

The Deaths of Khadija and Abu Talib

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Thanks to the chivalry and gallantry of the five paladins of Makkah, the members of the clan of Banu Hashim could now live in their homes once again. But they had barely begun to recover from the rigors of living in a mountain hide-out for three years, when Khadija, the wife, the friend and the companion of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, and the benefactress of Islam and the Muslims, fell ill and died. All her life she had lived in the midst of luxury and abundance but the three years of exile had been a time of excessive austerity for her which inevitably took its toll.

As noted before, Khadija was the very first woman in the whole world to declare that God was One, and Muhammad was His Messenger to all mankind. The honor and glory of being the *First Believer* in the whole world is hers to all eternity. She had sacrificed her comfort, her wealth, and her home for Islam; and now it would appear that she sacrificed her life also.

Without a doubt, if she had lived in her spacious and luxurious house in Makkah, surrounded by her maid-servants, she might have lived for many more years. But she preferred to stand by her husband and his clan, and to share the bitters of life with them. During the siege, she had to endure not only the pangs of hunger and thirst but also the extremes of heat in summer and cold in winter, and yet no one ever heard a word of gripe from her, and she never lost her serenity.

Whether times were good or bad, whether she had abundance or she had nothing, she was always cheerful. She was cheerful even in exile. Privation and austerity never soured her temperament. It was her temperament that was an unfailing source of strength, comfort and courage for her husband during the bleakest moments of his life.

During the years of the siege, Khadija spent her immense fortune on buying essentials like water, food and clothing for the clan of her husband. When she returned to her house, her last cent was gone; and when she died, there was not enough money in the house to buy a shroud. A cloak of her husband was used as a shroud for her, and she was given burial in it.

Muhammad Mustafa never married another woman as long as Khadija lived, and if she had not died, it is most probable that he would not have married any other woman.

Edward Gibbon

During the 24 years of their marriage, Khadija's youthful husband abstained from the right of polygamy, and the pride or tenderness of the venerable matron was never insulted by the society of a rival.

After her death, the Prophet placed her in the rank of four perfect women, with the sister of Moses, the mother of Jesus, and Fatima, the best beloved of his daughters. (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*)

Sir John Glubb

Khadija was Mohammed's first convert. From the moment of his first call, until her death nine years later, she never faltered. Whenever he encountered mockery or contradiction, he was sure, when he returned home in the evening, to find a cheerful and loving comforter. She was always ready by her confident equanimity to restore his courage and to lighten the burden of his fears. (*The Life and Times of Mohammed, New York, 1970*)

Ibn Ishaq, the biographer of the Prophet, says that when there was resumption of Divine revelation after its cessation following the first revelation, Khadija received a Divine tribute and a salutation of peace from God. The message was communicated to Muhammad by Gabriel, and when he conveyed it to Khadija, she said: "God is Peace (as-Salam), and from Him is all Peace, and may peace be on Gabriel."

Muhammad Mustafa forever remembered Khadija with love, affection and gratitude. During her brief illness, he kept a night-long vigil, nursing her, comforting her and praying for her. He told her that God had built for her a palace of pearls in Paradise. Her death filled his heart with deep sorrow.

Khadija died on the 10th of Ramadan of the 10th year of the Proclamation of Islam. She was buried in Hujun above Makkah. After the burial, the Apostle himself smoothed the earth on her grave.

One month after the death of Khadija, the Prophet sustained another shock in the death of Abu Talib, his uncle and guardian. Abu Talib was the bulwark of Islam since its birth. The death of these two friends, Khadija and Abu Talib, was the greatest shock and sorrow that he had to endure in the fifty years of his life. He called the year of their death "The Year of Sorrow."

The year 619 turned out to be a year of sorrow for Muhammad Mustafa in more than one sense. The death of one's loved ones is naturally a cause for sorrow. But in his case, the death of these two friends was not merely a subjective experience. He was soon made conscious of the meaning of their death by a series of extraneous events.

Ibn Ishaq

Khadija and Abu Talib died in the same year, and with Khadija's death troubles followed fast on each other's heels, for she had been a faithful supporter to him in Islam, and he used to tell her of his troubles. With the death of Abu Talib, he lost a strength and stay in his personal life and a defense and protection against his tribe.

Abu Talib died some three years before he (Mohammed) migrated to Medina, and it was then that Quraysh began to treat him in an offensive way which they would not have dared to follow in his uncle's lifetime. A young lout actually threw dust on his head.

Hisham on the authority of his father, Urwa, told me that the Prophet went into his house, and he was saying, "Quraysh never treated me thus while Abu Talib was alive." (*The Life of the Messenger of God*)

Washington Irving

Mohammed soon became sensible of the loss he had sustained in the death of Abu Talib who had been not merely an affectionate relative, but a steadfast and powerful protector, from his great influence in Mecca. At his death there was no one to check and counteract the hostilities of Abu Sofian and Abu Jahl.

The fortunes of Mohammed were becoming darker and darker in his native place. Khadija, his original benefactress, the devoted companion of his solitude and seclusion, the zealous believer in his doctrine, was dead; so also was Abu Talib, once his faithful and efficient protector. Deprived of the sheltering influence of the latter, Mohammed had become, in a manner, an outlaw in Mecca, obliged to conceal himself and remain a burden on the hospitality of those whom his own doctrines had involved in persecution (sic). If worldly advantage had been his objective, how had it been attained? (*Life of Mohammed*)

In stating that Muhammad had become "a burden on the hospitality of those whom his own doctrines had involved in persecution," the historian quoted above, has expressed an opinion with which we cannot agree. Muhammad was never a burden to anyone at any time. The members of his clan, the Banu Hashim, considered it a privilege and an honor to protect and to defend him against his enemies.

Sir William Muir

The sacrifices to which Abu Talib exposed himself and his family for the sake of his nephew, while yet incredulous of his mission (sic), stamp his character as singularly noble and unselfish. They afford at the same time strong proof of the sincerity of Mohammed. Abu Talib would not have acted thus for an interested deceiver; and he had ample means of scrutiny.

When the Patriarch felt that life was ebbing, he summoned his brethren, the sons of Abd al-Muttalib, around his bed, commended his nephew to their protection; and, relieved of the trust, died in peace, and was buried not far from Khadija's grave.

Mohammed wept bitterly for his uncle; and not without reason. For forty years he had been his faithful friend – the prop of his childhood, the guardian of his youth, and in later life a tower of defense.

His very unbelief (sic) made his influence stronger. So long as he survived, Mohammed needed not to fear violence or attack. But there was no strong hand now to protect him from his foes. A second Khadija might be found, but not a second Abu Talib. (*The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877*)

Sir John Glubb

The Apostle made great efforts to persuade Abu Talib to repeat the Muslim witness of faith, but he only lay silent making no response, until he passed away (sic). Abu Talib seems to us an attractive character. Outspoken, loyal and sympathetic, he endured many worries, losses and contradictions in order to protect his nephew, although he did not believe in his preaching (sic). He is not considered a hero by Muslims, for he died in unbelief (sic). *Nevertheless, if it had not been for the staunch courage with which he stood by his nephew, Islam might have died in its cradle.* (*The Life and Times of Mohammed, New York, 1970*)

I have quoted above Sir William Muir and Sir John Glubb verbatim. They have insinuated that Abu Talib died in unbelief. If challenged to produce authority for such a statement, they would advert to Bukhari. Bukhari says that when Abu Talib was on his death-bed, the Apostle urged him to become a Muslim but he said that doing so would embarrass him with his Qurayshi friends.

The author(s) of this “tradition” forgot one thing. Abu Talib was dying, and knew that he was not going to see his Qurayshi “friends” any more. He knew that he was going into the presence of his Creator. At a moment like this he could not have cared less for the Quraysh.

His anxiety at all times was to win the pleasure of God, and he proved by his deeds more than anyone else could ever prove by his words, that his faith in the Oneness of God, and in the mission of Muhammad as His Messenger, was rocklike and unshakable.

Abu Talib was a fervent believer in Islam. His attachment to Islam is pointed up by his consistency, and by the logic of facts.

No man can love Muhammad and idolatry at the same time; the two loves are mutually exclusive. And no man can love Muhammad yet hate Islam. The love of Muhammad and the hatred of Islam cannot coexist. Whoever loves Muhammad, must, inevitably, love Islam. Nor can anyone hate Muhammad and love Islam. Such a postulate would be a monstrous absurdity.

If there is any one thing beyond any doubt in the history of Islam, it is the love of Abu Talib for Muhammad. As noted before, Abu Talib and his wife, Fatima bint Asad, loved Muhammad more than they loved their own children.

Both husband and wife were ever ready to sacrifice their sons for Muhammad. Such love could have

had only one fountainhead, that of faith in Muhammad and Islam. Abu Talib's wife, Fatima bint Asad, the foster-mother of Muhammad, was the second woman to accept Islam, the first being Khadija.

Abu Talib was proud that God had chosen Muhammad, the son of his brother, Abdullah, in all creation, to be His Last Messenger to mankind. Muhammad was the greatest love and the greatest pride of his uncle, Abu Talib.

The glorious deeds of Abu Talib are an integral part of the story of Islam. No story of Islam would either be complete or true if it did not comprehend an account of his role, as the protector of Muhammad and the defender of Islam. His deeds are the most eloquent testimony of his faith in Allah and His Messenger.

May Allah bless His devout slaves, Khadija; Abu Talib and his wife, Fatima bint Asad. All three of them were the “instruments” through which He consolidated Islam, and made it viable.

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