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Letter 62: To the people of Egypt sent through Malik al-Ashtar when he was made the Governor of that place

ومن كتاب كتبه (عليه السلام)

إلى أهل مصر مع مالك الاشرى لما ولاه إمارتها

Now, Allah the Glorified, deputed Muhammad (may Allah bless him and his descendants) as a warner for all the worlds and a witness for all the prophets. When the Prophet expired, the Muslims quarrelled about power after him. By Allah, it never occurred to me, and I never imagined, that after the Prophet the Arabs would snatch away the caliphate from his Ahlul Bayt (the members of his house), nor that they would take it away from me after him, but I suddenly noticed people surrounding the man to swear him allegiance. 1

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ بَعَثَ مُحَمَّدًا (صلى الله عليه وآله) نَذِيرًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ،
وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ. فَلَمَّا مَضَى (صلى الله عليه وآله) تَنَازَعَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ الْأَمْرَ
مِنْ بَعْدِهِ، فَوَاللَّهِ مَا كَانَ يُلْقَى فِي رُوعِي، وَلَا يَخْطُرُ بِيَالِي، أَنَّ الْعَرَبَ تُزْعِجُ هَذَا
الْأَمْرَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ (صلى الله عليه وآله) عَنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ، وَلَا أَنَّهُمْ مَنَحُوهُ عَنِّي مِنْ
بَعْدِهِ! فَمَا رَاعَنِي إِلَّا انْتِيَالُ النَّاسِ عَلَيَّ فُلَانَ يُبَايِعُونَهُ،

I therefore withheld my hand till I saw that many people were reverting from Islam and trying to destroy the religion of Muhammad (may Allah bless him and his descendants). I then feared that if I did not protect Islam and its people and there occurred in it a breach or destruction, it would mean a greater blow to me than the loss of power over you which was, in any case, to last for a few days of which everything would pass away as the mirage passes away, or as the cloud scuds away. Therefore, in these happenings I rose till wrong was destroyed and disappeared, and religion attained peace and safety.

فَأَمْسَكْتُ يَدِي حَتَّى رَأَيْتُ رَاجِعَةَ النَّاسِ قَدْ رَجَعَتْ عَنِ الْأِسْلَامِ، يَدْعُونَ إِلَيَّ
مَحَقَّ دِينِ مُحَمَّدٍ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) فَخَشَيْتُ إِنْ لَمْ أَنْصُرِ الْأِسْلَامَ أَهْلُهُ أَنْ
أَرَى فِيهِ تَلْمَازًا أَوْ هَدْمًا، تَكُونُ الْمُصِيبَةُ بِهِ عَلَيَّ أَعْظَمَ مِنْ فَوْتٍ وَلَايَتِكُمْ الَّتِي إِنَّمَا
هِيَ مَتَاعٌ أَيَّامٌ قَلِيلٌ، يَزُولُ مِنْهَا مَا كَانَ، كَمَا يَزُولُ السَّرَابُ، أَوْ كَمَا يَتَقَشَّعُ
السَّحَابُ، فَنَهَضْتُ فِي تِلْكَ الْأَحْدَاثِ حَتَّى زَاخَ الْبَاطِلُ وَزَهَقَ، وَاطْمَأَنَّ الدِّينُ
وَتَنَهَّنَهُ.

A part of the same letter

ومن هذا الكتاب:

By Allah, if I had encountered them alone and they had been so numerous as to fill the earth to the brim, I would not have worried or become perplexed. I am clear in myself and possess conviction from Allah about their misguidance and my guidance. I am hopeful and expectant that I will meet Allah and get His good reward.

But I am worried that foolish and wicked people will control the affairs of the entire community, with the result that they will grab the funds of Allah as their own property and make His people slaves, 2 fight with the virtuous, and ally with the sinful. Indeed, there is among them he who drank (wine) unlawfully 3 and was whipped by way of punishment fixed by Islam, and there is he who did not accept Islam until he had secured financial gain through it. 4

If this had not been so I would not have insisted on gathering you, reprehending you, mobilizing you and urging you (for jihad) but if you refuse and show weakness I will leave you.

إِنِّي وَاللَّهِ لَوْ لَقَيْتُهُمْ وَاحِدًا وَهُمْ طِلَاعُ الْأَرْضِ كُلِّهَا مَا بَالَيْتُ وَلَا اسْتَوْحَشْتُ،

وَإِنِّي مِنْ ضَالِّهِمُ الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ وَالْهُدَى الَّذِي أَنَا عَلَيْهِ لَعَلِّي بَصِيرَةٌ مِنْ نَفْسِي
 وَيَقِينٍ مِنْ رَبِّي. وَإِنِّي إِلَى لِقَاءِ اللَّهِ لَمُشْتَاقٌ، وَلِحُسْنِ ثَوَابِهِ لَمُنْتَظِرٌ رَاجٍ، وَلَكِنِّي
 آسَى أَنْ يَلِيَ أَمْرَ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ سُفَهَاؤُهَا وَفُجَارُهَا، فَيَتَّخِذُوا مَالَ اللَّهِ دُولًا، وَعِبَادَهُ
 حَوْلًا، وَالصَّالِحِينَ حَرْبًا، وَالْفَاسِقِينَ حِزْبًا، فَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ الَّذِي قَدْ شَرِبَ فِيكُمْ
 الْحَرَامَ، وَجُلِدَ حَدًّا فِي الْأَسْلَامِ، وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ لَمْ يُسَلِّمْ حَتَّى رُضِخَتْ لَهُ عَلَى
 الْأَسْلَامِ الرِّضَائِخُ، فَلَوْلَا ذَلِكَ مَا أَكْثَرَتْ تَأْلِيْبِكُمْ وَتَأْنِيْبِكُمْ، وَجَمْعَكُمْ وَتَحْرِيطَكُمْ،
 وَلَتَرَكْتُكُمْ إِذْ أَبِيْتُمْ وَوَنَيْتُمْ.

Do you not see that the boundaries of your cities have diminished, your populated areas have been conquered, your possessions have been snatched away and your cities and lands have been attacked? May Allah have mercy on you, get up to fight your enemy and do not remain confined to the earth, otherwise you will face oppression and suffer ignominy and your fate will be the worst. The warrior should be wakeful because if he sleeps the enemy does not sleep; and that is an end to the matter.

أَلَا تَرَوْنَ إِلَىٰ أَطْرَافِكُمْ قَدْ انْتَقَصَتْ، وَإِلَىٰ أَمْصَارِكُمْ قَدْ افْتَتِحَتْ، وَإِلَىٰ مَمَالِكِكُمْ
 تُزَوَّى، وَإِلَىٰ بِلَادِكُمْ تُغْزَى! انْفِرُوا - رَحِمَكُمُ اللَّهُ - إِلَىٰ قِتَالِ عَدُوِّكُمْ، وَلَا تَتَّاقِلُوا إِلَىٰ
 الْأَرْضِ فَتُقْرُوا بِالْخُسْفِ، وَتَبُوءُوا بِالذُّلِّ، وَيَكُونَ نَصِيبُكُمْ الْأَخْسَ، وَإِنَّ أَخَا
 الْحَرْبِ الْأَرِقُّ، وَمَنْ نَامَ لَمْ يَنْمَ عَنْهُ، وَالسَّلَامُ.

1. The Prophet's declarations about Amir al-mu'minin that "This is my brother, my vicegerent and my caliph among you", and while returning from his farewell hajj at Ghadir Khum that "For whosoever I am the master, `Ali is his master" had settled the issue of his own replacement and succession after which there was no need at all for any new election, nor could it be imagined that the people of Medina would feel the need for an election. But some power-thirsty individuals so ignored these clear injunctions as if their ears had never been acquainted with them, and considered the election so necessary, that, leaving the burial rites of the Prophet, they assembled in the Saqifah of Banu Sa`idah and elected Abu Bakr as Caliph with a show of democracy. This was a very critical moment for Amir al-mu'minin. On one side some interested persons declared that he should take up arms and on the other hand he noticed that those Arabs who had accepted Islam by dint of its military strength were leaving it and Musaylimah ibn Thumamah al-Hanafi the liar (al-Kadhhab) and Tulayhah ibn Khuwaylid al-Asadi (the liar) were throwing tribe after tribe into misguidance. In these circumstances, if there had been a civil war and the Muslims had fought against the Muslims, the forces of heresy and hypocrisy would have joined together and swept Islam off the surface of the globe. Therefore, Amir al-mu'minin preferred to keep quiet rather than to fight, and, with the purpose of maintaining the solidarity of Islam, confined himself to protesting peacefully rather than taking up arms. This was because formal power was not so dear to him as the good and prosperity of the community. For stopping the machinations of the hypocrites and defeating the aims of the mischief-mongers there was no other course but that he should not fan the flames of war by giving up his own claim. This was such a big act for the

preservation of Islamic polity that it is acknowledged by all the sects of Islam.

2. This refers to the saying of the Holy Prophet about the children of Umayyah and the children of Abi al-`As ibn Umayyah (the grandfather of `Uthman ibn `Affan and the dynasty of Marwan's caliphs) as related by Abu Dharr al-Ghifari that the Holy Prophet said:

When the number of Banu (children of) Umayyah reaches forty men they will make Allah's people their slaves, grab Allah's funds as their own property and make the Book of Allah a cause of corruption. (al-Mustadrak, vol.4, p.479; Kanz al-`ummal, vol.11, p.149).

About the children of Abi al-`As it is related by Abu Dharr, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Ibn `Abbas, Abu Hurayrah and others that the Holy Prophet said:

When the number of Banu (children of) Abi al-`As reaches thirty men, they will grab the funds of Allah as their own property, make Allah's people their slaves and make the religion of Allah a cause of corruption. (al-Musnad, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, vol.3, p.80; al-Mustadrak, al-Hakim, vol.4, p.480; al-Matalib al-`aliyah, Ibn Hajar, vol.4, p.332; Majma` az-zawa'id, al-Haytami, vol.5, pp.241,243; Kanz al-`ummal, al-Muttaqi, vol.11, pp.148,149,351,354).

The history of Islam (after the death of the Holy Prophet) has enough evidence to prove this prophecy of the Holy Prophet; and the fear of Amir al-mu'minin for the Muslim community was based on this reason.

3. The man who drank wine was al-Walid ibn `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu`ayt. He was of the same mother as Caliph `Uthman and his Governor of Kufah. al-Walid on an occasion in a state of intoxication led the morning prayers in the Central mosque of Kufah with four units (raka`ah) instead of the usual two as prescribed by the Holy Prophet. The congregation, which consisted of several pious persons like Ibn Mas`ud, was much incensed and still more irritated when, finishing the four units, al-Walid said:

What a pleasant morning! I would like to extend the prayers further if you consent.

Repeated complaints had already been made to the Caliph against al-Walid on account of his debauchery, but as often dismissed. People now reproached `Uthman for not listening to their grievances, and favouring such a scoundrel. By chance they succeeded in taking off the signet ring from the hand of the Governor while he lay senseless from the effects of a debauch, and carried it off to Medina. Still the caliph was slow and hesitated to enforce punishment upon his Governor (of the same mother) ; giving cause to be himself reproachfully accused of ignoring the law; though at last he was persuaded to have al-Walid scourged with forty strokes. He was consequently deposed from his office. Sa'id ibn al-`As, a cousin of `Uthman was appointed to take his place, and this was a matter of great reproach against `Uthman. (Ansab al-ashraf, al-Baladhuri, vol.5, pp.33-35; al-Aghani; Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, vol.4, pp.174-187; al-Isti`ab, vol.4, pp.1554-1557; Usd al-ghabah, vol.5, pp.91-92; at-Tabari, vol.1, pp.2843-2850; Ibn al-Athir, vol.3, pp.105-107; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, vol.17, pp.227-245)

4. The man who accepted Islam after securing financial gain was Mu`awiyah who was adhering to Islam only for worldly benefits.

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