

## **Khalifa Abu Bakr - Successor to the Holy Prophet**

### ***Inaugural Address of Abu Bakr.***

Assembly of the people. On the day following the meeting at Saqeefa Bani Salida, all the Muslims of Madina assembled in the Prophet's mosque for Zuhr prayer, and for offering allegiance to Abu Bakr as the Caliph. The Holy Prophet had come from God, and to God he had returned. What could not be cured had to be endured, and for sheer survival the Muslim community had to perforce express faith in some leader who could lead them, and follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet. All were agreed that such leader could be no one other than Abu Bakr, the bosom companion of the Holy Prophet, the "second of the two" according to the Holy Quran, and the man whom the Holy Prophet had himself appointed as the Imam to lead the prayers.

Introductory address of Umar. Umar addressed the faithful gathered in the mosque in the following terms: "I expected that the Holy Prophet would outlive us all, but it was the will of God that after having fulfilled his mission he should return to God. Verily, the Prophet came from God, and to God he has returned. He has left with us the Holy Quran from which we can always receive guidance. And we have in our midst, Abu Bakr, Companion of the Prophet, and the "Second of the two in the Cave", who is undoubtedly the worthiest among us to conduct our affairs. To strengthen his hands and to maintain the integrity of the Muslim community, it is necessary that we should repose our confidence in him and offer him our allegiance. Now come and offer bait (allegiance) to him."

Ceremony of bait. Having made this appeal, Umar requested Abu Bakr to take his seat on the pulpit. Abu Bakr took his seat on the pulpit, a step below that which used to be occupied by the Holy Prophet. This gesture was expressive of the fact that the leadership of the Holy Prophet was to continue, and the new leader was not to be the successor of the Prophet, he was to be his deputy only. Abu Bakr stretched his hand, and the Muslims assembled in the mosque filed past the pulpit touching the stretched hand of Abu Bakr reverently as a mark of allegiance. It was a solemn ceremony, each Muslim acknowledged the leadership of Abu Bakr.

Inaugural address. When all the Muslims, gathered in the mosque, had offered their allegiance to Abu Bakr, Abu Bakr rose to address them. After praising Allah and offering his tribute to the Holy Prophet of Islam, Abu Bakr addressed the congregation in the following terms: "O people, I swear by Allah that I never coveted the caliphate either by day or by night, nor had I any inclination towards it. I never prayed to God openly or in secrecy to confer the office on me. I merely accepted this office lest some mischief might arise at this critical juncture in the history of the Muslims and thereby adversely affect the interests of Islam. In fact a big task has been assigned to me which is beyond my power to fulfil except with the help of the Almighty Allah and your whole hearted cooperation. I wished to see the strongest of men in my place this day. Now, it is beyond doubt that I have been elected your Amir, although I am not better than you. Help me, if I am in the right; set me right if I am in the wrong. Truth is a trust; falsehood is a treason. The weak among you will be strong with me till, God willing, his rights have been vindicated; and the strong among you shall be weak with me till, if the Lord wills, I have taken what is due from him. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Prophet, when I disobey Him and His Prophet, then obey me not. And now rise for prayers; may God have mercy on you."

Abu Bakr and the Caliphate. The caliphate issue. Immediately on the death of the Holy Prophet, the caliphate issue came to pose a great threat to the solidarity of the Muslim community. The Ansars insisted that in view of their services of Islam, the office should go to them. The Holy Prophet was a Quraish, and according to the Arab custom, Quraish insisted that the office should go to them. The Ansars by way of compromise proposed that they might have two leaders, one from the Ansars and one from the Quraish. The proposal militated against the solidarity of the Muslim community, and was not agreed to by the

Quraish. The issue did not concern the Quraish and the Ansars alone; it pertained to the entire Muslim community. If the Caliph was chosen from the Quraish, the tribe to which the Holy Prophet belonged, the other tribes could accept him, but if the Caliph was chosen from among the Ansars, the other tribes were likely to demand that they should also have their own Caliphs. This would have led to the disintegration of the Muslim community. The Quraish wanted the Caliph to be chosen from among them, not because they coveted power, but because they wanted to maintain the integrity and unity of the Muslim community.

Election of Abu Bakr as the Caliph. It was with considerable difficulty and after a good deal of discussion and even exchange of hot words that Abu Bakr ultimately succeeded in persuading the Ansars to let the Quraish have the office of the Caliph. Abu Bakr did not covet the office for himself. He wanted that any one out of Umar or Abu Ubaida should be elected. Umar and Abu Ubaida insisted that Abu Bakr should have the office. Abu Bakr realized that if he hesitated, the Ansars might change their mind. Abu Bakr accordingly let the people offer him allegiance. The entire process of election was spontaneous. There was nothing preplanned about it. The things moved in the course they did as ordained by destiny.

Abu Bakr's concept of the Caliphate. In the inaugural address which Abu Bakr delivered at the time of the assumption of power, he declared his concept of the caliphate in unequivocal terms. He held: Help me, if I am in the right; set me right, if I am in the wrong; The weak among you shall be strong with me till God willing his rights have been vindicated, and the strong among you shall be weak with me till, if the Lord wills, I have taken what is due from him. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Prophet, when I disobey Him and His Prophet, obey me not.

Sectarian differences. Unfortunately, the caliphate issue led to sectarian differences. Accounts that have come down to us in this respect are conflicting as well as confusing, and it is difficult for a student of history to assess the correct position. According to one account, Ail offered allegiance to Abu Bakr along with other Muslims. According to another account, Ali did not offer allegiance, and opposed the caliphate of Abu Bakr. In this he was supported by the Hashemites. It is alleged that Umar threatened to suppress this opposition with force. According to another account, Ali offered allegiance to Abu Bakr six months later, after the death of Fatima. Whatever the case, so much at least is undeniable that Abu Bakr's allegiance was duly taken by Ali some time during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. Ali was actively associated with the administration during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. When Abu Bakr died, Ali in his oration dilated at length on the superb qualities of Abu Bakr, and expressed full faith in his leadership. Ali married the widow of Abu Bakr, Asma, and looked after Abu Bakr's son Muhammad as his own son. This shows that the differences, if any at all, between Abu Bakr and Ali were duly reconciled during the lifetime of the Caliph Abu Bakr.

Nature of the issue. After Ali had taken the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr the controversy about the caliphate issue should have come to an end, and it should not have been made a religious issue. The Holy Prophet was a spiritual as well as a temporal leader. After his death, revelations ceased, and the new leaders of the Muslim community were to be temporal leaders only. The election of such leaders could be nothing but a political issue, and it was not correct to make it a religious issue. On the occasion of the farewell pilgrimage, Allah declared that He had completed the religion for the Muslims. If the caliphate were to be a religious issue, Allah or the Holy Prophet would have given instructions on the point. The very fact that the Holy Quran as well as the Sunnah are silent in the matter of caliphate shows that the matter is explicitly political and not religious in character.

Right of Ali. Some sections hold that in becoming the Caliph, Abu Bakr usurped the rights of Ali, and he was therefore a usurper. On the face of the fact that Ali did offer allegiance to Abu Bakr, though after some time, this argument loses its force. Abu Bakr's avowed policy was to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet and to do things as the Holy Prophet would have done if he were alive. Abu Bakr was very meticulous in carrying out all the commands of the Holy Prophet, in letter as well as in spirit. When all persons around Abu Bakr Holy Prophet him not to dispatch Usamah's expedition to Syria as Madina itself was threatened with danger, Abu Bakr overruled the objection on the ground that the order of the Holy Prophet had to be carried into effect. When he was asked to appoint someone else as the Commander instead of Usamah, he held that he could not reverse an appointment made by the Holy Prophet. It is well-

known that Abu Bakr did not covet the office for himself. This is established by the fact that at the time of his death, he refunded all remuneration that he had drawn from the public treasury as Caliph. Under the circumstances, if there had been any indication that the Holy Prophet wanted Ali to be the Caliph, Abu Bakr would have been the last man to stand in the way of Ali.

Choice of the leader. It is well known that the Holy Prophet left no instructions about his successor. Islam is from God, and in whatever way the history of Islam has shaped itself is the unfolding of the Will of God. We cannot, therefore, say that if the Holy Prophet did not nominate a successor, it was an omission or an accident. We must hold that such omission to nominate a successor was deliberate, and in accordance with the Will of God. The intention obviously was that the matter being political in nature, the community should in the matter stand on its legs, and choose the leader for itself.

Claim of Ali. Ali's claim was not based on seniority or merit; it was based on inheritance. The Holy Prophet declared in unequivocal terms that in the case of prophets, there was nothing to be inherited. The Holy Prophet did beget some sons but they did not survive. It appears that there was a set purpose behind that. The Holy Prophet was the last of the prophets, and it was accordingly the Will of God that with his death, there was the end of the prophethood, and there was nothing to be inherited. The caliphate could not be claimed on the basis of inheritance, it was a political office, and the community was free to choose, whomsoever they liked. If for some reason, Ali was not chosen, this could not be made a ground for religious grievance.

Judgment on the caliphate of Abu Bakr. In passing any judgment on the caliphate of Abu Bakr, two points deserve particular consideration. The first point is that we have definite indications that the Holy Prophet wanted Abu Bakr to succeed him. The second point is that the caliphate of Abu Bakr must be judged on the basis of its results. With regard to the first point, the Holy Prophet appointed Abu Bakr as the Imam, and that vested Abu Bakr with the mantle of the leadership of the Muslim community. The Holy Prophet declared that he was under obligation to no one other than Abu Bakr. The Holy Prophet also declared that all doors opening in the mosque should be closed except the door of the quarter of Abu Bakr.

As regards the second point it has to be borne in mind that when Abu Bakr was elected as the Caliph, Islam was confined to Makkah, Madina, and Taif only, and in the rest of Arabia the tribes had risen against Islam. When barely two years later, Abu Bakr died, the whole of Arabia was in the fold of Islam and even Iraq and Syria had come under the domination of Islam. The irresistible conclusion is that such a man could not be a usurper.

The verdict of history is that Abu Bakr successfully and faithfully carried out the mission of the Holy Prophet, and his policy aimed at securing the integrity and unity of the Muslim community, paid rich dividends. Nothing succeeds like success, and in view of the outstanding success of the caliphate of Abu Bakr, it should not be made the subject of any sectarian prejudices.

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Source : *Alim.org-Khalifa Abu Bakr History*