

Caliph 'Ali

Describe the relationship between the Prophet and Ali in the years after the first revelation.

He was the son of Abu Twalib and as mother Faatima. He was a descendant of Hashim, cousin and in-law of Holy Prophet (s.a.w). He was 30 years younger than the Holy Prophet (s.a.w). Due to his surroundings, he obtained formal education by which he was able to read and write. He was learned, intelligent and studious. He learned the Qur'an by heart and was pious well before his acceptance of Islam. He had a good guide in the person of the holy prophet (s.a.w).

Both the prophet (s.a.w) and Hazrat Ali (ra) were very close. Ali was brought up in the Prophet's household since childhood. He had been acquainted with the life style and family members of the prophet. It is to be noted that when the prophet (s.a.w) spread Islam, Hazrat Ali was the first child to accept Islam and when the Prophet was instructed to 'warn thy nearest kin' (26:214) Ali said 'I will be your helper'. In fact he listened and learned from the Prophet. It can be well said that the prophet was his direct teacher. During the whole mission of the prophet, Ali would always be by his side to spread Islam or to support the prophet and his family in so many different ways. Years passing by reaching the days before the Hijra to Madina, everyone waited for that right moment. Ali and Abu Bakr stayed behind in Mecca with the Prophet before the Hijra. Ali had risked his own life by sleeping in the Prophet's bed on the night of hijra for the Khawarij planned to burst into the house of the prophet to kill him in his bed. This was decided as such as Ali had a specific mission to perform that is to return things kept with the Prophet for safekeeping to their right owners. Later on when it became the time in Madina for brotherhood the Prophet declared Ali to be his brother.

He was so close to the prophet that he was married to Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. However, there was no show off out of this marriage. Ali and his family lived a frugal (economical) and simple life, just like the Prophet's family. He worked as a labourer with Prophet and engaged in building the mosque in Medina. He was the father of the famous Hasan and Husain, the Prophet's beloved grandchildren known so much in history for their piety and firmness on deen. As he was literate, he was a scribe of the Prophet and for the treaty of Hudaibiyah he was the main scribe. He was made standard bearer for the Muslims and he honoured his responsibility. He participated in the battles of the prophet and was a great warrior in all of them during the Prophet's lifetime. It is praiseworthy to mention here that there is the Ghadir Khumm episode where the prophet took the hand of Ali, raised it in the air and declared: 'For whomever I am the authority and guide Ali is also his guide and authority. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of Ali and be enemy of his enemies. Whoever helps him, help him, and whoever leaves him, leave him.' This is to show how Ali was honoured by the prophet. Finally, it is known that Ali, along with others, washed the Prophet's body and buried him.

To what extent was Ali successful during his Caliphate?

After the death of the prophet (s.a.w) there were 3 caliphs before Hazrat Ali in the name of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. All the 3 did their best at their own level to be a good leader. However, with events led by the Khawarij and after the assassination of Uthman, there were 3 days where there was no leader as caliph. When the Khawarij gave an ultimatum of 24 hours then Ali was chosen by the public. Muslims held Ali in high esteem due to being the son in law of the Prophet (s.a.w). He was born in the family of the prophet and he knew the message and practice of the Prophet better than most of the people of that time and he was revered for his knowledge of the Qur'an and the Shari'ah. He was then appointed as Caliph at assassination of Uthman where there was chaos in Madina. He maintained the Shari'ah and he was successful in doing so.

Secondly, he faced challenges to his rule right from the start of his short Caliphate which lasted for 5 years. The opponents wanted him to find Uthman's murderer immediately but it was in vain. Ali's priority was

the consolidation and the reorganisation of his Caliphate first. He dismissed some provincial governors and appointed new ones and that was an unpopular move. There were as such oppositions from Mu'awiya, the governor of Syria who was related to Uthman and who accused Ali of siding with the rebels at time of Uthman's death. This was considered as unsuccessful.

Thirdly, with the desire to find the murderers of Uthman Aisha, Talha and Zubayr went north to get support in their quest. This resulted in battle of the Camel (Jamal) in against Ali. That was the first civil war in Islam between two muslims' armies. However, Ali was successful in this move. Though there was fighting but it was in the favour of the caliph.

Fourthly, Ali shifted the Islamic capital to Kufa where he would have more support there and it was closer to Syria which was Mu'awiyah's base and that gave him an opportunity to fight him. However, the armies were reluctant to fight Mu'awiya at Siffin and that led to an arbitration agreed upon. Some soldiers from Ali's army (the Kharijites) opted out of arbitration and Mu'awiyah became Caliph in Damascus (Syria). Ali had no choice than to step down though he remained Caliph but he lost Syria. As such he was unsuccessful.

Fifthly, Ali fought Kharijites at Nahrawan and won this battle. However, this was the third war between Muslims. Ali then wanted his army to fight Mu'awiyah in Syria but his soldiers didn't agree. Following this the Kharijites planned the assassination of Ali, Mu'awiyah and Amr but only Ali was martyred while praying. Ali was a radical and an idealist person but he was not prepared to play the dirty game of politics. He was thus unsuccessful in uniting the Muslims politically which resulted in Sunni/Shi'a split.

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