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Chapter 9: From Sheperd to Merchant

The Divine guides are charged with a very important and great responsibility. It is a responsibility linked with embarrassment and deprivation, torture and calamities, murder and death; etc. in short with all sorts of hardships and sufferings. And the greater and more sublime their target is, the severer and the graver are the hardships attached to it.

On this account fortitude and forbearance, i.e. patience in the face of all calumnies, accusations, injuries and persecutions, is a pre-condition for the success of Divine leaders, because forbearance and patience are a real condition at all stages of a campaign for the attainment of their object.

In the history and the narratives relating to the Prophets we come across matters which it is very hard and difficult for us (ordinary human beings) to imagine. We read about Noah that he preached for 950 years and as a result of his campaign and prolonged efforts only eighty one persons expressed their belief in him. In other words in every twelve years he succeeded in bringing only one person to the right path.

The quality of forbearance and patience develops in man only gradually. It is necessary that he should face unpleasant events so that his soul should become fully acquainted with hardships and sufferings.

Before attaining the position of prophethood the Prophets used to spend a part of their lives as shepherds so that they might spend some time in the jungles in bringing up flocks and herds, and thus become patient and forbearing for the education of human beings and might take it easy to bear all hardships and sufferings.

This is so, because when a man is able to bear hardships with reference to an animal which. from the point of view of intellect and wisdom, holds no comparison with human beings, he inevitably accepts responsibility for the guidance of the misguided people, who are essentially prepared to have faith in Allah.

What has been said above is based upon the contents of a tradition wherein it has been said. "Allah has not sent any Prophet who has not been made to tend the flocks as a shepherd so that he may learn how

to guide the people. 1

The Holy Prophet also spent a part of his life in this manner and most of the writers of 'Seerah' have quoted this sentence from him "All the Prophets have been shepherds for some time before attaining to the position of prophethood". The people asked the Prophet "Have you too been a shepherd?" He replied "Yes. For some time I grazed the sheep of the people of Makkah in Qarareet area".

No doubt it was necessary for the person, who must fight with Abu Jahls and Abu Lahabs, and one who wanted to mould, out of degraded persons, whose common sense and intelligence was at such a level that they bowed before every stone and stick, a set of those, who should not submit to the will of anyone except the Will of Allah, that he should have rehearsed the lesson of forbearance and patience, in different ways, for quite some time.

We think that there was another reason also for the Holy Prophet choosing the pastoral occupation. It was that the sight of unreasonable ways of life of the powerful ones amongst the Quraysh and demonstration of viciousness by them weighed heavily on the mind of this brave and free man; who possessed a great sense of moral dignity.

Besides this, failure of the Makkan society to worship the Almighty and their going round the inanimate idols was something very unpleasant for an intelligent person. For these reasons the Holy Prophet dissociated himself from that society and spent a part of his life in the jungles and on the slope of the mountains which were naturally located at a distance from that polluted society, so that, for some time at least, he might be relieved of the mental torture caused by the pitiable conditions prevailing in that age.

By observing the beautiful sky and the positions and shape of stars and by reflecting on the plants of the jungle an enlightened person becomes acquainted with hundreds of signs of Divine order and strengthens his natural belief in monotheism with cogent scientific proofs.

The great Prophets, notwithstanding the fact that from the very time of their coming into existence their hearts were illuminated with the glowing torch of monotheism did not consider themselves independent of the need of studying the created beings and the Universe and through this very method they attained to the highest degrees of conviction and faith.

Abu Talib's Proposal

The stringent financial conditions of his nephew prompted Abu Talib, who was himself one of the chiefs of Makkah and noblemen of Quraysh and was famous for his generosity, bravery and magnanimous disposition to arrange for a vocation for him.

He therefore, said to his nephew: "Khadijah, daughter of Khuwaylad is one of the wealthy persons among Quraysh and her trade activities extend to Egypt and Ethiopia. She is on the look out for an honest man who should assume responsibility for her trade, participate on her behalf in the trade

caravan of Quraysh and take her merchandise to Syria for sale. O Muhammad! What a good thing it would be if you introduce yourself to her".2

The magnanimity and spiritual excellence of the Prophet did not permit him that he should go to Khadijah direct, without any acquaintance, and in the absence of any request from her, and make such a proposal.

He, therefore, replied to his uncle: "It is possible that Khadijah may herself send someone to me'. He said so, because he knew that he was well-known amongst the people as an 'honest' person. And the same thing did happen. When Khadijah came to know about their conversation she at once sent someone to the Prophet saying: "The thing which has inspired my regard for you is your truthfulness, honesty and good morals. I am prepared to give you double of what I give to others and shall also send along with you two slaves, who will obey you in all circumstances".3

The Prophet related this thing to his uncle and the latter said "This offer is a source of your livelihood which Almighty Allah has bestowed upon you"

The caravan of Quraysh, which included the merchandise of Khadijah, got ready to move. Khadijah placed an easy-paced camel, a quantity of costly goods and two slaves at the disposal of her agent and ordered the slaves to be very respectful to him at all stages, never to object to what he did, and to obey him in all circumstances.

Eventually the caravan reached its destination and all its members made profit. However, the profit made by the Prophet was comparatively more than that made by others and he also purchased certain things for being sold in the market–place of Tahamah.

After making a successful trip to Syria the caravan of Quraysh returned to Makkah. During this journey the Prophet once again passed through the land of Ad and Samud. The silence of death which prevailed over the environments of that unruly nation invited his attention more and more to the other worlds.

Moreover, the memories of the previous journey were also revived. He recollected the days when he had traversed those very deserts along with his uncle. The caravan of Quraysh drew near Makkah. Addressing the Prophet the slave named Maysarah said, "It will be better if you enter Makkah before us and inform Khadijah about the affairs of trade and the extraordinary profit which we have made this year'.

The Prophet entered Makkah at a time when Khadijah was sitting in her upper chamber. She ran down to receive him and took him into the chamber. The Prophet narrated, in a sweet manner, the matters relating to the merchandise. In the meantime Maysarah also arrived.4

The slave of Khadijah (Maysarah) narrated to her exactly all that he had seen during the journey and all of which testified to the greatness and spirituality of Muhammad, 'the honest one'. He told her inter alia

that during the journey 'the honest one' differed with a merchant about some matter.

That man told him that he would accept his word if he swore by 'Lat' and 'Uzza' but the honest one said to him in reply. "I consider Lat and Uzza, whom you worship, to be the meanest and most despicable things on the face of the earth".5

Maysara also added that in Busra 'the honest one' sat under a tree to take rest. In the meantime, a monk, who was sitting in his monastery, chanced to see him. He came and enquired about his name and then said "This man who is sitting under the shade of the tree is the very Prophet about whom I have read many good tidings in the Taurat and the Injeel".6

Khadijah - The First Lady Of Islam

Till that time the financial and economic conditions of the Prophet had not improved and he still needed financial help from his uncle, Abu Talib. His business matters were apparently not so firm as yet that he should choose a wife and set up a family.

His last journey to Syria, and that, too, in the capacity of the agent and representative of a wealthy and well-known lady of Quraysh (Khadijah) stabilised his financial and economic condition to some extent.

His courage and skill attracted the admiration of Khadijah and she expressed her willingness to pay him, as a prize, something over and above the settled amount. However, the Prophet accepted only that remuneration which had been agreed upon originally. He then proceeded to the house of Abu Talib and handed over to him all that he had earned, so as to ensure some relief for his uncle.

Abu Taiib had been waiting impatiently for his nephew who was the souvenir of his father (Abdul Muttalib) and his brother Abdullah. Tears trickled down his eyes as soon as he saw him. He was, nevertheless, very much pleased to learn about his business activities arid the profit that he had made, and expressed his willingness to place two horses and two camels at his disposal so that he could continue his business. As regards the money which he had earned during the said journey and had handed over to his uncle, he (Abu Talib) decided to utilize it for choosing a wife for his nephew.

In these conditions the Holy Prophet decided to choose a spouse for himself. The question, however, is as to how the lot fell upon Khadijah who had previously rejected the proposals of the most wealthy and influential men of Quraysh, like Uqbah bin Abi Mu'it, Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan.

What were the causes which brought together these two persons who were absolutely different from each other from the point of view of their respective lives, and which created such cordial relations, love and spiritual cohesion between them that Khadijah put her entire wealth at the disposal of Muhammad, and spent her wealth, which she gained from her business which extended upto Egypt and Ethiopia in the path of monotheism and for the exaltation of truth? And how was it that the house which was full of chairs studded with ivory and pearls and decorated with Indian silks and Iranian brocade curtains

eventually became an asylum for the Muslims?

The causes of these events should be ascertained from the life history of Khadijah. However, the thing which is indisputable is that services, indulgence and self-sacrifice of this kind cannot certainly become permanent unless they have a firm, pure and spiritual origin.

Pages of history testify that this marriage was the outcome of the faith of Khadijah in the piety, chastity, virtue and honesty of the Holy Prophet, the dear one of Quraysh, and the life history of Khadijah and narrations about her attainments make this fact abundantly clear.

As she was a chaste and virtuous woman she wished to marry a pious and virtuous husband, and it was for this reason that the Holy Prophet said about her "Khadijah is one of the honourable ladies of Paradise". And the first woman who expressed faith in Muhammad was Khadijah. Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, while describing, in one of his sermons, the pitiful condition of Islam in the early days of the prophetic mission of the Holy Prophet says "There was then no Muslim family except the family consisting of Muhammad, and his wife Khadijah, and I was its third member".

Ibne Athir says that a merchant named Afif came in Masjidul Harem and was very much surprised to observe the gathering there, and worship by a group consisting of three persons. He saw that the Holy Prophet was offering prayers along with Khadijah and Ali. On his return from the Masjid he met Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet. He told him what he had seen and inquired about the factual position. Abbas said to him, "The leader amongst those three persons is claimant of Prophethood and the woman is his wife Khadijah and the third person is my nephew Ali". Then he added, "I am not aware of any person on the face of the earth who should be a follower of this religion except these three".

It is beyond the scope of this book to explain and quote the narratives which have come down about the excellence of Khadijah. It would, therefore, be better that we should explain the causes which occasioned this historical event (i.e. marriage of Muhammad and Khadija).

The Patent and Latent Causes of The Marriage

Materialists, who study everything from the materialistic point of view, imagine that as Khadijah was rich and a trades-woman, she was very much in need of an honest person in connection with her commercial affairs and she, therefore, married Muhammad; and as Muhammad was also aware of her respectable position he consented to her request, although there was disparity in their ages.

However, history tells us that Khadijah was prompted to marry Muhammad the 'honest man' of Quraysh owing to a series of spiritual causes, and this union had no material aspect. Evidence in support of our claim is as follows:

1. When Khadijah enquired from Maysarah about the incidents related to the journey of the Prophet he narrated to her the miracles which he had seen from him and also what he had heard from the monk of

Syria. Khadijah felt excessive emotion within herself, which had its origin in her interest in the spirituality of Muhammad and she said to Maysarah involuntarily "Maysarah! That will do. You have doubled my interest in Muhammad. I hereby set you and your wife free and also place at your disposal two hundred dirhams. two horses and a costly dress ".

Thereafter she narrated what she had heard from Maysarah to Waraqah bin Nawfal, who was a sage of Arabia, and he said: "One who possesses these attributes is the Arabian Prophet".7

2. One day Khadijah was seated in her house while her bonds-women and slaves encircled her. One of the Jewish scholars was also present. By chance the Prophet passed that way and the Jewish scholar saw him. He at once requested Khadijah to insist upon Muhammad that he should postpone his task and join that party for a few moments. The Prophet accepted the request of the Jewish sage, which was based on observation of the signs of prophethood in his person.

Khadijah then turned to the Jewish sage and said "When his uncles will become aware of your investigation and inquisitiveness they will display an adverse reaction, because they are afraid of the Jews about their nephew". The Jewish sage then replied: "How can it be possible that anyone should harm Muhammad, when the hand of destiny has reared him up for the last prophethood and for the guidance of the people?" Khadijah said: "On what authority do you say that he will come to hold this position?"

He replied: "I have read the signs of the last Prophet in the Taurat. His signs include three things that is his parents will die, his grandfather and uncle will support him, and he will choose for his spouse a woman, who will be the lady of Quraysh". Then he pointed to Khadijah and said: "Blessed is she who has the honour of being his life-mate".8

- 3. Waraqah, uncle of Khadijah, was one of the sages of Arabia. He had thorough knowledge of the Bible and used to say time and again: "A man will be raised by Allah from amongst Quraysh for the guidance of the people and he shall marry one of the richest ladies of Quraysh". And as Khadijah was the richest woman of Quraysh he occasionally said to her: "A day will come when you will marry the noblest man on earth!"
- 4. One night Khadijah dreamt that the sun revolved above Makkah and then descended slowly and landed in her house. She related her dream to Waraqah bin Nawfal and he interpreted it thus: "You will marry a great man and he will become renowned throughout the world".

These are the incidents which have been quoted by some historians and by late Allamah Majlisig and have also been recorded in many history books. When all of them are taken into account they make crystal clear the reasons for the inclination of Khadijah towards the Prophet. This inclination was mostly due to her belief in the spirituality of the Prophet and the fact that the 'honest one' was more suitable for her business than others had no bearing on the consummation of this union.

Circumstances of Khadijah's Suit

This much is admitted that the proposal originated from the side of Khadijah herself; so much so that Ibn Hisham quotes 10 that Khadijah expressed her inclination personally and said: "Cousin! On account of the relationship which exists between us and the greatness and respect which you enjoy amongst your people and the honesty, good manners and truthfulness which you evidently possess, I am earnestly inclined to marry you". The 'honest man' of Quraysh replied "I must inform my uncles about this and this task should be accomplished with their approval".

Most of the historians believe that Nafisah, daughter of 'Alyah conveyed the proposal of Khadijah to the Prophet in the following manner:

She said, "O Muhammad! Why don't you illuminate the night-chamber of your life with the light of a spouse? Will you respond favourably if I invite you to beauty, wealth, gentleness and respect?" The Prophet said "What do you mean?" She then mentioned Khadijah.

The Prophet said, "Is Khadijah prepared for this, when there is a world of difference between the conditions of my life and of hers?" Nafisah said, "I hold authority on her behalf and shall make her agree. You should fix a date for the purpose so that her agent ('Amr bin Asad) may sit along with you and your kinsfolk and the ceremonies of marriage and rejoicing may be accomplished.11

The Holy Prophet talked about the matter with his honourable uncle (Abu Talib). A grand party consisting of distinguished persons amongst Quraysh was organized. In the first instance Abu Talib delivered a sermon, commencing it with praise for Allah. As regards his nephew, he introduced him thus "My nephew Muhammad bin Abdullah is superior to any man of the tribe of Quraysh with whom he may be compared. Although he lacks every sort of wealth, yet wealth is a passing shadow, and origin and lineage is something permanent. 12

As Abu .Talib had made in his sermon a mention of Quraysh and the family of Hashim, Waraqah, uncle of Khadijah said in reply "None amongst Quraysh denies your excellence. We earnestly wish to hold the string of your nobility. The marriage ceremony was then performed and the dowry was fixed at four hundred dinars. Some say that the dowry was twenty camels.

Age of Khadijah: It is usually said that at the time of marriage with the Prophet, Khadijah was forty years old and was born fifteen years before the 'Year of the Elephant'. However, some writers have mentioned that her age at the time of marriage was lesser than this. Previously she had married twice. The names of her husbands were 'Ais bin Abid and Abu Halah and both of them had died.

- 1. Safinatul Bihar, root word nabi.
- 2. Biharul Anwar, vol. XVI, page 22
- 3. Seerah Ibn Hisham, vol. II, page 24
- 4. al-Khara'ij, page 186 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XVI, page 4.

- 5. Tabaqat-i Kubra, page 140
- 6. Biharul Anwar, vol. XV, page 18.
- 7. Seerah-i ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 26.
- 8. Biharul Anwar, vol. XVI, page 19.
- 9. Biharul Anwar, vol. VI, page 124.
- 10. Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 204.
- <u>11.</u> It is well–known that Khuwaylid, the father of Khadijah was killed in a Fujjar Battle and for this reason her uncle authorized marriage on her behalf. Thus the view, recorded by some historians that in the first instance Khuwaylid was not agreeable, but later he agreed, owing to the severe inclination of Khadijah, is baseless.
- 12. Manaqib, vol. I, page 30 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XV, page 6.

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