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Birth and Ancestors

Setting: Hijaz

Most of the events and incidents narrated in this chapter took place in Hijaz, the northern part of today's Saudi Arabia. Hijaz is the region along the mountainous Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula from Jordan on the north to the region of 'Asir on the south. Its northern part was occupied as early as the 6th century B.C. when the Chaldean kings of Babylon kept Taym (or Tayma') as its summer capital. Later, Hijaz became part of the Nabataean kingdom which lasted for three hunded years: from 100 B.C. to 200 A.D. Its center was Mada'in Salih. This is the place where the Arabian prophet Salih and his people lived. The province was again placed under Baghdad's control till 1258 A.D. when it fell to the Egyptians and, in 1517 A.D., to Ottoman Turks. The most important cities in Hijaz are: Mecca, Medina, Jidda and Taif.

What Does 'Muhammad' Mean?

According to the great traditionist Jabir ibn 'Abdullah al-Ansari, may Allah be pleased with him, the Messenger of Allah has said, "I more than anyone else look like Adam, peace be upon him, while Ibrahim, more than anyone else, looks like me and deals with people as I do. Allah, from His *'Arsh,* gave me ten names. He conveyed the glad tidings of my advent to every messenger whom He sent to his respective people. In the Torah and in the Gospel (Bible), He included my name and taught me to speak divinely; He raised me in His heavens and derived a name for me from one of His Own, calling me 'Muhammad,' while He Himself is the 'Mahmood.'

And He extracted my seed out of the best from among my *umma*, making my name in the Torah 'Aheed,' for it is through *tawhid* that He has forbidden the bodies of my *umma* from entering the fire. In the Gospel, He called me ' Ahmad,' for I am more praised by the people of the heavens (than by those on earth), making the members of my *umma* the *hamidin* (those who laud me). In the Psalms, He made my name 'Mahi,' for Allah, the Most Exalted, the Most Sublime, wiped out through me idol-worship. And in the Qur'an,

He made my name 'Muhammad,' for I am praised by everyone on the Day of Judgment when decrees will be issued, and none besides me will receive such praise. On the Day of Resurrection, He will call me 'Hashir,' for people will be gathered together from underneath my feet. And on the Day of Standing, He will call me 'al-Mawqif,' for I will make all people stand before Him for judgment. And He called me 'al-'Aqib,' for I am the last of His prophets; none shall succeed me as such. And He made me the Messenger of mercy and repentance, the Imam of all those who stand before others and lead them in the prayers, since it was I who led all the prophets for congregational prayers. Moreover, I am also al-Qayyim, al-Kamil, and al-Jami'."

First, It was the Light of Muhammad

When Allah intended to create the living beings, He first created the *noor* (light) of Muhammad. Refer to al-Qastalani's *Al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyah*, Vol. 1, pp. 5, 9, and 10, where he quotes the Prophet's traditions to this effect as transmitted by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah al-Ansari[1] and Ali ibn Abu Talib. In his *Muruju al-Thahab*, the well-known historian al-Mas'udi[2] quotes a lengthy tradition from Ali to the effect that when Allah created, first of all, the Light of Muhammad, He said to it: "You are My chosen one and the Trustee of My Light and Guidance. It is because of you that I am going to create the earth and the skies, lay down reward and punishment, and bring into being the Garden and the Fire.'

Then the tradition goes on to speak about the family of the Prophet, about the creation of angels, the souls, the cosmos, the covenant taken from the souls which combined the belief in the One God with acceptance of Muhammad's Prophethood. This is why Ibn 'Abbas narrates saying that the Prophet said: "I was Prophet when Adam was between soul and body (i.e. when Adam's creation was in its preliminary stages)' (see at-Tabrani's book *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabir,* and Vol. 1, p. 4, of *Al-Khasa'is al-Kubra*).

Muhammad's Light adorned the 'Arsh (Throne) of God. Aeons later, Adam was created. That Light was then placed in his forehead. It continued its journey, generation after generation, through numerous prophets and their successors till it came to Prophet Ibrahim. From Ibrahim (Abraham), it came to his eldest son, Prophet Isma'il (Ishmael).

The Prophet said: "Verily Allah chose Isma'il from the progeny of Ibrahim, and chose Banu Kinanah from the progeny of Isma'il, and chose Quraish from Banu Kinanah, and chose Banu Hashim from Quraish, and chose me from Banu Hashim.' At-Tirmithi has narrated this tradition from *Wasilat ibn al-Asqa'* and has said that this tradition is *sahih* (correct or authentic).

Abu al-Fida' quotes in his *Tarikh* (book of history) a tradition wherein the Prophet says: "Gabriel said to me: 'I looked at the earth from the east to the west, but I did not find anyone superior to Muhammad, and I looked at the Earth from the east to the west but did not find any progeny superior to the progeny of Hashim.'

The Children of Isma'il

Prophet Ibrahim had brought his eldest son Isma'il with his mother Hajira (Hagar) from Ken'an to the barren valley of Mecca. He used to visit them once a year. When Isma'il was old enough to help him, Prophet Ibrahim built the House of Allah known as the Ka'ba.
There was no water in the land when Isma'il and Hajira were left there. The well of Zamzam miraculously appeared for Isma'il. Read how this miraculous event is portrayed in the Bible:

And God heard the voice of the lad [*Ishmael*]*; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven and said to her: What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise and lift up the lad and hold him in thy hand, for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.*
Genesis, 21:17–20

Finding the well, the tribe of Jurham sought the permission of Hajira to settle there. During Prophet Ibrahim's annual visit, permission was given to them, and ultimately Ishmael married in the same tribe. He begot twelve sons; the eldest was called Qidar (Cedar).

The Ishmaelites increased in number, thus fulfilling the promise of Allah to Ibrahim to multiply Ishmael exceedingly, as we read in Genesis.

The Ishmaelites, by and by, spread all over Hijaz. They were not organized and consequently had no power. About 200 years before Christ, 'Adnan from the children of Qidar arose to some fame. The genealogy of 'Adnan up to Qidar is not agreed upon. The Arabs have narrated various genealogies. The Prophet, in order to emphasize the Islamic ideology that personal qualities, rather than genealogy, was the criterion of excellence, and with a view not to entangle himself in such unnecessary and useless arguments, ordered the Muslims thus: "When my genealogy reaches 'Adnan, stop.'

In the third century of the Christian Era (CE), there arose a leader named Fahr in that family. He was son of Malik, son of Nadar, son of Kinanah, son of Khuzaymah, son of Mudrikah, son of Ilyas, son of Mazar, son of Nazar, son of Ma'd, son of 'Adnan.

Some people think that this Fahr was called Quraish, and that is why his children came to be known as Quraish.
In the fifth generation after Fahr, in the fifth century of the Christian era, a very powerful personality appeared on the scene. He was Qusayy, son of Kilab, son of Murrah, son of Lu'ayy, son of Ghalib, son of Fahr.

Many people say that it was not Fahr but Qusayy who was called Quraish. The famous Muslim scholar Shibli al-Nu'man, writes: "Qusayy became so famous and achieved such a high prestige that some people say that he was the first man to be called Quraish, as Ibn 'Abdi Rabbih has written in his book

Al-'Iqd al-Farid, clearly saying that as Qusayy gathered all the children of Isma'il from far and wide and made them leave the nomadic way of life, settling them around the Ka'ba, he was called Quraish (the gatherer).' Al-Tabari quotes 'Abdul-Malik ibn Marwan as saying that Qusayy was Quraish, and that nobody was given this name before him.

A man from the tribe of Khuza'ah named Hulail was the trustee of the Ka'ba when Qusayy came of age. Qusayy married his daughter and, according to Hulail's will, got the trusteeship of the Ka'ba after Hulail. Qusayy established many new institutions:
It was Qusayy who established Dar al-Nadwa (Assembly House). It was there that discussions were held to settle important matters like war and peace. Caravans assembled there before going out, and marriages and other ceremonies were conducted.

It was Qusayy who established the system of *siqaya* (making arrangements to supply water to the pilgrims during the *hajj* days) and rifada (to feed the pilgrims during those days).
It appears from al-Tabari that this system was followed in Islam up to his time, i.e. 500 years after Qusayy.

It was Qusayy who made arrangements for the pilgrims to stay at al-Mash'arul al-Haram at night. He used to illuminate the valley with lamps, making their stay comfortable.
It was Qusayy who rebuilt the Ka'ba and who dug the first well at Mecca. Zamzam was filled up long ago and nobody knew of its actual location.

Arab historians unanimously say that he was generous, brave, and sympathetic; his ideas were pure, his thinking clean, and his manners very refined. His word was followed like a religion during his lifetime and even after his death. People used to visit his grave at Hajun (present day Jannatul Ma'alla). No wonder that he was the undisputed chief of the tribe which owed its strength and power to his leadership. To him had converged all the responsibilities and privileges of the tribe: He was the trustee of the Ka'ba (*hijaba*), he was the chairman of Dar al-Nadwa which he himself had established; he fed the pilgrims (rifada); he arranged to provide them with drinking water (siqaya); he was the standard-bearer of Quraish in wartime (liwa), and he was the commander of the army (*qiyada*).

These were the six privileges which were looked upon with great respect and before which all of Arabia bowed down. The most wonderful aspect of his life is his selflessness. In all the accounts of his life, there never appears any hint that by being the undisputed leader of the tribe, he had gained anything for himself.

Qusayy had five sons and a daughter: 'Abduddar was the eldest, then Mughirah (known as 'Abd Munaf). Qusayy loved his eldest son very much, and at the time of his death, he entrusted him with all the six responsibilities mentioned above.

But 'Abduddar was not a very able man, whereas 'Abd Munaf was acknowledged as a wise leader even during the life of his father, and his words were dutifully obeyed by the whole tribe. Because of his

nobility and benevolence, he was commonly known as “generous.’ Thus, it came to pass that ‘Abduddar shared all his responsibilities with ‘Abd Munaf. ‘Abd Munaf even became the paramount chief of Quraish.

‘Abd Munaf had six sons: Hashim, Muttalib, ‘Abdush-Shams, and Nawfal were the most famous among them.

There was no trouble while ‘Abduddar and ‘Abd Munaf were alive. After their death, a dispute started between their children concerning the distribution of the six responsibilities. A war had almost started before it was agreed upon that *siqaya*, *rifada*, and *qiyada* should go to the children of ‘Abdu Munaf, and *liwa'* and *hijaba* should remain with the children of ‘Abduddar, while the chairmanship of Dar al-Nadwa should be shared by both families.

Hashim

Hashim's name will always shine in the history of Arabia and Islam not only because he was the great grandfather of the Prophet, but in his own right due to his tremendous achievements.

He may well be compared with any great leader of his time. He was the most generous, the most prestigious, and the most respected leader of Quraish. He used to feed the pilgrims during *hajj* with royal open-handedness. But the best testimonial to his benevolence is his title “Hashim’ whereby he came to be known. Once, there was a great famine in Mecca. Hashim could not look silently at the sorry plight of the Meccans. He took all his wealth, went to Syria, purchased flour and dried bread, brought it to Mecca and daily slaughtered his camels for gravy; the bread was broken into the gravy and the whole tribe was invited to partake of it. This continued till the famine was averted and all lives were saved. It was this extraordinary feat that earned him the name “Hashim,’ the one who breaks (the bread). Hashim's real name was ‘Amr.

Hashim was the founder of the trade caravans of Quraish. He obtained an edict from the Byzantine emperor which exempted Quraish from all kinds of duties or taxes when entering or leaving the countries under his domain. He obtained the same concession from the emperor of Ethiopia. Thus, Quraishites started taking their trade caravans in the winter to Yemen (which was under the Ethiopian rule) and in the summer to Syria and beyond up to Ankara (under Byzantine rule). But the trade routes were not safe; therefore, Hashim visited all the dominant tribes between Yemen and Ankara and entered into agreements with them. They agreed that they would not attack the trade caravans of Quraish, and Hashim undertook on behalf of Quraish that their trade caravans would bring all their necessities to their places of abode and would buy and sell at reasonable prices. Thus, in spite of all the looting and plundering that prevailed in Arabia then, the trade caravans of Quraish were always safe.

It is to this achievement of Hashim that Allah refers in the Qur'an, counting it as a great bounty of God upon Quraish:

In the Name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

For the security and safeguard enjoyed by Quraish, their safety during (their) journeys by winter and by summer, let them worship the Lord of this House Who provides them with food against hunger and with security against fear. **(Qur'an, 106:1-4)**

There was a pathetically pessimistic tradition in Quraish known as *ihtifad*. When a poor family could not feed itself, it would go out to the desert and, entering a tent, remain there till death claimed all of its members one by one. They thought that nobody would know of their plight and, by thus starving to death, they would protect their honour.

It was Hashim who persuaded Quraish to actively combat the poverty instead of succumbing to it. His scheme: He joined one rich person with a poor one, provided that their dependents were equal in number. That poor person was to help the rich one during the trade journey. Whatever increase of capital accrued by way of profit would be shared equally by both. Thus, there would be no need for *ihtifad*.

This scheme was wholeheartedly accepted and implemented by the tribe. This wise suggestion not only removed poverty from Quraish but also created a feeling of brotherhood and unity among them.

These achievements were enough to justify a very long life. But our wonder knows no bounds when we learn that Hashim was only 25 years old when death overtook him at Gaza, Palestine, in approximately 488 A.D. His grave is preserved, and Gaza is also called "Ghazzat Hashim,' i.e. Hashim's Gaza.

Hashim was very handsome, and because of his looks and prestige, many chiefs and even rulers wanted him to marry their daughters. But he married Selma daughter of 'Amr (from the tribe of 'Adi Banu Najjar) of Yathrib. She was the mother of Shaybatul-Hamd who was an infant when Hashim died. According to a number of sources, 'Abdul-Muttalib is also known as "Shaybatul-Hamd.' "Shayba' means: gray hair; it is said that when he was born, one gray hair was found on his head, hence his name.

'Abdul-Muttalib

Hashim had five sons: 'Abdul-Muttalib, Asad, Nadlah, Saifi and Abu Saifi. But the last three had no children; Asad had only a daughter, Fatima bint Asad, mother of Ali ibn Abu Talib. Thus, it was only through 'Abdul-Muttalib that the progeny of Hashim survived.

'Abdul-Muttalib was born in Yathrib (later named Medina) in his maternal grandfather's house, and he was only a few months old when Hashim died. After Hashim, his brother Muttalib succeeded him in all the privileges mentioned earlier. After some time, Muttalib went to Yathrib and brought his nephew to Mecca. When Muttalib entered Mecca with his nephew behind him on his camel, some people said: "This is the slave of Muttalib!' Muttalib said: "No! He is my nephew and son of my deceased brother

Hashim.' But the name stuck, and nowadays few people know that the real name of 'Abdul-Muttalib was Shaybatul-Hamd.

Muttalib loved 'Abdul-Muttalib and looked after him very well. But 'Abdush-Shams and Nawfal were hostile towards him. At the death of Muttalib, 'Abdul-Muttalib succeeded him in the two privileges held by him, i.e. *siqaya* and *rifada*.

In spite of the enmity of his own uncles, his personal virtues and qualities of leadership earned him in later days the title of "Sayyidul-Batha' (the Chief of Mecca). He lived to the ripe age of 82. A carpet was put for him before the Ka'ba and nobody else dared to put his foot on it. In later days, this rule was broken only by the orphaned son of 'Abdullah (i.e. the Prophet) who used to sit there and 'Abdul-Muttalib forbade Quraish from interfering with the child because, he told them, "This child of mine is to have a special dignity.'

It was 'Abdul-Muttalib who had forbidden his children from using intoxicants. It was he who used to enter the cave of Hira during the month of Ramadan to spend the month in remembrance of Allah and in feeding the poor. Like his father and uncle, he used to feed and provide water for the pilgrims during the *hajj* season. During the whole year, even the beasts and birds were fed from his house and, accordingly, he was called "Mut'imut-tayr' (feeder of the birds).

Some of the systems originated by 'Abdul-Muttalib were later adopted in Islam. He was the first person to make *nathr* and to fulfill it, to give one fifth (*khums*) of the treasure in the way of Allah, to forbid marriage between prohibited degrees, to cut a thief's hand, to make intoxicants unlawful, to forbid fornication and adultery, to discourage the system of killing the daughters, to discourage the *tawaf* around the Ka'ba without clothes, and to fix the compensation of manslaughter (killing someone by mistake or unintentionally) at 100 camels. All these systems were adopted by Islam. It is not possible to give the whole history of 'Abdul-Muttalib in this short chapter, but two important events must be mentioned: the recovery of Zamzam and the attempted attack on the Ka'ba by Abraha, governor of Yemen on behalf of the Ethiopian Negus3.

ZamZam

Hundreds of years ago before the birth of Prophet Muhammad, Zamzam was filled up and nobody knew where it was. One day, 'Abdul-Muttalib was sleeping in Hatim of the Ka'ba. Someone told him in a dream to dig the Taybah and to get water. He asked where Taybah was, but the vision vanished without any reply. The same vision was repeated the second and the third day, but the names were changed every time. On the fourth day, he was told to dig Zamzam. 'Abdul-Muttalib asked where Zamzam was. He was given the signs. 'Abdul-Muttalib, with his eldest (and at that time the only) son, al-Harith, dug the place where Zamzam is nowadays. On the fourth day, the wall of the well appeared, and after some more digging, the water level was reached. Inside the well there was a treasure of two gold deer, swords and shields.

At this success, ‘Abdul–Muttalib cried: ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ and said: “This is the well of Isma’il!’ The Quraishites gathered around him and started arguing that since the original well was the property of Isma’il, the recovered well, too, belonged to the whole tribe. ‘Abdul–Muttalib rejected their claim, saying that it was given especially to him by Allah. Quraishites wanted to fight and fill up the well then dig it up again.

At last, they agreed to put their case before the wise woman of the tribe of Sa’d in Syria. Every clan sent one man to represent it. ‘Abdul–Muttalib, with his son and a few companions, were in the same caravan, but he had his separate arrangements. The water with ‘Abdul–Muttalib was depleted when the latter was in the middle of the desert. The whole group was suffering from acute thirst. The leaders of the other party refused to give them any water. They were near their death. ‘Abdul–Muttalib advised his group to dig some graves so that when anybody died, others would bury him. Thus, only one person, the last to die, would remain unburied. They dug up their own graves. The opposite party was enjoying the scene.

On the second day, ‘Abdul–Muttalib exhorted his companions that it was cowardice to succumb to death like that without making a last ditch effort. Thus, he rode his camel, and the camel arose. In doing so, its foot hit the earth and Lo! A stream of cool sweet water appeared! ‘Abdul–Muttalib cried: ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ His companions, too, cried ‘*Allahu Akbar!*’ They quenched their thirst, filled their water–skins, and then ‘Abdul–Muttalib invited the opposite group to fill their water–skins from that fountain. His own companions objected, but he said, “If we do the same as they had done, there would be no difference between us and them.’

The whole caravan gathered around that fountain. They drank and filled their water–skins. Then they said: “O ‘Abdul–Muttalib! By Allah! Allah has decided between you and us. He has given you victory. By Allah, we will never dispute with you about Zamzam. The same God Who has created this fountain here in this desert for you has given Zamzam to you.’
Zamzam became the personal property of ‘Abdul–Muttalib.

1. Jabir ibn `Abdullah al–Ansari is one of the greatest sahabis of Prophet Muhammed (s.a.w), a first–class traditionist and a most zealous supporter of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s). According to Al–Isti`ab, he died at the age of 94 in 74 A.H. (some say in 77 and others in 78), and his funeral prayers were led by Aban ibn `Uthman, then governor of Medina. He was the very last to die from among the Prophet's close sahaba.
2. He is `Abd al–Rahman ibn `Abdullah al–Mas`udi. He died in 165 A.H./781 A.D. His descendant, Yahya ibn Muhammed ibn Abi `Obaydah ibn Ma`n was one of the major isnad authorities upon whom Abu Ja`fer Muhammed ibn Jarir al–Tabari (839 – 923 A.D.) relied in writing his famous work Tarikh al–rusul wal muluk (history of the Messengers and the kings).
3. “Negus” means “king” in the Amheric language, title of the supreme ruler of Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

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