

Sermon 134: Allah has taken upon Himself

Delivered when Caliph `Umar ibn al-Khattab consulted 1 Amir al-mu'minin about himself, taking part in the march towards Rome (Byzantine Empire).

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

وقد شاوره عمر بن الخطاب في الخروج إلى غزوالروم

Allah has taken upon Himself for the followers of this religion the strengthening of boundaries and hiding of the secret places. Allah helped them when they were few and could not protect themselves. He is Living and will not die. If you will your self proceed towards the enemy and clash with them and fall into some trouble, there will be no place of refuge for the Muslims other than their remote cities, nor any place they would return to. Therefore, you should send there an experienced man and send with him people of good performance who are well-intentioned. If Allah grants you victory, then this is what you want. If it is otherwise, you would serve as a support for the people and a returning place for the Muslims.

وَقَدْ تَوَكَّلَ اللَّهُ لِأَهْلِ هَذَا الدِّينِ بِإِعْزَازِ الْحَوْزَةِ، وَسِتْرِ الْعَوْرَةِ، وَالَّذِي نَصَرَهُمْ وَهُمْ قَلِيلٌ لَا يَنْتَصِرُونَ، وَمَنْعَهُمْ وَهُمْ قَلِيلٌ لَا يَمْتَنِعُونَ، حَيٌّ لَا يَمُوتُ. إِنَّكَ مَتَى تَسِرْ إِلَى هَذَا الْعَدُوِّ بِنَفْسِكَ، فَتَلْقَهُمْ بِشَخْصِكَ فَتُنْكَبُ، لَا تَكُنْ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ كَانْفَةً دُونَ أَقْصَى بِلَادِهِمْ، وَلَيْسَ بَعْدَكَ مَرْجِعٌ يَرْجِعُونَ إِلَيْهِ، فَاْبَعَثْ إِلَيْهِمْ رَجُلًا مُحْرَبًا، وَاحْفَظْ مَعَهُ أَهْلَ الْبَلَاءِ وَالنَّصِيحَةِ، فَإِنَّ أَظْهَرَ اللَّهِ فَذَلِكَ مَا تُحِبُّ، وَإِنْ تَكُنِ الْآخِرَى، كُنْتَ رِدْءًا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَثَابَةً لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ.

Alternative Sources for Sermon 134

(1) Ibn al- 'Athir, *al-Nihayah*, IV, 250;

(2) Abu `Ubayd, *al-'Amwal*, 252.

1. About Amir al-mu'minin, the strange position is adopted that on the one hand, it is said that he was ignorant of practical politics and unacquainted with ways of administration from which it is intended that the revolts created by the Umayyad's lust for power should be shown to be the outcome of Amir al-mu'minin's weak administration. On the other hand, much is made of the various occasions when the then Caliphs consulted Amir al-mu'minin in important affairs of State in the matter of wars with unbelievers. The aim in this is not to exhibit his correctness of thinking and judgement or deep sagacity but to show that there was unity and concord between him and the Caliphs so that attention should not be paid to the fact that in some matters they also differed and that mutual clashes had also occurred. History shows that Amir al-mu'minin did have differences of principles with the Caliphs and did not approve every step of theirs. In the sermon of ash-Shiqshiqiyah he has expressed in loud words his difference of opinion and anger about each regime. Nevertheless, this difference does not mean that correct guidance should be withheld in collective Islamic problems. Again, Amir al-mu'minin's character was so high that no one could imagine that he would ever evade giving counsel which concerned the common weal, or would give such counsel which would damage public interests. That is why, despite differences of principle, he was consulted. This throws light on the greatness of his character and the correctness of his thinking and judgement. Similarly, it is a prominent trait of the Holy Prophet's character that despite rejecting his claim to prophethood the unbelievers acknowledged him the best trustee and could never doubt his trustworthiness. Rather, even during clashes of mutual opposition they entrusted to him their property without fear and never suspected that their property would be misappropriated. Similarly, Amir al-mu'minin was held to occupy so high a position of trust and confidence that friend and foe both trusted in the correctness of his counsel. So, just as the Prophet's conduct shows his height of trustworthiness, and just as it cannot be inferred from it that there was mutual accord between him and the unbelievers, because trust has its own place while the clash of Islam and unbelief has another, in the same way, despite having differences with the Caliphs, Amir al-mu'minin was regarded as the protector of national and community interests and as the guardian of Islam's wellbeing and prosperity. Thus when national interests were involved he was consulted and he tendered his unbiased advice raising himself above personal ends and keeping in view the Prophet's tradition to the effect that "He who is consulted is a trustee" never allowed any dishonesty or duplicity to interfere. When on the occasion of the battle of Palestine, the Caliph `Umar consulted him about his taking part in it himself, then, irrespective of whether or not his opinion would accord with `Umar's feelings, he kept in view Islam's prestige and existence and counselled him to stay in his place and to send to the battlefield such a man who should be experienced and wellversed in the art of fighting, because the going of an inexperienced man would have damaged the established prestige of Islam and the awe in which the Muslims were held which had existed from the Prophet's days would have vanished. In fact, in the Caliph `Umar's going there Amir al-mu'minin saw signs of defeat and vanquishment. He therefore found Islam's interest to lie in detaining him and indicated his view in the words that: "If you have to retreat from the battlefield, it would not be your personal defeat only, but the Muslims would lose heart by it and leave the battle-field and disperse here and there, because with the officer in command leaving the field the army too would lose ground. Furthermore, with the centre being without the Caliph there would be no hope of any further assistance from behind which could sustain courage of the combatants."

This is that counsel which is put forth as a proof of mutual accord although this advice was tendered in view of Islam's prestige and life which was dearer to Amir al-mu'minin than any other interest. No particular individual's life was dear to him for which he might have advised against participation in the battle.

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