

The Caliphate of Imam Ali

Lesson 1



The Predecessors of Imam Ali

- After the death of the Prophet (s), the Muslim world was ruled by 3 companions of the Prophet:
 - 1. Abu Bakr: Ruled for 2 years from 11AH to 13AH.
 - 2. Umar b. al-Khattab: Ruled for 10 years from 13AH-23AH
 - 3. Uthman b. Affan: Ruled for 12 years from 23AH to 35 AH

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- In order to appreciate the circumstances that led to Imam Ali's ascension to power, we must first examine the events that lead to Uthman's assassination.
- **Who was Uthman b. Affan?**
- Uthman b. Affan belonged to the Umayyad clan and was among those who converted to Islam before the migration to Makkah. Thus, he was among the muhajireen.
- He was one of the richest men in Makkah.
- Uthman did not take part in the Battle of Badr, and stayed in Medina. He was present in the battle of Uhud but ran away to save his life when the Muslims were defeated.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- Unlike the other Muslim converts in Makkah, Uthman did not suffer great persecution because of his affiliation to the Umayyad's. Since the Prophet's most fierce enemies were the Umayyad's, it seems that they gave Uthman immunity.
- When the Prophet (s) migrated to Medina and began the construction of his masjid, Uthman was among those who felt that it was beneath him to do manual labor. He belonged to the aristocratic class of society.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- During the negotiations of Hdaybiyya, the Prophet sent Uthman as his messenger to the Quraysh in Makkah. He was sent because the Prophet (s) knew that Abu Sufyan would not bring any harm upon one of his clansmen.
- Unlike, his predecessors, Uthman had a weaker personality. He was much easier to influence which is why after Umar, who was seen by many as a rigid ruler, many wanted a Caliph who would allow them to indulge and enjoy more freedoms.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- Uthman loved the members of his own clan to a point where his love became an obsession.
- The Umayyads were the arch-enemies of Islam, and they had fought against its Prophet for more than two decades. Now suddenly, Uthman made them masters of the empire of the Muslims.
- When Uthman became Caliph, he was 72 years old. He himself became the symbolic figurehead of the Islamic empire, while his relatives took the reins of the government in their own hands.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- The real rulers of Uthman's government were Marwan (the cousin and son-in-law of Uthman) and Hakam b Abil-Aas (Uthman's uncle and Marwan's father).
- It's important to note that these men were so wicked that the Prophet (s) banished them from Medina.
- Uthman opened the gates of the public treasury to his relatives. He gave them rich presents, vast estates and high ranks.
- One one occasion, Uthman gave the khums of North Africa to his son-in-law, Marwan.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- Uthman was Caliph for twelve years. The power grid which he had inherited from Umar, worked relatively well for the first half of his reign. There was peace for him and for the Muslims. But in the second half, discontent began to build up against him.
- The people had genuine causes for their discontent. They knew that unlimited quantities of gold and silver were coming into the treasury from the provinces but they did not see any of it.
- The enormous amount of wealth that was deposited into the treasury was transferred to members of the Umayyad clan.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

إِلَى أَنْ قَامَ ثَالِثُ الْقَوْمِ، نَافِجًا حِضْنَيْهِ بَيْنَ نَثِيلِهِ وَمُعْتَلَفِهِ، وَقَامَ مَعَهُ بَنُو أَبِيهِ يَخْضَمُونَ مَالَ اللَّهِ
خَضَمَ الْأَيْلَ نِبْتَةَ الرَّبِيعِ، إِلَى أَنْ انْتَكَتْ عَلَيْهِ فَتْلُهُ، وَأَجْهَرَ عَلَيْهِ عَمَلُهُ، وَكَبَتْ بِهِ بَطْنَتُهُ.

“...till the third man of these people stood up with heaving breasts between his dung and fodder. With him his children of his grand-father, (Umayyah) also stood up swallowing up God’s wealth like a camel devouring the foliage of spring, till his rope broke down, his actions finished him and his gluttony brought him down prostrate.” - Imam Ali

Source: Nahjulbalagha, sermon 3

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- The ruling class was made up exclusively of the members of the Ummayyad clan.
- Uthman dismissed all the governors and commanders who had been appointed by Abu Bakr and Umar, and in their stead, he appointed those men whose only “credentials” were that they were Umayyads.
- Uthman’s nepotism was met with sharp criticism by some of the most prominent companions of the Prophet (s), like Abu Dhar and Ammar b. Yasir.

Who was Uthman b. Affan?

- The voices of Abu Dhar, Ammar b. Yasir and Abdullah b. Masood which rose in protest against the tide of materialism threatening to engulf Islam, were silenced by brute force.
- Uthman also angered people of great influence like Amr b. al-Aas and Aisha. He dismissed the former from his post as governor of Egypt and appointed his foster brother.
- Aisha despised Uthman, especially after he lowered her monthly stipend.

Revolutions

- Revolutions against Uthman's administration were launched from 3 regions of the Islamic empire:
 - 1. Kufa
 - 2. Egypt
 - 3. Basra

Revolutions

- In Kufa, Malik al-Ashtar is one of the key figures of the Kufan rebellion.
- In Egypt, Muslims were fighting the Romans under people like Muhammad b. Abi Bakr.
- These people rose up for religious reasons; they were pious generals of the Muslim army.
- There is no doubt that many were motivated by materialism and greed but the primary leaders of these uprisings (Malik and Muhammad) are people who wish to restore the sunnah of the Prophet (s).

The Role of Imam Ali

- Imam Ali played the role of unofficial advisor to the government.
- Sometimes they accepted his advice and other times they rejected but Imam Ali always offered sincere advice.
- When Imam Ali saw mass disapproval of Uthman's policies, he pressured Uthman to make reforms and address people's genuine grievances.

The Role of Imam Ali

- Imam Ali did not encourage people to rebel, nor was he even seen as a leader of the rebellion.
- In many cases the Imam requested protestors to remain calm and non-violent.
- The Imam did, however, believe that people were rightfully frustrated and swift policy changes needed to be made.

Public Protests

- A delegation of 700 members came to Medina from Egypt, and similar delegations also came from Kufa and Basra.
- They came seeking redress of mismanagement of public funds both in Medina and in other provinces.
- If Uthman had given them audience, had heard their grievances, and if he had only assured them that he was in sympathy with them, they would have been satisfied, and they would have returned to their homes. But unfortunately, he did not do so.

Public Protests

- The Egyptian delegates who were encamped at the outskirts of Medina, sent a letter with an emissary to Uthman, asking him to give them audience.
- In the letter they had requested him to remove his foster-brother from his position as governor of Egypt, and to institute certain administrative reforms. But instead of considering the request, Uthman ordered his servants to throw the Egyptian emissary out.

Public Protests

- All three delegations then pitched camp within sight of the palace of the Caliph.
- On the following Friday, Uthman led the congregational prayers, and he read the sermon. Standing in the pulpit, and addressing the delegations from Egypt and Iraq, he said:
“The Messenger of God had predicted that trouble-makers would one day come to his city to disturb its peace. He cursed them all, and now you can see what you are doing.”

Public Protests

- The congregation was enraged at these remarks, and there was much commotion in the mosque. Someone threw a rock at Uthman which struck him in the face; he fell from the pulpit, and was carried out of the mosque to his palace.
- After this incident, Uthman was in a state of siege in his palace. But he could go into the Mosque, and he still led the prayers. A few days later, however, the Egyptians and the Iraqis forbade him to enter the Mosque unless he listened to what they had to say.

Public Protests

- Imam Ali played the role of mediator between Uthman and the rebels.
- Ali met the leaders of the Egyptian delegation and talked with them. They agreed to return to Egypt if Uthman recalled his foster-brother,, and if, in his stead, he appointed Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr as the new governor. Ali told Uthman what he would have to do if he wished the Egyptians to leave Medina.

Public Protests

- Uthman agreed to appoint Muhammad b. Abu Bakr as the new governor of Egypt. This satisfied the Egyptians. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr left Medina to take charge of his new duties, and many of the Egyptians accompanied him. Uthman could once again enter the Mosque and lead the Muslims in prayer. The incident, apparently, was closed.
- However, Marwan b. al-Hakam warned Uthman that this would embolden the rebels to make more demands so he advised him to give a speech telling people that the Egyptians had left because they realized that everything they had heard were rumors.

Public Protests

- Uthman said to them:

““O Muslims! The Egyptians had heard some false reports about their Caliph, and they came to Medina to verify them. Here they noticed that whatever they had heard, was all lies. They were, therefore, satisfied, and they went back to Egypt. Now you too should return to your homes.”

Public Protests

- Everyone began to yell at him: “Uthman, repent! Uthman repent! You are lying. Fear God. You are lying in God's House, and on the pulpit of His Messenger.”
- Uthman was seized with panic, and not knowing what to do, he had to “repent.” He begged God to forgive his sin, and then went home.
- Imam Ali told Uthman that if he wished, he could still win the confidence and respect of the Muslims if he admitted his errors, and if he sincerely apologized for them. He also warned him that if he did not, the rebels might besiege him in his palace.

Public Protests

- On the following day, Uthman went into the Mosque, admitted his errors, sought pardon and mercy from God, resolved not to repeat the errors, and promised to take immediate action upon the demands of the Muslims for reforms in the government.
- When Uthman returned to his palace, Marwan rebuked him and said: “You have committed a major blunder in the Mosque by admitting your errors, and by 'repenting' in public. Admission of your sins has now brought the crowds from the Mosque to the gate of your house. They are here only because they have seen your weakness. If you had been 'firm,' with them, they would not have dared to come here. The only way to deal with them, and to impress them with your power and authority, is to be 'firm' with them.”

Public Protests

- Uthman again yielded to the pressure and gave Marwan his permission to address the rebels:

“Why have you gathered here? What are your intentions? Have you come to attack us or to rob us and to plunder us? If you have, then listen to this with attention. You will not succeed. You cannot strip power and authority from our hands. We shall not be intimidated by you or by anyone else. Now begone from here. May God curse you.”
- This was the point of no return and Uthman was eventually assassinated in his palace by the angry mob.

Where was Muawiyah?

- Muawiyah was a relative of Uthman and he was fully aware of what was happening in Medina.
- Uthman had sought help from him in a letter:
“The people of Medina have relapsed into apostasy; they have broken the pledge of loyalty to me. They are now contemplating treason. You, therefore, send to me immediately in Medina, the fierce warriors of Syria, mounted on swift animals.

Where was Muawiyah?

- Muawiya received Uthman's letter, but decided to watch the situation, and he preferred not to oppose the companions of the Prophet openly because he knew that they were all united in their opposition to Uthman.
- Muawiyah had his own aspirations to become Caliph. He actually did not want Uthman to survive this revolution.
- Muawiyah sends an army and positions them at the border of Medina.
- He tells his army not to enter until he gives them word.

Where was Muawiyah?

- When the rebels saw Muawiyah's army, it provoked them and created commotion.
- One could argue that the presence of Muawiyah's army was one of the factors that led to Uthman's death.

Allegiance to Imam Ali

- After Uthman was killed, that same day, many companions suggested that Imam Ali was the only person qualified to repair the damage done to the ummah.
- Prominent companions like Talha, Zubayr, Sa'ad b. Abi Waqqas came forward as possible contenders for the caliphate but the masses were chanting the name of Ali.

Allegiance to Imam Ali

- Why were the Muslims finally ready to accept Imam Ali as Caliph?
 - For nearly 25 years people saw Imam Ali as a wise unofficial advisor to the former administrations and his advice was proven time and time again to be the best course of action.
 - Imam Ali was highly respected and endorsed by senior companions like Ammar b. Yasir.
 - He was fiercely committed to social and economic justice. Muslims knew he had no worldly aspirations and his government would be the antithesis of Uthman's administration.

Allegiance to Imam Ali

- When the masses gather around the house of Imam Ali and beg him to become Caliph, he initially declines.
- He offers to play the same role he had played for the past 25 years-unofficial advisor.
- The people insist and show up the following day in larger numbers.

Allegiance to Imam Ali

فَمَا رَاعَنِي إِلَّا وَالنَّاسُ إِلَيَّ كَعُرْفِ الضَّبِّعِ، يَنْتَالُونَ عَلَيَّ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ، حَتَّى لَقَدْ وُطِيَءَ
الْحَسَنَانَ، وَشُقَّ عِطْفَائِي، مُجْتَمِعِينَ حَوْلِي كَرَبِضَةِ الْغَنَمِ

“At that moment, nothing took me by surprise, but the crowd of people rushing to me. It advanced towards me from every side like the mane of the hyena so much so that Hasan and Husayn were getting crushed and both the ends of my shoulder garment were torn. They collected around me like a herd of sheep and goats.” - Imam Ali

Source: Nahjulbalagha, sermon 3

The Philosophy of “Allegiance”

- If Imam Ali is divinely appointed, what is the purpose of people paying allegiance to him?
 - Allegiance is meant to recognize a qualified person, not make a person qualified.
 - Imam Ali doesn't need allegiance because his legitimacy comes from God.
 - Allegiance is a commitment to support so that this qualified leader is able to achieve the goals that they have set. An Islamic government with the participation of the people is required for the advancement of humanity.

The Philosophy of “Allegiance”

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

“Indeed We have sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance so that people can stand for justice...” Quran 57:25