

Salahuddin and the Khilafah

Translated from Arabic

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People highlight the military aspect of Salahuddin's personality, his jihad against the Crusaders in both Egypt and the Levant, his piety, his justice upon the citizens, his mercy and his preparation of the means. However, there is also another aspect that indicates his steadfastness upon his Deen and his firmness upon the Truth, which he adopted in any situation. This aspect is not highlighted and it manifests in his stance towards the Khilafah (Caliphate). Since Salahuddin (may Allah have mercy on him) adopted the unity of Khilafah, he did not recognize the existence of two Khalifahs (caliphs) at the same time. Since the legitimate Khaleefah was the Abbasi Khaleefah (Abbasid Caliphate), he vowed allegiance and obedience to that Khaleefah. He believed in fighting the second Khaleefah, who disputed with the Abbasi Khaleefah.

Salahuddin's intense concern for the unity of the Khilafah, and his belief that the Abbasid Khaleefah was the legitimate Khalifah, was apparent in his letter to Mansour Yaqoub bin Yusuf bin Abdul Mumin in the year 586, in which Salahuddin sought support from him against the crusader Franks to protect the coasts of Levant and Egypt from their fleets. This was because Yaqoub had a large naval force, whilst Salahuddin had only a small navy. Yaqoub was one of the leaders of the Al-Mohad State (Al-Muwahhidun of Northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula) and he called himself Ameer ul Mumineen (Leader of the Believers). Despite Salahuddin's urgent need of Yacoub's naval assets, he did not address Yacoub as Ameer ul Mu'mineen (i.e. Khaleefah). Instead, he addressed him as Ameer ul Muslimeen (Ruler of Muslims). Salahuddin insisted in his letter consideration of the Abbasid Khaleefah to be the inheritor of Prophets (as), in terms of knowledge, the inheritor of the earth, in terms of official authority, and an adornment in the heavens of Deen, where he is the jewel in the crown.

Abul Abbasi An-Nasiri (أبو العباس الناصري) wrote in his extensive work, الاستقصا لأخبار دول المغرب، وكان عنوان الكتاب: من صلاح الدين إلى الأقصى "Investigating the Information about the Far West," that "وفي أوله الفقير إلى الله تعالى يوسف بن أيوب وبعده الحمد لله الذي استعمل على الملة الحنيفية من استعمر الأرض، وأغنى من أهلها من سأله القرض، وأجرى من أجرى على يده النافلة والقرض، وزين سماء الملة بدراري الذراري التي بعضها من بعض... ولما وقف عليه المنصور ورأى تجافيه فيه عن خطابه بأمر المؤمنين، لم يعجبه ذلك، وأسرها في نفسه، وحمل الرسول على مناهج البر والكرامة ورده إلى مرسله ولم يجبه إلى حاجته. ويقال إنه جهز له بعد ذلك مئة وثمانين أسطولاً ومنع النصارى من The content of the letter was: "From Salahuddin to Ameer ul Muslimeen, Yusuf bin Ayyub, the one who is in need of Allah (swt). Praise be to Allah Who has appointed over the Islamic Ummah those who spread prosperity in the land and caused its people to be independent in financial means, without debt, and caused the supererogatory (naafilah) and the obligatory to be done through the rulers, the One Who adorned the sky of Deen with the pearls of rulers ... Mansoor took exception at being addressed by Salahuddin as merely Ameer ul Muslimeen (أمير المسلمين Ruler of Muslims) and not as Ameer ul Mu'mineen (أمير المؤمنين Leader of the Believers), and he held that against him. Thus he honored Salahuddin's envoy, without fulfilling any of his requests. It was later reported that Mansoor nevertheless prepared to send one hundred eighty ships, but their arrival was prevented by the Crusaders' capture of the Syrian coastal cities. Allah Knows Best."

Shihab Al-Din Al-Maqdisi (شهاب الدين المقدسي) in his book كتاب الروضتين في أخبار الدولتين النورية "The Book of the Two Gardens, Concerning Affairs of the Reigns of Nur al-Din and الصلاحية

Salah al-Din” stated, لم يحصل من جهة سلطان المغرب ما التمس منه من النجدة وبلغني أنه عز عليه كونه لم يخاطب بأمرير، “Salahuddin did not get enforcement from the Sultan of Maghrib. I was informed that the Sultan was concerned over not being addressed as Ameer ul Mu’mineen, according to their customs. He used to be a just Sultan who manifested Shariah and a warrior.” This narration brought by Shihab Al-Din Al-Maqdasi in his book, is preponderate over what is contained both in the poem of Yacoub’s cousin and the poem of Shamsuddin bin Munqid, the envoy of Salahuddin. The first poem considers Mansour to be the best of Khulafa’a and the second called him “the Leader of Muslims.”

Regarding the poem of Yaqoob’s cousin, Al-Maqdasi said,

وفيه يقول ابن عمه سليمان بن عبد الله بن عبد المؤمن أبو الربيع من قصيدة أولها:
هَبَّتْ بِنَصْرِكُمْ الرِّيحُ الْأَرْبَعُ *** وَجَدَتْ بِسَعْدِكُمْ النُّجُومُ الطَّلَعُ
إِنْ قِيلَ مَنْ خَيْرُ الْخَلَائِفِ كُلِّهَا *** فَالْيَاكَ يَا يَعْقُوبُ تُوْمِي الإِصْبَعُ
إِنْ كُنْتَ تَتْلُو السَّابِقِينَ فَإِنَّمَا *** أَنْتَ الْمَقْدَمُ وَالْخَلَاءُ يُقِ تَبَعُ

“His cousin Sulaiman bin Abdullah bin Abdul Muimin Abu Rab’ee says about the first poem:

‘The spring wind blows with your support, whilst rising stars are found with your happiness.

If asked who is the best of all the Khulafa’a, the fingers will point to you, O Yacoub!

Though you follow the predecessors, you and your morals are to be followed”

Regarding the poem of the envoy of Salahudin, Al-Maqdasi said,

وقد مدحه أيضاً شمس الدين بن منقذ هذا المرسل إليه من جهة السلطان بقصيدة منها:
سَأَسْأَلُكَ بَحْرًا ذَا عُبَابٍ قَطَعْتُهُ *** إِلَى بَحْرِ جُودٍ مَا لِنِعْمَاهُ سَاجِلُ
إِلَى مَعْدِنِ التَّقْوَى إِلَى كَعْبَةِ الْهُدَى *** إِلَى مَنْ سَمَتْ بِالذِّكْرِ مِنْهُ الْأَوَائِلُ
إِلَيْكَ أَمِيرَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَلَمْ تَزَلْ *** إِلَى بَابِكَ الْمَأْمُولِ تُرْجَى الرَّوَاجِلُ

“Shamsuddin bin Munqid has praised Al-Mansoor as Sultan in his poem:

‘I thank the angrily swelling sea that I cut away from, into the generous, calm sea, enjoyed at the coast,

To the mine of piety and the compass of guidance, to the one whom the predecessors would call upon, out of mention,

It is you, the Leader of Muslims, and your hopeful door always satisfies those who pass by.”

What affirms the passion of Salahuddin for the unification of Khilafah, and his conviction that the Abbasid Khalifah was the legitimate Khaleefah, is the report of Shihab Al-Din Al-Maqdasi (شهاب الدين المقدسي) in his book “The Book of the Two Gardens, Concerning Affairs of the Reigns of Nooruddin and Salahuddin” which contains the letter sent by Salahuddin to the capital of the Khilafah, Baghdad.

The book mentions what came in the letter: وبلاد أولاد عبد المؤمن فلو أن لها ماء سيف لأطفأ ما فيها من النار إلى أن تلعو كلمة الله العليا وتملأ الولاية العباسية الدنيا “had the lands of the children of Abdul Mu’min a sword of water raised against them, to extinguish the fire therein, raising the Word of Allah as the Highest, the Abbasid Authority would come to cover the whole earth.”

Here, Salahuddin seeks permission to fight the children of Abdul Mu'min. The reason for fighting them is their departure from the obedience to the Bagdad Khaleefah, through their declaration of themselves as Khulaafah or the Leaders of Believers.

As for Salahudin's own obedience to the Khalifah, he declared it at the beginning of every letter he sent to the Diwaan of the Khaleefah, and he considered himself a loyal servant.

Amongst those declarations is what is transmitted by Al-Qalqashandi (القلقشندي) in his encyclopedia, صبح العشى "Dawn for the Blind," في امتثال الأوامر ... "The servant who plunders the wealth of noble thresholds by greetings... In compliance to the honorable order which he hastens to and fights for." The letter also says, وحامداً الله الذي جعله من طاعة أمير المؤمنين عند حسن يقينه, "All Praise to Allah the One Who made him obey the Ameer ul Mu'mineen with the goodness of his certainty."

The letter also states, على الله الموحدين على الملحدین، وثبت كلمة المتقين على اليقين، بدوام أيام الديوان العزيز... "May Allah raise the status of those of Tawheed over those of atheism. May Allah establish the word of righteous people with certainty, continuously in days of noble courts... May Allah inspire the Creations to address in obedience to him (the Khaleefah), within the scrolls of Iman."

Amongst Salahudin statements about declaring obedience, as mentioned by Al-Maqdasi, وهذه المقاصد الثلاثة الجهاد في سبيل الله والكف عن مظالم عباد الله والطاعة ل خليفة الله هي مراد الخادم من البلاد إذا فتحها، "These three objectives, Jihad in the Path of Allah, preventing oppression upon the servants of Allah and obedience to the Khalifah of Allah (swt), are intended from a servant of a land when it is conquered and are his spoils in this world, if he is granted."

Salahuddin (may Allah have mercy on him) viewed that there can be no community, without an Imam. In one of his writings as mentioned by the Al-Madisi: أدام الله أيام الديوان العزيز... "May Allah preserve the days of noble Diwan. The Ummah is a collective, unified by its Imam. The Ummah is a collective of safety and not an amalgam of divisions."

Salahudin also believed that leadership is individualistic and not collective. Al-Maqdasi quoted from him in one of his letters, لا يختار إلا أن تغدو جيوش المسلمين متحاشدة على عدوها، لا متحاشدة، وبتوها، ولو أن أمور الحرب تصلحها الشركة لما عز عليه أن يكون كثير المشاركين، ولا ساءه أن تكون الدنيا كثيرة المالكين، وإنما "He (the Khaleefah) alone, not the tyrants with their injustice, decides upon mobilizing the armies of the Muslims against the enemy of the Ummah. If the matters of war were reconciled by the collective, there would be far more participants. The world may not be harmed through many rulers but governing the matters of war mandates nothing else but unity."

These texts, though they were written by Al-Qadi Al-Fadhil (Salahuddin's senior advisor), the Sultan Salahuddin was supervising. Al-Qadhi only expressed the Sultan's opinion and he ensured the consent of the Sultan, as the letters were directed to the Diwan of the Khilafah, in the name of the Sultan.

The most glaring evidence about Salahuddin's view regarding the unity of Khilafah is that he eliminated the Ubaid Caliphate of the Fatimids in Egypt. He considered the Fatimids to be the usurpers of the Baghdad Khaleefah, upon whom he had given Bay'ah. The Ubaidis seized the Wilayah of Egypt in 357 AH, and declared a Caliphate for themselves, which they falsely and scandalously called the Fatimid Caliphate. In the year 549 AH, the Abbasid Khaleefah, Al-Muqtafi, wrote a covenant conferring the Wilayah of Egypt to Nooruddin Zengi, the Wali of Aleppo and Damascus, and ordered him to proceed to Egypt. In 562 AH, Sultan Nooruddin Zengi prepared an army of two thousand troops, under the command of Asad Din

Shirkuh. Then in 564 AH, Shirkuh's nephew Salahuddin took his place. The last Fatimid Caliph, Al-Adid, remained in Egypt, outside the influence of the Abbasid Khaleefah in Baghdad. Then Salahuddin ended the Khutba declared for Al-Adid Al-Fatimi and returned Egypt to the Abbasid Khalifah in 567 AH. Thereby, the Khilafah became one and the Ummah was unified under the Abbasid Khalifah of Baghdad.

Imam Suyuti says in his "History of the Khulafa'a" about the incident in the year 567 AH: قال العماد الكاتب: استفتح السلطان صلاح الدين بن أيوب سنة سبع بجامع مصر على الطاعة والسمع، وهو إقامة الخطبة الأولى منها بمصر لبني العباس، وعفت البدعة، وصفت الشرعة، وأقيمت الخطبة العباسية في الجمعة الثانية بالقاهرة إلى أن يقول: وسير السلطان نور الدين بهذه البشارة شهاب الدين بن المطهر إلى بغداد، وأمرني بإنشاء بشارة عامة تقرأ في سائر بلاد الإسلام، فأنشأت بشارة أولها: الحمد لله معلي الحق ومعلمه، وموهي الباطل وموهنه، ومنها: ولم يبق بتلك البلاد منبر إلا وقد أقيمت عليه الخطبة "The I'mad the Scribe stated that in 567 AH the Sultan Salahuddin bin Ayub demanded the full submission of the people in the Great Mosque of Egypt and that was by the establishment of the Khutbah, on the first Friday in the month of Muharram, for the House of Abbas. Thus, innovation was destroyed and Shariah flourished. The Khutbah was read for the House of Abbasids on the second Friday in Cairo.... Sultan Nooruddin dispatched Shibabuddin al-Mudhahhar, to Baghdad with the good news and ordered me to draw up a public announcement of it to be read in all the Wilayahs of Islam. I accordingly penned a joyful proclamation beginning thus, "Praise be to God, the Exalter of Truth and its Revealer, the Destroyer of Falsehood and its Disabler." It also contained the following, "and there is not left in those Wilayahs a minbar but that the Khutbah is appointed to be read therein for our master, the Imam al Mustadhi bi' Amrillah, the Amir of the Believers." Mustadhi was the Abbasid Khaleefah of the time.

In response to the good news, the Khaleefah sent robes of honor and presents to Nooruddin and Salahuddin, with standards and banners for the Khuteebis of Cairo. He bestowed upon I'mad the Scribe a robe of honor and a hundred dinars.

In the year 569 AH, a faction in Cairo wanted to return the Caliphate to the House of Al-Adid, so Salahuddin killed them and crucified them between the two palaces. He considered their actions to be of the greatest crimes that would divide the community of Muslims.

When Khaleefah Nasir Al-Abbasi assumed the Khilafah, he dispatched to Salahuddin a robe of honor and the investiture of his dignity. Salahuddin wrote him a letter which stated, "Your servant, والخادم، والله الحمد، خلع من كان ينازع الخلافة رداءها، وأساع الغصة التي أذخر الله للإساعة في سيفه ماءها، All Praise be to Allah, may those who dispute with the Khilafah over its essence, drown upon the water which Allah (swt) has stored in His Sword for flooding..."

This was how Salahuddin (may Allah have mercy on him) adopted the unity of the Khilafah, believing that if the Bay'ah was given to two Khalifahs at the same time, the latter would be killed, since fulfilling the Bay'ah is obliged only to the first Khalifah alone, just as the Messenger of Allah (saw) conveyed.

It is worthy of notice that Al-Quds, which was captured by the Crusaders in 492 AH, was liberated by Salahuddin from the Crusaders in 583 AH, after he had eliminated the Ubaid Caliphate (Fatimids) from Egypt and unified the Khilafah in the year 567 AH. Thus, the power of Muslims is in their Khilafah. We ask Allah (swt) to return the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate) so that the Jewish entity will be eliminated from its roots, whilst Al-Quds will be liberated and the Blessed Land will be completely returned into the Abode of Islam.