

Khalifa Abu Bakr - Before and After Conversion to Islam

Conversion to Islam

Birth of Islam. One day in the year 610 C.E. when Muhammad (peace be on him) was praying in the cave of Hira outside Makkah, the angel Gabriel appeared to him, and conveyed to him the tidings that Allah had chosen him as His Messenger, and he was to convey to the people the message of Islam. That was a novel sensation. As the Holy Prophet came home, he felt agitated. Khadija comforted him, and was the first person to be converted to Islam. Khadija consulted her cousin Waraqa who was proficient in religious lore. He gave Khadija the glad tidings that her husband was the Prophet of God, about whose advent there were references in the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians. After Khadija, Ali, then a young boy living with the Holy Prophet, accepted Islam. Thereafter Zaid b Harith a slave whom the Holy Prophet had adopted as his son became a Muslim.

Abu Bakr's conversion to Islam. When the Holy Prophet gave the call of Islam, Abu Bakr was out of Makkah. He had gone on a business trip to Yemen. When Abu Bakr returned to Makkah, he was informed by some of his friends that in his absence Muhammad (peace be on him) had declared himself as the Messenger of God, and proclaimed a new religion. On hearing this, Abu Bakr lost no time in calling on the Holy Prophet.

The Holy Prophet told Abu Bakr full details of his experience in the cave of Hira, the visitation of the angel Gabriel, and the command of Allah to call the people to Him. On hearing the account, Abu Bakr felt inspired. He felt convinced that what the Holy Prophet had said was the truth. Overwhelmed with emotion, and elated with joy at the discovery of the truth, Abu Bakr said, "I believe in you and your mission from the depths of my heart. I testify and confirm that what you say is the truth. Call me to your religion, for verily you are the Prophet of God and that is a great honor."

The Holy Prophet stretched his hand, and Abu Bakr grasped it reverently as a mark of faith and allegiance. He declared with great solemnity, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet and messenger." This declaration forged new bonds between the Holy Prophet and Abu Bakr. Heretofore only three family members of the Holy Prophet, namely Khadija, Ali, and Zaid bin Harith had accepted Islam. Abu Bakr was the first person outside the family of the Holy Prophet to become a Muslim.

Significance of the conversion of Abu Bakr. In the annals of Islam, the conversion of Abu Bakr was an event of great significance. Abu Bakr was a rich merchant, and his business depended on the goodwill of the people around him. He knew that his conversion to the new faith would make him unpopular with people around him, and that would adversely affect his business. He was well aware that by such conversion he would be inviting the wrath and hostility of the Quraish. But his mind was made up. He felt convinced that Muhammad (peace be on him) had discovered the truth, and was required of him was to support the cause of the truth, whatever the cost.

Prior to his conversion, Abu Bakr asked no questions; he did not enter into any argument, he laid down no conditions; and he wanted no assurances. He did not hesitate even for a moment; no doubts assailed him; and there was no wavering in his mind. His declaration of faith in Islam was spontaneous as if he had been waiting for such a declaration all his life.

Years later, the Holy Prophet recalling the conversion of Abu Bakr said, "Whenever I offered Islam to any one, he always showed some reluctance and hesitation and tried to enter into an argument. Abu Bakr was the only person who accepted Islam without any reluctance or hesitation, and without any argument."

Reasons for the ready acceptance of Islam by Abu Bakr. Apart from Abu Bakr, Khadija was the other

person who had accepted Islam readily and without any hesitation. In the case of Khadija we know that she had already a premonition that Muhammad (peace be on him) was destined to be a prophet. Indeed she had been prompted to marry Muhammad (peace be on him) because she had an inner conviction that a great destiny awaited Muhammad.

It appears that Abu Bakr had a similar inner conviction that a great destiny awaited Muhammad (peace be on him). There is a story that when Muhammad at the age of twelve accompanied his uncle Abu Talib along with a trade caravan to Syria, and the monk Bahira on seeing Muhammad (peace be on him) had foretold prophethood for him, Abu Bakr was also with the caravan, and since that day Abu Bakr had harbored the conviction that Muhammad (peace be on him) was going to be a prophet. Abu Bakr traveled extensively, and in the course of such travels he had the occasion to learn from the Jewish rabbis and the Christian monks that the advent of a prophet was expected. This implies that Abu Bakr was already expecting the advent of a prophet, and when Muhammad (peace be on him) proclaimed his prophethood, and by first hand knowledge, Abu Bakr knew of the stainless character of Muhammad (peace be on him), he felt certain that Muhammad (peace be on him) was the prophet whose advent was expected, and as such there was no hesitation on his part in accepting the new faith.

As-Suyuti's account of the premonition of Abu Bakr about the advent of the Holy Prophet. In As-Suyuti's book History of the Caliphs, there is an account which corroborates the conclusion that Abu Bakr had a premonition about the advent of the Prophet. It is related that before Muhammad (peace be on him) had declared his mission, Abu Bakr had visited Waraqa bin Naufal, who was expert in Scriptures, and Waraqa had told Abu Bakr of the advent of the Prophet. According to As-Suyuti, Abu Bakr is reported to have declared: "I had a premonition about the advent of the Prophet. Therefore when the Apostle of God was sent, I believed in him. and testified to him."

According to Al Bayhaqi as quoted by As-Suyuti, Abu Bakr accepted Islam readily because he had been accustomed to behold the proofs of the prophetic mission. Al Bayhaqi also states on the authority of Aba Maysarah, the freed man of Abbas an uncle of the Holy Prophet, that when before the call, the Holy Prophet went forth, he used to hear some invisible person calling him, "O Muhammad." The Holy Prophet used to tell of these voices to Abu Bakr who was his intimate friend.

Impact of Islam on Abu Bakr. Islam changed the course of the life of Abu Bakr. Before conversion he was known as Abdul Ka'aba. The name was indicative of paganism, and after conversion the Holy Prophet changed his name to Abdullah. The change in name marked a change in the purpose of life for Abu Bakr. He was no longer the servant of the Ka'aba; henceforward he was to be the servant of Allah.

Change in family relationship. Islam brought a change in the family relationship of Abu Bakr. His wife Qutaila did not accept Islam and he divorced her. His other wife Umm Ruman became a Muslim at his instance. All his children except Abdur Rahman accepted Islam, and Abu Bakr separated from his son Abdur Rahman.

Abu Bakr's services to Islam. Abu Bakr was a man of shrewd judgment. He was highly intelligent and was endowed with the sense to discern the truth. When Abu Bakr accepted the new faith without any hesitation that was indicative of the fact that Islam was the truth. The conversion of Abu Bakr in fact set the pace for the extension of Islam. Abu Bakr commended considerable social influence, and he pressed such influence into service for promoting Islam. He made no secret of his conversion to Islam. Indeed he felt proud and honored that he had been blessed with Islam. In fact he became the messenger of the Messenger of God. He persuaded his intimate friends to accept Islam. He presented Islam to others in such a way that many of his friends opted for Islam.

Abu Bakr's missionary efforts. Those who accepted Islam at the instance of Abu Bakr were: Othman bin Affan Zubair bin Awam Talhah bin Ubaidullah Abdur Rahman b 'Auf Sa'ad b Abi Waqas Umar b Masoan Abu Ubaidah b. Al-Jarrah Abdullah b. Abdul Asad Abu Salma Khalid b Saeed Abu Hudhaifah. All of them were men of status and high social standing and they proved to be great assets for Islam.

After conversion. Before conversion to Islam, Abu Bakr used to meet Muhammad (peace be on him) occasionally. After becoming a Muslim, Abu Bakr made it a point to spend most of his time every day in the company of the Holy Prophet. Conversion to Islam made a phenomenal change in the life of Abu Bakr. He was little more than thirty seven years at the time of conversion to Islam. He lived thereafter for twenty six years, and during all these years, Islam was for him the end all and be all of existence.

Significance of the conversion of Abu Bakr. According to Gibbon (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)-"the moderation, and the veracity of Abu Bakr confirmed thc new religion, and furnished an example for invitation. "Muir has observed (Life of Muhammad): "Abu Bakr's judgment was sound and impartial; his conversation agreeable and his demeanor affable and much sought after by the Quraish and he was popular throughout the city.... The faith of Abu Bakr was the greatest guarantee of the sincerity of Muhammad in the beginning of his career, and indeed, in a modified sense, throughout his life. To have such a person as a staunch adherent of his claim, was for Muhammad a most important step."

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Source : Alim.org-Khalifa Abu Bakr History