Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

4. The First Muslims

‘Ali's mental capability and the integration of his life with the life of the Messenger enabled him to think as a philosopher while he was ten years old. He was able to arrive at a logical conclusion. The overwhelming majority of the Meccans had for thirteen years refused to open their eyes to the light of Islam and prevented the Messenger of God from reaching their ears.

They could not free their minds because they took the attitude of: "We have found our fathers on a road and we are following their footsteps." The inclination to walk in the path of the ancestor was and still is the main guarantee against the change of religion. This inclination stood and is still standing as a barrier between great thinkers of Western Society and the acceptance of the Islamic teaching. But ‘Ali at the tenth year of his age took the logical attitude.

While Muhammad and Khadijah were praying ‘Ali entered their room. He stood until the Prophet finished his prayer. "To whom do you prostrate?" ‘Ali asked. "We prostrate to God the One Who commissioned me as a Prophet and commanded me to invite people to Him " the Prophet replied.

The Messenger recited verses from the Holy Qur'an then invited his cousin to embrace Islam. ‘Ali was fascinated. He asked the Prophet to give him time to consult his father. He spent his night excitedly and on the following day he came to declare his Islam.

He embraced the new faith without taking the advice of his father Abu Talib reasoning: "God had created me without consulting Abu Talib. Why should I need his counsel to worship God?"[1]

It is a short statement but it announces a great deal of independent thinking capability of forming opinion and depth in faith. It is a logic which is not marred by contradiction. ‘Ali loved his father and believed that a child owes his father a genuine obedience. But he knew that the obedience of the father is not absolute. It has its own limitation.

His counsel ought to be sought only when the matter is not clear. When truth becomes evident consultation becomes useless. To ‘Ali the truth of Muhammad was as clear as the daylight. And it had

become the duty of ‘Ali to respond to Muhammad’s call and to respond to it immediately.

The message is new and he does not know what the attitude of his father will be toward the new faith. Abu Talib may believe in what his small child believed in.

Should this be the case it would please the father to see his son preceding him in accepting the truth. But Abu Talib may hesitate to accept the new faith and ‘Ali cannot delay his response to the call of His Lord. The Creator of Abu Talib and of his son has much more right than Abu Talib to be obeyed.

It is well known that ‘Ali was the first Muslim. Ibn Hisham recorded that ‘Ali Ibn Abu Talib was the first male to believe in the Messenger of God and that he prayed with him while he was 10 years old.[2] It is reported that when the time of prayer came the Messenger used to go outside Mecca accompanying ‘Ali to offer their prayer then come back in the evening.

It is reported that Anas Ibn Malik said: "The Messenger was commissioned on Monday and ‘Ali believed in him on Tuesday."[3]

Muhammad Ibn Majah in his Sunan and Al-Hakim in his Mustadrak reported that ‘Ali said: "I am the servant of God and the brother of His Messenger and I am the greatest believer in his Prophethood. No one says this after me but a liar. I prayed seven years before the rest of the people."[4]

Al-Hakim reported that Salman Al-Farisi said that the Messenger of God said: "The first one of you to drink from the Basin on the Day of Judgement is your first Muslim ‘Ali son of Abu Talib."[5]

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hunbul recorded that Maaqal Ibn Yasar said that the Messenger of God said to his daughter Fatima: "Would it not please you that I have married you to the first Muslim in my nation their most knowledgeable and their wisest?"[6]

How Valuable Was His Islam?

Those who argue about his being the first Muslim are not numerous. But there are those who argue about the value of his early adoption of the new faith compared to the conversion of other prominent companions whose Islam was preceded by that of ‘Ali. ‘Ali was still a child in the tenth year of his age they argue.

It would not be expected from such a child to think like a man and base his opinion on logic and wisdom in choosing between alternatives he faces. He rather is expected to adopt Islam not because of a sound thinking but because of his attachment to the Holy Prophet for he was brought up by the Prophet as a member of his family.

Had ‘Ali been an ordinary child this argument would be sound. But ‘Ali was not an ordinary child during his childhood nor was he an ordinary man during his manhood. All evidences show that he was one of

the genius types of individuals who reached the maturity in their early years and surpassed the average men in understanding the truth and high ideals.

Had ‘Ali been motivated by his attachment to the Holy Prophet he would not have asked the Prophet to give him time to consult his father. The Prophet was his guardian and teacher and ‘Ali was ready to follow his ethical instructions.

The Prophet used to raise for him every day a banner of his ethics and ‘Ali used to follow him as a child follows his mother. He did not ask the Prophet to give him time to consult his father or to think by himself whether he will follow any of his ethical teachings. Yet when he offered him a new religion he asked the Prophet to give him time to consult his father.

He spent his night thinking and when the truth became clear to him he decided not to consult his father after all and immediately accepted the invitation of the Holy Prophet. He came to the Messenger declaring his Islam and uttering his wise words which neither the ordinary children nor the ordinary men can think of.

The invitation of the Messenger to ‘Ali by itself tells us that the Messenger did not consider him an ordinary child.

We did not find in history that the Messenger ever invited any of the children except the Imam ‘Ali. He used to invite only men and women expecting their children to follow them because children cannot think for themselves or distinguish between right and wrong. He privileged ‘Ali by inviting him to adopt the new faith while he was ten years old.

In fact he bestowed on him two exclusive honors: He was the only child whom he invited to the faith and above all he invited him before he invited any of the men.

I would like to say that casting doubt on the importance of ‘Ali's adoption of the faith because of his young age does not accord with our belief in the wisdom of the Messenger and soundness of his opinion. The event which we shall consider in the following chapter indicates that the opinion of the Messenger about ‘Ali does not agree with the opinion of those who argue to the contrary.

Al-Jahith and other scholars tried to belittle the value of the Islam of ‘Ali because of his young age. They ignored the fact that the Holy Prophet took him as his minister and brother while ‘Ali did not exceed the thirteenth year of his age. This took place at the conference which he held with his close relatives at his house in Mecca. He not only bestowed on him these honors but also told the attending men to obey him.

1. Dr. Muhammad Hussein Haikal Hayat Muhammad (Life of Muhammad) p. 138.
2. Ibn Hisham Al-Searat (Biography of the Prophet) Part 1 p.245.
3. Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak Part 3 p. 112.
4. Ibn Majah Sunan Ibn Majah Part 1 p.44 (hadith 120)
5. Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak Part 3 p. 112

6. Imam Ahmad Al-Musnad Part 3 p. 136.

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/brother-prophet-muhammad-imam-ali-shaykh-muhammad-jawad-chirri/4-first-muslims#comment-0