

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Umar as Caliph

Nomination Of Umar As The Caliph

On the seventh Jamadi-ul Akhir of the 13th A.H. (8th August 633) which was a cold day, Abu Bakr took a bath and caught a chill. That developed into a high fever.

Abu Bakr was confined to bed, and he appointed Umar to lead the prayers during the period of his illness. His illness prolonged, and when his condition worsened, he felt that his end was near. It was suggested to him that a physician be called. He said "Now all is over."

Realising that his end was drawing near, Abu Bakr felt that he should nominate his successor, so that the issue might not be a cause of dissension among the Muslims after his death. Abu Bakr summoned Abdul Rahman bin Auf, and asked for his opinion about the nomination of Umar. Some other Companions were also consulted.

The general consensus was that Umar was the fittest person to be appointed as the Caliph. It was, however, felt that Umar had too fiery and tiresome temper, and he might not be able to show moderation so necessary for the Head of the Community.

Abu Bakr observed that Umar's display of severity was meant to counteract his (Abu Bakr's) leniency. Abu Bakr felt confident that when the full responsibility of government devolved upon Umar he would become more moderate in his opinions.

Abu Bakr elaborated.

"I can say from my personal experience that Umar had always cooled me down whenever I lost my temper with any one just as whenever he felt me to be too lenient he counselled greater severity. For this reason I feel certain that with time, Umar will achieve that moderation you desire".

Taleah objected to the nomination of Umar and said,

"O successor of the Prophet; You know full well how harsh Umar has been towards us all during your regime and God only knows how he will deal with us when you are gone. You know that you are leaving us for ever, and yet you are content to leave us in the hands of a man whose fierce and ungovernable rages are well known to you. Think O Chief, what answer will you give to your Lord for such a behest."

At this, Abu Bakr who was lying prostrate in his bed, rose up with considerable effort and said:

"Have you come to frighten me? I swear that when I meet my Lord, I will gladly tell Him that I appointed as ruler over his people, the man who was the best of all mankind. "

Thereupon Ali, who was also present, rose to say that he would acknowledge no other Caliph save Umar. Abu Bakr was much impressed with the selflessness of Ali for not pressing his own claim, and for putting the interests of the Muslim community above personal interests. Turning to Ali, Abu Bakr said:

"You are indeed a prince in the most exalted sense of the term, for others are mere men."

Then Abu Bakr sent for Umar, and informed him that he had appointed him as his successor.

Umar said: "But I have no desire for the office." Thereupon, Abu Bakr said:

"But the office needs you. I have prayed to God to direct me rightly in the choice of my successor, and my choice is fundamental for the unity and strength of the Muslims."

Umar acquiesced, and Abu Bakr dictated the testament to Othman appointing Umar as the Caliph in succession to Abu Bakr.

The testament having been drawn up, Abu Bakr, supported by his wife Asma walked up to the door, and addressed the people who had gathered there. He told them that he had appointed Umar as his successor, and they said "We approve."

After obtaining the approval of the people in general terms,

Abu Bakr lay on the bed and prayed to God;

"O Lord! I have made this testament for the welfare of the community in order to counteract discord among them. What my intentions are, you know full well. I have spared no pains in making the best selection. O God, I entrust the Muslims to your care. O Allah keep their ruler on the right path. O God, make my successor the most pious of rulers and confer peace on the Muslims."

[View Page](#)

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