

A Mercy to Mankind

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"And We have not sent you except as a mercy to mankind" (Surah Al-Anbiyah 21:107)

The year is 570 CE, five years after the death of the Roman Emperor Justinian. An army of men, horses and elephants ruthlessly march towards the city of Makkah, intending to wipe it out of existence. This is the army of the Abyssinian warlord Abraha, who after conquering Yemen is now advancing towards the sacred city of Makkah. One of the notables of Makkah, Abdul-Muttalib, has ordered all the women and children to go up into the mountains and take refuge there whilst the men go and fight. However, the men of Makkah are of no match to the deadly Abyssinian lancers who soon crush their resistance on the borders of the city.

Victory seems imminent for Abraha. Yet when the army advances to the fringes of the city, headed by its lead elephant, the creature stops unexpectedly and refuses to go any further towards the direction of Makkah. No amount of budging will make this beast go towards the direction of conquest, yet when the army turn it around, it is more than willing to go back. Suddenly from the distant horizon, a huge flock of birds is seen. Ominously it makes its way to the scene of the battle. In their beaks and claws the birds carry with them stones. Like lightning do they descend upon the confused army of Abraha and pelt them viciously with the stones. The stones start to cut and tear away at the bodies of these aggressors and reduce them to helpless wretches. The army of the tyrant are sent back in humiliation. It is no less than a miracle which has saved this sacred city.[2]

This event was to be remembered by the Arabs as the year of the elephant and was to hold great significance in the balance of power in Arabia. But it was the event which occurred fifty days later in the same year which was not only to be remembered, but would also change the course of history forever. It was on the 12th day of the month of Rabi-al-Awwal[3], that in the house of Abdul-Muttalib a child was born. It was the child of Amina, the wife of Abdullah, the son of Abdul-Muttalib. This was the child who would change the way of life of all those around him. This was the child who would unite all people under one way. This was the child who would bring the great empires of the world to a standstill.

This child was Muhammed, the last and final messenger of Allah to mankind.

The name Muhammed was given to the child by his grandfather Abdul-Muttalib. The name was one which was known amongst the Arabs at that time but was not common. The literal meaning of Muhammed is 'the praised one', and it is reported that upon being asked why Abdul-Muttalib had named his grandson so, he replied: "I did so with the desire that my grandson would be praised by Allah in Heaven and by men on earth"[4]. It seems as if the desire of Abdul-Muttalib came true, for it was the name of Muhammed (saws) which was to be uttered and praised more times than that of any person in history[5]. In fact it is not only men who praise this remarkable man, but also the Creator of the Heavens and the earth, Allah, and the inhabitants of the heavens, the angels:

"Verily Allah sends blessings upon the prophet, and his angels ask Allah to bless him. Oh you who have believed ask Allah to send blessings upon him and greet him with peace" (Surah Al-Ahzab 33:56)

The grandson of Abdul-Muttalib was destined to become the greatest man ever to live.

The early life of Muhammed (saws) before his prophethood, is unknown to most people. His life is highlighted by his sublime character and noble manners. The world of Muhammed, (saws) was a world of idolatry, a world in which women and slaves had no rights whatsoever, a world in which men would cheat each other for a few dirhams.[7]

However Muhammad (saws) was not like those around him. He was not known to swear or talk in a vile manner, nor was he known to drink or gamble. His honesty surpassed that of all others and he was known with the title of 'Al-Amin' (The trustworthy). In fact it was this quality of honesty which attracted so many people to his noble message.

The nature of the Arabs at the time of Muhammad (saws) was very barbaric and they would fight over the smallest of things, such as one tribes camel grazing on the land of another tribe. This would often result in wars which would last for years and take thousands of lives. In the year 605 CE the Kaabah was accidentally burnt down and a massive reconstruction programme had to be initiated. Many people were involved in it's rebuilding. However, upon its completion, the issue of replacing the black stone in its original place, the south east corner of the Kaabah, arose. Each of the major tribes and clans wanted the honour of placing the black stone in its proper place. Civil war loomed over the Arabian peninsula. It was then suggested by Abu Ummayah al-Mughira, one of the elders of Makkah, that the way to settle this dispute was to let the first person to come through the masjid gate the next morning, decide the fate of the matter. Lo and behold the first man to enter the masjid the next morning was indeed Muhammad (saws). Upon seeing him some of the Arabs exclaimed with joy, "here is the trustworthy one, we shall agree to his decision - he is Muhammad". Muhammad (saws) asked for a sheet or a robe to be brought to him and to have the black stone placed in the middle of it. He then asked the elders of each of the major tribes to lift up the sheet from each of the corners. The elders did as they were instructed and took the black stone over to the south east corner. Muhammad (saws) then took the stone and placed it firmly in its resting place And so it was Muhammad (saws) who with wisdom and honesty saved the Arabs from self-destruction.[8]

Muhammad's (saws) early life was wrought with unhappiness as he never saw his father Abdullah who died before he was born. At the age of six his mother, Amina passed away and he was entrusted into the care of his beloved grandfather Abdul-Muttalib. However, at the age of twelve, Abdul-Muttalib also passed away and Abu Talib, the uncle of Muhammad (saws), took charge of him. With such distress and heartache so early on in life, one would imagine that this boy would grow up to be rebellious and troublesome, as is the case in so many of our societies today[9]. But this was obviously not to be.

It was Abu Talib who then reared and brought him up. Abu Talib was a trader and businessman and he sometimes took his nephew along with him on his trade journeys. It was these trade journeys which eventually formed the alliance between Muhammad and his future wife Khadija (RA). Khadija was a wealthy widow from Makkah who was known for her noble character and morals. Soon Muhammad (saws) was working for Khadija as a manager for her trade caravans. It was his honesty and efficiency which led to Khadija's proposal, and soon after Muhammad (saws) had returned from a trade journey to Syria, they were married.

It was in the year 610 CE that the prophet Muhammad (saws) received the first revelation. It was the practice of Muhammad (saws) that he would often go up to the cave of Hira to meditate and pray to Allah alone. One night during the month of Ramadaan[10] while he was meditating, an angel appeared before him. This was the angel Jibraeel (Eng. Gabriel), the very same angel who had brought down revelation to the earlier prophets of Allah such as Jesus (as) and Moses (as). In a thundering voice the angel commanded him "READ" . "I cannot read", [11] replied Muhammad honestly. The angel grabbed hold of him and squeezed him so hard that Muhammad thought he would die of suffocation. "READ", the angel commanded again. Muhammad's reply was the same. So the angel squeezed him again and again, each time harder than the previous, and Muhammad replied the same, each time thinking that he would die of suffocation. The angel then released him and spoke the words which would be remembered as the first words of the final revelation to mankind:

"Read in the name of you Lord, Who Created. Who Created man out of a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is the Most Bountiful. It is He who has taught man the use of the pen. Taught man that which he did not know." (Surah Al-Alaq 96:1-5)

This was the start of the revelation from Allah to humanity. It was the final incorruptible message by which mankind would have to live by and worship according to. And it was Muhammed (saws), the son of Abdullah who was chosen to spread this good news.

His Noble Character

It is the character of the prophet Muhammed (saws) which was one of the main reasons for the spread of his noble message. As mentioned before, he never swore and he never spoke vilely about anyone. But after his appointment as a prophet of Allah, he not only observed these excellent qualities for himself, but also ordered all the Muslims to live their lives according to these noble traits. This is why we find that lying and cheating are totally forbidden in Islam, and about lying the prophet (saws) said: "Lying leads to obscenity and obscenity leads to the fire of hell" [13]. For the Arabs to stop cheating and lying it would mean that the whole of their lives would have to be turned upside down. Cheating and lying during business transactions was a regular practice for the Arabs, and it was from this behaviour that the racist slogan "you cheating Arab!" was derived. Backbiting and slandering one another were totally forbidden and the prophet (saws) was instructed by Allah to inform the people that backbiting another Muslim was like:

". . . eating the dead flesh of your brother" (Surah Al-Hujjarat 49:12)

Muhammed (saws) was known to laugh very little, if at all. Rather when he was happy he would express his delight by smiling and he is reported to have said: "Too much laughter kills the heart" [15]. Likewise when he was angry, he would not fly off the handle or start a tantrum, but rather the complexion of his face would simply turn red.

The generosity of Muhammed (saws) was so great that one of his companions, Ibn Abbas described his huge generosity as being like ". . . the blowing wind" [16]. To give charity during those days was outdated and those who gave charity were very rare in that troublesome society. But the trends of society were nothing to this man, who simply wished to attain the pleasure of Allah by helping those who were less fortunate than himself. In fact his giving of charity often meant that he had to sacrifice the pleasures of life for himself and his family. His wife Aisha (RA) reported that ".... three consecutive days would not go by without the family of Muhammed not eating their fill" [17]

The relationship between Muhammed (saws) and women has been subject to vicious attack by many western writers. He has been accused of being sexually immoral and depraved by his enemies. Many a feminist has accused him of depriving women of their rights. Yet the reality of this man is unknown to many of these ignorant people. When Muhammed (saws) left the cave of Hira, trembling and shaking like a leaf, who was the first person that this alleged male chauvinist turned to? When spreading the message of Islam who was the first person to respond to this so called "patriarchal" [18] religion? The answer is Khadija, his wife, a woman. It was Khadija who comforted him during these initial days of anxiety. It was Khadija who reassured him of his role by accepting his message. And it was Khadija who gained so much respect and admiration from this remarkable man.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was characterised by the evil crime of burying baby girls alive because they were seen as a shame to the family. Yet it was this man Muhammed who spoke out vehemently against this great social crime. In fact he stated the great blessing and reward of having and rearing female children : "Whomsoever brings up two girls upon this religion, then me and him shall be like this in paradise [and he joined his forefinger with his middle finger]"[19]. His conduct with women was not like that of the men today, rather

he treated the women as they deserved to be treated. He did not openly parade women about like cattle[20], as was done before the coming of Islam nor did he seek to please them by showing off his masculinity. Rather he as described as being ".....more shy than a virgin behind a veil"[21]. For a man who achieved so much in his lifetime it would be expected (by corrupt western standards!) that Muhammed would abuse his power with regards to women. Yet we do not find a single instance in his life in which he went out raping and destroying the honour of the women folk who were captured. Rather it was the women of Arabia who came forward in their droves to accept the message of this man, who came to liberate humanity from the oppression of this world[22].

By the time of his death in the year 632 CE almost the whole of the Arabian peninsula had been conquered. A million square miles lay at his feet. Yet such was the humble nature of this man that he would mend his own shoes, sew his own clothes and milk his own goats. Such behaviour has become awe inspiring for millions of people and has thus led them to the beauty of this religion. As a leader for his people he was a great example of humility and mercy. When his companions walked past his house they could hear him crying in his prayer, so much so that it was like a "... boiling pot"[23]. He would continuously pray during the nights to such an extent that his feet would swell up. Upon observing this his wife Aisha (RA) asked him "..why do you pray so much, when your Lord has forgiven your past sins and your future sins?" and the reply from the prophet (saws) was "should I therefore not be a grateful servant of my Lord (by praying at night)"[24].

The famous conquest of Makkah is an event which shall be remembered for the justice and mercy which were shown that day. Even though he had the option to punish those who were guilty of oppressing the Muslims, Muhammed (saws) issued a general amnesty by which many people were forgiven. It was this behaviour which saw the amazing acceptance of Islam by almost the whole population of Makkah literally overnight.[25]

With leadership and conquest comes fame but fame did not affect this man whose only aim was to establish the religion of Allah on earth. His position as a messenger of Allah was not exaggerated. His insistence on being a mere mortal like others was firm. And his desire to single out Allah alone for worship was stressed wholeheartedly. It is for this reason that he ordered his followers not to make any pictorial representations or statues of him. Before his death he condemned the ". . .Jews and Christians for taking the graves of their prophets and pious people as places of worship"[26]. By implication this made it haram (prohibited) for the Muslims to take the grave of Muhammed (saws) as a place of worship. For all those who call the Muslims 'Muhammedans'[27], then this is the response which we as worshippers of Allah bring forward. Throughout history leaders of nations, ideologies and empires have often ended up becoming objects of worship. We find statues and pictures of Marx, Lenin, Caesar, Jesus, St Paul, Hitler, Napoleon, Confucius and so many others. Yet despite all the reminders of these people, it is still this man Muhammed (saws) who has had the most influence upon history, despite the fact that we find no 3-D visual image of him [28]. This is indeed a mercy from Allah.

The world of the 7th century was a crumbling place. The empires of Rome and Persia were locked in constant battle. The Chinese and Indian civilisations were in moral decline. Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism were all religions which were fast losing momentum. The case of the Arabs was clear to everyone and they were regarded as being at the bottom of this decaying pit. It was among this decadence that Allah sent Muhammed (saws). He was like the light to this world of ignorance. Like a lamp did he shine in this abyss of darkness. From the confines of Arabia it was his light that would reach the farthest regions of the earth and release the people from their burdens:

"O' prophet. Verily We have sent you as a witness and a bearer of glad tidings and a warner, and as one who invites to Allah by His Permission, and as a lamp spreading light" (Surah Al-Ahzab 33:45-46)

"Be thankful for small mercies" goes the saying of old. But the mercy which we have been given is far from small. Rather the greatness of this mercy will enable us to live and die upon a way of success and contentment. This mercy is the Sunnah (way) of the prophet Muhammed (saws) and through it we -by the will of Allah- will enjoy an everlasting life to come.

"Indeed in the messenger of Allah you have the most beautiful pattern of conduct for him who hopes in Allah and the last day, and remembers Allah much" (Surah Al-Ahzab 33:21)

Footnotes

1 Surah Al-Anbiya 21:107

2 This incident is the subject of Surah Al-Fil (The Elephant) the 105th chapter of the Qu'ran

3 The 3rd month of the Islamic calendar

4 The History of Islam and the Muslims - Iqbal Mohammed, Vol 1 p. 138

5 This fact is even attested to by the non-Muslims, e.g. see the Guinness book of Records.

6 Surah Al-Ahzab 33:56

7 This was one of the forms of currency in Arabia at that time

8 The History of Islam and the Muslims - Iqbal Mohammed, Vol 1 pp. 163-166

9 In modern western societies much of the social problems are as a result of dysfunctional families.

10 The 9th month of the Islamic calendar and the month in which fasting is obligatory.

11 Muhammed (saws) could not read or write - This is one of the many proofs to show that he could not possibly have made the Qur'aan up by himself.

12 Surah Al-Alaq 96:1-5

13 Reported in Saheeh Muslim (Eng. trans Vol. 4 p.1375 No.6307)

14 Surah Al-Hujjarat 49:12

15 Reported by At-Tirmidhee and Ahmed

16 Reported in Saheeh Muslim (Eng trans Vol. 4 p.1241 No.5718)

17 Bukhari

18 Male dominated

19 Muslim

20 In pre-Islamic Arabia women were subjected to intolerable humiliation, and they were often paraded naked during the festivals which were held by the pagan Arabs.

21 Reported in Saheeh Muslim (Eng trans Vol. 4 p.1244 No.5739)

22 Despite the constant barrage of distortion against Islam, it is a fact that more than 70% of those people who become Muslim in the west, are women.

23 Abu Dawud (Eng Trans Vol. 1 p.230 No.903)

24 Bukhari

25 How different is this behaviour from that of the non-Muslim conquerors such as the crusaders, who upon the conquest of Jerusalem; raped, looted and burnt their way to success.

26 Reported in Saheeh Al-Bukhari (Eng trans Vol. 1 p.255 No.427)

27 This was the name used for Muslims during the middle ages. It means one who worships Muhammed (saws). Unfortunately through their ignorance many westerners still know Muslims by this name.

28 This fact has even been attested to by Christians, such as professor Michael Hart in his book "The 100: The most influential men in History". Despite the fact that professor Hart casts doubt upon the source of the prophet's law, he still cannot help but admit that this man exercised more influence on humanity than anyone else. It is for this reason that he places Muhammed (saws) in the No.1 position, even ahead of his lord Jesus, whom he places 3rd just behind St Paul

29 Surah Al-Ahzab 33:45-46

30 Surah Al-Ahzab 33:21

* pbuh - Peace be upon him; It is a Muslim practise to convey prayers of peace whenever the name of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and other prophets is taken.

http://saif_w.tripod.com/explore/iman/muhammad/a_mercy_to_mankind.htm