

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - The Kharijites

The Return March

After the execution of the arbitration agreement the forces of both the sides had to withdraw from the battlefield. Although the arbitration agreement had been forced on him Ali, as an honorable man found himself bound by the agreement. He accordingly ordered a return march for his forces. Ali left the battlefield of Siffin with a heavy heart. Victory had eluded him because of the treachery of his own men. He had been betrayed. Heavy casualties had taken place from both the sides and he mourned at the death of so many Muslims. He had lost some of his best supporters like 'Ammar b Yasir, and this vacuum could not be filled. He felt distressed that the Muslim Ummah had lost its unity. A generation after the death of the Holy Prophet, the people were losing their Islamic character and were once again relapsing into the evils of the Age of Ignorance. It was heartrending for him to see that truth was being suppressed, and falsehood was getting the upper hand. It appeared to him that by subjecting him and the Muslims to such ordeals, God intended the Muslims to be put to test. Ali bowed his head to the will of God, and prayed to the Almighty to grant him the patience and the courage to face the difficulties that beset his path. The return march was made by the shortest road on the right bank of the Euphrates. The troops that had marched to the battlefield fired with the urge to fight for the vindication of the truth were now a frustrated and disappointed people who were returning to their homes after losing much and gaining little. For such failure they reproached and accused one another when the truce was called. They had heaved a sigh of relief at the cessation of hostilities. On the way back when they reflected on the course of events which they had themselves precipitated they came to have second thoughts. It came to dawn on them that they were the victims of misfortune for which they themselves were to blame.

Back in Kufa, Ali found the city plunged in gloom and grief. Almost from every house in the city rose the shrieks of women mourning the deaths of their dear ones who had fallen in the Battle of Siffin. There was a sense of general discontentment with the people that the sacrifices that they had made had gone in vain, and the campaign to Syria undertaken at a heavy cost had proved to be an exercise in futility. The general state of administration had fallen at a low ebb. Government was faced with acute financial difficulties. The law and order position became unsatisfactory. Ali had to strive hard to restore some semblance of order. He sympathized with the families who had lost their men in the battle and assured them that such deaths would be avenged. In his sermons to the congregation in the principal mosque of the city, he exhorted the people to hold fast to the rope of God, cultivate the values of Islam, remain united among themselves, and pray to God for their ultimate victory. He took the people into confidence, and narrated at length how he had been betrayed at the Battle of Siffin. He calmed the feelings of the people, and sought their cooperation in another bid to avenge the truth.

[View Page](#)

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