

ومن خطبة [في بعض النسخ: كلام] له (عليه السلام)

From one of his sermons

لَمَّا قَبِضَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) وَخَاطَبَهُ الْعَبَّاسُ وَأَبُو سَفْيَانَ [فِي بَعْضِ النُّسخ: ... بِنِ حَرْبٍ ...] فِي أَنْ يَبَايَعَا لَهُ بِالْخِلافةِ

Delivered when the Holy Prophet died and 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb [1] offered to pay allegiance to Amīr al-Mu'minīn for the Caliphate

وذلك بعد أن تمت البيعة لابي بكر في السقيفة، وفيها ينهى عن الفتنة ويبين عن خلقه وعلمه

[النهي عن الفتنة: ] أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، شُقُّوا أَمْوَاجَ الْفِتَنِ بِسُفُنِ النَّجَاةِ، وَعَرِّجُوا عَنِ طَرِيقِ الْمُنَافَرَةِ، وَضَعُوا تِيْجَانَ الْمَفَاخِرَةِ. أَفْلَحَ مَنْ نَهَضَ بِجَنَاحٍ، أَوْ اسْتَسَلَّمَ فَأَرَّاحَ، مَاءَ أَجْنٍ، وَلَقْمَةً يَغْصُ بِهَا أَكْلَهَا، وَمَجْتَنِي الثَّمَرَةَ لِغَيْرِ وَقْتِ إِيْنَاعِهَا كَالزَّرْعِ بِغَيْرِ أَرْضِهِ.

O People! Steer clear through the waves of mischief by boats of deliverance, turn away from the path of dissension and put off the crowns of pride. Prosperous is one who rises with wings (i.e. when he has power) or else he remains peaceful and others enjoy ease. It (i.e. the aspiration for Caliphate) is like turbid water or like a morsel that would suffocate the person who swallows it. One who plucks fruits before ripening is like one who cultivated in another's field.

[خلقته وعلمه: ] فَإِنْ أَقْلٌ يَقُولُوا: حَرَّصَ عَلَيَّ الْمَلِكُ، وَإِنْ أَسَكَّتْ يَقُولُوا: جَزَعٌ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ! هَيْهَاتَ بَعْدَ اللَّتِيَّاءِ وَالَّتِي! وَاللَّهِ! لَأَيُّ طَالِبِ أَنْسٍ بِالْمَوْتِ مِنَ الطِّفْلِ بِثَدْيِ أُمِّهِ، بَلِ انْدَمَجَتْ عَلَيَّ مَكْنُونِ عِلْمٍ لَوْ بَحْتُ بِهِ لِاضْطِرَابِ الْأَرْضِيَّةِ فِي الطَّوِيِّ الْبَعِيدَةِ.

If I speak out, they would call me greedy towards power; but if I keep quiet they would say I was afraid of death. It is a pity that after all the ups and downs (I have been through). By Allāh the son of Abū Ṭālib [2] is more familiar with death than an infant with the breast of its mother. I have hidden knowledge; if I disclose it you will start trembling like ropes in deep wells.

Notes:

[1] When the Holy Prophet died Abū Sufyān was not in Madīnah. He was coming back when, on his way, he got the news of this tragedy. At once he enquired who had become the Leader and Chief of the Muslims. He was told that people had paid allegiance to Abū Bakr. On hearing this, the well-known mischief-monger of Arabia

went into deep thought, and eventually went to ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib with a proposal. He said to him: “Look, these people have, by contrivance, handed over the Caliphate to a man of Taym and deprived Banū Hāshim of it for good; and after himself this man would place over our heads a harsh-tempered and hot-headed man from Banū ‘Adī. Let us go to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and ask him to get out of his house and take to arms to secure his right.”

So taking al-‘Abbās with him he came to ‘Alī and said: “Stretch forth your hand; I shall pledge allegiance to you. And if anyone rises in opposition, I shall fill the streets of Madīnah with men of cavalry and infantry.” This was the most delicate moment for Amīr al-Mu’minīn. He regarded himself as the true heir and successor of the Prophet, while a man with the backing of his tribe and party like Abu Sufyān was ready to support him. Just a signal was enough to ignite the flames of war. But Amīr al-Mu’minīn’s foresight and sound judgement saved the Muslims from civil war. His far-reaching vision perceived that this man (Abū Sufyān) wanted to start a civil war by rousing the passions of tribal prejudice and racial partisanship, so that Islam should be struck with a convulsion that would shake it to its roots. Amīr al-Mu’minīn therefore rejected his counsel, admonished him severely, and spoke forth the words, whereby he restrained people from stirring up sedition and from vain pride, and declared his stand to be that for him there were only two courses: either to take up arms, or to withdraw from his right and sit quietly at home. If he rose for war, there appeared no helper or supporter by whose aid he could suppress these rising insurgences. Thus the only course left was to wait quietly for the opportunity till circumstances became favourable.

Amīr al-Mu’minīn’s silence at this stage was a reflection of his prudence and far-sightedness, because if in those circumstances Madīnah had become the centre of war, its fire would have engulfed the whole of Arabia in its flames. The rancour and discord that had already begun among the Muhājirūn (those who came from Mecca) and the Anṣār (the locals of Madīnah) would have increased to maximum, the wire-pullings of the hypocrites would have had full play, and Islam’s ship would have been caught in such a whirlpool that its balancing would have been difficult. Therefore, Amīr al-Mu’minīn endured grief and bore hardships, yet did not raise his hands. History is witness that during his life at Mecca, the Prophet endured every kind of suffering and hardship, but he was not prepared to clash or struggle by abandoning patience and steadfastness, because he realised that if war took place at that stage, the way for Islam’s growth and fruition would be closed. Of course, when he had collected enough supporters and helpers to suppress the flood of unbelief and curb the disturbances, he rose to face the enemy. Similarly, Amīr al-

Mu'minīn, treating the life of the Prophet as a torch for his guidance, refrained from exhibiting the power of his arm because he understood that rising against the enemy without helpers and supporters would become a cause of turmoil and destruction rather than success and victory. Therefore, in view of the circumstances, Amīr al-Mu'minīn has likened the desire for Caliphate to turbid water or a morsel suffocating the throat. Thus, even where people had forcibly snatched this morsel and wanted to swallow it by forcible thrusting, found that it got stuck in their throat. They could neither swallow it nor spit it out. That is, they could neither manage it properly, as is apparent from the blunders they committed in connection with Islamic injunctions, nor were they ready to cast off the knot from their necks.

He reiterated the same ideas in different words, saying: "If, under these unfavourable conditions, I attempted to pluck the unripe fruit of Caliphate, then by this the orchard would have been desolated and I too would have achieved nothing, just like these people who cultivate on other's land but can neither guard it, nor save it from animals, nor water it at proper time, nor reap any produce from it. Rather, the position of these people is that if I say: 'Vacate this land so that its rightful owner may cultivate it himself and protect it,' they start saying: 'How greedy and covetous he is!' But if I remain silent, they think I am afraid of death. They should tell me on what occasion did I ever feel afraid, or flee from battlefield for life, whereas every small and big encounter is proof of my bravery and a witness to my daring and courage. He who plays with swords and clashes with mountains does not fear death. I am so familiar with death that even an infant is not so familiar with the breast of its mother. Hark! The reason for my silence is the knowledge that the Prophet has put in my bosom. If I divulge it you would get perplexed and bewildered. Let some days pass and you would know the reason for my silence, and perceive with your own eyes what sorts of people ascend this seat in the name of Islam, and what destruction they would bring about. My silence is because this would happen, otherwise it is not silence without reason."

A Persian hemistich says: "Silence has meanings which cannot be couched in words."

[2] About death, Amīr al-Mu'minīn says that it is so dear to him that even an infant does not so love to leap towards the source of its nourishment while in its mother's lap. This is because an infant's attachment with the breast of its mother is under the influence of a natural impulse, but the dictates of natural impulses change with the advance of age. Thus, when the limited period of infancy ends and the infant's

temperament changes, he does not like even to look at what was so familiar to him but rather turns his face from it in disgust. But the love of prophets and saints for union with Allāh is intellectual and spiritual, and intellectual and spiritual impulses do not change, nor does weakness or decay occur in them. Since death is the means and first rung towards this goal, their love for death increases to such an extent that its rigours become the cause of comfort and ease for them, and its bitterness proves to be the source of delight and sweetness for their palate. Their love for it is the same as that of the thirsty for the well or that of a lost traveller for his destination.

Thus, when Amīr al-Mu'minīn was wounded by 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Muljam's fatal attack, he said: "I was but like the walker who has reached (the goal) or like the seeker who has found (his object) and whatever is with Allāh is good for the pious."

The Prophet also said: That there is no pleasure for a believer other than union with Allāh.