

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Islamic Actions and Social Mandates

Umar And Drinking

Drinking was very common among the Quraish. Some accounts say that during the days of ignorance even Umar was a wine bibbler. When Umar became a Muslim, he never touched wine. Umar was a great thinker. He thought that as under the influence of drink one becomes oblivious of his duties and responsibilities, drink must be prohibited by an injunction from God. Umar often talked to the Holy Prophet on the subject, and prayed for an injunction to enforce prohibition.

At Madina the following verse was revealed to the Holy prophet:

"They ask you about wine and games of chance. Say 'They lead to great sin, and have some use for men. But the sin inherent in them exceeds their usefulness.'" (2: 219)

The Holy Prophet informed Umar of this revelation. Umar said: 'Holy Prophet. This is not enough, pray to God for a specific injunction.'

Some time later came another revelation, namely:

"Believers! wine, games of chance, idols, and diving arrows are abominations which are the handiwork of the Devil. Avoid them so that you may prosper." (5: 90)

When Umar was informed of this revelation, he said: "Holy Prophet; this is a negative provision. Pray to God to give some positive injunction."

Then another verse was revealed which provided:

"The Devil intends that by means of wine, games of chance, he should provoke enmity and hatred among you; and stop you from remembering Allah and saying your prayers. Will you not keep them away from them?" (5: 91)

This verse provided the necessary sanction for the prohibition of drinking. In spite of this injunction many Muslims continued to indulge in drinking.

When Umar became the Caliph, and the Muslim conquests extended east and west, bringing prosperity to the Muslims, Umar felt that in order to safeguard the purity of faith some hard and fast policy about drinking should be laid down. While the Holy Qur'an provided specific punishments for some offences, no penalty was specified in the case of drinking. That made some of the wine bibblers take the plea that if God intended prohibition, the penalty for the offence would have been prescribed.

Umar convened a meeting of his Consultative Assembly to consider the question. The first question that was taken up for consideration was: whether the drinking of wine was lawful or unlawful. The verdict was that it was unlawful.

The next question was: if it was unlawful what should be the penalty therefore. Umar agreed that no penalty in this behalf had been laid down in the Holy Quran, but he held that a penalty therefore could be laid down on the basis of analogy keeping in view the penalty provided for offences of kindred character.

Ali argued that the offence of drinking was of the same species as calumny for under the influence of drink one was apt to say many things which he should not have otherwise said. In the case of calumny the

Holy Quran provided punishment as follows:

"Give eighty lashes to each one,

Of those who accuse honourable women;

But do not support their accusation with four witnesses.

Do not accept their testimony,

For it is they who break the law."

Ali advised that for drinking the same penalty i. e. eighty lashes should be provided.

This advice was accepted by Umar. Umar issued orders to all concerned to the following effect:

"Drinking is banned under the Holy Quran. If any Muslim drinks and pleads that this was lawful then cut off his head for what he says is a violation of the Holy Word. If he says that it is unlawful but that he fell into error then give him eighty lashes publicly."

These instructions were enforced vigorously, and the Muslim society was practically rid of the evil of drinking.

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Source : Alim.org-Umar bin al-Khattab History