

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Religious Measures of Uthman

Prayers on the occasion of the Hajj

During the first year of his caliphate, Uthman suffered from blood hemorrhage of the nose. Many other persons suffered likewise and in the Arab annals this year came to be known as the year of the hemorrhage. Uthman was not able to perform the Hajj during the first year of his office, but in subsequent years he performed the Hajj and presided at the Hajj functions.

When offering the prayers on the occasion of the Hajj between Mina and Mt Arafat, the Holy Prophet had shortened the prayers from four rakaats to two rakaats. Thereafter Abu Bakr and Umar while presiding at the Hajj functions followed the precedent set up by the Holy Prophet, and offered only two rakaats in prayers. In the early years of his caliphate, Uthman followed the same precedent, but in the year 649 C.E. Uthman offered the full prayers in four rakaats.

Uthman was criticized by hostile circles for making this departure from the precedent set up by the Holy Prophet. Even such companions like Abdur Rahman b Auf and Ali questioned Uthman about the advisability of such innovation. Uthman argued that as a matter of fact the prayer comprised four rakaats, and it could be shortened to two rakaats under special circumstances. When the Holy Prophet shortened the prayer, he had settled at Madina, and had come to Makkah as a visitor. Uthman said that his case was different. He had married in Makkah and had a house there. He also had some property at Taif. As such when he came to Makkah his status was not that of a mere visitor. As such he did not feel himself entitled to enjoy the concession of shortening the prayers. He also argued that in case he continued the practice of shortening the prayers, the Bedouins were apt to feel that the prayers comprised two rakaats only. In order to remove such impression it was necessary that the prayer should be offered in full. Uthman further argued that the shortening of the prayer was a concession. A concession was in principle meant to meet certain exigencies, and had to be withdrawn when such exigencies no longer existed. Uthman held that according to his Ijtihad, a stage had reached when the concession was no longer necessary, and the prayer should be offered in full. Uthman also elaborated that the offering of the prayers in full was in no way repugnant to the injunctions of Islam or Sunnah. If Islam had provided for four rakaats and he had offered two rakaats that would have been repugnant to Islam. Where Islam provided for four rakaats and gave the option of shortening the prayer in certain circumstances, and he chose to offer the prayer in full and not to avail of the concession, such an act was in furtherance of the purposes of Islam, and was in no way repugnant thereto.

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