

Home > Brief History of Fourteen Infallibles > The Third Infallible The First Imam, `Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Amir Al-Mu'minin (Peace be on him) > Chief of the Friends of Allah (Sayyid Awliya'Allah)

The Third Infallible The First Imam, `Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Amir Al-Mu'minin (Peace be on him)

Name: Ali.

Title: al-Murtada.

Agnomen. Abu. 'l-Hasan.

Father's name: Abu Talib ibn `Abd al-Muttalib.

Mother's name: Fatimah bint Asad.

Birth: In the Holy Ka'bah in Mecca on Friday, 13th Rajab 23 BH.

Death: Died at the age of 63, in Kufah (Iraq) on Monday, 21st Ramadan 40 AH; murdered by an assassin who mortally wounded him with a poisoned sword in the mosque of Kufah during the morning prayer on 19th Ramadan; buried in an-Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

Imam Ali was the cousin of our Holy Prophet. He was born in the Sacred House (Ka'bah). Providence alone had a hand in bringing his mother towards the Ka'bah. When his mother came to Ka'bah, she felt weighed down by intense pain of pregnancy. She knelt down before the Holy Structure and prayed humbly to God. `Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, saw Ali's mother praying to God. No sooner had she raised her head from supplication, then the wall of the Sacred House split by a solemn miracle. Fatimah entered the Ka'bah and that portion returned to its normal position. `Abbas and his companions flocked at the gate of the Sacred House which was locked, and tried to open it, but in vain. They then decided to give it up, considering the miraculous nature of the event and the Divine Will in action. The news of this miraculous incident soon spread like wild fire in Mecca.

`Ali was born within the Ka'bah with his eyes closed and his body in humble prostration before the Almighty. Fatimah stayed in the Ka'bah for three days and as the fourth day approached she stepped out, carrying her gem in her arms. To her great surprise, she found the Holy Prophet waiting to receive the newly-born child in his anxious arms. Imamate feeling the subtle touch of prophethood, Ali opened his eyes and saluted the Divine Prophet: "Asalamu alayka ya Rasula'llah" (Peace be on you, O

Messenger of Allah).

'Ali's birth in the Ka'bah is unique in the history of the world. Neither a prophet nor a Divine saint was ever blessed with such an honour. He was brought up under the care and affection of the Holy Prophet. As Ali says: "The Holy Prophet brought me up in his own arms and fed me with his own morsel. I followed him wherever he went like a baby-camel following its mother. Each day a new aspect of his character would beam out of his noble person and I would accept it and follow it as a command." (Nahju'1-balaghah)

Ten years in the company of the Holy Prophet had kept him so close and inseparable, that he was one with him in character, knowledge, self-sacrifice, forbearance, bravery, kindness, generosity, oratory and eloquence.

From his very infancy, he prostrated before God along with the Holy Prophet. As he himself said: "I was the first to pray to God along with the Holy Prophet."

"Ali preserved in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet," says al-Mas'udi, "all along his childhood." Allah created him pure and holy and kept him steadfast on the right path. Though 'Ali is indisputably the first to embrace Islam when the Holy Prophet called upon his listeners to do so, yet by the very fact that since his infancy he was brought up by the Holy Prophet and followed him in every action and deed including prostration before Allah, he can be said to be born a Muslim, just like the Holy Prophet himself.

`Ali, at all times, accompanied the Holy Prophet to help and protect him from his enemies. He used to write down the verses of the Holy Qur'an and discuss them with the Prophet as soon as they were revealed by the Holy Messenger, the Gabriel. He was so closely associated with the Holy Prophet that as soon as a verse was revealed to him during the day or night, Ali was the first to hear it.

The Holy Prophet has said of `Ali: O `Ali, you are my brother in this world as well as in the Hereafter. I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is the gate. Nobody knows 'Ali except Allah and I. Nobody know me except Allah and `Ali. If you want to see the knowledge of Adam, the piety of Noah, the devotion of Abraham, the awe of Moses, and the service and abstinence of Christ, look at the bright face of `Ali.

When the Holy Prophet reached Yathrib (Medina) and met his followers who had come from Mecca at his call, he immediately appointed for each such followers a person from the people of Yathrib known as Ansar (Helpers), who had accepted his prophethood, to be a brother to him. His appointment of brothers was a great act of help for the refugees known as Muhajirun (Emigrants), who left their home and come to Yathrib. He made brothers of people who followed the same trade so that the Muhajirun could be usefully employed immediately. While the Prophet was appointing an Ansar a brother to a Muhajirun, `Ali who was present there, was not appointed as a brother to any Ansar. On being questioned as to why he had not appointed a brother for Ali, the Prophet said: "He shall be a brother to me. "

The character and calibre of `Ali as judged by al-Mas'udi is, "If the glorious name of being the first

Muslim, a comrade of the Prophet in exile, his faithful companion in the struggle for faith, his intimate associate in life, and his kinsman; if a true knowledge of the spirit of his teachings and of the Book; if self-abnegation and practice of justice; if honesty, purity, and love of truth; if a knowledge of law and science, constitute a claim to pre-eminence, then all must regard `Ali as the foremost Muslim. We shall search in vain to find, either among his predecessors (save one) or among his successors, those attributes. "

Gibbon says: "The birth, the alliance, the character of `Ali which exalted him above the rest of his countrymen, might justify his claim to the vacant throne of Arabia. The son of Abu Talib was in his own right the chief of Banu Hashim and the hereditary prince or guardian of the city and the Ka'bah."

" `Ali had the qualifications of a poet, a soldier, and a saint; his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings; and every antagonist, in the combats of the tongue or of the sword, was subdued by his eloquence and valour. From the first hour of his mission to the last rites of his funeral, the Apostle was never forsaken by a generous friend, whom he delighted to name his brother, his vicegerent, and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses."

Marriage:

Under Divine instruction, the Apostle of Allah married his beloved daughter Fatimah to Ali, though others vainly tried for her hand.

Among their children, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum have left their marks on the history of the world.

After the death of Hadrat Fatimah, `Ali married Ummu1-Banin. `Abbas was born out of this wedlock and was so handsome that, he was fondly called Qamar Banu Hashim. He personified loyalty and bravery and proved it in the battlefield at Karbala'.

Death

In the 40th year of Hijrah, in the small hours of the morning of 19th Ramadan, Ali was struck with a poisoned sword by a Kharijite while offering his prayers in the mosque of Kufah. (See photo on p.56)

The Lion of God, the most brave-hearted and fentle Muslim that ever lived began his glorious life with devotion to Allah and His Apostle and ended it in the service of Islam.

And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay they are alive but you do not perceive.

(Qur'an, 2: 154)

The Imams And Leaders Of Islam

(By al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i)

The previous discussions lead us to the conclusion that in Islam, after the death of the Holy Prophet, there has continuously existed and will continue to exist within the Islamic community (ummah), an Imam (a leader chosen by God). Numerous prophetic hadiths have been transmitted in Shi'ism concerning the description of the Imams, their number, the fact that they are all of the Quraysh and of the Household of the Prophet, and the fact that the promised Mahdi is among them and the last of them. Also, there are definitive words of the Prophet concerning the Imamate of `Ali and his being the first Imam and also definitive utterances of the Prophet and Ali concerning the Imamate of the Second Imam. In the same way the Imams before have left definitive statements concerning the Imamate of those who were to come after them. According to these utterances contained in Twelve Imam Shi'ite sources the Imams are twelve in number and their holy names are as follows: (1) `Ali ibn Abi Talib; (2) al-Hasan ibn 'Ali; (3) al-Husayn ibn 'Ali; (4) 'Ali ibn al- Husayn; (5) Muhammad ibn `Ali; (6) Ja'far ibn Muhammad; (7) Musa ibn Ja'far; (8) `Ali ibn Musa; (9) Muhammad ibn Ali; (10) `Ali ibn Muhammad; (11) al-Hasan ibn 'Ali; and (12) the Mahdi.

The First Imam:

Amir al-Mu'minin, `Ali (upon whom be peace) was the son of Abu Talib, the Shaykh of the Banu Hashim. Abu Talib was the uncle and guardian of the Holy Prophet and the person who had brought the Prophet to his house and raised him like his own son. After the Prophet was chosen for his prophetic mission. Abu Talib continued to support him and repelled from him the evil that came from the infidels among the Arabs and especially the Quraysh.

According to well-known traditional accounts, `Ali was born ten years before the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet. When six years old, as a result of famine in and around Mecca, he was requested by the Prophet to leave his father's house and come to the house of his cousin, the Prophet. There he was placed directly under the guardianship and custody of the Holy Prophet.

A few years later, when the Prophet was endowed with the Divine Gift of prophecy and for the first time received the Divine Revelation in the cave of Hira¹, as he left the cave to return to town and his own house he met 'Ali on the way. He told him what had happened and `Ali accepted the new faith. Again in a gathering when the Holy Prophet had brought his relatives together and invited them to accept his religion, he said the first person to accept his call would be his vicegerent and inheritor and deputy. The only person to rise from his place and accept the faith was Ali and the Prophet accepted his declaration of faith. Therefore, `Ali was the first man in Islam to accept the faith and is the first among the followers of the Prophet to have never worshipped other than the One God.

Ali was always in the company of the Prophet until the Prophet emigrated from Mecca to Medina. On the

night of the emigration to Medina (hijrah) when the infidels had surrounded the house of the Prophet and were determined to invade the house at the end of the night and cut him to pieces while he was in bed. Ali slept in place of the Prophet while the Prophet left the house and set out for Medina. After the departure of the Prophet, according to his wish `Ali gave back to the people the trusts and charges that they had left with the Prophet. Then he went to Medina with his mother, the daughter of the Prophet, and two other women. In Medina also `Ali was constantly in the company of the Prophet in private and in public. The Prophet gave Fatimah, his sole, beloved daughter from Khadijah, to `Ali as his wife and when the Prophet was creating bonds of brotherhood among his companions, he selected `Ali as his brother.

`Ali was present in all the wars in which the Prophet participated, except the battle of Tabuk when he was ordered to stay in Medina in place of the Prophet. He did not retreat in any battle nor did he turn his face away from any enemy. He never disobeyed the Prophet, so that the Prophet said: "Ali is never separated from the Truth, nor the Truth from Ali."

On the day of the death of the Prophet, Ali was thirty-three years old. Although he was foremost in religious virtues and the most outstanding among the companions of the Prophet, he was pushed aside from the caliphate on the claim that he was too young and that he had many enemies among the people because of the blood of the polytheists he had spilled in the wars fought alongside the Prophet. Therefore, `Ali was almost completely cut off from public affairs. He retreated to his house where he began to train competent individuals in the Divine sciences and in this way he passed the twenty-five years of the caliphate of the first three caliphs who (came to power after the Prophet; the first by election of few Muslims; the second appointed by the first; and the third, chosen out of six unequal candidates nominated by the second caliph. . .?!). When the third caliph was killed, people gave their allegiance to him and he was chosen as Caliph.

During his caliphate of nearly four years and nine months, `Ali followed, exactly, the way of the Prophet and gave his caliphate the form of a spiritual movement and renewal and began many different types of reforms. Naturally, these reforms were against the interests of certain parties that sought their own benefit. As a result, a group of the companions (foremost among whom were Talhah and az-Zubayr, who also gained the support of `A'ishah, and especially Mu'awiyah) made a pretext of the death of the third caliph to raise their heads in opposition and began to revolt and rebel against `Ali.

In order to quell the civil strife and sedition, `Ali fought successfully a war near Basrah known as the "Battle of the Camel," against Talhah and az-Zubayr in which `A'ishah, "the Mother of the Faithful," was also involved. He fought another war against Mu'awiyah on the border of Iraq and Syria which lasted for a year and a half and is famous as the "Battle of Siffin". He also fought the Khawarij at Nahrawan, in a battle known as the "Battle of Nahrawan". Therefore, most of the days of `Ali's caliphate were spent in overcoming internal opposition. Finally, in the morning of the 19th Ramadan in the year 40 AH, while

praying in the mosque of Kufah, he was wounded by one of the Khawarij and died as a martyr during the night of the 21st.

According to the testimony of friend and foe alike, `Ali had no shortcomings from the point of view of human perfection. And in the Islamic virtues he was a perfect example of the upbringing and training given by the Holy Prophet. The discussions that have taken place concerning his personality and the books written on this subject by Shiites, Sunnis and members of other religions, as well as the simply curious outside any distinct religious bodies, are hardly equalled in the case of any other personality in history. In science and knowledge `Ali was the most learned of the companions of the Prophet, and of Muslims in general. In his learned discourses he was the first in Islam to open the door for logical demonstration and proof and to discuss the "divine science" or metaphysics (ma'arif-e ilahiyah). He spoke concerning the esoteric aspect of the Qur'an and devised Arabic grammar in order to preserve the Qur'an's form of expression. He was the most eloquent Arab in speech (as has been mentioned in the first part of this book).

The courage of `Ali was proverbial. In all the wars in which he participated during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, and also afterward, he never displayed fear or anxiety. Although in many battles such as those of Uhud, Hunayn, Khaybar and Khandaq, the aides to the Prophet and the Muslim army trembled in fear or dispersed and fled, he never turned back to the enemy. Never did a warrior or soldier engage Ali in battle and come out of it alive. Yet, with full chivalry he would never slay a weak enemy nor pursue those who fled. He would not engage in surprise attacks or in turning streams of water upon the enemy. It has been definitely established historically that in the Battle of Khaybar in the attack against the fort he reached the ring of the door and with sudden motion tore off the door and cast it away. Also, on the day when Mecca was conquered the Prophet ordered the idols to be broken. The idol "Hubal" was the largest idol in Mecca, a giant stone statue placed on the top of the Ka'bah. Following the command of the Holy Prophet, `Ali placed his feet on the Prophet's shoulders, climbed to the top of the Ka'bah, pulled "Hubal" from its place and cast it down.

`Ali was also without equal in religious asceticism and the worship of God. In answer to some who had complained of Ali's anger toward them, the Holy Prophet said: "Do not reproach 'Ali for he is in a state of Divine ecstasy and bewilderment." Abu 'd-Darda', one of the companions, one day saw the body of 'Ali in one of the palm plantations of Medina lying on the ground as stiff as wood. He went to `Ali's house to inform his noble wife, the daughter of the Prophet, and to express his condolences. The daughter of the Prophet said: "My cousin (`Ali) has not died. Rather, in fear of God he has fainted. This condition overcomes him often."

There are many stories told of `Ali's kindness to the lowly, compassion for the needy and the poor, and generosity and munificence toward those in misery and poverty. `Ali spent all that he earned to help the poor and the needy, and himself lived in the strictest and simplest manner. 'Ali loved agriculture and spent much of his time digging wells, planting trees and cultivating fields. But all the fields that he

cultivated or wells that he built he gave in endowment (waqf) to the poor. His endowments, known as the "alms of `Ali," had the noteworthy income of twenty-four thousand gold dinars towards the end of his life. (Shi'ite Islam)

M. A. Shakir writes:

'Ali is the son of Abu Talib and cousin of the Apostle of Allah.

Birth

He was born in the House of God, the Ka'bah on 13th Rajab 23 years before Hijrah. On the death of `Abdu 1-Muttalib, Abu Talib was appointed the guardian of Muhammad and was charged with the responsibility of bringing him up. Muhammad and 'Ali grew up in the same house. The Prophet was considerably older and he looked after and trained 'Ali with great love and care. The Apostle of Allah said that he and `Ali were two pieces of the same Nur (Light).

Successor and Caliph

According to the Holy Qur'an, Prophets and Apostolic Imams are chosen by Allah and not elected, selected, nominated or appointed by men.

1. When under Divine instructions the Prophet invited forty Arab chieftains and delivered the message of Islam, he proclaimed Ali as his Successor and Caliph.
2. When the Holy Prophet of Islam was returning to Medina after his last pilgrimage to Mecca in 11 AH, he, under Divine instruction, stopped at Ghadir Khumm and in the midst of about 124,000 Muslims, he officially and finally proclaimed 'Ali as his Successor and Caliph. (Besides these two occasions, the Holy Prophet has on hundreds occasions, either directly or indirectly, appointed Ali as his Successor and Caliph.)

Happy Days

The infant Ali passed very happy days in the laps of his mother Fatimah bint Asad, father Abu Talib and cousin Muhammad. Under love, care and happiness, 'Ali flowered into a handsome, eloquent, strong and courageous young boy of thirteen. At this time Muhammad started preaching Islam. Naturally, 'Ali was the first to declare his belief in Allah and His Apostle.

Persecution

Gone were the days of tranquillity and peace. The unbelievers started persecuting the Prophet in numerous ways, for no fault other than that of delivering to them the message of God. 'Ali helped and

supported the Prophet whenever necessary.

The unbelievers made the boys and the riffrafs of Mecca abuse the Holy Prophet and pelt stones at him. Loyal and brave 'Ali always defended the Prophet. With his strong fists, he gave the rascals severe beatings, after that none of them dare molest the Prophet.

Hijrah (Emigration)

In Mecca, life for the believers and the Apostle became unbearable owing to the cruelties and persecution of the unbelievers; so the Holy Prophet decided to emigrate to Medina.

On the night of his departure from Mecca, the Holy Prophet asked `Ali to sleep in his place on his bed, so he could leave for Medina without the unbelievers having any knowledge of his absence. Though 'Ali knew that the house was surrounded with forty armed enemies, he dauntlessly slept the whole night and said that he had never slept better. The Holy Prophet reached Medina safely and soon after, `Ali joined the Apostle at Medina.

Warrior

'Ali executed every order, command and injunction of the Holy Qur'an and the Apostle, as it should be done and none was his equal.

Badr

The idolaters of Mecca would not allow Islam to grow and spread in peace. Abu Sufyan, the chieftain of the Umayyad tribe, a bitter enemy of the Holy Prophet and Islam marched to Medina at the head of one-thousand well-armed and trained fighters with the intention of killing the Apostle of Allah and the believers.

The Holy Prophet collected his small band of three-hundred and thirteen faithful followers. The defence was made up of ill-equipped fighters, including young boys and old men. Instead of waiting for the attackers, the Prophet decided to meet them at a little distance from Medina at a place called Badr (150 Km from Medina).

The fighting was fast and furious and the unbelievers were defeated. `Ali made a name for himself for his bravery. It was his sword that routed the enemy.

Uhud

Next year Abu Sufyan came again with 10,000 men. The Prophet met him at Uhud with a 1,000 believers who were posted at various strategic places of defence. A few Muslims were given specific instruction

not to leave their position, no matter what happened.

The battle began and with the help of Allah, the believers inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, who began to flee. In spite of the strict instructions of the Holy Prophet, a few Muslims deserted their post and ran after the enemy to loot.

Khalid ibn al-Walid, one of the officers of Abu Sufyan, seeing the position occupied by Muslims undefended, attacked the believers. Many believers were killed including Hamzah, the brave uncle of the Prophet and winning fight began to become a losing one. `Ali came to the rescue (of the life of the Prophet) and beat off the attack.

After Hamzah and Ja'far, 'Ali was the flag bearer of Islam. Ali was the only commander of the Holy Prophet during his life and no other person was given the command of the Prophet's armies in the battles in which the Holy Prophet was himself taking part.

The wife of Abu Sufyan, cut open the liver of Hamzah and drank his blood. Then she made a necklace of the ears and noses of the martyrs and wore it round her neck.

When the Muslims returned to Medina to weep and mourn for their dead, the Apostle ordered that the mourning of Hamzah be observed before the mourning of their own dead.

Khandaq

The battle of Khandaq took place because Abu Sufyan collected many infidel tribes against the Prophet and invaded Medina. To make Medina safe the Prophet ordered a trench (Khandaq) to be dug around a part of the City, and therefore this battle is called the Battle of the Trench. In this battle the enemy warrior Amr ibn `Abdawad challenged the Muslims to a single combat. All the companions of the Prophet were present, yet none stirred except `Ali. But Muhammad restrained him. The challenge was repeated for the second time, even then no one moved to accept it but Ali. Again the Apostle stopped him. When they were challenged for the third time and again there was a silence from all, and again 'Ali offered to face `Amr, the Prophet gave him the permission. The Lion of Allah jumped to the battlefield and accepted the challenge.

The Holy Prophet of Islam said: Total Iman(faith) is now going to fight total kufr (disbelief) and one stroke of Ali's sword is better than all the prayers and worship of those in heaven and earth.

'Ali with one stroke of his sword, Dhu1-Faqar, killed the warrior. In the general encounter the enemy was defeated.

Khaybar

The Jews of Khaybar breached their agreement with the Prophet and started harassing and killing the Muslims. An army led by the Apostle surrounded the fortresses of Khaybar. `Ali was at Medina because of pain in his eyes.

For many days, the Muslims attacked the fort but were unsuccessful. After some days the Holy Prophet declared: Tomorrow, I will give the flag to one who will not run away. He will attack repeatedly and Allah will crown him with victory. Allah and the Apostle are his friends and he is their friend.

Next morning soon after prayers, a horseman came galloping, a cloud of dust flying behind him. It was `Ali and when he dismounted, Muhammad asked him about his eyes. When 'Ali said that they were still paining, the Prophet applied his saliva. The pain vanished and `Ali said that his vision had never been better.

Muhammad gave the flag of Islam to Ali and prayed for him. 'Ali dauntlessly marched to the fort. Marhab, the brave enemy warrior, came out to meet 'Ali in a single combat. According to the Arab custom, Marhab talked of his deeds of bravery and said that his mother called him Marhab (frightful). 'Ali retorted that his mother called him Haydar (Furious Lion). 'Ali cut Marhab into two pieces and the fort of Khaybar was conquered by Yadu'llah (Ali).

Statesman

At Hdaybiyyah, Ali was asked by the Holy Prophet to draft and write the peace treaty.

On the occasion of Mubahilah with the Christians of Najran, the Holy Prophet asked 'Ali to give them the terms of settlement.

'Ali is the founder of the land revenue system which protected the rights of the tillers of the soil. He gave the world this system, for it was unknown before.

`Ali is the father of the Arabic Grammar. He gave the language its grammar.

The Chapter of Repentance (al-Bara'ah or at-Tawbah) had to be recited to the people of Mecca, Abu Bakr offered to do so and started on his way. The angel Gabriel came with a message from God, asking the Prophet to recall Abu Bakr and to go himself or to send a person like him. As the Holy Prophet could not go, he decided to send 'Ali and `Ali represented the Holy Prophet to carry this Chapter to the Quraysh.

Marriage

Under Divine instruction, the Apostle of Allah married his beloved daughter Fatimah to `Ali.

Among their children, Imam Hasan, Imam Husayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum have left their marks on the history of the world.

By his other wife, Ummu1-Banin, Allah gave him Abbas who was so handsome that he was fondly called Qamar Bani Hashim (The Moon of Banu Hashim) and he personified his loyalty and bravery in the battlefield of Karbala'.

Hadith

When the Apostle led his army to Tabuk, he left `Ali in charge of Medina as his Deputy, Vicegerent and Caliph. On this occasion the Apostle of Allah said:

Ali's position with me is the same as Harun's was with Musa, with only this difference that there will be no prophet after me.

He (the Prophet) said: I leave behind Two Precious Things; one is the Holy Qur'an and the other are my descendants. Hold fast to them both, then you will not go astray.

And he (the Prophet) again said: I, `Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn are from the same Nur (Light). But like the ever-shifting sands, the people of Arabia disregarded the sayings of the Holy Prophet and introduced innovations which irretrievably divided the Muslims.

Death of the Prophet

During the last days of the month of Safar, the Prophet of Islam was very ill. The Companions saw that the Apostle would soon pass away.

Abu Bakr

The Arabs (some of the Ansar and at the end of the meeting three of the Muhajirun) immediately collected in the Saqifah to appoint a caliph (while the holy body of the Prophet was still unburied) ; and finally appointed Abu Bakr as caliph in 11 AH.

Banu Hashim and the true believers could not join the meeting at the Saqifah as they could not leave their ailing Prophet, who passed away on 28th Safar 11 AH. While the meetings were going on, the Banu Hashim and the true believers had to perform their sacred duty of burying the Apostle of Allah (after all, the Prophet had already appointed `Ali as his caliph).

The reason for this astounding happening was the desire to rule the State. In course of about eighty battles, there was not a tribe or family, whose members were not killed by Ali in jihad, though Allah and His Apostle had chosen Ali as the successor and caliph.

When Abu Bakr became the caliph, he said that now he was charged with the cares of the Government, though he was not the best among them. As death approached him, he nominated `Umar as his successor and caliph in 13 A H.

`Umar

For about ten years `Umar was the caliph, and before his death, he nominated a group of six (unequal in rank and knowledge) to select, under force, one (among the six) as a caliph, and if they fail they should be killed. Imam `Ali being one of the six nominated persons, having refused to abide with the group's condition to rule on the footsteps of the two passed caliphs (Abu Bakr and `Umar), the group then selected `Uthman, who was from the tribe of Umayyad, as the third caliph in 23 AH.

`Uthman

When `Uthman became the caliph, his near kin the Umayyads, became the actual rulers of the Islamic territories. The caliphate of `Uthman with the governors he had like Mu'awiyah, son of Abu Sufyan (the first and long-lived enemy of Islam), was first appointed by `Umar as the governor of Syria, and was responsible for the murders of Imam 'Ali and Imam Hasan. Mu'awiya's son Yazid butchered Imam Husayn (the grandson of the Prophet) at Karbala'. And like al-Walid ibn `Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt, the governor of Kufah; and Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh, the governor of Egypt, and above all, his close councillor and vizier Marwan ibn al-Hakam he had, the affairs of the caliphate reached to such an extent that led the Islamic ummah to revolt against `Uthman and killed him in 35 AH.

'Ali

Among sufferings and chaos, the Muslims clamoured to elect 'Ali as the successor of the Holy Prophet and caliph of Allah. Looking to the condition of the society, how everyone was running after this world, `Ali at first refused to accept the responsibility of the State, but on the third day with great reluctance, he agreed to take up the charge and to accept their oath of allegiance as a caliph.

Following the footsteps of the Holy Prophet, 'Ali established the Islamic tolerance and justice, brotherhood and goodness. He re-lit the torch of Islamic learning and progress.

Ali's famous sermons and lectures given from the minbar (pulpit) of the mosque of Kufah and on other occasions, have been published in a book called Nahju'l-balaghah are worth reading.

In his old age, 'Ali had to make three more jihads in the battles of Camel, Nahrawan and Siffin against

the hypocrites, who rebelled and revolted against the commands of the Holy Qur'an and the Apostle of Allah.

Murder

Ali's effort to establish the Kingdom of Allah on earth, was cut short by the assassin's sword. Ibn Muljam, the tool of Mu'awiyah, murdered 'Ali while he was saying his morning prayer and was crowned with martyrdom on 21st Ramadan 40 AH, and was buried in an-Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

Born in the House of Allah, the Ka'bah and was killed in the House of Allah, the Mosque of Kufah, the Lion of Allah, the most brave-hearted and gentle Muslim that ever lived, began his glorious life with devotion to Allah and His Apostle and ended it in the Service of Islam.

And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay (they are) alive, but you do not perceive. (2: 154)

Chief of the Friends of Allah (Sayyid Awliya'Allah)

Every God-fearing and pious Muslim knows `Ali, the Friend of Allah (waliyyu'llah) In every place 'Ali is acknowledged as the Chief of the Friends of Allah. `Ali's benevolent powers are known and experienced even today, by those who love him and they will continue to be felt till the end of time.

`Ali, the Friend of Allah, does what pleases Allah and Allah grants what pleases Ali.

* * *

`Ali, the fierce and furious fighter of Khandaq, courageous and dauntless conqueror of Khaybar, was the tender helper of the sick and the benefactor of widows and orphans.

Ali, the Prince of charity-givers, working very hard to earn money, overshadowed Hatim Ta'i, by giving away a laden caravan to a beggar when he asked for a piece of bread (for the sake of Allah). Ali, who himself ate dry barley bread and salt, would spread a banquet for the poor and the beggars. Ali, the Ocean of knowledge, would not speak unless asked.

In order to give dignity to honest labour, 'Ali rolled up his sleeves and worked on the farms of Jews and Muslims as a labourer.

The mighty Caliph of the Islamic Empire and Conqueror of eighty-three jihads would mend his, as well as the Apostle's shoes.

There were many phrases of 'Ali and no man ever knew him well.

The Holy Prophet of Islam said: Nobody knows Allah except I and Ali. Nobody knows me except Allah

and Ali. Nobody knows 'Ali except Allah and I. If you want to see the knowledge of Adam, the piety of Nuh, the devotion of Ibrahim, the awe of Musa and the service and abstinence of `Isa look at the bright face of `Ali.

'Ali said: "The descendants of the Prophet are his confidants, the shelter of his commands, the trustees of his knowledge, the stronghold of the Qur'an and the mountains of his faith.

"It is they who have made the bent back of Islam straight. The Muslims were afraid of the unbelievers, but they made them bold and brave.

"None of the followers of Muhammad can be compared with the descendants of the Prophet. The recipients cannot be equal to the bestowers of blessings.

"The Ahlu'1-bayt are the Foundation of Islam and the Pillars of Faith.

"Every Muslim is dependent upon them for help and guidance to attain salvation.

"They enjoy the privilege and right of Imamate and caliphate, which they retain. Now he who was the rightful and deserving heir to the caliphate has got it.

"The worshippers and followers of falsehood have always been in majority and the supporters of Truth have always been few in number.

"When the Prophet passed away, many people left the progeny of the Prophet and helped others. They left those whom they were ordered to love.

"The caliphate was handed over to other persons, who were worldly wise, with the usual human failings. They never had nor claimed any spiritual powers, nor were they sinless.

"O people! Let it be known to you that we are the descendants of the Holy Prophet. Angels come to us. We are the fountains of learning. We are the springs of wisdom and knowledge of Allah.

"He who is our friend and helper deserves the Mercy of Allah, and he who is our enemy, waits for the punishment of Allah. They speak lies against us and do injustice to us.

"Allah has elevated our position and he has made them inferior to us. He has opened the eyes of the people through us.

"Verily, the Imams shall be from Quraysh, who are the descendants of Banu Hashim. None but the Banu Hashim deserve Imamate.

"I advise you not to associate anything with Allah and do not spoil the sunnah of the Prophet. Keep these two pillars and you will be safe from blame and sins.

"Your religion is straight and your Imam wise. I was your friend during the lifetime of the Prophet. Know it well that the Imams are appointed caliphs by Allah. They rule over the people for Allah. Know it well that we are the true Companions of the Holy Prophet. We are the doors of his lemmings. It is not lawful to enter houses, but through its doors. He who disregards this rule is a thief.

"Only those people who obey Allah and His Apostle shall go to Paradise and those who do otherwise shall go to Hell. Verily, Allah made you Muslims and He wants you to be sincere Muslims. He who recognizes Allah, His Prophet and his Ahlu'l-bayt and even if he dies in bed and not in jihad he will be a martyr (shahid).

"O people! ask me (any question) before you miss me, -because certainly I am acquainted with the passages of the sky more than the passages of the earth, and before that mischief springs upon its feet which would trample even the nose-string and destroy the wits of the people.

"Now, I bid you goodbye; you will find my place vacant and realize my worth. You will remember me when others succeed me to caliphate." (Nahju 'l-baldghah)

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When Imam `Ali was fatally wounded by the poisoned sword of `Abdu 'r-Rahman ibn Muljam (the curse of Allah be on him), he (`Ali) made the following will to Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (peace be on them):

"I advise you (both) to fear Allah and that you should not hanker after the (pleasure of this) world even though it may run after you. Do not be sorry for anything of this world that you have been denied. Speak the truth and act (in expectation) for reward. Be an enemy of the oppressor and helper of the oppressed.

"I advise you (both) and all my children and members of my family and everyone whom my writing reaches, to fear Allah, to keep your affairs in order, and to maintain good relations among yourselves for I have heard your grandfather (the Holy Prophet) saying: 'Improvement of mutual differences is better than general prayers and fasting.'

"(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of orphans. So do not allow them to starve and they should not be ruined in your presence.

"(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of your neighbours, because they were the subject of the Prophet's advice. He went on advising in their favour till we thought he would allow them a share in inheritance.

"(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of the Qur'an. No one should excel you in acting upon it.

"(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of prayer, because it is the pillar of your religion.

"(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of your Lord's House (Ka'bah). Do not forsake it so long as you live, because if it is abandoned you will not be spared.

"(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of jihad with the help of your property, lives and tongues in the way of Allah.

"You should keep to a respect for kinship and spending for others. Avoid turning away from one another and severing mutual relations. Do not give up bidding for good and forbidding from evil lest the mischievous gain positions over you, and then if you will pray, the prayers will not be granted."

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