

The last hours of the Prophet Muhammad

The city of Medina was totally engulfed in confusion and anxiety. The companions of the Prophet had gathered round his house with tearful eyes and grieved hearts. The reports which were pouring out from the house showed that his condition was extremely serious and there was very little hope of his recovery. This showed that only a few moments of his precious life were left.

A number of the companions of the Prophet were desirous of seeing him from near but his serious condition would not permit that anyone except the members of the family should visit the room in which he was lying.

The honoured daughter and the only souvenir of the Prophet viz Lady Fatimah was sitting beside her father's bed. She was looking at his sacred face and could see that the perspiration of death was flowing down his face and forehead. With a heavy heart tearful eyes and choked throat she was reciting the following verse which Abu Talib had recited in praise of the Prophet: "The luminous face in whose honour rains are sought from the clouds. The person who is the asylum for the orphans and the guardian of the widows".

At this moment the Prophet opened his eyes and said to his daughter in a low voice: "This is a verse which Abu Talib recited about me. It will however be better if instead of the same you recite this verse of the Holy Quran: Muhammad is but a messenger. The messengers have already passed away before him. Will it be that when he dies or is slain you will turn back on your heels? He who turns back does no hurt to Allah and Allah will reward the thankful. (Surah Ale Imran 3:144)[1]

The Prophet Speaks To His Daughter

Experience shows that on account of excessive preoccupations the sentiments of big personalities with regard to their children become dim because absorption in world affairs keep them so busy that their sentiments for their children remain suppressed. However great spiritual personalities are an exception to this rule. Notwithstanding their great targets and universal ideals and ever-increasing activities they possess such extensive and great souls that inclination towards one part does not keep them from the other parts.

The Prophet's love for his only child was one of the most sublime manifestations of human sentiments so much so that he never proceeded on a journey without saying farewell to his daughter and when he returned from a journey he first of all went to see her. He accorded her great respect as compared with his wives and used to tell his companions: "Fatimah is a part of my body. Her pleasure is my pleasure and her anger is my anger." [2]

Whenever the Prophet saw Fatimah he was reminded of Khadijah the most pious and most kind woman of the world who endured extraordinary hardships and spent her enormous wealth in the path of the sacred mission of her husband.

Throughout the period of the Prophet's illness Fatimah remained by the side of his bed and was not away from him even for a moment.

Suddenly the Prophet made a sign to her asking her to speak to him. The Prophet's daughter bent a little brought her head near him and conversed with him in low tones. The persons who were present round the Prophet's bed did not become aware of what they talked about. When the Prophet ceased talking Lady Fatimah wept bitterly. However soon after this the Prophet made a sign to her again and spoke to her in low tones.

This time she raised her head in a happy mood and with smiling lips. Those present were surprised to observe these two antithetical conditions at one and the same time and they requested Fatimah to inform them of her conversation with the Prophet. She replied: "I am not going to divulge the secret of the Prophet of Allah".

After the passing away of the Prophet Fatimah informed them of the factual position on account of the insistence of A'isha and said: "In the first instance my father informed me about his death and stated that he was not likely to recover from his illness. Hence I began weeping. However when he talked to me for the second time he told me that I would be the first person from amongst his Ahl al-Bayt who would join him. This made me happy and I understood that I would be joining my dear father very soon".[3]

Brushing The Teeth

The Prophet used to brush his teeth before going to sleep at night and after waking up in the morning. The tooth-brush of the Prophet consisted of a piece of Arak wood which is very useful for strengthening the gums cleansing the teeth and removing the particles of food from them. One day Abdur Rahman brother of A'isha came to enquire about the health of the Prophet. He was then holding a fresh and green piece of branch in his hand. A'isha understood from the looks of the Prophet that he wished to brush his teeth with that branch. She therefore took the branch from her brother immediately and gave it to the Prophet who brushed his teeth with it.[4]

Recommendations Of The Prophet

While he was confined to bed the Prophet attached great importance to reminding the people of the obligatory matters and in the last days of his illness he strongly recommended the offering of prayers and good treatment of the slaves. He said: "Behave well with your slaves be careful about their food and dress speak gently with them and make sociability the business of your life". One day Ka'b Ahbar asked the Second Caliph "What did the Prophet say just before his death?" The Caliph pointed to the Commander of the Faithful who was also present in the meeting and said: "Ask him". Ali said: "While the head of the Prophet was resting on my shoulder he said: "Prayers. Prayers." Ka'b Ahbar then said: "This has been the way of the previous Prophets also".[5]

During the last moments of his life the Prophet opened his eyes and said: "Call my brother so that he may come and sit by my side. All those present understood that he meant no one other than Ali. Ali sat by the side of his bed but felt that he wanted to rise from his bed. He therefore lifted the Prophet from his bed and made him rest on his own chest.[6]

Soon afterwards signs of death began to appear in his sacred body. Some one asked Ibn Abbas:

"In whose lap did the Prophet breathe his last?" Ibn Abbas replied: "The Prophet departed while his head was in the lap of Ali." That person added: "A'isha claims that when the Prophet breathed his last his head was resting on her bosom. Ibn Abbas contradicted her claim and said: "The Prophet breathed his last in the lap of Ali and Ali and my brother Fadl bathed his body." [7]

In one of his sermons Imam Ali has mentioned this matter in these words: "The Prophet breathed his last when his head was on my chest. I bathed his body while the angels were assisting me". [8]

A number of the traditionalists have quoted that the last sentence which the Prophet uttered before breathing his last was: "No. With the Divine Companion" . It appears that at the time of his last breath the Archangel Jibreel gave him the option either to recover from the illness and return to this world or the Angel of Death might take out his soul and he might proceed to the next world and lead his life there along with the persons who have been alluded to in this verse: These are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favours from among the Prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and they are the best friends that one can have. (Surah al-Nisa 4:69) The Prophet uttered the above sentence and passed away. [9]

The Last Day

The sacred and sublime soul of the Messenger of Allah ascended the Paradise on Monday the 28th of Safar. [10] A Yemen sheet was spread over his sacred body and it was placed for a short period in a corner of the room. From the wailings of the women and the cries of the near ones of the Prophet the people outside the room knew that he had breathed his last. Soon afterwards the news of his death spread throughout the city.

For reasons which have not become clear so far the Second Caliph shouted outside the house that the Prophet had not died but had gone before Allah like Prophet Musa. He persisted on this very much and it was possible that he might have made some others share his views but in the meantime one of the companions [11] of the Prophet read this verse before Him: Muhammad is but a messenger. The messengers have already passed away before him. Will it be that when he dies or is slain would you then turn back to your pre-Islamic behaviour. (Surah Ale Imran 3:144)

On hearing this verse he abandoned his claim and became tranquil. [12]

Imam Ali bathed the sacred body of the Prophet and shrouded him as the Prophet had directed that his body should be bathed by one who was nearest to him [13] and such a person could be no one except Ali. Then he opened the Prophet's face while he was bitterly weeping said O Prophet of Allah! I love you more than I have loved my parents. Your death put an end to the prophethood, to revelation, and to the messengers from the Lord. While death of other Prophets had not resulted in this way. Your death caused a grief that every other grief was forgotten. The grief of your separation became common sorrow and everybody felt it.

If you had not ordered us to be patient and not to lament and bemoan loudly, we would have kept weeping and lamenting ceaselessly, though all this lamenting could not have compared with the actual losses of your separation. But death is an inevitable event, nobody can turn death back and

nobody can stop it from coming. Please remember us before Allah . (Nahjul Balaghah Sermon No. 23).

The first person who offered prayers for the Prophet was Imam Ali. Thereafter the companions came in groups and offered prayers and these rites continued till Tuesday noon. Thereafter it was decided that the sacred body of the Prophet might be buried in the same house in which he had breathed his last. The grave was prepared by Abu 'Ubaydah bin Jarrah and Zayd bin Sahl and the obsequies were performed by Imam Ali with the assistance of Fadl and Abbas.

It was the most tragic event. That great personality who changed the very fate of humanity by his efforts and sacrifices and opened new pages for human civilization passed away.[14]

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No doubt when a fair-minded person studies various aspects of the personality of the Holy Prophet as a man head of a family a member of the society a judge an administrator a teacher a military commander and a guide he comes to the conclusion that his all round perfection is a definite proof of his being a Divine Messenger. Human history has not witnessed any other person reaching a similar degree of perfection.

The Holy Prophet made wonderful contributions for the welfare of humanity at large. First he himself acted upon the Divine Message and then he asked others to follow him.

Notes :

[1] Vide al-Irshad Shaykh Mufid page 98

[2] Sahih Bukhari vol. V page 21.

[3] Tabaqat-i Ibn Sa'd vol. II p. 247 and Kamil vol. II p. 219.

[4] Tabaqat-i Ibn Sa'd vol. II page 234 and Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. II page 654.

[5] Tabaqat vol. II page 254.

[6] Tabaqat vol. II page 263.

[7] Tabaqat vol. II page 263.

[8] Nahjul Balaghah.

[9] A'lamul Wara' page 83.

[10] All the Shi'iah traditionalists and the biographers of the life of the Prophet are agreed upon this date and in Seerah Ibn Hisham vol. II page 658 it has been quoted in the form of a statement.

[11] According to Sahih Bukhari (page 7) it was Abu Bakr.

[12] Seerah-i Ibn Hisham vol. II page 656.

[13] Tabaqat page 57.

[14] After the Holy Prophet numerous difficulties cropped up in the path of his mission and the pursuance of his mission. The most patent among those was the question of the caliphate and the leadership of the Islamic society. Even before his passing away the signs of differences and dissensions could be clearly found among the Muslims. Notwithstanding the fact that this is one of the most sensitive and important chapters of the history of Islam it is beyond the scope of our present discourse. Hence we now bring our narrative to an end and are grateful to the Almighty Allah for this great blessing. (For further details refer Islamic Seminary Publications).

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