

Death of the Holy Prophet (s): New Line of Islamic History Starts

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After appointing Imam Ali (a.s.) in Ghadeer Khum as the caliph over the nation after him, the Prophet (saws) set out back to Medina. But, a day after another, his health got worse and illnesses began attacking him. He suffered a bad fever for many days that whoever of his wives or visitors put her/his hand on his (the Prophet) body, felt its heat.^[1] A vessel of cold water was put beside him in which he put his hand and put it on his holy face in order to lessen the heat of the fever. Some sources of history mention that the Prophet's illness was because of a poisonous food offered to him by a Jewish woman. He often said, "I am still feeling the pain of the food that I had eaten in Khaybar. This is the time that I found my aorta is cut because of that poison."^[2]

When the news of the Prophet's illness spread among Muslims, they hurried to visit him while being so distressed and sad. What made them more distressed was that the Prophet (saws) himself confirmed to them his soon death saying, "O people, I am about to be made die soon and taken away. I speak to you to be excused before you; I leave among you the Book of Allah and my progeny, my family." Then, he took the hand of Imam Ali, who was sitting beside him, and said, "This is Ali; he is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with Ali. They shall not separate until they shall come to me at the pond (in the Paradise)."^[3]

In this recommendation, the Prophet (saws) invited Muslims to keep to the Holy Qur'an and to his progeny in order not to go astray or fall into seditions.

The Army of Usamah

The Prophet (saws) saw factionalism among his companions and he became certain that they would fulfill their plans to take the caliphate away from his family, who were the center of knowledge and wisdom, and especially from his guardian and successor Imam Ali (a.s.). Hence, he thought to rescue the situation by sending all his companions in an army to fight the Romans so that his capital would be empty of them and thus Imam Ali (a.s.) would assume the caliphate after his (the Prophet) death easily and with no obstacles. The Prophet (saws) ordered all the notables of the Muhajireen and the Ansar to join the army of Usama whom he had appointed as the leader though he was a very young man. Among

those men there were Abu Bakr, Umar, Abu Ubaydah bin al-Jarrah, and Basheer bin Sa'd, and all of them were from the oppositionist party.[4] The Prophet (saws) said to Usama, the leader of the army, "March to the place where your father was killed and make the horsemen defeat them (the Romans). I have entrusted you with the leadership of this army. In the morning, attack the people of Ubna (in Syria) and meet them with fire. Hurry up to precede the news. If Allah grants you victory over them, do not remain there too long. Take guides with you, and make spies and pioneers in the front."

On the twenty-ninth of Safar, the army mutinied and no one of the notable companions joined his battalion. The Prophet (saws) was very angry at that. He went out of his house in spite of his illness. He encouraged his companions to join the army. He himself gave the banner to Usama and said to him, "March by the name of Allah and for the sake of Allah. Fight those who disbelieve in Allah."

Usama marched with his army and camped in al-Jurf.[5] The famous companions slackened in joining the camp. They criticized and disparaged the leader, young Usama. Umar said to him, "The messenger of Allah dies while you are an emir over me?!"

This saying was conveyed to the Prophet (saws) while he was badly ill suffering bad fever and headache. He became very angry and distressed. He went out of his house wrapped with a velvet garment and his head was folded. He ascended the minbar and showed the people his anger about not carrying out his orders. He said, "O people, what for is the saying of someone of you that criticizes my appointing Usama as the emir? You have criticized my appointing his father as emir before. By Allah, he was worthy of the emirate and his son after him is worthy of it..."[6]

He descended the minbar and went into his house. Then, he recommended people to join the army of Usama by saying, "Prepare the army of Usama!" "Let the army of Usama march!" "May Allah curse whoever does not join the army of Usama!"

These firm orders and insistence of the Prophet (saws) at his last hours of life did not move the people's determination. They slackened in joining the army and justified their doing with different excuses, though the Prophet (saws) did not accept their excuses. Rather, he showed them his anger and discontent.

As for the purpose of the Prophet (saws) behind his appointing of Usama as the leader of the army though he was too young was as the following:

First, the Prophet (saws) wanted to refute all the points of disagreement and criticism against the appointing of Imam Ali (a.s.) as the caliph that he was young, for Usama was younger than him.

Second, to ignore old age and not paying attention to it in entrusting the high positions in the state if an old man had no sufficient abilities and talents, for the managements of the nation's affairs must be entrusted to well-qualified people.

The Prophet (saws) said, "He, who precedes some men of Muslims while seeing that there are ones among them better than him, betrays Allah, His messenger, and the Muslims." [7]

Islam is totally careful in appointing the best of people in the posts of the state to sincerely regard the public interests and be loyal in serving the people, in collecting taxes, and in spending the general wealth, and be just in judging among people. All this has nothing to do with old age.

Third, appointing young Usama as the leader of that army refuted all Imam Ali's opponents who disliked him to be the caliph justifying their intention that Imam Ali (a.s.) was a young man then.

The Calamity of Thursday

The political tendencies and opportunistic trends which the famous companions adopted to turn the caliphate away from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) appeared clearly before the Prophet (saws). Therefore, he saw, in the last hours of his life, that he should save his nation from deviation and assure to it happiness and prosperity. He wanted to confirm the homage of Ghadeer Khum paid to Imam Ali (a.s.) by registering it in a document. He asked his companions, "Bring me a piece of paper and an inkpot to write you a book by which you shall not go astray at all..."

It was the greatest blessing that the Prophet (saws) wanted to write a book for the nation by which it would not go astray forever. It was a very precious opportunity, but, unfortunately, those companions lost it easily. And unfortunately, some of the Prophet's companions understood that the Prophet (saws) had intended to write down in that book the decree of the caliphate to Imam Ali (a.s.) and that would make their greed go in vain; therefore, one of them said, "The Book of Allah is enough to us..." [8]

Undoubtedly, if this sayer knew that the Prophet (saws) wanted to recommend of anything else in that book, he would not reply so impudently, but he understood well that the Prophet (saws) wanted to announce the caliph after him.

Anyhow, disputes and disagreements increased among the attendants that some of them

wanted to carry out the Prophet's wish and some others insisted on objection. The women from behind the curtain denied that impudent situation towards the Prophet (saws), who was living his last moments, and they cried out addressing the Prophet's companions, "Do you not hear what the messenger of Allah is saying? Do you not carry out what the messenger of Allah wants?"

Umar, who was the head of the oppositionists then, harshly replied to the women, "You are the friends of Yousuf (Prophet Joseph). If he became ill, you would press your eyes (to shed tears), and if he recovered, you would ride on his neck."

The Prophet (saws) looked at him angrily and said, "Let them alone! They are better than you." A terrible dispute broke out between the men. The party that wanted to carry out the Prophet's order was about to win, but someone (Umar) shot a bad arrow against the Prophet's order by saying harshly and impudently, "The Prophet is raving!"^[9]

How daring he was towards the Prophet (saws) and how impudent he was before the messenger of Allah!

These events must be studied thoughtfully and exactly because they concern the essence of our Islamic life. They have a clear criticism against the messenger of Allah, who was accused of raving whereas Allah has said about him, (Your companion does not err, nor does he go astray, nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed. The Lord of Mighty Power has taught him),^[10] and (Most surely it is the Word of an honored messenger, the processor of strength, having an honorable place with the Lord of the Dominion).^[11]

Yes, by Allah! This sayer had heard these verses that Allah had revealed about His holy prophet, but the political tendencies and the greed to authority led him to face the messenger of Allah with these severe words that hurt and threw Muslims into seditions, disasters, and great evils. When Ibn Abbas remembered this painful event, he wept and his tears covered his cheeks. He often said, "Thursday, and what Thursday is! The messenger of Allah (a.s.) said, 'Bring me a piece of paper and an inkpot to write you a book by which you shall not go astray after me at all' and they said, 'The messenger of Allah is raving.'"^[12]

Ibn Abbas wept because he knew well that the Prophet (saws) wanted to write down the decree of Imam Ali's caliphate after him. But alas! The companions accused the messenger of Allah of raving which was a clear criticism against his personality that had been chosen by the Lord of the worlds, and that caused him to refrain from writing down that book in order to preserve the sacredness of prophethood.

Fatima's distress

Sorrow and distress filled Fatima's heart and pain hurt her too much when she became certain that her father was going to leave her for the other world. She sat beside and stared at him.

She heard him saying, "Ah, my anguish!"

She, shedding tears, said, "Ah, my anguish for your anguish father!"

The loving father said kindly to his darling daughter, "There is no anguish for your father after this day!"[13]

She was very affected by these words because she became completely certain that her father would leave her. When the Prophet (saws) saw her very sad and distressed, he wanted to delight her. He asked her to come closer to him. He whispered to her something and her eyes were filled with tears, and then he whispered to her another thing and she began smiling. Aa'isha (the Prophet's wife) was astonished at seeing that and she said, "I have not seen delight that is nearer to sadness like this of today."

Aa'isha asked Fatima (a.s.) about what her father whispered to her but she did not answer her. When days passed, Fatima (a.s.) told Aa'isha saying, "He said to me: 'Gabriel reviewed the (whole) Qur'an to me once a year, but this year, he reviewed it to me twice. I do not think except that my death has come.'"

This was the cause of her pain and weeping. As for the cause of her delight, she said, "He said to me: 'You are the first one of my family that shall join me (die). I am the best ancestor to you.

Are you not pleased to be the principal of the women of this nation?'"[14]

The Prophet (saws) comforted Fatima (a.s.) saying, "O my daughter, do not weep! When I die, you say: 'we are Allah's and to Him we shall return'. It has recompense for any dead one."

She said, "And for you O messenger of Allah?!"

He said, "Yes, and for me."[15]

When the Prophet (saws) began suffering more pain, Fatima (a.s.) began weeping and she said to him, "By Allah, you are like what some sayer has said: "A white one by whose face it is prayed that clouds may rain; the resort of orphans, the guard of widows."

The Prophet (saws) said to her, "It is the saying of your uncle Abu Talib." Then he recited this Qur'anic verse: (And Muhammad is but a messenger; the messengers have already passed away before him. If then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels? And whoever turns back upon his heels, he will by no means do harm to Allah in the least and Allah will reward the grateful).[16]

The Prophet recommends of his Family

Anas bin Malik narrated, "Fatima, with al-Hasan and al-Husayn, came to the Prophet (saws) in his last illness. She embraced him and stuck her chest to his while weeping bitterly. The Prophet (saws) ordered her not to weep out of pitying her. He said while tears were falling down over his cheeks, 'O Allah, these are my family. I have entrusted them to every believer...' He repeated that three times.^[17] He said that because he understood from behind the unseen that his family would face all kinds of calamities.

The Prophet's recommendation about his two grandsons

Three days before his departure to the better world, the Prophet (saws) recommended Imam Ali (a.s.) to care much for his two grandsons saying to him, "O father of the two darlings, I recommend you of my two darling grandsons in all this life.

How soon your two supports will be undermined! May Allah be my guardian to you..." When the Prophet (saws) died, Imam Ali (a.s.) said, "This is one of my two supports that the messenger of Allah talked about", and when Fatima (a.s.) died, he said, "This is the second support that the messenger of Allah told me about."^[18]

To the High Paradise

It was time for the Prophet (saws) to leave this world and join the highest Paradise. The Angel of Death came down to him asking permission. Fatima (a.s.) said to the angel, "He (the Prophet) is busy with himself." The Angel of Death left and came back later asking permission.

The Prophet (saws) woke up and said to his daughter, "Do you know him?"

She said, "No, O messenger of Allah."

The Prophet (saws) said, "He is the establisher of graves, destroyer of houses (families), and separator of gatherings."

Fatima (a.s.) was shocked and sorrows attacked her. She said sadly, "O Father! To the death of the last of prophets (he has come)? Alas! To the death of the best of the pious and to the end of the master of choices? Alas! To the cease of the Revelation from the Heaven? After today, I shall be prevented from talking with you."

The Prophet (saws) pitied his darling daughter and said to her, "Do not weep! You will be the first one to join me..."^[19]

Then, the Prophet (saws) permitted the Angel of Death to come in to him. When he came in, he said, "O messenger of Allah, Allah has sent me to you and ordered me to obey you in whatever

you order me to do. If you order me to take your soul, I shall do, and if you order me to leave it,
I shall do."

The Prophet (saws) was astonished at the Angel's courtesy. He said, "O Angel of Death, would
you do that?"

The Angel said, "I have been ordered to obey you in whatever you order me to do."
No one of Allah's prophets and messengers had ever got such preference as Prophet
Muhammad (a.s.) had. Allah had ordered the Angel of Death to ask permission before coming
in to him and to obey him in everything.

Then Gabriel came down saying to the Prophet (saws), "O Ahmed, Allah is longing for you."
The Prophet (saws) chose to be near his Lord, for the afterlife would be better to him than this
life. He permitted the Angel of Death to take his holy soul.
Then he said to Imam Ali (a.s.), "Put my head in your lap, for the decree of Allah has come.
When my soul comes out, take it and rub your face with it, and then direct me towards the
qibla, prepare me, offer the prayer on me, and do not leave me until you burry me in my grave.
Seek help from Allah the Almighty."

Imam Ali (a.s.) put the Prophet's head in his lap and put his (imam Ali) right hand under his
(the Prophet) chin. When the Prophet's holy soul left his pure body, Imam Ali rubbed his holy
face with it.[20]

Mankind was afflicted with a great calamity; the leader, teacher, and educator died, and that
light, which lit this world with the divine teachings, high morals, and noble manners, went to the
other world.

Muslims were shocked by the disaster and they lost their minds. The Prophet's wives...began
beating their chests. The women of the Ansar beat their faces, and their throats were harmed
because of crying.[21]

As for Fatima (a.s.), she fell over the pure body of her father saying, "O father! O prophet of
mercy! Now, the Revelation does not come. Now, Gabriel ceases coming to us. O Allah, let my
soul join his (the Prophet) soul, and have mercy on me by looking at his face, and do not
prevent me from his reward and intercession on the Day of Resurrection." [22]

Then she mourned for him saying, "O Father, to Gabriel I mourn you! O father, the Paradise is
your abode! O father, you responded to the Lord Who has invited you!" [23]

Preparing the Holy Corpse for Burial

Imam Ali (a.s.), alone, washed (ritually) and prepared the Prophet's corpse for burial due to his
(the Prophet) own order.

While washing the Prophet's body, Imam Ali (a.s.) sorrowfully said, "May my father and mother be sacrificed for you O messenger of Allah! By your death, something has ceased that it has not ceased by the death of any other than you; prophethood, revelation, and the news of the Heaven. You have been particular until you sufficed away from anyone other than you, and you have been popular until people were the same in you. If you had not enjoined on patience and forbidden from impatience, we would have exhausted our tears for you, and disease would have lasted long, and distress would have endured forever."^[24]

Imam Ali (a.s.) talked about this ghusl (ritual washing) saying, "I undertook his ghusl while the angels were my assistants.

The house and the yards were full of clamor. Angels were coming down and angels were going up. Their whisperings did not leave my hearing. They were praying Allah for him."

Al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle and Usama gave Imam Ali (a.s.) water from behind a curtain.^[25] Good scent came out of the Prophet's body. Imam Ali (a.s.) said, "May my father and mother be sacrificed for you O messenger of Allah! You are good scented alive and dead."^[26] The water, which the Prophet's corpse was washed with, was from a well called al-Ghars that the Prophet (saws) used to drink from.^[27] Finishing the ritual washing, Imam Ali (a.s.) enshrouded the holy corpse and put it on a bed.

The Prayer over the Holy Corpse

The first who offered the prayer on the great corpse was Allah from above His Throne, then Gabriel, Israfel, and then the angels groups by groups.^[28] And then, Imam Ali (a.s.) offered the prayer on him.

When Muslims came to offer the prayer on the Prophet's corpse, Imam Ali (a.s.) said to them, "No one of you is to be an imam (in the prayer). He (the Prophet) is your imam alive and when dead."

So, Muslims came group by group to offer the prayer of the dead in lines with no imam. Imam Ali (a.s.) was standing beside the Prophet's corpse and saying, "Peace be on you, O prophet, and Allah's mercy and blessings. O Allah, we bear witness that he has informed of what has been revealed to him, been loyal to his nation, and struggled in the way of Allah until Allah glorified His religion and perfected His word. O Allah, make us from those who follow what has been revealed to him, and fix us (on that) after him, and gather us with him." People said, "Amen."^[29]

The masses of Muslims passed by the Prophet's pure body to see him off while overcome by sorrow and distress, because their savior, liberator, and teacher, who had established to them a

great civilization and state that prevailed the world and had lit to them the life after their ignorance and deviation, died.

The Burial

After the rituals of prayer on the holy corpse finished, Imam Ali (a.s.) dug the tomb and buried the sacred body in the last abode. He stood beside the tomb and said, "Patience is nice except for you, and impatience is ugly except for you. The calamity of your death is so great, and it is so great before and after you."^[30]

It was a very terrible day for all Muslims. The loss of their prophet was so great affliction to them that they could not bear. The Light of Allah and His great mercy that they used to see every moment was no longer among them since that moment. Sorrows and weeping filled every house everywhere.

But as for the pure progeny of the Prophet (saws), they were so terrified after his death. They feared that the Arabs, and especially the tribe of Quraysh, might revolt to avenge on the Prophet's family, because the Prophet (saws) had killed their men for the sake of Islam. The tendency of avenging was deep-rooted in the Arabs, and it was Imam Ali (a.s.) who had killed their men and heroes, and so they were eager to avenge. Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, "When the messenger of Allah (a.s.) died, his family spent the longest night and they thought that there would be no sky to shade and no earth to carry them, because the messenger of Allah had afflicted the near and the far (for the sake of Allah)."^[31]

Anyhow, the Prophet's death was the greatest of calamities that the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) faced. It was the beginning of the terrible calamities that they suffered later on. Quraysh avenged and announced openly that, "Prophethood and caliphate should not gather together in one house." And indeed it was so! The Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) were deprived of their rights and kept away from what Allah and His messenger had intended for them. After fifty years, the Prophet's progeny were killed in the desert of Kerbala, their heads were carried on spears, and their women and children were taken prisoners and made to go from place to another unveiled before all classes of people who looked at their faces that were unveiled unwillingly and by force though they were the Prophet's daughters! We are Allah's and to Him we shall return.

References:

- [1] Al-Bidayeh wen-Nihayeh, vol. 5 p. 226.
- [2] Encyclopedia of Imam Ameerul Mo'minin Ali bin Abi Talib, vol. 2 p. 62.
- [3] As-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, vol. 2 p. 361.

- [4] Encyclopedia of Imam Ameerul Mo'minin Ali bin Abi Talib, vol. 2 p. 85, Kanzol Ummal, vol. 5 p.312, Tabaqat ibn Sa'd, vol. 4 p. 46, Tareekh al-Khamees, vol. 2 p. 46.
- [5] Three miles from Medina towards Sham.
- [6] As-Seera al-Halabiyyah, vol. 3 p. 342.
- [7] Sunan of al-Bayhaqi, vol. 10 p. 111.
- [8] It was Umar bin al-Khattab as most historians have mentioned in their books.
- [9] All historians and narrators have mentioned this painful event. Al-Bukhari mentioned it many times in his Sahih vol. 4 p. 68-69, vol. 6 p. 8, but he concealed the sayer's name. In Nihaya of Ibn al-Atheer and Sharh Nahjol Balagha by ibn Abil Hadeed, vol. 3 p. 194, the name of the sayer was mentioned and it was Umar bin al-Khattab.
- [10] Qur'an, 53:2-5.
- [11] Qur'an, 81:19-20.
- [12] Musnad of Ahmed bin Hanbal, vol. 1 p. 355, and others.
- [13] The Life of Imam al-Hasan bin Ali, vol. 1 p. 128 quoted from Kanzol Ummal, vol. 7 p. 110, Sharh Nahjol Balagha, vol. 4 p. 4
- [14] Ansab al-Ashraf, part one, vol. 1 p. 133.
- [15] Ibid.
- [16] Qur'an, 3:144.
- [17] Ansab al-Ashraf, vol. 1 p. 133.
- [18] Amali of Sheikh as-Saduq, p. 119.
- [19] Durratul Nassihin, p. 66.
- [20] Manaqib Aal Abi Talib, vol. 1 p. 29. Many reliable sources have mentioned that when the Prophet (saws) died, his head was in Imam Ali's lap. Refer to at-Tabaqat al-Kubra, vol. 2 p. 51, Majma' az-Zawa'id, vol. 1 p. 293, Kanzol Ummal, vol. 4 p. 55, Thakha'ir al-Uqba, p. 94, ar-Riyadh an-Nadhirah, vol. 2 p. 219.
- [21] Ansab al-Ashraf, vol. 1 p.574.
- [22] Tareekh al-Khamees, vol. 2 p. 192.
- [23] Siyer A'lam an-Nubala', 2 p. 88, Sunan ibn Maja, vol. 1 p. 511.
- [24] Nahjol Balagha, vol. 2 p. 255.
- [25] Al-Bidayeh wen Nihayeh, vol. 5 p. 263.
- [26] At-Tabaqat al-Kubra, vol. 2 p. 63.
- [27] Al-Bidayeh wen Nihayeh, vol. 5 p. 261.

[28] Hilyatul Awliya', vol. 4 p. 77.

[29] Kanzol Ummal, vol. 4 p. 54.

[30] Nahjol Balagha, vol. 3 p. 224.

[31] Encyclopedia of Imam Ameerul Mo'minin Ali bin Abi Talib, vol. 2 p. 96-97