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The Death of Muhammad, the Messenger of God

The aims of the life of Muhammad Mustafa, as the Last Messenger of God on this earth, were:

to destroy idolatry and polytheism;

to proclaim the absolute Oneness of the Creator;

to deliver the Creator's Message to mankind;

to complete the system of religion and law;

to purify the souls of men and women;

to eradicate injustice, iniquity and ignorance;

to establish a system of peace with justice;

to create an apparatus in the form of a political state for the realization of all the foregoing aims, and one which would also maintain the momentum of his work.

Within the 23-years of his ministry as God's Messenger, Muhammad had achieved all these aims, and then it began to look as if like all other mortals, he too had to depart from this world. As noted before, he received this intimation for the first time when Surah *Nasr* (Help), the 110th chapter of Al-Qur'an al-Majid, quoted earlier in this book, was revealed to him.

Muhammad Mustafa had spent his whole life in prayer and devotions but after the revelation of *Nasr*, his absorption in worshipping his Creator became much greater than before, in preparation to meet Him.

The Prophet himself hinted, at least on the following two occasions that his death was not too distant from him:

1. In his address of the Farewell Pilgrimage in Arafat on Friday, the 9th of Dhil-Hajj, 10 A..H., he said:

“Perhaps, this is my last Hajj.”

In concluding his speech, he posed a question to the pilgrims, viz., “When you are questioned by your Lord about my work, what will be your answer?”

The pilgrims shouted with one voice: “You delivered the message of God to us, and you performed your duty.”

When he heard this answer, he lifted his gaze toward Heaven, and said: “O God! Be Thou a Witness that I have done my duty.”

2. At the “coronation” of Ali ibn Abi Talib at Ghadeer-Khumm, on 18th of Dhil-Hajj, 10 A.H., Muhammad, the Messenger of God, referred once again to his impending death by stating: “I am also a mortal, and I may be summoned into the presence of my Lord any moment.”

Tens of thousands of Muslims heard these declarations of their Prophet, and they all knew that he would not be with them much longer. He himself knew that he had accomplished the mission with which his Lord had entrusted him, and he was, therefore, eager to meet Him.

The Prophet spent his nights with his various wives by turns. On the 19th of Safar of 11 A.H., it was his turn to sleep in the chamber of Ayesha. At night, he paid a visit to the cemetery of Al-Baqi in the company of his servant, Abu Muwayhibah, who later reported that:

“The Apostle stood between the graves and addressed them in the following words: 'Peace be upon you who are in these graves. Blessed are you in your present state to which you have emerged from the state in which the people live on earth. Subversive attacks are falling one after another like waves of darkness, each worse than the previous ones.'”

Muhammad Husayn Haykal says that the (fatal) sickness of the Prophet began on the morning following the night on which he had visited the cemetery, i.e., on 20th of Safar. He further says:

It was then that the people became concerned and the *army of Usamah did not move*. True, the report of Abu Muwayhibah is doubted by many historians who believe that Muhammad's sickness could not have been the only reason that prevented the army from marching to al-Sham, that another cause was *the disappointment of many, including a number of senior Muhajireen and Ansar, in regard to the leadership of the army. (The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935)*

The following incident appears to have taken place on the morning of the 20th of Safar:

Sir William Muir

One night the Prophet walked to the burial ground in the outskirts of the city. There he waited long absorbed in meditation and praying for the dead. In the morning, passing by the door of Ayesha, who

was suffering from a severe headache, he heard her moaning: my head! oh, my head! He entered and said: “Nay, Ayesha, it is rather I that have need to cry my head, my head!”

Then in a tender strain: “But wouldst thou not desire to be taken whilst I am yet alive; so that I might pray over thee, and wrapping thee, Ayesha, in thy winding sheet, thus commit thee to the grave?”

“That happen to another,” exclaimed Ayesha, “and not to me!” archly adding: “Ah, that is what thou art desirous of! Truly, I can fancy thee, after having done all this and buried me, return straightway to my house, and spend that very evening in sporting in my place with another wife!”

The Prophet smiled at Ayesha's raillery, but his sickness pressed on him too heavily to admit of a rejoinder in the same strain. (*The Life of Mohammed, London, 1877*)

Betty Kelen

He (the Prophet) prayed the night through (in the cemetery of Al-Baqi) and returned to his home, entering the hut of Ayesha, who had a headache, and upon seeing him she screwed up her face and said, “Oh, my head!”

“No, Ayesha,” said the Prophet, “it is oh, my head!” He sat down heavily, his head pounding, pain squeezing his vitals. Presently he said: “Does it distress you to think of yourself dying before me, so that I should have to wrap you in a shroud and bury you?”

He was looking deathly ill, but Ayesha, who believed that he had by no means come to the end of his course of diplomatic marriages, gave him a sour reply: “No. Because I can also think of you coming straight back from the cemetery to spend a bridal night.” (*Muhammad, the Messenger of God*)

Muhammad Husayn Haykal

On the following morning, Muhammad found Ayesha, his wife, complaining of a headache, and holding her head between her hands, murmuring, “O my head!” Having a headache himself, Muhammad answered, “But rather, O Ayesha, it's my head!”

However, the pain was not so severe as to put him to bed, to stop his daily work, or to prevent him from talking to his wives and even joking with them. As Ayesha continued to complain about her head, Muhammad said to her: “It wouldn't be too bad after all, O Ayesha, if you were to die before me.

For I would then pray for you and attend your funeral.” But this only aroused the ire of the youthful Ayesha, who answered: “Let that be the good fate of some else and not me. If that happens to me, you will have your other wives to keep you company.” (*The Life of Muhammad, Cairo, 1935*)

The Prophet made no response to Ayesha's jibe, and reclined against the wall. When the pain subsided, he got up and visited his other wives as he had always done. On the 24th of Safar, he was in the

chamber of his wife, Maymuna, when he had a sudden attack of severe headache and fever. It is said that he called all his wives and asked them to attend to him in the chamber of Ayesha. They agreed to do so.

The Apostle was too weary to walk himself. Therefore, Ali supported him on one side, and Abbas, his uncle, on the other, and they escorted him from Maymuna's apartment to Ayesha's chamber. He stayed in Ayesha's chamber until his death a few days later.

But notwithstanding his fever and weakness, the Apostle went into the mosque as often as he could, and led the Muslims in prayer. On the 26th of Safar, he is said to have felt slightly better, and went into the mosque supported by Ali and Abbas. He led the *zuhr* (midday) prayer, and after the prayer, addressed the congregation.

This was the last speech of the Prophet of Islam, and in it he made one more veiled reference to his approaching death. Sunni historians say that Abu Bakr who was present in the audience, understood what the Prophet said, and he began to cry as he was very tender-hearted. The Prophet saw him crying and tried to comfort him, and then turning to the congregation, said:

“I am more grateful to Abu Bakr than to anyone else for his material and moral support, and for his companionship. If in this *umma*, I were ever to choose any man for a friend, I would have chosen him. But it is not necessary because the Islamic brotherhood is a stronger bond than any other, and it is enough for all of us. And remember that all doors which open into the mosque, should be closed except the door of the chamber of Abu Bakr.”

The Prophet warned the Muslims not to relapse into idolatry, and to remember that they were monotheists, and he added:

“One thing you must never do, is to worship my grave. Those nations of the past which worshipped the graves of their prophets, earned the wrath of the Lord, and were destroyed. Beware, lest you imitate them.”

Earlier in the day, it was reported to the Prophet that the Ansar were extremely sad because of his illness. It was, therefore, an opportune moment to tell the Muhajireen about the Ansar and their great services to Islam. He said:

“Do not ever for a moment forget what the Ansar have done for you. They gave you shelter and sanctuary. They shared their homes and their bread with you. Though they were not rich, they put your needs ahead of their own needs. They are my 'legacy' to you. Other people will grow in number but they will only diminish. Whatever were the obligations of the Ansar, they have faithfully fulfilled them, and now it is your turn to fulfill your obligations toward them.”

The Ansar were also present in the mosque, and they were trying to stifle their sobs. Addressing them,

the Prophet said:

“O Ansar! After my death you will be confronted with many sorrows and troubles.”

They asked him: “Messenger of God! what is your advice to us? How should we conduct ourselves when those bad times come?”

He said: “Do not abandon your forbearance, and keep your trust in God at all times.”

The Syrian expedition was still immobile. The Prophet denounced his companions for their laxity in reporting for duty to their general, and ordered them once again to leave the city there and then. He paused for a few moments, and then invoked the curse of God upon all those men who would disobey his orders to go to Syria.

The speech was over. The Prophet descended from the pulpit and returned to his apartment. He felt faint from the effort to speak, and did not go into the mosque again. It was the last time he was seen in public.

The first part of this speech which relates to Abu Bakr, appears to be spurious, and appears to have been interpolated. As already pointed out, Abu Bakr was under orders to join Usama's army but it is possible that the Apostle condoned his failure to report for duty.

The Apostle may also have acknowledged his material contributions to Islam. He had emancipated many slaves in Makkah, and had given his whole property to equip the Tabuk expedition.

The story that the Apostle ordered all doors in the mosque closed except the door of the chamber of Abu Bakr, is also a palpable concoction. Abu Bakr lived in a suburb of Medina called Sunh. He did not live in the city, and he did not have a chamber the door of which opened into the mosque.

The Apostle also said in his speech that if he were to choose anyone for a friend, he would choose Abu Bakr.

If this speech as reported, is authentic, then it means that the Apostle declared publicly that he did not want to make Abu Bakr a friend. If his statement is paraphrased, it would read: “If I were to choose a friend, I would choose Abu Bakr. But I am not choosing him. All of us are members of the universal brotherhood of Islam, and that's enough for all of us.”

After all, what was there to prevent Muhammad Mustafa from choosing Abu Bakr as a friend? Nothing! Archangel Gabriel did not come from heaven to tell him not to make Abu Bakr a friend, nor did any one on this earth threaten to do him any harm if he chose him (Abu Bakr) for a friend.

Since this was the last public appearance of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and since, according to the Sunni claims, he loved Abu Bakr very much, he ought to have availed of the opportunity, not only to

declare him a friend but also to declare him his khalifa (successor). If he did, would anyone dare to challenge him?

But for some mysterious reason or reasons, he did neither this nor that. (Muhammad neither chose Abu Bakr for a friend nor did he make him his successor). His “love” for Abu Bakr ought to have found some expression, but it did not; a most curious “omission” on his part at a most critical time!

On the 27th of Safar, the Apostle felt too weak to stand and pray. Sunni historians say that it was from this date that he ordered Abu Bakr to lead the Muslims in prayer. He himself, they say, remained seated and went into the motions of prayer.

Bukhari, the collector of *Hadith* (the traditions of the Prophet), reports the following incident in his *Sahih*:

“On the 28th of Safar, Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib, came to see Ali, and said: 'By God, Muhammad is soon going to die. I can tell from the expression on the faces of the children of Abdul Muttalib when they are going to die. I, therefore, suggest that you talk with him and ask him about the matter of his succession.' But Ali said: 'No. Not in the state in which he is now. I do not wish to bring up the subject.'”

The Shia historians discount this “tradition.” They say that the Prophet had declared, not once, but many times that Ali was his successor and the sovereign of all Muslims. If the Arabs were not going to acknowledge him their lord even after numerous declarations, one more declaration would have hardly made any difference.

The Prophet, had, in fact, made an attempt to write his will when he called for pen, paper and ink but he met defiance. And Ali did not want any one to show his “moral courage” by shouting that the Messenger of God was “talking nonsense.” Hearing the gratuitous remark would have only hastened the death of his master from shock.

If this story is true, it only points up Ali's devotion to his master, and his solicitude to shield him from every shock.

The Shia Muslims also say that Abbas himself could have taken up the subject to discuss with the Prophet who was his nephew. The latter was affable, and was accessible even to strangers. What was there for Abbas, therefore, to be leery of?

The companions could see that the Prophet was not going to recover from his fever and headache. Once he was confined to his deathbed, many of them felt that they were “safe” if they disobeyed him. Therefore, no matter what he did to pressure them into going to Syria, they did not, and Usama's expedition never materialized – in his lifetime!

In the afternoon, Muhammad Mustafa summoned Ali, and said to him: “For me it's the journey's end. When I die, you wash my body, cover it in a shroud, and lower it in the grave. I owe money to such and such people, among them a Jew who gave me a loan to equip the expedition of Usama.

Pay these debts to all of them including the Jew.” He then removed the ring he was wearing, gave it to Ali, and asked him to wear it which he did. He also gave him (Ali) his sword, spear, armor, and other weapons.

Monday, Rabi al-Awwal 1, 11 A. H.

Monday, Rabi al-Awwal 1 of 11 Hijri was the last day of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the Messenger of God, on this earth. There were moments when he felt slightly better but at other times, he was visibly in great pain. Ayesha, his wife, reports the following:

“As the day crept up toward noon, Fatima Zahra, the daughter of the Messenger of God, came to see him. He welcomed her and asked her to sit beside him. Then he said something to her which I could not hear but she began to weep. Noticing the tears of his daughter, he said something else to her which again I could not hear but she began to smile. She was so much like her father in temperament, character and appearance.”

Sometime after the death of the Apostle, Ayesha asked Fatima what was it that her father said to her which first made her weep and then made her smile.

Fatima said: “First my father told me that he was going to die. When I heard this, I began to cry. Then he informed me that I would be the very first to meet him in heaven, and that too, very soon. When I heard this, I was very happy, and I smiled.”

Washington Irving

Mohammed's only remaining child, Fatima, the wife of Ali, came presently to see him. Ayesha used to say that she never saw anyone resemble the Prophet more in sweetness of temper than this, his daughter. He treated her always with respectful tenderness. When she came to him, he used to rise up, go towards her, take her by the hand, and kiss it, and would seat her in his own place. Their meeting on this occasion is thus related by Ayesha, in the traditions preserved by Abulfida.

“Welcome my child,” said the Prophet, and made her sit beside him. He then whispered something in her ear, at which she wept. Perceiving her affliction, he whispered something more, and her countenance brightened with joy.

“What is the meaning of this?” said I to Fatima. “The Prophet honors thee with a mark of confidence never bestowed upon any of his wives.” “I cannot disclose the secret of the Prophet of God,” replied Fatima.

Nevertheless, after his death, she declared that at first he announced to her his impending death; but seeing her weep, consoled her with the assurance that she would shortly follow him and become a princess in heaven.” (*The Life of Mohammed*)

Toward the afternoon the Apostle had a feeling of great restlessness. He repeatedly moistened his face with cold water from a jug beside him. Seeing him in such pain, Fatima cried: "O my father's distress!" He again tried to comfort her, and said: "After this day, your father will never be in distress again." And he added: "When I die, say, 'We are for Allah, and toward Him is our return.'"

Presently, his breathing became irregular, and he was heard to murmur something. Ibn Saad says in his *Tabqaat* that the Apostle was saying: "All I seek now is the company of Allah." These were his last words.

Muhammad was heard to repeat these words thrice, and then he fell silent – for ever! Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God on this earth, had died.

Ayesha says: "I placed a pillow under his head, and covered his face with a mantle. Then I stood up with other women, and we all started crying, beating our breasts and heads, and slapping our faces."

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, died on Monday, the first of Rabi al-Awwal of the eleventh year of Hijra in the afternoon. He had lived 63 years less eight days.

The Sunni historians say that the Prophet died, not on the first but on the 12th day of Rabi al-Awwal. The Shia Muslims say that he died, not on the first of Rabi al-Awwal but a day earlier, i.e., on the 28th of Safar.

The consensus of the modern, Western historians, is, that the Prophet died on June 8, 632. The eighth of June, incidentally, is also the day of his birth.

Burial of the Prophet

The body of the Prophet of Islam was washed on Tuesday. Only six men were present at his funeral service. They were:

Ali ibn Abi Talib

Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib

FadhI ibn Abbas

Qathm ibn Abbas

Usama bin Zayd bin Haritha

Aus bin Khuli Ansari

Usama, the general of the expedition to Syria, was in Jorf, still waiting for the companions. Some of them sent word to him that the Prophet was dying, and that he should return to Medina. He returned,

and moments later, his master died.

Ali washed the body of the Prophet as Usama poured water. When the body was washed, Ali draped it in a shroud, and prayed for it. He then went out, and told the Muslims who were in the mosque, to go into the chamber and say the funeral prayers. Banu Hashim were the first to offer prayers, and then the Muhajireen and the Ansar carried out this duty.

In Medina, there were two gravediggers. They were Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah and Abu Talha Zayd bin Sahl. They were summoned but only the latter was available. He came and dug the grave. Ali entered the grave to smooth it out. He then lifted the body from the ground, and gently lowered it into the grave, assisted by his uncle and his cousins. The grave was then covered with earth, and Ali sprinkled water over it.

When Ali and other members of Banu Hashim were busy with the obsequies of the Prophet of Islam, Abu Bakr, Umar, Abu Obaida bin al-Jarrah, and some others were busy in Saqifa staking claims to the caliphate. Abu Bakr, it turned out, was the successful candidate. When he had obtained the pledge of allegiance from the Ansar in Saqifa, he and his friends returned to the Mosque of the Prophet. He then ascended the pulpit of the Prophet to take the same pledge from other people.

On Monday evening and all day on Tuesday, the people were coming to the mosque to take the oath of allegiance to him. Oath-taking was over late on Tuesday night, and it was only on Wednesday that the newly-elected khalifa found some time to turn his attention to his dead master, and to offer the funeral prayer at his grave.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, the Sovereign of all Muslims, and the greatest Benefactor of Mankind, did not have a state funeral. A handful of men – his close relatives – had given him burial. Many of those who claimed that they were his companions and friends, had forsaken him in the hour of his death. Their absence from his funeral was the most important nonevent of his obsequies.

Ibn Saad says in his *Tabqaat* that Ali ibn Abi Talib paid all the debts of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. He sent a crier around town in Medina, and during the Hajj season, he sent a crier to Makka, to declare that he (Ali) would pay all the debts of Muhammad, and that whoever had any claim, could come to him and collect it. He paid the claimants without asking them any questions and without seeking any proof that Muhammad owed them anything, and this he was doing to the end of his days.

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