

# The Caliphate of Imam Ali

## Lesson 4



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ENRICHING THE SOUL

# Changing the Islamic Capital

- In 36 AH, in the month of Rajab, Imam Ali decided to change the Islamic capital from Madina to Kufa.
- When law and order had been restored in Basra, he appointed Abdullah b. Abbas as its new governor, and then left for Kufa which became, thenceforth, the new capital of Islam.

# Changing the Islamic Capital

- On the 12<sup>th</sup> of Rajab in the year 36 AH, the Imam arrived at the gates of Kufa.
- The nobles of the city came out to greet him and to congratulate him on his victory.
- Entering the city, he first went into the Great Mosque, offered the prayer of thanksgiving to God for victory, and then delivered a speech in which he thanked the people of Kufa for their support, and commended them for their gallant performance in the Battle of the Camel.

# Changing the Islamic Capital

- In the second letter in Nahjulbalagha, Imam writes to the people of Kufa after his victory in Basra.

وَجَزَاكُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ مِصْرَ عَنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِ نَبِيِّكُمْ أَحْسَنَ مَا يَجْزِي الْعَامِلِينَ بِطَاعَتِهِ، وَالشَّاكِرِينَ لِنِعْمَتِهِ، فَقَدْ سَمِعْتُمْ وَأَطَعْتُمْ، وَدُعَيْتُمْ فَأَجَبْتُمْ.

”May God reward you, townsmen (of Kufah), on behalf of a member of your Prophet's family, with the best reward that He bestows on those who act in obedience to Him, and on those who thank Him for His bounties. Surely, you heard (me) and obeyed, and when you were called you promptly responded.”

# Changing the Islamic Capital

- The nobles of Kufa requested Ali to stay at the governor's palace but he did not agree. Instead, he chose a humble residence.
- Seven months after taking charge of the government, Ali made Kufa his new capital. Following were some of the reasons that prompted this change:
  - 1. The Battle of the Camel was fought and was won with the aid of the people of Kufa. Ali made Kufa his capital, partly in recognition of this service by them.
  - 2. He did not want Madina to become the locale of political disturbances at any time, and he wanted to save the City of the Prophet from destruction or desecration in the possible wars of the future.

# Changing the Islamic Capital

- 3. Kufa had a more central position in the empire. Administrative facility of the vast and sprawling territories dictated this change.
- 4. It was easier for Ali to watch the movements of Muawiya from Kufa than from Medina.

# The Rise of the Umayyads

- In the pre-Islamic era, the Umayyads had enjoyed some local importance in Makkah as guardians of the pantheon of idols and as wealthy usurers.
- When the Prophet conquered Makkah, he ended their rule and they found themselves with no other option but to submit to the new social order.
- The acceptance of Islam by the Umayyads, after their failure to destroy it, was only proof of their resiliency. They realized that their frontal attacks on Islam had all failed, and that they had to try something unconventional.

# The Rise of the Umayyads

- Their new strategy was to enter the ranks of the faithful, disguised as Muslims; to watch the events from within, and then to strike at Islam when the opportune moment presented itself.
- The opportune moment came after the death of the Prophet.
- Abu Sufyan initially tries to align himself with Imam Ali against the government to essentially divide and conquer the Muslims.
- He offered to fill the streets of Medina with infantry and cavalry, ready if Imam Ali would challenge the government of Saqifa. Imam Ali flatly refused.



# The Rise of the Umayyads

- It occurred to Abu Sufyan that if he tried to align himself with the leaders of the Saqifa government, he might find them more responsive than Ali. He did and they were!
- During the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar, the Umayyad's quietly consolidated their position. They didn't try to rock the boat and make waves. Time was not ripe yet for them to make an attempt at storming the stage of Islam.
- They, therefore, kept a low profile. But when Uthman became caliph, they felt that the time had come for them to cast off their caution and restraint.

# The Rise of the Umayyads

- Uthman dismissed all the governors of the provinces who had been appointed by Abu Bakr and Umar, and filled the vacancies with members of his own family and clan.
- He also gave the Umayyads the most fertile lands and pastures as their estate, and bestowed upon them all the gold and silver in the public treasury.
- When Imam Ali took the reins of the government, he dismissed all the governors who were plundering the country, and he ordered the Umayyads to restore to the State all the lands, estates and pastures which they had illegally procured.

# The Rise of the Umayyads

- But the Umayyads had no intention of giving up anything. They made it clear that they would hang on, as long as possible, to their former positions and their privileges, and if Ali still wanted them, he would have to take them by force of arms.
- Imam Ali knew it that he would meet massive resistance if he tried to distribute wealth equitably. But he put his duty toward God and the Muslim community ahead of the wishes or the resentments of the privileged class.
- Talha and Zubayr were out of the military equation, and Imam Ali's new confrontation was with the old adversaries - the Umayyads

# Prelude to the Battle of Siffeen

- Of the three battles that Imam Ali fought during this caliphate, the Battle of Siffeen was the most challenging.
- Imam Ali had appointed some government workers who didn't necessarily meet his standard of morality:
  - Ex. Ziyad b. Abih- He was not pious but he was obedience to the Imam as a worker.
- Muawiyah, on the other hand, was unwilling to be a subject and refused to recognized Imam Ali as the caliph.

# Prelude to the Battle of Siffeen

- Nahjulbalgha has documented some of the correspondences between Imam Ali and Muawiyah.

إِنَّهُ بَايَعَنِي الْقَوْمُ الَّذِينَ بَايَعُوا أَبَا بَكْرٍ وَعُمَرَ وَعُثْمَانَ عَلَيَّ مَا بَايَعُوهُمْ عَلَيْهِ، فَلَمْ يَكُنْ لِلشَّاهِدِ أَنْ يَخْتَارَ، وَلَا لِلْغَائِبِ أَنْ يَرُدَّ،

“Verily, those who swore allegiance to Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman have sworn allegiance to me on the same basis on which they swore allegiance to them. (On this basis) he who was present has no choice (to consider), and he who was absent has no right to reject;...”

- Source: Nahjulbalagha, letter 6

# Prelude to the Battle of Siffeen

- Muawiyah asks Imam Ali to at least grant him sovereignty over Syria but the Imam refuses.
- Muawiyah then begins questioning why Ali feels more deserving of the caliphate than him considering that both hail from the tribe of Quraysh.
- The Imam responds to this in letter 17 in Nahjulbalagha:

# Prelude to the Battle of Siffeen

وَأَمَّا قَوْلُكَ: إِنَّا بَنُو عَبْدِ مَنَافٍ، فَكَذَلِكَ نَحْنُ، وَلَكِنْ لَيْسَ أُمَيَّةٌ كَهَاشِمٍ، وَلَا حَرْبٌ كَعَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ،  
وَلَا أَبُو سُفْيَانَ كَأَبِي طَالِبٍ، وَلَا الْمُهَاجِرُ كَالطَّلِيقِ

“As for your saying that both of us are sons of 'Abd Manaf, it is no doubt so, but Umayyah cannot be like Hashim, nor Harb like Abd al-Muttalib, nor can Abu Sufyan be like Abu Talib. The muhajir (immigrant) cannot be a match for him who was set free (on the day Makkah was conquered)...”

# Prelude to the Battle of Siffeen

- Imam Ali makes numerous attempts to stop Muawiyah's plots to pursue the caliphate.
- As letters are being exchanged, Muawiyah gathers 75,000 to fight Imam Ali and they meet in northern Iraq and southern Syria.
- Imam Ali mobilizes an army of 45,000.



# The Battle of Siffeen

- Upon arrival in Siffeen, Imam Ali's army found its access to the waterfront barred by a strong contingent of the Syrian troops.
- Imam Ali sent Sa'sa' b. Sawhan, a companion of the Prophet, to Muawiyah, asking him to withdraw his pickets from the river, and to allow free access to water, to everyone. Muawiyah, of course, refused to do so whereupon the Imam ordered his troops to seize the waterfront by force.

# The Battle of Siffeen

- In letter 14 in Nahjulbalagha, the Imam gives instructions and guidelines to his soldiers relating to rules of engagement:

لَا تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى يَبْدَأُوكُمْ، فَإِنَّكُمْ بِحَمْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَى حُجَّةٍ، وَتَرْكُكُمْ إِيَّاهُمْ حَتَّى يَبْدَأُوكُمْ حُجَّةٌ أُخْرَى لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ،

“Do not fight them unless they initiate the fighting, because, by the grace of Allah, you are in the right and to leave them till they begin fighting will be another point from your side against them...”

# The Battle of Siffeen

- Before the battle began, Imam Ali sent a letter to Muawiyah suggesting that they should avoid the unnecessary casualties and instead face each other in a one-on-one combat.
- This letter has been preserved and is found in Nahjulbalagha as letter 10.

# The Battle of Siffeen

وَقَدْ دَعَوْتِ إِلَى الْحَرْبِ، فَدَعِ النَّاسَ جَانِباً وَاخْرُجِ إِلَيَّ، وَأَعْفِ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ مِنَ الْقِتَالِ، لِتَعْلَمَ أَيُّنَا  
الْمَرِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِهِ، وَالْمُعْطَى عَلَى بَصَرِهِ! فَأَنَا أَبُو حَسَنٍ قَاتِلُ جَدِّكَ وَخَالَكَ وَأَخِيكَ شَدْخاً يَوْمَ  
بَدْرٍ، ذَلِكَ السَّيْفُ مَعِي، وَبِذَلِكَ الْقَلْبِ أَلْقَى عَدُوِّي.

“You have called me to war so leave the people on one side, come out to me and spare both parties from fighting so that it may be known who of us has a rusted heart, and covered eyes. I am Abul-Hasan who killed your grandfather, your brother, and your uncle, by cutting them to pieces on the day of Badr. The same sword is with me and I meet my adversary with the same heart...”

# The Battle of Siffeen

- The Battle of Siffeen lasted for a few months. It fell on some of the sacred months where fighting was suspended.
- After the month of Muharram was over, Imam Ali redeployed his forces. He gave command of the right wing to Abdullah b. Abbas, and of the left wing to Malik al- Ashtar, while he himself commanded the center.
- The great companion of the Prophet, Ammar b. Yasir was also in the ranks of the Imam's army. He was an elderly man but fought with the vigor and passion of a young man.

# The Battle of Siffeen

- When Ammar b. Yasir was killed, people recalled the words of the Prophet when he foretold Muslims that Ammar would one day be killed by a rebellious group.
- Ammar's death had a profound effect upon both friend and foe, and it forced a tilt in perceptions. The army of Ali now fought with new zeal being convinced that they were fighting for Truth.
- At the same time, the Syrians were racked with doubt. Many of them stopped fighting.

# The Battle of Siffeen

- Amr b. al- A's quoted the tradition of the Prophet before Muawiyah, and said: "It is now obvious that we are the rebellious ones."
- Muawiyah bade Amr to keep quiet, and not to let others hear the tradition of the Prophet, and he added that Ammar had actually been killed by Ali who had brought him into the battle.
- One of the companions who was present in the entourage of Muawiyah, warily commented that if Ali had killed Ammar because he had brought him into the battle with him, then without a doubt, the Prophet had killed Hamza because he had taken him into battle with him.

# The Battle of Siffeen

- Men were dying in large numbers but without any tangible results to show. Imam Ali found this lack of progress detrimental to the morale of his troops, and he decided to remedy the situation.
- He called Abdullah b. Abbas who was his principal adviser, and Malik al-Ashtar who was one of his top commanders. Together they worked out a new strategy to bring the battle to a successful conclusion.



# The Battle of Siffeen

- On the following day, Imam Ali and Malik were to attack the enemy simultaneously, one from the right and the other from the left. Maintaining perfect coordination, synchronization and precision, they were to take the enemy in a pincer movement, and then converging upon his center, Malik was to lead the charge that would force Muawiyah to surrender.
- Malik fought all day long. Normally, the two armies stopped fighting after sunset, and returned to the camp for prayers and for rest but that day Malik refused to return. He also didn't let the Syrians return to their camp, and kept them in the battlefield.

# The Battle of Siffeen

- After a brief pause for his prayers, Malik launched his onslaught upon the Syrian army. This time his charge was so impetuous that the Syrians were driven before him like sheep. After the night prayer, Ali also returned to the battlefield, and attacked the right wing of the Syrians. Between them, they began to grind the Syrian army.
- Muawiya now could see with his own eyes that he was on the verge of losing the battle.

# The Battle of Siffeen

- Muawiyah asked Amr b. al-A'as for advice. By the suggestion of Amr and the order of Muawiyah, people of Syria put copies of the Quran on their spears, shouting: "O' people of Iraq! Let God be the arbiter between us".
- According to some accounts, they also shouted: "O Arab people! Think about your women and daughters. If you die, who is going to fight the Romans, Turks and the Persians."
- They thereby asked for ending the war. Imam Ali ordered his army to continue the war, but most people in his army wanted to accept the arbitration. Thus Imam Ali had to accept the arbitration