

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

From one of his statements

في ذم البصرة وأهلها [في بعض النسخ: في ذم أهل البصرة] بعد وقعة الجمل

Condemning the people of Baṣrah after the battle of Jamal [1]

كُنْتُمْ جُنْدَ الْمَرْأَةِ وَأَتْبَاعَ الْبَهِيمَةِ، رَغَا فَأَجَبْتُمْ، وَعَقِرَ فَهَرَبْتُمْ. أَخْلَاقُكُمْ دِقَاقٌ وَعَهْدُكُمْ شِقَاقٌ، وَدِينُكُمْ نِفَاقٌ، وَمَاؤُكُمْ زُعَاقٌ.

You were the army of a woman and in the command of a quadruped. When it bellowed you responded, and when it was wounded (hamstrung) you fled away. Your character is low and your pledge is broken. Your faith is hypocrisy. Your water is brackish.

وَالْمُقِيمِ بَيْنَ أَظْهَرِكُمْ مُرْتَهِنٌ بِذَنْبِهِ، وَالشَّيْءُ أَخْصَ عَنْكُمْ مُتَدَارِكٌ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ. كَأَنِّي بِمَسْجِدِكُمْ كَجَوْجُوِّ سَفِينَةٍ، قَدْ بَعَثَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا الْعَذَابَ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَمِنْ تَحْتِهَا، وَغَرِقَ مِنْ فِي ضِمْنِهَا.

He who stays with you is laden with sins, and he who forsakes you secures Allāh's mercy. As though I see your mosque prominent, resembling the prow of a boat, while Allāh has sent chastisement from above it and from below it, and everyone who is on it is drowned.

وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ: وَاللَّامُ اللَّهُ لَتَغْرَقَنَّ بِلَدَّتْكُمْ حَتَّى كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى مَسْجِدِهَا كَجَوْجُوِّ سَفِينَةٍ، أَوْ نَعَامَةٍ جَائِمَةٍ.

Another version: By Allāh, your city would certainly be drowned, so much so that as though I see its mosque like the prow of a boat or the breast of a sitting ostrich.

وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ: كَجَوْجُوِّ طَيْرٍ فِي لُجَّةِ بَحْرِ.

Another version: Like the bosom of a bird in deep sea. [2]

وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ أُخْرَى: بِلَادِكُمْ أَنْتَنَ بِلَادِ اللَّهِ تَرْبَةً، أَقْرَبُهَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ وَأَبْعَدُهَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَبِهَا تِسْعَةُ أَعْشَارِ الشَّرِّ، الْمُحْتَبَسُ فِيهَا بِذَنْبِهِ، وَالْخَارِجُ بَعْضُ اللَّهِ. كَأَنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى قَرْيَتِكُمْ هَذِهِ قَدْ طَبَقَهَا الْمَاءُ، حَتَّى مَا يَرَى مِنْهَا إِلَّا شَرْفَ الْمَسْجِدِ، كَأَنَّهُ جَوْجُوُّ طَيْرٍ فِي لُجَّةِ بَحْرِ.

Another version: Your city is the most stinking of all the cities as regards its clay, the nearest to water and remotest from the sky. It contains nine tenths of evil. He who enters it is surrounded with his sins and he who is out of it enjoys Allāh's

forgiveness. It seems as though I look at this habitation of yours that water has so engulfed it that nothing can be seen of it except the highest part of mosque appearing like the bosom of a bird in deep sea.

Notes:

[1] Ibn Maytham writes that when the Battle of Jamal ended, then on the third day after it Amīr al-Mu'minīn said the morning prayer in the central mosque of Baṣrah and after finishing it stood on the right side of the prayer place, reclining against the wall, and delivered this sermon wherein he described the lowliness of character of the people of Baṣrah and the weakness of their intellect, namely that they got enflamed at others' instigation without thinking, and making over their command to a woman, they followed the camel. They broke away after swearing allegiance, and exhibited their low character and evil nature by practising double facedness. In this sermon woman implies 'Ā'ishah and quadruped implies the camel (Jamal) after which this battle has been named the 'Battle of Jamal.'

This battle originated in this way that when although during the life time of 'Uthmān, 'Ā'ishah used to oppose him strongly and had left Madīnah for Mecca during the siege, and as such she had a share in his assassination—details of which would be stated at some suitable place—but when on her return from Mecca towards Madīnah she heard from 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Salamah that after 'Uthmān allegiance had been paid to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (as Caliph), she suddenly exclaimed, "If allegiance has been paid to 'Alī, I wish the sky had burst on the earth. Let me go back to Mecca." Consequently she decided to return to Mecca and began saying: "By Allāh, 'Uthmān has been killed unjustly, and by Allāh I shall certainly avenge his blood." On seeing this wide change in the state of affairs, 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Salamah said, "What are you saying as you yourself used to say 'Kill this Na'thal [Al-Fīrūzābādī has written in al-Qāmūs that the meanings of "Na'thal" are a male hyena and an old foolish man. In Madīnah there was a Jew by this name, and there was also a long-bearded man to whom 'Uthmān was likened.]; he had turned unbeliever'." Thereupon she replied, "Not only I, but everyone used to say so; but leave these things and listen what I am now saying, that is better and deserves more attention. It is so strange that first he was called upon to repent but before giving him an opportunity to do so he has been killed?" On this Ibn Abī Salamah recited the following verses addressing her:

You started it and now you are changing your position and raising storms of wind and rain.

You ordered for the killing of the caliph and told us that he had become an

unbeliever.

We admit that he has been killed by our hands, but under your orders and the real Killer in our view is the one who ordered it.

Nevertheless, neither the sky fell over us nor did the sun and moon fall into eclipse.

Certainly people have paid allegiance to one who can ward off the enemy with power and grandeur, does not allow swords to come near him, loosens the twist of the rope, that is, subdues the enemy.

He is always fully armed for combat and the loyal one is never like the traitor.

However, when she reached Mecca with a passion for vengeance, she began rousing the people to avenge 'Uthmān's blood by circulating stories of his having been victimised. The first to respond to this call was 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir al-Ḥaḍramī, who had been the governor of Mecca during 'Uthmān's reign, and with him Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ, and other Umayyads rose to support her. On the other side, Ṭalḥah ibn 'Ubayd Allāh and az-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām also reached Mecca from Madīnah. From Yemen, Ya'lā ibn Munabbih, who had been governor there during 'Uthmān's caliphate, and the former of governor of Baṣrah, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir ibn Kurayz, also arrived, and they joined together and began preparing their plans. Battle had been decided upon, but discussion was about the venue of confrontation. 'Ā'ishah's opinion was to make Madīnah the venue of the battle, but some people opposed this and held that it was difficult to deal with Madīnites, and that some other place should be chosen as the venue. At last, after much discussion it was decided to march towards Baṣrah, as there was no dearth of men to support their cause. Consequently on the strength of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir countless wealth, and the offer of six hundred thousand Dirhams and six hundred camels by Ya'lā ibn Munabbih, they assembled an army of three thousand and set off to Baṣrah.

On the way, a minor incident occurred on the way on account of which 'Ā'ishah refused to advance further. What happened was that at one place she heard the barking of dogs and enquired from the camel driver the name of the place. He replied that it was "Ḥaw'ab." On hearing this name, she recalled the Prophet's admonition when he had said to his wives, "I wish I could know at which of you the dogs of Ḥaw'ab would bark." So when she realised that she herself was the one meant in that warning, she got the camel seated by patting and expressed her intention to abandon the march. But the device of her companions saved the deteriorating situation. 'Abd Allāh ibn az-Zubayr swore to assure her that it was not Ḥaw'ab, Ṭalḥah seconded him, and for her further assurance also sent for fifty men

of the locality to stand witness to it. When all the people were on one side, what could a single woman do by opposing? Eventually they were successful and 'Ā'ishah resumed her forward march with the same enthusiasm.

When this army reached Baṣrah, people were first amazed to see the riding animal of 'Ā'ishah. Jāriyah ibn Qudāmah came forward and said, "O mother of the faithfuls, the assassination of 'Uthmān was one tragedy, but the greater tragedy is that you have come out on this accursed camel and ruined your honour and esteem. It is better that you should get back." But since neither the incident at Ḥaw'ab could deter her, nor could the Qur'ānic injunction: "Remain in your houses" (33:33) stop her, what effect could these voices produce? Consequently, she disregarded all this and continued onward.

When this army tried to enter the city, the Governor of Baṣrah 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf came forward with a detachment of troops to stop them, and when the two parties came face to face they drew their swords out of the sheaths and pounced upon each other. When a good number had been killed from either side, 'Ā'ishah intervened on the basis of her influence, and the two groups agreed that till the arrival of Amīr al-Mu'minīn the existing administration should remain unchanged and 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf should continue on his post. But only two days had elapsed when they made a night attack on 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, killed forty innocent persons, beat 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, plucked every hair of his beard, took him in their custody and imprisoned up. Then they attacked the public treasury, and while ransacking it, killed twenty persons on the spot, and beheaded fifty more after arresting them. Then they attacked the grain store, whereupon an elderly noble of Baṣrah, Ḥakīm ibn Jabalah, could not control himself and, reaching there with his men, said to 'Abd Allāh ibn az-Zubayr, "Spare some of this grain for the city's populace. After all there should be a limit to oppression. You have spread killing and destruction all round and put 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf in confinement. For Allāh's sake, keep off these ruining activities and release 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf. Is there no fear of Allāh in your hearts?" Ibn az-Zubayr said, "This is vengeance of 'Uthmān's blood." Ḥakīm ibn Jabalah retorted, "Were those who have been killed assassins of 'Uthmān? By Allāh, if I had supporters and comrades, I would have certainly avenged the blood of these Muslims whom you have killed without reason." Ibn az-Zubayr replied, "We shall not give anything out of this grain, nor will 'Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf be released." At last, the battle raged between these two parties, but how could a few individuals deal with such a big force? The result was that Ḥakīm ibn Jabalah, his son al-Ashraf ibn Ḥakīm ibn Jabalah, his brother ar-Ri'l ibn Jabalah and seventy persons of his tribe were killed. In short, killing and looting prevailed all

round. Neither anyone's life was secure nor was there any way to save one's honour or property.

When Amīr al-Mu'minīn was informed of the march to Baṣrah, he set out to stop it with a force which consisted of seventy of those who had taken part in the battle of Badr, and four hundred out of those companions who had the honour of being present at the Allegiance of Riḍwān (Divine Pleasure). When he stopped at the stage of Dhī Qār, he sent his son Ḥasan (a.s.) and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir to Kūfah to invite its people to jihād. Consequently, despite interference of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, seven thousand combatants from there joined Amīr al-Mu'minīn's army. From there he set out, organizing the troops under various commanders in pursuit of the enemy. Eye-witnesses state that when this force reached near Baṣrah, the first to appear was a contingent of the Anṣār, whose standard was borne by Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī.

After it appeared another contingent of 1000, whose commander was Khuzaymah ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī.

Then another contingent came in sight, its standard was borne by Abū Qatādah ibn al-Rabī'.

Then a crowd of a thousand old and young persons was seen. They had signs of prostration on their foreheads and veils of fear of Allāh on their face. It seemed as if they were standing before the Divine Glory on the Day of Judgement. Their Commander rode a dark horse, was dressed in white, his head wrapped in a black turban, and was reciting the Qur'ān loudly. This was 'Ammār ibn Yāsir.

Then another contingent appeared. Its standard was in the hand of Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah.

Then an army came to sight. Its leader wore white dress and had a black turban on his head. He was so handsome that every gaze circled around him in astonishment, as though eyes themselves were performing ṭawāf around his presence. This was 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās.

Then followed a contingent of the companions of the Prophet. Their standard bearer was Qutham ibn al-'Abbās.

Then, after the passing of a few contingents, a big crowd was seen, wherein there was such a large number of spears that they were overlapping and flags of numerous colours were flying. Among them a big and lofty standard was seen with distinctive position. Behind it was seen a rider guarded by sublimity and greatness. His sinews were well-developed and eyes were cast downwards. His awe and dignity was such that no one could look at him. This was the Ever-Victorious Lion of Allāh namely 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a.s.). On his right and left were Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (a.s.). In front of him Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah walked in slow steps carrying the banner of victory and glory, and on the back were the young men of Banū Hāshim, the people of Badr and 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib.

When this army reached the place az-Zāwiyah, Amīr al-Mu'minīn dismounted from the horse, and after performing four rak'at of prayer, placed his cheeks on the ground. When he lifted his head, the ground was drenched with tears, and the tongue was uttering these words: O Sustainer of earth, the heavens, and the high Firmament! This is Baṣrah. Fill our lap with its good and protect us from its evils.

Then proceeding forward, he got down in the battlefield of Jamal, where the enemy was already camping. First of all Amīr al-Mu'minīn did was to announce throughout his army: "Beware! Let no one raise a hand against anyone, nor take the initiative in fighting." Saying this he came in front of the opposite army and said to Ṭalḥah and az-Zubayr, "You ask 'Ā'ishah, by swearing in the name of Allāh and His Prophet, whether I am not free from the blame of 'Uthmān's blood, and whether I used the same words for him which you used to say; and whether I pressurised you for allegiance or you swore it of your own free will." Ṭalḥah got exasperated at these words but az-Zubayr relented. After this exchange, Amīr al-Mu'minīn turned back and, giving the Qur'ān to Muslim al-Mujāshī'ī, sent him towards them so that he might present to them the judgement of the Qur'ān. But people took both of them within their aim and covered this God-fearing man with their arrows. Then 'Ammār ibn Yāsir went to canvass and convince them, and caution them with the consequences of war but his words were also replied by arrows.

Till now Amīr al-Mu'minīn had not allowed an attack; as a result of which the enemy continued feeling encouraged and went on raining arrows constantly. At last, when several valiant men had fallen, consternation was created among Amīr al-Mu'minīn's ranks. Some people came with a few corpses before him and said, "O Commander of the faithful! You are not allowing us to fight, while they are covering us with arrows. How long can we let them make our bosoms the victim of their arrows, and remain hand folded at their excesses?"

At this moment the expression of Amīr al-Mu'minīn changed, but acting with restraint and endurance, came to the enemy in that very form, without armour or weapons, and cried out, "Where is az-Zubayr?" At first az-Zubayr hesitated to come forward, but when he noticed that Amīr al-Mu'minīn had no arms, he came out. Amīr al-Mu'minīn said to him, "O az-Zubayr, you must remember that one day the Prophet told you: 'O Zubayr! One day you shall fight 'Alī, and the wrong shall be from your side'." az-Zubayr replied: "Yes, he did say that." Then Amīr al-Mu'minīn enquired: "Why have you come then?" He replied: "It had slipped from my mind, and had I remembered it earlier I would never have come here." Amīr al-Mu'minīn said: "Well, now you have recollected it." He replied, "Yes." Saying this he went straight to 'Ā'ishah and told her that he was getting back. She asked him the reason and he replied, "'Alī has reminded me of something I had forgotten. I had gone astray, but now I have come on the right path, and would not fight 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib at any cost.'" 'Ā'ishah said: "You have caught fear of the swords of the sons of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib." He said: "No," and saying this he turned the reins of his horse. In any case, it is gratifying that some consideration was accorded to the Prophet's saying, for at Ḥaw'ab even after recollection of the Prophet's words, no more than transient effect was taken of it.

On returning after this conversation, Amīr al-Mu'minīn observed that the enemy had launched attacks upon the right and left flanks of his army. Noticing this Amīr al-Mu'minīn said, "Now the plea has been exhausted. Call my son Muḥammad." When he came Amīr al-Mu'minīn said, "My son, attack them now." Muḥammad bowed his head, and taking the standard, proceeded to the battlefield. But arrows were falling in such exuberance that he had to stop. When Amīr al-Mu'minīn saw this he called out at him, "Muḥammad, why don't you advance?" He said, "Father, in this shower of arrows there is no way to proceed. Grant but a brief pause until the force of the arrows subsides." Amīr al-Mu'minīn said, "No, thrust yourself in the arrows and spears and attack." Muḥammad ibn al-Hanafiyah advanced a little, but the archers so surrounded him that he had to hold his steps. On seeing this, a frown appeared on Amīr al-Mu'minīn's forehead; and advancing forward, he hit the sword's handle on the Muḥammad's back and said, "This is the effect of your mother's veins." Saying this, he took the standard from his hands and folding up his sleeves, made such an attack that a tumult was created in the enemy's ranks from one end to the other. To whichever row he turned, it became clear, and to whatever side he directed himself, bodies were seen falling and heads rolling beneath the hooves of horses. When, after convulsing the enemy ranks, he returned to his

position, he said to Muḥammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah, “Look, my son, battle is fought like this.” Saying this he gave the standard to him and said: “Now advance!” Muḥammad advanced towards the enemy with a contingent of anṣār. The enemy also came out moving, shaking their spears and levelling their lances. But the brave son of the valiant father convulsed rank after rank, while the other warriors also made the battlefield glory and left heaps of dead bodies.

From the other side also, there was full demonstration of spirit of sacrifice. Dead bodies were falling one over the other, but they continued sacrificing their lives devotedly around the camel like moths circling a flame. Particularly the condition of Banū Ḍabbah was that, although their hands were being severed from the elbows for holding the reins of the camel, and bosoms were being pierced, yet they had the following battle-song on their tongues:

To us, death is sweeter than honey. We are Banū Ḍabbah, the camel rearers.
We are the sons of death, when death comes. We announce the death of ‘Uthmān, with the edges of spears.

Give us back our chief, and there is an end to it.

The low character and ignorance of faith of these Banū Ḍabbah can be well understood from the one incident narrated by al-Madā’inī. He writes that in Baṣrah he saw a man with mutilated ear. He asked him its reason. The man said: “I was watching the sight of dead bodies in the battlefield of Jamal when I saw a wounded man who would at times raise his head and sometimes dashed it back on the ground. I approached near him, and the following two verses were on his lips: Our mother pushed us into the deep waters of death and did not turn back until we had fully drunk our fill.

By misfortune we obeyed Banū Taym, whose men are but slaves and whose women are slave-girls.

“I told him it was not the occasion to recite verses; he should rather remember Allāh and recite the kalimat ash-shahādah (verse of testimony). No sooner had I said this than he cast angry looks at me and, after uttering a severe abuse, said, ‘You are asking me to recite kalimat ash-shahādah, get frightened at the last moment, and now show impatience?’ I was greatly astonished to hear this and decided to return without saying anything further. When he saw me returning, he said, ‘Wait; for your sake I am prepared to recite, but teach me.’ I drew close to teach him the kalimah, whereupon he said: ‘Come closer.’ When I got closer, he caught my ear with his teeth and did not leave it till he tore it from the root. I thought: what is the use of striking a dying man? And was about to get back, abusing and cursing him, when

he said: 'Listen to one more thing.' I said: 'Tell it as well, so that no regret may remain with you.' He said: 'When you go to your mother and she asks who cut off your ear, tell her that it was 'Amr ibn Ahlab aḍ-Ḍabbī, who had been deceived by a woman aspiring to become Amīr al-Mu'minīn.'"

However, when the dazzling lightning of swords finished the lives of thousands of persons, and hundreds of Banū Azd and Banū Ḍabbah were killed for holding the rein of the camel, Amīr al-Mu'minīn ordered, "Hamstring the camel for it is Satan." Saying this, he made such a fierce attack that the cries of 'Peace' and 'Protection' rose from all round. When he reached near the camel, he ordered al-Ashtar an-Nakha'ī: "What are you looking at? Hamstring it." Thereupon al-Ashtar struck such a powerful blow that the camel collapsed upon its bosom, groaning loudly. No sooner than the camel fallen than panic spread throughout the opposing army, and the howdah of 'Ā'ishah was left lonely and unguarded. The companions of Amīr al-Mu'minīn took control of the howdah, and under orders of Amīr al-Mu'minīn, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr escorted 'Ā'ishah to the house of Ṣafiyyah bint al-Ḥārith.

This encounter commenced on the 10th of Jumādā ath-Thānīyah, 36 A.H., at the time of zuhr and came to an end the same evening. In it, from Amīr al-Mu'minīn's army of twenty two thousand, one thousand and seventy, or according to another report five hundred persons, were killed as martyrs; while from 'Ā'ishah's army of thirty thousand, seventeen thousand persons were killed, while according to another report the number reached twenty thousand. Thus the Prophet's saying, "That people who assigned their affairs (of state) to a woman would never prosper" was fully corroborated. (Kitāb al-Imāmah wa as-Siyāsah; Murūj adh-Dhahab; al-'Iqd al-Farīd; Tārīkh aṭ-Ṭabarī)

[2] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd has written that as prophesied by Amīr al-Mu'minīn, Baṣrah was flooded twice: once during the period of al-Qādir Billāh and once during the reign of al-Qā'im bi-Amrillāh. The state of flooding was just this that while the whole city was under water but the top ends of the mosque were seen about the surface of the water and looked like a bird sitting on the side of its bosom.