

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام) في معنى قتل عثمان [و هو حكم له على عثمان و على الناس بما فعلوا و براءة له من دمه]

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

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. وَأَنَا جَامِعٌ لَكُمْ أَمْرَهُ، اسْتَأْثَرَ فَأَسَاءَ الْآثَرَةَ وَجَزَعْتُمْ فَأَسَأْتُمْ الْجَزَعَ وَلِلَّهِ حُكْمٌ وَقَعَ فِي الْمُسْتَأْثَرِ وَالْجَاذِعِ.

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. 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.

Footnote :

1. ‘Uthmān is the first Umayyad Caliph of Islam who ascended the Caliphate on the 1st Muharram, 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 Dhi’l-hijjah, 35 A.H. and buried at Hashsh Kawkab.

This fact cannot be denied that ‘Uthmān’s killing was the result of his weaknesses and the black deeds 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, due to Abu Dharr’s disgrace, dishonour and extermination of Banu Ghifar and their associate tribes; due to ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ud’s merciless beating Banu Hudhayl and their associates; due to breaking of the ribs of ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, Banu Makhzum and their associates Banu Zuhrah; and due to the plot for the killing of Muḥammad ibn Abi Bakr, Banu Taym all had a storm of rage in their hearts. 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 Islam's features were being metamorphosed. The poor and the starving were craving for dried crusts while Banu 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. Rather, it was at their letters and messages that people from Kūfah, Baṣrah and Egypt had collected in Medina. Observing this behaviour of the people of Medina, 'Uthmān wrote to Mu'āwiyah: So now, certainly the people of Medina have turned heretics, have turned faith against 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-Ṭabari 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 of their unanimity.

In view of these circumstances to regard the killing of 'Uthmān as a consequence of timely enthusiasm and temporary feelings and to hurl it at some insurgents is to veil the fact, since all the factors of his opposition existed within Medina itself, while those coming from without had collected for seeking redress of their grievances at their call. 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 'Abdullāh ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarḥ who was foster brother of 'Uthmān the people of Egypt proceeded towards Medina and camped in the valley of Dhākhushub near the city. 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 the house and did not regard their demands worth 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 Kufah and Basrah had also arrived with their complaints and they, after joining these ones, proceeded forward with the backing of the people of Medina and confined 'Uthmān within his house, although there was no restriction on his going and coming to the mosque. But in his sermon on the very first Friday 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 Abi Bakr made governor by removing Ibn Abi Sarḥ. Amīr al-mu'minīn came back and put their demand before 'Uthmān who accepted it without any hesitation and said that to get over these excesses time was required. Amīr al-mu'minīn pointed out that for matters concerning Medina 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 Medina 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 they dispersed at his suggestion. Some of them went to Egypt with Muḥammad ibn Abi Bakr while some went to the valley of Dhākhushub and stayed there and this whole matter ended. On the second day of this event Marwān ibn al-Hakam said to 'Uthmān. "It is good, 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 and that statement should be that some people collected in Medina 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, and speaking in the Holy 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, "Offer repentance, fear Allāh; what is this lie you are

uttering?" 'Uthmān was confused in 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 meet 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 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 on 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. Take away your black faces 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 got back and Nā'ilah got the chance, 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 'Ali 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 standing 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 Hijāz, Muḥammad ibn Abi 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 was he going then? He said he was to go to Ibn Abi 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 at-Tujibi 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 Abi Bakr and his party reaches you then from among them kill so-and-so, arrest so-and-so, and put so-and-so in jail, but 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 Medina 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 been written at his behest.

However, improving conditions again deteriorated and they ought to have deteriorated because despite lapse of the required time every thing 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 Dhākbushub to watch the result of repentance again advanced like flood and spread over the streets of Medina, and closing the borders from every side surrounded his house.

During these days of siege a companion of the Prophet, Niyār ibn ‘Iyād 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 band over his own support 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-Hakam, Said ibn al-‘Āṣ and Mughirah 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 all except people of ‘Uthmān’s house, his well-wishers and Banu Umayyah ran away in the streets of Medina and a few hid themselves in the house of Umm Ḥabibah bint Abi Sufyān (Mu‘āwiyah’s sister) the rest were killed with ‘Uthmān defending him to the last. (at-Tabaqāt, Ibn Sa’d, vol. 3, Part 1, pp. 50-58; at-Ṭabari, vol. I, pp. 2998—3025; al-Kāmil, Ibn al-Athir, vol. 3, pp. 167—180; Ibn Abi’l-Ḥadīd, vol. 2, pp. 144—161).

At his killing several poets wrote elegies. That a couplet from the elegy by Abu 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 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 Pre-informed ones (who had been pre-informed 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) anṣār, original muhajirūn, 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 Banu Umayyah. If people like Marwān and Said ibn al-'Āṣ cannot be given precedence over the original muhājirūn 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.