

The Prophet and Abu Talib

If we leave aside the details and cast a glance not at the apparent conditions but at the reality, it appears that the conditions and the adventures of life of Ali son of Abu Talib were similar to those of the Prophet Muhammad, and the attitude of his companions towards Mu'awiya and his associates was similar to that of the Prophet and the Muslims towards Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl and other Quraysh. The difference between them was this that the Prophet acquired necessary strength to establish a state and to subdue the chiefs of Quraysh whereas the circumstances and conditions had changed in the days of Ali and he did not succeed in overpowering his opponents.

Although Ali could not rule over the people like Bani Umayyah he was not deprived of ruling over the pure hearts of the virtuous people. And he was so well-equipped with the qualities of a perfect man that he deserved to rule the hearts.

Before we begin our discourse about Ali it is necessary to throw some light on the relationship which associated him with Muhammad son of Abdullah. This relationship existed in the detailed adventures of their lives as well as in their spiritual qualities which had come together in one family. The Prophet was the most perfect person and the son of Abu Talib followed in his footsteps and was the most perfect person next to him and excelled all others.

When the Prophet was deprived of the love of his parents, his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib, who was the grandfather of Ali as well, assumed his guardianship. His grandfather was very fond of him. Many times it so happened that he fixed his eyes on his grandson and said to those present: "This child is very honourable".

He accorded Muhammad great respect even though he was a child yet, and in the general assemblies he made him sit at a place in the shade of the Ka'bah where even his brothers could not aspire to sit.

When the Prophet's grandfather breathed his last, his guardianship was assumed by his uncle Abu Talib, the father of Ali. The Prophet led a very comfortable life under the guardianship of his uncle, and benefited from his love and excellent manners and morals, which he had inherited from Abd al-Muttalib. The good morals, which were characteristic of the family of Abd al-Muttalib were inherent in the soul of

Muhammad and were manifest in his words and actions. It might be said that when God chose His messenger from the family of Bani Hashim He also chose his magnanimous uncle to train him. It appears that a messenger–angel had informed Abu Talib about the mystery related to his nephew of which others were not aware.

Once during a period of famine and drought this child was requested by his uncle to pray to God for rains with his back resting on the wall of the holy Ka'bah. The child complied with his uncle's wish and pointed to the sky with his finger. There was no cloud in the sky at that moment. However, the clouds gathered suddenly from all sides, and it rained heavily so that the fields were filled with water and the earth gained a new life.

The people asked Abu Talib, "Who is this boy?" He replied: "He is my nephew Muhammad about whom I have said: He is the white–faced one. By means of his bright face water is sought from the clouds. He is the refuge for the orphans and the protector of the widows".

This narrative indicates the fervent mutual love and affection of the uncle and the nephew. Abu Talib always attended to the needs of the child very meticulously and was extremely kind to him.

Once when Abu Talib went to Syria he also took with him his nephew (Muhammad) who was then about fourteen years of age. After having crossed Madyan, the valley of Qura and the land of Samud they came near the gardens of Syria. They enjoyed different scenes and observed therein the secrets of nature.

The views of Abu Talib about Muhammad were confirmed by the monk Bahira when he told him that his nephew would become a towering personality in the future. From then onwards he took greater care of his nephew because he became aware that a mystery was linked with his person.

When Abu Talib heard the people of Mecca calling Muhammad with the title of '*Amin*' (the honest) he was very much pleased, and the tears of joy began to flow down from his eyes.

Khadijah, the chief of the woman of Quraysh, herself proposed marriage to Muhammad although she had already rejected the suit of rich Qurayshite noblemen. The only confidant and true adviser of Muhammad was Abu Talib. He therefore, consulted him in the matter. Abu Talib was well aware of the nature and morals of Muhammad and knew that he was not inclined towards anything except goodness. He supported this alliance because what his nephew had enquired about was exactly the same thing which he (Abu Talib) himself had wished from the core of his heart.

After the Quranic verses were revealed to Muhammad in the Cave of Hira the first persons to express faith in him and to offer prayers with him were his wife Khadijah and his cousin Ali. When Abu Talib came to know about the embracement of Islam by Ali he said to him: "My son! What act do you perform?" Ali replied: "Dear father! I have adopted the religion of the Prophet of God, confirm what he has brought and follow him in offering prayers". Abu Talib said: "Dear son! Be obedient to him always,

because he will never invite you to anything except goodness and virtue”.

When the Prophet of Islam ordered the Muslims to migrate to Ethiopia he made Ja'far son of Abu Talib the chief of the migrants, and of all those persons he loved his cousin most.

Abu Talib was the first person in Islam who composed verses eulogizing Muhammad and exhorted the people to support him. Once a group of Quraysh came to Abu Talib and asked him to surrender Muhammad to them. He replied to them: “So long as all of us are not finished we shall neither surrender him to you nor withhold assistance from him”.

Throughout his life Abu Talib did not forget even for one moment that Muhammad was a great person and his (i.e. Abu Talib's) brother Abdullah and his father Abd al-Muttalib were also great personalities.

When the time of Abu Talib's death drew near he called a large number of persons belonging to his family by his bedside, and said to them: “I exhort you to behave well with Muhammad because he is known as 'honest' among Quraysh and is famous among the Arabs for his truthfulness, and all these qualities are combined in his person. I can imagine very well that the indigent and the nomads have gathered round him and have accepted his invitation and confirmed his words. Their movement has become strong. The chiefs and elders of Quraysh have been humiliated. The weak persons have become honourable. Those who were opposed to him most are most obedient to him and those who were more apart from him are profiting more by remaining in his service.

O Quraysh! Support and reverence him. I swear by God that whoever follows his path will be saved and whoever acts on his advice will become prosperous. If I had lived and death had granted me respite I would have defended him from the calamities of time because he is truthful and honest. Accept his invitation, co-operate with one another in supporting him and fight against his enemies, because so long as the world lasts he is the capital of dignity and honour for you”.

Abu Talib rendered support to the Prophet for forty two years. He opposed Quraysh for his sake and supported his declaration of prophethood till he breathed his last.

After Abu Talib's death the Prophet felt that he had been deprived of his great supporter who used to defend him against harm by Quraysh. Abu Talib was the chief of the family in which the Prophet had been brought up, and was his supporter against his enemies. He loved him ardently and warded off the mischief of the obstinate Quraysh against him. The Prophet himself said: “So long as my uncle Abu Talib lived the people could do me no harm”.

As we all know Muhammad was very patient and self-possessed, and notwithstanding the fact that his enemies were numerous and his friends were fewer, he believed firmly that he would succeed in his mission. The question therefore, arises as to the reason for his being so much grieved at the death of his uncle. In fact the reason was their great mutual love, because a person loves one who is kind to him and supports him. His flowing tears showed that the Prophet was feeling that he had lost something which

was as dear to him as his own life.

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