

Lesson 27: A Brief History of the Saqifah

Muslims maintain that without any doubt and in all certainty the Prophet of Islam (S) is without sin or error, and that his faultless speech is the same as reality and is the wish of Allah. If it were otherwise, they say, Allah could not have commanded unconditional obedience to him. So his command is Allah's command, and it is an absolute necessity to obey him.

What is more, we can see on the basis of the ayahs quoted below that the Prophet – may Allah bless and praise him – had the right of jurisdiction over the people, that his order took precedence over everyone else's idea or opinion, and that his commands on social or other matters had to be carried out:

“The Prophet has a greater claim on the believers than they have themselves.” (33: 6)

“It is not for any believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, to have a choice in the matter.” (33: 36)

An examination of this ayah and its explanation makes it clear that the decree of the Prophet in every matter, even in personal matters, is binding, since the ayah was revealed concerning an individual matter, viz. the marriage of Zayd and Zaynab. Zaynab was the daughter of the Prophet's uncle, and Zayd was a slave whom the Prophet freed.

The Prophet of Islam (S), so as to break the pre-Islamic custom whereby the noble and rich were not prepared to marry outside their own, ordered Zaynab to marry Zayd. The false pride and inappropriate arrogance which had been inherited from pre-Islamic times forbade her to take Zayd as a husband.

But this ayah makes it clear that even in personal matters the Prophet's command was to be obeyed, so Zaynab married him and was content. 1

“But no, by thy Lord! they will not believe till they make thee judge between them, then they shall find in themselves no impediment touching thy verdict, but shall surrender in full submission.” (4: 65)

Is the Prophet Subject to the Opinion of the Majority?

Some Sunnis say that in social matters the opinion of the majority is over-ruling, to the degree that the Prophet himself must obey.

A deeper look at the ayahs mentioned above would make it clear that this is invalid. Now we shall proceed to an investigation of their evidence and claims and then answer them.

Their evidence is ayah 159 of Surah 'Al Imran':

“It was by some mercy of Allah that thou wast gentle to them; hadst thou been harsh and hard of heart, they would have scattered from among thee. So pardon them, and pray forgiveness for them, and take counsel with them in the affair; and when thou art resolved put thy trust in Allah, surely Allah loves those who put their trust.” (3: 159)

The answer to this is that this ayah also gives clear evidence that the Prophet (S) is not subject to the opinion of the majority. In other words, the right of jurisdiction belongs to the Prophet even in social matters, and he has a duty, after consultation, to put his view into practice, not the opinion of others, since it says:

“Take counsel with them in the affair, and when thou art resolved, put thy trust in Allah.”

If it had been otherwise, and the view of others was to be acted upon. it should have said:

“When the opinion of people has been obtained on a matter, accept it and carry it out.”

But we see that the ayah was not revealed in this sense. What is more, there is evidence in history, the view of the Sunnis. For example, in the peace of Hdaybiyyah.

The Prophet of Islam (S) left Medina to visit the Ka'bah. Near Mecca, the representatives of the unbelievers of the Quraysh met with him and said that the Quraysh were not prepared to admit him into Mecca. He replied that he had not come for war, but only to visit the Ka'bah.

After much discussion, the Quraysh were prepared to make a peace treaty, and the Prophet, with some special conditions, agreed, although the Muslims were not happy with the agreement and wanted to enter Mecca that day.² The Prophet then told the Muslims; “I am the slave and Prophet of Allah . I will never turn away from the command of Allah, nor will He let me go.”³

Here, an honest reasonable question would be, what then is the meaning of the Prophet consulting with people at all?

His consultations were part of a policy both of respecting and showing the value of the views of the people, and of using reason and thought in the way of progress of Islam. Also, when faced with some

obstructions by some of the tribal leaders, consultations were held with them, because, by the value, which they gave to consultation, and by the fact that they saw themselves sharing in the work, they desisted from their destructiveness. However, in this kind of counsel meeting, the Prophet never subjected himself to the majority opinion, and, if he paid attention to the opinion of some person or group, it was, in fact, because that was also his own opinion.

Did Consultation Take Place after the Death of the Prophet?

We have seen and understood that it has been proved that the opinion of the Prophet was above the views of everyone, even the view of the majority, and that it was the sure view of the Prophet (S) that he selected Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) to be his successor on the day of Ghadir and informed the people of his decision.

So, consultations aimed at appointing a successor after the Prophet (S) are clearly against the wish of Allah and His Prophet, and are completely useless; however, abandoning this reality, we now want to ask whether after the Prophet (S) consultative meetings were held, and if so, whether the majority opinion was upheld.

To answer and explain the question, we shall take a look first of all at some history and the circumstances of the Saqifah of the Bani Sa'adah according to reliable historical documents.

A Brief History of Saqifah

When the Prophet (S) closed his loving eyes to the world, the Ansars, the original Medinese, gathered in a building called the Saqifah of the Bani Sa'adah, and pronounced that after the Prophet, government and walayat belonged to Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah. Sa'ad was ill, but was present in the meeting, and after praising Allah he said: "O Ansar! there is no group better than you in Islam.

For the Prophet (S) was thirteen years among the Quraysh, and he called them to abandon idols and their worship for the One God; but, apart from a few individuals, they did not believe in him and his ideas and make his religion grow. So Allah restored you to happiness put him and his religion in your hands, entrusted support for him and his religion to you. You have always been loyal to this agreement, till He chose to take him away. Now you should make every effort, for it is your special right."

The Ansar said that he had spoken well, and that he should take the government and succession into his own hands. But some said: "What if the Quraysh want to dispute the matter with us?"

"We shall tell them," said another group, "that they should choose a leader from themselves, and we shall choose a leader from among us."

"This would be the first blow to break Islam," said Sa'ad.

'Umar was informed. He sent for Abu Bakr, who was in the house of the Prophet (S) with 'Ali (a.s.), and who sent word that he was occupied. 'Umar sent another message, in which the news was that his presence was indispensable.

Abu Bakr left the presence of the beautiful body of the Prophet (S) which 'Ali was busy in preparing for the funeral. 'Umar said to him: "Do you not know that the Ansar are gathered in the Saqifah to choose Sa'ad for the Caliphate?"

So both of them hurried to the place. On the way they met Abu 'Ubaydah al- Jarrah, whom they took along with them. Then they reached the Saqifah, Abu Bakr raised up to address the crowd.

"Praise be to Allah, and blessings on his Prophet. Allah sent the Prophet to man so that they who worshipped many gods might worship the One God, they who suppose that their gods are healers that they are of benefit to them. And it was difficult for the Arabs to leave the religion of their fathers. Then Allah showed his preference for the Muhajrin (those Muslims from Mecca who migrated with the Prophet), and brought them faith in the religion of the Prophet (S). They bore the difficulties with this great man with forbearance, so they are more deserving after him in this matter. You, O Ansar, say that after you no one is to be more preferred in the religion, so after the muhajirin, no one has a higher degree than you. So we are the rulers, and you are the ministers and the counsellors We win not do anything without consulting you."

Habab ibn Mundhir stood up and said: "O Ansar, beware! Take the reins of government in your hands; for the people are under your protection, no one can quarrel with you. Do not fall out between yourselves, so that what you do is ruined. These people do not accept our authority, so we must have our own ruler, and they theirs."

"That can never be," said 'Umar. "The Arabs would never submit to your rule; they will not yield, for the Prophet was not from you."

Habab stood up again and said: "O Ansar! You must decide! Do not listen to this man and his friendliness. He wants to do completely away with your right. If they do not give up, you must throw them out of this town and take things over. I swear by Allah, you are the more deserving."

"May Allah kill you!" said 'Umar.

"May He kill you!" said Habab.

Abu 'Ubaydah stood up to come between them.

"O Ansar!" he cried, "you were the first group who gave support and believed, so you must not be the first to go astray."

Then Bashir ibn Sa'ad got up and said, "O Ansar, I swear by Allah that if we were the first in the jihad

against the polytheists, and had priority in the religion, it was only because we wanted nothing but the will of Allah.”

“Now!” cried Abu Bakr. “Do you wish to swear allegiance to both this 'Umar and this Abu 'Ubaydah al-Jarrah?”

“No!” they shouted. “We swear by Allah that you are the most deserving of the Muhajirin, and we are not on a par with you; so give your hands that we can swear allegiance to you.”

Then, as 'Umar and Abu 'Ubaydah wanted, they swore allegiance to Abu Bakr. Bashir ibn Sa'ad, from the Ansar and the tribe of Aws, the great Medma tribe, went before them and swore allegiance.

When the people of the tribe of Aws saw Bashir open the way and acknowledge the Quraysh to be more deserving than them, and the Khazraj, the other great tribe, wanted Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah as their leader, they spoke among themselves.

“By Allah, if the Khazraj take the reins of power in their hands, they will always have preference. Let us rise up and swear allegiance to Abu Bakr.”

Then 'Umar seized Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah by the collar and said to the people: “Kill him!”

And Sa'ad was ever more loyal to Abu Bakr.⁴

Now You Judge

With the evidence that we shall present to you now, it will be seen that the story of Saqifah was not only a consultation among the Muslims, but that it was a plot to usurp the right to the Caliphate of Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) may Allah bless him – and to put someone else in his place.

Firstly, while on his way to Saqifah, 'Umar sent word only to Abu Bakr and not to anyone else. And Abu Bakr who was in the house of the Prophet (S) with the great ones among the companions of the Prophet and with Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), did not tell anyone, forgot the commotion over the tragedy of the death of the Prophet (S), left the corpse of that great man and hurried to Saqifah. If, truly, a plan had not been arranged, why did Abu Bakr not tell 'Umar that he had to tell the Bani Hashim and the helpers of the Prophet, that at that time they should wait until the body of the Prophet was buried, and that afterwards they should proceed an together to the ascertaining of the successor to the Caliphate?

Is consultation – shura¹ – like this, that three people should come among one of the tribes of the town, and, with the opinion of these people being controlled by one man, by sweet words and threats and other means deceive them and create differences between them then by compulsion and bad words stop progress to their advantage and not let these people's trusted leader know, and then to kill anyone who is against them and say that he wanted to cause a disturbance among the people against the interests of the world of Islam, and on that pretext call for his execution or banishment?

In consultation over such a great and important matter, should not at least the great companions and the Bani Hashim in the forefront of whose ranks was Amir al-Mu'minin have been called'?

Secondly, Saqifah became like a football ground, involuntarily bringing shouts and cheers from the people.

After sweet words and self-advertisement, Abu Bakr said to the Ansar: "Swear allegiance to whomever you want - 'Umar or Abu 'Ubadah."

There was no place for questions. One of these two must be Khalifah, they who were following him. The Caliphate became like a ball, which they then passed to Abu Bakr and say, as long as you have it, what more do you want?

And the Sunnis call this childish ball game the meeting and consultation of the people!

Thirdly, 'Umar made dear that no consultation had taken place.

Some years after the proceedings of Saqifah, 'Umar said, at the time of his own Caliphate: "We have heard that one of you said that if 'Umar dies I shall swear allegiance to so-and-so. Someone said to him that the allegiance to Abu Bakr was without consultation and without reckoning.

"It is true that allegiance to Abu Bakr took place all at once without much thought or reckoning, but Allah protected us from mischief. However no-one should give you the example of Abu Bakr to follow."5

If there really had been a question of a consultation, and the great ones of the companions of the Prophet (S) could have voted in freedom, allegiance to Abu Bakr would not have been "all at once without much thought or reckoning." It would not in this way have become famous; there would have been no mischief or danger in it.

Fourthly, Umar said: "After the Prophet, 'Ali and Zubayr and their companions rose up against us, and assembled in Fatimah's house."6

We ask whether this clear opposition can be ignored, especially as it is acknowledged by 'Umar.

Fifthly, if the matter of the Caliphate must be resolved on the basis of consultation, the Prophet (S) would certainly before his death have explained, or at least implicated, the way it should be done. By the criterion of reason, would the Prophet explain some very abstruse command, but make no mention of such a great matter as this?

How was 'Ali's Right Usurped?

In all societies there are some people who wish to seize the reins of government by any possible means, and rule over the people.

They continue in their aims until such time as they manage to lay their hands on what they covet, although they disregard the commands of Allah and the Prophet. Anyone who looks into the history of the Caliphate after the Prophet of Islam (a.s.) will be able to find such people.

Now, those who gathered in Saqifah and struck a blow against Islam were from this group. So let us once again look at the reality of what happened during the illness and death of the Prophet.

1. The Troops of Usamah

In the last days of his life, on his sick bed, the Prophet (S) gave the command of the army to Usamah ibn Zayd who was a youth, but celebrated and worthy, to take the army towards Mu'tah, at the eastern limits of the Roman Empire of that time.

In his army there were both Muhajrin and Ansar, and in particular Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Abu 'Ubaydah al-Jarrah and others. The Prophet had laid much emphasis on the defence of this front, even though Usamah asked: "Please allow us to stay till Allah should favour you with recovery."

"Leave this town," the Prophet commanded, "and move off in the name of Allah."

"If I leave and dispatch the army and you are ill like this, I shall be anxious and ill at ease."

"Move off to victory and success."

"I am not happy to tell the expedition about your health."

"What I have commanded, do!" replied the Prophet, and fainted. When he recovered he said: "May Allah curse those who leave the army of Usamah and desert from it."⁷ But, in any case, Abu Bakr and 'Umar deserted from Usamah's troop, and resumed to Medina.

2. The Matter of the Pen and the Inkpot

In the last days of his life, on his sick bed, the Prophet (S) ordered that paper and ink be brought to him and he said that he wanted to write something down, so that the Ummah should not be lost after his death.

But some of those present said: "He is speaking in delirium."⁸

Ibn Abbas says that in the first years of 'Umar's Caliphate. He visited him 'Umar asked: "Does he ('Ali) still regard himself the Caliphate?" "Yes."

"Is he of the opinion that the Prophet made his Caliphate clear?" "Yes, and what is more clear is that I asked my father about this matter and he said that 'Ali was right."

"The Prophet wanted to specify his name towards the end of his life when he was ill, but I did not allow

him to do so.”⁹

It is clear from this sentence who was the person who, at that moment, had unjustly said that the Prophet was delirious.

Now, can it be said that 'Umar knew better than the Prophet what was to the advantage of the Islamic nation, that he should not allow the Prophet (S) to specify the name of 'Ali (a.s.)?

We can now bring this matter to an end by concluding that those who unjustly relied on plotting and deceit for the position of the Caliphate of the Prophet, were engaged in planning the seizure of the Caliphate from the time of the Prophet's death, if not before, and that it was from power-seeking and status-seeking motives.

This seeking of power motivated them to remove obstacles such as Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah who was against the Caliphate of Abu Bakr and did not swear allegiance to him, whereupon he was killed. They said the 'Jinn' killed him! Or Malik ibn Nuwayrah, a man of faith who was such that the Prophet rightly said of him that if anyone wanted to see one of the people of heaven he should look at Malik's face. Since he had heard from the Prophet (S) that the Caliphate belonged to the Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), when the Prophet died, and when he came to Medina and saw and heard that the Caliphate had been unjustly usurped, hastened to oppose it.

Khalid ibn Walid killed him and violated his honour. No punishment or penalty was meted out to him by the Khalifah.

Another evil work that was done in the way of consolidating this lust for power was the usurpation of Fadak.

Fadak was a district crowded with gardens and orchards and very fruitful. It was in the possession of the only daughter of the Prophet, Hazrat Fatimah – may Allah bless her always.

Abu Bakr seized it, and turned out Hazrat Fatimah's labourers out from it. Fatimah (a.s.) argued with Abu Bakr and won, and he give her the deed of ownership to the land. But 'Umar took that title-deed and tore it up without any reprimand from Abu Bakr¹⁰, hut this is matter to he treated separately, for Abu Bakr never replaced it with another document.

Thus, from what has been said, there can be no doubt that these were men with a lust for power, self-seekers, lovers of the world, who stooped at nothing to achieve their aims.

Questions

1. Why do Muslims believe that the holy Prophet is without sin and error?
2. Why are actions of the holy Prophet as God wills?

3. What does verse 6 ch. 33 say?
4. What does verse 36 ch. 33 say?
5. What does the explanation of verse 36 ch. 33 prove?
6. What does verse 65 ch. 4 say?
7. Is the holy Prophet subject to the opinions of the majority, if not why?
8. What does verse 159 ch. 3 say?
9. What kind of evidence does this verse provide?
10. What results does the author obtain from consultation mentioned in verse 159 ch. 3?
11. Does the peace treaty with Quraysh agree with the opinions of the majority?
12. If that peace treaty does not agree with the opinions of the majority then what is the meaning of consultation?
13. Did consultation take place after the death of the holy Prophet?
14. On what grounds are the decisions of the holy Prophet above other's opinions including that of the majority?
15. Why did Sa'd consider the Ansar as true supporters of Islam?
16. What right did Sa'd think the Ansars had?
17. What was the opinion of some others in case of dispute between Ansar and Quraysh?
18. Why did 'Umar urge Abu Bakr to join him and where did they go?
19. What did Abu Bakr say in his speech?
20. What reason did Abu Bakr provide in support of his group's rightfulness to Khilafat?
21. What did Habab Ibn Mundhir say in response to Abu Bakr?
22. What did 'Umar say in response to Habab?
23. What did Habab say again?
24. What did each of them say?
25. What did Abu 'Ubaydah say?

26. What did Bashir Ibn Sa'd say?
27. What did Abu Bakr say and propose?
28. What did 'Umar and Abu 'Ubaydah al-Jarrah say in response to Abu Bakr and what else did they do?
29. Who was the third person to support Abu Bakr?
30. Why is the outcome of the gathering at Saqifah not valid?
31. Who else should have been included in the gathering at Saqifah?
32. Who considers the happening at Saqifah as consulting?
33. Did 'Umar for his becoming successor to Abu Bakr follow the idea of consultation?
34. What are the implications of the statement of????
35. What are the legal effects of the gathering at the house of Sayyidah Fatimah according to 'Umar?
36. What does item 5th of the text suggest?
37. How was Imam Ali's rights usurped?
38. What kind of people is called power seekers?
39. What kind of instructions did the Prophet give to Usamah and his troops?
40. Who were ordered to join these troops?
41. What did the Prophet say about those who would not join the troops of Usama and ignore this order?
42. What are the facts of ink and paper?
43. Could the Prophet write the instructions that he wanted to write for the guidance of the Muslim and why not?
44. What are the facts in the conversation between 'Umar and Ibn Abbas?
45. Who spoiled the chance of the holy Prophet for writing instructions for the Muslims?
46. What did Imam Ali believe about Khilafat.
47. Was the establishment of Khilafat based on instructions of Qur'an and those of the Prophet or due to the zeal for power and position?
48. What did Khalid Ibn Walid do?

49. What happened to the garden of palm trees that belong to Fatimah Zahra'.

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1. Tafsir Nur ath- Thaḳalayn; vol. 4, p. 280.
 2. Sirah ibn Hisham, vol. 3, p. 3 21.
 3. Tarikh of Tabari, vol. 3, p. 1 546.
 4. Of course, there were many who did not swear allegiance to Abu Bakr the Bani Hashim, Abbas and his sons Habab ibn Mundhir, Salman al-Farsi Abu Dharr, Miqdad, 'Ammar, Zubayr, etc. (See Fusul al-Muhimmah, vol. 4, p. 1837).
 5. Tabari, vol. 4, p. 1820–1823
 6. Ibid.
 7. Ibn Abi'l Hadid Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, (in 4 volumes), vol. 2, p. 21.
 8. Tabari in vol. 4, p. 186. Sahih of Muslim in Kitab al-Wasiyyah relates this sentence to 'Umar.
 9. Ibn Abil Hadid, Op. cit. vol. 2, p. 563.
 10. Sirah al-Halabiyah, vol. 3, p. 400.

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