

Chapter 6: The Proclamation of Islam

At length the groundwork that Muhammad had to do to take charge of his duties and responsibilities as the Last and the Greatest Messenger of God to this world, was over.

The night of paganism, error and ignorance had been long, dark, dreary and dismal. Mankind was in a state of despair. It was at a loss to know if it would ever see the light of dawn.

It was God's infinite Mercy which harkened to the unspoken longing of mankind. In response to its silent appeal, the Sun of Islam rose from the valley of Makka to overpower the darkness of polytheism in the world, and to proclaim the triumph of the doctrine of Tawhid (monotheism).

Muhammad was 40 years old when he was commanded by Allah, through His angel, Gabriel, to declare His Oneness (Tawhid) to the idolaters and polytheists of the whole world, and to deliver the message of new hope and peace to an embattled humanity.

In compliance with this command of Heaven, Muhammad launched the momentous programme called Islam which was to change the destiny of mankind forever. The basic design of Islam, as he received it from Gabriel, was perfected in Heaven, and now he had to present it to the family of man.

Before he received his prophetic mission, Muhammad spent days and nights in prayer and meditation both at home and in the cave of Hira, as noted before. He was in Hira one evening when the Archangel Gabriel appeared before him, and brought to him the tidings that Allah had chosen him to be His last messenger to this world, and had imposed upon him the duty of extricating mankind from the welter of sin, error and ignorance, and to bring it into the light of Guidance, Truth and Knowledge. Gabriel then bade Muhammad to "read" the following verses:

**(In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful) Read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher
Who created: created man out of a clot of congealed blood. Read! And thy Lord is most bountiful,
He who taught the use of pen: taught man that which he knew not.**

These five verses were the earliest revelation, and they came to Muhammad Mustafa on the "Night of Power" or the "Blessed Night" in Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar) of the 40th year of

the Elephant.

1. Ramadhan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). (Chapter 2; verse 185)

2. We have indeed revealed this (message) in the night of power. (Chapter 97; verse 1)

3. By the book that makes things clear; We sent it down during a blessed night... (Chapter 44; verses 2 and 3)

The Night of Power or the Blessed Night occurs, according to tradition, during the last ten nights of Ramadan, and could be the 21st or 23rd or 25th or 27th of the month. According to the Gregorian calendar, the first revelation came to the Prophet on the 12th of February, 610, as per the calculations of Mahmud Pasha al-Falaki of Egypt.

These five verses are at the beginning of the 96th chapter of Quran Majid. The name of the chapter is Iqraa (Read) or 'AlaA (the Clot of Congealed Blood).

In their respective accounts of the reception by Muhammad Mustafa of the First Revelation, the Sunni and the Shia Muslims are not in agreement. According to the Sunni tradition, the appearance of Gabriel surprised Muhammad; and when the former ordered him to read, he said: "I cannot read." This happened thrice, and each time when Muhammad declared his inability to read, the angel pressed him hard to his bosom. Eventually, he was able to repeat the five verses whereupon the angel released him, and disappeared.

When Archangel Gabriel disappeared, Muhammad, who was now "ordained" the Messenger of Allah, descended from the cliffs of Hira, and repaired to his home in a state of great trepidation. Apparently, Gabriel's sudden intrusion had been a traumatic experience for him. He was shivering with cold, and when he entered his house, he asked his wife, Kltadija, to cover him with a blanket which she did. When he had sufficiently recovered from the shock, he recounted to her the story of his strange encounter with Archangel Gabriel in the cave of Hira.

The traditional Sunni account of this event is given in an article written by Shaykh Ahmad Zaki Hammad, Ph.D., captioned "Be Hopeful," published in the magazine, Islamic Horizons of the Islamic Society of North America, Plainfield, Indiana, May–June 1987, as follows:

The Prophet (pbuh) in the early stages in Makkah, feared that the revelation experience was an evil touch preying upon him, playing with him mentally, upsetting his tranquility and peace of mind. He was afraid that one of the jinn had touched him. He expressed this to Khadija. His fear increased to the point that --- and please don't be surprised by an authentic report in Bukhari --- the Prophet (pbuh) preferred to take his own life rather than to be touched by evil, to be tampered with, corrupted, or polluted."

But according to the accounts of the Shia Muslims, Muhammad Mustafa, far from being surprised, much less frightened, by the sudden appearance of Archangel Gabriel, welcomed him as if he had been expecting him. Gabriel brought the tidings that Allah had chosen him to be His Last Messenger to Mankind, and congratulated him on being selected to become the recipient of the greatest of all honors for a mortal in this world.

Muhammad had no hesitation in accepting the mission of prophethood nor he had any difficulty in repeating the verses of the First Revelation. He read them or repeated them effortlessly, spontaneously. Gabriel, in fact, was no stranger to him, and he also knew that as the slave of Allah, his own raison d'être was to carry out the mission imposed upon him by Allah. He was "mission-oriented" even before Gabriel's visit. Gabriel only gave him the signal to begin.

The Shia Muslims also say that one thing that Gabriel didn't have to do, was to apply physical pressure on Muhammad to read. If he did, it would truly be a bizarre mode of imparting to Muhammad, the ability to read – by squeezing him or choking him. They further maintain that Muhammad Mustafa did not contemplate suicide at any time in his life, even in its most desolate moments; and that it never occurred to him that he could ever be touched by "evil" or that he could be "tampered with, corrupted or polluted."

In this context, the Shia Muslims quote the following two verses of Quran Majid which appear to have a logical connection with this episode:

1. (Allah said to Iblis:) "As for My servants, no authority shalt thou have over them." enough is thy Lord for a disposer of affairs.

(Chapter 17; verse 65)

Allah Himself protects His sincere and true slaves from the clutches of Iblis (the Devil); he can have no authority over them, and they can never be tampered with or corrupted or polluted.

2. But God will deliver the righteous to their place of salvation; no evil shall touch them. Nor shall they grieve.

(Chapter 39; verse 61)

No evil could touch Muhammad, the chosen one of God Himself. Under God's protection, he was safe from every evil. He lived under the jurisdiction of God at all times.

Nevertheless, Muhammad felt alarm at the magnitude of the task ahead of him. He realized that in the execution of his duty, he would be confronted by the massive, formidable, and determined opposition of the pagans of the whole world. The state of his anxiety was almost palpable. He was therefore in a somber frame of mind as he left the cave to return home. And he did in fact ask Khadija to drape him in a blanket as he sat down to recapitulate the events in Hira to her.

When Khadija heard the story that Muhammad Mustafa told her, she comforted him and reassured him

by saying: "O son of my uncle, be of good cheer. Allah has chosen you to be His messenger. You are always kind to your neighbors, helpful to your kinsfolk, generous to the orphans, the widows and the poor, and friendly to the strangers. Allah will never forsake you."

R V. C. Bodley

"God is my protection, Oh Abul Kasim!" said Khadija, "Rejoice and be of good cheer. He in Whose hands stands the life of Khadija, is my Witness that thou wilt be the Messenger of His people!" Then she added, "Hast thou not been loving to thy kinsfolk, kind to thy neighbors, charitable to the poor, hospitable to the stranger, faithful to thy word, and ever a defender of the truth?"

(The Messenger, the Life of Mohammed, 1946)

It is possible that Muhammad was momentarily overwhelmed by the thought of his accountability to Allah in carrying the enormous burden of his new responsibilities, but when he heard Khadija's soothing words, he immediately felt the tensions within him decompressing. She reassured him and convinced him that with God's Hand on his shoulder, he would rise equal to his duties and would overcome all obstacles.

Muhammad rallied. He knew from that moment that Khadija was the "instrument" through which God would reinforce his courage if it ever flagged, and would bolster his morale if it ever sagged.

The following verse of Quran Majid also appears to support the Shia point of view:

And remember We took from the Prophets their covenant: as (We did) from tree: from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary: We took from them a solemn covenant: that (Allah) may question the (custodians) of truth concerning the truth they (were charged with): (Chapter 33; verses 7,8)

Translator's Note

There is an implied covenant on all created things to follow God's Law, which is the law of their being. But there is a special implied covenant with all Prophets, strict and solemn, that they shall carry out their mission, proclaim God's Truth without fear or favor, and be ever ready in His service in all circumstances. That gives them their position and dignity and their tremendous responsibility in respect of the people whom they come to instruct and lead to the Right Way. (A. Yusuf Ali).

The Shia Muslims point out that Allah had taken a Covenant from Muhammad to deliver His Last Message to Mankind. Therefore, they do not agree with those historians who allege that Muhammad reacted to Gabriel's visit with surprise, shock and fear. Such reactions, they say, simply do not jibe with his temperament, and are not consistent with the character of his solemn Covenant.

After a brief interval, Gabriel appeared once again before Muhammad when the latter was in the cave of

Hira, and presented to him the second Revelation which reads as follows:

O thou wrapped up (in a mantle)! Arise and deliver thy warning! And thy Lord do thou magnify!
(Chapter 74; verses 1, 2, 3)

The commandment from Heaven to "arise and warn" was the signal to Muhammad (the wrapped up in a blanket) to begin his work. Gabriel expounded to him his new duties the foremost of which was to destroy the worship of false gods, and to plant the banner of Tawhid – the doctrine of the Unity of the Creator – in the world; and he had to invite mankind to the True Faith –Islam. Islam means to surrender to Allah and to acknowledge Muhammad as His slave and His messenger.

A.I.r. a book which We have revealed unto you, in order that you might lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light – by the leave of their Lord – to the way of (Him) the exalted in power, worthy of all praise. (Chapter 14, verse 1)

Muhammad had to lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light.

How was Muhammad to lead mankind out of the depths of Darkness into Light? This question is answered by Quran Majid in the following verse:

A similar (favor have you already received) in that We have sent among you an apostle of your own, rehearsing to you Our signs, and sanctifying you, and instructing you in scripture and wisdom, and in new knowledge. (Chapter 2; verse 151)

Quran is precise and specific in defining the concept of his duty for Muhammad Mustafa. He had to lead mankind out of "the depths of darkness" into the light, by:

1. rehearsing the Signs of Allah; 2. sanctifying mankind; 3. instructing mankind in scripture and wisdom; and 4. imparting new knowledge to it.

Gabriel and Muhammad then went out of the cave. Gabriel taught him how to take ablutions (ritual purification before saying prayers). Muhammad took ablutions, and then, with Gabriel in the lead, both of them offered prayers.

When the prayer was over, Gabriel bade farewell to Muhammad, and disappeared in the sky.

That evening Muhammad returned home conscious and conscientious of his new duty to "arise and warn." He had to preach Islam, the Religion of Allah, to the whole world, and he had to begin from his own home – by preaching it to his wife.

Muhammad told Khadija about the second visit of Gabriel, and the duty imposed upon him by Allah to invite her to Islam.

For Khadija, the antecedents and the moral integrity of her husband were an incontrovertible attestation

that he was a divine messenger, and she readily accepted Islam. In fact, between her and Islam, an "ideological affinity" had pre-existed. Therefore, when Muhammad Mustafa presented Islam to her, she at once "recognized" it, and rosily embraced it. She believed that the Creator was One and that Muhammad was His messenger, and she declared:

I bear witness that there is no God but Allah; and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and his messenger.

Muhammad, the new messenger of Allah, had won his first convert – Khadija – his wife. She was the first one, the very first to affirm her faith in Tawhid (Oneness of the Creator), and she was the very first to acknowledge Muhammad as God's messenger to all mankind. She was the first Muslim.

Muhammad had "introduced" Islam to Khadija. He explained to her its meaning, and he initiated her into it. He told her that obedience to and love for Allah were central to the whole system called Islam.

Then Muhammad showed Khadija how to take ablutions and how to say prayers. She took ablutions and both of them offered their prayers, with Muhammad as the leader. After the prayer, both of them thanked Allah for bestowing upon them the blessing of Islam. They also thanked Him for the blessing of prayers (Salat) through which He gave them audience.

Prayer was, Khadija soon found out, the "Gate" to Allah's Tribunal of Grace and Mercy. The humble slaves of Allah have to pass through this "Gate" to get access to His Tribunal and to receive Grace and Mercy from Him. She also found out that prayer (Salat) was perpetual renewal and sanctification.

Khadija is the first Muslims – the very first to submit to Allah – next to her husband. Now no matter who compiles the list of the earliest converts to Islam, her name will always be on top. No venal historian can change this fact. The honor of being the first Muslims belongs to Khadija, and it will be hers to all Eternity.

After her induction into Islam, Khadija adopted the following credo:

Say: "verily, my Lord hath guided me to a way that is straight, - a religion of right, -the path (trod) by Abraham the true in faith, and He (certainly) joined not gods with Allah."

Say: "truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the cherisher of the worlds:

No partner hath He: this I am commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His will.

(Quran Majid. Chapter 6, verses 161, 162, 163)

Washington Irving

After the first encounter with Gabriel, Mohammed came trembling and agitated to Khadija. She saw everything with the eye of faith. "Joyful tidings dost thou bring," exclaimed she, by Him, in Whose hand is the soul of Khadija, I will henceforth regard thee as the Prophet of our nation. Rejoice," added she, "Allah

will not suffer thee to fall to shame. Hast thou not been loving to thy kinsfolk, kind to thy neighbours, charitable to the poor, hospitable to the stranger, faithful to thy word, and ever a defender of the truth?"

(Life of Mohammed)

A Yusuf Ali

At twenty-five he (Muhammad) was united in the holy bonds Of wedlock with Kltadija the Great, the noble lady Who befriended him when he had no worldly resources, Trusted him when his worth was little known, Encouraged and understood him in his spiritual struggles, Believed in him when with trembling steps He took up the Call and withstood obloquy, Persecution, insults, threats, and tortures,

And was a lifelong helpmate till she was gathered To the saints in his fifty-first year, -A perfect woman, the mother of those that believe.

(Introduction to the Translation and Commentary of the Holy Quran)

When Muhammad was ordained messenger of Allah, his young cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was ten years old. As young as he was, he showed remarkable grasp of the events taking place around him, and was richly endowed with the capacity for participating in his guardian's religious experience. He therefore eagerly declared what he believed – that God was One, and Muhammad was His messenger. And he could not wait long enough to offer prayers with Muhammad and Khadija. He wished to go into the presence of Allah in the company of His Own messenger.

Muhammad Mustafa taught Ali how to take ablutions and how to pray. Since then, Muhammad was never seen at prayer except when Ali was with him. The boy also memorized the verses of Quran Majid as and when they were revealed to Muhammad. In this manner, he literally grew up with Quran. In fact, Ali and Quran "grew up" together as "twins" in the house of Muhammad Mustafa and Khadija-tul-Kubra.

Ali lived in an ambience vibrant with the ethos of Islam.

Through such osmotic action, Islam became a part of the blood-stream of Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's young protege. Islam became the very texture of his being.

Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, had found the first Muslim in Khadija, and he found the first Muslim in Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq

Ali was the first male to believe in the Apostle of God, to pray with him and to believe in his divine message, when he was a boy of ten. God favored him in that he was brought up in the care of the Apostle before Islam began.

(The Life of the Messenger of Allah)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Ali was then the first youth to enter Islam. He was followed by Zayd ibn Harithah, Muhammad's client. Islam remained confined to the four walls of one house. Besides Muhammad himself, the converts of the new faith were his wife, his cousin, and his client. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Marmaduke Pickthall

The first of all his (Muhammad's) converts was his wife, Khadija; the second his first cousin Ali, whom he had adopted; the third his servant Zeyd, a former slave.

(Introduction to the Translation of Holy Quran, 1975)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

To his (Muhammad's) cousin Ali, the well-beloved,
Born when he was thirty, he appeared As the very pattern of a perfect man,
As gentle as he was wise and true and strong,
The one in whose defence and aid He spent his utmost strength and skill,
Holding life cheap in support of a cause so high,
And placing without reserve his chivalry, His prowess, his wit and learning, and his sword

At the service of this mighty Messenger of God. Khadija believed,
exalted in faith Above all women; Ali, the well-beloved,
Then a child of ten, but lion-hearted, Plighted his faith,
and became from that moment The Right Hand of Islam.

(Introduction to the Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an)

The third "witness" who accepted Islam, was Zayd bin Haritha, the freed man of Muhammad, and a member of his household.

Tor Andre

Zaid was one of the first to accept Islam, in fact the third after Khadija and Ali.

(Mohammed, the Man and his Faith, 1960)

Ali ibn Abi Talib was the first male to accept Islam, and his precedence in accepting Islam, is beyond any question. Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of Indo-Pakistan, calls him, not the first, but "the foremost Muslim."

Ali's was the foremost Muslim in point of time. No man preceded him in accepting Islam. But he was also the foremost Muslim in service to Islam and to its Messenger-Prophet as the years to come were to

reveal.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq, the biographer of Muhammad Mustafa, reports the following in his Seera:

From Yahya b. al-Ash'ath b. Qays al-ICindi from his father, from his grandfather Afiif: Al-Abbas b. Abdul Muttalib was a friend of mine who used to go often to the Yaman to buy aromatics and sell them during the fairs. While I was with him in Mina, there came a man in the prime of life and performed the full rites of ablution and then stood up and prayed. Then a woman came out and did her ablution and stood up and prayed.

Then a boy came out just approaching manhood, took his ablutions, stood up and prayed by his side. I asked Abbas what were they doing, and he said that it was his nephew, Muhammad b. Abdullah b. Abdul Muttalib, who claims that Allah has sent him as an Apostle; the other is my brother's son, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who has followed him in his religion; the third is his wife, Khadija daughter of IChuwayled who also follows him in his religion...

Afiif said after he had become a Muslim and Islam was firmly established in his heart, "Would that I had been a fourth."

The fourth "witness" who accepted Islam, was Abu Bakr, a merchant of Makka.

In the beginning, Muhammad preached Islam secretly. He invited only those people to Islam he could trust, and who were like his personal friends. The handful of neophytes he won, kept a "low profile" in Makka.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Fearful of arousing the enmity and antagonism of Quraysh for their departure from idol worship, the new Muslims used to hide the fact of their conversion.

(The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)

Among the earliest converts to Islam were Yasar; his wife, Sumayya; and their son, Ammar. They are remarkable for the fact that they were the first family all members of which accepted Islam simultaneously, thus making up the first Muslim family, outside the family of the Prophet of Islam himself.

Another early convert to Islam was Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari of the tribe of Ghiffar, noted in later years, for his uncompromising love of Justice and Truth.

Through the efforts of Abu Bakr, the fourth Muslim, a few other Makkans also accepted Islam. Among them were Uthman bin Affan, a future khalifa of the Muslims; Talha; Zubayr; Abdur Rahman ibn Auf; Saad ibn Abi Waqqas; and Obaidullah Aamir ibn al-Jarrah.

Abu Abdulah Arqam bin Abil Arqam was a young man of twenty. He belonged to the Makhzoom clan of

Quraysh, and was a successful businessman. He lived in a spacious house in the valley of Safa. He too heard the Call of Islam and responded to it, and he put his house – Dar-al-Arqam – at the service of the Prophet of Islam.

The Muslims at this time were so few in number that they did not dare to say their prayers in Kaaba or in public. The Prophet gratefully accepted Arqam's offer, and Muslims gathered in his house to offer their congregational prayers. Dar-al-Arqam thus became Dar-al-Islam – the missionary center of Islam, and the first meeting place of the Muslims.

Three years passed in this manner but in the fourth year of the Call, Muhammad was commanded by Allah to invite his own folks to Islam openly.

And admonish thy nearest kinsmen (Chapter 26, verse 214)

Muhammad's kinsmen included all members of Bani Hashim and Bani al-Muttalib. He ordered his young cousin, Ali, to invite their chief men to a banquet. Forty of them came.

The guests gathered in a hall in the house of Abu Talib, and when they had partaken of the repast, Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, rose to address them. Among the guests, there was one Abu Lahab, an uncle of Muhammad on his father's side. He had probably heard what his nephew was doing secretly, and guessed the reason why he had invited the Bani Hashim to a feast. Muhammad had just begun to speak when Abu Lahab rudely interrupted him, and himself addressed the assembly, saying:

Brothers, cousins and uncles: Do not listen to this "renegade," and do not leave your ancestral religion, if he invites you to a new one. If you do, then remember that you will rouse the anger of all Arabs against you. You do not have the strength to fight against all of them. After all, you are a mere handful. Therefore, it will be in your interest to be steadfast in your traditional religion.

Abu Lahab, by his brief speech, succeeded in throwing the assembly into confusion. Everyone stood up milling around and jostling against each other. They then began to leave, and soon the hall was empty.

Muhammad's first attempt to convert his own clan to Islam had failed. But unfazed by this initial setback, he ordered his cousin, Ali, to invite the same guests a second time.

A few days later the guests came, and when they had eaten supper, Muhammad addressed them as follows:

"I offer thanks to Allah for His mercies. I praise Allah and I seek His guidance. I believe in Him, and I put my trust in Him. He is Beneficent and Benevolent; and He is Gracious and Merciful."

After this doxology, the Prophet went on to say:

"I bear witness that there is no god except Allah; He has no partners, and I am His messenger. Allah has

*commanded me to invite you to His religion –Islam – by saying: “**And warn thy nearest kinsmen.**”*

I, therefore, warn you that you should abandon false worship, and call upon you to testify that there is no god but Allah, and that I am His messenger. O ye sons of Abdul Muttalib, no one ever came to you with anything better than what I have brought to you. By accepting it, your welfare will be assured in this world and in the Hereafter. Who among you will support me in carrying out this momentous duty? Who will share the burden of work with me? Who will respond to my call? Who will become my vicegerent, my deputy and my wazir?”

There were forty guests in the hall. Muhammad paused to assess the impact of his words upon them. But no one among them responded. No one in the audience seemed to stir. At last, when the silence became too oppressive, young Ali stood up and said that he would support the Messenger of Allah; would share the burden of his work; and would become his vicegerent, his deputy and his wazir.

But Muhammad beckoned Ali to sit down, and said: "Wait! Perhaps someone older than you might respond to my call."

Muhammad renewed his invitation but still there was no answer, and he was greeted only by an uneasy silence. Once again Ali offered his services but the Apostle still wishing that some senior member of the clan would accept his invitation, asked him to wait. He then appealed to the clan a third time to consider his invitation, and the same thing happened again. No one in the assembly showed any interest in what he told them. He surveyed the crowd and transfixed everyone in it with his gaze but no one moved. At length he beheld the solitary figure of Ali rising above the silent figures of the adults, to volunteer his services to him a third time.

This time Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, accepted Ali's offer. He drew him close, pressed him to his heart, and said to the assembly: "This is my wazir; my successor; and my vicegerent. Listen to him and obey his commands."

Edward Gibbon

Three years were silently employed in the conversion of fourteen proselytes, the first fruits of his (Mohammed's) mission; but in the fourth year he assumed the prophetic office, and resolving to impart to his family the light of divine truth, he prepared a banquet for the entertainment of forty guests of the race of Hashim. "Friends and kinsmen," Mohammed said to the assembly. "I offer you, and I alone can offer, the most precious gifts, the treasures of this world and of the world to come. God has commanded me to call you to His service. Who among you will support my burden? Who among you will be my companion and my vizir? No answer was returned, till the silence of astonishment and doubt, and contempt was at length broken by the impatient courage of Ali, a youth in the fourteenth year of his age. "O Prophet, I am the man, whoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O Prophet, I will be thy vizir over them." Mohammed accepted his offer with transport, and Abu Talib was ironically exhorted to respect the superior dignity of his son.

(The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)

Washington Irving

"O children of Abd al-Muttalib," cried he (Mohammed) with enthusiasm, "to you, of all men, has Allah vouchsafed these most precious gifts. In His name I offer you the blessings of this world, and endless joys hereafter. Who among you will share the burden of my offer? Who will be my brother, my lieutenant, my vizir?"

All remained silent; some wondering; others smiling with incredulity and derision. At length Ali, starting up with youthful zeal, offered himself to the services of the Prophet though modestly acknowledging his youth and physical weakness. Mohammed threw up his arms around the generous youth, and pressed him to his bosom. "Behold my brother, my vizir, my vicegerent," exclaimed he, "let all listen to his words, and obey him."

(The Life of Mohammed)

Sir Richard Burton

After a long course of meditation, fired with anger by the absurd fanaticism of the Jews, the superstitions of the Syrian and Arab Christians, and the horrid idolatries of his unbelieving countrymen, an enthusiast too – and what great soul has not been an enthusiast? – he (Mohammed) determined to reform those abuses which rendered revelation contemptible to the learned and prejudicial to the vulgar. He introduced himself as one inspired to a body of his relations and fellow-clansmen. The step was a failure, except that it won for him a proselyte worth a thousand sabres in the person of Ali, son of Abu Talib.

(The Jew the Gypsy and El Islam, San Francisco, 1898)

Ali had offered his services to Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and the latter had accepted them. To the elders of the tribe, Ali's conduct might have appeared rash and brazen but he soon proved that he had the grit to accomplish far more than others had the courage even to dream. The Messenger of Allah, on his part, accepted the offer not only with expressions of gratitude and joy but also declared that Ali was, from that moment, his vicegerent and his wazir. Muhammad's declaration was forthright and unequivocal. It is foolish to quibble, as some people do, that Ali's vicegerency of Muhammad, was confined to the tribe of Bani Hashim because it was an assembly of Bani Hashim. But Muhammad himself did not restrict Ali's vicegerency to Bani Hashim. Ali was his vicegerent for all Muslims and for all time.

The banquet at which Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, declared Ali to be his successor, is famous in history as "the Banquet of Dhul-'Asheera." This name comes from Quran Majid itself (Chapter 26; verse 214). Strangely, **Sir William Muir** has called this historic event "apocryphal." But what is

apocryphal or so improbable about it? Could anything be more logical for the Messenger of Allah than to begin his work of propagating Islam at his own home, and with the members of his own family and clan, especially, after he was expressly commanded by Allah to warn his "nearest kinsmen?"

The feast of Dhul-'Asheera at which Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah, designated Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor, is a historical event, and its authenticity has been affirmed, among others, by the following Arab historians:

1. Tabari, History, Volume II, p. 217 2. Kamil ibn Atheer, History, Vol. II, p. 22 3. Abul Fida, History, Vol. I, p. 116

Writing about Ali at this time, **Sir William Muir** says:

"His (Mohammed's) cousin, Ali, now 13 or 14 years of age, already gave tokens of the wisdom and judgment which distinguished him in after life. Though possessed of indomitable courage, he lacked the stirring energy which would have rendered him an effective propagator of Islam. He grew up from a child in the faith of Mohammed, and his earliest associations strengthened the convictions of maturer years."

(Life of Mohammed, London, 1877)

We have many reservations about **Sir William Muir**'s statement that Ali "lacked the stirring energy that would have made him an effective propagator of Islam." Ali did not lack energy or anything else. In all the crises of Islam, Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, selected him to carry out the most dangerous missions, and he invariably accomplished them.

As a missionary also, Ali was peerless. There was no one among all the companions of the Prophet who was a more effective propagator of Islam than he. He promulgated the first 40 verses of the Sura Bera'a (=Immunity), the 9th chapter of Quran Majid, to the pagans in Makka, as the first missionary of Islam, and as one representing the Messenger of Allah himself. And it was Ali who brought all the tribes of Yemen into the fold of Islam.

Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, had brought up Ali as his own child, and if the latter had lacked anything, he would have known it. He declared Ali to be his wazir, his successor and his vicegerent at a time when no one could have foreseen the future of Islam. This only points up the unbounded confidence that the Prophet of Islam had in this stripling of 14 years!

Ali symbolized the hopes and aspirations of Islam. In the great revolution which Muhammad, the Apostle of God, had launched at the feast of Dhul-'Asheera, he had mobilized the dynamism and the idealism; and the fervor and the vigor of youth; Ali personified them all.

Two things had happened at the Feast. One was that the Prophet had brought Islam out in the open; it was no longer an "under-ground" movement; it had "surfaced." At the Feast of his kinsfolk, Muhammad had "crossed the Rubicon" and now there could be no turning back. Time had come for him to carry the

message of Islam beyond his own clan – first to the Quraysh of Makka, then to all the Arabs, and finally, to the rest of the world. The other was that he had found Ali who was the embodiment of courage, devotion and resolution, and was worth far more than a "thousand sabres."

It is reported that some days after the second banquet of Dhul-'Asheera, Muhammad Mustafa climbed up the hill of Safa near the Kaaba, and called out: "O sons of Fehr; O sons of Loi; O sons of Adi; and all the rest of Quraysh! Come hither, and listen to me. I have something very important to tell you."

Many of those Makkans who heard his voice, came to listen to him. Addressing them, he said: "Will you believe me if I told you that the army of an enemy was hidden behind yonder hills, and was watching you to attack you as soon as it found you sleeping or off-guard?" They said they would believe him because they had never heard him telling a lie.

"If that's so," said Muhammad, "then listen to this with attention. The Lord of heavens and earth has commanded me to warn you of the dreadful time that is coming. But if you pay heed, you can save yourselves from perdition..." He had gone only as far as this when Abu Lahab, who was present among the listeners, interrupted him a second time by saying: "Death to you. Did you waste our time to tell us only this? We do not want to listen to you. Do not call us again."

Thenceforth, Abu Lahab made it a practice to shadow the Prophet wherever the latter went. If he started to read Quran or to say something else, he (Abu Lahab) interrupted him or started heckling him. Abu Lahab's hatred of Muhammad and hostility to Islam were shared by his wife, Umm Jameel. Both of them were cursed by Allah, for their perversity, in Chapter 111 of His Book.

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