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# Early Life And Virtues Of Imam Ali

All constituents of distinction and dignity can be found convened in the lineage of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) who belongs to the family of Hashim that is well-known for nobility, gallantry, hospiTalibty, and all features of righteousness that may be ascribed to a family.

Historians have mentioned some noble exploits of this family since its coming into being. While idolatry was the prevailing religion among the tribes of Makkah where giant idols were hanged on the walls of the Holy Ka'bah, the family of Hashim was the one and only family that professed monotheism and worshipped Almighty Allah, the God of Prophet Abraham. Referring to this fact, Imam Ali ('a) says,

By Allah I swear this! Neither my father nor did my grandfather's Abd Al- Muttalib, Abd-Manaf, and Hashim, worship any idol; rather, they worshipped Almighty Allah and performed prayers, turning their faces to the Holy House (i.e. Ka'bah), following the religion of Prophet Abraham, and adhering to it'1

Because the descendants of Hashim represented chivalry, intrepidity, and nobility, they were chief parties in the famous Hilf Al-Fudul Pact one of whose paragraphs was to help the oppressed people, be they from the tribe of Quraysh or any other tribe. The Holy Prophet (S) himself witnessed this pact and gloried himself on it.

Another sign of pride and glory for the Hashimites was the digging of Zamzam Spring after it had been wiped out for a long time. Although all people of Quraysh made big efforts to find this spring, all their attempts failed until Abd Al-Muttalib, the chief of the Hashimites, could find it along with a treasure of two golden gazelles, swords, and armors.

When they disputed about the possession of that treasure, Abd Al-Muttalib decided that the gold should be re-molded and put on the gate of the Holy Ka'bah.

Having been forerunners to every act of public benefit, the Hashimites applied themselves to supplying all the pilgrims to the Holy Ka'bah with water generously. They also used to serve all strangers and poor people with food.

These charitable attributes could easily found themselves spacious places in the selves of the descendants of Hashim all over ages. Hence, Imam Ali ('a) was the most evident example of these attributes that added up to his unique personality.

### **Celebrated Chiefs Of The Hashimites**

#### **Hashim**

The most honorable personality of Makkah, Hashim was the epitome of generosity as he used to serve the pilgrims with food in Makkah, Mina, and on Mount Arafat. He was the first to decide two journeys a year for the people of Quraysh; one to Yemen and one to Syria.3

#### **Abd Al-Muttalib**

One of the chiefs and objects of pride for the Hashimites, Abd Al-Muttalib was the noblest in his youth and the solemnest in old age. He was so praised and extolled that he was nicknamed Shaybat Al-Hamd, or the praised gray- haired chief. 4 Although he had faced many hardships in gathering fresh water, he did not stop serving the pilgrims to the Holy Ka'bah with water.

### **Abu Talib**

The father of Imam Ali ('a), Abu Talib is considered the foremost defender of Islam and the greatest vindicator of the Holy Prophet's promulgation for this religion. Without the protection of Abu Talib, the Holy Prophet (S) could not have conveyed the message of his Lord and could not have stood in the face of these rivals, underestimating their powers, disgracing their idols, and deriding their traditions and customs.

Abu Talib took much care of the Holy Prophet (S) and took upon himself the mission of bringing him up from childhood after the demise of his father, grandfather, and mother. On one of his journeys to Syria, Abu Talib accompanied his nephew, Muhammad, to teach him the principles of commerce.

Once his eyes fell on the Holy Prophet (S), a priest hurried to Abu Talib and said, 'I advise you to take your nephew and return home, even if this will cause you loss of your money and trade. I cannot guarantee that he will be saved from the trickeries of the polytheists and the Jews who, if they find out what I have just found out about this man, will not cease causing him harm; rather, they will assassinate him and nothing will stop them from doing so.'5

Once he heard these words, Abu Talib interrupted his trade journey and went back home so as to safeguard his nephew. Moreover, he was so vigilant over his nephew that he used to make him sleep next to him 6 and move him from one place to another in the darkest hour of night lest he would be assassinated.

### Abu Talib; The Defender Of Islam

When the Holy Prophet (S) proclaimed his immortal call that aimed at liberating and saving man from the murk of ignorance and from paganism, the entire tribe of Quraysh embarked upon standing against him in order to extinguish the torch of Monotheism. In the face of this unanimity of Quraysh in antagonizing the Holy Prophet (S), Abu Talib, the true hero of Islam, took upon himself the mission of protecting his nephew.

He furthermore used to buoy up the spirits of the Holy Prophet (S) and encourage him to be steadfast in his promulgation for the religion of Almighty Allah. In this respect, Abu Talib composed numerous poetic verses that demonstrated his profound belief in Islam and his backing up and protecting the Holy Prophet (S) whatever sacrifices this matter would cost.

Other poetic verses revealed that Abu Talib would always and under all circumstances support his nephew and would never allow the polytheists to assault or set about him.

Describing the Holy Prophet (S) in one of his poetic lines, Abu Talib said:

He is white-faced and by his face rain is prayed. He is the shelter of the orphans and the guardian of the widows.

This very poetic line left a great impact on the Holy Prophet's menTalibty. It is reported that Al-Madinah, the city of Yathrib that was taken as the capital of the Muslim State, was once afflicted with harsh aridity about which its people complained to the Holy Prophet (S).

Responding to them, the Holy Prophet (S) implored Almighty Allah for rain and it was no sooner that it rained. Pleased by this situation, the Holy Prophet (S) said, 'Had Abu Talib witnessed this, he would have been pleased.' As he understood the meaning of the Holy Prophet's saying, Imam Ali ('a) said, 'This is an indication of my father's poetic line about you.' He meant the previously mentioned poetic verse.

The other members of the Holy Prophet's household were also touched by this poetic verse. At the last hour of the Prophet's lifetime, Lady Fatimah ('a) repeated this poetic verse before him and he said, 'This is my uncle's composition.' He (S) then quoted this verse of the Holy Quran:

Muhammad is no more than a messenger. The messengers have already passed away before him. If then he dies or is killed will you turn back upon your heels? Whoever turns back upon his heels, he will by no means do harm to Allah in the least and Allah will reward the grateful. (3:144)7

Back to the history of Abu Talib, some heads of Quraysh came to him and offered to give him in custody one of their noblest and most handsome heroes; namely, Imarah ibn Al-Walid, if he would give up the

Holy Prophet (S) so that they would be able to assassinate him.

In response, Abu Talib ridiculed their offer and shouted at them with these words:

No, by God! You, the bunch of idiot ones, have not been fair! Fie on you and woe to you! Do you want me to give you my soul and son so that you will kill him and, in return, you give me your son so that I raise him for you? What is the matter with you?

How do you judge? Do you expect me to agree on replacing Muhammad with Imarah? I swear by Him Who grasps my soul that if you give me the whole world, I will never accept it as substitute for even a single nail from Muhammad's foot. Go away from me and never speak to me; otherwise, I will make my sword play on your heads!

The chiefs of the polytheists of Quraysh followed a new stratagem against the Holy Prophet (S) and his relatives and followers. They banished them to an open area out of Makkah and imposed a social and economic siege on them. During this detention, the polytheists made many attempts to assassinate the Holy Prophet (S), but Abu Talib asked his son Ali to guard the Holy Prophet (S) by replacing him in his bed.

This siege lasted for three years during which Lady Khadijah, the Holy Prophet's first and best wife and Lady Fatimah's mother, used to supply them with their needs of food and drink until she spent her entire fortune, which was so big, during these years of siege until Almighty Allah relieved the Muslims from this ordeal.

Abu Talib played a positive and distinctive role in the promulgation for Islam. One of his activities was that he wrote a message to the king of Abyssinia inviting him to this religion.8

He also proclaimed the virtues of the Holy Prophet (S) and spread his high merits and calibers. In this respect, he composed many poems.9

In conclusion, without the efforts of Abu Talib, Islam could not have achieved victory. It is therefore unappreciative to ignore his favors to Islam and Muslims.

## **Abu Talib's Last Will**

When he felt that death was approaching him, Abu Talib wrote an immortal will in which he instructed his sons and family members to adhere to the nobilities of character, to show loyalty to, and to defend the Holy Prophet (S).

He thus said:

I instruct you with regard to Muhammad, the most honest of all the people of Quraysh and the most truthful of all the Arabs' Show loyalty to him and be his defenders. By Allah I swear this: no

one follows the course of Muhammad but that he will most certainly be guided to the true path and no one adheres to him but that he will find pleasure.

If there will be any more days of my lifetime, I will most certainly protect him against any misfortune and ward off from him any conspiracy. However, I do bear witness to the truth of what he says and I do deem true all that which he says. 10

The news of Abu Talib's death depressed the believers and pleased the polytheists. Among the most depressive ones for this news was his son Ali who hurried to bathe his father's dead body ceremonially and put him in his shroud with teary eyes and stricken heart.

At the edge of his uncle's grave, the Holy Prophet (S) stopped gloomy and overcast, and eulogized him with these words:

O uncle! May you receive good regard from your relatives! May you be awarded abundantly! You did raise and guard me when I was little and support and sustain me when I was advanced in years. By Allah I swear this: I will most certainly implore God's forgiveness for you and I will intercede for you in such a way that will astonish both men and jinn.11

Expressing his deep sadness for losing his uncle, the Holy Prophet (S) called the year on which Abu Talib departed life as the year of sadness ('am Alhuzn).

By the loss of Abu Talib, the tyrants of Quraysh deemed the Holy Prophet (S) helpless and started annoying him using various means.

About this stage of his blessed life, the Holy Prophet (S) declared:

#### The people of Quraysh could not do me any harm until Abu Talib passed away. 12

Such attempts reached the climax when these polytheists agreed on assassinating the Holy Prophet (S) collectively, by sending a man from each tribe to kill him in his bed. Having been informed by Almighty Allah about this plot, the Holy Prophet (S) had to flee his homeland at night, leaving his cousin and successor, Imam Ali ('a), to take his place in his bed.

One of the distinctive features of Imam Ali ('a) is that he is the son of the protector of Islam who defended this fresh religion in its early stages.

# Fatimah Bint Asad; Imam Ali's Mother

Lady Fatimah bint (daughter of) Asad was one of the doyennes of her time in chastity, immaculacy, and dignity. She was one of the first women to embrace Islam. More specifically, she was the eleventh person to join this great religion. 13

She was also the first woman to pay homage to the Holy Prophet (S) when he asked women to make covenant with him that they would be always chaste, pure, and abstinent from evil. 14

She played a vital role in serving the Holy Prophet (S), since she preferred him to her sons in custody and tenderness. In return, the Holy Prophet (S) used to treat her honorably and called her as his mother.

Scholars of *Hadith* (i.e. the Holy Prophet's sayings and doings) consider this virtuous lady to be one of those who reported the Holy Prophet's discourses and traditions. She was then the reporter of forty–six traditions although Muslim Al–Nayshaburi and Al–Bukhari, the compilers of the most reliable books of Hadith for Sunnis, have reported from her one unanimously agreed upon tradition only.

She lived in the house of Imam Ali ('a) rather than his other brothers. When he married Lady Fatimah ('a), Imam Ali ('a) asked his mother to stay with her, saying,

You may bring water and settle the needs that require leaving the house, while Fatimah will work inside the house such as grinding the flour and making bread.

When this great lady was afflicted by ailments, Lady Fatimah ('a) used to look after her until she departed life. Her son, Imam Ali ('a), prepared for her funeral processions and then informed the Holy Prophet (S) about her death. Deeply saddened by this news, the Holy Prophet (S) ordered Imam Ali ('a) to dress his mother the Prophet's shirt as shroud and he himself managed her funeral ceremony and when a grave was dug, he laid down in that grave for several moments.

He then eulogized her with excellent words and prayed to the Lord to cover her with His mercy and pleasure as recompense for the kindness and compassion she had shown to him.

When he was asked why he had done so, the Holy Prophet (S) answered:

After Abu Talib, nobody was more compassionate to me than this woman. I have ordered that my shirt should be shrouded on her body so that she will be dressed from the garments of Paradise, and I laid down in her grave so that interrogation will be made easy for her. 15

Another distinctive feature of Imam Ali ('a) is that this virtuous lady who took the lead in believing in Almighty Allah and the Holy Prophet (S) and spared no single effort in serving him was his mother. Undoubtedly, Imam Ali ('a) must have inherited her virtues and high qualities in the same way as he had inherited his fathers' qualities who improved on all the Arabs.

## The Born In The Ka'bah

The unquestionable fact upon which all historians and traditionists have agreed unanimously is that Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) was born inside the Holy Ka'bah<u>16</u> and none before or after him was born in this place.

Beyond doubt, this is one of the clear-cut signs of Imam Ali's superiority and great standing in the view of Almighty Allah Who chose for his birth the most blessed place on the earth.

Describing Imam Ali's birth in this holy place, historians and traditions say that when Lady Fatimah bint Asad felt the throes of childbirth, she, breathless and with full confidence that her fetus would enjoy a great standing in the view of Almighty Allah, hurried towards the Holy Ka'bah.

When she arrived there, she directed all her emotions towards the Lord and prayed to Him to make easy her deliverance. She then hanged to the curtains of the Holy Ka'bah and said this supplicatory prayer:

O Lord, I do believe in You and in the Messengers and Books that have been brought from You. I also give full credence to the words of my grandfather Abraham who built this house. I now beseech You in the name of him who built this house and in the name of the fetus I am carrying in my womb to make easy my deliverance of this fetus. 17

No sooner did she finished these words than the wall of the Holy Ka'bah was rent as under and she found herself entering inside it from that rent, repeating words of glorification of Almighty Allah and having full confidence that the fetus to whom she was about to give birth would be a great person.

After a short while of staying in that holy place, Lady Fatimah bint Asad give birth to the blessed newborn who would surround the world with his talents and genius.

At the first look at her newborn, the mother noticed the clear-cut signs of courage and valor in his face and noticed the soundness of his body. She therefore gave him the name of Haydarah, which is one of the Arabic names of lion. This prediction was very true; Ali was the lion of Almighty Allah and His Messenger. With his sword, he decapitated the most courageous men of the Arab polytheists for the sake of Islam.

Having taken pride in this name on many occasions, Imam Ali ('a) used to say just before combating the strongest men of the polytheists,

I am the one whom was called Haydarah by my mother. I am thus like the powerful and attacking lion.

When his father was informed of the coming of his newborn, he entered the Holy Ka'bah and implored Almighty Allah to inspire to him the name he would say to his son. As a result, Almighty Allah inspired to him to name his newborn Ali. Immediately after that, Abu Talib went out of the Holy Ka'bah declaring that he had called this name to his newborn – a name that denotes highness and superiority.

Imam Ali ('a) was born on Friday, the thirteenth of Rajab, thirty years after the Elephant Year. According to the Gregorian calendar, he was born in 600 AD, twelve years before the messenger ship of the Holy Prophet (S).

- 1. Shaykh Al-Saduq, Ikmal Al-Din, pp. 104.
- 2. Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyyah 3:485.
- 3. Tarikh Al-Tabari 2:180.
- 4. Tarikh Al-Tabari 2:180.
- 5. Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyyah 1:90.
- 6. Al-Sirah Al-Halabiyyah 1:40.
- 7. Al-Baghdadi, Khuzanat Al-Adab 2:96.
- 8. Ibn Hisham, Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyyah 1:357; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj Al-Balaghah 3:224.
- 9. Al-Amini, Iman Abi Talib, pp. 189.
- 10. Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj Al-Balaghah 2:213; Sadr Al-Din Al-Shirazi, Al-Darajat Al-Rafi'ah, pp. 61; Al-Jazri (a Shafi'ite scholar), Asna Al-MaTalibb, pp. 20; Al-kamawi, Thamarat Al-Awraq, pp. 294.
- 11. Ibn Hammadi, Abu Talib wa-Banuh, pp. 103.
- 12. Ibn Al-Athir, Al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh 2:34.
- 13. Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj Al-Balaghah 1:14.
- 14. Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj Al-Balaghah 1:14.
- 15. Ibn Al-Athir, Usd Al-Ghabah fi Ma'rifat Al-Sahabah 5:510; Ibn Abd Al-Barr, Al-Istiab 4:269; Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, Sharh Nahj Al-Balaghah 1:14; Abu-Na'im, Ma'rifat Al-Sahabah 1:279.
- 16. Al-Hakim Al-Nayshaburi, Al-Mustadrak 'Ala Al-Sahihayn 3:483.

On this event, the author comments: 'Reports have uninterruptedly confirmed that Lady

Fatimah bint Asad gave birth of Imam Ali inside the Holy Ka'bah. This fact has been also reported in the following reference books:

Al-Mas'udi, Muruj Al-Dhahab 2:2; Ibn Al-Sabbagh Al-Maliki, Al-Fusul Al-Muhimmah, pp. 14; Muhammad ibn Talhah (the Shafi'ite), MaTalibb Al-Sa'ul, pp. 11; Sibt Ibn Al-Jawzi,

Tadhkirat Al-Khawass, pp. 7; Al-Shanqiti, Kifayat Al-Talibb, pp. 37; Al-Shabalnaji, Nur Al- Absar, pp. 76; Abd Al-Rahman Al-Saffuri (Shafi'ite), Nuzhat Al-Majalis 2:204; Shaykh Ali Al-Qawi (the kanbalite), SharhAl-Shafa 1:151; Ali Al-kalabi (the Shafi'ite), Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyyah 1:150; Al-Bardawani, Rawa'ih Al-Mustafa, pp. 10; 'Ala' Al-Din Al-Katwari, Muhadarat Al-Awa'il, pp. 120; Abd Al-kaqq Al-Dahlawi, Ghayat Al-Ikhtisar, pp. 97; Mustafa Al-'Aqqad, 'Abqariyyat Al-Imam Ali, pp. 38.

17. 'Allamah Al-Majlisi, Bihar Al-Anwar 35:8.

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