Consequently, after conquering Khurasan his courage increased and in 656 A.H. he marched on Baghdad with two hundred thousand Tartars. Al-Musta`sim Billah's army and the people of Baghdad jointly faced them, but it was not in their power to stop this torrent of calamity. The result was that the Tartars entered Baghdad on the day of `Ashura' carrying with them bloodshed and ruin. They remained busy in killing for forty days. Rivers of blood flowed in the streets and all the alleys were filled with dead bodies. Hundred of thousands of people were put to the sword while al-Musta`sim Billah was trampled to death under foot. Only those people who hid themselves in wells or underground places and hid from their sight could survive. This was the devastation of Baghdad which shook the `Abbasid Kingdom to its foundation, so that its flag could never fly thereafter.

Some historians have laid the blame of this ruin on Ibn al-`Alqami (Abu Talib, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Baghdadi), the minister of al-Musta`sim Billah, by holding that, moved by the general masses of the Shi`ahs and the ruin of al-Karkh sector (of Baghdad), he invited Hulagu Khan through the latter's minister, the great scholar Nasirud-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad at-Tusi, to march on Baghdad. Even if it be so, it is not possible to ignore the historical fact that before this the `Abbasid Caliph an-Nasir Lidini'llah had initiated the move for the attack on the Muslim areas. When the Khwarazm Shahs declined to acknowledge the authority of the Caliphate he had sent word to Chingiz Khan to march on Khwarazm, from which the Tartars had understood that there was no unity and co-operation among the Muslims. Thereafter the Hanafite had sent for Hulagu Khan to crush the Shafi`ite as a consequence of which the Tartars secured control over Khurasan, and prepared the way to march towards Baghdad. In these circumstances to hold only Ibn al-`Alqami responsible for the ruination of Baghdad and to ignore the move of an-Nasir Lidini'llah and the dispute between the Hanafite and the Shafi`ite would be covering up the facts, when in fact the cause for the ruin of Baghdad was this very conquest of Khurasan, whose real movers were the Hanafite inhabitants of the place. It was by this conquest that Hulagu Khan had the courage to march on the centre of Islam; otherwise it cannot have been the result of a single individual's message that he assaulted an old capital like Baghdad, the awe of whose power and grandeur was seated in the hearts of a large part of the world.

3. To know hidden things on a personal level is one thing, while to be gifted by Allah with knowledge of any matter and to convey it to others is different. The knowledge of the future which the prophets and vicegerents possess is gained by them through Allah's teaching and informing. Allah alone has knowledge of events which are to happen in the future. Of course, He passes this knowledge on to whoever He wills. Thus He says:

(He alone is) the "Knower of the unseen, neither doth He reveal His secrets unto any (one else) save unto that one of the Messengers whom He chooseth..." (Qur'an, 72:26-27)

In this way Amir al-mu'minin also received knowledge of the future through the instructions of the Prophet or inspiration from Allah, for which these words of Amir al-mu'minin stand evidence. Of course, sometimes it is not proper or expedient to disclose certain matters and they are allowed to remain under a veil. Then no one can be acquainted with them as Allah says: Verily, Allah is He with Whom is the knowledge of the Hour and He sendeth down the rain, and knoweth He what is in the wombs; and knoweth not any soul what he shall earn the morrow, and knoweth not any soul in what lands he shall die: Verily Allah is All-knowing, All-aware. (Qur'an, 31:34)