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Cover Photo:

Old map of Middle East map from 1716 showing part of the Middle East including Persia and Mesopotamia (now Iran and Iraq).

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ESSENCE OF ISLAM:

Part 25 – Revelation and Psychic Phenomena

This series sets out, in the words of the Promised Messiah^(as), Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, a summary of his exposition of four outstanding topics: ISLAM; ALLAH, THE EXALTED; THE HOLY PROPHET^(saw) and THE HOLY QUR'AN. The original compilation, in Urdu, from which these extracts have been translated into English, was collated with great care and diligence by Syed Daud Ahmad Sahib, Allah have mercy on him and reward him graciously for his great labour of love. Amin. The English rendering is by the late Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, may Allah be pleased with him, and is quoted from *The Essence of Islam*, Volume 1. All references throughout, unless otherwise specifically mentioned, are from the Holy Qur'an.

Some people put forward the objection that there are many groups like astrologers, soothsayers, physicians, and palmists, who claim to reveal the unseen. Sometimes they foretell things, some of which come to pass, and that more recently, some people have been able to reveal hidden matters through mesmerism. Then how could the revealing of the unseen be conclusive proof of the Divine origin of revelation?

The answer is that all these groups speak from conjecture, guesswork, and indeed from superstition; they possess no certain knowledge nor

do they claim to have certain knowledge. Their so-called prophecies are based upon signs and doubtful indications which have no relationship with certainty and which are not above suspicion and error. Very often, their predictions are proved baseless and false, on account of which those predictions lack all honour and acceptance and helpfulness and success. Those who indulge in those predictions are generally poverty-stricken and unfortunate, are held in no honour, and are cowardly, mean, unsuccessful and without any merit. They cannot convert the unseen to come into accord with

their predictions and in their own circumstances they exhibit the signs of Divine wrath and they possess no blessing or honour or help from the Divine. But the Prophets and *Auliya* do not merely disclose the unseen like the astrologers, but with the Grace and Mercy of God, which always accompany them, they make such prophecies in which the lights of acceptance and honour shine like the sun and which consist of the good news of honour and Divine help, and not that of misfortune and adversity.

Consider the prophecies of the Holy Qur'an and you will find that they are not like the predictions of the astrologers or others but are full of majesty and glory. All those prophecies are characterised by declaring the honour of the recipients and the disgrace of their enemies, their glory and the humiliation of their enemies, their success and the failure of their enemies, their victory and the defeat of their enemies, and their prosperity and the ruin of their enemies. Can any astrologer or soothsayer or mesmeriser put forth such prophecies? Certainly not.



The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as).

The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as). In 1891, he claimed, on the basis of Divine revelation, that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi whose advent had been foretold by Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and by the scriptures of other faiths.

The founder's claim constitutes the basis of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

Always to proclaim one's own good, and the decline of the opponent and to refute whatever the opponent says and to promise the fulfilment of that which is in one's favour, can only be from

God and cannot be the doing of man.

[Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol. 1, pp. 232-242, footnote 11]

Man's Knowledge of the Universe is Defective

Though man has been trying strenuously for thousands of years to discover God's powers through natural sciences and mathematics, yet his knowledge is so defective that he can only be described as hopeless and unsuccessful in his search. Hundreds of hidden mysteries are disclosed to those to whom visions and revelation are vouchsafed and they are borne witness to by thousands of the righteous; but the philosophers continue to deny them. The philosophers base all thinking and reflection on the brain, but those who have experience of visions have discovered through their spiritual experiences that the fountainhead of reason and understanding is the heart. For thirty-five years, I have observed that revelation which is the source of spiritual understanding and of the knowledge of the unseen descends upon the heart. Very often a voice

strikes the heart with force, as a bucket is thrown with force into a well full of water, and that water of the heart surges up like a closed blossom and arriving near the brain blooms like a flower and gives birth to words which are Words of the Divine. These spiritual experiences establish that the brain is not concerned with knowledge and true understanding. It is true that if the brain is healthy and suffers from no defect, it is benefited by the secret knowledge possessed by the heart, and as the brain is the centre of the nervous system, it is like a machine which can pump up water from the well. The heart is the well that is the fountainhead of hidden knowledge. This is a secret that has been discovered by men of truth through true visions and I myself have experience of it.

[Chashma-e-Ma'rifat, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol. 23, pp. 282-283]

I have been honoured with Divine converse for nearly eleven years and I know well that revelation descends from heaven. If one were to illustrate revelation by reference to some worldly object, one could perhaps compare it with the

telegraph which itself discloses every change that occurs in it. My experience is that at the time of descent of revelation, which is vouchsafed to me as the revelation of the *Auliya'*, I feel that I am under the control of an external force that is very effective. Sometimes this control is so strong and envelops me so forcefully in its light that I find myself drawn to it compulsively and no faculty of mine can stand up to it. In this condition, I hear clear and bright words. I sometimes see angels and observe the power and awe of truth. The words that are conveyed to me often comprehend matters that are unseen and there is such extraordinary control and seizure, which is proof of the existence of God Almighty. To deny this would amount to murdering a self-evident truth.

[*Barakat-ud-Du'a*, *Ruhani Khaza'in*, vol. 6, p. 26]

I call God to witness that it is the truth that revelation falls upon the heart from heaven as rays of the sun fall upon a wall. It is my daily experience that when the Word of God is about to descend on me then in the first stage I feel a sort

of helplessness and experience a change and, though my senses are in a manner working, I find that a powerful force has taken my whole being in its grip and I feel that all the arteries of my being are in the control of that force and all that is mine is no longer mine but belongs to it. When I am in that condition first of all God Almighty presents those of my thoughts to me on which He intends to cast a ray of His words. Those thoughts come before me one after the other in a strange guise, and it so happens that when a thought passes through my mind – for instance, whether a certain person will recover from his illness or not – then suddenly a Divine phrase falls like a ray and often with its falling the whole of my body is shaken. Then this is succeeded by another thought and as soon as it appears a piece of revelation falls upon it like an archer shooting an arrow on every quarry that appears before him. Just at that time, it is felt that this chain of thoughts is generated by our natural capacity and that the words that fall upon it descend from above.

Although poets and thinkers, etc.,

also receive suggestions on reflection, there is no relationship between revelation and such suggestion, for that suggestion is a consequence of thinking and reflection and is received within the limits of humanness in the full possession of one's senses. But revelation is received when the recipient comes under the full control of God Almighty with all his being, and his own senses and reflection do not intervene in any way. It appears as if one's tongue is not one's own and is being used by some other strong power. This should make clear the distinction between natural capacity and that which descends from heaven.

[Barakat-ud-Du'a, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol.6, pp. 22-23, footnote]

How Revelation is Received

The slight slumber that overtakes one at the time when the Word of God descends upon the heart is completely outside material causes and all physical causes are suspended at the time. When a righteous person, who has a true relationship of love and fidelity with God Almighty, submits a supplication to God in the upsurge

of that relationship, he is suddenly overtaken by a slight slumber while he is still occupied with his supplication and he seems to wake up and finds the answer to his supplication, couched in eloquent words, being conveyed to him behind the veil of that slumber. Those words possess a majesty and a quality of delight, and Divine Power is felt shining through them. They penetrate the heart like an iron nail and often contain knowledge of hidden matters. It often happens that when that righteous person seeks to submit something more with regard to his first supplication, or submits a fresh supplication, he is again overtaken by a slumber which disappears within less than a second and from it emerge Holy Words, as the kernel emerges from the shell, which are delicious and full of majesty. In this manner, God, Who is Gracious and Merciful and full of kindness, responds to every question and does not manifest any contempt or disgust. If a supplication is made sixty or seventy or a hundred times, a response is received in the same manner. That is to say, that at the time of each supplication a

slight slumber overtakes the recipient of revelation. On occasion, this faintness or slumber is heavy as if the person had fallen into a swoon. Such revelation is vouchsafed on very important matters and is the highest type of revelation.

The slumber that overtakes a recipient of revelation at the time of his supplication and prayer behind the veil of which Divine revelation is received, is above any physical causes. Whatever the physicists regard as the law of nature concerning dreams breaks down in this instance. There are hundreds of spiritual matters that refute the thinking of philosophers. Very often a person sees in a vision objects that are thousands of miles away and appear as if they were close to the eye, and often a person can meet and converse in complete wakefulness with the souls of those who have passed away.

[*Chashma-e-Ma'rifat, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol.23, pp. 111-112*]

Various Forms of Revelation

First Form: Out of several forms of revelation, which God has

disclosed to me, is that when God Almighty desires to disclose some hidden matter to His servant, He causes to flow from his tongue some phrases in a slight slumber, sometimes gently and sometimes harshly. Those phrases that flow harshly from the tongue fall upon the tongue as hardy as hail falls suddenly upon a hard piece of ground, or as the hooves of a fast running steed strike the earth. Such a revelation arrives with speed and is so awe-inspiring that the whole body is affected thereby and the tongue runs with it so fast and in such a majestic voice that it is as if it is not one's own tongue. The slight slumber disappears altogether when the revelation is completed and during the time that it is received one lies motionless like a corpse. Such revelation is received when God Almighty out of His Wisdom decides not to accept a supplication or decides to postpone its acceptance or wishes to convey something that would lie heavy on the recipient, for instance, when a person seeks to acquire something quickly and such acquisition is not in accord with the Divine Will or has to be postponed. I have been the

recipient of such revelations on occasion, which it would take too long to describe in detail, but I will set down one instance.

About three years ago, I prayed that people might be disposed to help in the publication of this book whereupon I received this type of revelation in hard words:

‘Not yet.’

When I received this revelation I informed a number of Hindus and Muslims of it, who are still alive and they also witnessed thereafter the lack of attention of people to this book.

As regards the other type of revelation, in which phrases flow from the tongue with gentleness, it would be enough to state that when some time had passed after the revelation just mentioned, and I was beset with difficulties, then one day I received a revelation from the Gracious Lord:

Take hold of the branch of the palm-tree and shake it; it will shed fresh ripe dates upon thee.

From this I understood that this was an indication that I should invite people’s help and that there was a promise that through such effort I would be able to collect enough money to defray the expenses of the publication of that part of the book. I informed several Hindus and Muslims of this revelation also and I also informed Hafiz Hidayat ‘Ali Khan, Extra Assistant Commissioner, who had arrived in Qadian the same day or the following day. I also informed Maulawi Muhammad Hussain of Batala. In short, after the receipt of this revelation, according to the Divine Command, I made some effort towards inviting assistance and thereafter I received from Lahore, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Malirkotla and a few other places, enough assistance to meet the expenses of the publication of that part. *All praise is due to Allah for this.*

[Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza’in, vol.1, pp. 248-251 sub-footnote 1]

The second form of revelation, which on account of its many wonders I call perfect revelation,

is that when God Almighty desires to inform a servant of a hidden matter after his supplication or on His own, He imposes a faintness upon him, whereby he becomes completely free from his self and sinks in that faintness like a person who dives in deep water and disappears in it; then when he emerges from this dive he feels a sort of echo inside himself, and when that echo ceases he feels from inside himself words that are appropriate and fine and delicious. This diving in the faintness is a wonderful experience, which cannot be adequately described in words. In this condition, a whole ocean of understanding is opened for a person. When repeatedly he has this experience of diving that is imposed upon him by God Almighty and he receives a response to every supplication in fine and delicious words, and in each instance God discloses to him verities which it is beyond human power to disclose, he thereby achieves the fullness of understanding and cognition. Man's supplication and God's response to it through the manifestation of His Godhead is

an experience as if the supplicant beholds God in this very world and immediately both worlds appear equal to him. When at the time of need a servant makes repeated supplications to his Lord and receives a response, as one human being receives from another, and that response is couched in fine eloquent words, sometimes in a language of which he is completely ignorant, and comprises hidden matters which are beyond the power of creatures, and sometimes conveys the good news of great bounties or of high ranks or of nearness to God, and sometimes comprehends prophecies with regard to worldly blessings, then by the hearing of these fine and eloquent phrases which are far above human power, he acquires a degree of understanding which is appreciated only by him upon whom this bounty is bestowed. In truth, such a one recognises God as one recognises a firm and old friend. Such revelation often relates to grand affairs. It sometimes contains words the meanings of which have to be sought for in a dictionary. Sometimes I have received such a revelation in an

alien language like English [this is a translation of a text in Urdu: *Editor*] or some other with which I am totally unacquainted.

(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol.1, pp. 260-264 sub-footnote 1)

The third form of revelation is communicated to one's heart in a gentle manner. A phrase passes through the heart, which does not comprehend all the wonders in perfection that are a characteristic of the revelation that we have just described. It is not necessarily preceded by any faintness or slumber. It can be received in complete wakefulness. It is felt as if someone has breathed those words into the heart or has thrown them at the heart. One might be partially awake or might be completely awake and one suddenly feels that new words have entered one's breast. Sometimes, immediately on entering the heart, the words manifest their forceful light and one becomes aware that these words are being conveyed by God. The revelation conveys comfort, satisfaction and contentment to the heart as the air that one breathes

conveys comfort to the heart and limbs. A disturbed mind feels its joy and coolness. This is a mystery of which the common people are unaware but men of understanding who have been bestowed experience of Divine mysteries by the Bountiful Lord understand it well. I have experienced such revelation on many occasions.

The fourth form of revelation is that some matter is disclosed by God Almighty in a true dream, or an angel assuming human shape discloses a hidden matter, or a writing appears on a piece of paper or on a stone, etc., which discloses hidden mysteries, or other similar experiences.

[Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol.1, pp. 273-274 sub-footnote 1]

The fifth form of revelation is that which has nothing to do with man's heart. One hears a voice from outside as if someone were speaking from behind a curtain, but the voice is very delicious and cheerful and is conveyed with some speed and the heart derives pleasure from it. One's mind is deep in thought and suddenly this

voice is heard and one is surprised from where it has proceeded and who is addressing one. One looks for someone from whom the voice could have proceeded and then one realises that it has come from an angel. It generally conveys some good news when one is anxious and sorrowful or is gripped by fear on hearing some bad news that turns out to have been false. Unlike the second form, such revelation is not the consequence of repeated supplications. An angel speaks suddenly when God Almighty so desires, contrary to the second type of revelation when a response is received from God Almighty to repeated supplications; a hundred supplications receive a hundred replies from the Absolute Benefactor as has been my own experience.

[Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol.1, pp. 287-288 sub-footnote I]

I have several times seen Jesus^(as) in a vision and have also met some of the Prophets in complete wakefulness. I have also seen and conversed many times with our lord and master Muhammad, the

chosen one^(saw) in complete wakefulness, which was entirely free from slumber or absent-mindedness. I have also met other deceased people at their graves or on other occasions and have talked to them in complete wakefulness. I therefore know well that such a meeting with deceased people in complete wakefulness, and talking to them and shaking hands with them, is quite possible. There is no difference whatsoever between this wakefulness and normal wakefulness. One feels that one is in this world with the same ears and eyes and tongue and yet one feels as if one were in another world. People of the world are not aware of such wakefulness for they are heedless. This wakefulness is bestowed from heaven. It is bestowed upon those who are granted new senses. This is true and is a fact.

[Masih Hindustan Mein, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol.15, pp. 36-37]

Hadhrat ‘Uthman Al-Ghani Ibn ‘Affan^(ra)

The Great Lover of Allah

By Amer Safir – London, UK

Introduction

Hadhrat ‘Uthman Ghani ibn Affan^(ra) was the third Khalifah (Successor) after the demise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw). A man of matchless modesty, he was born into the powerful Umayyad family of Makkah, and became an extremely wealthy merchant before his conversion to Islam. After the demise of ‘Umar^(ra), ‘Uthman^(ra) was chosen by a counsel to succeed ‘Umar^(ra).

His main achievement was centralising the institution of Khilafat, its related administrative set-up, and most importantly, compiling an official version of the Holy Qur’an. His tenure, however, was also marked as a time of great civil wars and unrest among Muslims. His assassination at the hands of a rebellious group signified the start of the first *fitnah*, a series of civil wars that threatened to tear the unity of the followers of Muhammad^(saw) apart.

Background

His full name was ‘Uthman bin Affan bin Abu Al-’As bin Umayyah bin ‘Abd Shams bin ‘Abd Munaf bin Qusai bin Kilab bin Murrah bin Ka’b bin Lu’ayy bin Ghalib. He was a close relative of Prophet Muhammad^(saw), as his maternal grandmother was the real sister of the Prophet’s paternal grandfather, ‘Abdul-Muttalib. It was through this link that ‘Uthman^(ra) and the Prophet^(saw) were related as cousins.

‘Uthman^(ra) was of middle height, fair complexion, had a full beard and curly-hair, was large-limbed, and had the most beautiful teeth. His most distinguishing physical feature was his exceptionally handsome face. It is not unusual for people to be described as beautiful or as possessing attractive facial features. Hadhrat ‘Uthman^(ra), however, was unmatched. It seems that whoever

gazed upon his face unanimously agreed that they had never seen anyone more handsome than him. “Abdullah ibn Hazm al-Mazini is reported to have said:

‘I saw ‘Uthman ibn Affan and I have never seen a man or a woman with a more beautiful face than him.’¹

It was solely a grace from Allah that he was granted with such excellent physical attributes. This alone, however, is not the only grace with which he was blessed. When one ponders on ‘Uthman’s life, it is clear that he was rewarded with numerous, remarkable and unique blessings, showing that he was a particularly beloved servant of Allah. One other such bounty was his great resemblance in terms of physical appearance to the Holy Prophet^(saw). Hadhrat ‘A’isha^(ra) said to ‘Uthman’s wife, Umm Kulthum^(ra), who was also the daughter of the Prophet^(saw):

‘Your husband, of all men, is the one who resembles your grandfather Ibrahim and your father Muhammad.’²

In another saying, Abu Hurairah^(ra) relates that the Holy Prophet^(saw) said:

“Uthman, of my companions, most resembles me in character.”³

The Holy Prophet^(saw) held ‘Uthman^(ra) in the highest esteem and gave two of his daughters in marriage to him. ‘Uthman^(ra) first married Ruqayyah^(ra) before the Prophethood of Muhammad^(saw), but she died during the Battle of Badr. It was a phenomenal honour for ‘Uthman^(ra) to have married the daughter of the greatest of all Prophets^(saw). This honour was doubled, because when Ruqayyah^(ra) passed away, the Prophet^(saw) gave his second daughter, Umm Kulthum^(ra), to ‘Uthman^(ra). This occurred soon after the Battle of Uhud took place. The Prophet^(saw) said:

‘Get ‘Uthman married. Even if I had a third [daughter] I would have got him married, and I did not get him married except through revelation from Allah.’⁴

It is evident from these words that the Prophet^(saw) had his daughters married to 'Uthman^(ra) solely for the reason that he had been instructed '*through revelation from Allah*'. 'Ali^(ra) once heard the Prophet^(saw) say to 'Uthman^(ra):

'Even if I had forty daughters I would marry them to you, one after another, until none of them remained.'⁵

Having had the unique privilege of marrying two of the daughters of the Prophet^(saw), 'Uthman^(ra) was known as '*Dhun-Nurayn*', the possessor of two lights. It was an immense honour for 'Uthman^(ra), one that is unprecedented in history, and one that could only occur through Allah's grace and to one that was exceptionally near to Allah. As 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar relates:

'My maternal uncle Hussain al-Jufi said, "Do you realise why 'Uthman was called the Possessor of Two Lights?" I said, "No." He said, "No-one other than 'Uthman" has ever been united to two daughters of a prophet since Allah created

Adam (nor will anyone be) until the Hour arises '⁶

'Uthman^(ra) and his first wife Ruqayyah^(ra) were a very congenial couple, and it is apparent that the Prophet^(saw) himself thought so too. Usamah ibn Zaid relates:

'The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, sent me to 'Uthman's house with a dish in which was meat. I went in, and there was Ruqayyah, may Allah be pleased with her, seated. I began to look at the face first of Ruqayyah and then of 'Uthman, again and again. When I returned, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, questioned me and asked me, "Did you go in to them?" I said. "Yes." He said, "Have you seen a couple more beautiful than them?" I said, "No, Messenger of Allah."⁷

Like Abu Bakr^(ra) and Umar^(ra), 'Uthman^(ra) was also a merchant by trade. He was extremely wealthy, a millionaire by today's standards, and was considered to be one of

the richest men in all of Makkah. He never, however, displayed any boastfulness or pride, and never did he take wine in the age of ignorance before the laws of Islam had been introduced. He belonged to one of the most powerful families of Makkah, the well-known and influential Umayyad clan, a fact that later would prove crucial to the plight of the Muslims during the Treaty of Hudaibiyah.

Early days as a Muslim

He was the fourth convert to Islam after Abu Bakr^(ra), Khadijah^(ra) and Zaid^(ra), and was about thirty-five years of age when he converted through Abu Bakr^(ra). Despite being very wealthy, he was amongst the most generous of the companions of the Prophet^(saw). From the day he entered Islam he would set a slave free every Friday.⁸

During the early years of the Prophet's ministry, persecution against the Muslims in Makkah was at its most intense. It was common for Muslims to endure torture and merciless beatings at the hands of the non-believers.

'Uthman^(ra) was a member of a powerful clan, and had been brought up in relative luxury and ease. Yet he bore the full brunt of the hardships faced by the Muslims. He was tied up by his uncle, Hakam bin Abi'l-'Aas, and received a harsh beating. 'Uthman^(ra) displayed the utmost composure and faced this persecution without any hint of disapproval.⁹ Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn al-Harith at-Taymi relates:

'When 'Uthman bin Affan became a Muslim, his paternal uncle, Al-Hakam ibn Abi'l-'Aas ibn Umayyah took hold of him, bound him with rope, and said, "Do you wish to leave the religion of your fathers for an innovated deen? By Allah, I will not leave you until you give up that which you are involved in." 'Uthman said, "By Allah, I will not give it up nor abandon it." When Al-Hakam saw his firmness in his deen he left him.'¹⁰

When the oppression reached an intolerable level, the Prophet^(saw) gathered his followers, and told

them of a land to the West where they could practice their faith without fear of retribution under a just ruler. A group of Muslim men, women and children thus migrated to Abyssinia. Amongst this small party of emigrants was 'Uthman^(ra). He took part in two migrations, first to Abyssinia¹¹, and later to Madinah. Anas relates:

'The first one to emigrate with his family to the Abyssinians was 'Uthman ibn Affan. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "May Allah accompany the two of them. 'Uthman is the first to emigrate with his family for the sake of Allah, since Lut (Prophet Lot)".¹²

When the Makkans discovered that a band of Muslim refugees had fled their hometown, they hatched a plan to force their return. After failing to convince the King of Abyssinia to hand them over, the Makkans began a rumour in Abyssinia that all of Makkah was under the fold of Islam. The incident of the so-called Satanic Verses about which orientalist have made much hue and cry is

also reported to have occurred at this time. Some Muslims then returned to Makkah only to find that the story had been false.¹³ 'Uthman^(ra) was also amongst this party.

In keeping with the prevalent Arab tradition, a returning emigrant had to seek protection from a chief or high ranking resident. As the son of a prominent Makkan chief, 'Uthman^(ra) was given protection by Walid bin Mughirah, a friend of his father, and was thus able to live in peace. When he saw the plight of the other Muslims in Makkah who continued to endure severe persecution, he became very disheartened.¹⁴ How could he have such protection whilst his fellow Muslims continued to suffer from cruelty? He went to Walid bin Mughirah and renounced his protection and this was accordingly announced in Makkah.

An instance occurred soon after where the chiefs of Makkah were seated in a gathering, listening to Labid, the poet-laureate of Arabia. Poets were held in high esteem by the Arabs and wielded considerable influence. They were seen

as leaders of the people and the poet-laureate therefore held an especially lofty status. Labid read a line which interpreted as, *all graces are limited*. Such was the strength of faith of 'Uthman^(ra) that he bravely contradicted Labid and said:

'The graces of Paradise will be everlasting.'¹⁵

In his position as poet-laureate, Labid was not used to being contradicted. What made it an even more bold act on the part of 'Uthman^(ra) was the fact that the Chiefs of the Makkans were also present. Labid became infuriated and said:

'Quraish, your guests were not insulted like this before. Whence has this fashion begun?'

To alleviate Labid's temper, a man from the gathering arose and said:

'Go on and take no notice of this fool.'

'Uthman^(ra), however, remained steadfast to his statement, and

argued that he had said nothing wrong whatsoever. The man who had stood up could take this disrespect to Labid no longer. He pounced on 'Uthman^(ra), delivering him a strong blow, knocking one of his eyes out.

Walid, whose protection 'Uthman^(ra) had denounced, was also present amongst the gathering. He was close to 'Uthman's father and could not bear to see his deceased friend's son being treated with such brutality. According to Arab custom, it was wrong for him to help someone who was not officially under his protection. He was therefore unable to help 'Uthman^(ra).¹⁶ In exasperation he turned to 'Uthman^(ra) and said:

'Son of my friend, you would have saved your eye, had you not renounced my protection. You have to thank yourself for it.'

'Uthman's reply shows the unrelenting fervour he had for Allah and His messenger:

'I have longed for this. I

lament not over the loss of one eye, because the other waits for the same fate. Remember while the Prophet suffers, we want no peace.’¹⁷

‘Uthman^(ra) has often been accused by non-Muslims, and even by some Muslims, of weak character. Those who accuse allege that, especially when he became a Khalifah, he did not always stand up for what was right, and infer that he was often too weak to confront falsehood. Nothing could be further from the truth.

His daring reply to Labid demonstrates the unquestionable strength of his faith and character, and the unflinching love he had for the Holy Prophet^(saw). ‘Uthman^(ra) cared not that the most important people of Makkah were sitting before him, and neither did he let traditions stand in his way when speaking out and defending the truth. The strength of his love for Allah was so powerful and intense that it was impossible for him to let anyone, whatever their status or position, infer that they were superior to Allah.

The strength of ‘Uthman’s faith can be gauged in light of the following saying of the Holy Prophet^(saw) where he explains how a Muslim should react having observed wrongdoing taking place:

‘He who amongst you sees something abominable should modify it with the help of his hand; and if he has not strength enough to do that, then he should do it with his tongue; and if he has not strength enough to do even that, then he should (at least abhor it) from his heart; and that is the least of faith.’¹⁸

The Prophet^(saw) has advised Muslims on three courses of action that can be used to stop evil; physical intervention, vocal disapproval, and rejection in the heart. The latter action according to the Prophet^(saw) displays the weakest kind of faith, whilst the first choice demonstrates the strongest conviction for Islam. In light of this quote, ‘Uthman^(ra) demonstrated that he was of the latter category – he possessed the strongest faith. He bravely stood

up to contradict the most important and feared people in Makkah, and in the process defied all protocols and precedent. When he was rebuked by the angry poet laureate and a member of the crowd, he remained steadfast and continued to vociferously defend the honour of the Prophet^(saw) and Allah. He not only offered his vocal disapproval; when he protested, he was attacked and lost his eye. In this way he also physically stood up against the falsehood of the Makkans. Surely this was not the action of a weak man, rather of a person of noble and fearless disposition.

Character

'Uthman's generosity and his altruistic nature in giving alms and helping the needy is an example for all to aspire to follow. Despite being one of the richest men in Makkah, he was also one of the most generous. When a famine occurred in Madinah, 'Uthman^(ra) rose to the fore and gave food to the needy. In another instance, the people of Madinah were suffering due to a shortage of water. A Jewish person owned a well, which he would only sell at a very

high price. 'Uthman^(ra) purchased the well for thirty-five thousand dirhams and gave it to the Muslims of Madinah for their use.¹⁹

Once a famine broke out during the Khilafat of Abu Bakr^(ra). The people were suffering greatly due to the shortage of food. News reached the people that 'Uthman^(ra) had entered Madinah with a huge supply of grain. The starving people of the city all rushed to him, pleading that he sell the grain at an affordable price.²⁰ 'Uthman^(ra) said:

'Bear witness that I have given away all the food grains to the poor and needy of Al-Madinah.'²¹

Whenever the Prophet^(saw) called for Muslims to give alms for any purpose, 'Uthman^(ra) would always give bountifully. Because of this extraordinary generosity, the Prophet^(saw) often praised 'Uthman^(ra) highly. 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Khabbab narrates:

'I witnessed the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him

peace, urging [people to] support the Army of Difficulty, and then 'Uthman ibn Affan said: "Messenger of Allah, I will be responsible for one hundred camels with their saddle blankets and their saddles, in the way of Allah." Then he further urged people to support the army and 'Uthman said, "Messenger of Allah, I will be responsible for two hundred camels with their saddle blankets and their saddles, in the way of Allah." Then he further urged people to support the army and 'Uthman said, "Messenger of Allah, I will be responsible for three hundred camels with their saddle blankets and their saddles, in the way of Allah." Then the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came down (from the minbar) saying, "There will be nothing at all against 'Uthman whatever he does after this."²²

His generosity for the poor was such that he earned the title *Ghani* (meaning rich), which people duly incorporated into his name.

One of 'Uthman's most outstanding characteristics was his exemplary modesty. This was particularly exceptional in the context of his background. He belonged to one of the most powerful families in Makkah. His influential family ties coupled with his immense wealth meant that 'Uthman^(ra) possessed a considerable social status. A lesser person in the same position, or one with less faith, could quite easily have shown arrogance in so many different ways. 'Uthman^(ra), however, displayed in his persona a matchless modesty. An interesting example in relation to 'Uthman's modesty is related by Al-Hasan, who said:

'If he were in the middle of the house and the door were locked, then he would take off his clothes in order to pour water over himself. Modesty would prevent him from raising [straightening] his backbone.'²³

Often people who are exceptionally handsome or beautiful often display pride in being more attractive than others.

Similarly, people with exceptional wealth, or who hold special positions of office, are also commonly known to show an air of superiority over others. This can be discerned by the boastful manner in which they walk, talk, and interact with other people. 'Uthman^(ra), was probably the richest man in Makkah, the most handsome person in all of Arabia, and belonged to one the most powerful and feared families, the great Umayyad clan. Not only was he humble, but, 'Uthman^(ra) displayed such modesty in his character that it was, in fact, unparalleled. His unrivalled modesty was most surely a result of his unflinching faith in Allah, and to his complete submission to his master the Holy Prophet^(saw). Aisha^(ra) relates that the Prophet^(saw) gathered his clothes around him when 'Uthman^(ra) appeared and said:

'Should I not feel shy of a man of whom the angels are shy?'²⁴

In another saying, Ibn Umar related that the Prophet^(saw) said:

'The angels are shy of

'Uthman, just as they are shy of Allah and His Messenger.'²⁵

Role under the Prophet^(saw)

He was one of the closest companions to the Holy Prophet^(saw) and amongst the most respected and learned. He memorised the entire Holy Qur'an and narrated one hundred and forty six Hadith from the Messenger of Allah. 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Hatib said:

'I saw none of the companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who, when he narrated a hadith, narrated it more completely and more excellently than 'Uthman ibn Affan, unless it was a man who was in awe of hadith.'²⁶

He was also the most knowledgeable in regards to the rights of Hajj [pilgrimage], and after him was Umar^(ra). He was ordained by the Prophet^(saw) as one of the ten companions promised the glad tidings of heaven whilst yet still alive. The Holy Prophet^(saw) appointed 'Uthman^(ra) as his deputy in charge of Madinah

during military campaigns to Dhat ar Riqa' and Ghatafan.

It has been related that 'Uthman's first wife, Ruqayyah^(ra) fell ill and passed away during the Battle of Badr. Under the instruction of the Prophet^(saw), 'Uthman^(ra) stayed behind on account of his wife's illness, and thus was unable to take part in the Battle. The Prophet^(saw), however, counted 'Uthman^(ra) amongst the people of Badr and even distributed a share of the spoils as a reward to him, saying:

'Uthman should be included among the Companions of Badr.'²⁷

Treaty of Hudaibiyah

In February 628, the Prophet^(saw) headed for Makkah from Madinah with one thousand five hundred companions. He had been instructed by God to enter the vicinity of the Ka'abah and perform 'Umrah (lesser pilgrimage). The Muslims had not returned to Makkah since the Prophet's migration to Madinah. 'Uthman^(ra) played a very important role in events

surrounding the Muslims return to Makkah.

The Prophet^(saw) with his companions reached Makkah and camped nearby at Hudaibiyah. He would not enter to perform the circuit of the Ka'abah without the permission of the Makkans first and thus decided to make contact with them. Various chiefs and prominent Makkans came to the Prophet^(saw) to parley with him. None, however, would grant his request to perform the circuit and leave immediately after.²⁸

The Prophet^(saw) decided that a wise person from amongst the Muslims should be sent to the Quraish of Makkah, who could put forward the Muslim's viewpoint. First Kharash bin Umayyah of Khuzaa' was sent. When he entered Makkah he was attacked and threatened with death. Thereafter the Prophet^(saw) thought of sending someone with influence amongst the Makkan chiefs and their tribes. Umar^(ra) was first suggested, however, he excused himself on the grounds that the Quraish bore great animosity towards him, and neither did he

have influential relatives who could protect him.²⁹ The Prophet^(saw) decided finally to send 'Uthman^(ra) as an envoy on behalf of the Muslims, as he belonged to one of the most powerful families in the city.

'Uthman^(ra) agreed to the task, and was provided with a written statement from the Holy Prophet^(saw). Addressed to the leaders of the Quraish, the statement explained the purpose of their visit to perform Umra, and that having completed this and offering their sacrifices they would return peacefully to Madinah. The Prophet^(saw) also instructed 'Uthman^(ra) to contact the poor Muslims of Makkah, to reaffirm that if they continued in their steadfastness God would open a way for them.³⁰

'Uthman^(ra) had many influential relatives in Makkah. When he entered the city they came out and surrounded him, placing him under their protection. When he went to Abu Sufyan and to other chiefs of the city he told them:

'We come to visit the Holy

House, and to honour it, and to perform worship there. We have brought sacrificial animals with us and after slaying them we shall depart in peace.³¹

He showed them the written statement produced by the Holy Prophet^(saw) to try and persuade them that their only intention was to perform the Umra in peace. The chiefs examined the written confirmation with avid interest. 'Uthman's talks with the chiefs unceremoniously continued as he sought to convince them to heed to their requests. The chiefs told 'Uthman^(ra) that he would be allowed to perform the circuit of the Ka'abahh if he wished to, but they remained adamantly resolved that the Muslims should not be permitted to enter Makkah under any circumstance that year. 'Uthman^(ra) declined their offer, refusing to forsake the Prophet^(saw) for his own desires; he rejected permission to perform the circuit unless it was in the company of his Master.³² Failing to persuade the Makkan chiefs, he thus made preparations to return to the Prophet^(saw) and the Muslim camp.

At this time a segment of the Quraish withheld 'Uthman^(ra) in Makkah thinking that by detaining him they could negotiate better terms. Because he had not returned in due time to the Muslim camp, a rumour was spread that 'Uthman^(ra) had been murdered.³³ The false rumour was heard by the Prophet^(saw) who gathered his companions and said:

'The life of an envoy is held sacred among all nations. I have heard that the Makkans have murdered 'Uthman. If this is true, we have to enter Makkah, whatever the consequences.'

Standing under the shade of an Acacia tree with the Muslims all around him, he demanded an oath from the faithful that they would fight for 'Uthman's freedom to the death:

'Those who promise solemnly that if they have to go further, they will not turn back save as victors, should come forward and take the oath on my hand.'³⁴

The Holy Prophet^(saw) had barely completed his pledge when all the one and a half thousand companions clamoured over one another to reach for the Prophet's hand to take the oath.³⁵ When all the Muslims present had finished the pledge placing their palms on the hand of the Prophet^(saw), he himself placed his right hand over his left, and said:

'This is the hand of 'Uthman; for if he had been here, he would not have lagged behind anyone in making the holy bargain, but he is at the time occupied with the work of God and His messenger.'³⁶

This oath is known as the *Pledge of the Tree* and holds a special place in the history of Islam. As Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad^(ra) relates:

'Everyone of those who took the oath remained proud of it to the end of his days. Of the fifteen hundred present on the occasion, not one held back. They all promised that if the Muslim envoy had been murdered, they would not go

back. Either they would take Makkah before dusk, or they would all die fighting.’³⁷

It is also mentioned in the Holy Qur’an in the following verse:

Surely, Allah was well-pleased with the believers when they were swearing allegiance to thee under the Tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquillity on them, and He rewarded them with a victory near at hand. (Ch.48:V.19)

Before the pledge had been completed, ‘Uthman^(ra) returned to the camp. He informed the Holy Prophet^(saw) that the Makkans would not permit the Muslims to perform Umra until next year. Subsequently an agreement was reached in a settlement known as the ‘Treaty of Hudaibiyah’.

The role ‘Uthman^(ra) played in the subsequent history of Islam and under both Abu Bakr^(ra) and ‘Umar^(ra) has been featured in *The Review of Religions* (November 2007).

Khilafat Election

‘Uthman^(ra) was elected as the third Khalifah of Islam by a panel composed of senior companions who pledged allegiance to him three days after Hadhrat Umar^(ra) was buried in Madinah. ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Awf^(ra), one of the six members of the Khilafat committee, decided to consult other members of the group in strict confidence to advise him about the right choice for the Khalifat. Speaking to ‘Uthman^(ra) in private he said: ‘If I don’t pledge allegiance to you who would you point out to me?’ He replied: ‘Ali.’

He then asked the same to ‘Ali^(ra), ‘If I don’t pledge allegiance to you who would you point out to me?’ He said: ‘Uthman.’

When he asked another member of the committee, Zubayr, ‘Whom would you point out to me?’ He was told, ‘Ali or ‘Uthman.’

He then asked another member, Sa’ad, ‘Whom would you indicate to me? Because, as for me and you, we do not want it.’ Sa’ad said, ‘Uthman.’³⁸

In this manner 'Abd ar-Rahman sought counsel from various people and he is reported to have said that amongst the people of sound judgement, no-one saw any equal to 'Uthman^(ra).

Thus professing his faith in 'Uthman's Khilafat he took 'Uthman's hand and said, 'We pledge allegiance to you according to the Sunna of Allah, the Sunnah of His Messenger and the Sunnah of the two khalifas after him.'³⁹ 'Uthman^(ra) was thus chosen as the third Khalifah of Islam.

Achievements

His Khilafat is divided into two periods, between the first half, where there were significant developments and achievements, in contrast to the second half of his tenure, characterised by violence and unrest and his attempts to quell it. For the first six years of his Khilafat, the Muslim Ummah community enjoyed relative prosperity. Az-Zuhri said:

'Uthman ruled as khalifah for twelve years. For six years he

ruled without people criticising him at all.'⁴⁰

Those first six years, as Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad states, were a '*period of peace, progress and prosperity*.'⁴¹ The Muslim army conquered many new territories. The Muslims were increasing in ascendancy, there was unity, and their success meant the Muslims were in a confident mood.

Militarily, the first of the major victories was the conquest of Alexandria, where the Muslim army from Cairo defeated Heraclius' son, Constantine. Thereafter, came success in Cyprus. 'Uthman^(ra) gave permission to "Abdullah bin Sa'd to lead the Muslim army to Libya in North Africa. In Armenia, the Muslims managed to conquer most of this area all the way up to parts of Iran, Afghanistan, and Sind in the subcontinent of India.⁴²

According to Abu 'Ubaid, Abu Bakr^(ra), 'Umar^(ra), Uthman^(ra) and 'Ali^(ra) had committed the Holy Qur'an to memory. Probably 'Uthman's biggest achievement

was his initiative to preserve the Holy Qur'an in book form, a project assigned to him by Abu Bakr^(ra). 'Uthman^(ra) decided that all variations should be forbidden and a single method of enunciating words should be dictated. One of the allegations made even today is that the Qur'an standardised by Hadhrat 'Uthman^(ra) was different from the one revealed to the Prophet^(saw). The opponents argue that because Uthman^(ra) made changes to the text of the Qur'an, the accuracy of the sacred text as a whole is brought into disrepute.⁴³ It is important to provide some background to the reasons why 'Uthman^(ra) chose to promulgate a single standard copy of the Holy Qur'an, because it is that very version of the Qur'an that is used by millions of Muslims today.

At the time of his Khilafat, the various tribes of Arabia pronounced words of the Qur'an in their own distinctive style, and consequently non-believers assumed that the differences in pronunciation meant that there were variations in the text of the Qur'an. In fact, the variations

arose out of differing tribal dialects.⁴⁴ Amongst the many tribes of Arabia, people would pronounce certain words according to their own tribal practices e.g. 'q' in Najaf and is pronounced as 'j' in Egypt to this day. These differences did not affect the meaning of the words being recited in any way.⁴⁵ When these tribes accepted Islam the Arabs became united under one social structure, thus abandoning their former tribal practices. Arabic became the common language, and as literacy began to significantly improve, Arabs were able to easily learn the correct pronunciation of Arabic words.⁴⁶

'Uthman^(ra) wisely decided that the thought it wise to forbid all variations even of enunciation of vowel points. He decided on a single method of pronunciation of Qur'anic words.⁴⁷ He sent seven copies of the standardised version of the texts which had been collected in the time of Abu Bakr^(ra), to all parts of the Muslim world. Copies were dispatched over time until almost every Muslim who could read had in his possession a copy of the

standardised version of the sacred text.⁴⁸

Disturbances, Violence and Civil Unrest

'Uthman's Khalifat suffered from civil unrest that began to spread across the Muslim world. Many of the disturbances arose out of disagreement with the decisions made by the Khalifah, whilst the spread of malicious and false rumours also played a significant role in the events that would shape much of 'Uthman's reign. Many of the rumours originated from new converts who lacked understanding of Islam, and were susceptible to false propaganda and the malicious designs of hypocrites. The violence and unrest divided the Muslims and lead to a number of terrible events; a dark period in the history of Islam.

Probably the first signs of discontent came around the year 25AH. After the successful conquest of Armenia, 'Uthman^(ra) reinstated Sa'd bin Abu Waqqas^(ra) as governor of Kufah. When Sa'd^(ra) ran into difficulties, 'Uthman^(ra) replaced him with

Walid bin Uqbah. Walid was a close relative of 'Uthman's, and according to the eminent historian As-Suyuti:

'...that was the first thing for which he was disliked; because he appointed his relatives to posts of authority.'⁴⁹

Subsequent to Walid's appointment, people began spreading rumours to defame him as related by As-Suyuti:

'It has been told as a tale that al-Walid led them in prayer for the dawn prayer with four raka'at when he was drunk, and that then he turned to them and said, "Shall I do more (raka'at) for you?"'⁵⁰

The rumour had spread that the governor was a drunkard. The case was brought before the caliph. When he entered the city and shook hands with Walid, people were upset. 'Uthman^(ra) was reluctant to hand out any punishment because no eye witnesses could confirm the alleged crime. 'Uthman's hesitancy was interpreted as a sign of weakness whilst

others assumed that the Caliph was showing leniency to his own kin. Finally an eyewitness came forth and said that he had seen Walid vomit wine. However, this particular instance is debated by eminent historians such as Tabari, who relate that the eye witness was unreliable.⁵¹ Nevertheless 'Uthman^(ra) decided, after consultation that Walid would be whipped and removed from his post.

In Egypt, 'Uthman's decision to appoint another family member in a prestigious post provoked a similar reaction. Abdullah bin Sa'd^(ra), foster brother to 'Uthman^(ra), was sent to Egypt as governor and to take care of the public treasury. Although renowned for his bravery, some Egyptians were shocked at his appointment over 'Amr bin al-'Aas^(ra), who was kept as only a military officer.⁵² 'Amr^(ra) had far more experience, and was popular amongst the Egyptians. The Egyptians were outraged that the Caliph had dismissed 'Amr^(ra) and handed control over Egypt instead to 'Abdullah^(ra). In addition, when Amr^(ra) was removed, and news

reached the Caesar of Constantinople, he began preparing a formidable army headed by an experienced general to invade Muslim-occupied Alexandria. The result of these events incensed the Muslims so greatly that it led to a revolt against the new governor.⁵³

'Amr^(ra) was subsequently sent back to govern Egypt. He defeated the advancing Romans, causing them to retreat. The situation was quelled thereafter and relative normality ensued in Alexandria and Egypt, although 'Amr^(ra) was once again replaced by 'Abdullah^(ra) as governor. Muhammad bin Abu Hudhaifah and Muhammad bin Abu Bakr began to openly show their opposition to the Khalifah, such was their outrage. They were incensed that 'Uthman^(ra) had chosen 'Abdullah even though the Prophet^(saw) had once shown displeasure at him.⁵⁴

The victories of the army were not without consequence. The strains of army life led to discontent and unrest amongst the soldiers. They were covering huge distances,

fighting in summer and winter, and spending a long time away from their families. In addition, 'Uthman's policy of not permitting Commanders and rich Makkans to possess private land in Iraq and other areas led to further discontent.⁵⁵

In similar fashion, unrest began to spread at his choice of governors, and other decisions. Around 33AH in Kufah, decisions taken by the newly appointed governor, Sa'eed bin Al-'Aas^(ra), led to widespread civil unrest. When Sa'eed^(ra) tried to suppress the uprising, rebels beat him unconscious. As a result, he imposed strict counter-measures to try and quell the disobedience.⁵⁶ The changes only made the situation worse as people reacted angrily. Opposition against the governor became opposition against the Khalifah. People took to the streets; however, eventually the situation was resolved when 'Uthman^(ra) sent the rebels to the governor of Hims, who was able to pacify the protestors. They were then allowed to return to Kufah.⁵⁷

It is difficult, writing more than 1400 years after an event, to

determine the motives and intentions of the people involved in the unrest. At times, it seemed like segments of the Muslims were looking for any opportunity to criticise the Khalifah, without good reason. For example, the Muslims of Madinah were outraged that 'Uthman^(ra) had given many of the important posts in the city to members of his own Umayyad family. They chose to ignore the possibility that he may have appointed these people on merit, rather than due to personal affinity. Karen Armstrong supports this view and argues that pride and arrogance caused these Muslims to object to 'Uthman^(ra). She says:

'They accused him of nepotism, even though many of the Umayyad officials were men of great ability. 'Uthman had, for example, appointed Mu'awiyah, the son of Muhammad's old enemy, Abu Sufyan, governor of Syria. He was a good Muslim, and a skilled administrator, known for his steadiness of character and his measured assessment of circumstances. But it

seemed wrong to the Muslims of Madinah, who still boasted of being the ansar (helpers) of the Prophet, that they should be passed over in favour of Abu Sufyan's offspring.'⁵⁸

Abdullah bin Saba

The main protagonist of the civil unrest and opposition to the Khalifah was a Jewish convert, 'Abdullah bin Saba. He began hatching plans against the Khilafat, and his plot spread to pockets across the Muslim world, resulting ultimately in the martyrdom of 'Uthman^(ra). Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad provides a background on 'Abdullah:

'He proclaimed himself a devoted admirer and a zealous champion of the house of the Holy Prophet^(saw). In this way he started a campaign against Othman. The chief source of his recruits were the newly converted Muslims who knew but little about the fundamentals of Islam. To mould them to his own views, he used artful means. He was a past master in the art of innovations.'⁵⁹

According to Akbar Shah Najeebabadi:

“Abdullah bin Saba was antagonistic to Islam on one hand and was hostile to 'Uthman ibn Affan^(ra) on the other. He was, therefore, restless to take his revenge on the Khalifah.'⁶⁰

After a fruitless period in Madinah, 'Abdullah moved to Basra and convinced many innocent Muslims that the Khalifah should be removed and replaced by 'Ali^(ra). To justify his claim he said that the Prophet^(saw) had chosen 'Ali^(ra) as executor of his will. He gained support from new converts from Iraq and Iran, but his propaganda was thwarted by the governor of Basra, and he was expelled to Kufah. He left behind secret instructions for his followers. In Kufah he found other people mischievously plotting against the Khilafat and therefore, he needed no encouragement to continue.⁶¹

He established himself as a pious person and soon gained respect and status. But here too the

governor, Saeed bin Al-'Aas^(ra), began to suspect his designs and 'Abdullah was again forced to leave for Syria. Once again he left a significant group of followers determined to help him. After failing to make headway in Syria, he moved to Egypt, this time treading carefully so as to not raise suspicions; Abdullah still managed to gain followers easily. The Egyptians were dissatisfied with the appointment of Abdullah bin Sa'd^(ra) as governor. Moreover, the governor himself was too distracted to notice his mischief.⁶²

Abdullah began a letter campaign to Basrah, Kufah, Damascus, Egypt and Madinah detailing complaints against various governors. He described the governors as harsh and unfair in their rulings. The letters also accused the Khalifah of favouring his own family, and blamed him for an inability to dismiss despotic Muslim rulers. His malicious campaign was gathering strength among the new converts and was spreading across the Muslim world.

When 'Uthman^(ra) came to know

of these happenings, he sent 'Ammar bin Yasir^(ra) to Egypt and Muhammad bin Masalamah^(ra) to Kufah to investigate and report back. 'Ammar^(ra), was prevented from returning to Madinah, and was told not to follow what they saw as the deplorable ways of 'Uthman^(ra).⁶³ From Kufah, Muhammad bin Masalamah^(ra) reported that people were openly plotting against the Khilafat and were restless. Sa'eed^(ra), the governor, decided to depart for Madinah to personally relate the situation in his city. He was a strict governor, and when he left Kufah, the rebellious elements came out into the open, publicly voicing criticism.⁶⁴

Emergency Conference

'Uthman^(ra) gave urgent orders for all governors to meet him for a conference in Madinah to discuss the growing discord in the Muslim Ummah. Mu'awiyah^(ra) from Syria, 'Abdullah^(ra) from Egypt, Sa'eed^(ra) from Kufah, 'Abdullah^(ra) from Basra, as well as governors from smaller provinces and also senior Muslims were all called for urgent consultations.⁶⁵

'Uthman^(ra) rejected suggestions to use brute force. Mu'awiyah^(ra) recommended that the capital and seat of Khilafat be moved from Madinah to Damascus. 'Uthman^(ra) declined this offer; he could never leave the home of the Prophet^(saw). Mu'awiyah^(ra) then suggested that a part of the Syrian army be posted in Madinah for the safety of the Khalifah. 'Uthman^(ra), however, ever concerned for his people, declined this proposal on the grounds that a large army could cause disturbance to the residents of Madinah.⁶⁶

At the same time, the rebels decided to make for Madinah to put forward their grievances. When they arrived, 'Uthman^(ra) sent two senior Companions to meet the rebels and enquire about their grievances. They reported that the rebels would settle for nothing less than the abdication of 'Uthman^(ra), and were prepared to kill him. 'Uthman^(ra) sought advice from the leaders of the Quraish and the Ansaar. They also suggested the use of force. 'Uthman^(ra) would not kill without justification, and therefore refused

their proposal. Instead he sent for the leaders of the rebel party to discuss their grievances directly. The fact, however, is that the rebels had no intention of listening to his perfect and logical answers – They had evil intentions.

Six allegations were raised against 'Uthman^(ra). He answered them so beautifully and with such overpowering logic, that no honest person could be left with any doubt about his integrity and right to be the Khalifah of the Muslims. The dialogue between the rebels and 'Uthman^(ra) speaks for itself.

The first man stood up and raised the objection: "You unlawfully gave away wealth and property to your relatives; for instance, you once gave the entire booty to 'Abdullah bin Sa'ad." 'Uthman^(ra) replied: "I have given him one-fifth from the one-fifth of the booty. And we have such examples during the Khilafat of Abu Bakr^(ra) and Umar^(ra)."

A second man stood and said: "You have conferred power and rule on your relatives; for instance,

you have appointed Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan governor of Syria. You made 'Abdullah bin 'Amir governor of Basra by deposing Abu Musa Ash'ari; you installed Walid bin Uqbah and then Saeed bin Al-As governors of Kufah by removing Mughirah bin Shu'bah." 'Uthman^(ra) replied: "Those governors are not my relatives but they have the ability to manage the affairs well. However, if they do not deserve the post, I am always ready to change them for others. Thus, I have already put Abu Musa Ash'ari as the governor of Kufah by removing Saeed bin Al-As."

In another report 'Uthman^(ra) said: "Did not the Holy Prophet^(saw) give preference to the Quraish over the rest of the Arabs? And from among the Quraish, did he not give preference to Bani Hashim?"⁶⁷

A third man now stood, objecting: "You have appointed undeserving and inexperienced persons as governors; for instance, 'Abdullah bin 'Amir is a young man and, he should not have been given such a high post." 'Uthman^(ra), replied,

"'Abdullah bin 'Amir is distinguished in prudence, ability and religiosity; being young is not a shortcoming."

Another man raised and rose yet another objection with the Khalifah: "You love family members most, and you give them heavy gifts." 'Uthman^(ra) replied: "Love of the family members is not a sin. And I give them gifts of my own possessions and not from the public treasury. How can I give them anything from the public treasury when I myself do not take a single dirham from there? I am at liberty to give away anything to anybody from my personal property."

Another person arose to the fore to object to 'Uthman^(ra): "You have used your position for yourself and reserved grazing grounds for your camels." 'Uthman^(ra) responded: "When I took charge of the Khalifat, nobody in Al-Madinah had camels more than me. But, today I possess only two camels and that only for the purpose of Hajj, and I do not allow them to go to any meadow. However, there is a reserved grazing ground for the

state camels and I cannot be blamed for this because this has come to me from the past.”

Another objected: “Why did you offer the complete prayer in Mina while it should have been a Qasr (shortened one)?” ‘Uthman^(ra), replied: “Since my family members were then residing in Makkah, it was not valid for me to perform the Qasr prayer.”⁶⁸

The governors left Madinah. The rebels made their final move. In the guise of pilgrims, they convened in their thousands in Madinah pretending to perform Hajj, and there they decided to strike the Khalifah.

Forged letter

When the rebels arrived in Madinah, ‘Uthman^(ra) sent ‘Ali^(ra) to intercede on his behalf. They told ‘Ali^(ra) that they wanted certain high-ranked officials removed. ‘Uthman^(ra) duly replaced the governor of Egypt. Seemingly satisfied that their demands had been met, the rebels departed from Madinah. After a few days, the rebels returned. They were fervent and cordoned off the house of

‘Uthman^(ra). ‘Ali^(ra) enquired as to why they had returned when their demands had been met.

The rebels said that they had captured a slave, sent by ‘Uthman^(ra), with a letter instructing ‘Abdullah bin Sa’ad that a number of the party that had just departed should be killed. The letter also said that appointment of the new governor should be terminated. ‘Ali^(ra) told them: “By Allah this is an act of conspiracy and you are ill-mentioned.” They responded: “Whatever be the case, we have decided to kill the Khalifah.”⁶⁹ ‘Ali^(ra) told them that this story was false. He pointed out that the rebels had come in three different parties, from three routes. How could they all have seen the same slave? Despite the truth, they were intent on mischief.

The Darkest Days In the History of Islam

The Khalifah wrote letters to various people in Muslims lands to come to his aid. Parties rushed from Egypt, Syria, Kufah and Basra to help the Khalifah but none could reach in time to save the life of ‘Uthman^(ra). The rebels

laid siege to his house for forty days and even cut-off the water supply.⁷⁰

Amongst the people who tried to intercede on behalf of the Khalifah was 'Abdullah Bin Salam^(ra), an eminent Jewish convert and Companion of the Prophet^(saw) who had the distinction of being mentioned in the Qur'an (Ch.13:V.44).⁷¹ He offered to guard 'Uthman^(ra) but was asked to speak to the rebel ringleaders to try and remove their grievances and stop their evil actions. Risking his safety, he approached the ringleaders. The rebels, cowards and hypocrites that they were, refused any of his approaches.

'Uthman^(ra) appointed Abu Ayyub al-Ansari^(ra) to lead prayers while he was unable to reach the Mosque. After a few days, the chief of the rebels, al-Ghafiqi bin Harb al-'Akki, began leading the prayers himself. 'Ali^(ra) sent his sons Hasan^(ra) and Hussain^(ra) to stand guard at the door of 'Uthman^(ra) to lock themselves in and stop the rioters from entering 'Uthman's house with their lives. The rebels would think twice

before attacking 'Ali's sons, and thereby risking the wrath of the powerful Banu Hashim tribe.

When the rioters confronted 'Uthman^(ra) with the forged letter, he rejected any involvement in writing it, or having any knowledge of it. They said even if he was telling the truth, he was at fault for being weak in managing the Muslim lands and letting someone write a letter in his name. 'Uthman^(ra) repeatedly attempted to pacify the rebels and explained to them their errors in judgment. At one time he went to the roof, and told the rebels of their responsibilities in Islam and of his own eminent position. Some seemed to forgive him, but the ringleaders intervened to maintain the rebellion.

It is important to note that 'Uthman's martyrdom had been prophesied by the Holy Prophet^(saw) who once mentioned a *fitnah*, or trial, and referring to 'Uthman^(ra) said: "This one will be killed wrongfully in it."

Zaid ibn Thabit heard the Prophet^(saw) say: 'Uthman passed

by me while one of the angels was with me, and he said, "A martyr whose people will kill him. We are shy of him."

In another case, Aisha^(ra) reports that the Prophet^(saw) said: "Uthman, perhaps Allah will robe you in a garment, so if the hypocrites wish to strip it off you, do not take it off until you meet me."

Hence, when he was asked to abdicate the Khilafat, 'Uthman^(ra) replied: "I cannot put off the garment that Allah has caused me to put on."⁷²

The rebels were now becoming restless and concerned that help was soon arriving: so they decided to act quickly. Although 'Ali's son's were guarding 'Uthman^(ra) from inside, the rebels broke in from the rear. What happened next was the darkest chapter in the history of Islam. No Muslim can read an account of what follows without welling up with emotion. On entering, Muhammad bin Abu Bakr, son of Abu Bakr^(ra), got hold of 'Uthman's beard. 'Uthman^(ra) asked him:

"What would your father have thought of you if he had been alive today, to behold what you are doing?"⁷³

He was taken aback by the thought of this, and withdrew. However two men standing behind struck the Khalifah. 'Uthman's wife, Naela, put her hand in front of her husband to protect him and lost three of her fingers. 'Uthman's blood dripped; his blood fell on the pages of the Holy Qur'an that he was reading at the time smearing the Verse that he was reciting;

And if they believe as you have believed, then are they surely guided; but if they turn back, then they are only creating a schism, and Allah will surely suffice thee against them, for He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

(Ch.2: V.138)

The Khalifah, 'Uthman ibn Affan^(ra), had been martyred in the cruellest of ways.

He was laid to rest next to the Holy Prophet^(saw), Abu Bakr^(ra) and

Umar^(ra) in Madinah, thus fulfilling the dream seen by Aisha of three moons having descended in her chambers.

Conclusions

The repercussions of 'Uthman's martyrdom are amply explained by Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad:

'Othman's death is one of the saddest chapters in the history of Islam. This tragedy, without any doubt, shook the foundations of Islam and shattered the bonds of Muslim harmony and accord forever. Subsequent history has borne out that the prediction, which he made a little before his death, has been literally fulfilled. He had said, "By God, if you kill me today, the Muslims will never unite in prayers till the end of days." The Muslims have therefore remained divided into sects and factions..."⁷⁴

Although 'Uthman's life is often seen by non-Muslim writers in the light of his martyrdom alone, it is impossible to overlook the incredible progress and

achievements that occurred in his time. He was one of the most generous companions of the Prophet^(saw), so much so that, as previously mentioned, he earned the title *Ghani*. He was extremely tolerant, as was shown by his repeated willingness to engage in dialogue with the rebels rather than resort to force. Many Muslims drank alcohol prior to accepting Islam but he never drank in his life. He would perform Hajj every year, and without fail fed pilgrims there, arranging meals for them at his own expense.

The Prophet^(saw) held him in incredibly high esteem, giving two of his daughters in marriage to him, and also prayed regularly for him:

"O Allah, I am pleased with 'Uthman; You also be pleased with him. O Allah, I am pleased with 'Uthman; You also be pleased with him. O Allah, I am pleased with 'Uthman; You also be pleased with him."⁷⁵

It has been mentioned that

'Uthman^(ra) would free a slave every Friday. Incredibly, he continued this amiable act when he was besieged by the rebels, and his water was cut off. Despite being the most handsome and very wealthy, he lived humbly and simply, wearing ordinary clothes, and eating simple food. He generously provided for his guests. The same spirit drove him to expand the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah at his own expense. He was also responsible for standardising the Qur'an into one version, which billions of Muslims benefit from today.

During his Khilafat, the number of attendees at Friday Prayers rose to such an extent that some could not even hear the Adhan. 'Uthman^(ra) decided to add a second Adhan before Jumu'ah, a practice which continues today. The Khutbah (sermon) was placed at 'Eid prayers for the first time.

He was accused of being weak, yet his actions speak of a fearless man. When he became a Muslim, he sacrificed his lofty social status, and faced the full brunt of persecution, remaining steadfast.

He stood up to the most powerful men in Makkah and subsequently, as we have seen, lost his eye. He was not weak, but rather a man of reason. A weak man would have abdicated the Khilafat, or at least wilted under the shadow of death. However, he was not afraid of being slain. 'Uthman^(ra) showed that he had total trust in Allah, and complete submission to the Holy Prophet^(saw). He, therefore, completely refused to take off the garments of Khilafat.

Although 'Uthman's life is blessed, it is also one of tragedy. Here was a man graced with such favours from Allah that it seemed as if there was nothing Allah had not bestowed upon him with. A multi-millionaire, handsome, powerful, loved dearly by the Prophet^(saw), son-in law twice to him, yet, this most humble, pious, revered, and knowledgeable man, was opposed as Khalifah like never before. People openly questioned him, taunted him, and refused to accept him. However, the rebels were nothing but utter hypocrites. They refused to listen to reason. Their arrogance prevented them from hearing the

truth. They believed false allegations against 'Uthman^(ra), and despite his eloquent rebuttals of their accusations, they could not absorb what was right. The biggest losers were the Muslims themselves, because the unity of Islam was broken and threatened never to mend.

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Hadhrat ‘Ali^(ra)

By Fazal Ahmad – UK

Introduction

Hadhrat ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib^(ra) Karram Allahu Wajhahu (allah bless his countenance with respect) is revered by millions of Shi’a Muslims around the world, and considered second in importance by them after the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(saw). He was one of the earliest and most significant Muslims and became the 4th Khalifah (Successor) of Islam. He was respected as an authority on the Holy Qur’an and also on Islamic legal matters.

In this article, we will explore his life and role in Islam, his close relationship with the Holy Prophet^(saw), and also the events that lead to the Sunni and Shi’a split in Islam. Care has to be taken to paint a balanced picture rather than blind adherence to the ‘accepted’ history of either side.

Background

‘Ali ibn Abi Talib^(ra) was born in the year 599 in Makkah, Arabia, to

Abu Talib and Fatimah bint Asad. It was Abu Talib, the leader of the Banu Hashim branch of the tribe of Quraish and uncle of the Prophet^(saw), who had taken in the young Muhammad^(saw) many years earlier when he was orphaned as a child and lost his grandfather Shaibah ibn Hashim (‘Abdul Muttalib).

Prophet Muhammad^(saw) grew up and then left the home of Abu Talib to be a trader and was later married to Khadijah^(ra) for whom he worked. It was three years after Muhammad’s^(saw) marriage that his cousin ‘Ali^(ra) was born, when the Prophet^(saw) was thirty.

Relationship with the Prophet^(saw)

Whilst still a young boy, the Prophet^(saw) decided to take ‘‘Ali^(ra) under his wing and act as his guardian as he had seen his uncle struggling to provide for all of his children when he himself had grown up in the household. He had

a great influence on young ‘Ali^(ra). When the Prophet^(saw) had been contemplating God in the cave of Hira near Makkah, it was ‘Ali^(ra) who would take food to him up in the cave. Following a series of other revelations, the Holy Prophet^(saw) had received a Divine revelation:

And warn thy nearest kinsmen.
(Ch:26: V.215)

Holy Prophet^(saw) stood on Mount Safa and called every Quraish tribe by name and warned them of the divine punishment that waited them if they did not give up their evil ways (*Bukhari*). The Holy Prophet^(saw) approached his own family and clan and said:

‘O sons of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, I know of no Arab who has come to his people with a nobler message than mine. I bring you the best of this world and the next. God has commanded me to call you unto Him. Which of you, then, will help me in this, and be my brother, my executor and my successor among you?’

‘Ali^(ra) was just ten years of age and was intrigued watching his cousin and his aunt Khadijah prostrated and uttering praises to their deity ‘Allah’. On questioning the Prophet^(saw), the reply was:

“We were worshipping Allah, the One. I advise you to do the same. Never bend your head before Laat, ‘Uzzah or any other idol.”

Laat, Uzzah and others were the main deities of the local Nabatean tribes and the Makkans, and their idols filled the Ka’abah at that time.

‘Ali^(ra) was impressed by the answers to his questions and immediately professed Islam and became the first free male Muslim. He answered the call of the Messenger saying:

“My eyes are sore and my legs are thin, but I’ll stand by you, O Messenger of Allah!”

Thereafter ‘Ali’s relationship grew stronger as he learned more about the faith and saw first-hand the direct relationship that the

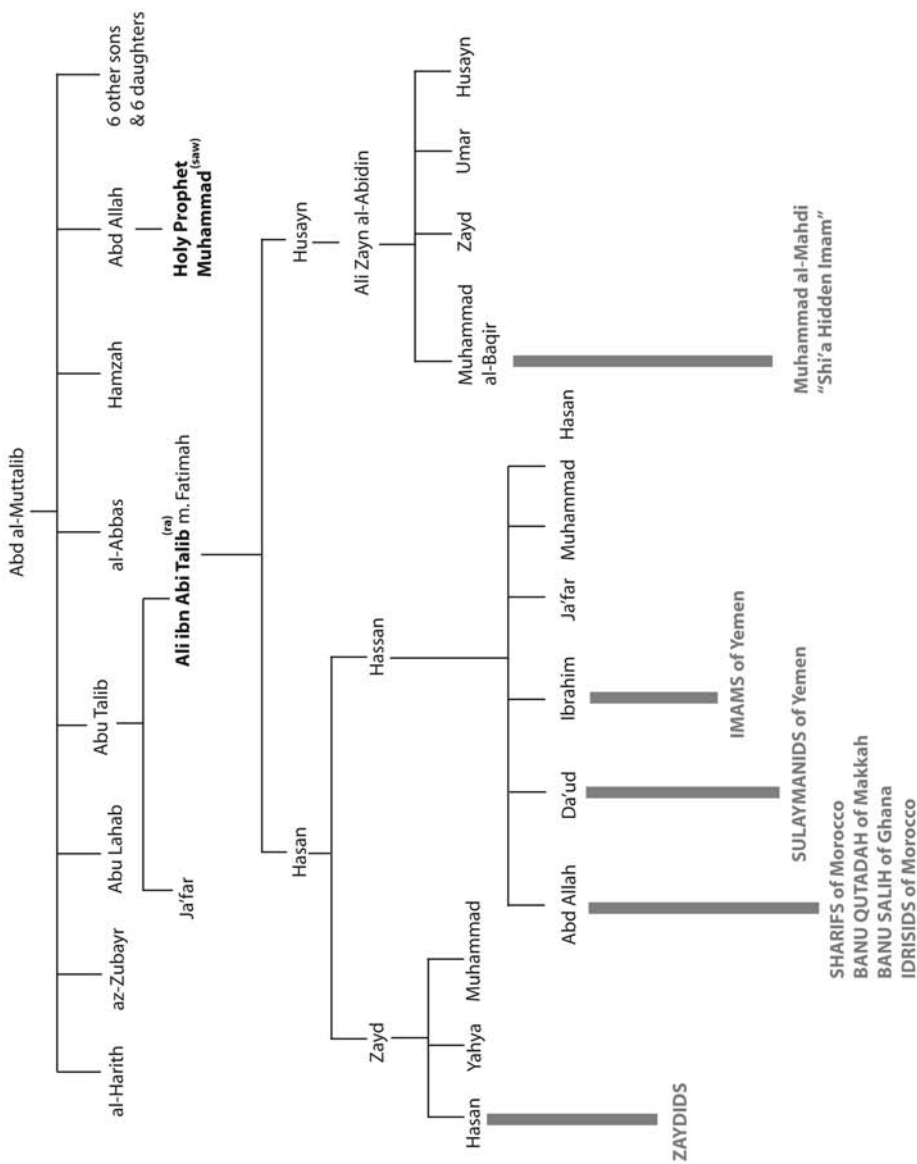
Prophet^(saw) had with God. His father Abu Talib died before he accepted Islam, but had provided full protection to his nephew from the Makkans and had tried to temper the reaction of the Makkan leaders who felt that his new message was driving a wedge between the young and their parents, and between slaves and their masters.

In the year 622, when the Muslims were forced to flee from Makkah to Madinah in order to escape persecution, there were concerns that the Makkans might try to attack and kill the Prophet^(saw) whilst he was still in his home. 'Ali^(ra) was asked to sleep in the Prophet's bed and to be his decoy until the Prophet^(saw) was safely away from the city, which he did. 'Ali^(ra) risked his life but survived. Some accounts even describe how the plotters of the Quraish had surrounded the house and entered in order to kill the person they thought was the Prophet^(saw). When they lifted the blanket, they were shocked to see young 'Ali^(ra) lying there. In all of that time, they had not noticed that the Prophet^(saw) had escaped from the

house at midnight under Divine protection. According to those accounts, the youths then beat and arrested young 'Ali^(ra) but later released him. Some had suggested that he should pay with his life, but his calm attitude led to his release.

He also bravely stayed three days longer in order to return property that had been entrusted with the Prophet^(saw) for safe-keeping back to their owners. At that time, although most Makkans had not accepted Islam, they still regarded the Prophet^(saw) as the most trustworthy person in the tribe and would entrust their precious items with him. 'Ali^(ra) was given the task of returning all items before the Muslims migrated to Yathrib (Madinah). All this time, 'Ali^(ra) faced the danger of attack, but bravely carried out his duties before himself emigrating to Madinah. This selfless sense of duty and bravery would be his hallmark as he matured.

During the ten years that the community lived in exile in Madinah, 'Ali^(ra) was tasked to take part in expeditions, defensive



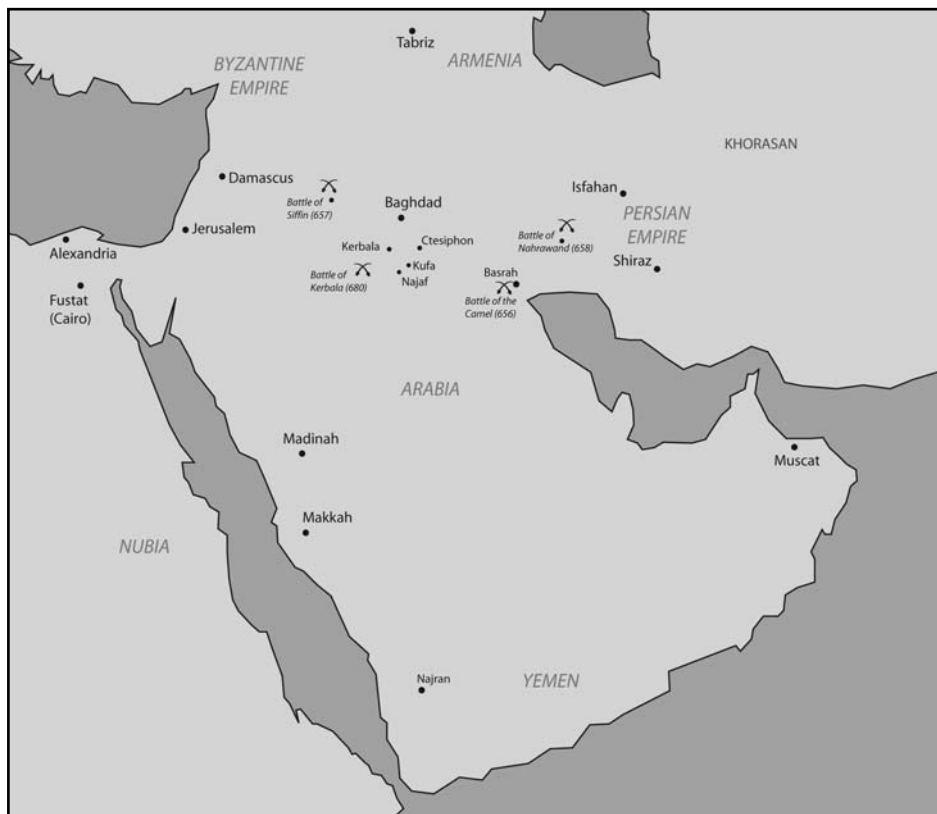
wars and as a messenger. It was at the Battle of Badr in 624 that he first displayed his tenacity whilst facing the worst possible persecution. The Makkans came to annihilate the Muslims, 'Ali^(ra) demonstrated great courage on the battlefield and is recorded by Ibn Hisham and Al Maghazi as killing at least 20 of the pagan attackers. He even defeated their champion, al-Waleed ibn 'Utbah. At the start of the engagement, the Makkans would often demand that their champions take on the champion of the Muslims, and normally it was 'Ali^(ra) who bravely stepped up to take on the challenge on behalf of his community.

However, it was not just his bravery that became evident. He was also very calm and purposeful in his endeavours. His approach was not an overly aggressive one, but rather based on his duty for Islam, and he would not allow his emotions to rule over his behaviour.

There is one notable event when Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) overpowered one of the opponents in individual combat. Just as he was about to

deliver the fatal blow, his opponent, spat on the face of Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) in desperation. To the amazement of the onlookers, 'Ali^(ra) let him go. When asked why he had freed his opponent, 'Ali^(ra) explained that if he had killed the foe after he had spat on his face, his motive may have become revenge rather than the defence of Islam. So not only did he display the utmost bravery, he also modelled himself on the highest moral character even in the battlefield during the most extreme of emotions. This demonstrated the control that he had on his emotions, and also his pure motives.

At later battles such as Uhud, he again demonstrated the same courage, and was recognised by his special shaped sword, known as *Zulfiqar*, which had a double point and was slightly curved in shape. According to al-Tabari, it was 'Ali^(ra) who carried the standard for the Muslim army and also struck down the standard-bearers of the pagans. It was at that battle that the enemy had dug a pit and covered it with twigs and grass. The Prophet^(saw) had fallen

HADHRAT 'ALI(ṚA)

into the pit and was helped out by 'Ali(Ṛa) and Abu Bakr(Ṛa). Later, 'Ali(Ṛa) and his wife Fatimah cleaned and dressed the wounds of the Prophet(saw).

In times of peace, 'Ali(Ṛa) undertook labour work for the sake of Islam while the Muslims tried to establish themselves in the new city of Madinah. He was earning a living by drawing out

water from wells to irrigate the farms around Madinah.

'Ali(Ṛa) had the great honour of becoming the son-in-law of the Prophet(saw) when he married his youngest daughter Fatimah in 625, just a year after the Battle of Badr in which he had shown such bravery. The Prophet(saw) showed great affection for his new son-in-law and anointed both 'Ali(Ṛa) and

Fatimah on the day of the marriage in a way that he had not done for any other marriage. At the time, the Muslims were very simple and had very few possessions, especially as they had fled Makkah and left most of their belongings there. 'Ali^(ra) offered his armour as dowry for his marriage to Fatimah, which reflected his circumstances at that time. At the same time, the Prophet^(saw) gave his daughter a simple mattress, a water bag, a cot, two grinding stones and two earthenware pitchers. This illustrates the modesty prevalent amongst those early Muslims.

Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) and Fatimah^(ra) had three sons, Hasan, Husain and Muhsin, the latter dying in infancy. They also had a daughter named Zainab. The marriage had further strengthened the bonds between 'Ali^(ra) and the Prophet^(saw). Sahl ibn Sa'd records:

'The name that 'Ali^(ra) loved the most was Abu Turab ('Dusty One' or literally 'Father of Dust'), and he rejoiced in being called by it. No one named him Abu Turab

except the Prophet^(saw). because one day, when he was angry with Fatimah, he went out and laid down against the wall of the mosque, and then the Prophet^(saw) came and his back was covered in dust. The Prophet^(saw) began to rub the dust from his back saying, "Sit down Abu Turab".'

This is an illustration of the fondness that the Holy Prophet^(saw) had for 'Ali^(ra).

Likewise it is related that the Holy Prophet^(saw) was seated next to 'Ali^(ra) eating some dates. The Holy Prophet^(saw) put the pips in front of him while 'Ali^(ra) out of mischief placed his pips in front of the Holy Prophet^(saw). To the remark that he had had a lot, the quick-witted Holy Prophet^(saw) remarked that some consume their fruit with the pip.

Finally, when the Muslims marched back to Makkah in 630 to establish freedom of worship at the Ka'abah, 'Ali^(ra) led one division of the army to peacefully take the city, and then was instrumental in destroying many

of the old stone idols within the Ka'abah precincts. The magnanimity of the Muslims towards their old foes, who had chased them into exile and had still attacked them in Madinah so many times, is one of the great episodes of history. The Prophet(saw) forgave the Makkans.

In 631, 'Ali(Ṛa) was given the honour of leading a mission to Yemen to proclaim the new religion to those people, and this turned out to be the last missionary expedition sent in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet(saw). God graced his visit in mid-winter and although the Yemeni tribes had been hostile at first, very soon the entire tribes of Madhhaj and Hamadan accepted the new faith. This followed a previous attempt by Khalid bin Waleed a couple of years earlier, but Khalid was not as eloquent in his description of Islam or his knowledge of the Qur'an and had not been successful, whereas 'Ali(Ṛa) was able to win over the tribesmen.

Having played a prominent role, 'Ali(Ṛa) was as shocked as all of the Muslims when in 632, the Holy

Prophet(saw) passed away. Being a close family member, he had been at the Holy Prophet's bedside in the last few days and he along with his uncle Abbas were part of the group that washed the Holy Prophet's body before burial. He also helped to place the coffin into the grave.

As agreed, a group of senior Muslims voted on the issue of the successor, and the vote went to Abu Bakr(Ṛa) who was greatly respected. It is at this point that the Shi'as deviate from the Sunnis, in that they believe that 'Ali(Ṛa) was the rightful Khalifa and was unhappy with the positions of the first three Khulafa Abu Bakr(Ṛa), 'Umar(Ṛa) and 'Uthman(Ṛa). Some Shi'as go as far as to curse the previous Khulafa for denying 'Ali(Ṛa) his titles at 'tabarra' sessions. To get a better understanding, we should investigate his behaviour and role under the other Khulafa based on facts and evidence instead of speculating on what he may have thought, or concocting ideas that he 'pretended' to accept the other Khalifahs.

Reports about 'Ali's acceptance and oath of allegiance to the first Khalifa range from an immediate acceptance to a delay of a few days. It is more in keeping with his character to consider that he immediately accepted the vote and showed his loyalty towards the new Khalifa, as he was very keen that Muslims must remain united. At one end of the spectrum, the Shi'a claim that he remained aloof as he thought that he had the rightful claim to Khilafah. However, even in their source 'Minar ul Huda' edited by Sheikh 'Ali al-Bahraani, 'Ali^(ra) is quoted as saying:

"I kept myself in the background until I realised that certain groups had renounced Islam and were inviting people to join them in order to annihilate Islam... I therefore went to Abu Bakr and swore allegiance to him and always remained shoulder to shoulder with him in fighting the troubles which very soon finished."

The scholar Ibn-Jareer al-Tabari (838 - 923) records the incident

through the witness of Habeeb ibn Thaabit in his *Tarikh ur-Rasul wal Mulk* as follows:

'Ali was sitting in his house when a man came and told him that Abu Bakr was sitting in the mosque accepting oaths of allegiance from Muslims gathered there. On hearing this, 'Ali at once left his house and did not even wait to dress himself properly. He was then wearing only a long shirt. He showed this much haste because he did not like to lag behind in this matter. So he came and took the oath of allegiance and seated himself near Abu Bakr.'

(al-Tabari, History of the Prophets and Kings, Vol.2)

Certainly 'Ali^(ra) himself had no illusions. When questioned later, as reported by Ibn-i-'Asakar, he replied that the Holy Prophet^(saw) had not died suddenly, but over the course of a long illness. In that time, he had never indicated that 'Ali^(ra) was the rightful Khalifa to follow him. In fact, during those days, he had instructed that Abu Bakr^(ra) lead the prayers. Surely

this was the best indication of the status of the Companions at the time.

It is also related that Abu Bakr^(ra) denied Fatimah^(ra) the right to an estate on the basis that the Holy Prophet's^(saw) estate, belonged to the treasury. Again, this narration is dismissed but 'Ali's^(ra) subsequent denial at a meeting with Abu Bakr^(ra) showing that Ali^(ra) remained totally loyal to Abu Bakr^(ra).

Role under the other Khulafa

'Ali^(ra) was a devoted Muslim who had strong opinions, but still served the other Khulafa with full loyalty. At the time of Abu Bakr^(ra), 'Ali^(ra) was still young and inexperienced in leadership so he would have learned a lot about governance by watching how the first Khalifa quelled anxieties and potential factions after the death of the Prophet^(saw) through his moderate and balanced understanding of Islam. He obeyed all the commands of Abu Bakr^(ra) and became a trusted friend and ally.

Those first few months were

traumatic as the Muslims settled under new leadership, and the trauma was heightened for Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) when just a few months into the new Khilafat, he lost his beloved wife Fatimah.

After Abu Bakr^(ra) passed away, Hadhrat 'Umar^(ra) was elected as the second Khalifa and once again, 'Ali^(ra) was to serve in a prominent role. He was made a senior judge by Hadhrat Umar^(ra) on account of his profound knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence and comprehensive knowledge of the Holy Qur'an. Umar^(ra) would often pass over the more difficult cases to 'Ali^(ra) as he knew he could trust his judgement.

On one occasion, when Hadhrat Umar^(ra) was visiting Jerusalem after the Muslims had been victorious in taking it peacefully, he left 'Ali^(ra) in charge of Madinah, at that point the capital of the Islamic Empire. Again this shows the degree of trust and regard that the Khalifa had for 'Ali^(ra).

Of course, 'Ali^(ra) did not always see eye to eye with the Khulafa. There were times when he

disagreed, such as on the subject of the distribution of wealth that came back as spoils from defensive conflicts. While Umar^(ra) decided to retain a portion for unforeseen circumstances, 'Ali^(ra) wished that all of the money be distributed, as they should rely entirely upon God in times of difficulty. He may also have been gaining favour from the military as he had the same dispute with 'Uthman^(ra) later as Karen Armstrong writes:

'Increasingly, the malcontents looked to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin, who, it seems, had opposed the policies of both 'Umar and 'Uthman, standing for 'soldiers' rights' against the power of the central authority.' (*Islam – A Short History*, p.28)

He may have disagreed on some issues, but he also acted as a trusted counsel for the Khulafa. At times of disorder, 'Uthman^(ra) would send 'Ali^(ra) to investigate and report back e.g. when a party from Egypt had claimed that a harsh instruction had been sent to the Governor of Egypt in al-Fustat

(modern Cairo). However, this was a concocted letter, and 'Ali^(ra) helped to unearth the plot.

Even when 'Uthman^(ra) was attacked at home, the front of the house was being guarded by Hasan and Husain, the two sons of Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra); but unfortunately the rebels managed to set fire to the front creating a diversion and attacked from the back of the house.

Khilafat of 'Ali^(ra)

When the third Khalifa 'Uthman^(ra) was assassinated, 'Ali^(ra) was elected as the fourth Khalifa of Islam at a time of plots and unrest. 'Uthman^(ra) had also been a son-in-law of the Prophet^(saw) and was an upright leader, so 'Ali^(ra) would have been shocked by his untimely death.

'Ali^(ra) was not keen to accept Khilafat, but the people of Madinah were in panic because, over two thousand rebels who had killed 'Uthman^(ra) were now creating disorder in the city. The Muslims gathered in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah and as the clamour grew from the Ansar and

Muhajirun of Madinah, they persuaded Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) to accept Khilafat to try to restore order. They all pledged allegiance to him that day. Some of the Umayyad family did not pledge allegiance, and fled to Syria with the blood-stained shirt of the late Khalifa.

In his first address, 'Ali^(ra) was forceful and told the congregation:

“The area around the Ka’abah is sacred. Allah commands the Muslims to live as brothers. A Muslim is he who does not hurt anyone with his word or deed. Fear Allah in your dealings with other men. On the Day of Judgement, you will have to answer for your dealings, even with animals. Obey Allah, the Almighty. Do not cast aside His commandments.”

'Ali^(ra) knew that difficult times lay ahead. The forces of suspicion and lawlessness had been unleashed. It would require tireless work, patience and much tact to restore law and order. 'Ali^(ra) hoped to accomplish the task with the co-

operation of the people and his trusted advisors.

Soon after his first address, a deputation including Talha and Zubair asked the Khalifa to enforce Shariah Law and to punish the murderers of 'Uthman^(ra). Emotions were still running high, but 'Ali^(ra) replied:

“I will not let 'Uthman’s death go unavenged, but you must wait. Conditions are not normal yet. The rioters are still powerful in Madinah. We are in their grip. My own position is shaky, so please wait. As soon as conditions allow, I will do my duty.”

The answer clearly did not satisfy all of the companions, but 'Ali^(ra) began by changing the leadership to reflect his own trusted associates. Among the regional governors, several were replaced by close aides such as Salman Farsi and Malik al-Ashtar. Not everyone agreed with the changes. He was also advised to make some tactical decisions to keep various parties happy, as Ibn Khaldun describes:

‘At the beginning of his (term of) office, ‘Ali himself was advised by al-Maghirah to leave az-Zubair, Mu’awiyah, and Talha in their positions, until the people had agreed to render the oath of allegiance to him and the whole thing was consolidated. After that, he might do what he wanted. That was good power politics. ‘Ali, however, refused. He wanted to avoid deceit, because deceit is forbidden by Islam.’

(Ibn Khaldun, p.165)

The whole situation following the death of ‘Uthman^(ra) still troubled him deeply. ‘Ali^(ra) honestly believed that the troubles faced by the third Khalifa were due to the men around him of the Banu Umayya family who had taken advantage of his age and forbearance to gain political power which they later misused. This is why he had replaced so many of them from office in the outlying territories.

‘Ali^(ra) had gained a reputation for inspiring others through his letters and sermons. He used his deep well of knowledge gained from so

many years of close proximity to the Prophet^(saw) to extol virtues such as justice and compassion when dealing with non-Muslims who were now coming under Muslim rule and care.

Battle of the Camel

Soon, ‘Ali^(ra) faced a rebellion by those same companions Talha and Zubair in which the Prophet’s wife ‘A’ishah^(ra) also took part in December 656. The reason was their frustration at ‘Ali’s failing to punish the rebels who had killed Hadhrat ‘Uthman^(ra). ‘Ali^(ra) too had wanted justice and to deal with them, but he wanted to restore order first and then deliver justice, rather than further fan the flames of ill-feeling. However, not everyone had the patience for his pragmatic approach.

‘A’ishah^(ra) had been on Hajj when the late Khalifah had been killed. She was appalled and addressed a public gathering in Makkah to gather support to avenge the killing. She took an army of hundreds of men to Basrah to gain further support and en route it became three thousand men. Basrah was divided in opinion, but

after taking the city, the leaders rooted out suspects from the uprising against 'Uthman^(ra). Hundreds of men were interrogated, and some were found guilty and killed. Basrah was in the grip of a reign of terror. Now 'A'ishah^(ra) sought support from the rest of the Muslim world to punish the suspects, and the unrest grew.

'Ali^(ra) was forced to take his own troops to Basrah to tackle the unrest joined by 9,000 men from Kufa. On reaching Basrah, 'Ali^(ra) sent a peace delegation to 'A'ishah^(ra) with the message:

“The demand for revenge is very just, but how can you lay hands on the mischief-mongers without first making the hands of the Khalifa strong? ... If you really want to end trouble, gather under the banner of the Khalifa. Do not plunge people into civil war.”

Both sides seemed destined on peace, but a party led by 'Abdullah bin Saba realised that they would be found out for the insurgence against 'Uthman^(ra) and so, at night

their party manufactured a conflict between the two camps and relayed messages to both sides that the other party had betrayed them. Full-scale fighting ensued and to 'Ali's horror, 10,000 men died in fighting amongst Muslims. At the end, he was victorious, but his heart bled for the needless loss.

Although 'Ali^(ra) defeated this rebellion in what became known as the Battle of the Camel at Basrah, the unrest continued. 'A'ishah^(ra) was sent back to Madinah but without sanctions. Despite the hostility of Talha and Zubair, when 'Ali^(ra) learned that they had been killed, he wept for them, and explained that the battle was the result of misunderstandings. However, they both held a high status amongst the Muslims at the time of the Prophet^(saw), and 'Ali^(ra) had heard the Holy Prophet^(saw) once say:

'Every Prophet had a disciple and az-Zubair is my disciple.'

Any thought that 'Ali^(ra) glorified in combat is totally false. He was forced into these situations due to troublemakers that were infil-

trating Islam and did not have pure motives.

Any attempts to link 'Ali^(ra) to the plot that led to the murder of 'Uthman^(ra) are also totally false. In his first sermon as recorded by al-Tabari, he condemned the murder and called the antagonists the 'instruments of Satan'. He had reminded his congregation of the grave nature of the crime of shedding the blood of a fellow Muslim. It was from this stance that he wanted to first get calm and unity back amongst the Muslims.

Dispute with Mu'awiyah

Mu'awiyah, the Governor of Syria, and 'Ali^(ra) had struggled in the prolonged Battle of Siffin in 657 when Mu'awiyah had tried to wrestle the Khilafat away from 'Ali^(ra). Eventually, they decided upon arbitration, which was not settled conclusively at Adhruh. A group of 4,000 from 'Ali's army left him and became a threat in their own right, later known as the Kharijites. They sacked Ctesiphon (modern Mada'in) but were later defeated by those still loyal to 'Ali^(ra) at the Battle of Nahrawand in 658.

Despite the worsening political problems as the Islamic Empire grew, Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) kept his faith in God, and would be found in deep prayer. He was not only regular in his obligatory prayers, but was also regular in observing additional (*Nawafil*) prayers, often absorbed in worship throughout the night. It was his prayers that protected him and the early Muslims from potentially much worse situations plotted against them.

Someone asked 'Ali^(ra):

'Why do the people disagree concerning you, and why did they not disagree concerning Abu Bakr^(ra) and Umar^(ra)?'

He replied:

'Because Abu Bakr^(ra) and Umar^(ra) were in charge of men like me, and I today am in charge of men like you.'

He had a keen sense of justice, and was often quoted advising followers to treat others the way that they wished to be treated themselves. It was in this spirit

that he was trying to achieve stability and balance across the Muslim world before improving the spiritual state of his followers.

The harsh treatment meted out to the Kharijites at Nahrawand lost him favour in some quarters. The Kharijites sought what they considered to be true Muslim leadership in accordance with the Holy Qur'an, and no compromise with those seeking political advantage. This view started to gain some support, although their interpretation of motives was as prone to error as the supposed errors themselves.

After the Battle of the Camel, Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) spent some time in Basra on the southern coast of modern Iraq, and there he appointed his cousin 'Abdullah, the son of 'Abbas, as the governor of the area. 'Ali^(ra) then entered Kufa in January, a relatively new garrison town in Iraq established just twenty years earlier. He transferred the capital from Madinah to Kufa in modern Iraq while Damascus, the other seat of power, was now under the control of Mu'awiyah. This was a signi-

ficant moment as from that time onwards, Madinah never again became the seat of authority and power for Islam.

'Ali^(ra) was a decent and upright man, but he was now struggling to come to terms with the political manoeuvres going on all around him.

Achievements

'Ali^(ra) was respected and was known for his qualities which included piety, great knowledge and courage. During the lifetime of the Prophet^(saw), he had memorised the Qur'an and recited it to him; and in later life, he became an authority on the scriptures.

'Ali^(ra) did not just memorise the verses of the Qur'an; he also knew the context of each verse: *when* the verse was revealed, *where* and in *what* circumstances. Having been such a close companion of the Holy Prophet^(saw) for thirty years, he was also an authority on the sayings and traditions of the Prophet^(saw) and had memorised hundreds of traditions. He would often narrate these traditions, and

was also very proficient at delivering speeches referring to both the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Having such an in-depth knowledge of the Qur'an, it is natural that he was considered an authority on Islamic legal matters. 'A'ishah^(ra) is quoted as saying:

'As for him ['Ali], he is the most knowledgeable of those who remain in the Sunnah.'

Similarly, Abu Hurairah quotes Hadhrat 'Umar^(ra) as saying:

'Ali is the best of us in judicial decision'.

'Ali^(ra) was a simple man like all of the Khulafah. He had endured difficult times as a Muslim and preferred simplicity. He wore simple clothes and ate simple food. He was always concerned about the welfare of others. He often went without food, and even when he became a Khalifah, he continued to live a simple lifestyle and remained focused on his service of the community. Some reports cite that his meals consisted of a cup of milk, a piece

of bread and some vegetables.

He lived in a simple house just like the other Muslims around him without any extravagance.

There is an account of when he and his wife Fatimah were eating some dry bread, and a beggar approached their door and asked for food. They gave him the bread and remained hungry for the rest of the day. He imparted those same values to his sons as he said:

'Keep company with good people and keep away from bad people. The worst food you take is the one you earn in a forbidden way. Be kind to anyone who might be harsh to you, for after a while he would become kind to you'.

It is very easy to view the life of the Khulafah as a series of struggles and battles, but there would not have been a core of well-trained, motivated and dedicated Muslims had it not been for their efforts. It was their values of love, compassion, fair treatment and desire for knowledge that would be later reflected in the

great periods of Islam such as Al-Andalus in Spain and Baitul Hikmah in Baghdad.

'Ali's death

Despite his best attempts to create calm among the Muslims, the growing divisions led to inevitable tensions. 'Ali^(ra) was killed in the year 661 in the city of Kufa at the age of 62. He had been attacked by one of the remaining Kharijite vigilantes by the name of 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Muljam during the month of Ramadhan whilst leading Fajr prayers. 'Ali^(ra) managed to survive for a couple of days during which he conveyed his wishes to his son Hasan whom he addressed as follows:

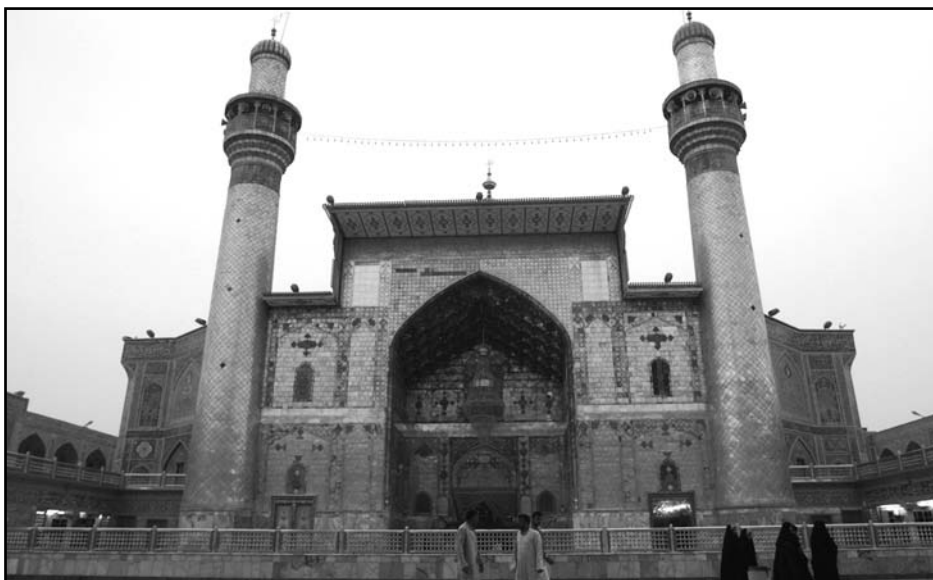
'Love Allah and obey Him and live for the service of the people in the way of Allah. And do not forget to set apart the best of your time for communion with Allah, although every moment of yours is for Him, provided it is spent sincerely in the service of your people.'

Amazingly, he even instructed his sons not to molest his killer, and

asked them to offer him food and provide for his shelter. Such mercy for his killer shows the extent of his character. He is quoted as saying:

'Treat the man kindly and give him food and water. If I die, his life is left to justice, and he shall be slain for the deed he has done; but do not mutilate him, for that was forbidden by the Prophet^(saw).'

After 'Ali^(ra) passed away, it is thought that he was buried in private and secret to prevent his grave from being desecrated by his enemies. There was doubt about his gravesite until a later Khalifah Harun al-Rashid (786 - 809), was told that the site was on raised ground at a site in Najaf. At his orders, a great mosque and shrine was built around the tomb. There are several accounts of how the Khalifah learned of the site of the tomb including one that the sixth Shi'a Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq told him so based on information passed down amongst the Shi'a leadership. A small minority of Shi'as still believe that the actual tomb is at the Rawze-e-Sharif



'Ali's Shrine in Najaf, Iraq

(also known as the Blue Mosque) in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan.

'Ali's Legacy

'Ali had become respected as an authority on Islam, and a collection of his speeches and letters was preserved under the title *Nahjul Balaghah* (The Peak of Eloquence).

His family also went on to honour his wishes and to serve the community. His sons Hasan and Husain both played a key role. It is thought that Hasan declined taking

on the Khilafat in order to prevent further schisms among the Muslims, and this enabled Mu'awiyah to take on the Khilafat and establish what became known as the Umayyad Arab dynasty. This seizure of power cut-off the Khulafa Rashidun from the subsequent rulers of the Muslim Empire, continuing in name only through various dynasties till the Ottoman Empire formally terminated the last remnant of Khilafat.

However, for the Shi'as, 'Ali^(ra) had been the first Imam, and

therefore his sons took on the mantle, Hasan being the second Imam and Husain the third. The descendants of 'Ali^(ra) through Hasan and Husain were the only bloodline of the Prophet^(saw) through his daughter Fatimah and are still honoured to this day with the title 'Syed' (or 'Sayyid').

Examples of the bloodline include the *Sharifs* and *Idrisids* of Morocco, *Banu Salih* of Ghana descended through grandsons of Hassan, and the *Suleymanids* of Yemen descended through a son of Hasan.

The issue that worried 'Ali^(ra) the most was the unity of the Muslims. He struggled continuously to bring all of the parties together despite calls from all sides to take decisive action. His belief in the need for unity and order compelled him to try to steer a more moderate course, and even at the worst times when he faced armies of Muslims, his intention was dialogue and arbitration. However, the motives of the trouble-makers had nothing to do with the faith, and eventually, 'Ali^(ra) lost the battle.

A more lasting legacy of Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) was his profound first-hand recollection of the actions and sayings of the Holy Prophet^(saw). He related 586 hadith, which were then transmitted by many others such as his sons Hasan and Husain, and then Abu Musa, Abu Imamah and Abu Hurairah amongst others.

The Shi'a Split

Islam soon split into many factions, the two most notable being the Sunnis and Shi'as. The question to ask is whether this was the intention of Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) or of 'A'ishah^(ra). Certainly the early Muslims, having faced such severe persecution at the hands of the Makkans would have wanted unity and compassion, not division and infighting.

So what were the main events and triggers for the split?

Under the surface, there had been a growing undercurrent of discontent against the politicisation of Arab Islam in which new adherents from nearby Persia were told that they needed an Arab patron in order to be considered a

Muslim. Some of the Arabs were trying to use their shared nationality with the Prophet^(saw) as a means of gaining political and monetary power.

The Persians wished to return to the theological roots of Islam which they felt could only be recovered through the direct family of the Prophet^(saw), now represented in the families of the sons of 'Ali^(ra). So the killing of Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) and the passing of power back to a political Arab was seen as a disaster, and when Husain and his followers were massacred cruelly at Kerbala a few years later in 680, this compounded the feeling of tragedy and disaster for the Shi'as. It is these incidents that Shi'as still commemorate to this day in the festival on the tenth of Muharam by inflicting wounds on themselves in an effort to participate to an extent in the martyrdom of Imam Husain. Clay tablets from this area are used to place on prayer mats by some Shi'as for prostration.

It is interesting that as-Suyuti quotes Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) as saying:

'The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them peace, called me and said, "Ali, there is in you a resemblance to Isa^(as); the Jews hated him so much that they slandered his mother, and the Christians loved him so much that they gave him a degree which was not his.'

The Holy Prophet^(saw) may have known that 'Ali^(ra) would suffer at the hands of the factions during his Khilafat, but also that later generations might overly venerate him just like the Christians e.g. invoking his name for help (Ya 'Ali Madad).

Conclusions

Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra), of all of the early Khulafa, had a direct and personal relationship with the Holy Prophet^(saw) and was one of the earliest Muslims to pledge his allegiance to the new faith. He was a man of principles and had a strong sense of justice and fair-play especially as Islam came to influence other nations beyond Arabia. His knowledge of the Holy Qur'an was supreme as he had memorised it in his younger

years, and validated his understanding through recitation in front of the Holy Prophet^(saw).

Although undoubtedly very brave, 'Ali^(ra) was unable to control the political machinations happening all around him, and this ultimately led to his downfall, and the end of an era of *Rightly-Guided* Khulafa. Much has been made of his own special status and indeed a large number of Muslims (Shi'as) fervently believe that it was his rightful destiny to alone be the Khalifa of the Prophet^(saw).

Would if Hadhrat 'Ali^(ra) have recognised many of the claims made in his name today which appear to drive a wedge between him and the other Khulafa? Would he instead have described his loyalty to each of the Khulafa, and how he reluctantly took office and tried so hard to unite the Muslim Ummah?

Perhaps we can leave the last word to the famous historian of the 18th Century, Edward Gibbon, who wrote:

'The first of the true believers

might aspire to march before them in this world and the next; and if some were of a graver and more rigid cast, the zeal and virtue of 'Ali were never outstripped by any recent proselyte. He united 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.'

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