

وَمِنْ كَلَامٍ لَهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ

From one of his statements

فِي مَعْلَمَانِي قَتَلْتُ عِثْمَانَ

Disclosing real facts about assassination of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān [1] Amīr al-Mu'minīn said:

وَهُوَ حُكْمٌ لَهُ عَلَى عِثْمَانَ وَعَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى النَّاسِ بِمَا فَعَلُوا وَبِرَاءةٍ لَهُ مِنْ دَمِهِ

لَوْ أَمَرْتُ بِهِ لَكُنْتُ قَاتِلًا، أَوْ نَهَيْتُ عَنْهُ لَكُنْتُ نَاصِرًا، غَيْرَ أَنَّ مَنْ نَصَرَهُ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يَقُولَ: خَذَلَهُ مِنْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ، وَمَنْ خَذَلَهُ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يَقُولَ: نَصَرَهُ مِنْ هُوَ خَيْرٌ مِنِّي.

If I had ordered his assassination I should have been his killer, but if I had refrained others from killing him I would have been his helper. The position was that he who helped him cannot now say that he is better than the one who deserted him while he who deserted him cannot say that he is better than the one who helped him.

وَأَنَا جَامِعٌ لَكُمْ أَمَلَرُهُ، اسَلَّمْتُ أَثَرَ فَأَسَاءَ الْآثَرَةَ وَجَزَعْتُكُمْ فَأَسَأْتُمْ الْجَزَعَ، وَلِلَّهِ حُكْمٌ وَقَعَ فِي الْمُسْلِمَاتِ أَثَرٌ وَالْجَزَعُ.

I am putting before you his case. He appropriated (wealth) and did it badly. You protested against it and committed excess therein. With Allāh lies the real verdict between the appropriator and the protester.

Notes:

[1] 'Uthmān was the first Umayyad caliph in Islāmic history. He ascended the Caliphate on the 1st Muḥarram, 24 A.H. at the age of seventy and, after having wielded full control and authority over the affairs of the Muslims for twelve years, was killed at their hands on the 18th Dhū al-Ḥijjah 35 A.H. and buried at Ḥashsh Kawkab.

This fact cannot be denied that 'Uthmān's killing was the result of his weaknesses and the misdeeds of his officers. Otherwise, there is no reason that Muslims should have unanimously agreed on killing him, while no one, except a few persons of his house, stood up to support and defend him. Muslims would have certainly given consideration to his age, seniority, prestige and distinction of companionship of the

Prophet; but his ways and deeds had so marred the atmosphere that no one seemed prepared to sympathize and side with him.

The oppression and excesses perpetrated on high ranking companions of the Prophet had roused a wave of grief and anger among the Arab tribes. Everyone was infuriated and looked at his haughtiness and wrong doings with disdainful eyes.

Thus, because of the humiliation, mistreatment, and exile of Abū Dharr, Banū Ghifār and their allied tribes were enraged; because of the merciless beating of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd, Banū Hudhayl and their allies from Banū Zuhrah were angered; because of the breaking of the ribs of ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, Banū Makhzūm and their allied tribes were incensed; and because of the arrangements made for the killing of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, a storm of anger was raging in the hearts of Banū Taym.

The Muslims of other cities were also brimful of complaints at the hands of his officers, who, under intoxication of wealth and the effects of luxury, did whatever they wished and crushed whomever they wanted. They had no fear of punishment from the centre nor apprehension of any enquiry. People were fluttering to get out of their talons of oppression, but no one was ready to listen to their cries of pain and restlessness. Feelings of hatred were rising but no care was taken to put them down.

The companions of the Prophet were also sick of him, as they saw that peace was destroyed, administration was topsy-turvy, and Islām’s features were being metamorphosed. The poor and the starving were craving for dried crusts of bread, while Banū Umayyah were rolling in wealth. The Caliphate had become a handle for belly-filling and a means of amassing wealth. Consequently, they too did not lag behind in preparing the ground for killing him. Indeed, it was in response to their letters and messages that people from Kūfah, Baṣrah, and Egypt had gathered in Madīnah.

Observing this behaviour of the people of Madīnah, ‘Uthmān wrote to Mu‘āwiyah: So now, certainly the people of al-Madīnah have turned heretics, turned away from obedience, and broken the (Oath of) allegiance. So you send to me the warriors of Syria on brisk and sturdy horses.

The policy of action adopted by Mu‘āwiyah on receipt of this letter also throws light

on the condition of the companions. Historian aṭ-Ṭabarī writes after this: When the letter reached Mu‘āwiyah, he pondered over it and considered it bad to openly oppose the companions of the Prophet, since he was aware that they were united in their opposition. (Ṭabarī, Vol. 3, p. 402)

In view of these circumstances, to regard the killing of ‘Uthmān as a consequence of timely enthusiasm temporary feelings, and to hurl it at some insurgents, is to veil the fact; since all the factors of his opposition existed within Madīnah itself. Those coming from without had collected in response to the call of its people, seeking redress of their grievances. Their aim was only improvement of the position, not killing or bloodshed. If their complaints had been heard, then occasion for this bloodshed would not have arisen.

What happened was that when, having been disgusted with the oppression and excesses of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa‘d ibn Abī Sarḥ, who was foster-brother of ‘Uthmān, the people of Egypt proceeded towards Madīnah and camped in the valley of Dhī Khashab near the city (Dhī Khashab is a valley situated one night’s journey from Madīnah). They sent a man with a letter to ‘Uthmān and demanded that oppression should be stopped, the existing ways should be changed, and repentance should be offered for the future. But instead of giving a reply, ‘Uthmān got this man turned out of his house and did not regard their demands worthy of attention. On this, these people entered the city to raise their voice against this pride and haughtiness, and complained to the people of this behaviour besides other excesses.

On the other side, many people from Kūfah and Baṣrah had also arrived in Madīnah with their own complaints and they, after joining these ones, proceeded forward with the backing of the people of Madīnah and confined ‘Uthmān within his house; although there was no restriction on his going and coming to the mosque. Yet, in the very first Friday sermon he delivered thereafter, he severely rebuked these people and even held them accursed, whereupon people got infuriated and threw pebbles at him, as a result of which he lost control and fell from the pulpit. After a few days, his coming and going to the Mosque was also banned.

When ‘Uthmān saw matters deteriorating to this extent, he implored Amīr al-Mu‘minīn very submissively to find some way for his rescue and to disperse the people in whatever way he could. Amīr al-Mu‘minīn said, “On what terms can I ask them to leave, when their demands are justified?” ‘Uthmān said, “I authorise you in this matter. Whatever terms you would settle with them I would be bound by them.” So Amīr al-Mu‘minīn went and met the Egyptians and talked to them. They

consented to get back on the condition that all the tyrannies should be wiped off and Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr made governor by removing Ibn Abī Sarḥ. Amīr al-Mu'minīn came back and put their demand before 'Uthmān, who accepted it without any hesitation. He stated, however, that to get over these excesses, time was required. Amīr al-Mu'minīn pointed out that for matters concerning Madīnah delay had no sense. However, for other places, so much time could be allowed that the Caliph's message could reach them. 'Uthmān insisted that for Madīnah also three days were needed. After discussion with the Egyptians, Amīr al-Mu'minīn agreed to it also and took all the responsibility thereof upon himself. Then the people dispersed at his suggestion. Some of them went to Egypt with Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, while some went to the valley of Dhī Khashab, and stayed there and this whole matter ended.

On the second day of this event, Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam said to 'Uthmān: "It is good that these people have gone, but to stop people coming from other cities you should issue a statement so that they should not come this way and sit quiet at their places. That statement should be that some people collected in Madīnah on hearing some irresponsible talk but when they came to know that whatever they heard was wrong they were satisfied and have gone back." 'Uthmān did not want to speak such a clear lie, but Marwān canvassed him that he agreed. Thus, while delivering a sermon in the Prophet's Mosque, he said: These Egyptians had received some news about their Caliph; and when satisfied that they were all baseless and wrong, they went back to their cities.

No sooner he said this, than there was great hue and cry in the Mosque, and people began to shout to 'Uthmān: "O 'Uthmān! Offer repentance, fear Allāh; what is this lie you are uttering?" 'Uthmān was stunned by this commotion and had to offer repentance. Consequently, he turned to the Ka'bah, moaned in the audience of Allāh, and returned to his house.

Probably after this very event Amīr al-Mu'minīn advised 'Uthmān that: "You should openly offer repentance about your past misdeeds so that these uprisings should subside for good; otherwise, if tomorrow people of some other place come, you will again cling to my neck to rid you of them." Consequently, he delivered a speech in the Prophet's Mosque wherein, admitting his mistakes, he offered repentance and swore to remain careful in future. He told the people that when he alighted from the pulpit, their representatives should meet him, and he would remove their grievances and fulfil their demands. On this, people acclaimed this action of his,

and washed away their ill-feelings with tears to a great extent.

When he reached his house after finishing from here, Marwān sought permission to say something, but ‘Uthmān’s wife Nā’ilah bint Farāfiṣah intervened. Turning to Marwān, she said, “For Allāh’s sake, you keep quiet. You would say only such a thing as would bring but death to him.” Marwān took it ill and retorted, “You have no right to interfere in these matters. You are the daughter of that very person who did not know till his death how to perform ablution.” Nā’ilah replied with fury, “You are wrong, and are laying a false blame. Before uttering anything about my father you should have cast a glance on the features of your father. But for the consideration of that old man I would have spoken things at which people would have shuddered but would have confirmed every such word.”

When ‘Uthmān saw the conversation getting prolonged, he stopped them and asked Marwān to tell him what he wished. Marwān said, “What is it you have said in the Mosque, and what repentance you have offered? In my view, sticking to the sin was a thousand times better than this repentance, because however much the sins may multiply, there is always scope for repentance; but repentance by force is no repentance. You have said what you have said, but now see the consequences of this open announcement: that crowds of people are at your door. Now go forward and fulfil their demands.” ‘Uthmān then said, “Well, I have said what I have said; now you deal with these people. It is not in my power to deal with them.”

Consequently, finding out his implied consent, Marwān came out and addressing the people spoke out, “Why have you assembled here? Do you intend to attack or to ransack? Remember, you cannot easily snatch away power from our hands, take out the idea from your hearts that you would subdue us. We are not to be subdued by anyone. Begone from here. Allāh may disgrace and dishonour you.”

When people noticed this changed countenance and altered picture, they rose from there full of anger and rage and went straight to Amīr al-Mu’minīn and related to him the whole story. On hearing it, Amīr al-Mu’minīn was infuriated and immediately went to ‘Uthmān and said to him: “Good heavens! How badly you have behaved with the Muslims. You have forsaken faith for the sake of a faithless and characterless man and have lost all wit. At least you should have regard and consideration for your own promise. What is this, that at Marwān’s betokening you have set off with folded eyes? Remember, he will throw you in such a dark well that you will never be able to come out of it. You have become the carrier animal of Marwān, so that he can ride on you howsoever he desires and put you on whatever

wrong way he wishes. In future I shall never intervene in your affair nor tell people anything. Now you should manage your own affairs.”

Saying all this, Amīr al-Mu'minīn returned, and Nā'ilah got her opportunity. She said to 'Uthmān, “Did I not tell you to get rid of Marwān, otherwise he would put such a stain on you that it would not be removed despite all effort. Well, what is the good in following the words of one who is without any respect among the people and low before their eyes. Make 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib agree; otherwise remember that restoring the disturbed state of affairs is neither within your power nor in that of Marwān.”

'Uthmān was impressed by this and sent man after Amīr al-Mu'minīn, but he refused to meet him. There was no siege around 'Uthmān, but shame deterred him. With what face could he come out of the house? But there was no way without coming out. Consequently, he came out quietly in the gloom of night and, reaching Amīr al-Mu'minīn's place, he moaned his helplessness and loneliness, offered excuses, and also assured him of keeping promises. But Amīr al-Mu'minīn said, “You make a promise in the Prophet's Mosque while standing upon the Prophet's pulpit before all the people, but it is fulfilled in this way that when people go to you they are rebuked and even abuses are hurled at them. When this is the state of your undertakings, which the world has seen, then how and on what ground can I trust any word of yours in future? Do not have any expectation from me now. I am not prepared to accept any responsibility on your behalf. The tracks are open before you. Adopt whichever way you like and tread whatever track you choose.”

After this talk 'Uthmān came back and began blaming Amīr al-Mu'minīn in retort to the effect that all the disturbances were rising at his instance and that he was not doing anything despite being able to do everything.

On this side, the result of repentance was as it was. Now let us see the other side. When, after crossing the border of Ḥijāz, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr reached the place Aylah on the coast of the Red Sea, people caught sight of a camel rider who was making his camel run so fast as though the enemy was chasing him. These people had some misgivings about him and therefore called him and enquired who he was. He said he was the slave of 'Uthmān. They enquired wherefor he was bound. He said Egypt. They enquired to whom he was going. He replied to the Governor of Egypt. People said that the Governor of Egypt was with them. To whom, then, was he going? He said he was to go to Ibn Abī Sarḥ. People asked him if any letter was with him. He denied. They asked for what purpose he was going. He said he did not know that. One of these people thought that his clothes

should be searched. So the search was made, but nothing was found on him. Kinānah ibn Bishr al-Tujībī said, “See his waterskin.” People said, “Leave him, how can there be a letter in water!” Kinānah said, “You do not know what cunning these people play.” Consequently, the waterskin was opened and seen. There was a lead pipe in it wherein was a letter. When it was opened and read, the Caliph’s order in it was that “When Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr and his party reaches you, then from among them kill so-and-so, cut off the hands of so-and-so, and put so-and-so in jail, and you remain on your post.” On reading this all were stunned and thus began to look at one another in astonishment.

A Persian hemistich says: Mind was just burst in astonishment as to what wonder it was!

Now proceeding forward was riding into the mouth of death; consequently, they returned to Madīnah taking the slave with them. Reaching there, they placed that letter before all the companions of the Prophet. Whoever heard this incident remained stunned with astonishment, and there was no one who was not abusing ‘Uthmān. Afterwards a few companions went to ‘Uthmān along with these people, and asked whose seal was there on this letter. He replied that it was his own. They enquired whose writing it was. He said it was his secretary’s. They enquired whose slave was that man. He replied that it was his. They enquired whose riding beast it was. He replied that it was that of the Government. They enquired who had sent it. He said he had no knowledge of it. People then said, “Good heavens! Everything is yours, but you do not know who had sent it! If you are so helpless, you leave this Caliphate and get off from it so that such a man comes who can administer the affairs of the Muslims.” He replied, “It is not possible that I should put off the dress of Caliphate which Allāh has put on me. Of course, I would offer repentance.” The people said, “Why should you speak of repentance which has already been flouted on the day when Marwān was representing you on your door, and whatever wanted has been made up by this letter. Now we are not going to be duped into these bluffs. Leave the Caliphate; and if our brethren stand in our way we will hold them up; but if they prepare for fighting we too will fight. Neither our hands are stiff nor our swords blunt. If you regard all Muslims equally and uphold justice hand over Marwān to us to enable us to enquire from him on whose strength and support he wanted to play with the precious lives of Muslims by writing this letter.” But he rejected this demand and refused to hand over Marwān to them, whereupon people said that the letter had indeed been written at his behest.

However, improving conditions again deteriorated, and they ought to have

deteriorated because despite lapse of the required time everything was just as it had been and not a jot of difference had occurred. Consequently, the people who had stayed behind in the valley of Dhī Khashab to watch the result of repentance again advanced like flood and spread over the streets of Madīnah, and closing the borders from every side, surrounded his house.

During these days of siege, a companion of the Prophet, Niyār ibn 'Iyāḍ, desired to talk to 'Uthmān, went to his house and called him. When he peeped out from the above, he said, "O 'Uthmān, for Allāh's sake give up this Caliphate and save Muslims from this bloodshed." While he was just conversing, one of 'Uthmān's men aimed at him with an arrow and killed him, whereupon people were infuriated and shouted that Niyār's killer should be handed over to them. 'Uthmān said it was not possible that he would hand over his own supporter to them.

This stubbornness worked like fan on fire, and in the height of fury people set fire to his door and began advancing for entering, when Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣ, and al-Mughīrah ibn al-Akhnas, together with their contingents, pounced upon the besiegers, and killing and bloodshed started at his door. People wanted to enter the house but they were being pushed back. In the meanwhile, 'Amr ibn Ḥazm al-Anṣārī, whose house was adjacent to that of 'Uthmān, opened his door and shouted for advancing from that side. Thus, through this house, the besiegers climbed on the roof of 'Uthmān's house and descending down from there, drew their swords. Only a few scuffles had taken place when, except people of 'Uthmān's house, his well-wishers, and Banū Umayyah ran away in the streets of Madīnah, and a few hid themselves in the house of Umm Ḥabībah bint Abī Sufyān (Mu'āwiyah's sister). The rest were killed with 'Uthmān, defending him to the last. (aṭ-Ṭabaqāt, Ibn Sa'd, vol. 3, part 1, pp. 50-58; aṭ-Ṭabari, vol. I, pp. 2998—3025; al-Kāmil, Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 3, pp. 167—180; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, vol. 2, pp. 144—161).

At his killing, several poets wrote elegies. That a couplet from the elegy by Abū Hurayrah is presented:

Today people have only one grief, but I have two griefs: the loss of my money bag and the killing of 'Uthmān.

After observing these events, the stand of Amīr al-Mu'minīn becomes clear, namely that he was neither supporting the group that was instigating at 'Uthmān's killing, nor can be included in those who stood for his support and defence. Indeed, as long as the circumstances allowed, he advised them regarding ways of his salvation; but

when he saw that what was said was not acted upon, he kept himself aloof.

When both the parties are looked at, then among the people who had raised their hands off from 'Uthmān's support are seen 'Ā'ishah, and according to the popular versions (which is not right) the then living persons out of the ten Preinformed ones (who had been preinformed in this world by the Prophet for their being admitted in Paradise), out of those who took part in the consultative committee (formed for 'Uthmān's selection for caliphate), the Anṣār, original Muhājirūn, people who took part in the battle of Badr, and other conspicuous and dignified individuals; while on the side (of 'Uthmān) are seen only a few slaves of the Caliph and a few individuals from Banū Umayyah. If people like Marwān and Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ cannot be given precedence over the original Muhājirūn, then their actions too cannot be given precedence over the actions of the latter. Again, if *ijmā'* (consensus of opinion) is not meant for particular occasions only, then it would be difficult to question this overwhelming unanimity of the companions.