

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام) لما أرادته الناس على البيعة بعد قتل عثمان

When people decided to swear allegiance [1] at Amīr al-mu'minīn's hand after the murder of 'Uthmān, he said:

دَعُونِي وَاتَّمِسُوا غَيْرِي؛ فَإِنَّا مُسْتَقْبِلُونَ أَمْرًا لَهُ وَجْهٌ وَأَلْوَانٌ؛ لَا تَقُومُ لَهُ الْقُلُوبُ، وَلَا تُثَبِّتُ عَلَيْهِ الْعُقُولُ، وَإِنَّ الْأَفَاقَ قَدْ أَغَامَتْ،  
وَالْمَحْجَةَ قَدْ تَنَكَّرَتْ. وَإِعْلَمُوا أَنِّي إِنِ أَجَبْتِكُمْ رَكِبْتُ بِكُمْ مَا أَعْلِمُ؛ وَلَمْ أَصْنَعْ إِلَيَّ قَوْلَ الْقَائِلِ وَعَتَبِ الْعَاتِبِ، وَإِنْ تَرَكْتُمُونِي فَأَنَا  
كَأَحَدِكُمْ؛ وَلَعَلِّي أَسْمَعُكُمْ وَأَطُوعُكُمْ لِمَنْ وَلِيْتُمُوهُ أَمْرَكُمْ، وَأَنَا لَكُمْ وَزِيرًا، خَيْرَ لَكُمْ مِنِّي أَمِيرًا!

Leave me and seek some one else. We are facing a matter which has (several) faces and colours, which neither hearts can stand nor intelligence can accept. Clouds are hovering over the sky, and faces are not discernable. You should know that if I respond to you I would lead you as I know and would not care about whatever one may say or abuse. If you leave me then I am the same as you are. It is possible I would listen to and obey whomever you make incharge of your affairs. I am better for you as a counsellor than as a chief.

Footnote :

[1] When with the murder of 'Uthmān the seat of Caliphate became vacant Muslims began to look at 'Alī (a.s.) whose peaceful conduct, adherence to principles, and politia lacumen had been witnessed by them to a great extent during this long period. Consequently they so rushed for swearing allegiance on his righteous in the same way as a traveller who had lost his way and catches sight of the objective would have rushed towards it, as the historian at-Ṭabarī (in at-Tārīkh, vol. 1, pp. 3066, 3067, 3076) records:

People thronged on Amīr al-mu'minīn and said, "We want to swear allegiance to you and you see what troubles are befalling Islam and how we are being tried about the near ones of the Prophet."

But Amīr al-mu'minīn declined to accede to their request whereupon these people raised hue and cry and began to shout loudly, "O Abu'l-Ḥasan, do you not witness the ruination of Islam or see the advancing flood of unruliness and mischief? Do you have no fear of Allāh?" Even then Amīr al-mu'minīn showed no readiness to consent because he was noticing that the effects of the atmosphere that had come into being after the Prophet had overcome hearts and minds of the people, selfishness and lust for power had become rooted in them, their thinking affected by materialism and they had become habituated to treating government as the means for securing their ends. Now they would like to materialize the Divine Caliphate too

and play with it. In these circumstances it would be impossible to change the mentalities or turn the direction of temperaments. In addition to these ideas he had also seen the end in view that these people should get further time to think over so that on frustration of their material ends hereafter they should not say that the allegiance had been sworn by them under a temporary expediency and timely thought and that nature thought had not been given to it, just as 'Umar's idea was about the first Caliphate, which appears from his statement that :

Abu Bakr's Caliphate came into being without thought but Allāh saved us from its mischief. If anyone repeats such an affair you should kill him. (aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ, al-Bukhārī, vol. 8, pp. 210, 211; al-Musnad, Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, vol. 1, p. 55; aṭ-Ṭabarī, vol. I, p. 1822; Ibn al-Athīr, vol. 2, p. 327; Ibn Hishām, vol. 4, pp. 308-309; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 5, p. 246)

In short, when their insistence increased beyond limits Amīr al-mu'minīn delivered this sermon wherein he clarified that "If you want me for your worldly ends, then I am not ready to serve as your instrument. Leave me and select someone else who may fulfil your ends. You have seen my past life that I am not prepared to follow anything except the Qur'ān and sunnah and would not give up this principle for securing power. If you select someone else I would pay regard to the laws of the state and the constitution as a peaceful citizen should do. I have not at any stage tried to disrupt the collective existence of the Muslims by inciting revolt. The same will happen now. Rather, just as keeping the common good in view I have hitherto been giving correct advice, I would not grudge doing the same. If you let me in the same position it would be better for your worldly ends, because in that case I won't have power in my hands so that I could stand in the way of your worldly affairs, and create impediment against your hearts' wishes. However, if you are determined on swearing allegiance on my hand bear in mind that if you frown or speak against me I would force you to tread on the path of right, and in the matter of the right I would not care for anyone. If you want to swear allegiance even at this, you can satisfy your wish."

The impression Amīr al-mu'minīn had formed about these people is fully corroborated by later events. Consequently, when those who had sworn allegiance with worldly motives did not succeed in their objectives then broke away and rose against his government with baseless allegations.