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## 30. Was Abu Talib a Muslim?

All the Shi'ite scholars and some of the eminent Sunnite ones like Ibne Abil Hadid, the commentator of Nahjul Balaghah, Qastalani, in his book *Irshad al-Sari* and Zini Dahlan, in his annotations to the book *Sirah Halabi*, have regarded Abu Talib as being a Muslim. In the original Islamic sources too, there exist numerous evidences in support of this issue, which when studied leave us profoundly astonished and perplexed as to why Abu Talib finds himself the object of such unkindness and accusation?

How is it possible that one, who had defended the Noble Prophet (S) by his entire existence, and time after time had presented himself and his children as a shield for him in times of peril, be the object of such an allegation?

And here the discerning researchers have surmised that this wave of antagonism against Abu Talib is one that is political in nature and stems from the opposition of the evil lineage of Bani Umayyah to 'Ali (a.s.).

This is because it is not just Abu Talib, who due to his proximity with 'Ali (a.s.), has found himself to be an object of this onslaught; rather, we observe that in the history of Islam, whosoever happened to possess a close relation – in any manner whatsoever – with 'Ali (a.s.) had not remained protected from these foul and shabby offensives. In truth, Abu Talib had no crime to his name save that he was the father of 'Ali ibne Abi Talib – the great leader of Islam!

Here, we enumerate, only briefly, some varied arguments that bear a clear testimony to the faith of Abu Talib, and leave the details for books that have been particularly devoted to this issue:

Even prior to the proclamation of the prophethood of the Noble Prophet (S), Abu Talib had been well cognizant of the fact that his nephew would attain the rank of prophethood. This is because the historians have written that on one of the journeys that Abu Talib had undertaken to Egypt in the caravan of the Quraish, he had taken his twelve-year old nephew Muhammad, along with him.

In the course of this journey various extraordinary acts were witnessed from him; in addition, as soon as

the caravan came across a monk by the name of Bahira – who had been engaged in worship in the monastery for years, possessed knowledge of the Old and New Testaments and used to be visited by the trade caravans who passed that way – Muhammad (S), who was not more than twelve years old then, attracted his attention. Bahira, after gazing at him deeply and profoundly, asked: To which of you does this child belong? Those around pointed to Abu Talib, who informed him that he was his nephew.

Bahira said: “This child has a brilliant future before him. He is the very prophet, whose prophethood has been prophesized by the Divine books and whose attributes I have read in them.”<sup>1</sup>

Even before this encounter, there had been other indications which made Abu Talib aware of the prophethood and the spirituality of the Noble Prophet (S).

As has been stated by the Sunni scholar Shahrastani (the author of *al-Milal Wal Nihal*) and others, one year skies of Mecca withheld their rains and the city was caught in the grip of a severe drought. Abu Talib ordered his nephew, Muhammad, who was just a suckling then, to be brought to him. When the child, suntil wrapped in swaddling–clothes, was handed to him, he stood before the Ka'bah, raised the child upwards three times and each time beseeched: O' Lord! By the sake of this child, send down the blessed rains upon us.

It was not long before a cloud became visible above the horizon and soon covered the skies above Mecca; it then began to pour with such intensity that it was feared that the Ka'bah might suffer damage.

Shahrastani then writes: This incident, which indicates Abu Talib's knowledge of his nephew's prophethood right from his infancy, proves that he believed in the Noble Prophet (S). Later, Abu Talib recited the following verses in connection with this incident:

وَأَبْيَضُ يُسْتَسْقَى الْغَمَامُ بِوَجْهِهِ ثِمَالُ الْيَتَامَى عِصْمَةٌ لِلْأَرَامِلِ.

“He is a luminous–faced one and it is for him that the clouds pour down rain he is the shelter of the orphans and the protector of the widows.”

يُلَوِّذُ بِهِ الْهَلَاكُ مِنْ آلِ هَاشِمٍ. فَهُمْ عِنْدَهُ فِي نِعْمَةٍ وَفَوَاضِلٍ.

“Those from the Bani Hashim who face destruction seek refuge in him and it is by means of him that they find themselves receiving bounties and favours.”

وَمِيزَانُ صِدْقٍ لَا يَخِيسُ شَعِيرَةً وَوَزَانُ صِدْقٍ وَزَنُهُ غَيْرُ هَائِلٍ.

“He is that balance of justice that never violates (even) one grain of barley and he is a correct measurer whose weight and measurement are not to be feared for error.”

In addition to Shahrastani, numerous eminent historians too have reported the incident of the people resorting to Abu Talib during the famine, and his entreaty to Allah (s.w.t.) by employing the honour of the Noble Prophet (S). 'Allamah Amini has mentioned this incident in his book, *al-Ghadir*, quoting it from the books *Sharh Bukhari*, *al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyyah*, *al-Khasais al-Kubra*, *Sharh Bahjah al-Mahafil*, *Sirah Halabi*, *Sirah Nabawi* and *Talabah al-Talib*.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, certain well-known Islamic books contain some poems from Abu Talib, all of which have been gathered and this collection referred to as *Diwan Abi Talib*. Some of these poems are presented below:

وَاللّٰهُ لَنْ يَّصِلُوْا اِلَيْكَ بِجَمْعِهِمْ حَتّٰى اَوْسَدَ فِى التُّرَابِ دَفِيْنًا.

“O' Nephew! The enemies shall never reach you until such time that Abu Talib has rested in the earth and taken the grave as his bed,”

فَاَصْدَعْ بِاَمْرِكَ مَا عَلَيْكَ غَضَاضَةٌ وَّ اَبْشِرْ وَّ قَرِّ بِذٰكَ مِنْهُ عِيُوْنًا.

“So accomplish your assignment and fear none give glad tidings and make the eyes joyous and cheerful.”

وَّ دَعَوْتِنِيْ وَّ زَعَمْتُ اَنَّكَ نٰصِحِيْ وَّ لَقَدْ صَدَقْتَ وَّ كُنْتَ قَبْلَ اَمِيْنًا.

“You invited me towards your faith and I know fully well that you are a sincere adviser to me and surely you invited and are trustworthy in your invitation.”

وَّ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُ اَنَّ دِيْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ مِنْ خَيْرِ اَدْيَانِ الْبَرِيَّةِ دِيْنًا.

“Indeed I have perceived that the religion of Muhammad is the most excellent of all religions.”<sup>3</sup>

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمُوا أَنَّا وَجَدْنَا مُحَمَّدًا نَبِيًّا كَمُوسَى خُطَّ فِي أَوَّلِ الْكُتُبِ.

“O' Quraish, do you not know that we have found Muhammad to be a prophet just as Musa was and his mention has been recorded in the Divine books?”

وَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ فِي الْعِبَادِ مَحَبَّةً وَلَا سِنَّ فِيمَنْ خَصَّهُ اللَّهُ فِي الْحُبِّ.

“The servants of Allah (s.w.t.) possess a special fondness with respect to him and this is not out of place for one whom Allah (s.w.t.) has singled out for His love.”<sup>4</sup>

Ibne Abil Hadid, after presenting a great number of Abu Talib's poems (which Ibne Shahr Ashub, in his book *Mutashabihat al-Qur'an*, has claimed to be three thousand in number) says: After going through the entire collection of these poems, there does not remain a semblance of a doubt for us that Abu Talib had indeed believed in the religion of his nephew.

Traditions have been narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) which testify to the faith of his self-sacrificing uncle – Abu Talib. According to the author of the book *Abu Talib: Mu'minu Quraysh*, when Abu Talib passed away the Noble Prophet (S), after having escorted his funeral and as he mourned his death, said: O' My Father! O' Abu Talib!

How sad I am over your death? How can I ever forget the tragedy of your death? O' you who fostered me when I was an infant and accepted by invitation when I was a grown up; in proximity to you, I was as an eye is to its socket, and as a soul is to the body.<sup>5</sup>

Also, he (S) used to repeatedly confess:

مَا نَأَلْتُ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ شَيْئًا حَتَّى مَاتَ أَبُو طَالِبٍ.

“The Quraish were unable to inconvenience me in any way until after the death of Abu Talib.”<sup>6</sup>

It is an indisputable fact that, years before Abu Talib's death, the Noble Prophet (S) had been ordered to refrain from establishing any kind of cordial relationship with the polytheists. In such a situation, exhibition of such fondness and affection towards Abu Talib on his (S) part indicates that he (S) had known that he was a monotheist. Or else, how could it be conceivable that while he prohibited others from befriending the polytheists he himself exhibited affection towards Abu Talib that reached the frontiers of love?

In traditions that have been narrated from the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) too, there are abundant evidences that meet the eye which attest to Abu Talib's faith and sincerity. These traditions, mentioning all of which would only protract this discussion, contain rational and logical arguments, like the tradition of the fourth Imam (a.s.) in which it has been reported that the Imam (a.s.), in reply to a question, attests to the faith of Abu Talib and then says:

Honestly, I am amazed as to why some are given to imagine that Abu Talib was a disbeliever! Do they not realize that by harbouring such beliefs, they hurl taunts and sarcasms at Abu Talib and the Noble Prophet (S)? But has it not been prohibited in several verses of the Qur'an for a woman to continue to remain in the matrimony of her disbelieving spouse after she has accepted Islam? It is an incontrovertible fact that Fatimah Bint Asad, who had been of those who had taken a lead into Islam, had Abu Talib as her spouse all through her life.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from all these, if we were to be sceptical of all things, the one reality with respect to which none can harbour scepticism and doubt is that Abu Talib was of the most vociferous and intense supporters of Islam and the Noble Prophet (S), and his support was in such measure that it cannot be interpreted as stemming from consanguineous ties or tribal partianship.

The most manifest example of this being the incident of Shi'b Abi Talib which has been reported by all the historians; when the Quraish subjected the Noble Prophet (S) and the Muslims to an intense social, economic and political blockade and severed all connections with them, Abu Talib was the only supporter and defender of the Noble Prophet (S).

For three years he abandoned all his other work and, taking the Hashemites to a valley located between the mountains of Mecca and popularly known as Shi'b Abi Talib, settled down there. His self-sacrifice reached such an extent that in addition to constructing special towers for protection against the attacks of the Quraish, every night, he would move the Noble Prophet (S) to a different place to sleep and make his dear son 'Ali (a.s.) sleep in his place instead.

When 'Ali (a.s.) said: Dear father! Under these circumstances, I am bound to be killed, Abu Talib said: Dear son! Do not lose your forbearance. Every living thing advances towards death. I have sacrificed you for the son of 'Abdullah.

Interestingly, 'Ali (a.s.) responds to his father's words by saying: Dear father! These words of mine were not out of my apprehension of being killed in the path of Muhammad (S) rather, it was spoken since I wanted you to know how obedient I am to you and that I am fully prepared to help Ahmad.<sup>8</sup>

We are of the opinion that every person, who casts aside his prejudice and studies the gold lines of history about Abu Talib impartially would concur with Ibne Abil Hadid and say:<sup>9</sup>

وَلَوْ لَا أَبُو طَالِبٍ وَابْنُهُ لَمَا مَثَلَ الدِّينُ شَخِصًا فَقَامَا فَذَاكَ بِمَكَّةَ أَوْى وَ

## حَامِي وَ هَذَا بِيَثْرِبَ جَسَّ الْحَمَامَاً.

“If it was not for the presence of Abu Talib and his son, the religion (of Islam) would never have stayed in place and stood up aloft. Abu Talib rushed to the assistance of the Noble Prophet (S) in Mecca, while 'Ali (a.s.), in supporting Islam, plummeted into a whirlpool of death in Yathrib (Medinah)!”<sup>10</sup>

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1. An abstract from Sirah Ibn Hisham (vol. 1, pg. 191), Sirah Halabi (vol. 1, pg. 131) and other books.
  2. al-Ghadir, vol. 7, pg. 346
  3. Khazanah al-'Arab, Tarikh Ibn Kathir, Sharh of Nahjul Balagha Ibn Abil Hadid, Fath al-Bari, Bulugh al-'Arab, Tarikh Abi al-Fida, Sirah al-Nabawi etc., as reported in al-Ghadir, vol. 8
  4. Ibid.
  5. Sheikh al-Abatih, quoting from the book Abu Talib: The Believer of the Quraish.
  6. Tabari, quoting from the book Abu Talib: The Believer from the Quraish.
  7. Kitab al-Hujjah; al-Darajat al-Rafi'ah quoting from al-Ghadir, vol. 8.
  8. al-Ghadir, vol. 8
  9. al-Ghadir, vol. 8
  10. Tafsir-e-Namuna, vol. 5, pg. 192

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