

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Life of Ali, General Review

Periods in the life of Ali

The life of Ali can be divided into three distinct periods. The first period comprises the first thirty-two years of the life of Ali and extends from 600 to 632 C.E. I call this period the period of education and action. It was during this period that Ali received his education under the loving care of the Holy Prophet; imbibed the values of Islam; and acquired all the attributes that contribute to greatness. In the post-Hijri years he emerged as the greatest warrior of the age. He distinguished himself as a great warrior in the battles of Badr, Uhud and the Ditch. His crowning success was his conquest of the Khyber. In the battles he killed more men than any other single man in history. All those who fought in the duels against him were invariably killed. He came to be known as the "Lion of God". He acted as a Justice, and acquired fame for his wise and well reasoned judgments. He acted as the Governor of Yemen, and acquired good deal of experience as an administrator. He had the honor of announcing the verses of the Holy Quran about the "Declaration of Immunity" to the people on behalf of the Holy Prophet on the occasion of the Hajj. When the Holy Prophet died, Ali was in the prime of his youth, enlightened, experienced, wise, valiant, and an embodiment of virtues. He had expected that because of his outstanding qualities and his relationship to the Holy Prophet, he would be chosen as the Caliph, He was however, passed over, and this state of affairs continued for 24 years when the office of the caliphate was held by Abu Bakr, Umar and Othman. This period constitutes the second period of the life of Ali. During this period although Ali acted as a counselor to the Caliphs he generally kept aloof from active politics. I call the period as the "Period of inaction and contemplation." It was a period of inaction from the political point of view because he kept aloof from politics. It was the period of contemplation from the spiritual point of view, for this period was spent by Ali mostly in prayers, religious exercises and dialogues with God. The farther he went from the world, the nearer he got to God. The third period began when Ali was elected as the Caliph. This period lasted for five years only. I call this period as the period of frustration Ali found the caliphate to be a bed of thorns. During five years he had to fight three battles, the Battle of the Camel; the Battle of Siffin; and the Battle of Nahrawan. All these battles were fought against the Muslims and led to considerable bloodshed. It was a matter of the greatest shock for Ali that instead of fighting against the non-Muslims he had to fight against the Muslims. During this period, Ali had to suffer from frustration because of repeated and continuous betrayals, even by men close to him. At the outset of his caliphate, he was betrayed by the Banu Umayya, when Muawiyah defied him and accused him of involvement in the murder of Othman. He was betrayed by the people of Madina who did not respond to his call to undertake "Jihad" against Muawiyah. He was betrayed by Talha and Zubair who took the oath of allegiance to him and later defected. He was betrayed by Ayesha, his mother-in-law, who took up terms against him. He was betrayed by the people of Basra who had taken the oath of allegiance to him but later defected. At Siffin he was betrayed by his own army who would not fight when the victory was in sight. In the matter of arbitration he was betrayed by his umpire Abu Musa Ashari, who instead of defending his cause deposed him. He had to face the secession of the Kharijites who had originally fought on his side at the Battle of Siffin. He was betrayed by Khurrit b Rashid who had been his ally, but later revolted against him, and created trouble in Basra. He was betrayed by his own brother Aquil, who was not satisfied with the allowance that Ali gave him, and joined Muawiyah who rewarded him handsomely. He was betrayed by his cousin Abdullah b Abbas when he had appointed as the Governor of Basra, and who left his post after misappropriating heavy funds from the Bait-ul-Mal. The final act of betrayal came when Ali was martyred by a fanatic Kharijite.

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