

Chapter 3: Childhood and Youth

[Some Scenes From The Prophet's Childhood And Youth](#)

[A Few Scenes](#)

Muhammad went through the difficulties of orphanhood in his childhood with the support of his high-spirited grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and his affectionate uncle, Abu Talib. It seems that the heart-rending pains of orphan hood must have severely tormented his pure delicate soul. It is logical to believe that these sufferings were necessary for the foundation of his supreme character and that such difficulties taught him how to resist the hardships of life and to bear the heavy responsibility later to be put on his blessed shoulders.

As time went on, Muhammad grew up and his childhood gave place to youth, when instincts and potentials bloom. Although he was deprived of a mother's care and a father's affection, he received affectionate care and attention from Abu Talib, who, due to his moral attitudes and in obedience to his father's emphatic order, protected and supported him.

In fact, Muhammad represented three things to Abu Talib: a son, a reminder of his brother, Abdullah, and of his father, Abdul Muttalib. So the Prophet became a beloved member of Abu Talib's family, lived in his house, and was treated as his own son. To the Prophet, Abu Talib was an affectionate father, a loyal uncle, and a compassionate preceptor. These two – uncle and nephew – were so fond of each other that their lives seemed to be intertwined. This very intense affection had caused Abu Talib to refuse to ever part from him.

He would take his hand in his own and go with him to the famous Arab markets of `Akaz, Majnah, and Zil-Majaz. Even when he was to accompany the caravan on travelling on business from Makkah to Damascus, he could not bring himself to part with his nephew. So Abu Talib took him along to Damascus. Riding on a camel, the Prophet started the long journey to Yathrib and Damascus. [1](#)

Bahira's Interview With The Prophet

On the day the Quraysh caravan was nearing Basra, ²Bahira, a devout monk, caught sight of it through his monastery's window. He observed the caravan shaded by a little cloud that kept pace with it.

Bahira came out of his monastery, stood in a corner and instructed his servant, 'Go and tell them that today they are all my guests!'

All came to him but the Prophet, who was standing beside the property and equipment of the caravan. Seeing that the cloud had ceased to move, Bahira asked his guests, 'Are all the members of the caravan present here?' They answered, 'All but a youth who is the youngest!'. Bahira said, 'Tell him to come as well!'. So he was asked to come to the monk's room. The keen eyes of Bahira noticed that the cloud over his head moved with him. Taken by surprise, Bahira kept staring at the young boy. When the meal was over, the pious monk told him, 'I have a question to ask you and you must swear by Lat and 'Uzza ³to answer my question!'

Muhammad said, 'These two you have asked me to swear by are the most detestable things to me!'. Bahira said, 'Swear by Allah to answer my question!'

He said, 'Ask your question!'

After a short interview with him, Bahira knelt down before him and started kissing his hands and feet, saying, 'If I live till you start your divine mission, I will most faithfully aid you and fight your enemies. You are superior to all of Adam's offspring...!'

Then he asked, 'Whose son is this youth?' The caravan members pointed to Abu Talib, saying, 'His son!'. Bahira said, 'No. His father must be dead!'

Abu Talib said, 'You are right. He is my nephew!'. Bahira then said, 'This youth will have a brilliant, extraordinary future. If the Jews find out what I have realized about him, they will destroy him. Take great care lest the Jews should hurt him!'

Abu Talib said, 'What is he destined to do? What have the Jews to do with him?' Bahira said, 'He is predestined to become a Prophet, and the angel of inspiration will come down and make divine revelations to him!'. Abu Talib said, 'God will not leave him alone and will Himself protect him against the Jews and his malevolent enemies!'

The Prophet As A Shepherd And A Contemplative Man

Although Abu Talib was rated as a man of status among the Quraysh, his income, was not sufficient to support his family. Now that Muhammad was of mature age, he was naturally inclined to find a job to ease the heavy burden upon his uncle's shoulders. But what kind of job should he engage in to suit his

supreme character?

Since he was destined to become a great Prophet and a sublime leader, to face unrestrained obstinate people, to fight against the superstitious beliefs and wrong customs of the period of ignorance, and to lay the foundations of the magnificent palace of justice and proper laws and regulations, he found it expedient to become a herdsman.[4](#)

Our Holy Prophet would take the sheep and cattle of his relatives and those of the people of Makkah to the surrounding deserts to graze. He gave his uncle the wages he received in return. [5](#)

This engagement outside the noisy, agitated environment of the city and away from people's disputes and conflicts gave him an invaluable opportunity to acquire much experience, of which the sweet fruits appeared during his prophethood and time of leadership.

Indeed, during this period, he acquired many superior human characteristics such as generosity, good temper, magnanimity, good behaviour towards neighbours, tolerance, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and avoidance of vices. He became known as 'Muhammad, the Trustworthy'. [6](#)

[The Prophet's Chastity](#)

When childhood gives its place to maturity and human instincts and potentialities bloom, youngsters suddenly find themselves in the stormy stage of maturity – much more exciting and agitating than childhood. During this critical period of life, various kinds of deviations, seditions, moral deteriorations, and forms of heedlessness threaten the young and their future life. Unless they are properly directed and carefully looked after, or themselves endeavour to control and restrain their overflowing instincts, they will so fall into the terrible abyss of misery and immorality that they can hardly attain happiness and prosperity for the rest of their lives.

The Prophet lived in a severely polluted environment, the atmosphere of which was darkened with all kinds of moral deteriorations and sins. In the Hijaz, not only the youth, but also the aged had become most shamefully involved in sexual deviations and unchastity. In every alley and neighbourhood, black flags had been hung over some houses as a sign of corruption, inviting un-virtuous people inside.

The Prophet grew up in such a foul society, but though he remained unmarried until the age of 25, the sordid environment could not affect him the least bit, nor did anybody observe any immoral action springing from him. Both his friends and his enemies regarded him as the best model of chastity and virtue.

The poems commemorating his blessed marriage with Khadija – the great lady of the Quraysh – remind us of modesty, Addressing Khadija, the poet says, `...O Khadija, among all the people of the world, you have attained a sublime position, the most honourable position. You have been granted the honour of being wife to Muhammad, the great man whose peer has not been born by any woman in the whole

world. All praiseworthy virtues and majestic qualities plus modesty are to be found in him and will be so forever'. [7](#)

Another poet had said, 'If Ahmad is weighed against all other creatures, he will outweigh them, and truly his virtues are obvious to the Quraysh'. [8](#)

[1.](#) Sirihī ibn Hishām, Vol. 1, p. 180.

[2.](#) Basra was a small town near Damascus.

[3.](#) Lat and Uzza were two of the famous idols that the Arabs worshipped and swore by on various occasions.

[4.](#) Sirihī ibn Hishām, Vol. 1, p. 181; A'lam Alwari, published in Najaf, 1390 A.H.L., p.26; and Bihar ul-Anwar, Vol. 15, pp.193-204.

[5.](#) Sirihī ibn Hishām, Vol. 1, p. 167 (footnote).

[6.](#) Ibid., p. 183.

[7.](#) Bihar ul-Anwar, Vol. 16, p.3; Tarikh Ya'aqubi, Vol. 2, p. 15.

[8.](#) Ibid., p.74.

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