

Chapter 21: Death of Abu Talib

Economic blockade of the Muslims by Quraysh ended in failure on account of the intervention by some good-natured persons. The Holy Prophet and his supporters came out of the "Valley of Abu Talib" and proceeded to their homes after three years of exile, boycott and hardship. Their business and trade with the Muslims was restored and it could be hoped that their conditions would improve.

However, the Prophet was suddenly faced with a very painful event which left a very unwholesome effect on the morale of the helpless Muslims. The extent of the impact of this occurrence at that critical moment cannot be measured by any scale or balance, because the growth of an idea and thought depends on two factors i.e. freedom of speech and necessary strength to defend oneself against the dastardly attacks of the enemy.

Hence, it so happened that when the Muslims were blessed with freedom of belief they lost the second factor because the distinguished supporter and defender of Islam breathed his last.

On that day the Prophet lost a supporter and defender who had been responsible for his protection and safety from the time he was only eight years of age till the day when he was passing through his 50th year. It was he who hovered round his person in the same manner in which a moth hovers round a candle. It was he, who provided the Prophet of Islam with means of his livelihood till he himself became a man of means and gave him priority over himself as well as over his offspring.

The Prophet lost a personality whom Abdul Muttalib (the grandfather of the Prophet) while breathing his last, had made his guardian with the following words:

"O Abd-i Munaf! ¹ "I am making you responsible for the protection of one who is the worshipper of One Allah like his father".

Abu Talib said: "Dear father! Muhammad does not stand in need of any recommendation, because he is my own son as well as that of my brother".

Specimens Of The Kindnesses And Love Of Abu Talib

Specimens of mutual love and kindness of different persons have been recorded in the pages of history. Usually, however, they are based on material and formal considerations and move round the pivot of wealth and beauty and the flame of love quenches within their selves in a very short time and is extirpated. However, the sentiments which are based on ties of kinship or faith in the spiritual excellence of the loved one do not peter out so soon.

It so happened that the love of Abu Talib for the Prophet was based on both these considerations, that is he believed in him and considered him a perfect man and a unique specimen of humanity, and he was also his nephew (real brother's son) whom he gave the position of brother and son in his heart.

Abu Talib believed so much in his spirituality and purity that at the time of drought he took him to musallah (the prayer carpet) with himself and invoked Allah in the name of his proximity to Him and requested for rains for the afflicted people, and his prayer was granted by the Almighty. Many historians have quoted the following incident:

Once Quraysh were faced with a terrible drought and the earth and the heavens withheld their blessings from them. They came to Abu Talib with tears in their eyes and requested him earnestly to go to musallah and pray to Allah for rains. Abu Talib held the hand of the Prophet, who was then a young boy, and leaned on the wall of the Ka'bah and raising his head towards the sky, said: "O Lord! Send rains for the sake of this young boy (pointing towards the Prophet) and favour us with your unlimited blessings".

The historians write unanimously: "He prayed to Allah for rains when there was not a single patch of cloud on the sky, but a cloud then appeared immediately from the horizon. A part of the cloud spread in the sky above Makkah and the places round it. Thunder and lightening created great noise. All the places were flooded with water and everyone was happy."²

Change In The Programme Of The Journey

The Prophet was not yet twelve years of age when Abu Talib decided to go to Syria with a trading caravan of Quraysh. When the camels had been loaded and were about to move, and the bell for departure had been rung, the nephew of Abu Talib suddenly held the bridle of his camel and said with tears in his eyes: "Dear uncle! To whom are you entrusting me? I must go with you". A tear in the eyes of Muhammad then brought a flood of tears in the eyes of Abu Talib.

At this critical time he decided, without any prior planning, to take his nephew with himself. Although Muhammad's place in the caravan had not been taken into account Abu Talib decided to bear the hardships involved in his accompanying him.

He accommodated him on his own camel and was careful about him throughout. During that journey he observed some extraordinary things in Muhammad and composed verses about them. They are

recorded in his poetical works.[3](#)

Defence Of His Sacred Beliefs

From the point of view of stability no strength equals that of faith. The strength of faith in one's aim is the most powerful factor for the advancement of man in all walks of life. It prepares him to endure all inconveniences and hardships and makes him sacrifice his very life for the achievement of his sacred ideal.

A soldier equipped with the strength of faith is totally successful. When he believes that to kill or to be killed in this path is a blessing, his victory and success is ensured. Before a soldier is armed with modern material weapons he must be equipped with the strength of faith, and his heart must be imbued with love for reality. His movements at the time of war and peace should be guided by faith. His going to war or his making peace are entirely for the defence of his faith.

The thoughts and beliefs are the offspring of one's spirit and intellect. Just as a man loves his children, he also loves his ideas which issue from his intellect and spirit. Rather, his love for his faith is even greater than that for his children. Hence, he is prepared even to embrace death for the defence of his faith, but does not go to that extremity for the protection of his children.

Man's love for wealth and position is limited. He goes after them only to that extent that he is not threatened with sure death. In the matter of his faith, however, he is prepared to court death and prefers honourable death to a life in which he is not allowed the freedom of faith. He observes that real life is that of a 'mujahid' (one who struggles) and repeatedly says:

"Real life consists of faith and jihad".

Just cast a glance at the life of Abu Talib, the distinguished supporter and defender of Islam and Prophet Muhammad. What was the stimulant for him in this path and what was the factor which persuaded him to go up to the edge of the precipice of annihilation, to forsake his life, wealth, position and tribe, and to sacrifice all of these things for the sake of Muhammad?

It is an established fact that he had no material motives and he was not at all anxious to obtain any worldly gain from his nephew, because in those days the Prophet himself did not possess any wealth. He did not want to acquire any position or office, because he already possessed the highest office in the society of those times and was the chief of Makkah and Batha.

As a matter of fact it was possible that he might have lost even his prominent position and status on account of his defending the Prophet, because his defence was the cause of the chiefs of Makkah rising against the family of Hashim and Abu Talib.

A False Idea

It is possible that some shortsighted persons may think that the reason for the sacrifices made by Abu Talib was his close relationship with Muhammad and it was on this account that he was prepared to lay down his very life for his sake.

However, this idea is so baseless that a very brief reflection makes its stupidity evident, because the tie of blood relationship is never so strong that a person should sacrifice his entire being for one of his relatives and should offer his own son (Ali) as a sacrifice for his nephew, and be ready to see the one being cut to pieces for the sake of the other.

At times fraternal sentiments do pull a man to the precipice of annihilation, but there is no sense in these sentiments being so acute for a particular person only, whereas Abu Talib made all these sacrifices for a particular person from amongst his relatives (i.e. the Prophet) and did not do so with regard to other descendants of Abdul Muttalib and Hashim.

The Real Stimulant For Abu Talib

In view of what has been stated above the real stimulant for Abu Talib's sacrifices was spiritual and not material, and he was prepared to face every pressure of the enemy for the sake of Muhammad. It was so because he considered him to be a perfect specimen of excellence and humanity and had found his religion to be the best programme for acquisition of prosperity and happiness. As he was a lover of reality he naturally defended reality.

This fact becomes evident from the verses of Abu Talib, as giving vent to his feelings he says that Muhammad is a Prophet like Prophets Musa and 'Isa. Here is the translation of his verses:

"Distinguished personalities should be aware that Muhammad is a Prophet and a guide like Prophets Musa and 'Isa and every Prophet takes responsibility for the guidance of the people under the command of Allah. You may read about his qualities in the Heavenly Books with perfect correctness and this is a true statement and not a calumny on the unseen".[4](#)

In another laudatory poem about his nephew he says thus:

"Don't you know that we consider Muhammad to be a Prophet of Allah like Musa bin Imran and read about him in the earlier Books?"[5](#)

The above-mentioned verses as well as many others which are found in the poetical works of Abu Talib and also in the inner folds of history and the books of traditions and exegeses clearly testify that the real stimulant for Abu Talib's defending the Prophet was the defence of the true religion of Islam. We mention below some of the sacrifices made by him and you can very well decide, after necessary scrutiny, whether they could be motivated by anything other than true belief.

A Short Account Of The Sacrifices Made By Abu Talib

The chiefs of Quraysh held a meeting in the house of Abu Talib when the Prophet was also present. They conversed with one another. The chiefs got up without achieving any result, and 'Uqbah bin Abi Mu'it began saying loudly: "Leave him alone. Advice is of no use. He should be assassinated; he should be finished off".

Abu Talib was very much disturbed on hearing these sentences but could not do anything, because those people had come to his house as guests. It so happened that the Prophet went out of his house that day and did not return till evening. His uncles went to his house but did not find him there. Suddenly Abu Talib recollected the words of 'Uqbah which he had uttered a few hours earlier and said to himself: "They have certainly killed my nephew and have finished his life".

He thought that the die had been cast and it was necessary to protect Muhammad and take vengeance on the Pharaohs of Makkah. He called the descendants of Hashim and Abdul Muttalib and gave instructions that all of them should conceal sharp weapons under their clothes and arrive in Masjidul Haram collectively.

Further, that each one of them should sit by the side of one chief of Quraysh and as soon as he himself said loudly: "O chiefs of Quraysh! I want Muhammad from you", they should rise up at once and each of them should kill the man sitting by his side and thus all the chiefs should meet their fate.

When Abu Talib was about to leave, Zayd bin Harith entered the house all of a sudden and saw them in a state of readiness. He was wonder-struck on seeing this and said: "No harm has come to the Prophet. He is in the house of a Muslim at present and is busy propagating Islam".

Having said this he immediately went to the Prophet and informed him of the dangerous decision taken by Abu Talib. The Prophet then proceeded hastily to his house. As soon as Abu Talib saw his nephew's face tears trickled from his eyes and he said: "My nephew! Where have you been? Were you quite happy and safe from every harm during this time?" The Prophet assured his uncle that no harm came to him from any quarters.

Throughout that night Abu Talib kept thinking. He pondered over the matter and said to himself: "My nephew has not become the target of the enemy today, but Quraysh will not sit still until they kill him". He considered it expedient to go into the mosque along with the descendants of Hashim and Abdul Muttalib after sunrise, when Quraysh had assembled there, and to inform them about his decision so that they might possibly be over-awed and might not plan to kill Muhammad.

The sun rose and the time arrived for Quraysh to leave their houses and to go and join their assemblies. They had not yet started conversing when the figure of Abu Talib appeared at a distance and they saw that some brave men were also accompany him. All became attentive and waited to see what Abu Talib had to say and with what aim he had come to the mosque along with all those men.

Abu Talib stood before their gathering and said: "Yesterday Muhammad disappeared from us for some time. I thought that you had acted upon what 'Uqbah had said and had killed him. Hence, I decided to come to Masjidul Haram along with these men. I had also instructed them that each one of them should sit by the side of each one of you and as soon as they heard me speak aloud they should get up and attack you with their concealed weapons. However, luckily I found Muhammad alive and safe from any harm from you". Then he asked his men to take out their concealed weapons and ended his speech with these words: "By Allah! If you had killed him I would not have spared even one of you and would have fought with you to the last"[6](#)

If you look into the biography of Abu Talib you will find that he supported the Prophet for full forty two years and peculiarly displayed great bravery and sacrifice during the last ten years of his life which were significant because of the appointment of the Prophet to the prophetic mission and to his 'call' during that time. The only factor which kept him so steadfast was his strong faith and his pure belief in the sacred mission of the Prophet of Islam. And if the sacrifices of his son, Imam Ali are also added to his own, the meaning of the verses of Ibn Abil Hadid, as translated below, becomes quite clear:

"If Abu Talib and his son had not been there the religion would not have been successful. He supported and protected him (the Prophet) in Makkah, and his son dived in the whirlpools of death in Yathrib for him."

The Will Of Abu Talib At The Time Of His Death

At the time of his death Abu Talib said to his children:

"I recommend Muhammad to you, because he is the trusted one of Quraysh and the truthful one of Arabia and possesses all the virtues. He has brought a religion, which has been accepted by the hearts, but the tongues have chosen to deny it on account of fear of taunts. I can see that the weak and the helpless of Arabia have got up to support Muhammad and believe in him, and he has also risen to help them breaking the ranks of Quraysh.

He has humiliated the chiefs of Quraysh and devastated their homes and has made the helpless strong and given them status". He concluded his remarks with these words: "O my kinsmen! Become the friends and supporters of his faith (Islam). Whoever follows him becomes prosperous. If death had given me some more time, I would have warded off all the dangers that came to him".[7](#)

We have no doubt about it that he was quite sincere in expressing this wish, because his services and sacrifices, especially during the last ten years of his life, bear testimony to his truthfulness.

Another evidence of his truthfulness is the promise he made to Muhammad at the commencement of the latter's prophethood, because when the Holy Prophet gathered all his uncles and kinsmen round himself and presented Islam to them Abu Talib said to him: "Arise, O' my nephew! You enjoy a high position. Your religion is the noblest of all religions. You are the son of a great man. If a tongue harms you,

severer tongues will come forth to defend you and sharp swords will cut off the tongues of your enemies. By Allah! The Arabs will be as meek before you as the off-spring of an animal is before its mother".

The Last Journey

It would be better if we enquire about the sincerity of faith of Abu Talib from his honest near ones, because the owner of a house knows better what is within it.

1. When Ali informed the Prophet about the death of Abu Talib the latter wept bitterly. He directed Ali to arrange for his bathing, shrouding and burial ceremonies, and prayed to Allah for the salvation of the departed soul.[8](#)
2. A mention was made about Abu Talib before Imam Zaynul Abidin, the fourth Imam. He said: "I wonder why people doubt the faith of Abu Talib, when a woman cannot continue her matrimonial alliance with a non-Muslim husband after she has embraced Islam and Fatimah, daughter of Asad, was amongst those women who embraced Islam at a very early stage and still remained his wife till he breathed his last".
3. Imam Muhammad Baqir says: "The faith of Abu Talib was superior to the faith of many people and Ali, the Commander of the Faithful ordered that Haj should be performed on his behalf." [9](#)
4. Imam Ja'far Sadiq says: "Abu Talib was like the People of the Cave. They had faith in their hearts but pretended to be polytheists. For this reason they will be rewarded twice". [10](#)

The Viewpoint Of Shi'ah Scholars

Following the people of the Prophet's household the Imamiyah Ulema are unanimous about the fact that Abu Talib was one of the distinguished personalities of Islam and when he breathed his last he possessed a heart which had perfect faith in Islam and was very sincere to the Muslims. These scholars have written many books and treatises on this subject.

- [1.](#) Sometimes it is said that the real name of Abu Talib was Imran. Some scholars are of the view that 'Abu Talib' was his real name and not his 'kunnayah' (patronymic).
- [2.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. I, page 125.
- [3.](#) Diwan-i Abu Talib, page 33.
- [4.](#) Majma'ul Bayan, vol. VII, page 37 and al-Hujjah, pp. 56 – 57.
- [5.](#) Majma'ul Bayan, vol. VII, page 36. Ibn Hisham has quoted fifteen verses of the poem in his Seerah vol. I, pp. 352 – 353.
- [6.](#) Tara'if, page 85 and al-Hujjah, page 61.
- [7.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. I, page 390.
- [8.](#) Sharh-i Nahjul Balaghah by Ibn Abil Hadid, vol. XIV, page 76.
- [9.](#) Sharh-i Nahjul Balaghah, vol. XIV, page 68.
- [10.](#) Usulul Kafi, page 244.

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