

OMAR IBN AL-KHATTAB THE EARLY YEARS

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Omar ibn Al-Khattab descends from the tribe of Adii ibn Kaab, one of the tribes of the Quraysh. However, the tribe of Adii did not enjoy the same social class nor the standard of wealth and opulence that the other tribes of the Quraysh possessed. This made the tribe of Adii seek knowledge and learning. The knowledge and wisdom they attained made them hold the function of envoys for the Quraysh, and as judges in disputes between the tribes of the Quraysh, and between the Quraysh and other clans. They were masters of speech and oration, skillful at discourses. Their wisdom induced some of them to shun and avoid the practice of idol worship and paganism.

The father of Omar was Al-Khattab ibn Nufayl ibn Abd Al-Uzza ibn Rabah ibn Abd Allah ibn Qurt ibn Razah ibn Adii ibn Kaab. Adii ibn Kaab is the brother of Murrah, the eighth grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad (prayers and peace from Allah upon him). The mother of Omar was Hantamah bint Hashem ibn Al-Mughirah ibn Abdullah ibn Omar ibn Makhzoum. Al-Khattab was a chieftain in his tribe, with no wealth or grandeur. He was characterized by a stiff personality, hard at heart, cruel and sharp in conduct. He was intelligent, adamant, courageous and highly respected among his people of Bani Adii, and among tribes of the Quraysh.

The early years of Omar ibn Al-Khattab were not well documented. He grew up as an ordinary youngster of the Quraysh; however, he learned to read and write an asset, which distinguished him among his age group at that time. During his adult age, Omar looked after the camels of his father Al-Khattab in the environs of Macca. When Omar grew into the age of youth, he developed the strong physique and muscular form in stature and tallness more than the average of his age.

He walked with a rapid stamping stride. His skin was white with a shade of redness. He developed great skills in physical activities, wrestling, and horsemanship. He excelled in speech dialogue, rational thought and decision making. For such qualities, he was deputized by the Quraysh to settle differences with other clans, and his embassy was well respected. Omar had a natural talent for poetry and literary sciences which he could compose with elegant fluency and gifted talent. Like most men of the Quraysh, Omar indulged in drink was fond of frequenting places where drink was liberally served. He was also pleasure seeking and pursued the satisfaction of his carnal desires by developing promiscuous relations with unchaste women.

Omar was always an eminent popular figure in all the tribal and communal gatherings and ceremonies of the Quraysh and other Arab clans. These profligate wanton actions were not particular to Omar ibn Al-Khattab; they were part of the prevalent life style of the very greater majority of the masculine elements of the Quraysh in these days of (Jahiliyah).

Omar inherited the stiffness of character and hard personality of his father Al-Khattab.

For those characteristics, Omar was well reputed as a distinctive part of his personality. Like all other young men of the Quraysh, Omar took part in the trade activities of his tribe. He joined the trade convoys north to Syria in summer and south to Yemen in winter. He also participated in trade convoys to Persia and parts of the Roman Empire. These travels of Omar did not increase his wealth as much as they increased his cultural faculties and abilities. His knowledge to read and write and his command of rational reasoning, argument and dialogue were assets that made him gain more sagacity and wisdom. Through these various foreign contacts and interactions, Omar developed a wider focus of understanding, and his mind grew more intellectually comprehensive, intelligent and ecumenical.

Omar pursued the channels of knowledge and learning with perspicuous insistence and constant endurance. His mental faculty helped him to absorb, rationalize, differentiate, and finally construe a structural understanding of a paradigm of integrated discretion and candidness. The impact of such mental growth and maturity of Omar ibn Al-Khattab was optimized by the very basic inherent characteristics of the man. He became more desiring for perceptive wisdom, and less wanting for worldly lavish prodigality.

At the age of twenty five, Omar became an outstanding figure of the Quraysh and in the pagan idol-worshipping society of Macca. He was also well known among the other tribes of the Arab Peninsula, and also in the markets of the neighbouring trade centres. The basic features of his character and personality were well known to all who knew him. He was strong in physique, tall in stature, sharp in temper, candid in opinion, prompt in decision, scrupulous in action, simple, trustworthy, dependable, and bluntly straight forward. The integrity of these characteristics was manifested in an unyielding stubborn self respect, confidence of opinion and an intense capacity of patience and persevering challenge.

The beliefs and practices of the pagan society of the Quraysh in Macca did not hold a major portion of the interests of Omar. He accepted them as facts of communal practices associated with the structural built up of that tribal society. He did not think it was necessary or important to put that issue into analytical thought and rationale reasoning. His most paramount concern was the perpetual unity and integrity of the Quraysh as the opulent Maccan society with the undisputed supremacy of wealth and man power, amidst all the other tribes inhabiting the Arab Peninsula from the Syrian borders north, to the Indian Ocean south; and from the Arab Gulf east, to the Red Sea west.

The pagan beliefs of the Quraysh and other Arab tribes were not the only creedal practices in the Arab Peninsula. Judaism and Christianity were established forms of faith among some tribal groups resident at Al-Madinah, Khaybar, and in Negran; and in the Roman occupied territories north of the Peninsula in Syria and Palestine. These tribal groups believed in more rational comprehensive prophetic doctrines of faith. They refuted paganism and totally rejected its practices: and considered it degrading to the human mind. They achieved an intellectual civilization which they related to the doctrines of their faith, which the Arab pagan tribes failed to accomplish in their Jahiliyah of paganism and darkness of mind. Some Arabs who came in contacts with

Christianity succumbed to the influence of Christian missionary activities, believed in Divinity and rejected pagan practices and beliefs. They developed a much more intelligent and more logical system of belief. Omar ibn AlKhattab was very antagonistic to this trend, and refused to reconcile with any understanding in this direction. He flatly considered such trend as a breach of tribal unity and group integrity. The issue at hand was the perpetual conflict between individual freedom, and communal group system. The individual cannot live without freedom and the society cannot survive without a cohesive system and pattern of life. Omar ibn Al Khattab was against those who diverted from paganism to the more intelligent teachings of faith; not because of, his love or firm belief in paganism, but because of his great fear that communal group system of the tribal life of the Quraysh and other clans would fracture and collapse. This strict blindly conservative attitude on the part of Omar remained to master his thoughts for sometime. His main concern was that those individuals who turned their backs to paganism and looked ahead for more realistic trends of belief were the cream of the Arab intelligentsia and mentally illuminated elite. Among them were Omar's own cousin Zayed ibn Amr ibn Al—Khattab, Waraqa ibn Nofal, Osman ibn AlHuwayrith, Abdullah ibn Jahesh and several others. Omar feared that these individuals would propagate their thoughts and beliefs among others of the Quraysh; and based on these fears Omar and those that shared his ideas and thoughts stood firm against everything that was contrary to the social system of the tribal life of Macca. They made sure that the new trends of thought remained only in the minds of the very few, who carried their thoughts only to themselves. Omar was very cruel to those individuals and treated them with extreme enmity. The preservation of the social system of the Meccan pagan community was the principle issue occupying the optimal importance in the mind of Omar ibn Al-Khattab.

In spite of his knowledge, learning, wisdom and sagacity of mind, Omar's thoughts remained for sometime absolutely determined that the most vital objective in his thinking was the stability of the tribal structure of the Quraysh and the integrity of its social system. He did not analyze the absurdly stupid pagan system of worship, he did not adhere to it nor did he practice it with belief. He was only concerned that the Quraysh would remain the most opulent Arab tribe with undisputed supremacy in wealth and man power. This could not be maintained except through the stability of its social system, and the integrity of its tribal structure.

The tribe of the Quraysh remained with their minds in the pitch darkness of Jahiliyah of paganism. Omar ibn AlKhattab fiercely challenged with emphatic stubbornness every trend of thought that was contrary to the tribal patterns and life style of the Quraysh. However, alone and in the silence of his educated rational mind, he revised the issues that were perturbing his innermost self. What was the Reality and Truth The tide of time that was to carry to all humanity the enlightening light of the renaissance of true belief was yet to come.