

A CHAPTER FROM ISLAMIC HISTORY
WHY OMAR AL-AAS CHOSE TO SIDE WITH MOAWIYA
AGAINST ALI (A.S)

A.H Sheriff

On assassination of Uthman - the third caliph, the Mohajireen and Ansaar joined hands in persuading Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S.) to accept the caliphate of the Muslim Ummah. Muawiya b. Ali Sufyan in Damascus put on the garb of an avenger of Uthman's blood against the new Caliph by falsely accusing him of his assassination. But the fact is that his concealed aim was to discredit Ali (A.S.) and grab the caliphate of the Muslim Ummah.

In order to achieve this aim, he commenced enlisting support of leading personalities of the time. In the course of that, Ataba b. Abi Sufyan advised him to seek the intervention and support of Omar Al-Aas in his fight against Ali (A.S.) for he was a neutral person and had been aloof during the caliphate of Uthman. Besides he was likely to remain aloof from Moawiya but could possibly be won over to his side if induced with money and high position.

So the matter of winning over Omar Al-Aas, that renown elderly shrewd politician was seriously considered. He was then living a low profile life in Palestine. A letter was addressed to him by Moawiya inviting him to Damascus for consultation on the issue in question.

When the letter reached his hands, Omar Al-Aas divulged the contents to his three sons and invited their opinion. The first son Abdullah known for his thoughtfulness and pure faith said this to his father:

"The day the Prophet of Islam died followed by the death of the first two Caliphs, they were not displeased with you. When Uthman was killed you were not in Madina. Now would it not be wise of you to stay at home and better refrain from associating with Moawiya for the sake of worldly gain. As it is because of your advanced age, you are not likely to enjoy anything for long period, whilst you would bear the consequences at your death."

But the second son Mohamed had a view contrary to that of the first. He exhorted his father to support Moawiya saying:

"You are the chief of Quraish and if you remain quiet in such matters you will be looked down upon by people. Righteousness is on the side of Moawiya and his people. You should assist them in the work of avenging the blood of Uthman. This is the time when Banu Umayya have risen for that purpose".

Omar Al-Aas was a man of extreme shrewdness. Addressing his sons, he said: "Your opinion - that of Abdullah-is to the benefit of my religion whereas that of Muhammad is good for my this world. Let us ponder over this matter."

Thereafter, he turned to his younger son Wardan and sought his opinion on the matter, and the boy had this to say:

"Do you want me to tell you what is in your heart?" the young son asked.

"Yes, do tell me what you know, my dear son" replied Omar.

"It is the consideration of both this world and the next that has at present overtaken your heart. But the fact is that in following Ali (A.S.) there is salvation for the next world but devoid of this worldly gain, although the life hereafter will be such as to compensate the shortfalls of this world. Whereas in case of your switching to Moawiya, no doubt there will be this worldly gain but devoid of the next worldly salvation and neither would that gain compensate the less in the next world. You find yourself at present at a cross-road between these two and unable to decide which one to choose."

On hearing these words, Omar Al-Aas responded by saying:

"You are right, my son, but now tell me what shall I do?"

"You better stay at home. If religion is to succeed, you will be living under its protection. If the people after this worldly gain are to succeed, then they will not be independent of you (because of your position)" replied the son.

But alas! Omar Aas ignored all the sound advice of his sons. His heart was already overwhelmed with the greed for this worldly gain and position of power. He made his final decision which is portrayed in the following words of a couplet which he composed as he proceeded to Damascus to be in the camp of Moawiya - the arch-enemy of Ali b. Abi Talib (A.S.)

"As for Ali, with him there is certainly religion but not shared with the world. And with that (Moawiya) there is the world and power (to gain). Verily it is out of my greed that I have chosen the world and I have no logic argument for what has been chosen."

Islamic history bears witness of how Omar Al-Aas closely associated with Moawiya and advised him on matters of confrontation with Ali (A.S) and his treacherous ways of sabotaging his leadership of the Muslim Ummah to the detriment of Islam.