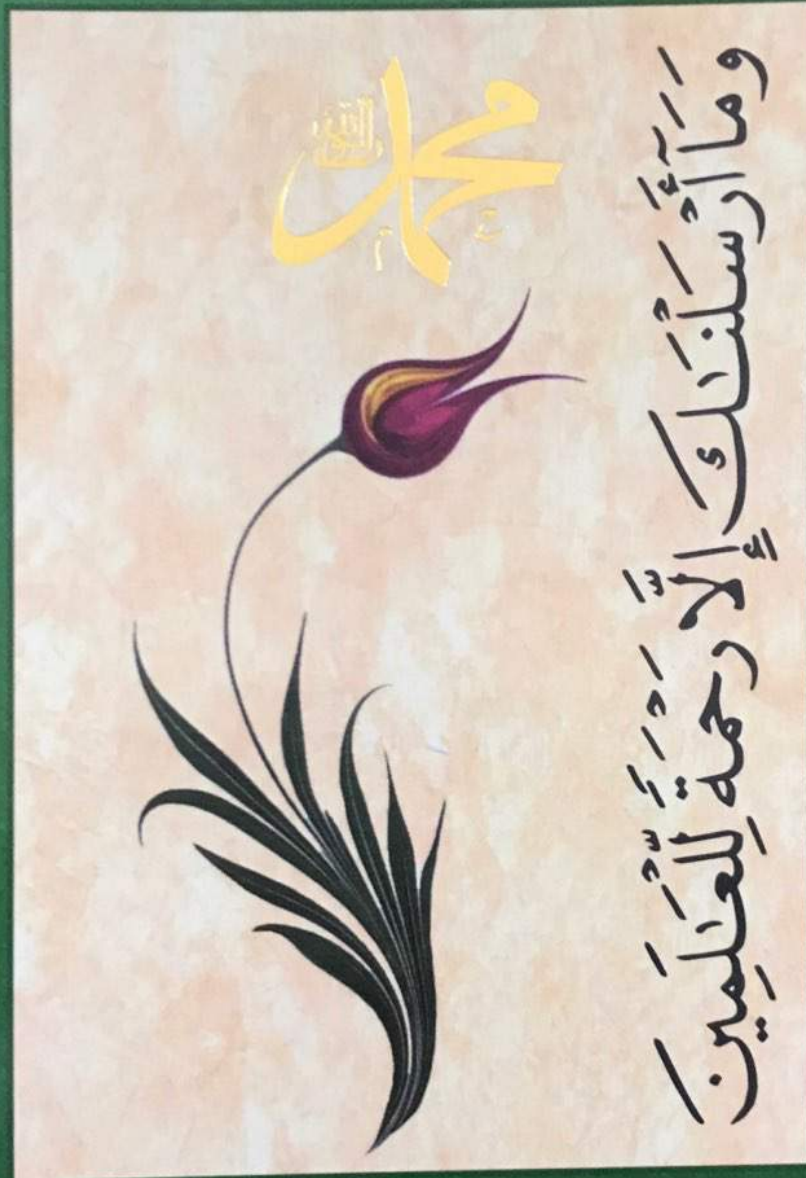


Muhammad ﷺ

Light and Peace for Humanity

A Fresh Approach



Hussein Ghubash

Translated from the Arabic by Habib Bewley

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Islamic Book Trust
Kuala Lumpur

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Thanks and Appreciation

In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, All-Merciful

﴿ O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness, and a
bringer of good news and a warner, a caller to Allah by
His permission and a light-giving lamp. ﴾

Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, 33:45-46

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May Allah reward them all on my behalf in the best possible way.



Preface

There are many biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in almost every language of the world, so why write a new one? What can be added to what has already been written? I hope this work provides an answer.

The *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq is historically considered the most important biography of the Prophet. Ibn Ishāq died in 151 AH, making it one of the earliest works of its kind. Caution is needed when reading it, however, for many details are inaccurate. The chaff has not been separated from the wheat.

The next best-known biography is the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām, who died in 218 AH. It corrects and reworks the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq and over time has replaced it and become the primary reference for all subsequent Prophetic biographies. It remains the most accurate and systematic chronicle of the major events in the life of the Prophet. However, it and similar works are fact-driven narratives which collate a plethora of details that may interest specialist researchers but get in the way of ordinary readers. They lack analysis and thus fail to bring to light the spiritual lessons of

Muhammadan wisdom and self-purification, which are the essence of Prophetic *Sīra*.

However, the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām remains the primary source of reference for this work but we also draw upon a number of other Prophetic biographies, including *As-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya* of Nūr ad-Dīn al-Ḥalabī, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl* of Amīn Duwaydār, *Zād al-Ma'ād* of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and *al-Maghāzi* of al-Wāqidī.

Every age has its own unique language, terminology and readership, and this age is no exception. The language people use and understand has changed, and the majority are no longer equipped to fully understand the classical, historical, narrative-based language used in most works of *Sīra*. This acts as a barrier to accessing the Muhammadan lessons and spiritual awakenings. This biography is therefore written in as contemporary a style as possible, without being overly simplistic, in order to bring to life these divine lessons and lights.

This factor alone—although there are many others—justifies producing a contemporary *Sīra* that extracts the material from the historical sources and paints in modern terms a true and accurate picture of the life of our noble Prophet that sheds new light on the course of events. In doing so, it aims to be as concise as possible while leaving the divine Muhammadan core intact.

As we have indicated, there is more to creating a biography of the Prophet than simply compiling events and writing them down. In many ways, it is more akin to an act of pure faith. One cannot truly reflect on the life of the most noble Messenger ﷺ without reflecting on the spiritual and Muhammadan dimensions of Islam, embodied in his words and actions. Through his life and words, the Qur'ān is brought into the world of form, and when

sincere Muslims study that life in all its glorious details, relive its events, and return to the source of the pure spring of Islam, their faith is strengthened and purified.

By going back to these foundational events when the values, gnosis and knowledge necessary for a life in accordance with Islam were put into place, Muslims access the roots of their own belief and nurture their own spiritual consciousness and awakening. This opening to an unimpeachable Muhammadan Islam, full of blessing, enables them to acquire some of the qualities of good character embodied by their role model ﷺ.

All of this and more can be found in the *Sīra* of our most noble Messenger ﷺ—within his life, everything we could ever need is given form. Thus, the study of his *Sīra* and following of his example are prerequisites for knowledge and belief. Allah says,

﴿You have an excellent model in the Messenger of Allah, for all who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah much.﴾ Al-Aḥzāb, 33:21

Indeed, it must be asked whether a person who has not read the *Sīra* or learnt its lessons can truly follow the Prophet ﷺ. Is it possible for a person to take him as a role model when he has no knowledge of the details of his life? Can a person who is ignorant of the life of this utmost example of perfection, this vehicle for Islam and guidance, be a true Muslim? The answer is clearly no, so it is safe to say that being ignorant of the *Sīra* is tantamount to being ignorant of true Islam.

This ignorance of the true nature of their Prophet ﷺ and role model is clearly endemic among the Muslims of the present day, and has led to an erosion of the great values and wisdom of Islam. Many of the religion's pedagogic, moral and spiritual dimensions

have been stripped away. The version of Islam we see today is bereft of purification and wisdom, a body without a soul, limping its way towards its Creator.

For too many, Islam has become a religion of outward acts, rites and rituals. The inward dimensions of it—namely, wisdom and spirituality—have been stripped away. It is this that has caused the Arab and Islamic world to break up and fall apart. True Islam is the Islam of the heart. That is Muhammadan Islam. Only it leads to faith. Indeed, it is faith itself.

There is not just one source of law, there are two: the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. If Islam is a part of life—and it is not just a part of life but life itself—then the Prophetic life story is the spirit and soul of that life. A life of faith cannot exist without illumination and guidance from the life of our most noble Messenger ﷺ. The Muhammadan way includes every aspect of the life of the Messenger ﷺ: the ritual and the spiritual, his words and his deeds, his character and his Muhammadan nobility. Allah describes him by saying,

❖ Truly you are vast in character. ❖ Al-Qalam, 68:4

A “vast character” is one in which all the noble qualities of character are to be found, qualities such as tolerance, kindness, forgiveness, forbearance, austerity of the heart and limbs, generosity, and preference. Within such a character they are perfectly structured and aligned and found in perfect measure. Wisdom is their crown. Such character brings inner strength, such character shows spiritual purity. It is this that the Messenger ﷺ brought, and it was in this that he instructed us to follow him to the best of our abilities. He ﷺ said, “I have only been sent to perfect the noble qualities of character.” These noble qualities of

character can be learnt from the *Sunna*, as well as from the Prophetic laws that are required for a person to have true belief. How many of them have we embodied? How many of them have we taken on?

If Allah's love and pleasure are truly what we seek, then we must properly understand the lessons and wisdoms of our Messenger's great life story, and not downplay its importance nor consider it to be but a secondary source for Islam. Instead, we must take it as our primary source for learning the true nature of our religion and understanding its values and what constitutes good character. We must follow it in both letter and spirit so that we can obtain the pleasure of Allah.

The Prophet of Allah was not like other great historical figures—his job did not end just because his earthly task was completed. "A light and a clear book have come to you from Allah". His is a light that never stops shining, his is a life story that is timeless and relevant to every people and every age, from the moment he was sent until the moment Allah inherits the earth and all upon it. The importance of his life cannot be overstated, and we will not understand its true significance until we see him as he was intended to be seen, as a lamp bringing light to all of mankind.

Each Prophet was given a unique gift by his Lord, a quality that set him apart from his fellows: Ibrāhīm¹ was known as the Close Friend² of Allah; Mūsā³ as the One Who Talks⁴ to Allah;

¹ Abraham.

² Khalil.

³ Moses.

⁴ Kalīm.

and 'Īsā⁵ as the Spirit⁶ of Allah. Our Prophet was given all these qualities, along with another quality that was granted to him alone, for he ﷺ was the Beloved⁷ of Allah. The unique connection between him and his Lord is one of love, and it is love that is the basis of all existence and the highest of all feelings and emotions.

The Messenger ﷺ said, "None of you believes until I am more beloved to him than his parents, his children and all other people." The extent of Allah's love for His slave depends on the extent of that slave's love for His Messenger ﷺ. Similarly, the link between love and faith is an intrinsic one—if a person has no love, he has no faith. This love is only truly sincere if a person follows the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. If he does not follow him, he has no love.

From this, it is abundantly clear that love is the heart and soul of faith, and that a large part of faith is loving Allah and His Messenger ﷺ and, indeed, loving all His creation. Following the Prophet is not just some form of theoretical guidance, but the very essence of life and purification. Allah says,

﴿Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah.﴾
An-Nisā', 4:80

By obeying the Messenger ﷺ, a person is obeying Allah, and the extent of his obedience determines the extent he is loved by Allah. And the same is true for prayers on the Prophet—the more of them a person does, the stronger becomes the bond that links him to his Lord.

⁵ Jesus.

⁶ Rūḥ.

⁷ Ḥabīb.

Everything that happens in existence is a manifestation of the Will of Allah, and it is beautiful to explore the *Sīra* and see in it the direct hand of our Lord and Creator. It opens to the believer understanding of the meaning of Allah's Words

﴿ It is He who is God in heaven and God on earth. He is the All-Wise, the All-Knowing. ﴾ Az-Zukhruf, 43:84

Almost everything the Prophet did came from direct inspiration and divine appointment.

Our study of the life story of the Prophet will show us how the verses and chapters of the Qur'ān were revealed before, during, or immediately after every event. And when we approach the *Sīra* with this awareness and certainty that every event was decreed by Allah in His infinite wisdom, we see the Prophetic life story for what it is—a perfectly designed picture painted for us by Allah with His own hands.

The Messenger of Mercy ﷺ is like the rain that brings life to the earth and causes the plants to grow and bear fruit. He restores the green and fertile earth's connection to the sky, enabling his community to leave their graves and come back to life. The noble *Sīra* is like the spirit that gives life to the body—it brings life to the one who brings it to life and illuminates the path of the one who seeks guidance by means of it.

Allah says,

﴿ You who believe, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to what will bring you to life! ﴾ Al-Anfāl, 8:24

By the lights of his *Sīra*, our most noble Messenger ﷺ brings dead hearts to life and will continue to do so until Allah inherits the earth and those upon it. Allah says in the Qur'ān,

❖ Is someone who was dead and whom We brought to life, supplying him with a light by which to walk among people, the same as someone who is in utter darkness, unable to emerge from it? ﴿ Al-An‘ām, 6:122

Allah's Words "whom we brought to life" mean "whose hearts we brought to life" so that their inner eyes could bear direct witness to the lights of the Divine, and so that Allah and His Messenger ﷺ might be ever present in their hearts. Any heart from which they are absent is dead, even though its body be alive. Many are those walking around in such a state, dead hearts within living bodies. They are both dead and alive at one and the same time. These are the ones who Allah describes, saying,

❖ Those to whom Allah gives no light, they have no light. ﴿ An-Nūr, 24:40

for when someone has no light, his heart drowns in the seas of darkness of ignorance. And ignorance is death itself.

❖ They are just like cattle. Indeed, they are even more astray! ﴿ Al-Furqān, 25:44

Intellect and religion are inextricably linked, bound together in a timeless knot that can never be loosened or undone. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "He who has no intellect has no religion, and he who has no religion has no intellect. Indeed, religion is nothing but intellect." Since there can be no *taklīf* (legal responsibility) without intellect, intellect is an essential prerequisite of Islam and an essential component of our faith. Indeed, it can be said that intellect is the very basis for the Islamic creed. In the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī*, Allah says, speaking directly to the intellect,

"I have not created anything better than you, for it is because

of you that I give, because of you that I take, and because of you that I punish.”

Intellect sets the human being apart from other creatures: it is part of Allah’s generosity to man that He granted him a full intellect and wisdom. A Muslim cannot hope to know perfection—or to know the One who created him—unless he is in full possession of his mental and spiritual faculties. That is why Allah calls on those who have intellects and who seek knowledge of the true nature of their Creator to reflect on creation and ponder the meanings of the Qur’ān. The highest achievement of the intellect is knowledge of Allah.

A noble ḥadīth says, “An hour’s reflection is equal to a year’s worship.” In another version, it says seventy years’ worship. Does this not show the high regard within which Allah holds reflection and contemplation, two of the chief functions of the intellect?

There is a dynamic interplay between the cognitive functions of the heart and the mind and the types of knowledge that they each perceive. The mind perceives the general overall picture of things, while the heart perceives them in a very special way. Its perception is through the lens of faith and is based on tasting (*dhawq*). As the gnostics say, its taste can be found in the realm of boundless meaning. When knowledge of the mind relocates to the heart, it is transformed into *wajdānī*⁸ knowledge, spiritual knowledge, or gnosis. At that moment, knowledge ceases to be simply thoughts and ideas and goes beyond them, transformed into something active and alive.

⁸ This term basically refers to direct spiritual experience. Some have translated it as *intuitive*.

One might say that the mind represents the cognitive centre of outer consciousness, while the heart represents the cognitive centre of inner consciousness. The heart is the deep spiritual core of the body. Allah says,

﴿ Will they not then ponder the Qur'ān or are there locks upon their hearts? ﴾ Muhammad, 47:24

It is thanks to this give and take that an intellect nourished by the gnosis of the heart becomes enlightened, or, to put it a different way, transforms into an intellect capable of giving expression to experiential gnosis, an intellect that is wise and has gained direct knowledge of Allah.

Wisdom, as we know, has a special status within Islam, for Allah

﴿ ... gives wisdom to whoever He wills and he who has been given wisdom has been given great good. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:269

Of all the levels of intellect, wisdom is the highest, for, at its core, it is direct knowledge of Allah. The intellect—and, by extension, wisdom—enjoys a symbiotic relationship with faith, for each needs the other to exist and each brings the other nourishment and sustenance. A person lacking intellect or lacking faith can never be in full possession of his right mind. “The religion is intellect.”

From the moment *Sūrat Iqra'* (Qur'ān 96) opened the way for the birth of gnosis and knowledge and announced the dawn of the Muhammadan Age, Islam has emphasised that the use of reason and intellect is as important in religious affairs as it is in matters of day-to-day life. The very first instruction given to the people of *lubb* (sound intellect) was “Read” (*Iqra'*, 96:1) and of the many verses that followed, a significant number of them stressed the

importance and necessity of reflection and contemplation.

Sometimes the Qur'ān achieves this through use of the interrogative form, such as when Allah says,

﴿ Say, "Are the blind and seeing equal? Or are darkness and light the same?" ﴾ Ar-Ra'd, 13:16

or ﴿ Say, "Are they the same—those who know and those who do not know?" ﴾ Az-Zumar, 39:9

or ﴿ What is the matter with these people that they scarcely understand a single word? ﴾ An-Nisā', 4:78

and sometimes it is achieved through the use of a motivational phrase, such as when Allah says,

﴿ So will you not reflect? ﴾ Al-An'ām, 6:50

or ﴿ So will you not use your intellect? ﴾ Al-An'ām, 6:32

or ﴿ So will they not ponder ...? ﴾ An-Nisā', 4:82

or ﴿ We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān so that hopefully you will use your intellect. ﴾ Yūsuf, 12:2

Are not Allah's Words

﴿ There is no compulsion where religion is concerned. Right guidance has become clearly distinct from error. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:256

a clear indication that the intellect is given pride of place in Islam? Do they not show the importance of making use of one's mental faculties? Does not Islam's rejection of compulsion in any form represent the most clear-cut divine affirmation of the principle of freedom?

Allah has made man His vicegerent on the earth. It is not possible that He would grant such an honour and assign such a

task to one deprived of freedom. In the view of Islam, man has the capacity to choose. In other words, he is free, for choice is not possible for one who lacks freedom. In the context of this Qur'ānic verse, the word "compulsion" is used in the broadest possible sense. In other words, there must be no compulsion of any sort, and if it is not fitting for us to compel others in matters of faith and religion, then how can it be acceptable for us to compel them in any other matter, whether that be an act of worship, a transaction, or simply some aspect of the ordinary and mundane. Compulsion is hateful to Allah and contradicts the generous spirit of Islam.

The capacity to use one's intellect implies having free will, so every time we are instructed to use our intellects, we are being instructed to engage our free will. Divine justice demands this. Compulsion undermines the very basis for the divine Decree and contradicts it, for a person who is coerced and does not act of his own free will cannot be held accountable or subjected to punishment or reward. Such a thing would be inconsistent with Divine justice. So, any attempt to compel people in any way is an attack on the spirit of Muhammadan teachings and values.

So, now, we arrive at a truly deep and insightful understanding of what freedom means in Islam: it is by an absence of compulsion and coercion that man's free will becomes apparent. And not only free will, but might, for the might of a believer comes directly from the might of Allah. Allah says,

﴿ But all might belongs to Allah and to His Messenger and to the believers. ﴾ Al-Munāfiqūn, 63:8

Might, by its very nature, is tied to freedom, not compulsion, for the one who is not free is powerless and has no might.

One of the points of pride and strength for Islam is that it is the religion of *fiṭra*⁹. The *fiṭra* of our intellect is experiential gnosis. Love for the attributes of the Divine is wired into us at a biological level, love for goodness, justice, freedom, beauty and perfection. Similarly, we are repelled by injustice, compulsion, coercion and ugliness. Nothing nourishes and sustains our essential intellect except for equality, respect and exemplary values.

Faith is a matter for the heart—it is fed by the intellect and in turn feeds it. But the heart, just like the intellect, is governed by *fiṭra*, by the promptings and impulses of our most primordial beings. Whatever is repellent to the *fiṭra* is unacceptable to the heart and rejected by the intellect.

And, just as faith and freedom are connected to *fiṭra*, so too is might.

This *fiṭra* about which we speak is the *fiṭra* of the believer, the *fiṭra* that is free and active, not the one that has been suppressed. Allah addresses His Prophet, saying,

﴿Do you think you can force people to be believers?﴾

Yūnus, 10:99

This means that a person must possess free will—he becomes Muslim only by intellectual or spiritual conviction. Islam gives a person freedom of belief, and there is no clearer proof for that than Allah's Words

⁹ This term is often translated as the unadulterated natural form. It refers to the primordial form, the original state of the human being, and everything that fits in with that state.

It is well known that each of the Prophets and Messengers of Allah had their own miracles. And though he had no need of them, given that he himself represented the greatest miracle that any of us could ever want, our noble Messenger ﷺ was no exception. He too was granted miracles and their effects and influence continue to be felt in the lives of human beings to the present day.

One such miracle is the Noble Qur'ān. This astonishing book is read daily by Muslims the world over and not one of them grows bored of reading it. Indeed, it has the opposite effect—the more they read, the deeper their enjoyment becomes. And no matter how familiar with it they become, they never lose the thrill and sense of awe they felt when they first looked upon its Words. They know in the deepest levels of their being that this Book, which was revealed over fourteen hundred years ago, has never ceased to be pure revelation, full of secrets and treasures. And the purer their hearts become and the more profound their faith, the greater its secrets and treasures.

Another such miracle was the ability granted the Messenger ﷺ to build an entire nation of people from absolutely nothing. The fact that he took a people dominated by tribalism—who between them did not even have the prerequisites to form a community, let alone a nation—and turned them into the best nation ever to be produced before mankind was truly astonishing. How could this unlettered Prophet take these deeply divided, backward and ignorant idol-worshipping tribes and, in less than twenty years, create from them a nation of great virtue, the best nation ever to be produced before mankind? Is this not the greatest miracle in the history of the human race?

On top of this, Islam is a civilisation, a fully integrated and

comprehensive way of life for the human being, in which consideration is given, first and foremost, to spiritual, moral and ethical concerns, and the values of tolerance and love reign supreme. And at the same time, it is a complete system of laws and rulings, embodying the spirit of divine justice and governing the life of the individual, the society and the state.

It was our Messenger ﷺ who put in place the firm foundations of Islamic civilisation, built on knowledge, reason, good character, and respect for others, a civilisation that desired only peace and good for mankind, and sought to implement God's Will on the earth. This diverse Islamic nation, with all its race, colours and ethnic groups, is the best nation ever to be produced before mankind.

But, the Islam about which we speak is the generous-spirited Muhammadan Islam, not the narrow and doctrinal abomination which has appeared in its place. All these various shapes and forms of political and dogmatic Islam, which are by their very nature closed in upon themselves, both in terms of ideology and in terms of practice, are diametrically opposed to the essence of Muhammadan Islam. There is no way that such an Islam could ever build a civilisation whose most important prerequisites are openness and tolerance; it could only ever create the opposite.

The message brought by the *Sīra* was one of compassion and mercy—its goal was to save mankind from destruction and loss. Allah says,

﴿ And we did not send you except as a mercy to all the worlds. ﴾ Al-Anbiyā', 21:107

In the same way, every true Muslim, who is mindful and whose heart is illuminated, carries with him a message of

tolerance and respect for the other, for that other has also been created by Allah in his form.

It goes without saying that the spiritual and metaphysical well-being of the Muslim depends upon him reading the *Sīra* of our Prophet ﷺ. The *Sīra* is our guide to true faith, to true goodness and success, our guide to victory over the “self that commands to wrong”. It provides us with the means of purifying it and turning it into the “self that is well-pleasing and well-pleased”, the self that our Lord will invite into His Garden.

It is incontrovertible that the Muslim who neglects the *Sīra* can never truly be mindful. The divine civilisational message that was once the hallmark of this religion can only truly be carried and delivered by Muslims who have studied the lessons of the *Sīra* and absorbed them, taking them from the realm of theory into the realm of direct experiential gnosis. The Muslim who does not take the noble Messenger ﷺ as his role model in both letter and spirit can never hope to succeed.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that we have not dedicated a separate chapter to the noble qualities of character of the Prophet. The reason for this is simple, and is found in the description of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent from the seventh heaven:

❖ Truly you are vast in character. ❖ Al-Qalam, 68:4

These few words express the truth and reality of his character better than any person or book ever could. And, anyway, his character cannot be isolated from the events of his life. Anyone who reflects well on the *Sīra* will see that it is through what happened to him—the stages through which he passed and the unfolding of events—and what he said and did that the divine

qualities of character he possessed were given substance and form and brought to life.

Another truly remarkable thing one notices when reading the *Sīra* of the Prophet ﷺ is the astonishing precision in his choice of expression. In his entire life, from the day he was born to the day he died, he never said something superfluous or incomplete—he only ever spoke well and his words were always precise and to the point.

Before concluding this preface, we should make some mention of the impression the *Sīra* has left on non-Arab and non-Muslim thinkers, authors and philosophers. A great many of them could not help but speak and write of the profound effect the Prophet ﷺ and the religion he brought had had on them. For example, the great German poet Goethe said, “Every time I read the Qur’ān, I feel as if my soul is vibrating inside my body.” Then, he added, “I searched in history for the best human example and found it to be the Arab Prophet.” The French philosopher Lamartine, said, “The most remarkable thing that happened to me in my whole life is that I studied the life of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ comprehensively, and I realised its greatness and eternity.” The great Russian novelist Tolstoy said, “I am an admirer of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. The laws that he brought will prevail in the world because they agree with reason and wisdom.”

Finally, throughout this book of *Sīra*, every time we recount an incident in the life of the Prophet, we will attempt to shed light on which quality of Muhammadan character the event best showcases and highlights. His entry into Makkah during the final stage of his life most perfectly embodies the summation of his quality of character, his tolerance and Prophetic nobility in its highest of forms. Our work of *Sīra* will reach its end with this, the

conquest of Makkah, in the eighth year after the Hijra, and we will conclude it with the Farewell pilgrimage, during which he asked his Companions to bear witness to the fact that he had delivered in full the message with which his Lord had sent him and perfected the qualities of good character.



Introduction: A Brief History

Social and Cultural Circumstances

Ḡa'far ibn abī Ṭālib said to the king of Axum, Aṣḥama, better known as the Negus, when he emigrated to his land with a group of the Muslims,

“Your majesty, we were a people who lived in a state of the purest ignorance, worshipping idols, eating carrion and doing all manner of wanton and immoral deeds. We broke our ties of kinship, and the strong among us took advantage of the weak. This continued to be our way until Allah sent us a Messenger from among ourselves—a man whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness and integrity were known to us all. He called us to worship Allah alone and renounce the stones and idols which we and our forefathers had been worshipping beside Him.

“He ﷺ commanded us to speak the truth, fulfil our trusts, maintain our ties of kinship and treat our neighbours well. He told us to refrain from doing what is unlawful, avoid spilling innocent blood, and eschew wanton and immoral behaviour. Furthermore, he forbade us from giving false testimony,

misappropriating the wealth of orphans and slandering married women.

“He ﷺ commanded us to worship Allah alone and not associate anyone or anything with Him, to establish the prayer, pay the *zakat* and fast the month of Ramadan. We believed in him, affirmed the truth of what he brought and closely followed his injunctions, worshipping Allah alone without partner, and declaring unlawful what he made unlawful and lawful what he made lawful.”

This brief synopsis accurately describes how the Arabs were before Islam, as well as summarising the religious and ethical bases of Islam. Ja'far and his companions were among the first products of the Prophetic teaching, and they represent a clear model for all true Muslims of how to live. These were men and women who had emigrated from Makkah to escape Quraysh's persecution.

Although this picture of ignorant tribalism is representative of what was happening the length and breadth of the entire Arabian Peninsula, it is not a complete portrayal of how the Arabs of the pre-Islamic era were. In order to arrive at a complete picture, there are elements of their culture and system of ethics of which we must be made aware, elements that Ja'far chose not to mention as they were not relevant to his situation.

If we look at the pre-Islamic Arabs, we will see that there were certain positive traits that were, with but a few exceptions, common to them all and which underpinned their character and cultural mindset. These traits paint a very different picture to the highly negative portrait of them that is widely circulated, so it behoves us to draw attention to them. Despite their social backwardness, despite the never-ending series of tribal wars that

defined their era, Arab societies could never be accused of lacking noble qualities and values. Courage, and the qualities of chivalry—truthfulness, preference for others, generosity, gallantry, and hospitality—could be found in abundance among them. Giorgio noted that the Arabs took great pleasure in being generous and magnanimous, and preferring others to themselves. These qualities were part of the Arab code of *murū'a*, the quality of being a real man.¹

Murū'a, and the accompanying quality of *jīra*, embodies the essence of noble values. *Jīra* does not just mean safeguarding one's neighbours, a duty considered almost sacred by Arab Muslims and Christians alike, but also means offering protection to those

¹ The history of the intertribal wars of the Arabs gave rise to very few recorded instances of the combatants engaging in barbaric practices, such as the Mongols' sack of Baghdad, or the Vikings' ravaging of Europe, or the European colonists' treatment of the Native Americans Indians, to say nothing of what they did to the Africans, who they exported in their millions from their homelands to the Americas as slaves and bondsmen. More than half of these Africans died on the trip, shackled in the bowels of the slaveships, and their bodies were tossed into the ocean to become food for the sharks.

It is indisputable that even were we to add together all the victims of every war waged between the tribes in pre-Islamic times—over a period of more than one thousand years—their numbers would pale in comparison to the number of Native Americans massacred by the “civilised” European settlers. Indeed, the entire population of the Arabian peninsula was less than the number of Native Americans massacred or the number of Africans enslaved.

Furthermore, Western Europe in pre-Islamic times was no more developed than the Arabian Peninsula. Their societies too were enveloped in almost total darkness and characterised by extreme backwardness.

who come from outside, seeking refuge from a tribe. The protection granted to such people is so comprehensive that it means war to violate it. When a Bedouin asks for refuge and shelter in the torn tent of a Arab in the heart of the desert, whether because he is starving or dying of thirst or because he is fleeing highway robbers or others who would do him harm, the tent owner's highly developed sense of honour leaves him with no option but to grant him that refuge and protection.² Renan, one of the most prominent orientalist of his age, a man who demonstrated a strong anti-Islamic bias in his writings and talks, admitted that in the entire history of human civilisation, it would be hard to find a better mode of life than that of the Arabs in pre-Islamic times.³

In addition to this, the Arabs revered freedom. Freedom is the lofty spiritual ethical value around which all other noble values revolve and essential to the human being. It is a part of his innate nature, for it is innate for man to reject coercion and subjugation. The Arab, in common with noble-spirited people in other times, refused to accept tyranny and injustice and yearned instead for justice, equality and freedom.

There is an intrinsic connection between beauty and free spirit. Language expresses a person's innermost wishes, thoughts and direct spiritual experiences. The Arabs' pride in their language and the emphasis they place on eloquence, gives witness to the value they give to words that combine the meanings of beauty and freedom. Indeed, their timeless and sophisticated

² Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 86.

³ *Ibid.*

poetry embodies it. We need only mention the celebration of poetry at the annual fair at Sūq ‘Ukāẓ to prove this love of fine language—each year, they would take the winning poems and hang them on the walls of the Ka‘ba as if they were sacred verses, glorifying the literary skills of the poets and the spirit of beauty their poems had captured.

The Arabs’ reverence for language, poetry and poets since the pre-Islamic era is a sign of a deep culture and a proof of a noble and free spirit. These values and noble human attributes, transformed by faith and illuminated by the Muhammadan lights, gave birth to a civilisation which dazzled the entire world.

My friend, the Omani historian Shaykh Aḥmad as-Siyābī, reminded me of a classic story from the annals of the Arab peoples before Islam that illustrates the qualities of faithfulness, manliness and eternal freedom which the Arabs would give—and have given—their lives to protect. He reminded me of what happened after the Persian emperor Chosroes executed an-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir, the founder of the city of an-Nu‘māniyya in Iraq. An-Nu‘mān was a Christian and one of the grandsons of Imru’ al-Qays. He was also one of the best known of the Mundhirī kings. Before his execution, an-Nu‘mān took some items belonging to him and left them on trust with Hānī’ ibn Mas‘ūd ash-Shaybānī. When Chosroes learnt of this, he sent word to ash-Shaybānī, demanding that he hand them over to him at once. But ash-Shaybānī refused, saying that the only people to whom he would give up these items were the direct heirs of an-Nu‘mān. Chosroes, angered by the impertinence of this “little man from a little tribe” and considering it a challenge to his authority, commanded his army to launch an immediate attack upon him. But the other Arab tribes of the region came flocking

to the aid of ash-Shaybānī and, though outmatched, defeated the Persian army in the battle of Dhū Qār. The noble Prophet ﷺ later said, "That was the first day the Arabs got justice from the non-Arabs."⁴

Makkah al-Mukarrama

Makkah, the site upon which our master Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, built the Sacred House, had transformed, over the course of many centuries, into a commercial and religious hub, servicing the entire Arab peninsula. But, despite its centrality and importance, and despite it being the most populated region in the peninsula apart from the Yemen, its population had never exceeded ten thousand people.

The social structure of Makkah was very simple and well defined—the top tier of society was made up of the tribal leaders and noblemen of Quraysh, the second tier of the merchants, the third of the lesser tradesmen, and the lowest of the slaves and the menial labourers.

Since Abrahamic times, as well as being a religious centre, Makkah had been the primary economic hub of the entire Arabian Peninsula. It hosted markets which supplied the needs of Arabs from the length and breadth of the peninsula: foodstuffs and grains from the Yemen, fabrics and perfumes from India, and, during the summer months, useful commodities and wares brought down by their caravans from Syria.

Many of these Arabs visiting Makkah for commercial reasons

⁴ As-Siyābī, Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Sa'ūd, *Ma'ālim as-sīra an-nabawīyya*, Maktabat aḍ-Ḍāmīrī li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', Musqaṭ, 2013, p. 45.

would use the opportunity to fulfil their religious duties and rites, for over three hundred and sixty idols from all over the peninsula were housed in Makkah, including al-Lāt, al-‘Uzzā and Hubal. Indeed, every tribe without exception in the Arab peninsula had its own specific idol stored in the Sacred House in Makkah, and whenever they came to trade, they would set aside time in their trip to visit it and carry out their religious observances. And, soon, religious festivals were coordinated to coincide with the times of greatest commercial activity. Even the greatest religious pilgrimage of all, the Ḥajj, essentially became little more than a trade convention.

Makkan society was not a Bedouin tribal society in the traditional nomadic desert-based sense of the word. Rather, it was a sedentary society, more akin to an “urbanised” society than a purely nomadic one. This ongoing social stability in Makkah, a stability that had endured for centuries, brought about a degree of order and helped create a society with a highly defined set of values, traditions, customs and rules. It was these customs and rules that governed all interactions between citizens and helped create, in Makkah, a spirit of accord and a guarantee of peace, both of which are core constituents of civil life.

Makkah’s rich historical heritage had, over the centuries, set Makkan society apart and differentiated its culture from other Arab societies of the time. This, combined with an ongoing evolution in the core principles upon which tribal culture in general was built, had conspired to create a society which set great store by the principles of consultation and power-sharing in the running of affairs.

The leadership of Makkah passed into the hands of the Banū Hāshim branch of the Qurayshi tribe a few decades before the

divine Message was revealed, and the first thing they did upon taking up the reins of power was to establish a house of assembly known as the Dār an-Nadwa. This house was the place where the leaders of Makkah would come to confer about the pressing matters that arose in their society. It was essentially a power-sharing assembly, in which decisions were taken on issues connected to the city and society, such as trade, declarations of war, peace treaties, marriage and even circumcision.

The Banū Hāshim

The Quraysh were direct descendants of Ismā'īl, peace be upon him, who had married into the Yemeni Qaḥṭānī Jurhum tribe. One of the branches of Quraysh was the Banū Hāshim. Indeed, it was the most important branch of Quraysh, and its whole lineage is summarised in a ḥadīth from the Prophet ﷺ. He ﷺ said,

“Allah chose Kināna from the children of Ismā'īl, then He chose the Banū an-Naḍr from Kināna, then He chose the Banū Hāshim from the Banū an-Naḍr, and then He chose me from the Banū Hāshim.”

Thus, the Prophet ﷺ was the direct descendent of the best and most noble of all the Arabs.

But the noble Messenger ﷺ never once boasted about his tribal affiliation or his Hāshimī roots. Instead, his way was that of the Qur'ānic verse

❖ The most noble of you in the sight of Allah are those who are most God-fearing. ❖ Al-Hujurāt, 49:13

But, for reasons relating to the transmission of the Message, Allah decreed that he be a part of the most noble of all families.

Duwaydār writes about this, saying,

“The more noble the family of the one calling to Allah, the more likely people are to listen to what he has to say. But when preachers come from more humble backgrounds, it is in most people’s nature to dismiss them out of hand and view them with disdain. As for the Prophet ﷺ, the nobility of his background was undeniable and his social credentials impeccable. They could not deny him on that basis, nor indeed on any other basis. There was nothing they could find to say against him, so they were forced to make up lies. Nobility of lineage is part of the reality of existence, even though the faith itself considers deeds to be of far greater importance than family or social status.”⁵

It is estimated that close to three thousand years passed in the Arabian peninsula between the time of Ismā‘īl, peace be upon him, and the sending of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, a period of time in which not a single Prophet or Messenger came to the Arabs nor a single divine revelation was revealed. As a result, the tribes that came and went before Quraysh are all believed to have followed the religion of Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him. And the same was true of Quraysh themselves, but, as the centuries passed, their faith lapsed into paganism and the worship of idols.

The corruption of Quraysh’s faith started, according to historical accounts, when a man from the Hijaz called ‘Amr ibn Luḥayy al-Khuzā‘ī, during one of his frequent visits to Greater Syria, saw a group of people worshipping idols, a thing he had never seen before. He asked them about it and they told him, “We worship these idols because, whenever we ask them for rain, they give us rain, and whenever we ask them for help, they give us

⁵ As-Sibā‘ī, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Beirut, 2010, p. 35.

help.”

Marvelling at their words, ‘Amr ibn Luḥayy asked them to give him one of their idols to take back with him so he and the Arabs could start worshipping it. So, they gave him an idol called Hubal. He took this idol back to Makkah and placed it in a prominent location next to the Ka‘ba, and there it remained until the day the Muslims conquered Makkah and destroyed it. This was the primary cause of the religion of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl being replaced in the Hijaz by idolatry.⁶

The Noble Qur’ān says about such people:

❖ Who would deliberately renounce the religion of Ibrāhīm except someone who reveals himself to be a fool? ❖

Al-Baqara, 2:130

Although idol worship had become the norm, a small number of people in Makkah continued to hold to the true belief, following the ways of our master Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, right up until the arrival of our master Muḥammad ﷺ. They rejected idolatry and never ceased to criticise Quraysh for perverting the Abrahamic laws. The poet Zayd ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl, who was perhaps the most famous of them, died just before the first revelations came. Throughout the course of his life, he never once associated anything or anyone with Allah, and remained a man of pure natural belief, a Muslim, following the way of Ibrāhīm, until the moment he went to meet his Creator. Because of this, when ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and the poet’s son, Sa‘īd ibn Zayd ibn ‘Amr, asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ if they

⁶ Al-Jazā’irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, p. 25.

could ask forgiveness for Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl, he replied, "Yes, for he will be raised up as a community (*umma*) of a single man."

The religious rites of Ibrāhīm—the Ḥajj and 'Umra, the circumambulation of the Ka'ba—continued in Makkah throughout the age of idolatry, but their original Unitarian and Abrahamic significance was abandoned. All that remained of them was empty ritual. Indeed, the circumambulation of the Ka'ba had descended into a pagan ritual, a veneration of idols. Islam came to purify the Ka'ba of idolatry and association, to bring the divinely appointed rites back to the Ḥajj and 'Umra, and to add to them a Muhammadan flavour and touch.

In this way, Islam was to restore the spirit and soul of the Abrahamic Unitarian rites and imbue them with new Islamic purpose and spiritual meaning. It brought them back to life with Prophetic *Sunnas*. Allah says,

﴿ Do jihad for Allah with the jihad due to Him. He has selected you and not placed any constraint on you in the faith—the religion of your forefather Ibrāhīm. He named you Muslims before and also in this, so that the Messenger could be witness against you and you could be witnesses against all mankind. ﴾ Al-Ḥajj, 22:78

So, it was our master Ibrāhīm who first named the Muslims "Muslims".

Alongside the idolatry that had taken over much of the Arabian Peninsula, there were also a few Christians, especially in the region of Najrān in Yemen, and a significant minority of Jews in Sanaa, whose descendants continue to live there in peace until the present day. The Christians were comparatively recent arrivals, but the Jews had been there for much longer, and had

also established a relatively large presence in Yathrib and Khaybar, a town some distance north from Yathrib.

According to historical sources, there were two reasons for this Jewish presence in the peninsula. Firstly, they had fled there to escape the heavy persecution being meted upon them by the Roman state in 70 AD. Secondly, they wanted to be there when the Prophet prophesied by the Torah and Gospel came, for their prophecies told them that he would be one of the descendants of Ismā'īl and would appear in the land of the Arabs. So, they moved to the northern Hijaz in the hope that the Prophet of the end of time would be sent among them, hoping to be among the first to believe in him and fight alongside him against his enemies.⁷

By the time the Muslims came on the scene, few followers of these two religions, Christianity or Judaism, remained in the peninsula. The Christians were especially few, and that lack of numbers protected them from the deviant form of Christianity that confused the human with the divine and believed in the Trinity. This Trinitarian brand of Christianity made little to no inroads into the peninsula, unlike in Syria and Iraq, and even there its influence was starting to decline.

As for Judaism, while there were some Jews in the peninsula, such as the Samaritans in Nablus, who maintained the precepts of the original Jewish religion and kept it pure of the deviations that had started to appear, the religion of the majority had been perverted and corrupted so much that it had lost touch with the Divine. The spiritual dimension had largely been lost, with the only thing setting them apart being membership of a tribe, the

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 32.

tribe of Israel, to whom Messages and Messengers had been sent in the past. That tribal and racial affiliation came to define them, and so they became an exclusive group, closed off from everyone else. Their religion was no longer capable of conveying a Divine message to the world nor of delivering the call to peace nor of bringing mercy to the human race.⁸

In direct contrast to Islam and Christianity, it was Judaism that first propagated ideas of racial superiority, championing the concept of inequality and rejecting the possibility of showing tolerance towards other peoples, whom the Jews called “gentiles”. The principle of racial superiority came to be the hallmark, the defining characteristic, of Jewish culture.

In the world of the sixth century AD, it was not only the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula who were swimming in a sea of darkness and ignorance, the whole world was awash with it. Moral decay and inhumanity abounded everywhere one looked. It was a profoundly difficult and uninspiring time in which to be alive. The Messenger ﷺ said,

“Allah looked upon the people of the earth, Arab and non-Arab, and despised them all except for a few of the people of the Book.”

Such was the state of the world that a Prophet had become an absolute necessity, for none but he could hope to save humanity from the darkness which had engulfed them. Into this world came Muḥammad ﷺ, bringing his Message. What he brought was not something new, it was simply a continuation of previous divine

⁸ An-Nadwī, Abū al-Ḥasan, *as-Sīra an-nabawīyya*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2010, p. 23.

messages, refreshing them and supplementing them with fresh laws and legislations. But it was different in one essential respect: his Message was universal, not just to a single people, the Arabs, but to all of mankind.

The only reason this particular region was chosen for the revelation of this Message was the supplication made by Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, when he called upon his Lord, saying,

﴿Our Lord, raise up among them a Messenger from them to recite Your Signs to them and teach them the Book and Wisdom and purify them. You are the Almighty, the All-Wise.﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:129

This is what the Qur'ān tells us. Allah wanted the last of His Messengers to be an Arab directly descended from the Prophet Ismā'īl, peace be upon him.

There are so many passages in the books of the Jews and Christians prophesising the coming of a Prophet in this region. Taken together they can be considered a clear-cut proof. And today these accounts in the two Holy Books, the Torah and Gospel, documenting the coming of a Prophet directly descended from Ismā'īl, peace be upon him, are no longer even secret, unlike in the past. In those times, the priests and rabbis kept religious manuscripts and books under lock and key, granting access only to a select few, but today they have been translated out of their original languages and published in books of history and religion written in every language of the world.

Some authors of *Sīra* have tried to justify why the last Message was sent down in the Arabian Peninsula. But their efforts are little more than general observations and largely meaningless propositions, for Allah, with His limitless and infinite power, does

not require particular circumstances to send a Messenger. It is not the circumstances which dictate and decide what Allah wants, but it is Allah, in His infinite wisdom, who decides the time and place. Indeed, He chose them even before creating the world. Allah knows in His timeless knowledge where His Messengers and His Messages are to be sent.

It was not only the Arabs who were in dire need of being rescued from clear misguidance, it was the entire world. But Allah chose the Arabs in the peninsula to be the initial recipients of this great Message, just as He chose to send all other divine Messages to areas closely connected to the Arabian Peninsula. For He made this region the home of the Prophets and Messengers and the cradle of religion.

As we mentioned earlier, Arab society had fallen into an abyss of darkness and idolatry. So, the task was not simply to correct some doctrine or other, or reform some aspect of society, but to sweep aside the debris that had accumulated over the centuries of ignorance and idolatry. For buried deep under that rubbish were the teachings of the Prophets and Messengers and the efforts of teachers and reformers. The task at hand was to build a mighty edifice, covering the entirety of the earth and offering shelter and refuge to all peoples.⁹

Prophecies and Good News

Allah, in His infinite wisdom, wanted to bring forth from this nation the best community ever to be produced before mankind—the best community because it believed in the Oneness of Allah

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 58.

and lived its life in the way that He prescribed. It would be the best community because it was guided to the right way by the Light-Giving Lamp and because it was given the responsibility of carrying out the divine means for creating human beings who viewed the world through a spiritual lens, whose view of the world was built upon three pillars—knowledge, reason and wisdom. This community would truly be a community, a close-knit fellowship. It would be the spiritual ground upon which a true Islam could blossom and come to life.

As we mentioned earlier, previous Messengers had prophesied the coming of the final Prophet of Allah in this region of the world. But before we turn our attention to these prophecies, we should first look at one of the main Qur'ānic verses that indicate the existence of such prophecies. Allah says in Sūrat al-A'rāf:

❖ Those who follow the Messenger, the Unlettered Prophet, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel, commanding them to do right and forbidding them to do wrong, making good things lawful for them and bad things unlawful for them, relieving them of their heavy loads and the chains which were around them. Those who believe in him and honour him and help him, and follow the Light that has been sent down with him—they are the ones who are successful. ❖ Al-A'rāf, 7:157

Taking into consideration the great number of versions of the Torah and the Gospel, and the disputes over the four *canonical* gospels upon which most of the world's churches today rely, not all of which are considered genuine—indeed, even Christian scholars themselves doubt their accuracy and authenticity—and because of the many revisions and changes to which they have

been subjected over the years and the inconsistencies that have been found therein, we elected, in the interests of accuracy, to primarily rely upon the writings of the Professor of Divinity and former priest 'Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd. He located all the texts he could find prophesising the coming of the Messenger and collated them in a book entitled *Muḥammad ﷺ: as he appears in the books of the Jews and Christians*. We consider this work to be the most accurate and trustworthy book on this topic.

It is well known now that, in the 1980s, some ancient copies of the gospels were discovered written on parchment. These gospels paint a picture far different from that painted by the four canonical gospels and differ significantly from them. Indeed, they sometimes directly contradict them, such as in the matter of the crucifixion of our master 'Īsā, peace be upon him, affirming the account found in the Noble Qur'ān that the person who was crucified was not him but someone else entirely.

Let us start first with what was revealed to the Prophet Mūsā, peace be upon him. It says in Deuteronomy 18:18,

"I will raise them up a prophet from among their brothers, like you, and I will put my words in his mouth."

Then Mūsā says to his followers,

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people." [Acts 3:22-23¹⁰]

¹⁰ Dāwūd, 'Abd al-Aḥad, *Muhammad: as he appears in the books of the Jews and Christians*, the translation of Muḥammad Fārūq az-Zayyīn, al-'Ubaykān, Riyadh, 2010, p. 26.

The clear implication of these words is that if someone does not follow the coming Prophet, he will cease to be a true Jew, for, by doing so, he will have gone against the teachings and commands of Mūsā, peace be upon him, and will therefore find himself cut off from those who are upon his religion. He will no longer be a Jew who puts into practice the teachings of his own Prophet, Mūsā, peace be upon him.

The prophecy of Mūsā speaks of the “brilliant light that shines forth from Paran”. Paran is the mountain chain of Makkah. It says in Deuteronomy 33:2,

“The (light of the) Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He (it) shone forth from Mount Paran, and He (it) came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.”

According to some commentators, the light of the Lord that came from Sinai was the Message of Mūsā, peace be upon him, and the light that dawned from Seir was the Message of ‘Īsā, peace be upon him. So it follows that the light that shone forth from Mount Paran was the Message of Muḥammad ﷺ.

‘Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd says, “I carefully checked the wording and accuracy of this prophecy. And there is no doubt that it was Muḥammad ﷺ who entered Makkah, accompanied by ten thousand believers, and it was he who he entered the House of God with the signet ring of divine law upon the fingers of his right hand. In that way, the Divine light shone forth from the mountains of Makkah, a land of revelation in which the House of God is honoured and esteemed and to which sacrificial animals are led. Sacrificial animals are not led to the Church of Christ. This is further indicated by the prophecy found in the Book of Habakkuk 3:3: “the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory

covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.” The word “praise” is extremely significant, for the name “Muhammad” literally means “the one who is praised”.¹¹

There are a huge number of prophecies of this type, but these few we have mentioned are enough to prove our point. We could stop here, but we would not have done this important topic justice if we did not recount the story of the great Companion Salmān al-Fārisī. As well as being a tremendous example of love for truth and travelling great distances to find it, this account is, at the same time, an emphatic corroboration of the topic upon which we are engaged, namely, the existence of prophecies about the coming of the Prophet ﷺ. It is also a quintessential tale of the quest for spiritual enlightenment and the sacrifices that must be made on its path.

The man whose name was to become Salmān al-Fārisī after accepting Islam was born Mābih Yūdhukhshān in the region of Isfahan in Persia. His father was a Magian fire worshipper. From an early age, he was entrusted with the job of making sure that the flame in the temple remained alight and never went out even for a single instant. This job was one of the most esteemed in Magian society and the one who did it was known as the “keeper of the fire”.

One day, Salmān left his house, heading for his father’s plantation, and on the way he passed by a church. Intrigued by the sound of chants, bells and prayers, he went inside. The Christian prayers captivated him. He knew nothing about the religion of ‘Īsā, peace be upon him, but the attraction he felt towards these

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 27-30.

worshippers was instantaneous, and he felt an intense longing to learn more about this Christian faith. So he asked them where their religion came from, and they advised that, if he wanted to better know the Christian religion, he should go to Syria to find a priest to serve and learn from directly. So, he followed their advice and departed to Syria, leaving his father and his possessions behind, and entered the service of a priest.

There were only a select few priests in the region at the time who were true Christians and nearly all of them were old men in the final years of their lives, including the one into whose service he had entered. Shortly before he died, this priest directed him to continue his education with a fellow priest in Mosul.

So Salmān left Syria for Mosul to continue his study of the Christian religion. Then, when the priest of Mosul felt the time of his death drawing near, he advised Salmān to head for ‘Amūriyya in Syria where he would find a priest known for the profundity of his knowledge. Salmān did not hesitate, so great was his thirst for knowledge and desire to learn the truth, and he returned to Syria to find this priest. This was to be the final stop on the Christian phase of his journey, for only a few short years later, this teacher also came to the end of his life. But, shortly before he died, Salmān sat with him and asked him for advice, and the priest replied,

“My son, there is no one left among all the bishops and priests that I can advise you to follow—all of them have moved on to the next life. But the time has come when a Prophet will come forth in the lands of the Arabs, sent with the pure religion of Ibrāhīm. He will emigrate to a land between two tracts of lava rock filled with palm trees. This Prophet will bear the unmistakable signs of Prophethood—he will eat from what is

given to him as a gift but not what is given as *ṣadaqa*¹², and between his shoulder blades will be the Seal of Prophethood. If it is within your capacity to make it to that land, then you must go.”

This priest must have read about the coming of the noble Prophet in the books of his religion or he would not have been able to describe his appearance and characteristics so precisely, nor know about his emigration from Makkah to Madinah.

Salmān's resolve and spiritual need had led him to go wherever fate took him, following without hesitation the guidance and advice of the priests from whom he had learnt, but the advice of this particular priest was of a different nature. He was not being advised to seek out some other priest from whom to learn more teachings of the church, but rather to go forth and look for the final Prophet and Messenger, from whom he might hear the final messages to mankind from the Divine, and from whom he might finally learn the truth, the search for which he had dedicated more than half his life. After the death of his teacher, Salmān remained for a time in 'Amūriyya, seeking someone to help him identify and reach his goal. Finally, he happened upon a group of merchants from the Banū Kalb and asked them to take him with them, offering them in exchange all his worldly possessions, which at the time amounted to two cows and a small flock of sheep.

They accepted his offer and took him as far as Wādī al-Qurā, where they betrayed him and sold him as a slave to a Jew. Salmān had set out to find one to free him from the darkness and guide

¹² *i.e.*, what is given solely for the face of Allah. Often translated as “alms”.

him into the light, instead he found one who took his freedom and enslaved him. But, whatever the case, his new “master” took him to a region not far from Yathrib and put him to work in his plantation. One day, a cousin of the Jew’s from the Banū Qurayza in Yathrib, came on a visit and bought Salmān, taking him back with him to Yathrib.

As soon as Salmān set eyes on Yathrib, with the palm trees arranged exactly as they had been described to him, he knew that he had reached his destination. How he arrived was not important, he had reached the place that Allah had willed him to find the truth for which he had long been searching.

Salmān recounted that one day, one of the Jew’s relatives came to visit him in a state of agitation. “May Allah strike down Banū Qayla (this was the patronym of al-Aws)!” he said. “By Allah, right now they are gathering at Qubā’ to welcome a man coming to them from Makkah, claiming that he is a Prophet!” Salmān started to tremble and felt as if this news was meant for him alone, for it was precisely the reason he had come.

Thus, the prophecies of the bishop of ‘Amūriyya were shown to be true—Allah decreed for Salmān to be in Yathrib that precise moment when He brought His Prophet into the city. Salmān said, “That evening, I seized the opportunity and went to Qubā’, taking a few dates with me. I entered upon the Prophet and said to him, ‘I have heard that you are a right-acting man and that some of the Companions you have brought with you are in need. These dates are something that I have intended to give as *ṣadaqa* and I see you as having more right to them than anyone else.’ So I handed him the dates, but when he took them from me he distributed them all among his Companions, and did not eat a single one himself. Seeing this, I said to myself, ‘Here is one of the signs.’ Then I went

away. A few days later, I went to visit him again, but this time after he had already moved to Yathrib. When I arrived, the Messenger ﷺ was in al-Baqī', burying one of his Companions. So, I approached him and said, 'When I gave you *ṣadaqa* last time, I noticed that you did not eat. So, please accept these dates this time as a gift.' I handed them to him, and he accepted them, eating some of them and distributing the rest among his Companions.' Then I tried to go behind him to see if I could see the third sign—the Seal of Prophethood—that the bishop had described to me. When he ﷺ saw what I was trying to do, he knew immediately what I was after, so he let his cloak drop from his shoulders, uncovering the Seal. When I saw it, I immediately embraced the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and with tears flowing down my cheeks, I kissed the Seal and told him my full story. So pleased was the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with what he heard that he instructed me to relate my story in full to his Companions."¹³

A man who had been free and honoured in his own land was fated to travel along many long and winding roads, giving up everything that he had in search of the truth, in search for Allah and the path that would bring him to Him. And, finally, Allah decreed that he should reach His Prophet, shackled and manacled, a slave that had been bought and sold, from one Jew to another, until he came to the place that Allah wanted him to reach. Allah wanted to bring him to the noble Messenger ﷺ so that he could be guided by him and enter Islam at his hands.

The Messenger ﷺ, with the generous help of the Muslims, freed him from his slavery to the Jew, and Islam freed him from

¹³ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, pp. 209-214.

his slavery to inner darkness. Salmān's heart was ready to receive the Muhammadan lights and was thirsty for faith. And so quickly did Allah fill him that soon he was filled to overflowing with Divine knowledge. The Messenger ﷺ remarked about him, "Salmān has eaten his fill of knowledge."

One of the most beautiful things about Islam is that a man such as Salmān, a Persian coming from a family of fire worshippers, could become the brother of a man like Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, an Abyssinian slave coming from the wilds of Africa, who almost died from the torture inflicted upon him on account of his having entered Islam. These two men became close Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, while Abū Lahab, an uncle of the Messenger and a noble of the Hashemite clan of Quraysh, became one of those most distant from him. His overweening pride and ignorance had blinded his intellect and inner eye in this world, and veiled him from Allah and His Garden in the Next.



Makkah al-Mukarrama: The Cradle of the Message

﴿Muḥammad is only a Messenger and he has been preceded by other Messengers.﴾ Al 'Imrān, 3:144

The noble city of Makkah is a place of great blessing and divinity. It is a place, like Jerusalem, where the celestial and the worldly, the eternal and the finite, connect and intersect, a connection that will remain in place and not be broken until Allah inherits the earth and all upon it. There have been two distinct enlightened *rabbānī* periods through which Makkah has passed: the Abrahamic Age, in which Makkah was established and Abrahamic law came into being, and the Muhammadan Age, in which a new dispensation for humanity came forth.

Despite the length of time that separated these ages, there was a spiritual connection and interaction between them: the Khalīl of Allah chose to emigrate there with his pregnant wife, Hājar, peace be upon them both, when forced to leave Palestine because of the open hostility of its idol-worshipping people, and within the noble city of Makkah their son Ismā'īl was born, and it was there that he

spent his formative years. After he grew up, Allah instructed him and his father to put the foundations in place for the “Sacred House”¹ so that it might become a *qibla*² and a place of pilgrimage for the people. As they carried out this great work, they raised their hands in supplication to their Lord, asking Him to make them both Muslims fully submitted to Him, and their descendants a Muslim *umma* fully submitted to Him.

Then Ibrāhīm, the Khalīl, asked that a Messenger might be sent to this Muslim community from among themselves. Allah says about this in Sūrat al-Baqara,

﴿ And when Ibrāhīm built the foundations of the House with Ismā‘īl, (saying,) “Our Lord, accept this from us! You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. Our Lord, make us both Muslims submitted to You, and our descendants a Muslim community submitted to You. Show us our rites of worship and turn towards Us. You are the Ever-Returning, the Most Merciful. Our Lord, raise up among them a Messenger from them to recite Your Signs to them and teach them the Book and Wisdom and purify them. You are the Almighty, the All-Wise.” ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:127-129

When the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was asked when his story began, he replied, “I am the supplication of my father, Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, the glad tidings of my brother, ‘Īsā, peace be upon him, and the dream of my mother.” The noble Messenger did not come with a new religion. Rather he was that long-awaited

¹ It is worth pointing out here that the first one to build the Ka‘ba was, in fact, Ādam, peace be upon him. Then it was rebuilt by the Prophet Shīth, and then Ibrāhīm came to set up its foundations.

² The direction in which a people pray, the focal point of their prayer.

descendant of Ismā'il, commanded by His Lord to be Muslim and to follow the religion and way of the father of Prophets, Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him.

❖ Ibrāhīm was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a man of pure natural belief: a Muslim. ﴿ Al 'Imrān, 3:67

Before the advent of the major faiths and all the different systems of divine law, there was Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him. He was the progenitor of them all. Islam was the last of them, a continuation of the one and only religion of Allah.

Allah says in Sūrat an-Nisā':

❖ We have revealed to you as We revealed to Nūḥ and the Prophets who came after him. And We revealed to Ibrāhīm and Ismā'il and Ishāq and Ya'qūb and the Tribes, and 'Īsā and Ayyūb and Yūnus and Hārūn and Sulaymān. And We gave Dāwūd the Zabūr. ﴿ An-Nisā', 4:163

Islam combined the spirit of the Zabūr of Dāwūd, the Torah of Mūsā, and the Gospel of 'Īsā. These were all different ways and legal systems, but they were intrinsically connected to one another and were but different aspects of one and the same religion, namely, Islam. The stars had aligned for the Muhammadan age to dawn, for the last of the Prophets and Messengers of Allah to be born. It happened in the noble city of Makkah, on a Monday in the month of Rabī' al-Awwal in the "Year of the Elephant", fifty-three years before the Hijra. Everything was now in place for the final Message from the Divine to the whole of mankind to be revealed.

The Prophet Muḥammad was born to the Banū Hāshim, the least wealthy but most venerated and esteemed of the Arab clans, and it was part of Allah's decree for him that he be doubly

orphaned, with both his parents dying while he was still but a child. Al-Mālikī says about the significance of this that it meant that no other children would be born to his parents, thereby ensuring that the fullness of the purity of the lineage was passed on to him alone with no one to share it. Allah created a lineage especially for him that would produce a Prophet and preserve the highest degrees of honour and nobility.³

Seven months before he was born, his youthful father, ‘Abd Allāh, passed away. ‘Abd Allāh had left for Syria, having spent only three days in the company of his newly married bride, Āminah bint Wahb, and died on the return journey. Then, when he ﷺ was only in his fifth or sixth year, his mother died before his eyes while returning with him from Yathrib, having gone there to visit the grave of her late husband, adding greatly to the deep sorrow and pain he ﷺ already felt at losing his father.

By the Decree and Wisdom of Allah, all that remained of his family were his grandfather and uncles and aunts, although he had spent three and a half years in the desert with his nursemaid, Ḥalīma, while his mother was still alive. This was part of the custom of Arab nobility, and they did it to ensure that their children grew up in an environment that was sound and healthy for both their bodies and minds.

Thus, he had never seen his father and had spent but little time in the company of his mother. After she died, he was taken in by his distinguished grandfather, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, with whom he was to develop a very close bond. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib loved his

³ Al-Mālikī, Muḥammad ‘Alawī, *Muḥammad al-insān al-kāmil*, Markaz Ahl as-Sunna, Gujarat, India, 2001, p. 14.

grandson dearly, and it was he who gave him the name, Muhammad, saying that he wanted him to be one who was praised in both the heavens and the earth. And, of course, his supplication came true. He was the only person with the name in the whole Arab peninsula. But Muhammad's much-cherished grandfather was already eighty years old, and so it was not long before he too departed this world. After his death, Muḥammad ﷺ moved into the house of his uncle Abū Ṭālib.

While the fact that he was an orphan was an essential part of the carefully orchestrated path laid out for the Messenger ﷺ and one of the lessons by which Allah taught and educated him, it was also a part of his psychological, ethical and intellectual make-up. While it is natural that being orphaned and losing one's parents has a profound psychological effect on a child, there are aspects to it that can be positive, as we clearly see in the life of Muḥammad ﷺ, the man and the Messenger.

These difficult childhood years helped shape his character, and created the circumstances for the great transparency and lofty humanity for which he ﷺ became known, and which enhanced his brilliance and splendour. He ﷺ was to later say that a special place beside him in the Garden will be reserved for those who foster orphans.

It is one of Allah's *Sunnas* in creation that His Prophets be surrounded by love, care and concern from the moment they come into this world, thus preserving their divine *rabbānī* essence and core and keeping it intact. And the same was true of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Throughout his childhood years, he lacked for nothing and was loved by one and all. He grew up well balanced and well adjusted, with a highly developed sense of justice and fair play. But, even in his early years, he was set apart

from his peers by his aversion to idols and the pagan customs associated with them, keeping them always at arm's length and never having anything to do with them. Speaking of this period of his life, he ﷺ was later to say, "By Allah, in all the years before Allah honoured me with Prophethood, I never once made a single offering to an idol."

The Messenger ﷺ was born pure of heart and pure of spirit, and the youthful transgressions of his peers held no interest for him. Never once did he drink alcohol, despite its being almost an integral part of Makkan society. From the very first moment he came into this world, his Lord protected him. He was immune from the appetites of the self and the whisperings of Shayṭān had no effect on him. He ﷺ was a man, a human being, of course, but everything about his early life clearly intimated to the fact that he had been purified and imbued with all the attributes and characteristics of Prophethood. This was clear even before he received his first revelations and became a Prophet and Messenger.

Throughout his childhood years, two of the most prominent and prestigious men of Quraysh, and indeed of the entire Arab race, were his constant companions. These two men were, like him, from the Banū Hāshim. The first of them was his uncle, the indomitable Ḥamza, from whom he learnt how to be a knight and a warrior and the skills and qualities of character that such a knight must have. The second of them was his uncle al-'Abbās, from whom he learnt all about the world of trade and commerce. Al-'Abbās was always faithful to the Prophet ﷺ and stood by him even before Allah guided him to Islam. The other close companion of his youth was a man who never ceased to be his companion and never left his side, a man whose name was to

become synonymous with faithfulness and human nobility, Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq.

Another important part of his early upbringing was those few years he ﷺ spent in his infancy in the desert with his nursemaid, Ḥalīma. Their role in developing his character and their positive psychological influence cannot be underestimated, for it was in the desert that the true and authentic Arab values and customs were maintained and preserved, and it was in the desert that one could drink from the purest wells of language and learn Arabic in its most eloquent form. No one could match the Messenger ﷺ in the eloquence of his tongue.

The first job he ﷺ was given in his early years was to herd the sheep. This was no easy matter, especially given the harsh heat and blazing sun of the desert lands that surrounded Makkah. People did not choose this job—it was forced upon them by the circumstances of life. But, as is often said, it was the profession of the Prophets, for they started their lives looking after sheep and finished their lives looking after people.⁴ Shepherding is also a job that helps build virtue and good character.

Before he began to embark on his Prophetic mission and call them to Islam, Quraysh had had a great deal of respect and admiration for Muḥammad ﷺ, and held him in high esteem. This is clearly shown in the story of the black stone. It is reported that cracks had started to appear in the four corners of the Ka'ba, so Quraysh decided the time had come to knock it down and rebuild it from scratch. But when they reached the level in which the black

⁴ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Volume 1, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 119.

stone was due to be replaced, the different parties involved in the rebuilding process could not agree among themselves over who should have the honour of putting it in place. Even in the age of idolatry, the black stone was highly revered.

The disagreement swiftly became heated and still no resolution was in sight, so they finally agreed to appoint an arbiter to make the decision for them. They said, "Let the first man who walks through the mosque gate judge between us." And lo, that man was Muḥammad ﷺ. When they saw who it was, to a man they rejoiced, saying, "It is the truthful and trustworthy! Him we will happily accept as an arbiter!"

Hearing the cause of their argument, Muḥammad ﷺ laid his robe flat upon the ground and placed the black stone in the middle. Then he asked for a representative of each clan to step up and take hold of a corner of the cloak so that they could all carry the black stone to its place in the Ka'ba together. Then, when they had lifted the stone to its place, the Prophet himself took the stone in his right hand and inserted it into its designated place in the wall of the Ka'ba. His wisdom had defused the tension and division that had threatened the wellbeing of Makkan society.

From this symbolic story, we learn two things: firstly, the tremendous moral standing of the Messenger among Quraysh; and secondly, the importance placed by Islam on using the intellect to resolve disputes—in this case, by getting everyone to participate in the act of carrying the stone.

Then fate took him into the employment of Sayyida Khadija bint Khuwaylid. Knowing of his truthfulness and honesty and the purity and excellence of his character, this great lady, a direct descendant of the noblest and wealthiest families of Quraysh, personally invited him to come and work for her.

On the first trading trip he undertook on her behalf to Syria, he ﷺ met an ascetic monk called Naṣṭūra along the way. This encounter took place in the region of Buṣrā. Naṣṭūra had taken the place of Baḥīra, a monk well known to scholars of Islamic history. Naṣṭūra told Muḥammad ﷺ the same thing that Baḥīra had told him all those years before—that Allah's concern was not limited to one group of people at the expense of others nor to one particular religious group, and that the claim of the Jews that Allah had chosen them over all other peoples and religions was false and simply a sign of their arrogance. Allah's mercy, he said, encompasses all people, Jews and non-Jews alike. Then he added that Allah was going to send a Prophet from among the Arabs who would introduce great changes to their beliefs and customs.⁵

Following his return from this trip, the servant who had accompanied Muḥammad ﷺ on the journey reported back to Khadīja how greatly he admired him, telling her of his unparalleled nobility of character, his great humility and his respect for others. This only served to further underline what she already recognised in him, and love for him took root in her heart. So, as soon as he got back from his next commercial trip, she asked him to marry her, telling him that it was his nobility of character that had prompted her to make such an offer. She herself had had no shortage of offers of marriage from influential men in Makkah, but had rejected them all.

Knowing the great social standing of Khadīja and her reputation for purity and nobility, the Prophet ﷺ did not hesitate and accepted her offer immediately, even though she was a widow

⁵ Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-ʿArabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 43.

and fifteen years his senior. Their marriage, as believers say, was written in the stars and fated to come to pass. So, Muḥammad ﷺ got married at the age of twenty-five to Khadīja who was then aged forty.

During the twenty-four years of their marriage, the Messenger ﷺ would be blessed with family life at its most perfect. Sayyida Khadīja provided him with familial warmth and tranquillity—everything that he had lacked as an infant and a young boy, and she bore him six children—four daughters and two sons. Both sons, however, died in their infancy, and only the daughters remained: Ruqayya, Umm Kulthūm, Zaynab and Fāṭima, peace and blessings be upon them all. Fāṭima was to play a very important role in Islamic history.

The most interesting aspect of this story is the picture it paints of the social status of women in pre-Islamic times. They were not second-class citizens, the Arabs of the time clearly treated their noble women with the utmost respect. They had their own wealth and were granted almost complete independence to when it came to work, trading and dealing directly with their male counterparts.

Moreover, they were free to choose their own husbands and even propose to them. But, perhaps such rights were not granted to every woman in their society, only the nobility. We do not know. But whatever the case, those rights and other rights women had not been granted before were to come with Islam, as we shall later see in the sections dealing with the Madinan stage of the Prophet's life, especially with respect to inheritance. Islam guaranteed a woman's material rights in full and elevated her social standing.

The Cave of Ḥirā': The Birthplace of the Message

The Messenger ﷺ was moving inexorably towards his appointment with his Lord. That is clear to anyone who reflects deeply on his background, his noble life up to that point and the stages through which it had passed—his family, his birth, his childhood, his youth, and even his marriage to Sayyida Khadīja. One cannot fail to see the invisible hand of divine providence at work. Every step that the Messenger ﷺ took, every journey, was mapped out and undertaken under the concerned and watchful eye of a Lord who misses nothing, as will soon be underlined for us in *Sūrat aḍ-Ḍuḥā*.

His retreat into the cave of Ḥirā' was the start of his heart's ascension through the heavens. This retreat was dedicated to invocation and remembrance of Allah. To that cave, on the summit of that mountain, a few miles outside Makkah, he devoted the entirety of his month of Ramadan every year. He would go there to spiritually seclude himself with his Lord, his Abrahamic belief having given him that connection he sought with his Creator. He would perform remembrance of Allah on a continuous basis throughout the month that he spent there, and his heart would become clear and purified so the lights of his Lord could shine forth. Spiritual retreat is, as has been said, the purifying of the pure.⁶

It used to take him an hour or more to walk to the mountain and climb to the cave. When the small amount of provision that he brought with him ran out—the olive oil, dry bread and dates,

⁶ See al-Ḥalabī, Nūr ad-Dīn 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *as-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, pp. 338-339.

he would come down from the mountain to replenish them. Then he would go straight back to his retreat, so devoted was he to this spiritual practice that had become his norm, and so loath was he to interrupt it. And sometimes, he would not even have to leave the cave or interrupt his devotions, for his wife, Khadīja, would herself make the difficult climb to bring him what he needed.

In this small desolate cave, no bigger than two metres square and remote from the matters, concerns and people of this world, a spiritual state would come over him which would make him continue with his remembrance and reflection, and make him feel a spiritual connection with his Creator.

Every year for the next five years he would go on retreat, and it became an integral part of his spiritual life of worship. And this fact did not escape the notice of the people of Makkah and, alongside his moral rectitude, spiritual purity, Abrahamic belief, hatred of idolatry and love of solitude, it created a specific impression of him in their minds, leading some of them to remark, “Muḥammad has fallen in love with Lord.”

This was certainly true, for had he not been motivated by that love for the Divine and spurred on by his inspired inner voice, he would not have been able to bear the solitude and hardship of those periods of time spent in spiritual retreat, alone and cut off completely from his family. One might say in hindsight that Allah made him love spiritual retreat so that his heart and mind might be made ready to carry His Message. So, retreat was essential to ready his soul for the great *rabbānī* destiny that awaited him.

Amīn Duwaydār writes in his book *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl* that Muḥammad did not take his inspiration for going into spiritual retreat from anyone, not from some adherent of the pure natural religion of Ibrāhīm nor from any of his Arab predecessors.

No, the inspiration for the practice came directly from his Lord, who wanted to make him ready for the light of Prophethood to illuminate his pure soul.⁷ Spiritual retreat continued to be an important part of his practice and an essential component of his *rabbānī* life even after his Mission began, so it is a *Sunna*. But it is a *Sunna* that most Muslims have set aside and forgotten about.

Muḥammad returned in his heart to his Lord and joined with Him in heart and soul. And as his heart became clear and the connection with his Lord complete, the visions started to come to him in his sleep. And everything he saw in his sleep came true in the real world the very next day in exactly the way he had seen it. These visions, it seems, were simply another way of preparing him spiritually for the revelation that was to come. They were one of his very first miracles, and it has been reported that they continued, night after night, for six months, continuing right up until the moment he received his first revelations.

The Dawn of the Muhammadan Age

The dawn of the Muhammadan Age is the dawn of an age of a new humanity. After reaching the age of forty, on the Night of Power in the month of Ramadan in the year 610 AD, and after a long day of worship and remembrance in the cave of Ḥirā', Muḥammad lay down to sleep in the usual way. While he was sleeping, Jibrīl, peace be upon him, came to him, woke him from his slumber, and said, "Read!" So he replied, "I cannot read." Then Jibrīl said again, "Read!" and again he replied, "I cannot read",

⁷ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Volume 1, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo 1987, p. 191.

and then he said it a third time and again the Prophet ﷺ replied he could not. So Jibrīl said,

❖ Recite: In the Name of your Lord who created, created man from clots of blood. Read: And your Lord is the Most Generous, He who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know. ﴿ Al-‘Alaq, 96:1-5

The Prophet said, narrating what happened, “So I read it and then he went away. And I woke from my sleep and it was if it had been etched onto my heart.”

After receiving the revelation, Muḥammad went back down the mountain and returned as fast as he could to his wife, Khadija, terrified by what had happened and afraid for his own sanity, for it was no ordinary thing that had occurred. When he arrived, he told her everything, and she could not help but notice the extent of his anxiety and fear. She was a person of pure natural belief, a person who had deep belief in Allah, and it was almost as if she had been expecting something like this to happen. It is said that such was the strength of her joy that she almost fell over from delight.

The news that had been brought to her was no ordinary piece of news. No. Allah had chosen her husband to be a Prophet and Messenger, to carry the Message of mercy, and forgiveness to the human race. Calmness and serenity swept over her and she responded to him with the certainty of the believer, “God forbid! Allah would never visit disgrace upon you, for, by Allah, you fulfil your trusts, help those in need, stand up for the oppressed, maintain ties of kinship and speak the truth.”

This extraordinary woman knew with the certainty of the true believer that this right acting, trustworthy, truthful man in

front of her, a man with all the qualities of character loved by Allah, would never be humiliated by his Lord. Allah never abandons his right-acting slaves, of that she was certain, for she knew well the consequences of right action.

These accounts also show the tremendous bond between the Messenger ﷺ and Sayyida Khadija and the crucial role she played in his life, both before and after his Mission began. Like him, she had an Abrahamic belief, and like him, she was blessed with wisdom and superior intellect. She was the first of the Muslims.⁸

When she heard what Jibrīl, peace be upon him, had brought, she said, "Rejoice, cousin, for by the One in whose hand rests the soul of Khadija, I am hopeful that this means you are the Prophet of this community." To confirm it, she took him to her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal. According to some, he followed the Abrahamic faith, according to others he was a Christian, but, whatever the case, he was a man of great wisdom and knowledge, a gnostic, a man who was well versed in the sacred books, the Torah and Gospel. And as a result, Sayyida Khadija was confident that he would be able to correctly explain the significance of the

⁸ The Prophet ﷺ was deeply in love with his wife and very proud of her. He once said of her, "Maryam bint 'Imrān was the best woman of her age, and Khadija bint Khuwaylid was the best woman of her age." He made a direct comparison between the standing of Maryam, the mother of the Masīh, peace be upon her, with Allah and the standing of Khadija, peace and blessings be upon her. Not only did Sayyida Khadija have a special place in the heart of the Prophet ﷺ, but also a special place and standing with Allah. On one occasion, Jibrīl came to the Prophet ﷺ and said to him, "Allah sends you His peace and sends His peace to Khadija, and gives her the good news that He has built a house for her in the Garden." When she was told of this, Khadija replied, "Allah is Peace, and upon you and upon Him be peace."

momentous celestial event that had happened to her husband.

So, she sought out Waraqa and addressed him, saying, "Cousin, listen to your nephew and hear what happened to him." So, Muḥammad ﷺ told him everything that had happened. The moment Waraqa heard his story, he knew what it signified. He had no doubt as to the honour that Allah had bestowed on the man in front of him, so he said to him, "By the One is whose hand rests my soul, you are the Prophet of this community. The great Nāmūs who once came to Mūsā has come to you." Then he said, "But your people will reject you, abuse you and cast you out from your home." Then he added, "I wish to yet be among the living on that day your people cast you out."

"Will my people truly cast me out?" asked the Messenger ﷺ. Waraqa replied, "Yes, they will, for no man has brought the like of what you have brought except that he has been met with open hostility. If Allah grants me to be alive when that happens, I will give you my strongest support."⁹ This was the testimony of a man of faith and belief. Regardless of whether he was a follower of the Abrahamic faith or a Christian, he was a man with profound knowledge of the divine Messages and the stories of the Prophets and Messengers.

The Qur'ānic verse "Read!" is the doorway to knowledge and wisdom and the key to all that is good. Through it shone forth the lights of the heavens, marking the beginning of the dawn of an age of new humanism. The very first lesson of the Qur'ān begins with a divine command to remove darkness and ignorance from the

⁹ An-Nadwī, Abū al-Ḥasan, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2010, p. 110.

hearts and intellects of mankind, the command to seek knowledge and gnosis.

A person cannot have full knowledge of Allah and His manifestations and creation, nor of belief and Oneness, until he first has full spiritual knowledge. Light and darkness are not the same. Knowledge alone is not enough to obtain gnosis, it must be knowledge that has been purified by wisdom. Allah says,

﴿He gives wisdom to whoever He wills and he who has been given wisdom has been given great good.﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:269

If wisdom is the highest level of intellect, then it immediately becomes obvious to us how important the intellect is in Islam. Wisdom is not accessible to those whose intellects are darkened and full of ignorance.

The Messenger was not asked to pray nor to fast, he was asked to read. The first message from Allah to man was addressed to his intellectual capacity, commanding him to read. Not just to read anything, but rather to read the knowledge of the Divine. "Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, He who created and taught." This Qur'ānic verse brings together three core concepts: creation, man, and knowledge, for together they form the foundational basis for the reality and significance of existence.

Yes, it is true that the noble Messenger was unlettered and uneducated in the sciences of the people of this world, but he had mastery of the sciences of the world of the Divine, and it is those sciences that are most honoured and esteemed. Divine wisdom decreed that he be unlettered so that he might never speak from whim. Instead, every word that passed his lips was divinely inspired, revelation revealed, divine knowledge given at specified and pre-determined intervals. Allah says to him,

❖ Allah has sent down the Book and Wisdom to you and taught you what you did not know before. Allah's favour to you is indeed immense. ❖ An-Nisā', 4:113

He taught him what he did not know. Allah showered him with knowledge, wisdom and imbued him with divine qualities of character. With this event at the cave of Ḥirā', the education of the Prophet ﷺ began. He was to learn directly from his Lord. Allah was his teacher and his tutor—He took on all aspects of his education. As Shakyh Aḥmad Kuftārū put it, "How extraordinary the knowledge of the student whose teacher is the Creator of all existence! How wondrous his qualities of character when they are learnt directly from the Creator of all existence!" The Prophet ﷺ himself would later say, "My Lord educated me and gave me the best of educations."

The Trustworthy spirit, Jibrīl, peace be upon him, brought him ﷺ the lessons of the heavens to him, and made sure they were properly understood and put into practice. In this context, the following ḥadīth of the mother of the believers 'Ā'isha, peace be upon her, from the Prophet ﷺ is apt. He ﷺ reported that Jibrīl, peace be upon him, said, "I searched the earth from top and bottom, and from east and west, but could not find a man better than Muḥammad ﷺ, nor a clan better than the Banū Hāshim."¹⁰

Every Prophet of Allah was given wisdom and special teachings for their communities. But the Qur'ān that was given to the Messenger ﷺ is the only book of divine knowledge that was for all the worlds and all the peoples of the worlds, not just the Arabs.

¹⁰ Al-Mālikī, Muḥammad 'Alawī, *Muḥammad al-insān al-kāmil*, Markaz Ahl as-Sunna, Gujarat, India, 2001, p. 13.

Allah says,

﴿We have honoured the sons of Adam.﴾ Al-Isrā' 17:70

The Qur'ānic chapters and verses that came forth on the tongue of the Messenger ﷺ would be transformed into knowledges, laws and rulings. His words and his actions would be transformed into *Sunnas*, overflowing with light. Anyone who found guidance through them would not go astray. Allah commands the believers to learn from those *Sunnas* and follow them, saying,

﴿You have an excellent model in the Messenger of Allah, for all who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah much.﴾ Al-Aḥzāb, 33:21

Each time a Qur'ānic chapter or verse was sent down, it was etched onto the heart of Muḥammad ﷺ. It was as if it had been placed into a preserved book, one which he would never forget. In this manner, the entirety of the Qur'ān was to be imprinted upon his heart, and the Messenger ﷺ was to learn all the sciences from the Noble Qur'ān. In addition to being the final Message, it was also the most important book of culture existing upon the earth. And it continues to the present day to divulge its secrets to mankind as the intellect and knowledge of the human being changes and evolves.

Through the knowledge he received from the heavens, the Messenger was transformed into a veritable river of knowledge, gnosis and light. He became a teacher and educator to the Muslims, a man of the highest degrees of wisdom, a unique leader, a man of state. He brought his community out of the narrow and constricted caves of ignorance and idolatry into the wide-open spaces of knowledge and belief. He established the firm

foundations of a glorious humane Islamic civilisation.

The life of the Prophet ﷺ was to transform into a series of signs and examples of how the Qur'ān could be brought to life in words and in actions, for the life of anyone whose every utterance is revelation from his Lord cannot be anything but a true embodiment of the Book of the Lord. Sayyida 'Ā'isha gave the ultimate confirmation of this when she said in response to a question about his conduct and character, "His character was the Qur'ān." There is also a well-known description of him which says, "The universe is a silent Qur'ān, the Qur'ān is the spoken universe, and the Messenger is the Qur'ān walking upon the earth."

After the revelations started and the spirit of Muḥammad made direct contact with his Lord, he was imbued by Him with certain high and lofty attributes to perfect the qualities of Prophethood and better enable him to carry the Message. These divine attributes and noble qualities were made his. Allah increased him in knowledge, wisdom, mercy, patience, forbearance, generosity, tolerance and strength of will. He was transformed into a veritable garden of knowledge and wisdom.

These Muhammadan qualities became part of the *Sunna*, and it is the responsibility of every heedful Muslim to take them on and embody them in both letter and spirit, for, without them, he could not become the believer whose heart and intellect are illuminated. It is by holding fast to the Muhammadan qualities of character that the conscious awareness of the Muslim is nourished and his belief strengthened and consolidated. And that is why they lie at the very heart of the religion and constitute the heart and soul of its acts of worship, for what use does Allah have with an act of worship if the worshipper lacks the Muhammadan qualities

of character?

After the revelation of "Read!" no more revelations came for the next forty days (or even six months according to some sources). Even though there was a divine wisdom in this, it affected the Prophet ﷺ deeply, and how could it not when he had only just been told he was the Messenger of Allah. The severing of one's direct connection to the Divine is incredibly traumatic and cannot be compared to the severing of any other connection. And, coming when it did, there is no doubt that it caused the Prophet ﷺ great consternation and created in him misgivings and doubts.

He ﷺ would spend much of his time wandering the mountains and valleys of Makkah, deep in contemplation, looking within for anything that might quieten those misgivings and expunge those doubts. While on these walks, as the books of *Sīra* mention, the rocks and trees would call out to him in greeting, saying, "Peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah." This had happened to him even before he received his first revelation, and when he first heard these greetings, he did not know what to make of it and was filled with apprehension, but Sayyida Khadīja was always there by his side to offer him words of encouragement and alleviate his fears.

Following this period of no revelation, Allah sent down Sūrat aḍ-Ḍuḥā to His Prophet ﷺ. With this Sūra, He cleansed His Messenger ﷺ of all doubts, and let him know that He remained with him and had never for one moment left his side. He let him know that He would be with him at every stage of his life.

❦ By the brightness of the morning and the night when it is still, your Lord has not abandoned you nor does He hate you. The Last will be better for you than the First. Your Lord will soon give to you and you will be satisfied. Did He not find you

orphaned and shelter you? Did He not find you wandering and guide you? Did He not find you impoverished and enrich you? So as for orphans, do not oppress them, and as for beggars, do not berate them. And as for the blessing of your Lord, speak out! ﴿٢٠﴾ Ad-Ḍuhā, 93:1-11

One day, while the Messenger of Allah was walking through the mountains of Makkah, he heard a sound from the sky, and lo, there was the angel who had come to him in the cave of Ḥirā', sitting astride the heavens and the earth. Whichever direction Muḥammad ﷺ looked, whichever way he turned, all he could see was the angel. It was if he had filled up every inch of the sky. The angel addressed him, saying, "I am Jibrīl and you are the Messenger of Allah." Muhammad's initial reaction was one of fear, as if at first he did not believe him to truly be an angel sent to him by his Lord.

So, he ﷺ fled back to his family, trembling with fear, and repeated, again and again, the words "Cover me! Cover me!" So Sayyida Khadīja covered him with her cloak and sat by his side. As he was sitting there, covered up in his bed, Jibrīl came to him, bringing the second set of Divine Commands:

﴿٢١﴾ You who are enveloped in your cloak! Arise and warn. Magnify your Lord. Purify your clothes. Shun all filth. Do not give out of a desire for gain. Be steadfast for your Lord. ﴿٢٧﴾ Al-Muddaththir, 74:1-7

After Sūrat al-Muddaththir was revealed, along with the divine command to read in the name of his Lord, and knowing that Allah was with him and had not abandoned him nor forgotten about him, nothing remained for him but to begin to carry the first of the tasks of the Mission with which he had been entrusted—to warn his people. This was the moment the

floodgates opened and the revelations started in earnest, coming down, one after the other, in close succession. Now his task could truly begin and he could do what he had been sent to do—deliver Allah's Message to mankind in the manner commanded.

He was instructed to start with his close relatives and give them the good news of the Message which had been revealed to him before anyone else, calling them to Allah and showing them the way to him. He was told to be patient, for the affairs of Heaven happen in their own time: it is Allah, in His infinite wisdom, who sets the times and guides the steps.

So, he invited his close relatives to Islam. The first one whose heart was illuminated by the Qur'ānic verse "Read!" was Sayyida Khadija, and she was the first of the Muslims and the first of those brought near to Allah. Her heart was pure and ready and prepared to accept the call—she had been waiting for it with great longing. She was followed into the new faith by others carefully chosen by Allah. These men and women were to form the nucleus of a select group that would be taught and educated by the Messenger ﷺ, and then sent forth by him to take the Message of good and mercy to the rest of mankind, following a plan decreed, lit up by the light-bringing lamp.

When Jibrīl, peace be upon him, taught the Messenger ﷺ how to do *wudu* and the prayer and make supplication, he taught his wife, and they started to do the prayer together, two *rak'āt* in the morning and two in the evening. This was before he ﷺ was taken up on the Ascent to his Lord, some ten years later, on the night of the Isrā', for it was during that journey that the five daily prayers were made obligatory. It was like this with all the acts of worship and elements of the faith: they were all legislated in stages, step by step, even one so pivotal as the prayer.

One evening, while they were praying together, 'Alī came in upon them. At the time, he was only eight years old and the Messenger ﷺ had taken him in to live with him. When they finished their prayer, 'Alī asked them, "To whom are you prostrating?" The Messenger replied, "We are prostrating to Allah who sent me as a Prophet and commanded me to call people to His worship." So, 'Alī became Muslim then and there while still a pre-adolescent.

Even before guiding him to Islam, the honour Allah had shown 'Alī was already vast, for He had brought him into the noblest of houses, placed him in the care of the noblest of men and entrusted his education to His beloved upon the earth, the Messenger ﷺ. This boy was enabled to drink directly from the fountain of divine lights. He was transformed from a penniless child into the wisest and most knowledgeable of all the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. He was to the Messenger ﷺ like Hārūn was to Mūsā, peace be upon them both.

'Alī became an ascetic, a Sufi, a sage, a most eloquent poet, one of the most courageous warriors in the entire history of Islam. He was to become the son-in-law of the Prophet ﷺ and the father of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon them both.

He was followed into Islam by Zayd ibn al-Ḥāritha, the adopted son of the Messenger ﷺ, and then by the great travel companion of the Messenger and the first of the rightly guided Caliphs, Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, the very embodiment of nobility in Islam. Abū Bakr was, at the time, highly respected within Makkan society, and, because of that, a significant number of eminent young Qurayshis followed him into Islam, including 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, the third of the rightly guided Caliphs, Sa'd ibn abī Waqqāṣ, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf, Abū Ḥudhayfa ibn 'Utba,

Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, and other eminences of Islamic history.

According to the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām, the most historically accurate of the books of *Sīra*, Abū Bakr's two daughters, Asmā' and 'Ā'isha, entered Islam at the same time as he did. At the time, 'Ā'isha was, as Ibn Hishām states, still very young.¹¹ But, still, she must have been old enough for her Islam to count for something. If she was but an infant, she would have been too young to realise what she was doing or think for herself, and the books of *Sīra* would not have counted her among the first Muslims. So, she must have been born at least four or five years before the Mission began, meaning that she would have been nineteen or twenty when she married the Messenger ﷺ some fourteen years after the revelations began.

The School of Purification and Wisdom

It was not long before this small group was augmented by another influx of fresh converts, including Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, the dearly loved cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, and al-Arqam ibn abī al-Arqam, a young Companion in whose home the Messenger of Allah was to establish the first centre for the call to Islam, and the Muslims' first place of gathering.

The house of al-Arqam came to be known as the "house of peace", and it became the first school in Islam. It was where the Companions were taught Qur'ān and good conduct and received their spiritual education. The Messenger would read out to them the chapters and verses of the Qur'ān as soon as they were revealed to him, and explain to them what they meant. He would

¹¹ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 243.

﴿ ... command them to do right and forbid them to do wrong, making good things *halal* for them and bad things *haram* for them, and relieve them of their heavy loads and the chains which were around them. Those who believe in him and honour him and help him, and follow the Light that has been sent down with him, they are the ones who are successful. ﴾ Al-A'rāf, 7:157

The Messenger ﷺ sought to instil the sciences of the Book and wisdom directly into the hearts of these noble few whom Allah had chosen to attend his classes. He explained to them in depth the significance and meaning of the verses and chapters of Qur'ān that had been thus far revealed and taught them how to pray. And they in turn took that prayer to the rest of their new Muslim brothers and sisters.

The Messenger ﷺ laid out for them the Qur'ānic vision of the true reality of existence, life, creation, the universe and the human being; and the true reality of good and evil and their undeniable connection to light and darkness.

The entire Muhammadan way—its educational method and system of conduct—revolves around *tazkiya* (purification), and that is why the noble Messenger worked so hard to purify the intellects and souls of his followers of all remnants and traces of the culture and values of idolatry and ignorance, and replace that with the sciences and lights of Heaven. He purified them using the lofty spiritual moral principles of Islam.

Allah says in one of the verses of His Book:

﴿ Allah showed great kindness to the believers when He sent a Messenger to them from among themselves to recite His Signs to them and purify them and teach them the Book and

Wisdom, even though before that they were clearly misguided. ﴿Al 'Imrān, 3:164﴾

The entire task of the Messenger ﷺ is summarised here by the words

﴿Purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom.﴾

He has two jobs, purifying and teaching knowledge and wisdom, and a direct connection is drawn between them. They both constitute crucial components of belief: they are the gateway to the lights of Heaven and the secret for one's acts of worship finding their way to the Lord. It is only by means of them that it becomes possible for a believer's heart and intellect to know success in this world and the Next. Allah Himself bears witness to this, saying in His Book,

﴿He who has purified himself will have success, he who invokes the Name of his Lord and prays.﴾ Al-A'la, 87:14-15

Success, whether in this world or in the Next, is reserved exclusively for those who purify themselves and remember Allah much.

The Companions absorbed these values and qualities of Prophethood sitting at the feet of their Prophet ﷺ, learning directly from him, and becoming themselves examples of noble conduct, scrupulousness and patience for other Muslims to study and emulate. The more the lights of belief filled their hearts and shaped their emotions and conscience, the more their love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ grew. For love of the Messenger ﷺ is a part of love of Allah. Indeed, he who does not love him lacks true belief. What does this mean? It means that love gives life to belief. It underpins it. True belief cannot exist or manifest without it.

Everything was ready, all that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was

waiting for was a Command from his Lord. And that Command came in the beginning of the fourth year after the revelations began, with the revelation of the verse

﴿ Proclaim what you have been ordered to and turn away from those who associate with Allah. ﴾ Al-Hijr, 15:94

The time had come to make Islam public and announce it to the world. In a sense, this was the official opening.

So, he ﷺ gathered together the people of Makkah and told them of the Message from Heaven. He was no longer concerned about how the idolaters might react or what they might do, for the divine Command had come in the moment that Allah decreed. The moment had come for truth to combat falsehood, and the struggle between belief and idolatry was about to start in earnest as we will soon discover.



The Struggle between Good and Evil

The life of a Prophet is strewn with difficulty. In the words of the Gospel of Luke, "No Prophet is accepted in his hometown." In the history of the human race, from the time of Nūḥ to the times of Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and 'Īsā, there has never been a Prophet who did not experience opposition and rejection, whose people did not abuse him. But, even if Quraysh themselves did not originally welcome and honour the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and even though he had to undergo all the myriad forms of physical and psychological abuse they directed at him, the call of Heaven's final envoy met with a swift and positive response, first in Makkah, then in Madinah, then in the whole Arab peninsula, and later wherever Islam has gone. Love took hold and quickly blossomed in the hearts of his followers.

Although the struggle between truth and falsehood had been delayed, it was an inescapable part of the Decree. It was inevitable and could not be prevented, for truth cannot abide falsehood and falsehood cannot abide truth. Truth seeks to liberate mankind from the darkness and evils of the earth and build a society of free, spiritual, illuminated men and women whose hearts are firmly

connected to Heaven. Falsehood, on the other hand, insists on rendering men blind and helpless, forever at the mercy of ignorance. Another term for falsehood is "*shirk*" or associating others with Allah. *Shirk* is but the darkness of the heart. When the divine and sacred are removed from a person's life, his life becomes empty and without meaning—all connection to the spirit, all light, is sucked out of it and he loses contact with his essential nature.

In his ignorance, the man of *shirk* holds fast to his darkness, imagining that it is where all goodness lies. It is not only external idols that he worships—the greatest idol that he worships is his self—he has lost the capacity to see beyond his whims and appetites, to think of anything but the foolish gratification of his senses. *Hawā* (whim) is the most worshipped god upon the earth! Because those who associate others with Allah do not believe in the higher life of the spirit nor in the life to come, because they do not believe in a Creator nor in One who brings death, because they do not believe in the Decree nor in punishment and reward, seeing death as being final and absolute.

It was this nihilistic way of viewing the world, which had become the dominant mindset of the people of the peninsula since the neglect of the Abrahamic laws, that the Messenger ﷺ had come to wipe from the face of the earth, so that he could build in its place a noble life for human beings. It is a fundamental law of existence that sometimes to create, one must first destroy.

There was debris that had to be cleared from the way before mankind could advance to the wide-open plains of goodness and success. It was not enough for Islam to simply take away the idols that Quraysh had worshipped for generations and lovingly carved with their own hands, it had to also tackle and clear away the

underlying culture of idolatry, the pre-Islamic beliefs that underpinned their worldview.

Once all that ignorance and superstition had been cleared away, the Messenger ﷺ could then fill the void left behind by their absence with hearts and minds directly connected to the Sacred and Divine. But this would undermine and destroy the false moral and religious authority that Quraysh had so carefully cultivated, for it was the presence of those idols in Makkah that had maintained its lofty standing in pre-Islamic Arab society for so long. Quraysh were the people of the Sacred place, the keepers of the House and the servants of the gods. This was the basis of the privileged status and leadership given to them by the Arabs. It brought them material wealth, for the visiting pilgrims and traders would bring income to Makkah, while the highwaymen and robbers did not dare touch their trade caravans as they made their way through the peninsula on their winter journeys to Yemen and their summer journeys to Syria. If they lost their idols, they lost their influence over the backward tribes.¹

Thus, two problems confronted the Prophet ﷺ as he called to Islam: the first was the problem of entrenched belief, although it was not as entrenched as it first appeared; and the second and greater problem was that of vested economic interest and social standing. The status quo suited Quraysh and granted them enormous amounts of political and moral influence, and they had a lot to lose if it were broken. Quraysh was the single most important Arab tribe in the entire Arab peninsula, and it had occupied that position of fame and privilege for hundreds of

¹ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Volume 1, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 205.

years. Standing up to Quraysh was not something that an Arab of the time considered, let alone did.

But none of that mattered to the Messenger ﷺ, for he was responsible for only one thing and that was clear transmission. So he chose the appropriate venue and picked his words carefully, speaking with great determination and resolve, for it would not befit Heaven's Message to convey it any other way. He stood atop mount Ṣafā near the Ḥaram and called out to the people of Makkah to gather round. And crowds of people came flocking from every direction. Then he ﷺ addressed them, saying, "Tribe of Quraysh, were I to tell you that an army were at the foot of this mountain, making preparations to attack, would you believe me?" "Yes," they replied, "we have only ever known you to tell the truth."

So, he ﷺ said to them, "I am a Messenger from Allah to you ... I bring you warning of a terrible punishment, so save yourselves from the Fire! Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib! Banū 'Abd Manāf! Banū Zuhra! Banū Taym! Banū Makhzūm ... Allah has commanded me to warn my close relatives, but I cannot bring you benefit in this world nor can I give you a portion of the Next unless you first say, "There is no god but Allah ..."

The Messenger ﷺ, for the first time, made his Message public, reminding Quraysh that there is a Creator who knows everything and is always present, who brings life and death and to whom belongs the Kingdom, and reminding them that there is another life and the worse of ends awaits those who associate others with Allah and wallow in their ignorance.

As might be expected, these words caused consternation and bewilderment. Quraysh was not prepared for the language of the Prophets. A hush settled over the crowd, a hush that was

eventually broken by his own uncle, Abū 'Utba. He stood and spoke to the Messenger ﷺ as if he were addressing a rival from another clan, saying, "May you perish! Is it just for this that you invited us here?!"

The Messenger ﷺ had transmitted his Message, and announced that the heavenly mercy had been sent down for the people, but from the very first moment the Muhammadan message was made public, Abū 'Utba adopted a hostile stance against the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. His ignorance had blinded him and prevented him from understanding the call of the Messenger of mercy. Of course, the Prophet ﷺ himself did not respond to Abū 'Utba, but a defence of the Messenger ﷺ was to come almost immediately from beyond the seventh heaven in the form of a Sūra of the Qur'ān:

❧ Ruin to the hands of Abū Lahab and ruin to him! ❧
Al-Masad, 111:1

In this Sūra, Allah informed him that both he and his wife would burn in a flaming fire. Following the revelation of this Sūra, it was clear that the fate of Abū Lahab, for that is the name by which Abū 'Utba thereafter came to be known, was sealed and there was no way back for him, and he became an example of the type of human being that Islam considers wretched.

Abū Lahab never tired of cursing the Messenger ﷺ or visiting indignity upon him. It became a daily occurrence throughout the time the Messenger ﷺ remained in Makkah, but never once did the Messenger ﷺ react. He remained calm and serene throughout, as he always did in such situations. He never responded in kind to ignorant people who insulted him or addressed him rudely. Firstly, because the noble attributes of the Prophets allow them to rise above such things, and secondly, because Allah says,

❖ Ward off evil with what is better. ﴿ Al-Mu'minūn, 23:96

In his role as Envoy of mercy to all the worlds, how could he be anything but wise, noble and forbearing?

But this lesson was wasted on Abū Lahab, so blinded was he by his ignorance, and not only did he continue to maltreat the Messenger ﷺ, but he took it to new extremes. He cut off family ties with him completely, not realising that it was, in fact, that connection which brought huge honour and might to him and his family. His two sons, 'Utba and 'Utayba, had entered into contracts of marriage with two of the daughters of the Messenger, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthūm, but had yet to consummate those marriages. But, no sooner had the two girls' father announced that he was the Messenger than Umm Jamīl, the mother of 'Utba and 'Utayba, a woman no less horrible and abusive than her husband, demanded of her sons that they immediately divorce the daughters of Muhammad.

The two sons heeded the wishes of their mother, and without the slightest regard for feelings or respect, divorced the daughters of the Messenger ﷺ, a vile act even according to the customs and values of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And it was not just anyone they divorced—it was the daughters of the Prophet of Allah ﷺ, closeness to whom equates to closeness to Allah and His Garden. What they did was dishonourable in the extreme—it cut the two girls to the quick and deeply upset their noble mother, Sayyida Khadīja, to say nothing of the great sorrow it caused the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Many projects and missions experience problems at the outset, and it was no different with the Call of Islam. The initial stage in Makkah was by far the most difficult stage through which Islam had to pass. It was then that things were at their most

difficult for the Muslims, for no sooner had the Muhammadan way appeared than Quraysh started their public war against the Messenger ﷺ and his followers, using every means at their disposal to cause them discomfort and harm. Throughout this period in Makkah, all the Muslims encountered was torture and persecution—those years were a true trial and test. But, at the same time, the patience the Muslims showed in the face of those odds exemplified the belief in their hearts.

The Bewilderment of Quraysh

It is not every day that a Messenger is sent from Heaven, so the fact that a Messenger had been sent among them was momentous and shocking to Quraysh. They did not know quite how to react. Their first thought was to send a man of influence to the Messenger ﷺ to try to persuade him to stop calling people to Allah by offering him what they, in their pre-Islamic mode of thinking, thought would be attractive to him. They delegated 'Utba ibn Rabī'a, one of their chiefs with a reputation for great wisdom, to approach him.

When 'Utba came upon the Prophet ﷺ, he found him sitting alone in the Ḥaram, engaged in reflection and the remembrance of his Lord. So he went up to him and said, "Nephew, you are one of us and you have a position of honour and high standing in our community, and come from the best of families. But this thing you have brought your people is grave indeed, for by means of it, you have broken the unity of their community and demeaned their gods and their religion, and accused their forefathers of unbelief! So, listen to the offers I bring you and see which one of them is most to your liking." The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Speak, Abū Walīd—I am listening."

‘Utba said, “Nephew, if it is desire for wealth and property that has made you say what you are saying, then we will give you enough of our wealth to make you the richest man among us. If it is honour and respect that you want, then we will make you the first among us and will not make any decision without consulting you. If it is kingship and dominion that you want, then we will make you our king and our ruler. And if these things that come to you are the result of some apparition that you are unable to fend off by yourself, then we will look for the medicine that you need, and will spare no wealth in seeking it until you are healed.”

When he had finished presenting all these offers, the Messenger said to him, “Have you finished what you have come to say, Abū Walīd?” When he replied that he had, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Now listen to me:

❦ In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, All-Merciful. Hā Mīm. It is revelation sent down from the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful. A Book whose verses have been demarcated for people who know as an Arabic Qur’ān, bringing good news and giving warning; but most of them have turned away and do not hear. They say, “Our hearts are covered up against what you call us to and there is a heaviness in our ears. There is a screen between us and you. So act—we certainly are acting.” Say, “I am only a human being like yourselves. It is revealed to me that your god is One God. So be straight with Him and ask His forgiveness.” Woe to those who associate others with Him, those who do not pay *zakat* and reject the Next world. Those who believe and do right actions will have a wage which never fails.” ﴿Fuṣṣilat, 41:1-8

The Prophet then continued to recite Sūrat al-Fuṣṣilat to him and it is narrated that when the Prophet reached Allah’s Words

﴿ If they turn away, then say, "I warn you of a lightning bolt like the lightning bolt of 'Ād and of Thamūd." ﴾ Fuṣṣilat, 41:13

'Utba put his hand over the mouth of the Prophet and said, "By Allah and the family connection between us, I beg you to stop!" Allah's threat filled him with such fear.

'Utba had remained silent and unmoving for the entire time the Prophet was reciting the Sūra, awestruck by the language of the Qur'ān, for such is its eloquence even when judged by the standards of the language of the people of Quraysh. Quraysh, like the rest of the Arabs of the time, were a people who took tremendous pride in their linguistic excellence. They were a literary people whose culture was built on poetry. But, even so, when they heard the Qur'ān, the level of its language and eloquence astonished and bewildered them.

The knowledgeable among them could tell the difference immediately between the words of men and the words of God. And when the Qur'ān opened up their hearts and breasts and prepared them to receive the lights of heaven, they believed in it straight away, as happened to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when he recited one of the verses of Sūrat Ṭāhā.

But as for those who insisted upon remaining in misguidance, they would remain in clear misguidance until the Day of Recompense. Their hearts would remain closed and they would never believe, even were they to find it within themselves to accept that the verses were indeed revealed from Heaven.

When the Messenger finished reciting, he said to 'Utba, "You have heard what you have heard, Abū Walīd. Now it is for you to decide." So Abū Walīd went away, dazzled and overwhelmed by what he had heard. When his companions at the House of

Assembly saw him returning, they said to one another, "We swear by Allah, the look on the face of Abū Walīd is very different from when he left us!" "What happened to you, Abū Walīd?" they asked.

He replied, "By Allah, I heard words the like of which I have never heard. By Allah, it is not poetry, nor is it the words of magicians nor soothsayers! Tribe of Quraysh, heed me well and let this man continue about his business. Leave him alone, for by Allah, the words that I heard from him are something truly momentous. If the Arabs defeat him, then others will have saved you the trouble of dealing with him yourselves, and if he is victorious against them, then his kingdom will be your kingdom and his glory will be your glory, and he will have made you the most fortunate of people." They said, "His words have bewitched you, Abū Walīd." He replied, "I have given you my opinion on the matter. It is up to you to do as you see fit."²

Language was something dear to the heart of every Arab, and over the years preceding the Message, they had almost perfected their mastery over it, but the Qur'ān was something else entirely. With its revelation, the Arabic language had come into direct contact with the sacred and divine, and some of that sacredness had spilled over into it, so that when certain people heard it being recited, they could not help but fall into prostration, awestruck by the eloquence of its chapters and verses, they could not help but become Muslim.

The fact that the final Prophet ﷺ had been sent from among them was an honour of the highest order for both the Arabs and

² Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 277.

their language. Addressing this fact, the noble Prophet ﷺ said, "If someone loves the Arabs, it is by his love of me that he loves them, and if someone hates the Arabs, it is by his hatred of me that he hates them."

The advice 'Utba gave his fellow leaders of Quraysh was wise indeed and they knew him to be a man of great intelligence and perspicacity, but still they did not follow it. Their arrogance had blinded them to the truth and they had lost the ability to think clearly and rationally. But, more shockingly still, the wise sage of Quraysh himself, the one who had uttered these words, the one had been so completely captivated by the verses of Qur'ān as they were recited to him, was to himself die as an idolater at the Battle of Badr, even though his own son, Abū Ḥudhayfa, had become Muslim. He was one of the first Companions to attend the school of al-Arqam and learn directly from the Messenger ﷺ, as well as fighting alongside him ﷺ at the Battle of Badr. 'Utba, however, never left the ranks of the unbelievers and fought with them against his son on that fateful day. In the heat of the battle, the two of them almost came to blows, but the Messenger ﷺ held Abū Ḥudhayfa back. Then, later in the battle, 'Utba was killed by Ḥamza ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, may Allah be pleased with him. When Abū Ḥudhayfa heard of his father's death, he felt great sadness that his father had died an unbeliever.

Quraysh were at a complete loss as to what to do. The Message was not something that they could bring themselves to follow, but, at the same time, they could not stop him from calling people to it, for no Messenger could ever be prevailed upon to stop conveying the Message of Heaven. Eventually, they decided that the only option remaining for them was to demand of him to produce some miracles, saying, "If he does it, then maybe we will

believe in him.” So, they approached him and said, “Ask your Lord to remove these barren mountains about us and cause great rivers like those of Iraq and Syria to spring up in their place! Ask Him to bring our forefathers back to life so we can ask them about whether what you say is true! Or ask your Lord to send down an angel to corroborate your words. Ask Him to make us gardens and palaces and treasure houses full of gold and silver to help serve your cause.”³

Allah says in Sūrat al-Isrā’

﴿ They say, “We will not believe you until you make a spring gush out from the earth for us; or have a garden of dates and grapes which you make rivers come pouring through; or make the sky, as you claim, fall down on us in lumps; or bring Allah and the angels here as a guarantee; or possess a house built out of gleaming gold; or ascend up into heaven—and even then we will not believe in your ascent unless you bring us down a book to read!” Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a human Messenger?” ﴾ Al-Isrā’, 17:90-93

Perhaps the only thing one might learn from these requests is how arrogant the idolaters of Quraysh truly were. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ replied to them in the clearest possible terms, “I have not come for what has brought you to me. I do not seek your wealth, nor a position of honour among you, nor dominion over you. No, Allah has sent me as a Messenger, and sent me a Book, commanding me to bring you good news and warning. I have transmitted the Message of my Lord to you and I have given you advice. If you accept what I have brought, it will be to your advantage in this world and the Next. If you reject it, then I will

³ *Ibid.* pp. 281-292.

wait patiently for the Command of Allah by means of which He will judge between us.”⁴

And, indeed, Allah was to judge between them, and the armies of the Muslims were to enter Makkah victorious on an appointed day. Allah says,

ﷻ Say, “I possess no power to help or harm myself, except as Allah wills. If I had had knowledge of the Unseen, I would have sought to gain much good and no evil would have touched me. I am only a warner and a bringer of good news to people who believe.” ﴿١٨٨﴾ Al-A‘rāf, 7:188

It is only natural that Allah knows what is going to happen—He is the Living, the Actor. But, as we shall see as we move through the *Sīra*, the thing that truly makes a person aware of the direct hand of Allah in the affairs of creation is the fact that the chapters and verses of Qur’ān were revealed to His Prophet immediately after or immediately before the event to which they refer. In this way, the reader experiences the Presence of Allah and see His acts reflected in life.

The verses are revealed to bring illumination to the hearts of the believers and increase them in belief upon belief, while, at the same time, exposing the ignorance of the idolaters, revealing their true intentions and refuting their arguments, one by one. Their pre-Islamic “proofs” are shown up and rebutted by clear proofs from the Qur’ān. Allah says,

ﷻ He reflected and considered. Curse him, how he considered! Again curse him, how he considered! Then he looked. Then he frowned and glowered. Then he drew back

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 279.

and was proud. He said, "This is nothing but magic from the past. This is nothing but the words of a human being." ﴿

Al-Muddaththir, 74:18-25

"By Allah, were they to put the sun in my right hand ..."

Deciding a different strategy was needed, some notables decided that the time had come to approach Abū Ṭālib, the Prophet's uncle and complain directly to him about his nephew. Abū Ṭālib was the leader of the Banū Hāshim, a man of great standing, not just among Quraysh but across the entire Arab world. He was the man to whom most of the tribe looked for moral guidance, so they thought that if they could convince him of their point of view, he would be uniquely positioned to calm the situation and curtail his nephew's activities. They said, "(Abū Ṭālib,) You are one of our elders and have status and rank among us. Your nephew has cursed our gods and insulted our religion. He has called our dreams foolish and accused our forefathers of being misguided. So, either you put a stop to his activities, or leave the way open for us to deal with him, for you follow the same religion as we do and your beliefs are the same as ours."

Abū Ṭālib summoned the Prophet ﷺ and said to him, "My nephew, your people have come to me complaining of you and protesting about your actions." Then, after he told him ﷺ what they had said, Abū Ṭālib said, "Spare me and spare yourself. Do not burden me with more than I can bear." The pressure Quraysh had brought to bear on him was clearly having its desired effect. The Messenger ﷺ could not but help feel sympathy with his uncle, such was the love, affection and respect he felt for him, and his eyes welled up with tears. But, it was an impossible thing his uncle had asked of him, so he gave him his famous reply, "My uncle, by

Allah, were they to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on condition that I abandon this course of action, until Allah makes it victorious or I perish therein, I would not abandon it.”

It is the Command of Allah, it is decreed and inevitable. The uncle knew then that his nephew was resolved upon his path of calling to Allah, and that neither Quraysh nor anyone else could dissuade him from transmitting his Message, so he replied, saying, “Go forth, my nephew, and say what you want to say, for, by Allah, I will never give you up on any account!” How beautiful the response of this fine and noble man!

Abū Ṭālib understood well that this was no small matter and that the position he had taken had set him at variance with the other leaders of Quraysh, but, for him, it was a matter of honour. So he convened an assembly of all the members of his clan, the Banū Hāshim, and gave them the full story of what had transpired between him and the envoys of Quraysh. Then he reminded them of their traditions and their moral responsibility towards Muḥammad as a fellow clansman, and asked them to give Muḥammad their full support and protection. And they all agreed, giving him their word that they would not let him down. Even if they did not follow his religion, their sense of honour would not allow them to abandon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, for, despite everything, he was still a member of the Banū Hāshim.⁵

Abu Talib’s moral integrity made him defend the Messenger of Allah ﷺ against Quraysh, and he continued to do till his final

⁵ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Volume 1, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 247.

breath, despite never becoming Muslim. The spirit of tribalism pervaded Makkan society. But not all types of tribalism are negative, for although one tribal grouping had come together on the basis of falsehood and idolatry, the other had come together on the basis of truth. It is part of the nature of tribalism to lie dormant in times of peace and stability and rear its head in times of discord and unrest. So, on the one side, we had Quraysh and its allies and, on the other, Banū Hāshim and the Muslims.

To a man Banū Hāshim stood firm behind the Messenger ﷺ except for the wretched Abū Lahab. But, that did not stop him being subjected to constant abuse and physical harassment. These feeble-minded people even went so far as to mock and ridicule him in public, chanting the words “The boy of the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib—he hears voices in the sky!” As if this were not enough, Quraysh also had their poets write poems satirising and lampooning Muḥammad ﷺ, for poetry, alongside public speaking, was the main media vehicle for public condemnation and denouncement of one’s opponents and adversaries.

Quraysh were shaken to the core. Three core Islamic principles undermined their historical cultural structure—justice, equality and Unitarianism, for when such principles are applied in a society built primarily on racial and class-based discrimination, they strike hard at its foundations. These principles threatened the material and moral bases upon which tribal society was built. They shook its cultural structure to the core and uprooted the foundations of pre-Islamic beliefs, to say nothing of the fact that they undoubtedly destroyed the basis upon which Quraysh had made itself the social centre of the entire Arab peninsula.

The teachings and principles of Islam, which had appeared like lights, banished darkness and gloom from the hearts of the

Muslims, especially the slaves and impoverished among them, and made them realise that Islam had not only come to liberate them from ignorance and idolatry, but also to rescue them from all types of tyranny and injustice, and from the enslavement of one man by another. Thus, Islam represented liberation from both inward darkness and outward tyranny. And, in those dark and ignorant times, these lofty human teachings and principles had an almost magical effect on the hearts of the Muslims.

Moreover, the spirit of brotherhood that the Prophet had tried to instil in his followers from the very beginning had a definite effect in strengthening and maintaining the morale of the Muslims, for they realised that their might was connected to the might of Allah and His Messenger:

﴿ But all might belongs to Allah and to His Messenger and the believers. But the hypocrites do not know this. ﴾
Al-Munāfiqūn, 63:8

This was beyond the comprehension of the idolater. His worldview, his circular logic, did not permit him to understand that the true might of the believer is drawn directly from the might of his Lord. The believer is mighty with the might of the Lord of Might, and there is no slave-hood except to Allah alone. The noblest of you in the eyes of Allah are those who have most fear of Him, not those who are the wealthiest nor those who have the highest social standing.

The Messenger ﷺ laid out the firm foundations for brotherhood on the basis of belief. His teaching was encapsulated by the well-known Islamic principle: "The believers are but brothers." There is no discrimination and no racism in Islam—there is no difference between white and black, Arab and non-Arab, except on the basis of *taqwā*. *Taqwā* is nothing if not giving

pride of place to Allah in one's heart. *Taqwā* is the conscious constant awareness that Allah is present and active in the life of the human being. In this way, Islam was to make the master and the slave equal.⁶

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 239. The story of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ and Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī illustrates the Islamic position on equality as a human value and showcases its ethical position that racial discrimination was a despicable pre-Islamic act that had no place in Islam. Some of the Companions had gathered together to exchange views and speak with one another on the matter of the army. Among those present were Khālid ibn al-Walīd, Bilāl and Abū Dharr. Abū Dharr presented a proposal to Khālid ibn al-Walīd, but Bilāl opposed it, saying that the proposal was a mistake. This caused Abū Dharr's suppressed tribalism to bubble to the surface, despite the fact that he was one of the very first Companions and many idolaters had entered Islam at his hands, and he said to Bilāl, "What? Even you, you son of a black woman, accuse me of being in the wrong!"

These words cut Bilāl to the quick and he went to the Prophet ﷺ to tell him what happened. When he heard, the Prophet became angry, and when Abū Dharr came before him, he ﷺ said to him, "Abū Dharr, did you insult him on the basis of who his mother was?" Abū Dharr replied that he had, so the Messenger ﷺ said to him, "You are a man within whom still remains traces of the times of ignorance!" This is how the Messenger of Allah described racist behaviour. Abū Dharr immediately asked the Messenger ﷺ to ask forgiveness for him, and on his way back home, met Bilāl in the street. As soon as he saw him, he fell to the ground and placed his head upon the earth. Then he said to Bilāl, "By Allah, Bilāl, I will not raise my cheek from the ground until you put your foot upon my head. It is you who are noble and I who am lowly." Hearing these words, Bilāl burst into tears. Then he approached Abū Dharr and bent down and kissed him on the cheek, saying, "By Allah, I will never put my foot on a face that has made a single prostration to Allah."

There is a lesson that can be learnt from the mistake Abū Dharr made

Islam was to make equal Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, the Abyssinian slave, and Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, the close Companion of the Messenger, the first of the rightly guided Caliphs and the one who bought him and gave him his freedom. Islam was to make equal ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, a man who had once been a slave, and Ḥamza, the hero of Quraysh and the uncle of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. In Islam, all were brothers and all were valued. This is the perfect example of the concepts of justice and equality to which the Messenger ﷺ was calling.

Then there is the doctrine of Oneness. This is the primary basis upon which Islam is built, and it posed the biggest problem and the greatest danger to the idolaters of Quraysh. Allah is the True and everything other than him is false:

❦ Say, “Call on those you make claims for besides Allah. They have no power over even the smallest particle, either in the heavens or in the earth. They have no share in them. He has no need of their support.” ❦ Saba’, 34:22

This one doctrine destroyed all their pre-Islamic beliefs in one fell swoop and exposed the reality of the idols they worshipped for what they were. If this call of the Prophet’s was successful, what could remain of the things upon which they had

with respect to Bilāl. It is possible for a Muslim to make a mistake and trample on the rights of another, it is possible for him to use hateful racial slurs against him, but that is not acceptable in Islam. And there is an even more important lesson in Bilāl’s response, but the most important lesson is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ viewed and described the behaviour of Abū Dharr. In the eyes of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, all types of discrimination, whether on the basis of colour, race or class, are symptomatic of pre-Islamic thinking, and Islam came to abolish that form of thinking.

built their privilege, sovereignty and glory?⁷ This is what Duwaydār says in his book, but it might equally be said from the opposite perspective that were they to have believed and answered the call of Islam, their standing among the Arabs might have reached even greater heights and further glory might have been added to the glory they already possessed.

The Belief of the Poor: “I will never abandon he who has brought light to my heart!”

In the beginning, tribal ties prevented the idolaters from harming Muslims who were affiliated to any of the well-known tribal groups, for the proper functioning of Makkan society depended on tribal customs and values being observed. But this immunity did not extend to impoverished Muslims and slaves whose hearts had been illuminated by light of belief. In their eyes, and according to their customs, they were fair game, so the idol-worshipping leaders of Quraysh wasted no time in taking out their anger and frustration on them. Slave owners, in particular, meted out punishment on their Muslim slaves. A particularly savage example of this was the torture to which Umayya ibn Khalaf subjected his Abyssinian slave, Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ.

Umayya used to say to him, “You will continue to be punished until you either reject Muḥammad and declare your belief in al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā, or you die!” And Bilāl used to respond by raising his index finger to the sky and saying, “One. One.” By openly declaring his belief and holding fast to it in such an obvious manner, he issued a direct challenge to his torturer. It

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 218.

was like he was saying to him, "Do your worst—there is nothing you can do to me that I cannot bear."

One day, Waraqa bin Nawfal passed by Bilāl while he was being thus tortured and said to him, "Yes, Bilāl: One. One." Then, addressing his words to Umayya ibn Khalaf, he said, "I swear by Allah, if you kill him, I will take him as a *ḥanān*⁸—that is, I will build him a shrine to which people will come to seek blessing."

But Bilāl did not die. Instead, Abū Bakr came and bought him from his master, saving him from certain death and liberating him from demeaning slavery. Bilāl, the impoverished slave of Quraysh, was to become one of the closest Companions of the Messenger ﷺ and the first caller to the prayer in Islam. What possible divine honour could be greater than this one, bestowed upon this impoverished Abyssinian slave?!

This is but one example of the justice of Islam. And that was not the end of it, for Allah decreed that Bilāl should turn the tables and himself be the one to end the life of his former master. Remarkably, Bilāl came face to face with Umayya on the battlefield of Badr and, shouting the words "Enemy of Islam!" plunged his sword deep into his chest.

Abū Bakr did not only save Bilāl's life, but also saved the lives of six others, four of whom were women. He bought them all from masters who were torturing them and gave them their freedom. In the same way that Islam had liberated them from the torment and humiliation of the slavery of the spirit, he used his wealth to liberate them from bodily torture. But he was not able to save them all. Sumayya, the mother of 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, who was

⁸ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 297.

being tortured alongside her husband and son, died under torture, a martyr. The Messenger ﷺ had come to see her shortly before her death and said to her, "Be steadfast, family of Yāsir, for your meeting place will be the Garden."

Like he had done with the other slaves, Abū Bakr tried to purchase her freedom, ready to pay whatever was necessary, but her master, Abū Jahl, refused to sell. And not only that, but he also ignored the pleas and entreaties of the many women of Quraysh for whom Sumayya had acted as midwife. He tortured her so badly that she could no longer even move, but still she remained firm and unwavering in her faith.

When he finally despaired of breaking her spirit, he decided to kill her. So, he dragged her along the ground into the courtyard of the Ka'ba and spoke to her there in front of all the people, saying, "Will you not leave Muhammad?" She replied, "I will never leave the one who brought light to my heart." This statement of belief was to resonate in the hearts of the Muslims. So, Abū Jahl picked up his spear and stabbed her in the heart, and her pure breaths came to a stop. But she had told us, before giving up her soul to her Creator, that the thing that had given her and others the strength to endure the torture was the light that Muḥammad had brought and by means of which their hearts had been illuminated.

Giorgio mentions that when Quraysh noticed how many of their slaves were becoming Muslim and saw how Abū Bakr was buying them all and giving them their freedom, they banned people from selling him any more slaves, for they did not want the number of Muslims to increase any further. Abū Bakr had expended a significant proportion of his wealth in his attempts to

help the spread of Islam.⁹

Like Bilāl, Sumayya's son, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, became a close and honoured Companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He became Muslim when he was in his twenties and from that moment never left the side of the Messenger ﷺ, fighting alongside him at every major battle. He lived through the Caliphates of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān, and only met his death as a martyr in the time of the Caliphate of 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, during the war against Mu'āwiya.¹⁰

As an aside, it is interesting to note that the majority of those who entered Islam and followed the Messenger ﷺ in this early period were young men, such as Sa'd ibn abī Waqqāṣ, 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, Zayd ibn al-Ḥāritha, 'Ammār ibn Yāsir and Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ. Perhaps the oldest of the first wave of Muslims was Bilāl. Even

⁹ Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 94.

¹⁰ 'Ammār ibn Yāsir was martyred at the Battle of Ṣiffīn in the year 37 AH. He was fighting on the side of 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib against Mu'āwiya. At the time he died, 'Ammār was seventy years old. 'Ammār ibn Yāsir had a special place in the heart of the Prophet ﷺ. In a *ḥadīth*, the Messenger ﷺ said, "Whoever is an enemy of 'Ammār, Allah will be an enemy to him, and whoever hates 'Ammār, Allah will hate him ... His belief is mixed in with his flesh and blood. 'Ammār has never been given a choice between two things except that he chose the one that is closer to what is right." In another *ḥadīth*, he said, "Ammār will be killed by the transgressing group." When Mu'āwiya was informed of the death of 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, he said, "We are not the ones responsible for his death—it is 'Alī who is responsible since he brought him to the battle." 'Alī responded to him by saying, "Does that mean that the one who killed Ḥamza was the Prophet ﷺ, since he was the one who brought him to the battle?!" See al-Ḥalabī, Nūr ad-Dīn 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *as-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 101.

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was twenty-six, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān thirty-four and Abū Bakr thirty-eight. History bears witness to the fact that this select group carried out their task selflessly and exceptionally well. Thanks to the education they received at the hands of the Messenger ﷺ, they lived a life of jihad, exemplary in every sense of the word.

A wonderful illustration of the depth of the belief of these men and the strength of their love for the Messenger ﷺ, is found in the story of Sa'd ibn abī Waqqāṣ and his mother, Ḥamna bint Sufyān ibn Umayya, one of the chief ladies of Quraysh. One day, when she came into her house, she chanced upon her son doing the prayer, so she stood in front of him and screamed in his face, saying, "O woe is me, Sa'd! Have you become a Sabean?" "No," he replied, "rather I have found right guidance. I have been guided to the Abrahamic religion which instructs us to be good and treat our parents well." Sa'd had a reputation for being a dutiful son and treating his mother well.

Knowing this, his mother demanded of him that he leave the religion of Muḥammad ﷺ and come back to the religion of their forefathers and, in an ultimately futile attempt to force him to return to their ways, she announced that she would not eat or drink until Sa'd left the religion of Muhammad. She addressed her son, saying, "By al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā, there is no way I can continue to live in this house when I see you beside me following the religion of Muhammad!" Sa'd replied, "I will never leave the religion of Allah. I have been guided back to right guidance after I was misguided and astray, I have been guided back to belief after I was an unbeliever."

In her attempt to get him to renounce his religion, she maintained her fast for three long days, but her efforts did not

have the desired effect. Sa'd did not renounce his faith. Instead, he tried to convince her of Islam, using every means at his disposal, but the heart of the idolater is blind and unable to see the lights of reality. Eventually, he lost patience with her and said, "Drink or do not drink, eat or do not eat. By Allah, even if you had one hundred lives and were to sacrifice each one of them, still I would not abandon the religion of Muḥammad ﷺ." Seeing the strength of his resolve, and the light of belief shining from his face, her obstinacy and stubbornness melted away.

In all these stories of early Islam, it is interesting to see the highly active role played by women. In this regard, from whichever perspective one views it, Islam was truly a pioneer. The first person to embrace Islam was a woman, namely Khadija, peace be upon her; and the first person to be martyred was a woman, namely Sumayya, may Allah be pleased with her. It is clear from accounts recorded in the books of *Sīra* how active a role they played in early Islamic history. Not only did a significant number of Muslim women become actively involved in calling to Islam in times of peace, but they even helped defend it in times of war, standing side by side with the men on the battlefield.

There are many stories from the annals of Islamic history that show the extraordinary love the women of Islam had for their Messenger ﷺ, and the great sacrifices they made on his behalf. A prime example of this is the story of the great Companion and model of womanhood, Nusayba bint Ka'b, may Allah be pleased with her. Nusayba, who was a woman of the Anṣār, took part alongside the Messenger ﷺ in most of the early battles of the Muslims. At first, she would dress the wounds of the Muslims injured in battle and bring them water to drink, but then, at the Battle of Uḥud, when she saw the Prophet ﷺ exposed and his life

threatened, used her own body to shield him from his enemies and fought to defend him with singular courage and bravery.

How did these remarkable early Muslims endure torture and hardship and make huge sacrifices, despite the newness of their Islam, winning them the admiration of believers everywhere and bewildering their enemies. What had Muḥammad done to them in such a short space of time to give them such an extraordinary capacity to put up with so much pain and hardship for his sake and the sake of the religion to which he called? How had he come to have such a tight grip upon their hearts?

The answer is the light mentioned by Sumayya shortly before she died, for the endurance that they showed in the face of torture was not a physical endurance, but an unprecedented spiritual one. And that form of endurance has its basis in gnosis and light. Were it not for those Muhammadan lights which brought life back to their hearts and replaced their connection to earth with a connection to Heaven, they would never have been able to endure what they did.



The Turning Point and the Spread of Islam

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ spared no effort in his attempts to break through the thick walls of idolatry, but the spread of Islam was painfully slow during the first six years of the Message. After three years of calling people to Allah in secret and three years calling them semi-publicly, only forty people had rallied to his side

But, in the course of that sixth year, Allah decreed that the time had come to bring two great historical figures to Islam who would strengthen the cause of the Muslims. Those two men were firstly the legendary warrior of Quraysh, the uncle of the Messenger, Ḥamza ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and then three days later ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. The latter’s entry into Islam was triggered by reading the initial verses of Sūrat Ṭāhā.

The Sūrat says,

﴿ Ṭāhā, We did not send down the Qur’ān to you to make you miserable, but only as a reminder for those who have fear, a Revelation from Him who created the earth and the high

heavens, the All-Merciful, established firmly upon the Throne. Everything in the heavens and everything on the earth and everything in between them and everything under the ground belongs to Him. Though you speak out loud, He knows your secrets and what is even more concealed. ﴿ Tāhā, 20:1-7

These verses unlocked ‘Umar’s closed-off heart. Immediately upon reading them, he exclaimed, “These are not the words of a human being!” For how could any human being produce verses such as these? So he went to find the Messenger to enter Islam, having initially strapped on his sword and left his house that morning with the intention of killing him while he taught at the al-Arqam. But, thanks to these noble verses, which he read when he made a detour to his sister’s house, he was transformed on the spot from an implacable enemy into one of the closest followers of Muḥammad ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ was later to say, “Allah gave me the support of four helpers: two from the inhabitants of heaven, Jibrīl and Mikā’il; and two from the inhabitants of the earth, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar.”¹

This ferocious and hard-hearted man was transformed into a sensitive loving scrupulous worshipper, one of the great ascetics of Islam, without losing any of the forthrightness, will and passion for truth, justice and equality for which he was known. In pre-Islamic times, he was known as the colossus of Quraysh, and after becoming Muslim he was to become known as the giant of Islam. ‘Umar became the second Caliph, and his name became a byword for justice. He was a great example of the spiritual Muhammadan teaching. The Messenger ﷺ honoured him with the title of “al-

¹ Al-Ḥalabī, Nūr ad-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *as-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 391.

Fārūq” (the one who distinguishes and differentiates between justice and tyranny).²

With ‘Umar and Ḥamza now in the ranks of the Muslims, the period of isolation could end and the call to Islam could be made more openly and publicly. The Muslims had broken through the surrounding wall of idolatry, and created a massive hole in it, through which the light of “Read!” could shine forth and illuminate what was beyond. ‘Umar was the first one to call on the Muslims to take their religion into the public domain, saying, “If we are following what is true, then why do we not practice our religion openly?!”

Thanks to these two men, the Muslims were given a little breathing space and their resolve grew stronger. They started to make their Islam public, doing their *ṭawāfs* of the Ka‘ba and saying the *takbīr* and the *shahāda* out loud. They would even do the prayer openly in the immediate vicinity of the Sacred House. This continued for some time until the opposition and the crisis they faced become even worse.

With ‘Umar’s entry into Islam, the number of Muslim men reached forty, alongside the women who had also entered into the faith. If this was not a big enough cause for concern, the thing that

² It is worth pointing out that the life and accomplishments of ‘Umar al-Khaṭṭāb—and indeed the lives and accomplishments of the other great Caliphs—are so many as to merit their own books to discuss them. It was during his rule that Syria was liberated from Byzantine occupation and Iraq freed from Persian occupation. Indeed, he was to bring about the end of the Sassanid dynasty. In but a few short years, the greatest empire of the time collapsed and completely disappeared. ‘Umar was also the one who conquered Jerusalem and received the keys to the city.

really started to make Quraysh feel uneasy was the fact that it was not only people from the Banū Hāshim who were entering the religion, but notable men and women from the other clans, including Abū Bakr from the Banū Taym, and 'Uthmān from the Banū Umayya.

These were some of the main clans of Quraysh, and their joining the Muslims threatened the unity of Quraysh and the delicate balance of society. And when 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb became Muslim, Quraysh's consternation deepened further, for 'Umar was from Banū 'Adī, the third most important clan of Quraysh.

'Umar was a man with a fearsome reputation who inspired awe in all who saw him. The Messenger ﷺ informed us that even Iblīs would move aside when he saw him coming. Before Islam, he had been, like his uncle Abū Jahl, one of the most vociferous opponents of Muḥammad ﷺ and his followers. So, his Islam took Quraysh completely by surprise. They could not understand how a man who had been so vocal in his opposition to Muḥammad could now have such tremendous love for him and follow him so obediently.

This question that so puzzled and perplexed Quraysh is one that still perplexes idolaters and unbelievers in this present day. They find themselves asking the same questions: What is it that makes so many people of so many different nationalities, languages and cultures follow Muhammad? What is it that makes them have such profound love for him? These are questions no idolater can ever hope to answer, for they cannot comprehend these spiritual bonds that are unlike any other form of human connection.

The Luminous Lamp must take his natural place in the hearts

of the believers, for Allah has made love of the Messenger ﷺ one of the preconditions of belief. Love of the Messenger is an integral part of belief—one cannot truly be a believer until one loves the Messenger ﷺ. And the more you love the Messenger ﷺ, the more you love Allah and the greater your belief in Him. The love the believer has for the one who embodies human perfection allows his heart to always have a connection to divine perfection.

Some time later, when ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard the Prophet ﷺ say, “None of you will truly believe until I am more beloved to him than his wealth and possessions, his children and all other people”, he said, “You are more beloved to me, Messenger of Allah, than everything aside from my own self.” So, the Messenger ﷺ said, “You will not be a true believer until your love for me is greater even than your love for yourself.” ‘Umar replied, “By the One who sent you the Book, my love for you is greater indeed than my love for self.” So, the Prophet said, “Now (you have it), ‘Umar!”

The Invitation of the Anṣār:

Conquering Madinah through the Qur’ān

In order to spread the call of Islam further afield, the Messenger would go among the tribes who came to Makkah during the season of pilgrimage and acquaint them with the teachings of Islam. But most of these efforts met with little to no success. Indeed, some of those he tried to meet dismissed him out of hand, saying, “Your people and your family know you better than anyone and they have not followed you, (so why should we)?” Only a few of those he met showed themselves willing to listen, but among them, crucially, was a group of men from Yathrib.

When the noble Messenger met them and found out that

they were from the tribe of Khazraj, he asked, "Are you allies of the Jews?" When they replied that they were, he asked them, "Will you sit with me and listen to what I have to say?" So they sat with him and he presented them with Islam, called them to Allah and recited a few Sūras from the Qur'ān. When they heard the words of the Qur'ān, their hearts and breasts opened to Islam, and they spoke among themselves, saying, "By Allah, here before us is the Prophet the Jews have threatened us with! Do not let them follow him first!"

The Anṣār had heard the Jews constantly affirm that a Prophet was to come from among them, but now Allah had chosen to send that Prophet from among the Arabs instead. So, they did not hesitate to declare their belief in the Messenger ﷺ and enter Islam. They said to him, "We have left our people living in a state of almost perpetual enmity and hostility, so it is our hope that Allah has sent you to unite us. We will go back to them, call them to your religion and present them with the Message you have conveyed to us. If Allah then unites them behind you, you will be the mightiest of men."³

At long last, the people of Yathrib had found the promised Prophet! They had found the Prophet with whom the Jews had constantly threatened them, but this Prophet was not with the Jews, he was with them. He would unify the warring tribes of Aws and Khazraj and bring them together under his banner, he would bring solidarity and togetherness in place of the discord they had always known, and bring brotherhood and peace in place of enmity and civil war.

³ Ṭabāra, 'Afif 'Abd al-Fattāḥ, *Ma'a al-anbiyā' fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, Beirut, 1989, p. 362.

On their return to Yathrib, they set about teaching the people about Islam and met with great success, igniting the hearts of those who heard the call. Their hearts were ready and prepared to embrace the Muhammadan message and come to its defence. The connections between them and the Messenger strengthened and culminated in the thirteenth year after the Revelation in the famous Pledge of al-‘Aqaba, a pledge that was to open the door for Muslims to start emigrating from Makkah to Yathrib.

In the meantime, in Makkah, the situation was getting progressively worse for the Muslims, and without the means to protect them, the Messenger ﷺ was left with no option but to give them permission to emigrate to Abyssinia. “Were you to go to the land of Abyssinia, you would find a king who treats no man unjustly! His land is one of truth and honesty. Perhaps it is there that Allah will grant you relief from this situation in which you find yourselves.”

Desperate to protect his followers from the idolaters, the Messenger ﷺ turned to a right-acting Christian man, King Aṣḥama, better known as the Negus. He valued his sense of justice and described his country as being a land of truth and honesty. In describing him, the Messenger ﷺ did not refer to him as an unbeliever or an idolater, but rather as a just king from whom he expected only good. He thought of him as an ally, a man who would protect his Muslim followers from the persecution of his idol-worshipping tribe in Makkah. The Messenger of Islam set great store by this Christian king, Aṣḥama, and had the highest opinion of him. This extraordinary level of courtesy displayed by the Prophet in his dealings with others would invariably result in nothing but good.

Two groups of Muslims made the trip to Abyssinia. The first

was led by Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, the cousin of the Prophet and one of his main assistants and advisers.⁴ Ja'far, a young man of singular courage, was martyred in 8AH at the Battle of Mu'ta against the Byzantines. The second was led by Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, and comprised almost eighty men and women, including 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, the third Caliph, and his wife, Ruqayya, the daughter of the Messenger ﷺ. 'Uthmān was to later be given the title "Dhū an-Nūrayn" (Possessor of Two Lights) on account of his having married two of the daughters of the Messenger ﷺ. First, he married Ruqayya, who emigrated with him, and then, after she died, married her sister Umm Kulthūm.

Thanks to the words and efforts of this eloquent young man, Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, the Negus got to know of the Message of Muḥammad ﷺ. He learnt of the mercy and good that the Prophet ﷺ had brought to all mankind, and when Ja'far told him how much Islam revered and respected 'Īsā and his mother, peace be upon them both, and recited to him a number of verses from Sūrat Maryam, he warmly welcomed his Muslim guests into his country, guaranteeing them safety and a place to stay. The Negus said, as he listened to the verses, "This comes from the exact same source as what 'Īsā brought."

When Quraysh were later to send their two envoys, 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ and 'Abd Allāh ibn abī Rabī'a, to demand the return of the Muslim fugitives, the Negus refused and sent them back home,

⁴ The Prophet ﷺ said in a noble ḥadīth, "No Prophet came before me except that he was given seven noble companions and assistants. But I have been given fourteen: Ḥamza, Ja'far, 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, Abū Dharr, al-Miqdād, Ḥudhayfa, Salmān, 'Ammār and Bilāl."

frustrated and empty-handed, refusing the gifts they had brought him, considering them bribes.

This emigration to Abyssinia was a success. It was a religious and cultural experiment that brought benefit to all parties, opening the way for a cultural cross pollination to occur between Arab Muslims and African Christians. This bond between Muslims and Christians in the African continent has lasted to the present day, with a form of brotherhood still existing between them, thereby showing the extraordinary wisdom and prescience of the noble Messenger ﷺ.

Al-Būṭī, may Allah have mercy on him, says, commenting on the statement of the Negus above, “It is indisputable that Prophets come with the exact same belief, differing not with each other even by so much as an iota. Therefore, the differences in doctrine we find among the people of belief must have come later. Allah Himself bears witness to that, saying,

﴿Those given the Book only differed after knowledge had come to them, envying one another.﴾ Al ‘Imrān, 3:19

True belief in the Gospel and Torah demands belief in the Qur’ān and Muḥammad ﷺ.

“And that is why Allah instructs His Messenger ﷺ to call the people of the Book to Allah by calling on them to put into practice what is found in their Books, the Gospel and Torah. A proper application of those teachings will inevitably bring them to Islam, for those Books instruct the followers of those religions to believe in the Prophet ﷺ and his Message.”⁵ Allah says,

⁵ Al-Būṭī, Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān, *Fiqh as-sīra an-nabawīyya*, Dār as-Salām, Damascus, 2015, p. 94.

ﷺ Say, "People of the Book! you have nothing to stand on until you implement the Torah and the Gospel and what has been sent down to you from your Lord." ﴿٥٨﴾ Al-Mā'idā, 5:68

The Muslims stayed in Abyssinia for close to fifteen years, enjoying the protection of its just king. Umm Salama, one of the women emigrants, gave testimony to that effect, saying, "When we arrived in the land of Abyssinia, we were immediately granted protection by the best of protectors, the Negus. He provided us with a safe space in which to practice our religion and we were able to freely worship Allah. Never once did any harm come to us and never once was anything said to us that we found disagreeable." The letters that passed back and forth between the Prophet ﷺ and the Negus give us some idea of the extraordinary level of love and respect that existed between the two men, the one a Prophet of Islam and the other a Christian king.

"You are as your Lord named you, 'gentle and merciful'"

Despite all the difficulties and hardships the Messenger ﷺ faced in Makkah, he continued to call people to Allah, and his Message soon became known throughout the peninsula. His efforts were largely unsuccessful, however, so he decided to look beyond Makkah, and made the journey on foot to at-Ṭā'if, a city one hundred kilometres from Makkah, to extend his invitation to them.

Upon his arrival, the Messenger ﷺ went to see the three brothers who between them ruled over the tribe of Thaqīf, hoping that they might become Muslim and inspire the rest of their tribe to follow them into the faith, thereby giving him ﷺ the necessary support to stand up to Quraysh. He explained about Islam and its teachings and called them to it. But to no avail. Instead of

accepting, they rejected him in the most hostile way. "Did Allah not find anyone to send apart from you?" they jeered.

His hopes in at-Ṭā'if and its people dashed, the Messenger ﷺ parted company with them and went on his way. But they did not let him leave in peace and dignity. They gathered their children and a few hot-headed fools and had them jeer him and curse him and pelt him with rocks and stones. By the time he reached the outskirts of the city, blood was dripping from his noble feet. Taking refuge in an orchard, he sat under the shade of a tree to tend his wounds and wipe away the blood, and as he did, he called out to his Lord, "O Allah, I complain to you of my weakness, lack of resourcefulness and the humiliation I have been made to receive at the hands of the people. O Most Merciful of the Merciful, You are the Lord of the weak, and You are my Lord. So to whom have You entrusted me? But as long as You are not angry with me, I do not care."

In that moment, an angel came to him and told him that he was ready to carry out the Prophet's orders and would punish the people of at-Ṭā'if who had so ill-treated him if that was what he wanted. The Prophet replied, "No, let them be, for perhaps Allah will bring forth from their loins those who worship Him alone and do not worship any other alongside Him." When he heard this, the angel said, "You are as your Lord named you, 'gentle and merciful.'"⁶

The Messenger ﷺ did not supplicate against those who had abused him so disgracefully, but instead asked his Lord to forgive

⁶ Al-Ḥalabī, Nūr ad-Dīn 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *as-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 504.

them because they did not know any better. And, indeed, as he hoped, Allah was to later bring forth from their loins men and women who worshipped Him and helped bring victory to His religion. In this way, our Messenger ﷺ teaches us another important Prophetic lesson on forbearance and forgiveness—when he looked upon those who abused him, he did not see them but rather their potential children and grandchildren whom he hoped would become Muslim and help his religion. And, indeed, it came to pass in the manner he hoped.

According to accounts in the books of *Sīra*, the owners of the orchard were nearby and saw the Messenger ﷺ enter and sit under the tree. So, they sent for a servant of theirs called ‘Addās and told him to take the Prophet ﷺ some grapes. So ‘Addās put some grapes on a plate, took them over to the Messenger ﷺ and handed them to him. When the Messenger ﷺ took the grapes from him, he said, “*Bismillāh*” (In the name of Allah). When ‘Addās heard him utter these words, he looked more closely at the Prophet ﷺ and said, “By Allah, that is not something that the people of this land usually say.”

“Where do you come from, ‘Addās?” asked the Messenger ﷺ. “And what religion do you follow?” ‘Addās replied, “I am a Christian of the people of Nineveh.”

“Ah!” said the Prophet ﷺ, “Then, you are from the city of the right-acting man of Allah, Yūnus ibn Mattā.” ‘Addās said in astonishment, “How do you know about Yūnus ibn Mattā? By Allah, even when I was still in Nineveh itself, I never met more than ten people who knew of him!” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “He is my brother, for he was a Prophet and I am a Prophet.” So ‘Addās threw himself to the ground before the Messenger ﷺ, kissed his head and his feet, and became Muslim.

Quraysh grew more and more hostile to Islam and the Muslims and, in the seventh year of the Mission, after all their attempts to limit the activities of the Muslims had failed, their arrogance led them to adopt a deeply unjust resolution, a resolution that was strange even according to their own customs and traditions and went completely against the Arab concept of honour and manliness. They decided to completely isolate and boycott the clan of Banū Hāshim, as well as all those who stood by them, as a punishment for defending Muḥammad ﷺ and his followers.

So, on a fateful day, the remaining nine clans of Quraysh came together and agreed to a total economic and social boycott of Muḥammad and his followers and protectors, by whom they meant the Banū Hāshim. They drafted and signed a document in which they pledged not to buy or sell from them nor marry their women or give them women to marry. This step they had taken was unprecedented and the boycott was absolute and all-encompassing. Once the document was signed by all the tribes of Quraysh, it was hung on the interior wall of the Ka'ba.

The boycott lasted for three long years, and so stifling was the economic blockade that the Banū Hāshim and the Muslims were forced to leave Makkah and seek safety in the ravines of the surrounding mountains. During the course of those years, they were subjected to all sorts of harm and abuse at the hands of the rest of Quraysh and experienced the most extreme and unbearable forms of privation. Sometimes, they were brought to the point of complete starvation, even to the extent that they were obliged to eat grass to remain alive. Sayyida Khadija spent all that she had to provide the Banū Hāshim with food and supplies, and the rich men of the Banū Taym, including Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, did the

same.

But, to the astonishment of all, they did endure, demonstrating incredible fortitude in the face of all manner of suffering and hardship. Even though most of them were not Muslim and did not yet believe in his Message, they never wavered in their determination to defend Muḥammad ﷺ, no matter how much psychological pressure they were put under, no matter how many physical losses they were made to endure.

After three exhausting and attritional years, Hishām ibn ‘Amr ibn Rabī‘a⁷, an idolater who had vociferously opposed the unjust boycott from the start, decided that the situation had gone on long enough. He went to the notables of the Quraysh, and addressed them, saying, “People of Makkah! How can we sit here, eating our food and wearing our clothes while our kin, the Banū Hāshim, perish before our eyes, and no one is able or willing to do anything about it because of that unjust document?! By Allah, I will not rest until it is torn to pieces!”⁸

His words were heeded and, despite a few objections, the boycott was finally lifted. Quraysh themselves had lost their appetite for the boycott and could put up with the unnatural situation no longer, for it had caused them almost as much harm as those they had boycotted and had damaged their standing in the peninsula, for the Arab tribes viewed the unethical and inhumane way Quraysh had acted towards their own tribesmen with ever growing disapproval.

⁷ Some accounts state that the man in question was Zuhayr ibn abī Umayya.

⁸ An-Nadwī, Abū al-Ḥasan, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2010, p. 139. Also see al-Jazā’irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, p. 85.

The boycott had finally come to an end, but the hostility of Quraysh towards the Messenger and his followers showed no sign of abating. Indeed, it intensified, and the final three years before the Messenger ﷺ was eventually forced to leave his homeland and emigrate to Yathrib, were by far the most difficult he was to face.

This was a cause of sadness to the Messenger ﷺ, but what brought him even greater sorrow during that period was the death of two of those whom he held most dear. The first to die was his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, that wise old man who took Muḥammad ﷺ into his house as a child, supported him throughout his youth, and defended him as a Messenger until he breathed his final breath. The Messenger said of him, "Quraysh were not able to do anything truly disagreeable to me until after Abū Ṭālib died." The next to die, only three days later, was his wife, Khadija, peace be upon her, his partner and Companion and the first one to believe in him. The Messenger called that year the "Year of Sadness".

"Glory be to Him who took His slave on a journey by night"

In the eleventh year of the Mission, the supremely spiritually significant event known as the "Night Journey and Ascent" took place. This journey was a way for Allah to honour His beloved on the earth in a way none of his creation had ever been honoured before. Specifically referring to this event, Allah says in the beginning of Sūrat al-Isrā':

﴿Glory be to Him who took His slave on a journey by night from the Masjid al-Haram to the Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, in order to show him some of Our Signs. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.﴾
Al-Isrā', 17:1

When the Messenger ﷺ led his fellow Prophets and

Messengers in prayer at the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, it was an affirmation of his position as the seal of the Prophets. The Qur'ān tells us that Allah addressed the Prophets and Messengers in the spirit world and made them promise to follow the laws of the Qur'ān, for there is no contradiction between the laws of the Qur'ān and the laws brought by earlier Messengers, they merely represent their continuation and progression.

Allah says,

❖ Remember when Allah made a covenant with the Prophets: "Now that We have given you a share of the Book and Wisdom, and then a Messenger comes to you confirming what is with you, you must believe in him and help him." He asked, "Do you agree and undertake my commission on that condition?" They replied, "We agree." He said, "Bear witness, then. I am with you as one of the witnesses." ﴿٣٨﴾ Al 'Imrān, 3:81

This noble verse confirms that Allah had previously told the Prophets of the coming of Muḥammad ﷺ, and that He had asked them that if they happened to be alive in his time, after having first ascertained that he had come confirming what they had brought, that they would then believe in his Prophethood, follow him and give him their aid. After the Prophets all agreed to this, Allah told them to bear witness to that effect, and He Himself bore witness alongside them.

Then the Prophet ascended through the highest heavens so that his Lord could show him some of His greatest signs. And, finally, he was brought to the seventh heaven. And, there, he went beyond the Lote Tree of Furthest Limit, where even Jibrīl was not allowed to accompany him, thus proving that he truly saw his Lord. In that place, Allah made the five daily prayers obligatory upon him. Then, on that same night, he returned back to Makkah.

When he came back, the Messenger ﷺ did not talk about the details of his journey to the highest heavens, but simply said that he had been taken on a night journey to Jerusalem. Quraysh immediately accused him of lying, and Abū Lahab and Abū Jahl ridiculed him and made fun of him. The first one to believe him was Abū Bakr. When he heard, he said, "How can I not believe him in this when I already believe him when he tells me that revelation comes down to him from heaven every single day?!"

Sometime later, when 'Ā'isha, may Allah be pleased with her, asked him whether he had seen Allah when he made his Ascent through the heavens, he ﷺ replied, "He is light. How could I see him?" And in another version of the ḥadīth, he replied, "I saw light." He neither affirmed nor negated—he simply made do with this statement. But this short statement is more affirmative than negative, since is Allah not the Light of the heavens and the earth?

If Sūrat al-Isrā' tells us no more than the fact that Muḥammad ﷺ made a night journey to Jerusalem and then journeyed up through the highest heavens, Sūrat an-Najm provides us with some of the details of what happened during the Ascent, using language as majestic as it is beautiful, as eloquent as it is divine.

❖ By the star when it descends, your companion is not misguided or misled; nor does he speak from whim. It is nothing but Revelation revealed, taught him by one immensely strong, possessing power and splendour. He stood there stationary—there on the highest horizon. Then he drew near and hung suspended. He was two bows' length away or even closer. Then He revealed to His slave what He revealed. His heart did not lie about what he saw. What! Do you dispute with him about what he saw? He saw Him again another time by the Lote Tree of the Final Limit, beside which is the Garden

of Refuge, when that which covered the Lote Tree covered it. His eye did not waver nor did he look away. He saw some of the Greatest Signs of his Lord. ﴿٥٣﴾ An-Najm, 53:1-18

There is a certain amount of disagreement among the people of knowledge concerning certain aspects of this journey. They disagree as to whether the Messenger ﷺ made the journey in body and in soul or just in soul, and they disagree as to whether he saw his Lord.

As for the matter of whether he saw Him, the answer seems clear from these magnificent and unambiguous verses of Sūrat an-Najm. There is no interpretation needed. In them, Allah Himself swears by the star—and that is a mighty oath if you only knew⁹—that whatever His Messenger ﷺ says is true, for he does not speak from whim.

Further, Allah confirms that “your companion is not misguided or misled” (An-Najm, 53:2), “his eye did not waver nor did he look away” (An-Najm, 53:17) and “his heart did not lie about what he saw” (An-Najm, 53:11).

In this Sūra, Allah speaks out in defence of His Messenger ﷺ, and all these things He says are affirmations that leave one in no doubt whatsoever that Allah did indeed meet with His Messenger ﷺ.

Allah Himself addresses His question to those who voiced their doubts to the Messenger: “What! Do you dispute with him about what he saw?” (An-Najm, 53:12).

⁹ This is a reference to the oath in Sūrat al-Wāqī‘a: “And I swear by the falling of the stars—that is a mighty oath if you only knew” (Al-Wāqī‘a, 56:75-76).

Do you doubt his words? Allah defends His Messenger ﷺ by providing us with clear and ambiguous answers. Allah is not only speaking to the idolaters here, He is speaking to the believers themselves. Then Allah says, "He saw Him again another time by the Lote Tree of the Final Limit, beside which is the Garden of Refuge" (An-Najm, 53:13-15).

In other words, the Prophet ﷺ saw Him a second time in the Garden of Refuge. The proof that this refers to Allah is that no one else aside from the Prophet ﷺ was permitted to enter that place, not even Jibrīl, the Trustworthy Spirit, peace be upon him. Everyone has his known station, and the station of the Prophet ﷺ is higher than that of Jibrīl, peace be upon him.

As for the question of whether he saw Him with his eyes or with his inner sight, does not the soul itself have some sort of eye with which it sees, and is that not what is meant by "inner sight"? The verse proves that he ﷺ saw his Lord. As for exactly how Allah manifested Himself to His Messenger ﷺ, that depends on whether the Ascent was made in body or in spirit alone, and the truth of that is a matter of the Unseen, known only to the Knower of the Unseen. It is enough for us to believe what the Prophet ﷺ told us and accept what the verses of Qur'ān clearly say.

While it is difficult for us as human beings to imagine how something like this could be done, it is equally difficult for us as believers to have any doubts about it, for the affirmations of our Lord Himself in Sūrat an-Najm are clear and unambiguous and cannot be denied. There is no way, logically speaking, that Allah would send the Seal of His Prophets ﷺ on a visit to the highest heaven and not receive him into His presence.

Then there are the many times throughout the Sūra that Allah speaks up on behalf of His Chosen Prophet ﷺ and vouches

for him. First, Allah vouches for his Prophet's truthfulness, saying, "Your companion is not misled"; then He vouches for his knowledge, saying, "He was taught by one immensely strong"; then He vouches for his sight, saying, "His eye did not waver nor did he look away"; then He vouches for the inner knowledge He bestowed that night upon His Prophet ﷺ, when He taught him things of which he had no prior experience, saying, "He saw some of the Greatest Signs of his Lord, and there was revealed to him what was revealed to him."

If a believer can believe that the Messenger ﷺ was taken on a night journey, then taken up to the highest heavens, and then brought back to Makkah on the self-same night, then how can he fail to believe that he saw the Lord who took him on that night journey to the seventh heaven?!

This honour was unique and totally unprecedented, one which Allah had never once granted any Messenger before him. The Ascent was, by its nature, something beyond the ken of the human being and beyond his wildest imaginings. The precise manner it occurred was according to the Will of Allah, and He is capable of taking His Prophet ﷺ up through the heavens in whichever way He wanted—His Knowledge is absolute and so is His Power. But having said that, it seems to us most likely that the Ascent of the Prophet ﷺ was made in spirit and not in spirit and body. We say this because the body, like time and space, is part of the material world, and how could a body created of clay endure an ascent in which it must have been travelling faster than the speed of light? But as for the spirit world, that is a part of the world of heaven, and so a spirit would be able to ascend at whatever speed required. Allah has given the spirit abilities that far outstrip the abilities of the body—the spirit sees and hears, and

it has its own special form of intellect.

There is another interpretation that is worth considering, and that is that the Ascent was the opening of the heart's inner eye, enabling it to see the lights of the next abode. So, he ﷺ travelled without his body moving so much as an inch from its spot. In this way, his spirit ascended to the highest heavens and met his Lord and saw His greatest signs. This is what gnostics refer to as "spiritual opening" (*fath*) or "spiritual illumination" (*kashf*).

The Messenger ﷺ returned from his Ascent, bringing back with him the obligation of the five daily prayers. This was the only obligation he brought to us from direct meeting with his Lord, every other obligation was brought through Jibrīl, peace be upon him. As a result, the prayer is the unbroken link between the slave and his Lord and the central support of the religion. No sooner did the Companions hear of this great obligation of Islam than they started to put it into practice in the exact manner described to them by their beloved Messenger ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ was to spend thirteen years of his life as a Messenger in Makkah, and it was there that he was blessed to receive more than half of the Qur'ān. Throughout this period, the Messenger ﷺ gave his followers the most thorough and complete of educations, nourishing their souls with the lights of the Qur'ān and planting the seeds of belief deep within their hearts so that it could take root, grow strong and give forth of its divine fruits. The Muslims were fed and sustained by the Qur'ānic Sūras as they were revealed to their Messenger ﷺ, and the Revelation created within them a deep spiritual awareness and a firm and unwavering belief. That belief transformed their hearts and brought them to life, making them the best of men and women, capable of carrying the divine Message and transmitting it

faithfully to the rest of mankind.

As for the second half of the Qur'ān, it was to be revealed in Madinah during the last ten years of the life of the Messenger. The Sūras that were revealed in this period came to be known as the Madinan legislation, for they contained nearly all the legal rulings of the religion: rulings governing acts of worship, rulings distinguishing the lawful from the unlawful, rulings governing how Muslims must act when dealing with non-Muslims, and rulings relating to family and inheritance. The rulings of this last category, the laws of inheritance, are highly significant as they show the degree to which Islam honours women.

The Phase of Diffusion and Manifestation

In this moment, when things were at their lowest ebb for the Messenger ﷺ and his Mission, Allah sent the Anṣār to come to his aid. For them was to be the incalculable honour of setting the stage for Islam to enter its Madinan phase. The time had come for the call to Allah, which had remained semi-confined to Makkah for thirteen long years, to make the transition to its second Muhammadan phase, the phase of diffusion and manifestation.

Of course, there were a certain number of the people of Yathrib, both from Aws and from Khazraj, who had raced towards the good and entered Islam sometime previously. Their first encounter with the Messenger ﷺ is mentioned in the previous chapter. At this first encounter, only a handful of Anṣār were present. Then, the following year, a small delegation, comprising representatives from both tribes, came to see the Messenger ﷺ. When this delegation returned to Yathrib, they were accompanied by Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr. Muṣ'ab had studied in the Muhammadan school in Makkah and he was entrusted by the Prophet ﷺ with the

task of taking the Message of Islam to the people of Yathrib, and he fulfilled that task admirably with a great many of the people there accepting his call to Islam.

As soon as they got to know the Prophet ﷺ and learnt of the teachings and tenets of his religion, they embraced Islam without delay and rejoiced that the call to his religion was being brought to their fellow clansmen in Yathrib. They hoped that, through him ﷺ, the hearts of the people could be unified and the two tribes could unite and help give him victory over his idol-worshipping enemies. Their encounter with the Messenger ﷺ, and the pledge of allegiance they had given him, had filled them with great optimism, and they returned home with renewed purpose and Islam began to spread into every clan and family of Yathrib.

However, the most important meeting with the Messenger ﷺ was not to take place until the Ḥajj season in the following year. On this occasion, a large delegation, comprising seventy men and three women, came to Makkah from Yathrib, having arranged in advance a clandestine meeting with the Prophet ﷺ. A large number of the members of this delegation were from the tribe of Khazraj, for they had won a major victory over the tribe of Aws at the recently concluded Battle of Bu'āth. The delegation was led by the poet Ka'b ibn Mālik, accompanied by Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. They met the Messenger ﷺ as arranged, and Muṣ'ab brought him up to date with how things had gone, telling him how extraordinarily receptive the people of Yathrib had been to the call of Islam and how quickly it had spread.

One of the members of this delegation was Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh ibn an-Nu'mān ibn Imru' al-Qays, the chief of the tribe of Aws and a noted warrior. At that time, he was still a young man, only recently into his thirties, but, even so, it was he who was to single-

handedly bring the whole of the tribe of Aws into Islam. After the Prophet ﷺ emigrated to Yathrib, Sa'd was to become one of his closest friends and one of his most important and trusted Companions, playing a major and historic role alongside him ﷺ in many battles and events, including the Battle of Badr and at the Battle of Uhud. During the course of this latter battle, he was to prove his worth in his courageous defence of the Messenger ﷺ.

When the delegation met with the Messenger ﷺ, Sa'd informed him that there was no longer even a single household in Yathrib that did not have at one person in it who had become Muslim. Upon hearing this news, the Messenger's joy knew no bounds. He felt as if Allah had readied Yathrib for him and the Muslims, a base from which they might operate in safety and impunity, a refuge and a support for his religion after Quraysh had let him down.

The joy the Anṣār felt upon meeting the Messenger ﷺ shone from their faces, and their words expressed its depth. They said, "Today, we are the most fortunate of people. Our dreams have been answered and our hopes have come true! A Prophet has been sent from among our people and not from among the Jews. We used to feel small and insignificant next to the Jews and the Christians, because they were people of a book while we had no book, and we used to wish that we had a book like theirs. So how happy, how fortunate, we are today! A Prophet has come to us bringing the Qur'ān, that book that makes a person tremble and his skin quiver whenever he hears it recited!"¹⁰

¹⁰ Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 154.

An interesting aspect of this encounter that is often overlooked is the fact that the Messenger of Allah did not go to it alone, but brought along his uncle al-'Abbās, despite the fact that al-'Abbās had yet to become a Muslim. What does this tell us? It tells us that family still has its place in Islam. There are positive sides to family and tribal loyalty, just as there are negative ones. Al-'Abbās was there to look after the interests of his nephew. He addressed the delegation from Yathrib, warning them in no uncertain terms, "If you think you might let the Prophet down and give him up to his enemies after he comes to you, then it is best that you leave now and let him be, for here he is in his homeland, honoured and protected by his people."

A member of the delegation, al-Barā' ibn Ma'rūr, responded on behalf of them all, saying, "By Allah, if we had something else to say, we would have said it. No, our word is our bond and we speak only truth. We are ready to give our lives to protect the noble Messenger. Speak, Messenger of Allah, and we will listen. Take from us for yourself and for your Lord whatever you will, we will pledge you our allegiance!"

Certain now that their intentions were true, the Messenger ﷺ began to speak. After he had recited some verses from the Noble Qur'ān, he explained to them exactly what their pledge of allegiance would entail, telling them, "You will pledge to hear and obey, in both times of difficulty and ease, to command the right and forbid the wrong, to not fear the blame of any censurer in the way of Allah, and to give me your aid and support when I come to you."

They replied, "We pledge allegiance to you on that basis, Messenger of Allah, and we will give you protection." Then they asked the Messenger ﷺ where he would stand with respect to

them were they to cut their ties with the Jews, for such a step may be interpreted by the Jews as a declaration of war. The Messenger smiled ﷺ. Then he replied, "Your honour and your blood are my honour and my blood. I am a part of you and you are a part of me. I will fight whoever fights you and I will make peace with whoever makes peace with you."¹¹

Then he asked them to appoint twelve men to represent the rest of them. So, nine men stepped forward from Khazraj and three from Aws. The Messenger ﷺ addressed these twelve men, saying, "You are to be responsible for your people as the Disciples were responsible before 'Īsā ibn Maryam, and I am responsible for my people." When they replied that they were ready to do as he asked, the Prophet ﷺ told them that the reward with Allah for fulfilling this contract was the Garden. This concluded the greater pledge of al-'Aqaba.

This blessed pledge of allegiance marked the moment the Islamic call entered its Madinan phase, during which time Allah was to bring His religion into the light and reveal it in all its glory. For it was the moment the Messenger ﷺ finally gave his followers permission to emigrate to Yathrib, telling them, "Allah has given you brothers and made you a home where you will be safe." So, the Muslims secretly started making preparations to emigrate. As for the Messenger ﷺ himself, his time to emigrate had not yet come. He remained behind, waiting for a command from Allah granting him permission to leave.

¹¹ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 402.

The Emigration to Allah

This pledge of allegiance made by the Anṣār was a pivotal moment in the history of the Prophet ﷺ. But, for their part, when they heard about it, Quraysh felt extremely threatened. They knew they were in real danger of losing control of the whole situation, especially when they started realising that many of the Muslims were leaving and heading for Yathrib. So, they decided to act. First, they hunted down as many of the people of Yathrib as they could get their hands on in order to make an example of them, and then they cordoned off the city in order to make it as difficult as possible for the Muslims to leave.

It soon became so difficult to emigrate that the Muslims could only slip away alone or in small groups in the dead of night, forced to leave their families and nearly all their possessions behind. This is exemplified by Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān¹² whose story shows the depth of belief these early Muslims had and the level of sacrifice they were prepared to make:

When Quraysh learnt he was intending to emigrate to Yathrib, they accosted him, saying, "You came to us a lowly vagrant and became rich here among us. All you have you got is through us, and now you think you can take yourself and your wealth away from here. By Allah, we will not let that happen." They sought to dissuade Ṣuhayb in this way, but Ṣuhayb was not

¹² Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān was known in Makkah as the "Byzantine". The Messenger of Allah ﷺ, however, gave him the patronymic of Abū Yaḥyā. He was one of the earliest Muslims. He was originally one of the people of Mosul, but had been enslaved by the Byzantines when he was still a young boy. When he reached manhood, he fled from the Byzantines and settled in Makkah, where he became Muslim. He died in Madinah.

deterred. He was ready to make the hard decision. So, he offered them all his wealth in exchange for letting him leave and they accepted. He sacrificed everything he owned in the way of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.

His sacrifice wrong-footed Quraysh. It was incomprehensible to them that a man who had fled his homeland and come to their city without a penny to his name would give up everything he had spent a lifetime accumulating, choosing to return to poverty for the sake of his religion and his Messenger ﷺ. But this time he was not a fugitive running away from something, he was a believer, affiliated to the Messenger ﷺ and fleeing to Allah.

His story is one example of how belief manifests itself in those who have true certainty and whose hearts are connected to heaven. The moment the truth of this world becomes apparent to them and they realise how meaningless and insignificant its baubles truly are, they stop devoting their lives to their development and accumulation. The true believer knows that he owns nothing in this world and nothing owns him.

When the Prophet ﷺ was told of what Ṣuhayb had done, he said to him, "What a profitable deal you have made, Abū Yaḥyā, what a profitable deal!" No deal could be more profitable than selling this world for the Next. In honour of his sacrifice, Allah revealed the following noble verse:

﴿ And among the people there are some who give up everything, desiring the good pleasure of Allah. Allah is Ever-Gentle with His slaves. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:207

Ṣuhayb went from being a man of great wealth to one of the poorest and most impoverished. He became one of "the People of the Bench", and although he was to rely on the largesse and

generosity of the charitable for his next meal, the light of belief never ceased to shine forth from his noble face.

In a fit of vengeful pique Quraysh confiscated the possessions and homes of those who had already emigrated and sold them on the open market. Others, like Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān, had their wealth taken from them before they left and had to make the journey to Madinah with only the clothes on their backs.

The stories of these inspirational men—Ṣuhayb, Bilāl, ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir and others—really does show us how strong the belief was of these early Muslims. They were prepared to sacrifice everything precious and dear to them for the sake of their religion. And lest we forget, not one of the members of this blessed vanguard was ever forced to become Muslim.

How did the noble Messenger ﷺ succeed, in the space of a few short years, in turning these simple men from idol-worshipping slaves with no value in the eyes of Quraysh and no standing in the eyes of society into historic figures chosen by Allah and honoured both in heaven and on earth? The answer lies in the Muhammadan qualities of character they acquired by osmosis and the Prophetic education they received at his hands. The answer lies in *tazkiya* (spiritual purification) and much remembrance of Allah.

After belief entered their hearts—as well as their minds through the language of reason and logic—they came to exemplify better than anyone the qualities of patience, courage and sacrifice. Then they emigrated to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ and left this world behind, for what is following the Messenger ﷺ if not a continuous emigration to Allah. Allah says in the Qur’ān, addressing His Prophet,

❖ Say, "If you love Allah, then follow me and Allah will love you and forgive you for your wrong actions. Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful." ﴿٣١﴾ *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:31

Without following, there is no love.

Soon, no one remained in Makkah of the Muslims aside from the Messenger ﷺ and his two close Companions, Abū Bakr and 'Alī. Quraysh realised that the Muslims had established a very real base for themselves, and foresaw that, were the Messenger to reach it, Yathrib could be transformed overnight into a city where the forces of Islam could grow and shake the very foundations of their world and undermine the entire basis for their influence in the Arabian Peninsula. Quraysh's mild alarm had turned into full-blown panic—how could they get themselves out of this predicament? They agreed among themselves that it was imperative to prevent the Messenger ﷺ from linking up with his Companions. Every option was now on the table. Things previously unthinkable now became permissible to thwart his departure.

They convened an assembly of the people. Some of them proposed putting the Messenger ﷺ in chains and locking him up, others proposed sending him into exile. All these proposals were dismissed. Finally, Abū Jahl stood and proposed they kill him, and they unanimously agreed to his plan. They had always avoided this option, for Banū Hāshim would have sought retaliation and demanded a life in exchange.

But Abū Jahl came up with a plan, he believed, to avoid such reprisal. He suggested they entrust the task of killing Muḥammad ﷺ to nine young men, one from each of the main clans of Quraysh, telling them to strike the Messenger ﷺ at the same time. This way, no single clan could be held accountable for the killing,

and Banū Hāshim would not be able to demand reprisal, since no matter how strong or determined they were, there could not fight the whole tribe to get vengeance for the murder of Muḥammad ﷺ.

Quraysh plotted and planned, but Allah had decreed something else entirely, for He would never allow the one He sent to earth as a mercy to be harmed by idol-worshipping hands. Jibrīl, peace be upon him, came to Muḥammad ﷺ that night and told him what Quraysh were planning. Then he told him, "The time for your emigration has arrived." The Divine permission for which the Messenger ﷺ had been waiting had come.

To keep his intentions secret, the Messenger ﷺ asked 'Alī to sleep that night in his bed, for it was possible to see from outside the house whether the bed was occupied but not who its occupant was. He hoped in this way to deceive his enemies into believing him still to be there. He ﷺ also gave 'Alī all the things that had been left to him on trust and asked 'Alī to return them over the coming days to their rightful owners.

Later that same evening, the young men entrusted with the murder circled the house of the Prophet ﷺ, waiting for him to come out so they could do the heinous deed. As they stood guard, Allah decreed that they slip into a deep sleep from which they did not waken until they felt the heat of the sun on their faces the following morning. And so the Messenger ﷺ was able to slip through their ring and make his escape.

On his way out of the city, he passed by the house of his close Companion Abū Bakr and told him of his decision to emigrate. Relieved and overjoyed, Abū Bakr could not stop himself from weeping. He had made all the necessary preparations already and had simply been waiting for this: the go ahead from the Messenger to leave Makkah. 'Ā'isha later said about that day, "I never once

saw my father weep like I saw him weep on that day.”

Together, they made their way out of the city, heading first for Thawr, a cave a few miles outside the city. They planned to stay there for three days until the search for them had died down. The moment Quraysh learnt that Muḥammad ﷺ had escaped and left the city unharmed, they mobilised as many men as they could and sent them forth in all directions, offering a reward of a hundred camels to whoever brought him back to them, dead or alive.

Some of these men came so close to the cave in which the Prophet ﷺ and Abū Bakr were hidden that when Abū Bakr looked out through the entrance, he could see the men's feet. So, he whispered to the Messenger ﷺ, “Were any of them to bend down and look into the mouth of the cave, he would most certainly see us.” The Messenger ﷺ replied, “Do not fear! What do you think of two when Allah is the third of them?”

By reminding Abū Bakr that Allah was with them and could see everything that was going on both inside and outside the cave, the Messenger ﷺ reassured Abū Bakr and stilled his beating heart and these noble words became for him a palpable reality, something that he tasted and felt. He had attained a station of belief wherein the spiritual bond between believer and Creator is secured and made fast. To achieve peace of heart and a life of calm and tranquillity, all the believer needs to do is remain conscious that Allah is with him and that he is with Allah, regardless of the situation in which he finds himself. “If you do not see Him, then He sees you”. This is the station of *murāqaba*¹³, and anyone who

¹³ Spiritual contemplation whereby one constantly monitors and keeps

lives his life in a state of *murāqaba* increases the strength of his connection to Allah.

When the chase died down and the way grew clear, they left the cave and continued their journey towards Yathrib. But not all the pursuers had given up. One of them, Surāqa ibn Mālik, a poet warrior and an expert tracker from the tribe of Kināna, still had hopes of getting the reward. He anticipated their route and caught up with them on their track. But when he tried to close in on them, his horse tripped and sent him flying. This happened twice, something unheard of for an experienced horseman. So, the third time, he approached slowly and carefully, but this time his horse's forelegs sank into the sand and it refused to advance any further. When this happened, Surāqa knew without a doubt that the Prophet ﷺ was protected by Divine Providence and that it would be impossible for him, or for anyone, to do him any harm. So, he called out to the Prophet ﷺ, asking him to halt so he could inform him of what Quraysh had done and the rewards they had offered to anyone who killed him and brought his body back to them.

When the Prophet ﷺ met Surāqa, a truly remarkable thing happened, for he took hold of his hand and said, "This hand was not created to kill a Prophet!" Then he added, "But how would you like instead, Surāqa, to one day wear the bracelets of Chosroes?" "The bracelets of Chosroes the son of Hurmuz?" asked Surāqa in astonishment, "The king of Persia?" "Yes", replied the Messenger ﷺ. Surāqa shook his head and retraced his steps back to Makkah.

careful watch over his own heart as a cat keeps careful watch over a mouse-hole.

How could a Prophet on a camel in the middle of the desert, with only his Companion Abū Bakr for company, fleeing from his homeland and pursued by his enemies, a man still far from his destination, with no state, no army and no political base of power, how could he promise the bracelets of the emperor of Persia, Chosroes, to a man such as Surāqa? Was he looking with the light of Allah?

This statement of the Messenger ﷺ was a prophecy that the Muslims would conquer Persia, and it happened exactly as he prophesied. It was in the time of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb that the Muslims finally defeated the armies of Chosroes. Following the battle, the booty of war was piled up, and in it were found the bracelets of Chosroes. So 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb picked them up and, handing them over to Surāqa, said, "Today is the Day of Fulfilment!"¹⁴

The emigration was a watershed moment—it drew a line between the old world and the new. It marked the end of the time of ignorance and the beginning of the time of Islam.¹⁵ It represented a paradigm shift—the moment the new Muhammadan Age emerged and the greatest manifestations and signs of Allah made their appearance on the earth.

Although the emigration to Yathrib was a physical emigration, one that took place in time and space, it also had a most definite spiritual dimension, for it opened up fresh pathways to heaven and symbolised the emigration of the heart to Allah. It

¹⁴ Al-Ḥalabī, Nūr ad-Dīn 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm, *as-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 61-62.

¹⁵ Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 174.

says in a well-known ḥadīth, “The emigrant is the one who leaves what Allah has prohibited.” Therefore, every *tazkiya* is an act of emigration to Allah. Every purification of the heart from its diseases is an act of emigration to Allah. Every purification of the body from sins and wrong actions is an act of emigration to Allah. And when that emigration is combined with *tawba*, it creates a purified and constant spiritual path to Allah, and becomes a lasting proof before Allah.

Tawba is the spiritual rebirth of the human being—the broad gates of heaven are thrown open for the penitent, and the believer moves onto the path to his Lord that will always be there. It says in a noble ḥadīth, “Emigration will not stop until *tawba* stops, and *tawba* will not stop until the sun rises from whence it sets.”



The City of the Messenger ﷺ

Yathrib: A Brief History

Before the emigration, much like any other large city in the Arab peninsula, Yathrib was a backward city full of idolaters, living in the dark ages, its pre-Islamic social and cultural identity largely defined by the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of its own individual social circumstances and framework. If Makkah, the city referred to in the Noble Qur'ān as the “mother of all cities”, was a unitribal area, with a population made up almost exclusively of members of the Quraysh, Yathrib was very different. It was home to three distinct tribal factions: the tribe of Aws, the tribe of Khazraj and the Jews.

Aws and Khazraj were both idol-worshipping tribes who traced their lineage back to a common group of ancestors. Not only did they come from the same tribe in the Yemeni Qaḥṭānī al-Azd confederation, but were descended from two brothers of al-Azd. As for the third faction, there were a number of Jewish tribes living in and around Madinah. At various points in the past, these tribes had emigrated from Syria and taken refuge in the Arab

peninsula, fleeing Roman persecution. Three of these tribes settled in Yathrib: the Banū an-Naḍīr, the Banū Qurayẓa, and the Banū Qaynuqā', and nearly all of them were now Arab or had been Arabised. Alongside these three Jewish groups, there was another major grouping of Jews who had settled some one hundred kilometres to the north in an oasis called Khaybar.

Thanks to their position as merchants, jewellers, goldsmiths, leather workers and plantation owners, these Jews had become the most powerful grouping in Yathrib, and gained control over most aspects of the local economy, giving them considerable influence over the other tribes. The two Arab tribes may well have been in the majority, but they were without a doubt the weaker class of Yathrib society.

This monopoly the Jews enjoyed over the assets and resources of Yathrib had inevitably created a general atmosphere of discontent and unhappiness among the peoples of Aws and Khazraj, and eventually they lost patience. They sent one of their tribal leaders, Mālik ibn 'Ajalān, to enlist the aid of his cousins, the Christian Ghassanids in Syria. The Ghassanids viewed this call for help as a perfect opportunity to punish the Jews for their maltreatment of 'Īsā, peace be upon him, so they sent a strong army back to Yathrib. This army dealt the Jews a painful blow and weakened their hold on the area significantly, thereby strengthening the hand of Aws and Khazraj and enabling them to regain a degree of their former influence and authority. But, even though they had been freed from the iron grip of the Jews and the wealth of the land was once again distributed more equitably, still they were not safe from their wickedness.

When the Jews saw that the Arab tribes had recovered their cohesiveness and had once again come to enjoy influence over the

city, they started to plot and conspire against them. Taking advantage of their naivety and impetuosity, the Jews tried to create a conflict between the two Arab tribes, one group pretending to support the tribe of Khazraj and the other the tribe of Aws. And their efforts were to prove successful. They succeeded in turning the two tribes against each other and so began a tribal war that was to last for more than a century. It was one of the darkest chapters in the early history of the Peninsula, and the last major tribal war of the pre-Islamic period. This continuous conflict created a power vacuum that the Jews were quick to fill, and they restored the hegemony that they had lost.

According to historical accounts, it was usually the tribe of Khazraj who prevailed in the frequent skirmishes. A mere five years before the Messenger ﷺ emigrated to Yathrib, however, the tables were turned and Aws inflicted a crushing defeat on Khazraj at Bu'āth, a place just outside the city, and were on the verge of massacring them. But before this tragedy played out, reason and sense prevailed. Wise men on both sides, independently of each other, came to the decision to lay down their arms and stop fighting, for the cheap and senseless killing brought benefit to no one but their mutual enemies. A group of these men went to Aws and said to them, "Khazraj are your brothers, and are better neighbours to you than these jackals!" By "jackals", they meant the Jews.¹

However, while the fighting and violence had stopped, true peace had not materialised, for the hearts remained divided and consumed by hatred. And, until tribal resentment and bitterness

¹ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, pp. 63-64.

could be set aside, peace would remain an impossibility. Conciliation only truly came to the two tribes when the Messenger of peace ﷺ came into their lives and took it upon himself to draw up a blessed treaty to bring lasting peace between them.

When things were at their bleakest and irreparable tragedy was about to strike, Allah caused wisdom and reason to emerge and prevail, waking the warring parties up to the senselessness of their actions and readying their hearts and minds to accept their Prophet ﷺ and nurture and protect his Message. Both tribes saw the Messenger ﷺ as the leader for whom they had been waiting. With his wisdom and light, he ﷺ would be the one to bring back peace to the Arabs, he would be the one to restore their ties of brotherhood. And, it was to happen in exactly the manner they hoped, for the bond the Prophet created between them was like no bond the Arab world had ever before seen. Sayyida 'Ā'isha, peace be upon her, would later say, "The Day of Bu'āth was the day Allah prepared the way for His Messenger."

Qubā': Peace and Brotherhood

When the Prophet emigrated to Yathrib in 622 AD, he was fifty-three years old. On the way there, he passed through Qubā', a district some three kilometres south of Yathrib inhabited by members of the tribe of Aws. Anticipating his arrival, they had stationed a look-out outside Qubā' to keep them posted. When the look-out saw the camel approaching from a distance, he knew immediately that it was the Messenger ﷺ and his Companion Abū Bakr, so he called out to the people in the loudest voice he could muster, "Banū Qayla, your saviour has come!"—Aws were often referred to by the name of their grandmother, Qayla, who was a

direct descendent of Imru' al-Qays—"Here is that saviour for whom you have been waiting!"

When he and his Companion Abū Bakr arrived, they were welcomed by two of the more important chiefs of Aws, Ibn 'Āmir ibn 'Awf and his nephew, Āmir ibn 'Awf, and hosted by Kulthūm ibn al-Hidm. It was at Qubā' that he ﷺ led the people in the first Jum'a prayer ever prayed in Islam. After being received so warmly by these men of Aws, the Messenger ﷺ enquired about the leader of Khazraj, As'ad ibn Zurāra. They replied that As'ad was not welcome in their territory on account of the fact that he had killed so many of their men during the civil war.

"Let him come!" said the Messenger ﷺ, "I will vouch for him. As'ad shall be under my protection." They replied, "Every one of us is with you and under your protection, Messenger of Allah." In this matter, the leaders of Aws displayed great dignity and true nobility. Although their tribe had suffered great losses at the hands of Khazraj during the long and devastating civil war that had only recently concluded, still their support for the Messenger ﷺ never wavered for a single moment, even when he asked them to invite their erstwhile foes into their homes and make peace with them.

The next day, an invitation was sent to As'ad ibn Zurāra and he came immediately, bringing fifty of the men of Khazraj with him. After he arrived, the Messenger ﷺ convened a meeting with representatives of the two tribes, and explained to them how much emphasis Islam places on peace and the avoidance of bloodshed. He told them that Allah had given them the gift of Islam, and, in Islam, the blood of another Muslim is considered sacrosanct. Allah wants the Muslim community to be united, not divided. That bloody chapter in their history must be closed and

never again reopened. Brotherhood and togetherness is the key to the wellbeing of their society—no success or victory over their enemies or the enemies of Islam was possible without it.

When the Messenger ﷺ felt that the moment was right and their hearts had opened to peace, he asked Aws whether they would pardon Khazraj, and they replied without hesitation that they would. Such was the wisdom of the Messenger ﷺ that he succeeded in less than an hour in erasing a legacy of warfare and hatred that had lasted for close to one hundred and twenty years and planting the seeds of love of peace and brotherhood into hearts that had known only discord. Both parties left that meeting with purified hearts, cleansed of hatred and healed of their long-term wounds. From that moment forth, Aws and Khazraj were to become not just allies but brothers in the truest sense of the word, and never again did they take up arms against each other, for the bonds of the brotherhood that joined them had been tied together by Allah. Allah says, “The believers are but brothers.” Together, these two sides were to form a crucial part of the victorious army of Islam.

The Messenger ﷺ spent just three days in Qubā’, but during those three days he was able to achieve two highly significant things.

First, he ﷺ was able to make peace between Aws and Khazraj and bring to an end their century-long war. This historic achievement put in place the foundations necessary for a firm and lasting peace in Madinah-to-be.

Second, he ﷺ built the first mosque ever built in Islam. This mosque, which came to be known as the Mosque of Qubā’, was the first mosque in which the peoples of Aws and Khazraj prayed together side-by-side. Allah revealed the following verse regarding

this great mosque:

❖ A mosque founded on taqwā from the first day has a greater right for you to stand in it. In it there are men who love to purify themselves. Allah loves those who purify themselves. ﴿ At-Tawba, 9:108

Even today, anyone who prays in this mosque cannot help but feel the elevated spiritual presence of the Prophet ﷺ—one feels such serenity within its walls it is almost tangible.

Having accomplished these two blessed tasks, the Messenger ﷺ left Qubā' and continued on to Yathrib, accompanied by Abū Bakr and a throng of people from both Aws and Khazraj. It was a stirring and wondrous sight. It was as if he ﷺ was bringing with him the spirit of peace and brotherhood and making sure it made its way into Yathrib.

The Virtuous City

The greatness for which the city had been destined had finally arrived. Yathrib was ready as no city had ever been ready before for the coming of this visitor, a visitor unlike any other, an envoy of God to earth. After his arrival, Yathrib was to never again be the same, purified of ignorance and darkness and transformed it into a city of Muhammadan lights, a virtuous city. It was now Madinah, the Enlightened City of the Messenger ﷺ.

If the Makkan phase was one of combatting idolatry and association, the Madinan phase was to be one of Prophetic revolution and reformation, one in which the Islamic state was to be built with its new culture and constitution, one in which the foundations of a glorious Islamic civilisation were to be laid.

In a manner never before and never again seen, the whole of

Madinah came forth from the city to welcome their long-awaited visitor. People came singing their poems and beating their drums to meet a guest who had come to them to bring light to their hearts and life to their lands, and guide them towards the paths to heaven. Madinah gave him the best of welcomes, chanting verses that were to become immortal:

The full moon has risen over us
From the valleys of al-Wadā'.

And we must have thankfulness
For as long as there are callers to Allah.

O you who have been sent among us,
You have brought a command that must be obeyed.

A Messenger has come with the Truth.
His every word is revelation from the Heavens above.

You have come and brought honour to Madinah,
So welcome, O best of callers.

The imagery in this great song with which they greeted their visitor is highly symbolic. First, they compared the Prophet ﷺ to the full moon which rises high into the night sky and dispels the darkness and fills the world with light. This moon was coming into Madinah, turning it into a centre of luminosity, sending forth its beams of Muhammadan light. Thanks to him, lights of certainty and truth were to emanate and shine forth from the city. Then, they gave him their word that they would do anything and everything asked of them.

His arrival in Madinah marked the dawn of the Hijri Age, the

moment the world made the transition from being a world of idolatry and unbelief to being one of light and belief. The Islamic Age was to chart a new course for human history. Islam had arrived and was here to stay and the human experience would never again be the same.

The man granted the honour of hosting the Prophet ﷺ during his first few months in Madinah was Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, a great Companion whose exploits on the field of battle became legendary and who was to die a martyr beneath the walls of Constantinople.²

So bound to the Messenger ﷺ was the city of Madinah to become that it was almost as if it became a spiritual part of him. It was he who named it "Madinah" and he who planted the seeds of his light and spiritual teaching deep within its fertile soils. His emigration to it marked the start of the second phase of his Mission, and within its walls are to be found his mosque, his grave, and the graves of many of his Companions, two of whom are buried alongside him, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and the rest of whom are buried nearby in the revered graveyard of al-Baqī'.

Despite the change in location, the revelation continued

² Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī was eighty years old when he became a martyr. He was fighting jihad against the Byzantines beneath the walls of Constantinople and it was there that he was buried. Some 800 years after his death, Mehmet Fetih, who came to complete the jihad of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī and conquered Constantinople for the Muslims in 1453 AD, was able to locate his grave thanks to the dream of one of the Shaykhs of Damascus, and built a mosque over it in the city that was to later become Istanbul. Today, this mosque is considered one of the most important Islamic heritage sites in the whole of Turkey.

unabated and the archangel, Jibrīl, peace be upon him, continued to bring the Prophet ﷺ the messages from Heaven. It was here in Madinah that the second half of the Qur'ān was to be revealed, and that is why it is considered the second most sacred city after Makkah in the Arabian Peninsula.

The Messenger ﷺ was to transform Yathrib, a backward idol-worshipping town, into the virtuous city of Muhammad. Madinah was to undergo a Prophetic reformative revolution unique in the history of mankind. The society to which it gave rise was the blueprint of the Islamic state, a state of unparalleled virtue, founded on the great Constitution of Madinah.

The “president” and protector of this state was the champion of virtue, the Messenger ﷺ, who only came “to perfect good character”. He was, as described by Allah in His Book, “the light-giving lamp”. The Lord Himself bore witness to the excellence of his character in the strongest possible terms, addressing him ﷺ with the Words

﴿Indeed you are truly vast in character.﴾ Al-Qalam, 68:4

The citizens of this state were the noble Companions, the luminous Muhammadan vanguard of Islam, the best group of men and women to ever walk this earth. This community, alongside their Messenger ﷺ, were to build a great Islamic civilisation and change the course of history in the Arab world and beyond.

The Messenger ﷺ was to build this great city of his on the most enlightened of principles, principles that he described and emphasised for us time and time again. For example, he ﷺ said, “None of you truly believes until he wants for his brother what he wants for himself ...”; “Those who love one another for the sake

of Allah will enter the Garden ..."; "The believers are to one another like bricks in a well-built wall, each one strengthening the other..."; "Have mercy on those on the earth, and the One who is in Heaven will have mercy on you ..."; "Protect yourself against the Fire even if it be with but half a date, and if you do not even have that, then with a kind word ..."; and "A kind word is an act of *ṣadaqa*." From these *ḥadīths* and many others, we can see that love, mercy, brotherhood and speaking kind words were all elements of the ethical, cultural and Islamic make-up of Madinan society.

Within two days of arriving in the city, the Messenger ﷺ began building the great Mosque of Madinah and his own home, which was to be attached to it, working alongside his Companions to get the work done, an indication of his extraordinary humility. It is reported that when one of the Companions saw the Messenger ﷺ carrying a heavy brick, he tried to take it from him to lighten his load. But the Messenger ﷺ told him to go and take another one, saying, "I am just as much in need of Allah as you."

Alongside the mosque, the Messenger ﷺ built a special area known as aṣ-Ṣuffa (the Bench) to serve as a shelter for the poor and destitute. The Companions who congregated there came to be known as the "People of the Bench", and it is said that there were close to three hundred of them. Some of the best known among them were: Abū Hurayra; Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī; Ka'b ibn Mālīk, the poet of the Messenger; 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, the great compiler of *ḥadīths*; Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, the *mu'adhdhin* of Madinah; Salmān al-Fārisī; Ṣuhayb ar-Rūmī, the merchant who had left all that he owned behind in Makkah, seeking the pleasure of Allah; Zayd ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the brother of the future Caliph 'Umar; and al-Barā' ibn Mālīk, a man who was to become known as "the

dishevelled dust-covered one”, and about whom the Messenger ﷺ was to say, “Were he to make an oath by Allah, Allah would fulfil it.”

More select a group than this cannot be found. Their every moment was spent in worship, memorisation of Qur’ān and remembrance of Allah. Out of the ranks of these poor men were to emerge some of the greatest figures in early Islamic history: scholars, jurists, governors and regional rulers. It was on their shoulders that the task of spreading Islam throughout the lands of the Arabs and beyond was to fall.

The Messenger ﷺ loved sitting in their company and became more intimately connected to them than to anyone else. Every evening, when the time of supper came, he would invite a few of them to come to his house to eat, while sending the rest out in groups to the houses of his Companions. On one occasion, he said to them, “If you only knew what Allah has in store for you, you would want to increase still further in poverty and need.” Indeed, one of the best-known supplications the Prophet ﷺ used to make was, “O Allah, make me live as a pauper, make me die as a pauper and raise me up in the company of paupers.”

The Prophet ﷺ was loved by the poor and all ascetics followed his example, for he lived and died just as they did, with nothing to his name. He ﷺ used to say, “Be in this world as if you are a stranger or someone passing through.”

Every time we look at any aspect of the life of the Messenger ﷺ, we go to school. Indeed, every quality he possessed is a school of perfection. His worship and ascetism is a school; his vast character is a school; his extraordinary wisdom, tolerance and forbearance is a school, as are all the other illuminated aspects of his being that we have mentioned and will continue to mention as

we move through the account of his noble life.

It is enough in this context to see what the life of the Messenger ﷺ tells us about *zuhd*. What do we learn? We learn that not only is *zuhd* an ethical way of living one's life, but the key to constant spiritual purification and cleansing. *Zuhd* is jihad against the whims of the self. Through it, one can purify oneself of them and achieve closeness to Allah. The Messenger ﷺ said, "Love of this world is the root of all evil", and "Have *zuhd* in this world, and Allah will love you."

It is well known that Allah told His Messenger ﷺ that, if he so wished, He would fill the entire valley of Makkah with gold and give it all to him. But His Messenger ﷺ refused, saying, "No, my Lord, rather make me hungry one day and full the next. On the day that I am hungry, I will turn to You in earnest supplication, and on the day that I am full, I will give You praise." So, he refused gold and all that it symbolises, preferring to alternate between the stations of supplication and thankfulness and everything that they symbolise. Thus, al-Mālikī points out, the poverty of the Messenger was a poverty of choice not a poverty of circumstance, a poverty of purification and godliness.

He ﷺ turned away from this world completely. He came to this world as a Messenger to guide its inhabitants to Allah, but he did not belong to it. Like his poor friends from the People of the Bench, he slept on a bed of woven palm fronds that left deep indentations on his skin. And when he was asked if he wanted something softer upon which to sleep, he ﷺ said, "What is this world to me? My likeness in this world is that of a rider on a hot summer's day. He stops to rest for a short while in the shade of a

tree but then he moves on, leaving the tree behind.”³ The Prophet ﷺ was to continue to sleep on that bed of woven palm fronds until the day he died. He saw this world as being no more than a moment’s rest under the shade of a tree.

There is no shortage of ḥadīths describing all aspects of the *zuhd* of the Messenger ﷺ, but the following words of ‘Ā’isha, may Allah be pleased with her, sum them up: “The Messenger ﷺ died never having filled his belly twice in a single day with bread and oil.” On occasion, he even pawned his possessions to put food on the plate of his family. Indeed, when he died, his coat of armour was in the possession of a Jew, pawned for thirty *ṣā’s* of barley.⁴ Imagine, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ lacked the money to buy a basic lunch of bread and oil for his family, and was forced to pawn his armour!

Let us conclude this section with the following words of wisdom of the Messenger ﷺ, given to ‘Alī ibn abī Ṭālib when asked to describe his philosophy of life: “Gnosis is my capital; reason, the basis of my religion; longing, my vehicle; remembrance of Allah, my boon companion; trust, my treasure; grief, my friend; knowledge, my weapon; patience, my cloak; contentment, my booty; poverty, my pride; *zuhd*, my profession; truthfulness, my intercessor; obedience, my love; jihad, my character; and my heart finds its delight in the prayer.” These wise words light up the Prophetic *Sīra* and the Muhammadan university they represent.

³ Al-Mālikī, Muḥammad ‘Alawī, *Muḥammad al-insān al-kāmil*, Markaz Ahl as-Sunna, Gujarat, India, 2001, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Having faithfully conveyed this ḥadīth in which the Messenger ﷺ explained his philosophy of life, ‘Alī then described him in his own words, saying, “He was the most generous-hearted of people and the most truthful when he spoke, he had the gentlest of dispositions and always treated his Companions with the greatest honour. His aspect inspired fear and awe in those who saw him for the first time, but those who spent time in his company loved him. If someone later tried to describe him, all they could say was, they never before and never again saw his like.”

The Prophetic Open University

The Prophetic Mosque is a place of prostration, a place in which to draw near to Allah, a place in which all blessings and good qualities are gathered and combined. Within its walls lies one of the meadows of the Garden. Shaykh al-Mālikī describes it as a congregational mosque surrounded by beauty and majesty and lit up with timeless and eternal awe,⁵ and as a spiritual forum. It was a place for worship and remembrance and for teaching the Qur’ān. It was a base for the Messenger ﷺ where he could carry out his role as the imam of the Muslims, and as the city of Madinah’s governor and judge. The first to give the call to prayer in it was the great Companion Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, and the precise wording of that call to prayer was the result of an inspired vision seen by a number of the Companions and to which the Messenger ﷺ gave his blessing.

But, alongside this, the Mosque was the quintessential open

⁵ Al-Mālikī, Muḥammad ‘Alawī, *adh-Dhakhā’ir al-Muḥammadiyya*, Dār Jawāmi‘ al-Kalim, Cairo, 1993, p. 108.

university. In the same way that the house of al-Arqam in Makkah was the first school in Islam, the Mosque of the Prophet was its first open university, playing a vitally important role in teaching and educating the Companions and those who came after them.

Islam emphasises knowledge and considers its acquisition to be one of the noblest occupations. It is important to realise that the connection between knowledge and faith in Islam is interactive and reciprocal, for knowledge can reflect one's faith and give it expression. The Messenger ﷺ said, "If a day comes during which I do not increase in knowledge, then the dawning of that sun brings with it no blessing for me." What a truly profound ḥadīth! What an important message it delivers! One of his main supplications was "O Allah, increase me in knowledge."

When we read this ḥadīth of the Messenger of knowledge, one possible meaning that suggests itself is that when a person lacks knowledge, his life lacks wisdom and the lights of heaven do not shine down upon him. And when those two things are lacking, their opposite inevitably takes their place: ignorance and darkness. And belief cannot blossom on a tree of ignorance. Indeed, the lack of the light of knowledge extinguishes the light of belief. But when knowledge and belief are combined, wisdom blossoms and the knowledges of the Divine take up residence in the heart of the believer.

It is interesting to note here that Islam considers knowledge itself to be a form of ongoing worship. Indeed, when a person seeks knowledge for the good of mankind, it becomes a form of jihad, and that is why it says in a noble ḥadīth, "If someone travels a path in search of knowledge, Allah will make the way to the Garden easy for him."

So, it is incumbent on people, especially Muslims and

believers, to constantly expand their knowledge and gnosis so that they might increase in belief and nearness to their Lord. In Islam, the path towards knowledge is one of the paths that takes you to the Garden. Knowledge is acquired for many reasons, but there is no reason higher than gaining knowledge of Allah and increasing in nearness to Him. The greatest blessing of the intellect is its capacity to have knowledge of Allah. Knowledge of Allah is the very essence of wisdom.

In line with the theoretical and practical Prophetic curriculum of spiritual and behavioural learning, it became a part of the practice of the Muslims to memorise ten verses of the Qur'ān at a time, and not move on from those ten verses until they had fully settled into their hearts and they had put them into practice in their day-to-day lives.

Not only did the Messenger ﷺ teach them all these chapters and verses of the Qur'ān and explain their meaning, he also revealed their higher meanings and hidden dimensions. In this way, he ﷺ opened their eyes to the basic spiritual realities of Islam, purified and cleansed their hearts and souls and strengthened their faith. This strengthened faith, this certainty, is what allowed them to gain true knowledge of Allah and submit themselves fully and consciously to His Will and Decree. It is these to whom Allah refers when He says,

﴿Allah is the Friend and Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light.﴾
Al-Baqara, 2:257

When they achieve full knowledge of the Real, all the worries and whims of the self fall away and their hearts become established in the station of slave-hood and perfect compliance to the Commands of Allah. At this point, they no longer desire or

want any of the things of this world—only Allah remains in their hearts, they are concerned only with what He wants of them. After this tremendous jihad in the way of Allah, they fully deserve his paths and fully warrant his lights, as Allah Himself makes clear when He says,

﴿As for those who do *jihad* in Our Way, We will guide them to Our Paths.﴾ Al-‘Ankabūt, 29:69

In this way, Qur’ānic knowledge becomes a practical form of spiritual knowledge that creates true believers and awakens their innermost spiritual core. The Messenger ﷺ did not only educate his Companions in dogma and doctrine and religious rulings and rites, he did not simply teach them by rote, he also taught them the affairs of the spirit and educated by his character and conduct. Religious education was interspersed with spiritual and behavioural teaching so that it might become their means to *wajdānī* enlightenment and spiritual advancement along the path.⁶

In this way, the Messenger ﷺ educated his followers and crafted them into beings who were to become a shining example for the rest of mankind. There is a well-known story of Ḥanzāla and Abū Bakr that illustrates this point perfectly and gives us a clear indication of the role the Messenger ﷺ played in opening the inner eye of his Companions. It is reported that Ḥanzāla and Abū Bakr went to the Messenger ﷺ and said to him, “When we are sitting in your company, and you speak to us of the life of the Next world, of the Fire and the Garden, we feel as if they are right

⁶ Binya‘īsh, Muḥammad, *al-Bu‘d at-tawḥīdī li adh-dhikr fī al-Islām*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2007, pp. 12-14.

there in front of us. It is almost as if we can see them with our own two eyes. But, then, when we leave your company and return to our day-to-day lives, we no longer feel that way."

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "By the One who holds my soul in His hand, were your state to always be as it is when you are with me, and were you to remain ever constant in your remembrance, the angels would shake hands with you in your beds and on the streets. But Hanzala, there are times and there are times!" This story teaches us that when the Companions were in the presence of the Messenger ﷺ and their hearts were directly connected to his, some of the veils that were over their hearts fell away, enabling them to move from a general state of spiritual knowledge to a special state of direct experiential witnessing, which, were it to have persisted, would have enabled them to shake hands with the angels themselves as they went about their business in the streets.

This gives us to understand that such was the station of the Messenger ﷺ that he transported the hearts of his Companions into a state of direct witnessing simply by sitting in their company and giving out his knowledge. So, by staying close to the Messenger ﷺ and following the lessons of his life, hearts can be purified and souls can ascend to the plains of direct experiential perception and certainty. This is a portion of those "paths" about which Allah speaks.

It goes without saying that the generation of men and women who learnt their religion directly from the noble Messenger ﷺ were the best generation to ever walk the earth. This Prophetic university produced graduates of every type: scholars, thinkers, sages, and historic leaders, and they all combined to help build our great Islamic civilisation. The first wave of Companions became lighthouses, shining their light across the world. And,

despite the passage of time, that light has not dimmed and they continue to give guidance to believers in every age.

It should not be forgotten that among the graduates of the Prophetic university were the four rightly guided Caliphs: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī. They were transformed from traders and camel herders, from misguided worshippers of idols, into rulers whose exploits astonished the world. They were rulers the like of whom the world had never before seen and was never again to see, such was the unprecedented wisdom and human decency they displayed in all their dealings during the course of their reigns.

In less than a century, they succeeded in liberating the whole of Iraq from the Persian Magian occupation and the whole of the Levant from the Byzantines, and forged the Arabs into a single unified nation. They took the fiercely independent Arab tribes and used their shared faith, land and language to bind them into a single cohesive unit. These three things still flow through the blood of the Arab people today and form the basis of their cultural identity, feeding their sense of national consciousness and belonging. It was due to the efforts of these early Muslim giants that the Muslims were later able to create a glorious Islamic civilisation in which reason and human imagination continued to be given pride of place, and literature, art and architecture flourished.

All we need to know of the Companions of the Messenger ﷺ is found in Allah's description of them in these extraordinary verses in Sūrat al-Faṭḥ:

❖ Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are fierce to the unbelievers, merciful to one another. You see them bowing and prostrating, seeking

Allah's good favour and His pleasure. Their mark is on their faces, the traces of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah. And their likeness in the Gospel is that of a seed which puts up a shoot and makes it strong so that it thickens and grows up straight upon its stalk, filling the sowers with delight—so that by them He may infuriate the unbelievers. Allah has promised those of them who believe and do right actions forgiveness and an immense reward. ﴿ Al-Fath, 48:29

The Mosque did not only function as a centre for religious activity and education, it played an important social and cultural role in Madinan society too, for it helped minimise and remove racial bias and purify it of class-based distinctions. It did this in the most practical way possible—through the congregation of the Muslims, within its walls, for the prayer. Men stood side by side, rich man next to poor, lord next to commoner, black next to white. Before Allah, there is no scope for discrimination. In His eyes, all are equal and the only differentiation is in their level of *taqwā*. The Mosque served as a true social melting pot and, as a result, the values of equality and brotherhood took root in the hearts of the Muslims, and an Islamic social conscience was created.

Al-Mu'ākhāt

In the context of the early Madinan situation, this term, "*al-mu'ākhāt*", has a very specific meaning, for it refers to the steps the Messenger ﷺ took to create bonds of brotherhood between the Anṣār and the Emigrants. It happened concurrently with the building of the Mosque, which was completed in a few months.

Ostensibly, the main purpose behind this was to help resolve the economic hardship that had arisen from the emigration of the

Muslims to Madinah, but, in practice, it did far more than just that. On its own, it went a long way towards eradicating deeply entrenched social divisions and helped the community to cohere.

Since the emigration had begun, close to one hundred and eight people had emigrated to Madinah. The process of *mu'ākhāt* assigned to each of them a brother from the Anṣār. This was not just to be a token form of brotherhood but something real—they were to act towards each other and share with one another as if they were blood brothers. The Anṣār entered into this with their heart and soul. The spirit of solidarity they exhibited was far greater than anyone could have imagined. They showed themselves willing to sacrifice much of what they held to make this *mu'ākhāt* a success and reality. This is amply illustrated by the story of the Anṣārī who was ready to give half of everything he had to his new emigrant brother, including one of his two wives!

This Anṣārī said to his emigrant brother, “I have two shops: pick one and I will sign it over to you. And I have two wives: choose whichever of them pleases you and I will divorce her so she can become your wife.” The emigrant replied, “May Allah bless you in your family and your wealth! All I need from you is directions to the marketplace so I can start trading.” And thus it was.

This preference goes beyond the acknowledged limits of self-denial, and makes clear that the bonds of brotherhood it created were stronger than those based on blood, race or tribe. More than anything, it was this that enabled this great generation to produce an Islamic culture of such extraordinary cohesion and solidarity.

This purity of spirit did not go unnoticed, and the following verses of the Noble Qur'ān were revealed, addressing those who took on this pact of brotherhood directly and giving them the

good news of forgiveness and generous provision. Allah says in Sūrat al-Anfāl,

❖ Those who believe and have emigrated and done jihad in the Way of Allah and those who have given refuge and help, they are the true believers. They will have forgiveness and generous provision. ❖ Al-Anfāl, 8:74

The late Dr. Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, may Allah have mercy on him, remarked that the Islamic state in Madinah was built on three foundations: the Mosque, the pact of brotherhood between the Anṣār and the Emigrants, and the Charter of Madinah. This latter was a social covenant and constitution formulated and dictated by the Prophet ﷺ and drafted by 'Alī. The Mosque became the base for both the spiritual and political leadership of the community and, thanks to the solidarity it helped create, complete social unity was achieved.

The Charter of Madinah

Following the completion of the Mosque and the success of his brotherhood programme, the Messenger moved on to this next historic step, drafting the document known as the Charter of Madinah. This charter bore the hallmarks of a modern-day constitution, for it laid out the legal and legislative bases for governance in Islam. It affirmed pluralism, respect for others, and freedom of religion and opinion, and rejected compulsion and all forms of extremism. It was a unique social contract for all the peoples of Madinah.

This constitution was far ahead of its time and represented a civilisational leap forward for Madinah and Arabia. Moreover, it became the primary source of reference for just governance in Islam.

The charter contained over fifty clauses, the purpose of which were to establish the constitutional principles whereby all aspects of social, economic and religious life in Madinan society could be governed and regulated. Despite declaring in its preamble that the Muslims, whether Anṣār or Emigrants, are “one nation”, the twenty-sixth clause of the Constitution stipulates that “the Jews have their religion and the Muslims theirs”, and that neither party should infringe on the rights of the other. The Constitution emphasises core Islamic principles as well as establishing the rules of coexistence under the rule of law. These are key components in the concept of the modern state and prerequisites for modern-day contractual citizenship.

The Islamic system of governance is built on the Qur’ānic principle that there is no compulsion in religion. Allah poses the following question in His Book:

﴿ Do you think you can force people to be believers? ﴾

Yūnus, 10:99

A person must be intellectually convinced before he can become a Muslim, and intellectual conviction is only possible with free will. As that conviction settles deeper into the heart, it becomes belief. So, any form of compulsion goes against the spirit of Muhammadan Islam and runs counter to the essential nature of the human being. No person of right mind could ever accept it.

Moreover, if compulsion in religion is unacceptable, then how could it ever be acceptable in any avenue of day-to-day life?! Thus, the basic right to freedom and liberty is enshrined in the Book of Allah and enshrined in Islamic law. This right and principle is underlined still further by Allah’s Words

﴿ Say, "It is the Truth from your Lord, so let whoever wishes be a believer and whoever wishes be an unbeliever." ﴾

Al-Kahf, 18:29

These two Qur'ānic verses, describing the essence of Islam, lay the groundwork for freedom of belief and pluralism in Islamic society.

This charter guaranteed followers of other religions all their civil and religious rights, protected their freedom to worship and fulfil their religious rites, and offered them the chance to live in peace alongside the Muslims. It also guaranteed them the right to peace and stability within Islamic society. This clause of the charter took its inspiration from the Words of Allah in Sūrat al-Baqara

﴿ Those who believe, those who are Jews, and the Christians and Sabaeans, all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and act rightly, will have their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:62

Giorgio writes in his thesis, "The reason for this apparent appeasement is that Islam was based upon principles of freedom and equality, and so it had no fears concerning the followers of other religions. The Sabaeans who are mentioned in this verse were those who believed in Allah, but worshipped stars and angels alongside Him. The proof that they maintained their belief in Allah is found in this verse, for Allah includes them alongside the Jews and Christians, and promises to encompass them in His mercy on condition that they remain true to their belief."⁷

⁷ Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 193.

Another area with which the charter addressed was the defence of the City, stipulating that all parties and citizens, regardless of religion or race, had to work together to defend the city from external aggression. The Jews were required to come to the defence of the Muslims, and the Muslims were required to come to the defence of the Jews. In the same vein, it was prohibited for any group or citizen to provide aid or protection to Quraysh or any of their allies and fellow enemies of Islam.

Perhaps the crowning glory of the charter was its so-called “article of peace”. This article states that “the land of Madinah is a sanctuary, and it is not permitted for anyone to stir up any trouble or quarrels within its boundaries.” The virtuous city of Muḥammad was a sacred city, not a city of bickering, division and hypocrisy. It was not possible nor acceptable that it be anything but a city of peace. For a constitutional document to conclude with such a statement was a beautiful thing indeed, especially in an age in which fighting and feuding was the norm. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ planted and sowed those seeds of peace in Madinah more than fourteen hundred years ago, and the spirit of peace they created can still be felt.

This charter was a legislative embodiment of the spirit of the true principles and values of Islam. It was drawn up by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he oversaw its enactment, giving us a practical lesson of what had been, up to then, only theoretical. These constitutional principles helped establish a culture of tolerance, and have remained the yardstick for principles of their kind until the present day.

Shaykh al-Būṭī, may Allah have mercy on him, says in his discussion on this first Islamic charter, “We consider this constitution—which was drafted by the Messenger ﷺ following

revelation from his Lord and which was made the basis for the pact between the Muslims and their Jewish neighbours—to be proof that Islamic society has been built on a solid and complete constitutional footing right from the very start, and that all the necessary constitutional elements for the successful running of a state were built into the Islamic state at the moment of its inception. This charter is the greatest proof of that, for the reality is that peace is only truly possible for societies that have been built on a foundation of true justice and complete and total equality before the law.”⁸

Constitutional theory could truly already be seen in the Islamic political theory of the Prophet ﷺ, although the term “constitution” was unfamiliar to the people of the time, alongside other modern-day terms such as “citizenship”, “state”, “legislative organisation” and “executive organisation”. In fact, the word “constitution” had not been used once, anywhere in the world, since Aristotle wrote about it. And those books of Aristotle, alongside most of the other ancient Greek texts, were to remain buried for seventeen hundred years until the Arab Andalusian Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (born 1198 AD) brought them into the light.

This open and welcoming nature of Islam would later allow non-Arabs who entered Islam to culturally assimilate into Arab societies without suffering discrimination, and to slot seamlessly into the single Islamic nation, the nation of Muḥammad. The noble Messenger ﷺ always placed great emphasis on the notion that society was a single space and a single zone, and that every

⁸ Al-Būṭī, Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān, *Fiqh as-sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār as-Salām, Damascus, 2015, p. 152.

single individual living within a society was as responsible for preserving and defending the interests of greater society as he was for his own.⁹

Justice, the Basis for Sound Governance

The Messenger ﷺ brought rules, laws and a constitution, and spent every waking moment of the Madinan phase of his life overseeing their implementation, hoping in that way to place us all on the path to good and success in this Abode and the Next. Madinah brought the Messenger ﷺ new responsibilities. It was no longer possible for him to just be the Imam of the Muslims and their legislative and moral authority, he now had to become their head of state and the commander-in-chief of their army.

The noble Messenger ﷺ had now been granted a direct divine mandate and full legitimacy by Allah Himself to be the absolute ruler of Madinah. He could have legally acted in any way that he wanted and reached his decisions unilaterally without opposition. His word was law and he could have abused that position, but that was not the way of the Prophet ﷺ. Instead, he based every governmental decision on five core Islamic principles: justice; freedom; equality and respect for pluralism; and, above all, consultation. These principles lie at the heart of Islamic political thought.

In his great wisdom, the Messenger ﷺ made sure that he never embarked on a course of action without first seeking the advice of others. The Messenger of justice hated autocracy and

⁹ *Al-Mawsū'a al-muyassara fī at-ta'rīf bi nabī ar-raḥma*, Rābi'at al-'Ālam al-Islāmī, D. M., D. T., pp. 320-321.

autocrats as much as he hated injustice and idolatry. He showed us, by his example, that eliciting and respecting the opinions of others is a core part of Islam, whether that be in times of war or in times of peace.

Not every divine text is flexible or open to interpretation. Some are unambiguous and fully binding, and the following Qur'ānic verses relating to governance and judgement fall into that category. Allah says, "When you judge between people, judge with justice" (An-Nisā', 4:58), "Consult with them about the matter" (Āl 'Imrān, 3:159) and "Manage their affairs by mutual consultation" (Ash-Shūrā, 42:38).

One cannot set aside such principles without doing irreparable damage to Islam itself. The spirit of just governance falls by the wayside and tyranny and ignorance inevitably ensue.

How could something which comes directly from Allah and is put into practice by his Prophet ﷺ ever fail? Any society underpinned by these divine principles of truth, justice, consultation and tolerance is guaranteed to succeed. The Prophet ﷺ is our example. The entire time he ruled over the Muslims he never deviated from these principles of pluralism, freedom and respect for the opinions of others. He was the embodiment of justice, as expected from the Envoy of Heaven.

Legislation

The material for this reformative Prophetic revolution was provided by the divinely revealed legislation that made up the bulk of the second half of the Muhammadan Message. So, it would not be right to continue our rich journey through the noble life of the Prophet ﷺ, without examining this Madinan legislation.

During the ten years the Prophet ﷺ spent in Madinah, the second half of the Qur'ān was revealed. Whereas the Makkan Sūras were largely concerned with laying the groundwork for the pillars of faith and doctrine of unification, the Madinan Sūras were largely legislative in nature. They were revealed to purify the heart and soul of the Muslims from the sins and wrong actions of life and strengthen their connection with their Creator.

At the time this legislation from heaven came, the customs and practices of the Arabian Peninsula—indeed, the societies of the entire world—were rooted in ignorance, darkness and pre-Islamic superstition. This reformative legislation was a socio-cultural revolution.

The legislations came in a constant flow. Each act of legislation that was revealed helped to embed the values of Islam in Madinan society and adjust the rhythm of life in the city until it accorded with the Islamic vision of justice and equality. First, in the second year after the Hijra, came the obligation to fast the month of Ramadan; then came the implementation of zakat and all its associated rules, prerequisites and thresholds; then came the rules of inheritance and the rulings concerning polygamy.

Islam was the first religion to place legal limits on the amount of men a man could marry. Previous religions allowed them to marry as many as they wanted. The Prophet Dāwūd, peace be upon him, had eighteen wives, and the Prophet Sulaymān, peace be upon him, had six hundred!

The practice of polygamy was widespread throughout pre-Islamic Arabia. It was universally accepted and considered a sign of status and a mark of honour. But the practice oppressed and maltreated women, miring society in backwardness, for it was deemed acceptable for men to take a dozen wives or more and

even to engage in numerous extra marital relationships on top of that. But Allah determined that the time had come for such pre-Islamic practices to be consigned to the rubbish heap of history, so He sent down legislation to gradually do away with them.

The first laws to be revealed were those relating to one's religious obligations, such as the prayer and fasting, but then came the rulings relating to civil and social rights in Islam, and these brought a halt to those practices that demeaned women and impinged on their status as human beings and mothers. Yes, Islam allows men to marry four wives, but the conditions it imposes are ones that most sane men would struggle to meet and fulfil.

Another practice that was widespread in pre-Islamic times, in Arab societies and beyond, was that of slavery and bondage, a blot on humanity and an enduring source of shame for us all. Having first negated the very principle and idea of it, Islam set about dissuading people from its practice, with the intention of eventually eradicating it completely. It did this by imposing extensive legal limits on it and offering incentives for people to set slaves free. As we know, it is a basic principle in Islam that, just like the teeth on a comb, all people are equal before Allah. Islam honours man and gives him the dignity of justice and freedom, so there is no way it will then accept him being cast into bondage.

No more proof of this is needed that the following eternal words of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: "How come you enslave a man who was born free?!" This statement showcases the spirit of justice in Islam, and it preceded the slogans of the French revolution and the statutory laws of Europe by over one thousand years.

This was then followed by the laws relating to inheritance, an exceptional piece of legislation that has yet to be matched in any human society anywhere. It constituted a complete, self-contained

philosophy of rights. And while the details of those laws are beyond the scope of this investigation, still, we would be remiss if we did not point out that, for the first time in history, women were granted economic and social rights, recognised as people in their own right, and honoured and valued within society. Each heir had his share of inheritance determined according to a divinely inspired scale.

Although the primary purpose of these laws of inheritance was to protect the material rights of people, they also came to culturally liberate women from the tyranny of pre-Islamic customs and traditions, raise their profile and enhance their status as independent human beings. In practice, they also helped liberate men themselves from the bonds of ignorance and backwardness.

To sum up, thanks to the social contract of Islam and its laws and legislation, as well as the Muhammadan teaching and education, the noble Messenger ﷺ gradually eradicated the last remnants of ignorant pre-Islamic culture and convention from society, regardless of whether it was directed at women or related to social discrimination in general, and replaced them with a new culture, based on respecting the rights of man. And most astonishingly of all, the noble Messenger ﷺ succeeded in bringing about this deep-seated social and cultural change in the space of a few short years—no time at all in the grand scheme of things.



Islam and the Jews in Madinah

The issue of the Jews in Arab and Islamic history is a sensitive and problematic one. Following their struggles and travails in Makkah, the Muslims had come to Madinah, looking forward to a period of peace and stability, far from the reach of Quraysh, especially since freedom is a prerequisite for the call to Allah to find its way into hearts thirsting for belief. But the situation they found in Madinah belied those hopes and expectations, for while they had a single enemy in Makkah (Quraysh), in Madinah they were to find three: the Jews, the idolaters and the hypocrites.

Initially, these three groups were separate, but it did not take long before they joined forces with one another to combat the burgeoning Muslim threat. This happened in the run up to the Battle of the Trench when the Jews and the hypocrites allied with Quraysh in a consolidated attempt to finish off the Muslims.

Unlike Quraysh, who had political might but lacked religious legitimacy and authority, the Jews followed a divinely revealed religion and were experienced in religious debate. Indeed, they had spent much of their history arguing with the Messengers God

sent them and arrogantly denying their Messages. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the majority of Jewish history had been an exercise in the denial of truth and peace. This was to pose the newly formed Muslim state a significant set of challenges, although, at the same time, it made the hearts of the largest segment of Madinan society—the tribes of Aws and Khazraj—more receptive to the message of Islam, and allowed Islam to swiftly grow in strength and power.

A large part of the identity of the Jews was predicated on their belief in the coming of a Prophet. This belief was hardly surprising, given the high prevalence of prophecies among them, and throughout the peninsula, predicting a Prophet's imminent arrival. As time passed, this belief ceased to simply be a belief and became a rallying cry and a concrete cause for optimism, especially among the Jews themselves. Indeed, whenever any of the Arab tribes gave them trouble, they would threaten them by saying, "A Prophet will soon be sent, and when he comes, we will follow him and kill you all in the same way that 'Ād and Thamūd were killed."¹

So, it is ironic indeed that when the Prophet ﷺ did come, the Jews were among the first to reject him, despite all those years they had waited patiently and eagerly for his arrival. It is not that they did not recognise him, for they did. They acknowledged as much when they said, "He is not the Prophet we were expecting!" It is more because they had hoped and prayed that he might be Jewish and might lead them in battle against the Arabs.

¹ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 2, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 66.

In the following noble Qur'ānic verses, Allah mentions the true reasons they decided to reject His Prophet ﷺ:

﴿They swore by Allah with their most earnest oaths that if a warner came to them they would be better guided than any other community. But then when a warner did come to them, it only increased their aversion, shown by their arrogance in the land and evil plotting. But evil plotting envelops only those who do it.﴾ Fāṭir, 35:42-43

Allah speaks the Truth.

Giorgio reports that when the Jews saw that the Mosque of Qubā' was being built facing towards Jerusalem and noticed how often the Qur'ān made mention of previous Prophets such as Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and 'Īsā, peace be upon them all, they thought that Muḥammad was going to follow the religion of Mūsā, for they believed that Prophets were only sent among them, the people of the Chosen Race. So, while the Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims were still occupied in building the Mosque of Qubā', they sent some rabbis to speak with him. "There is no right guidance except what we are on.² So, if it is a Prophet you want to be, Muhammad, then you must first become a Jew. For Allah has only ever chosen His Prophets from among us as we are His Chosen people."

The Messenger ﷺ replied that he had not chosen Prophethood for himself. He was a Prophet because Allah had chosen to send him. And, in the eyes of Allah, all people were equal—no people were preferred or chosen over another. Allah chose to whom to direct His Message and chose whom to send. There was nothing particularly specially about them and that they

² Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 491.

were not chosen or preferred by Allah. In fact, they were just the same as everyone else.³ Then the following verse was revealed affirming his words:

﴿ They say, "Be Jews or Christians and you will be guided." Say, "Rather adopt the religion of Ibrāhīm, a man of natural pure belief. He was not one of the associators." ﴾

Al-Baqara, 2:135

As soon as they learnt that Muḥammad ﷺ was a Messenger who had been sent with a new set of laws, confirming some of their ancient laws and abrogating others, they resolved to oppose him and fight against him with everything they had. And they set about that task immediately, spreading unfounded rumours about the supposedly harmful and damaging effects of the Islamic call, making all manner of outlandish claims. For example, they circulated the rumour that any woman who became Muslim immediately lost her ability to fall pregnant.

The fact that the Jews adopted this as their official stance did not mean, however, that no Jews became Muslim. A few of their number were true to their faith, and they saw that the Message of Muḥammad ﷺ was an extension and continuation of the Message of his brother Mūsā, peace be upon him.

One such man was 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām. He was one of the best-known rabbis of his age and a leading scholar. His people respected him highly and deferred to his knowledge and opinion. When the Prophet ﷺ arrived at Qubā', he was out among his plantations with his aunt, Khālida bint al-Hārith, and as soon as

³ Giorgio, Constantine, *A new look at the life history of the Messenger of Allah*, ad-Dār al-'Arabiyya for encyclopedias, Beirut, 1983, p. 180.

he heard the news, he exclaimed, "*Allāhu akbar*" (Allah is greater). No sooner had these words left his mouth than his aunt turned to him and said, "May Allah frustrate you! By Allah, even were you to have been told that Mūsā was coming, you could not have been more enthusiastic!"

'Abd Allāh replied, "My aunt, by Allah, he is the brother of Mūsā, and of the same religion as he, for he has been sent with what Mūsā was sent with!" She said, "My nephew, is he the prophesised Prophet for whom we have long been waiting?" When he replied that he was, she said, "Then you must go to him!"

"Spread peace and love"

So 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām went to see the Prophet ﷺ to make sure he was indeed a Prophet. He arrived just in time to hear the Prophet of Islam ﷺ deliver his first *khutba*, and heard him say, "Spread peace, feed people, maintain ties of kinship and pray in the night when others are sleeping. If you do that, you will enter the Garden in peace." In this first public address to the people of Madinah in public, he called on them to spread peace. For Allah is Peace—He is "the King, the Most Pure, the Perfect Peace". And the greeting of the inhabitants of Paradise is "Peace".

Thus, the first bond formed between the Prophet ﷺ and the inhabitants of Madinah was based on peace and love. Peace and love were to spread throughout Madinah, indeed, peace and love were to spread wherever Islam was to reach. But the first place it starts is in the hearts of the believers, for Allah is the Perfect Peace, and when Allah resides in the heart of the true believer, peace pervades it. This is why the noble Messenger ﷺ was to say in his second *khutba*, "Those whose hearts Allah adorns are the

successful ones ... They love what Allah loves, and love Allah with all their hearts."

'Abd Allāh ibn Salām said, "When I looked upon his face, I knew at once that his was not the face of a liar." So, he immediately went up to the Prophet ﷺ and made the declaration of faith, saying, "I bear witness that you are truly the Prophet of Allah, and that you have come bringing the truth." The Prophet ﷺ turned his attention to him and said, "What is your name?" When he replied, "Al-Ḥuṣayn ibn Salām", the Prophet ﷺ said, "No, rather, your name is 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām." So he said, "Yes, Messenger of Allah, it is 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām! By the One who sent you with the truth, from this day forth, I do not want to be called by any other name!"

'Abd Allāh ibn Salām was a man of profound knowledge, a descendent of the Prophet Yūsuf, peace be upon him. And, upon entering Islam, he became one of the close Companions of the Messenger. He was the first of the Jews to see the true nature of the connection between Mūsā and Muḥammad ﷺ. The Qur'ān affirms this, saying,

❖ Those We have given the Book recognise it as they recognise their own sons. Yet a group of them knowingly conceal the truth. ﴿١٤٦﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:146

'Abd Allāh was perhaps the only man in the history of Islam to be given the title "the Rabbi Imam". This great man of knowledge became Muslim and changed his name without the slightest hint of hesitation. As soon as he set eyes on the face of the Prophet ﷺ, he saw that it was overflowing with the lights of Prophethood and instantly believed in him. Allah clearly loved 'Abd Allāh and chose him to be one of the close Companions of His Prophet ﷺ in Madinah.

One of the very first things ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām did after meeting the Messenger ﷺ and becoming Muslim was to warn him against trusting the Jews. He said, “They are a people inclined to slander and falsehood. They know I am their leader and the most learned man among them, so invite them to come and ask them what they think of me before they find out that I have become Muslim. The moment they learn I have become Muslim, they will start to tell lies against me.” Who could know the nature of the Jews better than their own rabbi?

So, the Prophet ﷺ did as he suggested and invited the Jews to visit him. When they came, he ﷺ said to them, “O Jews! Woe to you! Have fearful awareness of Allah! By Allah whom there is no god but Him, you know for a fact that I am the Messenger of Allah. You know that I have come to you, bringing the truth. So, become Muslim!” After having invited them to Islam, he then asked them about al-Ḥuṣayn ibn Salām and what position he held among them.

They replied, “He is our leader and the son of our leader, our greatest man of learning and the son of our greatest man of learning.” As soon as they said these words, ‘Abd Allāh came out to them. ‘Abd Allāh himself reported what happened: “I emerged from the room and said to them, ‘O Jews, have fearful awareness of Allah and accept what he has brought to you. For, by Allah, you know him to be the Messenger of Allah. You have seen his name and his description written within the pages of the Torah. I myself bear witness that he is the Messenger of Allah, and I believe in him and affirm him.’”

They said, “You are a liar!” So, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām said to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, “Did I not tell you, Messenger of Allah, that they are a people given to lying and depravity!” ‘Abd Allāh

concluded his story by saying, "I made my Islam public and all the people of my household became Muslim, including my aunt Khālida bint al-Ḥārith."⁴

It was a great day for the Muslims of Madinah when 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām became Muslim, for not only did his Islam strengthen them, it also irrevocably damaged and weakened the position of the Jews who denied the Messenger ﷺ and his Message, for he could refute every one of their claims and arguments. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya wrote about this, saying, "Even if the only Jew to have become Muslim at the time had been their leader and most learned rabbi, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām, still that would have been enough to offset every other Jew on the earth. So how must it be when an uncountable number of rabbis and priests followed him into Islam?"⁵

The truth is that sincere Jews and Christians who hold fast to the true tenets of their religion cannot but help believing in Muḥammad ﷺ and his Message—their faith compels them. Allah remarks on this when He says,

﴿ But those of them who are firmly rooted in knowledge, and the believers, believe in what has been sent down to you and what was sent down before you: those who establish the prayer and pay zakat, and believe in Allah and the Last Day— We will pay such people an immense wage. ﴾ An-Nisā', 4:162

In the books of *Sīra*, we find many stories of Jews who tried

⁴ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, pp. 465-466.

⁵ Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut, 2005, p. 53.

to ascertain the truth of the Prophet's claim to Prophethood and whether he was worthy of being followed, each using his own method to do so. The most famous of these stories is that of Zayd ibn Sa'na. This rabbi said, "There were only two signs of Prophethood which I had yet to see in Muhammad: that he be able to put up with rudeness and ill treatment without succumbing to anger, even when he did not know the reason why he was being treated so rudely, and that he respond to those who treated him in such manner with generosity and kindness.

So Zayd ibn Sa'na came to the Prophet ﷺ in his own mosque and made a scene. He walked up to him and grabbed him by the cloak, causing the cloak to wrap around the neck of the Prophet ﷺ and almost strangled him. Then, despite knowing full well that his debts were not yet due, demanded payment of those debts in the harshest possible terms, saying, "You, family of 'Abd al-Muttalib, are a people who always put off the payment of their debts!" When 'Umar saw the impertinence and insolence of this Jew, disrespecting the Prophet ﷺ in his own mosque in front of his Companions, his fury knew no bounds. He berated him and even took out his sword and threatened to cut off his head.

But the Prophet ﷺ himself remained calm and the smile never left his face. He did not show the slightest sign of anger or displeasure in the face of this deplorable behaviour. Instead, he turned to 'Umar, and with his customary forbearance said, "This is not the response we needed of you, 'Umar! Instead, you should have advised me to be better in paying my debts and him to be better in the way he asks for repayment!" Then he added, "However, there are still three days remaining before my debt falls due." In other words, the date upon which he agreed to pay back the loan was still three days away, but even so, he instructed

‘Umar to pay the man what was owed to him and give him an extra portion in lieu of the fright ‘Umar had given him.⁶

This is but one example of many of the extraordinary forbearance of the Messenger ﷺ. Not matter how badly people acted towards him, he never became angry or lost his equanimity, so great was the character with which his Lord had endowed him. When the Jew left in the company of ‘Umar, he told him that he had been testing the Messenger ﷺ to see how far his forbearance would go. Then he announced his acceptance of Islam. As for the debt that was repaid to him, it is said that he gave it all away to the poor and needy among the Muslims.

While this story of the rabbi, Zayd ibn Sa‘na, illustrates the forbearance and tolerance of the Messenger ﷺ, the story of Şafiyya bint Ḥuyayy, a Jewish woman who became Muslim and married the Messenger, reveals how deep the hostility of the Madinan Jews towards the Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims truly ran.

When the Messenger ﷺ arrived at Qubā’, Şafiyya’s father, Ḥuyyay, and her uncle, went to test his claims. Şafiyya described the impact on them of seeing him ﷺ, “When they returned, they looked stunned, as if they were in a daze. Then I heard my uncle, Abū Yāsir, say to my father, ‘Is it him?’ He replied, ‘Yes, by Allah, it is him.’ So my uncle asked him, Did you recognise him by his description? Yes, by Allah, replied my father. So my uncle said, ‘What is your feeling towards him?’ My father replied, ‘Enmity! By Allah, he will be my enemy for as long as I shall live.’”

Despite the fact they recognised him, despite acknowledging

⁶ Al-Jazā’irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, p. 346.

him to be the awaited Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the only feeling they had in their hearts towards the Envoy of Heaven was one of enmity and hostility. And, not only that, but they were determined to hold on to that enmity for as long as they should live, knowing full well that Muḥammad ﷺ thought well of them, given that they were a people of the Book, and hoped that they might accept his Message, given that he had only come to complete and perfect the Messages of the Prophets who came before him.

Allah says,

❧ Say, "We believe in Allah and what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to Ibrāhīm, Isma'īl and Ishāq and Ya'qūb and the Tribes, and what Mūsā and 'Īsā and all the Prophets were given by their Lord. We do not differentiate between any of them. We are Muslims submitted to Him." ❧
 Āl 'Imrān, 3:84

The Messenger ﷺ only ever acted honourably towards them, but they refused to reciprocate. Instead of welcoming him with open arms, they snubbed him, and instead of working with him, they plotted against him. They remained unrelentingly committed to that course, and although their acts of open hostility were few, they persisted to work against him behind the scenes until the Muslims were finally able to exile them and rid the Islamic state of the danger they posed, first from Madinah and then from Khaybar. Indeed, it was only after they had been defeated at Khaybar that their political power and influence was finally broken, and the Muslims were able to achieve some modicum of security and stability in their nascent state.

The overwhelming majority of the Jews refused to affirm the Messenger ﷺ. Those of them who rejected him would say, "Only

the worst of us believe in Muḥammad and follow him. Were they from among the best of us, they would never have left the religion of their forefathers for another religion.” But the opposite was true, for their rabbi, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām, had been the best of the Jews, and, by making his Islam public, he was following the instructions of the Prophet Mūsā, peace be upon him, who commanded his followers to follow the Prophet who was to come after him and become Muslim.

Their true intentions were known to Allah. He, glory be to Him, says,

❖ If they argue with you, say, “I have submitted myself completely to Allah, and so have all who follow me.” Say to those given the Book and those who have no Book, “Have you become Muslim?” If they become Muslim, they have been guided. If they turn away, you are only responsible for transmission. Allah sees His slaves. ﴿٢٠﴾ Āl ‘Imrān, 3:20

Moreover, as al-Būṭī mentions, the spirit of justice that infused the Charter of Madinah and the Prophet’s dealings with followers of other faiths laid the groundwork for a peace treaty between the Jews and Muslims. The historic charter documents how the Messenger ﷺ extended a hand of reconciliation to the Jews, guaranteeing them peace and that their rights and interests would be protected, and that their dignity and status within Madinan society would not be stripped from them.

But, unfortunately, the Jews succumbed to the worst of their nature and allowed the enmity within them to overcome their better sense. This made it impossible for them to act in a spirit of tolerance or genuinely accept the invitation to a lasting peace between the religions, so, within a short space of time, they started to wilfully ignore the articles of the Charter to which they had

committed themselves, and to plot and connive against the Messenger ﷺ and the Muslims. They betrayed the Muslims, and by their treachery, released the Muslims of all the commitments they had made towards them.⁷

The Jews had never been able to let go of the notion that they were racially and culturally superior to the Arabs in general and the Arabs of the peninsula in particular, despite living in their midst for many hundreds of years. They felt the Arabs were beneath them, but now this natural, in their eyes, order of things was being threatened by the Messenger ﷺ and they could see the spirit of unity and brotherhood that Islam had brought to the Arab tribes. They could feel their influence waning: their control over the tribes had all but gone and their status and reach within the rest of the peninsula had lessened and diminished.

Islam had unified what pre-Islam had kept apart, and turned the Arabs into a closely knit unit, lined up in ranks behind their Messenger ﷺ. The Arabs had moved from a state of weakness to a state of might and strength, and no harm or evil could befall the Muslims so long as they held firm to the teachings of their Messenger ﷺ and followed in his footsteps.

The first outwardly hostile action the Jews took against the Muslims was to try to reignite the flames of enmity and division that had existed between Aws and Khazraj, and revive the pre-Islamic mindset that had lain at the heart of that conflict.

To this end, one of the men of the Jews, Shās ibn Qays, convened a gathering and invited members of both tribes to

⁷ Al-Būṭī, Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān, *Fiqh as-sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār as-Salām, Damascus, 2015, p. 153.

attend. Then he sent an agent provocateur among them and told him to play on the pride of their poets and remind them of the heroic exploits of their warriors during the great civil war. This would then inspire them to compose poems on the subject and those poems would stir up the tribal feelings of the past. And that is indeed what happened. Little by little, the poems started to have the desired effect and a red mist began to settle over people's eyes, and the misguided tribal zeal of pre-Islamic times that the Messenger ﷺ had worked so hard to temper began to rear its ugly head once again. Weapons were pulled from their sheaths and the two groups squared off against each other.

When word reached the Messenger ﷺ of what was happening, he hurried to where the two groups had gathered, and addressed them, saying, "Muslims, (remember) Allah! (Remember) Allah! Do you still pay heed to the call of the Days of Ignorance when I am here among you? After Allah has guided you to Islam, honoured you, saved you from unbelief, joined your hearts together, and taken you away from the foolishness of the Days of Ignorance, will you then go straight back to the path you were on before?" These Muhammadan words were enough to pull them back from the brink and stop them from tumbling into the abyss of conflict and strife.

They realised then that they had been played by their enemies, and remembered how truly awful the war of Bu'āth had been and how close it had come to utterly destroying them and their society. Then they remembered that they had become brothers in Allah, and that their Prophet ﷺ had guaranteed them peace and solidarity, so they sheathed their weapons and embraced one another, weeping as they did so. The Messenger ﷺ put the conflict and strife back in to the box from which it had

escaped and locked it away, and they all returned with him to the mosque and to the right way.

Following this incident, verses were revealed in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān. The first addressed to the Jews directly. Allah says,

﴿ Say, “People of the Book, why do you bar those who believe from the Way of Allah, desiring to make it crooked, when you yourselves are witnesses to it? Allah is not unaware of what you do.” ﴾ Āl ‘Imrān, 3:99

Then Allah says, turning His attention to the believers,

﴿ You who believe! if you obey a group of those given the Book, they will make you revert to being unbelievers after you had belief. How can you be unbelievers, when Allah’s Signs are recited to you and the Messenger is there among you? Whoever holds fast to Allah has been guided to a straight path. You who believe! have fearful awareness of Allah with the fearful awareness due to Him and do not die except as Muslims. Hold fast to the rope of Allah all together, and do not separate. Remember Allah’s blessing to you when you were enemies and He joined your hearts together so that you became brothers by His blessing. You were on the very brink of a pit of the Fire and He rescued you from it. In this way, Allah makes His Signs clear to you, so that hopefully you will be guided. ﴾ Āl ‘Imrān, 3:100-103

The hostility of the Jews towards the Muslims was further exacerbated by the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Makkah a year and five months⁸ after the Hijra of the Prophet ﷺ, when an order came from Heaven telling the Muslims to change the direction in which they prayed. Allah says,

⁸ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 492.

﴿ We have seen you looking up into heaven, turning this way and that, so We will turn you towards a direction which will please you. Turn your face, therefore, towards the Masjid al-Harām. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:144

It is clear from this verse that the Messenger ﷺ was not happy with the Muslims having to pray in the direction of Jerusalem. He wanted pride of place to be given to the Sacred House, the House of his forefather, Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, and that is indeed what happened. The moment the *qibla* was changed, a group of Jews came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said to him, "What has turned you away from the direction you used to face? Do you not claim that you are following the religion of Ibrāhīm?"

Thereupon, Allah revealed the verse

﴿ The fools among the people will ask, "What has made them turn away from the direction they used to face?" Say, "Both East and West belong to Allah. He guides whoever He wills to a straight path." ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:142

As much as the change in *qibla* annoyed Jews, it filled the hearts of the Muslims with great joy, for this Divinely decreed decision was deeply meaningful for them. By re-establishing their connection to the religious and spiritual heritage left to them by the father of the Prophets, our master Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, and his son, Ismā'īl, peace be upon him, the Muslims were finally able to develop their own unique religious and spiritual identity, and Makkah was restored to its position of sanctity in the Islamic consciousness.

The Role of the Hypocrites

The treacherous behaviour of the Jews towards the Muslims

continued to grow. Indeed, it came to a head and forced the Muslims to confront them directly and deal with them once and for all. For the truth is that, after Quraysh, the Jews were the most deadly and implacable of all the Prophet's foes. But, within Madinah, they were not alone. There was a third grouping of people hostile to the Muslims, the hypocrites, and the threat they posed cannot be underestimated. They were the fifth column, receiving instructions from Quraysh and the Jews and doing their dirty work from within.

They were a malignant tumour within the body of the Muslims, weakening and sickening them from within, but they were soon exposed for who they were. Allah says,

﴿ When the hypocrites come to you, they say, "We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of Allah." Allah knows that you are indeed His Messenger and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are certainly liars. ﴾
 Al-Munāfiqūn, 63:1

They pretended to be Muslims but they were not Muslims. Although they lived alongside the Muslims, prayed with them, fasted with them, and celebrated with them on their days of celebration, they did so out of hypocrisy, not out of belief. They sought by their actions to weaken the Muslims, not add to their strength. The hypocrites truly were the worst of people, and that is why Allah promises that He will put them in the very lowest levels of the Hellfire.

At the head of this group was the wicked leader of the hypocrites, a notorious figure in Islamic history, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl. He was an idolater from Khazraj who had succeeded, in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Bu'āth in the fifth year before the Prophetic emigration (5 BH), in

convincing the two tribes to make him their leader and king.

But when the Muslims came to Madinah, all the old tribal contracts and pacts were automatically revoked, and the schemes and plans of their leaders came to naught, for Aws and Khazraj had united under the banner of Islam and submitted themselves to the authority of truth, justice and equality as established and put into place by their noble Messenger ﷺ. They became his close Companions and no longer had need of kings or autocrats to rule over them.

We should remember that Allah, in His infinite wisdom, had united them in the immediate aftermath of a brutal century-long war. Before Islam, they had never known peace, never felt safe and never experienced security. But now they had it in the shape of the Messenger ﷺ and they no longer needed a king to look after their affairs. Their pre-Islamic alliances and old tribal pacts had ceased to have any meaning for them.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy blamed the Prophet ﷺ for usurping what he saw as his rightful position and began to view him as the enemy, opposing him at every turn, usually in secret but occasionally in a more public manner. Regardless, everyone knew him for what he was.

As fate would have it, his own son, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, entered Islam and became a close Companion of the Messenger ﷺ. He was a courageous, strong-willed and charismatic young man, and his deep love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ was matched by his uncompromising opposition to his father.

The story of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy teaches us two lessons: the depth to which the hypocrites were committed to opposing the Muslims and the height of wisdom and forbearance the

Messenger ﷺ had when dealing with those who opposed him secretly and openly.

Two events were to expose the hypocrites and their leader for who they were and what they were trying to achieve—the destruction of Islam from within.

The first, the more serious, was in the third year after the Hijra when the Muslims went to fight Quraysh at Uḥud. As soon as the Muslims set out for Uḥud, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy split away from the army, taking nearly three hundred men with him—almost a third of the army of the Messenger ﷺ—and returned to the city. This cowardly act, which weakened the Muslim forces considerably, almost caused them to suffer a catastrophic defeat.

The second was to happen in the fifth year after the Hijra when the Messenger ﷺ went forth to quell the uprising of the Banū Muṣṭaliq. Both these events will be discussed in more detail in their respective chapters.



The Wars against the Muslims

The Battle of Badr

The Messenger of mercy and peace ﷺ was sent as a bringer of good news, a guide, a caller to Allah. In the short period of his Prophetic mission, he ﷺ forged a nation with its own culture, knowledge and way of thinking—he shaped its consciousness and identity and built up its character and religious and spiritual power. He established an Islamic civilisation founded on honour and dignity and taught it how to behave towards its enemies in times of war and in times of peace. Thus, the wars into which the Muslims were dragged form only a small part of the picture of the life of the Messenger ﷺ.

The original goal of the expedition to Badr was not to wage war on Quraysh—it started out as something else and then the weight of circumstances turned it into a clash with them. Similarly, the battle of Uḥud was instigated by Quraysh—they aggressed against the Muslims, not the opposite. And the very same thing was to repeat itself at the battle of the Trench, but this time the aggressors were not just a single group, but a coalition of

Qurayshi idolaters and Jews numbering more than ten thousand fighting men. This army had come to Madinah and laid siege to it with the intention of wiping the Muslims from the face of the planet.

The early Muslim community spent far less time engaged in warfare than people think. The total number of days they spent fighting the idolaters during the twenty years of Prophethood could not have exceeded ten days, or maybe two weeks at the most. And the same applies to casualties: in all the time that the Muslims and the idolaters fought against each other, there were no more than four or five hundred at most, a figure that combines all the losses suffered by both sides. This does not include the wars fought against the Byzantines and Persians to liberate Syria and Iraq from them respectively, for these wars came after the Messenger ﷺ had moved on from this plane of existence.

In the interests of accuracy, we must take great care not to confuse certain technical terms with their modern usage. An example is the word "*ghazwa*"—today the word means assault or military offensive, but, at the time, the word had positive connotations. The fact the Messenger ﷺ went on a *ghazwa* only meant that he took part in a battle, not that he was its instigator. To avoid such confusion, it is important to look at the historical background of the time and the way they then used language. And when we examine "*ghazwa*", we see that, within the context of the Prophetic *Sīra*, the word was used to refer to the military battles the Muslims waged in response to attacks made against them by their enemies.

There are two well-known terms that are frequently used in Arabic to describe military campaigns: "*sariyya*" and "*ghazwa*". Only one of these terms, "*ghazwa*", was used to describe the

battles in which the Prophet ﷺ was present.¹ As for the other term, “*sariyya*”, it had a somewhat different connotation, being used mainly to describe the small detachments and patrols that were sent out by the Muslims to maintain security, keep the peace and quell tribal uprisings against the Islamic state.

For the purposes of this book, we are only concerned with the battles that constituted waypoints in the life of the Prophet ﷺ and which impacted on the development and evolution of the Muslim community.

Badr, which took place in the second year after the Hijra, was the first battle that the Muslims were dragged into. But despite the battle being forced upon them, and despite being heavily outnumbered and less well armed, the Muslims achieved a great victory over Quraysh which raised their status and made them a force to be reckoned with in the eyes of the wider Arabian Peninsula. Like the Battle of the Trench, this battle was to prove to be a profoundly significant moment in the history of the early Muslims, and there is much that the student of *Sīra* can learn from it.

In the nearly three years since the Islamic state was first established in Madinah, the necessary tools and means had been acquired to take Islam to the next level, the level of full consolidation. This came after a period of extreme deprivation. The Muslims who had emigrated from Makkah had been forced to leave their wealth, lands and possessions behind and had been cut off completely from their kith and kin. And, prior to that, for

¹ As-Sibā'ī, Muṣṭafā, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Beirut, 2010, p. 78.

thirteen long years, they had been subjected to all manner of persecution, ignominy and torture. So, it was only natural that, when the opportunity presented itself to pay Quraysh back and compensate the Muslims for their losses, the Prophet ﷺ decided to take it. News had reached him of a richly laden Qurayshi caravan on its way back from Syria. The route that these caravans took typically passed quite close by Madinah, so he gathered some of his Companions and instructed them to capture it, saying, "For it may well be that Allah will make it a source of booty for you"—that is, "Allah may well compensate you for what you have lost by means of it."

So, a force of three hundred or so men set forth from Madinah with the intention of intercepting this huge caravan which they had heard comprised more than one thousand heavily laden camels. The Qurayshi caravan was being personally led by Abū Sufyān, and when news reached him that the Muslims had set out from Madinah, he sent a man to Makkah to apprise them of the imminent danger and ask them to send an army to defend the caravan.

Quraysh responded quickly to the alarm and assembled an army of one thousand men which set forth to protect their caravan and prevent it from being seized. In the meantime, Abū Sufyān had diverted the caravan away from its usual route and slipped through the grasp of the Muslims. He sent word to the Qurayshi army to let them know their goods were safe. One might have thought such news would have brought relief to the Qurayshi army and caused it to reverse course and return to Makkah, but their leaders decided differently. They chose instead to continue their march to Badr and stay there for a number of days, reasoning that even though their caravan was safe, this was

an opportunity to show off their strength to the rest of the Arab world.

The Muslims had not left Madinah with the intention to fight a war, but the circumstances left them no choice in the matter. The Messenger ﷺ did not see any other viable option other than confronting the Qurayshi army, especially in light of the fact that Allah had recently given the Muslims permission to wage war against those who waged war against them, saying,

❖ Permission to fight is given to those who are fought against because they have been wronged—truly Allah has the power to come to their support—those who were expelled from their homes without any right, merely for saying, “Our Lord is Allah.” ❖ Al-Hajj, 22:39-40

Allah had given permission to those who were fought against, wronged and expelled from their homes to fight back against their enemies. This applied fully to the Emigrants, but the same was not true of the Anṣār. The Messenger ﷺ realised that the pledge of allegiance the Anṣār had given him at al-‘Aqaba only required them to protect him and the Emigrants from attack within the confines of the city of Madinah. They were not under any obligation to take part alongside them in any battles outside its walls.

It was not the way of the Messenger ﷺ to impose his views or his will upon his followers in any matter such as this—he always consulted them and listened to what they had to say. He did not see consultation as some optional extra—it was a vital part of the process, a necessary step on the way before a ruling could be reached. Consultation—attaching value to the opinions of others besides oneself—is a crucial and defining feature of Islamic governance. Through his living example, the Messenger ﷺ showed

us exactly what just governance truly looks like.

So, the Messenger ﷺ turned to face his men and said, "Advise me, my people! What do you suggest we do?" One of the Emigrants, al-Miqdād ibn 'Amr, stood up and replied, "Messenger of Allah! By Allah, we will never say to you as the Tribes of Isrā'īl said to Mūsā: 'You and your Lord go and fight—we will stay sitting here.' Instead, we say, 'You and your Lord go and fight, and we will fight alongside you!'"²

"March forward with us with the blessing of Allah"

Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, one of the men who had pledged allegiance to the Messenger ﷺ at al-'Aqaba, quickly realised that what the Messenger ﷺ really wanted to know was where the Anṣār stood on the matter, so he said, "Messenger of Allah, we have believed in you, affirmed you, and testified as to the truth of what you brought. It was why we gave you our pledge and our word to hear and obey. So take whatever course you see fit, Messenger of Allah, and we will go with you. By the One who sent you with the Truth, were you to ask us to go with you into the sea and cross it, we would dive into it beside you, and not a man among us would be found wanting or remain behind! Perhaps Allah will bring pleasure to you through what we do, so march forward with us with the blessing of Allah."³

The words of this redoubtable warrior brought great joy to the heart of the Messenger ﷺ, for not only did they confirm the

² Al-Mulyabārī, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Sīrat sayyid al-bashariyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Kerala, India, 2001, p. 154.

³ As-Sibā'ī, Muṣṭafā, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Beirut, 2010, p. 79.

togetherness of the Muslims and their unity of purpose and direction, they also fulfilled one of the necessary prerequisites for the Muslims to defeat their enemy. For, without the participation of the Anṣār, it would have been impossible for the Muslims to engage Quraysh and win.

But even with their participation, the odds were stacked heavily in favour of the enemy, for the army of the Messenger ﷺ comprised only three hundred poorly shod, poorly clothed, poorly fed and poorly armed men, while the army that faced them was more than a thousand strong. And not only were they superior in numbers, but also in terms of everything else necessary for an army to wage war effectively: weaponry, armour, supplies, horses and experienced leaders and commanders.

But the outcome of the battle was determined not in the realm of the material but in the realm of the metaphysical. The secret to the Muslim's success lay in the depth of their belief and the resulting spirit of sacrifice. The Muslim army was held together by a shared doctrine and belief, fighting to defend the Word of Allah on Earth. Their men went forth seeking the Hereafter, marching forward with chests bared, hoping beyond hope for one of two great goods—either victory or direct witnessing (martyrdom). And in their eyes, both outcomes were victory and both outcomes were direct witnessing of Allah.

For them, the most important thing was that Allah was with them, in contrast to the idolaters of Quraysh, who were only fighting to safeguard their worldly interests and achieve glory and renown, or to defend idols and empty pre-Islamic beliefs. There were no lofty ideals in their hearts to nourish them and give them strength nor any moral certitude or conviction. In a way, they were simply going through the motions.

The battle got underway on the night before the *Jumu'a*. For the entirety of that night, right up until the dawn, the Messenger ﷺ stayed awake, deep in prayer and supplication to His Lord, asking Him for succour and support. He ﷺ knew how crucial this battle was and that its outcome would have a profound effect on the course of history: were the Muslims to be defeated in their first battle against their idolatrous enemies, they would find it difficult to rise again.

Some of the supplications made by the Prophet ﷺ on the night of Badr suggest a certain degree of worry and anxiety concerning the fate of Islam and its followers, especially as they had set out from Madinah with a different intention and had not come to fight and so were not adequately equipped for battle. For example, he ﷺ called out, "O Allah, I entreat you to fulfil what You promised me. O Allah, if this small band (i.e. of believers) is destroyed, You will not be worshipped on this earth."

Allah responded, setting the heart of His Messenger at rest, saying,

❖ Remember when you called on your Lord for help and He responded to you, "I will reinforce you with a thousand angels riding rank after rank." ❖ Al-Anfāl, 8:9

And,

❖ When your Lord revealed to the angels, "I am with you so make those who believe firm." ❖ Al-Anfāl, 8:12

It was with these words of revelation that those who believed knew for certain that Allah had accepted the supplication and supplied them with all the reinforcements they needed.

The Muslims felt the presence of their Lord alongside them throughout the battle. Their Messenger ﷺ had taught them a first

important lesson: the key to victory lay not in strength of arms, but in turning sincerely to Allah and handing the affair over to Him. The first thing one must do to acquire victory was to raise one's hands in supplication to Him, in absolute recognition of the fact that He is the only One who determines things and makes them happen. Whatever happens, happens by the Wisdom of Allah, and no one knew this better than His Messenger ﷺ.

The Muslims would have been justified to fear defeat, given their poorly equipped army was less than a third the size of the enemy's, but the fear that gripped the leaders of Quraysh before the battle was not so easily understood. It was not that they lacked courage, but when they saw these unshod half-clothed men who opposed them, with no weapons but the swords in their hands, they were taken aback by their resolve, determination and willpower, and terror crept into their hearts. They realised that even were they able to kill all the Muslims, each Muslim man would take one of theirs down with him. One of them is reported as having said, "How much of a victory will it be if a third of our men are left dead on the battlefield?!" This fear became a dread that gripped them completely. The Muslims had already won half the battle before it started.

The morale of Quraysh was further dented when their sage and elder, 'Utba ibn Rabī'a, begged the leader of the army, Abū Jahl, to reconsider his decision to fight. It was not that he was a coward, but he realised how high the cost of victory was likely to be, and there was no guarantee that they would in fact be victorious.

But, Abū Jahl's mind was made up and he would not be dissuaded. He accused 'Utba of being a coward, and swore a solemn oath that he would not return to Makkah until he had

fought the Muslims or, as he put it, "until Allah judges between me and Muhammad."⁴ Allah was indeed to judge between them, and the Muslims were to be given a resounding victory over the idolaters.

At the first light of dawn on the day of *Jumu'a*, the two sides lined up against each other on the battlefield. The Muslims began to advance, their battle cry ringing out across the battlefield. "One! One!" they cried, emphatically declare the Oneness of their Lord. The Messenger ﷺ had promised his followers a glorious victory and told them that whomsoever was martyred on that day would be granted the Gardens of Paradise, saying, "By the One who holds the soul of Muḥammad in His hand, any man who fights against them today, steadfastly and for the sake of Allah, and is killed in the line of duty, will be sent by Allah directly to the Garden."

The resolve and courage of the Muslims on that day was truly extraordinary, as is seen in the story of 'Umayr ibn al-Ḥamām, a man overcome by poverty and hunger. He had just got hold of some dates and was alleviating his hunger when he heard the Messenger ﷺ utter these words. As he heard these words, it seemed to him as if the Garden was right there in front of him, and if he reached out with his hands, he could almost touch it, so he said, "Then the only thing that lies between me and the Garden is martyrdom! If I am alive long enough to finish eating these dates, I will have tarried too long in this life!" Throwing aside the

⁴ Al-Jazā'irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, p. 144.

dates, he grabbed a sword and fought until he was martyred.⁵

This was the spirit in which the Muslims fought, and the army of the unshod launched an all-out charge on the heavily armed and armoured army of idolaters. And, by the time of the midday prayer, following a sustained assault upon the enemy, the battle had ended in a decisive victory for the Muslims over the idolaters. The enemy army were defeated in less than six hours, with seventy of their warriors killed and a further seventy taken prisoner. And, among the victims, were many of their leaders and chiefs, including the leader of their army, Abū Jahl, and the elder of Quraysh, 'Utba ibn Rabī'a. The Muslims had only lost fourteen men.

When the Messenger ﷺ was told that Abū Jahl had been killed, he said, three times in succession, "Allah! There is no god but Him!" Then he went to see his body and addressed it with these words: "Praise be to Allah who has visited disgrace upon you, O enemy of Allah! This man was the Pharaoh of this nation!" With his death, the greatest bastion of pre-Islamic ignorance and idolatry tumbled to the ground.

The army of idolaters had been struck an unlikely and devastating blow by a small and ragtag band. Whereas Makkah received the news of the defeat of their army with shock and incredulity, Madinah welcomed back its victors with drums and song. It was a resounding and needed victory that lifted the spirits of the Muslims and put the banner of Islam on the map of the Arabian Peninsula.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 146.

It represented a victory of the few over the many, the poor over the rich, the weak and barefoot over the strong and shod, but, at heart, it was a victory for belief over idolatry. By this overwhelming victory, achieved in the shortest of battles, the Muslims moved from a position of weakness to one of both moral and military strength. But they never lost sight that it was due to Allah and their firm belief that the victory was theirs.

Prisoners of War: Teaching in Exchange for Freedom

The army of the poor returned to Madinah in triumph, bringing with them their prisoners of war. The Messenger ﷺ instructed his followers to treat these prisoners with kindness and not to humiliate or torture them in any way. Indeed, he even forbade them from speaking to them in a hurtful manner. Any act towards them ill-befitting their status as human beings was prohibited, for, in Islam, transactions with other people are essentially transactions with Allah. Behaviour towards others, whoever they are, regardless of whether Muslim or not, must be pleasing to Allah and something of which He approves. So, how must it be when the other before you is a prisoner in your hands? This is one of the fundamental moral constants of Islam.

At the time of Badr, of course, no specific rules had yet been written regulating how one should act or behave towards prisoners of war. But, still, in the eyes of Islam, prisoners had human dignity and were to be granted the rights that were their due. The Messenger ﷺ condensed those rights into a single word, “*ihsān*”, and instructed the Muslims to have *ihsān* towards them.

“*Ihsān*” is a term of extraordinary depth and subtlety with layers of meaning. Among these meanings are “acting well”, “preferring others”, “being tolerant”, and “being kind and

compassionate". Such praiseworthy qualities of character lie at the very heart of this great religion.

The Muslims heeded the instructions of their Prophet ﷺ and showed preference to their prisoners. Indeed, some of them even showed more preference to their prisoners than themselves, giving them their best food while making do with inferior food for themselves.

This was the first time that the Muslims had taken prisoners, and so, naturally, the first questions that were asked were, "How should they be dealt with?" and, "What sort of punishment do they deserve?" In matters such as these, it was the way of the Messenger ﷺ to consult with his close Companions, so he met with a group of them and asked them what they thought should be done with prisoners. Did they think they should be killed as punishment for their transgressions against the Muslims in Makkah, or did they think they should be freed in exchange for the ransom money offered by their families?

The fact that the Messenger ﷺ sought their advice did not mean that he did not know what to do or was lacking in wisdom, for his intellect was the perfect intellect, and he possessed more wisdom than any human being before or after him. He did not need advice to know what was right from what was wrong. The only reason he acted as he did was so that the Muslims could see and learn from his example.

Abū Bakr was the first to respond. He said, "Messenger of Allah, these men are your people and members of your family, so spare their lives. Perhaps Allah will pardon and forgive them." In the eyes of Abū Bakr, even their enemies were family and had a chance of being forgiven by Allah.

Then ‘Umar spoke up. He was a man who had no less compassion than his brother, Abū Bakr, but was better known for his severity. His viewpoint was the opposite of Abū Bakr’s. He said, addressing the Messenger ﷺ directly, “These men rejected you, cast you out of Makkah and waged war against you. The just desert of that is death.” In moments such as these, these are the two prototypical points of view, but which of them is wiser and better serves the Prophetic message?

After these two great Companions of his had spoken, the Messenger ﷺ felt moved to describe them. First, he spoke about Abū Bakr, saying, “The likeness of Abū Bakr with respect to the angels is that of Mikā’il, who brings down the contentment and forgiveness of Allah upon His slaves; and with respect to the Prophets, it is that of Ibrāhīm, who was gentler and more yielding with his people than honey, for when they lit the fire and threw him into it, the worst he said to them was

❧ Shame on you and what you worship besides Allah! Will you not use your intellect? ❧ Al-Anbiyā’, 21:67

Then Ibrāhīm finished by saying,

❧ He who follows me is part of me. But if someone disobeys me, You are All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. ❧ Ibrāhīm, 14:36

Then, he spoke about ‘Umar, saying, “The likeness of ‘Umar with respect to the angels is that of Jibrīl, who brings down the wrath and vengeance of Allah upon His enemies; and with respect to the Prophets, it is that of Nūḥ, who was harder on his people than unyielding stone.” Then he mentioned what Nūḥ said in the supplication he made to his Lord:

❧ Nūḥ said, “My Lord, do not leave a single one of the unbelievers on the earth! If You leave any, they will misguide

Your slaves and spawn nothing but more dissolute unbelievers.” ﴿Nūḥ, 71:26-276

Allah knew before the event how they would act and what they would do, but the circumstances were perfect for His Messenger ﷺ to teach the believers a few valuable lessons, so He left him to it. Then, once the lessons had been taught, He told the Messenger ﷺ and his followers which course of action was preferable in His eyes when it came to the prisoners. In this way, He taught the Muslims what they need to know.

After the Messenger ﷺ had chosen to adopt the course of action proposed by Abū Bakr, the following verse was revealed:

﴿It is not fitting for a Prophet to take captives until he has let much blood in the land. You desire the goods of this world, whereas Allah desires the Hereafter. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.﴾ Al-Anfāl, 8:67

Many Muslim scholars have interpreted this to mean that Allah preferred that the prisoners be killed, but that is not what the Words of Allah say. Rather they say that “it is not fitting for a Prophet to take captives”—full stop. In other words, Allah does not approve of prisoners being taken in the first place, making the matter of whether they should be ransomed or not a moot point.

The more we read this verse, the clearer it becomes that Allah would have preferred the Muslims to have kept on fighting until they had broken the back of the idolaters and properly punished them for defying His Command, rather than wasting their precious time taking prisoners. Allah says, “Until he has let much

⁶ Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 109.

blood in the land.” In other words, until he has broken the back of the enemies of Islam and achieved a full and complete victory over the idolaters. There is a lesson in this for others, and that is that it is not acceptable in the eyes of Allah for Muslims to be oppressed or degraded and humiliated.

But, immediately after Allah taught us this lesson, He sent down another verse giving the Messenger ﷺ a complete mandate to take whatever course of action felt most right to him with respect to prisoners of war: he was free to choose whether to kill them or to ransom them or to pardon them completely. Allah says in Sūrat Muḥammad,

﴿Therefore, when you meet those who disbelieve strike their necks. Then when you have decimated them, tie their bonds tightly and set them free or ransom them, until the war is finally over.﴾ Muḥammad, 47:4

It was left entirely to the discretion of the Messenger of mercy ﷺ to decide what to do with prisoners of war, so, he ﷺ took the decision to pardon and free all the prisoners who were poor and could not afford to pay a ransom, and only ransom those who had the means to pay. As for the few prisoners who were known to be able to read and write, he demanded a different type of ransom, offering to free them in exchange for each teaching ten Muslim children to read and write.⁷

This was a step of profound significance, for it highlighted the connection between freedom and knowledge. Knowledge is freedom. This decision re-emphasised the standing of teaching

⁷ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 322.

and learning in Islam. A religion that puts knowledge and freedom together on the same scales is a religion of liberation and learning. Knowledge promotes and protects human freedom and dignity, and that is one of the primary aims of this religion.

In particular, the books of *Sīra* mention how the Messenger ﷺ dealt with two prisoners. The first was his son-in-law, Abū al-‘Āṣ ibn ar-Rabī‘, who was married to his daughter, Zaynab bint ar-Rasūl, and the second was his uncle, al-‘Abbās, along with a few other close relatives of the Messenger ﷺ. ‘Ā’isha, may Allah be pleased with her, said, “When the people of Makkah sent the money to ransom the prisoners, Zaynab bint ar-Rasūl sent some valuables to ransom her husband, Abū al-‘Āṣ, including a necklace that her mother, Sayyida Khadīja, had given her on her wedding night. When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ saw the necklace, his heart melted and he turned to his Companions and said, ‘If you see fit to release her prisoner to her and give her back her valuables, then please do so.’”⁸

This matter was one that was deeply personal to the Messenger ﷺ, for it concerned one highly dear to him, whose husband was a prisoner of the Muslims, which meant, by extension, that he was a prisoner of his own father-in-law, the Prophet ﷺ. And it involved a present that had been given by his dearly beloved late wife, Sayyida Khadija. But, even so, he ﷺ still left it in the hands of his Companions to decide what to do. It would have been easy for him to give the command to free him, and the Companions would not have objected. Indeed, they would have leapt at the chance to fulfil it, especially given that it

⁸ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 575.

concerned one of those near and dear to their beloved Prophet ﷺ, but, despite knowing this, he gave no such order and left the decision to them.

In honour of their Messenger ﷺ and his dearly beloved daughter, Zaynab, the Companions chose to set Abū al-ʿĀṣ free immediately and give him back the ransom his wife had sent to acquire his freedom. Once this was done, Abū al-ʿĀṣ gave the Messenger ﷺ his word that the moment he got back to Makkah, he would release Zaynab from her vows and send her back to him, for she was a Muslim and he was an idolater, and it was no longer permissible for them to be together following the Qurʾānic legislation that had been sent down in that regard. And he did just as he promised, sending her back to her father ﷺ when he got home. He did the honourable thing even though he was still an idolater and his people were still at war with the Messenger ﷺ.

But Abū al-ʿĀṣ was a gallant man, renowned for the nobility of his character, the nephew of Sayyida Khadīja. The noble Arab qualities of character were still revered among the idolaters, and this prompted the Messenger ﷺ to say, "The best of you before Islam will be the best of you in Islam." Sometime later, Allah was to show favour to Abū al-ʿĀṣ, and he would himself become Muslim and his wife would be returned to him, and he would become one of the close Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

There is an equally valuable lesson to be learnt from how the Messenger ﷺ dealt with the second of the two prisoners, his own uncle, al-ʿAbbās, but of a somewhat different sort. Given their close family ties and given how staunchly he had defended him and stood by him throughout his time in Makkah, al-ʿAbbās hoped and expected the Messenger ﷺ to release him without a

ransom. But the Messenger ﷺ refused to do that. So al-‘Abbās tried a slightly different tack, telling the Messenger ﷺ that he had become Muslim some time ago. The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Allah knows best about your Islam. If what you say is true, then Allah will recompense you. But, from the outside, it appears that you were against us, so pay the ransom for yourself and your two nephews, Nawfal ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and ‘Aqīl ibn abī Ṭālib ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.”

Al-‘Abbās said, “I don’t have the money, Messenger of Allah.” So, the Messenger ﷺ replied, “What of that money that you and Umm al-Faḍl buried, when you said to her, ‘If I am killed on this trip, then this money I have buried must go to my sons, al-Faḍl, ‘Abd Allāh and Quthm.” When he heard this, al-‘Abbās said, “By Allah, Messenger of Allah, now I know that you are indeed the Messenger of Allah, for no one knew of this besides myself and Umm al-Faḍl!” Then, he paid the ransom for himself and his nephews.⁹

It is worth reflecting on what actually transpired here: the Messenger ﷺ had before him his own uncle, a man whom he had grown up with, a man who had been one of his boon companions throughout his younger years, seeing as they were almost the same age, a man whom he loved and cared for deeply—so deeply that ‘Ā’isha, may Allah be pleased with her, was to later say, “I never saw the Messenger ﷺ admire anyone as much as he admired al-‘Abbās”—and yet he ﷺ showed him no favouritism and demanded a ransom from him just as he demanded it from everyone else.

⁹ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1987, pp. 322-323.

The exact moment when al-'Abbās, may Allah be pleased with him, became Muslim is not known with any certainty. Some say he became Muslim before this incident and kept his Islam hidden so that he could remain among Quraysh and keep the Prophet ﷺ informed of their movements, others say he became Muslim much later, perhaps only a year or so before the conquest of Makkah. But, whatever the case, what we do know is that when he did become Muslim, it made the Messenger ﷺ the happiest of people.

The Messenger ﷺ was to say of him, "Allah took me as His close friend just as He took Ibrāhīm as His close friend. My place in the Garden lies opposite that of the place of Ibrāhīm, and al-'Abbās is between the two of us, a believer between two close friends of Allah." Al-'Abbās was to die in Madinah in the year 32 AH at the age of 88.

Of course, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ did not know the Unseen, but the veils to it were lifted for him from time to time. In addition to his visions and prophecies, he was the recipient of Divine Revelation, so it was only natural that he came to know of things that were beyond the ken of anyone else. For example, he often knew exactly what his enemies were planning, as well as what they had voiced to one another in secret. His knowledge of the buried wealth of al-'Abbās and Umm al-Faḍl was of this type and he ﷺ displayed this type of knowledge on numerous occasions, especially whenever there was a threat to his life. On each occasion, he would be granted foreknowledge and would emerge unharmed and unscathed. And, very often, the person who had come with the intention of killing him would become Muslim as a result. This is perfectly illustrated by the following account.

An Attempt on the Life of the Messenger ﷺ

A commonly narrated story in the books of Islamic history is that of 'Umayr ibn Wahb. It begins in Makkah in the immediate aftermath of the crushing defeat at Badr when 'Umayr ibn Wahb met Ṣafwān ibn Umayya in the Sacred Mosque and came to an agreement with him to kill the Prophet ﷺ in exchange for Ṣafwān paying off all his debts. Ṣafwān also agreed to look after his family and children were he to fail in his task and be captured or killed by the Muslims. The agreement was made and both solemnly swore to keep it a secret and tell nobody.

After buckling on his poisoned sword, 'Umayr left Makkah and headed for Madinah, pretending that the only reason he had come was to ransom his son, Wuhayb, who had been captured by the Muslims at the Battle of Badr. But, the moment 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb saw him approaching the Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ, he felt a strong premonition of danger and immediately said to those around him, "This dog is the enemy of Allah, 'Umayr ibn Wahb. By Allah, it can only be mischief that has brought him here!" Then he headed straight into the mosque to see the Messenger ﷺ and said to him, "Prophet of Allah, the enemy of Allah, 'Umayr ibn Wahb, is just outside and he has brought his sword." The Messenger ﷺ said, "Let him in." So 'Umayr was admitted into the presence of the Prophet ﷺ, but a number of other men were also brought in to protect the Messenger ﷺ from him.

When 'Umayr entered, he greeted the Prophet ﷺ with the customary Arab greeting: "Happy be your morning." The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Allah has honoured us with a greeting better than yours, 'Umayr. It is that of 'peace', the greeting of the people of the Garden." Then the Messenger ﷺ asked him, "What has brought you here, 'Umayr?" He replied, "I have come to seek

the freedom of my son, for he is one of your prisoners.” So, the Messenger ﷺ said, “So what is the purpose of the sword that is hanging by a strap from your neck?” ‘Umayr replied, “May Allah curse all swords. What good have they ever done?!” So, the Messenger ﷺ said, “Tell me the truth. What brings you here?” He replied, “I only came for the reason I told you.”

Thereupon, the Messenger ﷺ said, “No, you have come for another reason entirely. You and Ṣafwān ibn Umayya sat together in the Ḥijr and spoke with one another about your fallen comrades. Then you said to him, ‘If I did not have so many debts and so many responsibilities towards my dependents, I would go and kill Muhammad.’ So, Ṣafwān offered to take on your debts and look after the needs of your dependents in exchange for you killing me. But, you will not be successful, for Allah will protect me from you.”

‘Umayr could not believe his ears. How did the Prophet ﷺ know what his intentions were? How did he know what had truly brought him to Madinah? There could be only one explanation. So, he said to the Prophet ﷺ, “I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah! We used to deny you and say you were lying when you told us you received news straight from heaven and revelation straight from Allah. Well, there was no one there to witness this conversation except for Ṣafwān and myself, so, by Allah, no one could have told you about it except for Allah Himself. Praise be to Allah who has guided me to Islam and shown me the right path.” Then he said, “I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.” So, the Messenger ﷺ turned to his Companions and said, “Take your brother, educate him in the basics of the religion and teach him some Qur’ān. Then release the

prisoner he came for into his custody.”¹⁰

‘Umayr had traversed the harshest of terrain, travelling over four hundred kilometres on the back of a camel, with but one goal in mind—to kill the Prophet ﷺ, and had entered the mosque with the worst of intentions. But, then, only a few moments later, he emerged a changed man, a Muslim who loved Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. In the blinking of an eye, he had transformed from an archenemy of the Muslims into their beloved brother, a man whom they were duty-bound to teach the basics of the religion.

Islam wipes clean everything that came before, and Allah pardons all past misdeeds. When a man becomes Muslim, it no longer matters how great his past enmity and hostility to the Muslims: by the simple utterance of the testimony of faith, he becomes their brother.

According to some of the accounts in the books of *Sīra*, as soon as ‘Umayr had learnt the basics of the religion, he returned to Makkah to try and spread Islam to the idolaters from within their ranks, and, indeed, many people in Makkah became Muslim at his hands.

The position of the Muslims towards ‘Umayr is best expressed by the words of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may Allah be pleased with him. He said, “By the One who holds my soul in His hand, a pig used to be dearer to me than ‘Umayr, but now he is more dear to me than some of my own children!”

¹⁰ Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 123; Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 583.

The Banū Qaynuqā' and the Muslims

The victory of the Muslims at Badr did not only thwart Quraysh, it shocked the Jews of Madinah and the surrounding areas and filled their hearts with fear, for it had raised the moral and practical standing of the Muslims within Madinan society. Thanks to the generosity of Allah and the wisdom of His Prophet ﷺ, the Muslims—especially the Emigrants who had up till now been poor and vulnerable—were no longer in a position of weakness, but were now a force to be reckoned with.

The Prophet ﷺ had a special regard for the people of the Book, and the Jews in particular. He wanted them to become Muslim more than he even wanted the idolaters to become Muslim, for they were the people of a divinely revealed religion that promoted the doctrine of Unity, they were the people of a Book whose contents and message were frequently endorsed by the Qur'ān, and they were a people of knowledge who valued the intellect and based their judgements on it. Moreover, their own books had prophesised the coming of the Messenger ﷺ and called on them to follow him.¹¹

But, despite knowing that the Torah itself had prophesised the Messenger's coming and recognising that the Prophet ﷺ matched those descriptions to the letter, still the Jews steadfastly refused to see Islam as an extension and continuation of previous Messages. Instead, they rejected and denied the Messenger ﷺ, and harboured enmity, hostility and hatred towards him. This enmity was to reveal itself following the victory of the Muslims at Badr.

¹¹ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, pp. 335-336.

The relationship between the Muslims and Jews had originally been one of peace and friendship, but, over time, largely at the instigation of the Jews, the relationship had soured and changed to hatred and open hostility. As this happened, more and more lines of communication were opened by the Jews to Quraysh as they looked for ways to incite people against the Muslims. Confrontation between the two sides became inevitable, for the Muslims could not continue to live in a situation where they were constantly having to look over their shoulders. It was proving impossible for them to build a stable and functioning society when there was a group in their midst always plotting against them and opposing them at every turn.

The well-known Jewish poet Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf spearheaded their campaign of hostility against the Muslims, using biting verse to get his message across. For example, he said, commenting on the defeat of Quraysh, "These are the noblemen of the Arabs and the kings of their people! If Muḥammad has indeed struck them down, then it would be better to be under the earth with them, than to walk upon it." Because of the defeat of a group of idol-worshippers, this poet of the Jews thought it better to be dead than alive!

Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, did not stop at hate speech or at poems in which he openly mocked the Messenger ﷺ and his followers. So great was his hatred of the Muslims, that he took it a step further still, and tried to incite people to kill the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. How could a person who believes in one of the Books do that? It makes no sense. How can one of the people of the Book incite people to kill a Prophet who believes in the Oneness of God and calls people to it, a Prophet who spreads peace and love everywhere he goes, even among those who do not believe in him?

But such a man was Ka'b. And he did not stop there, but even went to Makkah in order to light a flame under Quraysh and persuade them that the time was ripe for them to get their revenge on the Muslims and recover their lost honour.¹²

As a result of these hate crimes, the situation deteriorated drastically, and tensions became more and more strained, reaching fever pitch when Ka'b started inciting people to kill the Messenger ﷺ, so the Prophet ﷺ went to visit the Jews at the market of Qaynuqā' to warn them of the direction in which things were headed, saying, "Beware lest you meet with the same fate as Quraysh. Accept Islam, for you know that I am a Prophet sent by God." They rudely retorted, "Muhammad, do not let a victory over a people who know nothing of warfare deceive you as to your military might. You took advantage of that well. But if you try your hand with us, by Allah, you will see what type of people we are."

Such threats to the Messenger ﷺ were unacceptable to Allah, so He straight away revealed to him the following verse:

﴿ Say to those who disbelieve, "You will be overwhelmed and crowded into Hell. What an evil resting place!" ﴾
 Āl 'Imrān, 3:12¹³

The Muslims were witnesses to the first half of this verse coming true. As for the second half—that they will be crowded into Hell—that is a matter for the Unseen world and will come true in that Abode in the manner promised by Allah.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Al-Wāqidi, Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 165.

The Muslims had no intention of opening up a battlefield inside their own city, for it would not have been in their own best interests to do so. But the Jews had different ideas, and bent every sinew and strained every nerve to make it happen, openly plotting and inciting against the Muslims. And their relationship with Quraysh went from being a friendship based on shared interests to a firm alliance, a step that was to make its repercussions felt later at the Battle of the Trench.

In this heavily charged atmosphere, a Jewish man from the tribe of Qaynuqā' assaulted a Muslim woman who was shopping in their marketplace and visited great indignity upon her, ripping off her clothes and exposing her nakedness. A Muslim onlooker was so horrified by this despicable act that he immediately rushed to her aid, and struck the Jewish man a blow that killed him. This in turn led the surrounding Jews to form a mob, which set upon the Muslim man and killed him. The fuse had been lit and things had reached the point of no return—conflict could no longer be avoided or postponed. The Banū Qaynuqā' realised that a response from the Muslims was forthcoming, so they drew back to their fortified houses and got ready to fight.

The conduct of the Messenger ﷺ in matters of peace, just as in matters of war, was transparent and beyond reproach. He acted with nobility and dignity towards those with whom he was at peace, and fought with courage and honour against those with whom he was at war. And the same applied to his interactions with the Jews. Despite everything he knew about them, the Messenger ﷺ never withdrew the olive branch. He sought peace with them at every turn, as the social contract he drew up with them shows, but they rebuffed him at every turn.

By assaulting the Muslim woman in their marketplace, the

Banū Qaynuqā' broke the terms of their contract and rendered it null and void. They were no longer protected by the Constitution of Madinah.

Under the circumstances, the Muslims had little option but to act and to act decisively, so they gathered a force of men, set up a perimeter around the fortified houses of the Banū Qaynuqā' and laid siege to them for almost half a month. For their part, the Banū Qaynuqā' had decided to wait it out, expecting their Jewish allies to come to their aid and help break them free. But the aid and reinforcements never materialised, for the Banū Qurayza still respected the Constitution of Madinah and were loath to break the peace treaty they had made with the Prophet ﷺ, although, as we know, this was to change a few years later at the Battle of the Trench.

Eventually, the Banū Qaynuqā', realising that no one was coming to their aid, sent word to the Messenger ﷺ to arrange their terms of surrender. And it was agreed that if he spared their lives and let them go, they would leave the city and go into exile, taking all their people with them. And that is exactly what they did, the majority of them emigrating to Syria.

The Battle of Uḥud

Very little of note happened in Madinah between the the time of the Battle of Badr in the second year after the Hijra and the Battle of Uḥud in the first quarter of the third year after the Hijra, aside from the Muslims being forced to expel the Banū Qaynuqā' from the city. But, even so, they still found themselves unable to achieve any degree of stability in the city, given the constant attempts of the Jews to undermine the peace.

For their part, Quraysh was equipping a new army and

preparing to take revenge on the Muslims, for the defeat it had suffered at Badr was the greatest defeat Quraysh had ever experienced.

The Qurayshi army that finally moved out of Makkah comprised more than three thousand warriors under the leadership of Abū Sufyān, and it had been paid for by the merchants whose caravan had escaped the clutches of the Muslims shortly before the Battle of Badr.

Speaking of this, Allah says,

❖ Those who disbelieve spend their wealth barring access to the Way of Allah. They will spend it; then they will regret it; then they will be overthrown. Those who disbelieve will be gathered into Hell. ﴿٢٦﴾ Al-Anfāl, 8:36

It was part of Allah's *Sunna* to keep His Prophet and the believers abreast of everything that happened, no matter how small or large, and this situation was no different. So Allah revealed these verses, and by means of them, raised their morale and gave them reassurance. They knew He was protecting them and guiding their steps, and that gave them a sense of peace and serenity.

With its preparations made, the Qurayshi army set out for Madinah. Meanwhile the Muslims were meeting within the city to determine the best course of action. And, following a drawn-out discussion, they decided to go forth to engage the enemy outside the city. The Prophet ﷺ had held the view that they should remain inside the city and barricade themselves inside, but, in the end, he acceded to the view of the majority that they should go and face the army of Quraysh outside. A group of believers who had not been present at the Battle of Badr were particularly insistent on

this point, wanting the chance to show their courage and valour.

The determination and fighting spirit of these men around the Messenger ﷺ was extraordinary, as the viewpoints of the men in this meeting tell us. It also shows why most of them preferred to go out to fight rather than to stay in the city and defend it, and this was fully appreciated by the noble Messenger ﷺ.

One of those who supported the idea of going out to fight the Qurayshi army said, "We fear, Messenger of Allah, that our enemy might think us cowardly and afraid if we fail to go out to meet them, and that will lift their morale and embolden them against us."

Another said, "On the day of Badr, with but three hundred men, Allah granted you victory over them. Well, today, our forces are much larger, and we have been eagerly awaiting this day and making earnest supplication for it to come. And Allah has brought it to us in our own backyard!"

Another, Mālīk ibn Sinān, said, "Messenger of Allah, what awaits us is one of the two bounties: either Allah grants us victory over them—that being the outcome we desire—or, Messenger of Allah, He grants us martyrdom. And, by Allah, Messenger of Allah, I do not mind which of the two outcomes comes to pass!"

Finally, an-Nu'mān ibn Mālīk settled the argument once and for all, saying, "Messenger of Allah, why would you deny us the Garden? For, by Allah whom there is no god but Him, I shall enter it!" The Messenger ﷺ said, "With what (shall you enter it)?" An-Nu'mān replied, "I am a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and I will not flee when the war starts and the time comes to fight!" So, the Messenger ﷺ said, "You have spoken the truth!" And, indeed, an-Nu'mān was martyred in the course of the

battle.¹⁴

How could an army made up of such resolute and determined men ever lose? So, the Messenger ﷺ acceded to the wish of the majority and decided to go out to fight, despite his army of one thousand men being less than a third the size of the enemy's. The army set forth from the city, but the moment they reached the city limits, an act of unspeakable treachery happened. The leader of the hypocrites, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, who had pretended to go along with all the plans, suddenly announced that he and his men would not fight, and taking his three hundred men, marched back into the city. As he left, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar addressed him, saying, "May Allah cast you out, enemies of Allah! Allah will spare His Prophet the need of you." Then Allah sent down the following verses concerning them:

❧ So that He would know the hypocrites. They were told, "Come and fight in the Way of Allah or at least help defend us." They said, "If we knew how to fight, we would certainly follow you." They were closer to unbelief that day than to belief, saying with their mouths what was not in their hearts. And Allah knows best what they are hiding. ❧ *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:167

Allah was fully aware of their secret thoughts and innermost beliefs, and on that day, they were indeed closer to unbelief than to belief. An act of treachery of this magnitude would have dealt a major blow to any army, for it is not easy to come to terms with the sudden and unexpected loss of a third of one's forces, especially when that army is on the point of going into battle. The Messenger ﷺ now had but seven hundred men, less than a quarter

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 194.

the size of the enemy forces. But, even though their numbers had been diminished by this act of treachery, still the resolve of the men who remained was not shaken and their morale remained as strong as ever.

The source of their might was the might of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and they despised nothing so much as unbelief, for in the eyes of the believers, it was the embodiment of lowness and ignominy. More mundane issues, such as numbers or supplies or equipment, did not come into the equation as far as they were concerned.

An army that is moved by faith and which seeks only to raise high the Name of Allah upon the earth will be reinforced and strengthened by Him and He will grant it victory. All that such an army needs for success is to maintain a good opinion of Allah and respect the commands of His Prophet ﷺ.

The two armies met in the region of Uhud and fighting broke out almost immediately. And from the very first, despite the huge disparity in size between the two forces, the Muslims fought with utter fearlessness, filling the hearts of the idolaters with trepidation and fear, and they quickly started to force the enemy backwards. All the signs pointed to a glorious victory, and if the Muslims had continued in the manner they started until the end of the day, the Qurayshi army would have been routed and Quraysh defeated and humiliated for a second time. With victory in grasp, the Muslim army made a fatal mistake, and got distracted. So swiftly had the enemy been overwhelmed, they abandoned their equipment and provisions in their haste to flee. This booty lay scattered across the ground, and the Muslims, thinking the battle already won, broke off their pursuit to collect it. This was their first mistake.

The second mistake was to prove fatal: a battalion of archers stationed on Mount Uḥud under the leadership of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Jubayr left their posts, fearing that they would miss out on the spoils of war if they did not go and join their comrades in collecting it. This battalion had been a vital component of the army, serving a very necessary function. The Prophet ﷺ had given them strict and specific instructions to protect the Islamic army from attack from the rear and prevent the Qurayshi cavalry, under the command of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, from flanking them and overrunning their forces, warning them not to leave their posts under any circumstances. The Prophet ﷺ said to them, “Protect our backs and do not let them come at us from the rear. When they come at you, fire your arrows upon them, for horses cannot advance through a hail of arrows. We will only continue to be victorious so long as you stay at your posts. O Allah, you are my witness against them.”¹⁵

The Messenger ﷺ had emphasised to them how crucial it was for them to stay in place no matter what was happening elsewhere in the battle, for he knew how capable Khālīd ibn al-Walīd was and understood how he thought. He knew that there was a strong possibility Khālīd would try to flank the Muslim forces and come at them from the rear, and that is why he warned the archers so strongly against leaving the strategic position in which he had placed them, telling them, “We will only continue to be victorious so long as you stay at your posts.”

But most of this fifty-strong battalion of archers abandoned

¹⁵ As-Sibā’ī, Muṣṭafā, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Beirut, 2010, p. 83; al-Wāqidi, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, pp. 203-209.

their posts on the mountain the moment they saw the enemy retreating, inadvertently leaving the Muslim army exposed to an attack from the rear. Taken in by the swift retreat of the enemy and seduced by the promise of spoils of war, they defied the orders of their commander-in-chief, saying, "What point is there in staying here when the enemy army has already been routed?" The leader of this battalion, 'Abd Allāh ibn Jubayr, tried to change their minds, but they would not listen to him and soon only ten of them remained. The strong warnings of the Messenger ﷺ had not been heeded.

This was what Khālīd ibn al-Walīd had been waiting for. The moment this peerless military commander saw the archers streaming down mount Uhūd, he flanked around to the back and overran the few archers who had remained in their posts, killing them all, thereby turning the battle on its head. The Muslims had lost their defensive position and their army was now exposed to attack.

The balance of power in the battle had swung decisively back in favour of Quraysh, and, in an instant, the Qurayshi army switched from retreat to attack, their flagging morale completely restored. From being certain of victory, the Muslims were now certain of defeat, and many of them were martyred on that day. The Qurayshi army continued to fight their way through the ranks of the Muslims until a group of them succeeded in reaching the command centre of the Muslim army, from where the Messenger ﷺ was directing the battle. Suddenly, the life of the Messenger ﷺ himself was put at threat.

Sensing his presence, Quraysh made a concerted attempt to kill him. They launched wave after wave of attack on those who were around him and hurled rocks and stones in his direction,

some of which struck him and almost knocked him unconscious. When one such rock drew blood, the Messenger ﷺ said, "What success can there be for a people who bloody the face of their Prophet when he is trying to call them to their Lord?" Allah's response to His Messenger ﷺ came straight away:

❖ You have no part in the affair. Either He will turn towards them or He will punish them, for they are wrongdoers. ❖

Āl 'Imrān, 3:128

The Messenger ﷺ was in very real danger.

The Battle to Defend the Messenger ﷺ

The courage and valour of the Muslims was undoubted for they had no fear of death, and he who fears not death fears no enemy. This showed itself throughout the battle, but their extraordinary heroism and love of martyrdom came to the fore in the battle to defend the Messenger ﷺ. The moment the life of the Messenger ﷺ was threatened, a small group of Companions hurried to his side and formed a cordon around him to shield him and prevent the enemy from reaching him. These men used everything at their disposal to protect him, even using their bodies as human shields, intercepting the spears and arrows hurled and shot in his direction. The names of some of these brave men are mentioned in the books of *Sīra*: 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Anas, Abū Dujāna, Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, Sa'd ibn abī Waqqāṣ, Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, Abū 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ, and Abū Ṭalḥa al-Anṣārī.

This small band of less than a dozen men faced down more than one hundred Qurayshi soldiers hell-bent on striking down the Prophet ﷺ. In all the fights that have been fought throughout the course of Islamic history, there is no scene more epic or more heroic than this one, and the level of sacrifice of those who took

part made them legends in their own lifetime. All we can do is stand back and look on with admiration.

The enemies thought that if they could kill these men around the Messenger ﷺ, they would finally be able to capture or kill the Messenger ﷺ himself, so they redoubled their efforts and pressed the defenders harder and harder. But the defenders did not withdraw and did not back down, no matter how exhausted they became. One man, Abū Dujāna, a warrior of the Anṣār, no longer even had the energy to lift his sword and it fell from his hand. But, still, he would not move from his position and used his body in lieu of his sword to defend the Messenger ﷺ. Arrow after arrow was fired into his frame, but he stood firm until at last he collapsed to the ground. But, amazingly, he did not die that day and lived to fight alongside his beloved Messenger ﷺ in all the battles that were yet to come. He was not to be granted martyrdom until the Battle of Yamāma in the twelfth year after the Hijra, two years after the death of the Messenger ﷺ.

After Abū Dujāna fell, his compatriot, Abū Ṭalḥa al-Anṣārī, took his place. But, somehow, a rumour started to spread among the Muslims that their Messenger ﷺ had been killed. This would have decimated the morale of the believers were it not for the wisdom and quick-thinking of a few noble men. Anas ibn an-Naḍr, the uncle of Anas ibn Mālik, was the first to realise what was happening. Seeing a group of Muslims who had stopped fighting, he hurried towards them and said, "Why are you sitting down?" They replied, "Muḥammad has been killed!"

Anas replied in words expressing the strength of his faith and resolve, "What is it you are planning to do with your lives now he is gone? Go and die fighting for what he died fighting for!" Then he left them and charged at the idolaters, fighting them with

peerless bravery, taking countless blows from their swords and spears to his face before he fell. The wounds he received on that day disfigured his face so much that no one could recognise him when they came to bury him, until eventually his sister came and recognised him by his hands and fingers.¹⁶

Another of these wise Companions was Sa'd ibn ar-Rabi'. He had fought without stopping until his wounds got the better of him and he was forced to stop to tend to them. While he was thus engaged, some of the Companions passed him by. Seeing him there, one of them said, "Do you not know that Muḥammad has been killed?" Sa'd replied, "I bear witness that Muḥammad has transmitted the Message of his Lord and fought to defend His religion. Allah is Ever-living and does not die!"¹⁷ Then Sa'd leapt back into the fray.

When the battle was done and the Muslims were counting their casualties, the Messenger ﷺ sent a man to search for Sa'd ibn ar-Rabi'. When he finally found him, Sa'd was on his last legs, so the man said to him, "Sa'd, the Messenger ﷺ asked me to look for you and then report back to him whether you were alive or dead." Sa'd replied, "I am among the dead. Convey my greetings of peace to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and tell him that Sa'd says, 'May Allah reward you on my behalf better than any Prophet has ever been rewarded on behalf of his people.'" So the man returned to the Messenger ﷺ and told him what Sa'd had said, and the Messenger ﷺ replied, "May Allah have mercy on him. He was

¹⁶ Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 243.

¹⁷ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 374.

faithful to Allah and His Messenger in both life and death.”

A short time after the rumour had started, the Muslims heard Ka'b ibn Mālik call out at the top of his voice, “Muslims! Rejoice, for the Messenger of Allah has not been killed! The Messenger of Allah has not been killed!” As soon as the Muslims heard this, their morale came flooding back and their spirits soared anew, for what could ever bring more joy to a Muslim than the news that his beloved Messenger ﷺ was safe and well?!

The Muslim army found fresh courage and resolve and set about their task with renewed gusto. As for those around the Messenger ﷺ, their ranks had not depleted at all, for whenever one man fell, another stepped in to take his place. One of these men was Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr. He used his body as a shield to block blows aimed at the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and was martyred as a result. The books of *Sīra* mention that of the seventy or so men who were martyred at the Battle of Uhud, fully thirty of them were killed protecting the life of the Messenger ﷺ.¹⁸

The battle around the Messenger ﷺ may have been painful and bloody, but it did serve as a wonderful illustration of how far the Muslims were prepared to go in the way of Allah. If ever there was an example of true sacrifice, it was this. And not only did it show the depth of their belief in Allah, but also how much they loved their Messenger ﷺ, for it was for him that they gave up their most valuable and precious possession—their own lives—and a person only gives up what he values when the thing for which he gives it up is even more valuable and beloved to him. In this case, the life of the Messenger ﷺ. In these crucial moments, the safety of

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 363.

the Message of Heaven depended upon the safety of the Messenger of Heaven—everything else was just detail.

One of the most extraordinary things about this battle was the fact that one of these ten surrounding the Messenger ﷺ was not a man at all, but a woman. This woman, who fought with just as much valour as the men beside her, was called Sayyida Nusayba, also known as Umm ‘Umāra al-Anṣāriyya. At the start of the battle, she had been tasked with nursing the wounded and bringing them water to drink, but as soon as she saw the attack against the Messenger ﷺ, she threw aside her water bottles and picked up a sword and leapt into the fray to drive the attackers back from the Prophet ﷺ. Her husband and her son came to her side. The Messenger ﷺ was so impressed by her courage and resolve that he said to her and her family, “May Allah’s blessing be upon you, O people of the household!”

Then he ﷺ said to Umm ‘Umāra, “Who could possibly bear what you have borne, Umm ‘Umāra?! Ask of me whatever you will.” She replied, “I ask that I be in your company in the Garden.” So he ﷺ said, “O Allah, gather me in the company of these people in the Garden.”¹⁹ Later, the noble Messenger ﷺ was to say of her, “Whichever direction I looked on the Day of Uhud, I saw her fighting to defend me.” On that day, Umm ‘Umāra sustained twelve major wounds, some from swords and some from spears.

This love for the Prophet ﷺ and the desire to become a martyr in his defence was not unique to the men who were fighting, but was shared by the families of the martyrs, and

¹⁹ Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 237.

homage must be paid to them too. Nothing mattered to these families so much as the safety and wellbeing of the Messenger ﷺ, every other consideration was trivial in comparison, even the loss of family members and loved ones. One story that has become famous in this regard is that of the great woman Companion Umm 'Āmir al-Ashhaliyya. The men of her household had gone to Uhud to fight alongside the Messenger, and all three of them perished in the fighting. When the Muslim army returned to Madinah from the battlefield, they made a special effort to visit all those women whose relatives were martyred, and one of the first was Umm 'Āmir. The fighters came to her house and told her that her father, her husband and her brother had all been killed, fighting to defend the Messenger ﷺ, and not one of the men of her household remained alive. She listened in silence. Then after they had expressed their condolences, she asked, "And what of the Messenger of Allah? How is he?" They replied, "He is well, Umm 'Āmir, praise be to Allah, as you would wish." So, she said, "Show him to me so I can see for myself." So, they told her where he ﷺ was, and when she finally saw him, she said, "All misfortunes are nothing so long as you are safe!"²⁰

Then there is the mother of Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, the leader and great warrior of the tribe of Aws, a man not yet forty, who had

²⁰ There are those who believe that the noble Companion who said these words was Asmā' bint Yazīd as-Sakan. And many of the books of *Sīra* refer to her as "a woman from the Banū Dīnār". But the name Duwaydār mentions in his account is "Umm 'Āmir al-Ashhaliyya". We do not know if this second name was simply a patronymic of the first woman, or whether it is the name of a different woman entirely. We have simply used the name used by Duwaydār in his book, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*.

fought with rare bravery at the battle of Uḥud, and survived despite the extent of his wounds. His mother, Umm Sa'd, came running to make sure the Messenger ﷺ was safe, and when she saw that he was well, she said, "Now that I have seen that you are safe, all other misfortune seems as nothing."

The Martyring of Ḥamza

After these extraordinary never-to-be-forgotten Muhammadan scenes, a moment of great sadness was to follow that darkened the story with the evil of the idolatrous enemies of Islam. This moment was set in motion when Hind bint 'Utba commissioned Waḥshī, an Ethiopian slave of hers, with the task of killing Sayyid Ḥamza ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the uncle of the Messenger ﷺ, in exchange for his freedom. She did this to avenge her father, 'Utba ibn Rabī'a, and her brother, al-Walīd ibn 'Utba, both of whom had been killed by Ḥamza at the Battle of Badr.

So, Waḥshī lurked on the edge of the field of battle, waiting for an opportunity to kill Ḥamza, and so to win his freedom. For almost the entire duration of the battle, he lay in wait, looking for the perfect opportunity to hurl his deadly spear into the chest of this great hero. And when the moment came, he threw his spear with deadly accuracy into the chest of Ḥamza as he stood there, fighting in the way of Allah, and Ḥamza fell to the floor, dead. His loss was felt keenly by the Muslims and there was nothing that could make up for it. In that one moment, the enemies of Islam had succeeded in winning half the battle.

After she found out about the death of Ḥamza, Hind, drunk with revenge, came onto the field of battle to see the body of her victim with her own eyes. But even that was not enough for her—she was not satisfied just to see the noble body of the Lion of Islam

stretched out and bleeding upon the ground, she wanted to revenge herself upon him still further. So, exceeding all bounds of decency, she took up her knife and mutilated his pure noble corpse. Then she cut open his body and took out his liver. And this beautiful noblewoman of Quraysh with a taste for poetry transformed into a savage wild animal, gnawing at the liver of Hamza, in a sickening scene.

When the Messenger ﷺ later came and saw the corpse of Hamza, he exclaimed, "Never have I stood in a place that has brought me more distress than this!" It was almost too much for him to bear, and tears of pain and sadness flowed from his blessed eyes. And how could the eyes of the Messenger of mercy not fill with tears at the loss of his dearly beloved uncle and milk-brother, the man who was one of his most trusted generals? He ﷺ wept for him because he had been martyred, and he wept for him because Hind had violated both the sanctity of the human being and death itself.

But, despite his great sadness, it is noteworthy that when one of the Muslims asked him to supplicate against those who had disfigured and mutilated the body of his uncle, Hamza, he ﷺ said, "O Allah, You did not send me to curse people, You sent me as a mercy to all the worlds!" Even in that moment of extreme sadness and pain, when his anger was righteous and more than justified, still, he ﷺ would not curse his enemies.

This scene of the disfigurement of Hamza is truly horrifying, for it shows that when a person lacks belief and lacks a connection to the sacred and divine, all values and ideals go out the window. And that should only be expected, given that a heart that is empty of Allah and empty of belief is a heart that is empty of mercy and empty of the highest ideals, leaving it wide open for all manner of

inhumane and dishonourable impulses.

The fortunes of war turn. Sometimes it is one people's turn and sometimes it is the turn of another. On this occasion, Quraysh counted themselves the victors. Abū Sufyān said, "A day for a day: Uḥud for Badr."

Yes, it is true that the fortunes of war swing one way and then the other, but the Muslims, despite suffering more casualties, had not been fully defeated from a military perspective. And that is why they did not see Uḥud as a defeat, they simply saw it as a trial and a lesson.

How was it not a military defeat? Firstly, the armies were mismatched with the idolaters outnumbering the Muslims by more than four to one. Simply taking to the field was a moral victory in itself. Secondly, Quraysh failed to achieve their military goals. Even though they wounded the Messenger ﷺ, they did not succeed to reach him or take him down. Indeed, the extraordinary valour displayed by the Muslims in defending him represented perhaps the greatest single military victory of the day. And they did not conquer Madinah or march through its gates in triumph. Instead, they retreated to Makkah to fight another day, so where then is the incontrovertible victory that they claimed?

The Lessons of Uḥud

Taking a more holistic view of the battle, beyond considerations of military victory or defeat, we see that the event of Uḥud was full of lessons, spiritual messages and indications. Allah wanted this battle to be a deepening experience for the Muslims on many levels. There were significant lessons to be learnt at every step of the battle. The decision to leave Madinah and face the enemy outside the city bore testimony to the courage and resolve of the

Muslims. The withdrawal of the hypocrites, forcing the Muslims to enter the battle with reduced numbers, had no effect on their morale and resolve to fight. The Muslims' ascendancy for the early part of the battle, despite the huge disparity in numbers, proved that they could inflict defeat on their enemies no matter how large their armies. Then there was the archers' abandoning their posts, and the devastating attack of Quraysh that ensued as a result. Then there was the battle to defend the Messenger ﷺ, and the large number of Muslims who were martyred in the process.

Like all the lessons from the Prophetic *Sīra*, the numerous lessons of Uḥud have profound spiritual implications and dimensions and touch deeply on matters relating to faith. They can be applied to every time and every place. Above all, we learn that success is contingent upon holding fast to the commands of the Messenger ﷺ, whether that be in times of peace or in times of war, and whether that be then or in the present day. As for those who fail to take the Messenger ﷺ as their example, all that awaits them is doom and destruction.

We also learn that the key to victory in war is victory over one's self, for the most most-worshipped god upon the earth is the whims of the self, and the one who is in thrall to his whims and desires can never be successful. The lesson of Uḥud—and the lesson of Badr before it—testify to this fact, for it was only thanks to faith and belief that a small underequipped group overcame an enemy many times bigger and more powerful than it, and would have overcome them again had they followed the instructions of their commander-in-chief.

The definitive account of the battle is found in the Words of Allah. Allah says in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, letting us know what really happened,

❖ Do not feel disheartened and do not be sad. You shall be uppermost if you are believers. If you have received a wound, they have already received a similar wound. We deal out such days to people turn by turn, so that Allah will know those who believe and can gather martyrs from among you. Allah does not love wrongdoers. And so that Allah can purge those who believe and wipe out the unbelievers. Or did you imagine that you were going to enter the Garden without Allah knowing those among you who had struggled and knowing the steadfast? ﴿١٣٩﴾ *Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:139-142

Allah starts these verses with two instructions, the purpose of which are to lift the spirits of those who are with Him. Indeed, He uses the imperative form to further increase their emphasis:

❖ Do not feel disheartened and do not be sad. You shall be uppermost if you are believers. ﴿١٣٩﴾ *Āl ‘Imrān*, 3:139

“Do not feel disheartened” and “do not be sad”! Why not? Because “you shall be uppermost”. But your standing in heaven will not reach those lofty heights unless you are first true believers who have taken the Messenger ﷺ as their example. If you are not believers, then all you will have is disheartenment and sorrow.

The purpose of this great trial was so that Allah could draw a clear line between those whose belief was true and those whose belief was not. There were those whose hearts were still connected to this world and those who longed for the Hereafter. He only tried and tested them to turn them away from this world and to forgive them, so that they might then become His right-acting slaves. Then Allah continues to explain what happened, saying,

❖ Allah fulfilled His promise to you when you were slaughtering them by His permission. But then you faltered, disputing the command, and disobeyed after He showed you

what you love. Among you are those who want this world and among you are those who want the Next. Then He turned you from them in order to test you—but He has pardoned you. Allah shows favour to the believers. Remember when you were scrambling up the slope, refusing to turn back for anyone, and the Messenger was calling to you from the rear. Allah rewarded you with one distress in return for another so you would not feel grief for what escaped you or what assailed you. Allah is aware of what you do. ﴿١٥٣﴾ Āl ‘Imrān, 3:152-153

These Words of Allah are a sufficient explanation in themselves, for they are the lamps that shed light on the experience and reveal its inward and outward lessons and dimensions, but profound commentaries have been made by the great scholars of Islam.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, may Allah have mercy on him, points out that Allah wanted to use this trial to give the believers a taste of the consequences of disobeying their Messenger ﷺ, so that they might learn from it and be more careful and attentive in the future. Moreover, were they to have been victorious on every single occasion, more and more unbelievers would have joined their ranks—as indeed happened after the Battle of Badr—and it would have become increasingly difficult to tell true believers and non-believers apart. It is only when people are made to pass through the crucible that the truth about them becomes clear.

Were Allah to have bestowed victory upon them at every turn and given them complete mastery over their enemies, they would have become arrogant and conceited, as people do when Allah grants them complete expansion in their provision. This is not fitting for them, it is only fitting for them when they experience both expansion and contraction, times of hardship as well as times

of ease. This is a part of the education of the believer, and is a lesson he must learn for him to fully appreciate the Oneness of Allah and what slave-hood to Him truly entails. On the other hand, were the Muslims to have been defeated at every turn, then there would have been no purpose in sending a Messenger, for his Mission could not then ever be fulfilled. Allah's Wisdom dictated the presence of both, although the final successful outcome is only for those who have fearful awareness of Allah.

Ibn Qayyim writes that constant good health, victory and wealth cause the self to become arrogant and conceited, and incline towards this fleeting world, and that is a sickness that prevents it taking its journey to Allah and the Hereafter seriously. But if the self who has this sickness is one for whom the Compassionate Lord desires good, then He assigns it enough trial and hardship to cure it of this sickness that is blocking it from travelling swiftly along the path towards Him. This trial and hardship is much like the foul-tasting medicine administered by a doctor to his patient—if the patient drinks it, his cure can commence, but if he leaves it, his sickness gets worse and worse until it brings about his demise.²¹

For his part, Duwaydār, after mentioning all the explanations provided by our Lord in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, brilliantly remarks that "Allah did not leave His slaves in despair, but swept away their sorrows with kindness and compassion, combining mild rebuke with useful advice, and making it clear to them that defeat did not in any way discredit the purpose for which they fought, nor

²¹ Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Maktabat al-Mawādd, Cairo, 2006, Vol. 2, pp. 128-139.

devalue the principles they sought to defend. Their principles remained the highest principles and their purpose remained the noblest of purposes. Victory and defeat are but incidental outcomes that swing from one group to another, and a part of the pattern upon which Allah created the world.”²²

Finally, there is the lesson for us in what transpired with the Messenger ﷺ, both with respect to his injury and with respect to the rumour of his death. This lesson awakens us to the true nature of our faith. Allah says in His Book,

﴿Muḥammad is only a Messenger and he has been preceded by other Messengers. If he were to die or be killed, would you turn on your heels? Those who turn on their heels do not harm Allah in any way. Allah will recompense the thankful.﴾

Āl ‘Imrān, 3:144

It was a reminder to the Muslims that their Messenger ﷺ was a human being like themselves with an appointed time, but in whom the blessing of Allah was completed and the noble qualities of character were perfected, and that when His Message had been delivered, he too would move on from this world to the Highest Assembly. They learnt from this lesson—as Sa’d ibn Rabī’a and Anas ibn an-Naḍr themselves remarked during the course of the battle—that they were not fighting for Muḥammad ﷺ as a person, but rather for the Lord who had sent him and made him His Messenger.

And even if the body of Muḥammad ﷺ were to die, his spirit would not die, but remain alive and active in the spirit world.

²² Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 216.

And, not only that, but he ﷺ left us the Qur'ān, which continues to flow like a gushing torrent of life through the veins of the believers, and his living *Sīra*, which grants us constant and unceasing access to his Prophetic lights. Whether alive or dead, he ﷺ will always remain the light-bringing lamp.

The Enemy Within

Despite the heroics and sacrifices made by the Muslims, they returned to Madinah unbowed but with heavy hearts, for alongside those who had been killed, more than one hundred and fifty of their warriors had been wounded.

But, instead of their return providing their warriors with the necessary rest they needed to dress their wounds, restore their spirits and properly assess what had happened to them, their enemies within the city took the opportunity to gloat and display their enmity and defiance. The Jews tried to plant seeds of doubt in the hearts of the people and get them to lose trust in the Messenger ﷺ. "Were he truly a Prophet," they said, "he would not have lost to the idolaters. No, he is but a man who seeks kingship and dominion, so some days he wins and some days he loses."

The hypocrites, under the leadership of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, also seized this opportunity to undermine the morale of the Muslims, trying to make them call into question the wisdom of the decision to fight outside the city. The desert Arabs, allies of Quraysh, imagining the Muslims to be in a weakened state, considered the opportunity ripe for an assault on Madinah.

But, the Muslims had come to know their enemies well, and these attacks did not affect their morale. They showed no sign of weakness and continued to hold their heads up high as is shown by the events of two days later. News had reached the Messenger

ﷺ that the Qurayshi forces were started to regroup in the region of ar-Rawḥā', near the village of Ḥamrā' al-Asad, and were preparing to launch an assault on Madinah itself, so he assembled the Muslims and told them to ready themselves to head out immediately to intercept the enemy. And they all rushed to comply. Not a single one stayed back, not even those who had been badly wounded. The only ones the Messenger ﷺ forbade from coming were those who had not been present at the Battle of Uḥud—the honour of participating in this campaign was for the warriors of Uḥud alone.

The unparalleled fighting spirit of these men was matched only by the depth of their love for the Messenger ﷺ. This is exemplified by the words of one of the men of the Banū Ashhal: "My brother and I fought alongside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ at Uḥud and both of us were wounded when we returned to Madinah. But, when we heard the caller of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ announce that he wanted men to go forth in pursuit of the enemy, I said to my brother, 'How can we let any opportunity to go out to battle with the Messenger slip us by?!' And by Allah, though we had but a single steed between us, and I was the less wounded, we went forth with the Messenger ﷺ, taking it in turns to ride."²³

So, once again, the men of Uḥud went forth, carrying their wounded with them, their resolve and spirits undiminished, to face the Qurayshi army. When the Muslim army reached the village of Ḥamrā' al-Asad, they set up camp and readied themselves to fight. They stayed in the camp for three days, but

²³ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 88.

the Qurayshi army did not appear, for when their commanders heard how quickly the Muslims had mobilised, and realised their readiness to fight, they were thrown into panic. How had the Muslims mobilised their forces so quickly, despite their wounds and exhaustion? Quraysh had also received word that those who had not fought at Uḥud had come forth this time, eager to fight, although we know that was not actually the case. So, Quraysh took the decision to return to Makkah rather than face the Muslim forces. The two armies had not met on the field of battle, but the outcome was as valuable to the Muslims as a military victory.

In Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān, Allah pays tribute to the faith and courage displayed by these Muslims in going forth to meet the enemy without fear or hesitation, saying,

❦ Those who did good and had fearful awareness among those who responded to Allah and the Messenger after the wound had been inflicted will have an immense reward, those to whom people said, “The people have gathered against you so fear them.” But that merely increased them in belief and they said, “Allah is enough for us and the Best of Guardians.” ﴿٣٧﴾ Āl ‘Imrān, 3:172-173

Quraysh knew now that no single foe could ever again stand up to the Muslims or inflict defeat upon them, for even though the Muslims had suffered a military setback at Uḥud, their heads remained unbowed and their spirits buoyant. Such resolve could not be overcome. Their will combined with the Will of Heaven had made them unassailable.

How wise and timely this decision by the Messenger ﷺ to go forth in this way, taking only those who had fought at Uḥud with him! By means of this one wise decision, he dispelled the feelings of gloom and failure that had set in following the Battle of Uḥud

and healed the wounds of the soul and restored the spirits of the Muslim community.

The Incident at Bi'r Ma'ūna

An Attempt on the Life of the Messenger ﷺ and the Banishment of the Banū an-Naḍir

Throughout the third and fourth years after the Hijra, between the times of the Battle of Uḥud and the Battle of the Confederates, true stability was still to prove out of reach for the Muslim state, for an atmosphere of hostility continued to pervade the city and the plotting of the malcontents continued unabated. This finally culminated in an attempt on the life of the noble Messenger ﷺ.

This attempt made on his life by the Banū an-Naḍir was the second of two important events that happened in this period, the first being the slaughter at Bi'r Ma'ūna, and no work of *Sīra* would be complete without making some mention of them.

In the fourth year after the Hijra, a devastating tragedy was to befall the Muslims that was to strike them a psychological blow no less painful than that of the Battle of Uḥud, and claim as its victims a company of the best Companions, including many who had memorised large portions of Qur'ān.

The books of *Sīra* mention that one of the leaders of the Banū 'Āmir, a man named Abū Barā', had come to visit the Messenger ﷺ earlier in the year and had asked him to send a group of Qur'ān reciters to the people of Najd to call them to Islam. When he made this request, the Messenger ﷺ had replied, "I am afraid of what the people of Najd will do to them." Abū Barā' said, "They will be under my protection. Send them and let them call the people to

your faith.”²⁴

So the Messenger ﷺ entrusted the task to seventy men, all of whom had memorised Qur’ān and many of whom were close friends of his and “Companions of the Bench”. When they arrived in the area, a man called ‘Āmir ibn at-Ṭufayl immediately went among the tribes and tried to turn them against the Muslims, and his efforts proved successful. The tribes ambushed the Muslim delegation in an area known as Bi’r Ma’ūna, and massacred them, leaving only one man alive: ‘Amr ibn Umayya.

‘Amr ibn Umayya succeeded in escaping and getting back to Madinah, where he gave the Messenger ﷺ the news of what had happened. The Messenger ﷺ was distraught at the loss of these Companions and Qur’ān reciters whom he had ranked among his closest friends, and his first response was to say, “This is the work of Abū Barā’.

This is exactly what I feared would happen!” The massacre at Bi’r Ma’ūna affected the Muslims deeply and caused them great heartache and pain.

The situation was exacerbated by ‘Amr ibn Umayya’s actions during the course of his return to Madinah, for, on his way home, he had come upon two men from the Banū Kilāb and, thinking them responsible for what had happened to his comrades at Bi’r Ma’ūna, had killed them in retaliation. But, unbeknownst to him, these two men were from a tribe with whom the Messenger ﷺ had a peace treaty. So, when the Messenger ﷺ heard what he had done, his anguish grew, and he had no option but to remedy the situation as quickly as possible by sending blood money to the families of the men who were killed.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 159.

The money due to them was a considerable sum, more than the Messenger ﷺ himself had, so he decided to go and ask the Jewish tribe, the Banū an-Naḍīr, for help, for they were allies of the tribe of the two men killed. The Banū an-Naḍīr agreed to do what they could to intervene on behalf of the Messenger with the Banū Kilāb in order to find a way to recompense the tribe that was suitable to all parties. But, they said, they needed a little time to withdraw and discuss the matter among themselves to decide on the best way to resolve things. However, it quickly became clear that they had not deferred to discuss ways of how to help the Messenger ﷺ but rather of how to kill him.

This was treachery at its very worst—publicly offering a Prophet of Allah help and assistance, while privately plotting to kill him. And it must not be forgotten that they were bound to him by a peace treaty. They planned to take advantage of the visit of the Messenger ﷺ to commit the deed. The Messenger ﷺ was sitting by the wall of one of their houses and there was a window above his head. It was proposed that someone drop a heavy rock on his head from the window and rid themselves of him once and for all.

A man called ‘Amr ibn Jihāsh ibn Ka‘b volunteered to do the deed, and made his way to the upper storey in order to throw the rock from the window. But Allah would never allow His Messenger ﷺ to be killed by the Jews, and so He informed him of their intentions. The Messenger ﷺ straight away stood up and walked away, saying nothing to the two Companions who had accompanied him, Abū Bakr and ‘Alī, in order not to raise any suspicions. It was only when they rejoined him later in Madinah that he ﷺ told them what the Jews had been planning.

It was completely unpardonable what the Banū an-Naḍīr had

done, for there is no crime worse than attempting to kill a Messenger of Allah. It changed the Muslims' attitude towards them completely: they went from being valued allies to outright enemies.

The Messenger ﷺ wasted no time, and sent immediate word to them that they had ten days to leave the city. They realised the gravity of their mistake, but knew that it was already too late and there was no way to change the Messenger's mind. They had but one option and that was to comply.

But, the leader of the hypocrites, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, sent word to them, telling them not to leave, and promising them that he would send them two thousand of his warriors to defend them from the Muslims. So, the Banū an-Naḍīr reversed their decision to leave and instead barricaded themselves within their fortresses. Then they sent word to the Messenger ﷺ, telling him, "Do what you will! We will never leave our homes!"²⁵

The Messenger ﷺ now had little choice but to move against them, so he instructed his men to make ready to fight the Banū an-Naḍīr and punish them for their betrayal and disregard for the traditions of the land, to say nothing of their blatant contravention of the charter of Madinah. Their actions were an open rejection of the state of peace and security that the noble Prophet ﷺ had granted them throughout the time he had lived among them.

The Muslims mobilised their army and laid siege to the

²⁵ As-Sibā'ī, Muṣṭafā, *as-Sīra an-nabawīyya*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Beirut, 2010, p. 87; al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Maktabat al-Mawādd, Cairo, 2006, Vol. 2, pp. 152-153.

fortresses of the Banū an-Naḍir. For their part, the Jews stayed where they were, waiting for either their ally, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, or the Banū Qurayẓa to come to their aid, but, just like with the Banū Qaynuqā‘, the days passed and nobody came. Finally, after waiting in vain for six days, the Banū an-Naḍir agreed to go into exile in exchange for the Messenger ﷺ sparing their lives.

And, as agreed, he ﷺ allowed them to leave the city in peace and go wherever they wanted. But, before they left, they flattened their houses so the Muslims would not be able to make use of them. Then, they headed for the region of Khaybar where many of them stayed, although a few continued to Syria. It was about this tribe that Sūrat al-Ḥashr was revealed in which Allah tells us that it was He Himself who took vengeance upon them and He Himself who exiled them for what they had planned to do to His Prophet ﷺ. Allah says,

﴿It is He who expelled those who disbelieved among the People of the Book from their homes to the first gathering place. You did not think that they would leave and they thought that their fortresses would protect them from Allah. Then Allah came upon them from where they least expected it and cast terror into their hearts. Their houses were pulled down by their own hands and by the hands of the believers. People of insight, take note!﴾ Al-Ḥashr, 59:2

Their awareness that Allah, the Living, was always there, personally directing and overseeing the passage of events, filled the Muslims with a sense of peace and tranquillity, for they knew that He is the All-Knowing, All-Wise and that everything happens according to His Will and His Decree. The first few verses of Sūrat al-Ḥashr deal exclusively with the People of the Book and how

Allah punished them, but Allah did not forget the role played by the hypocrites and the verses that follow discuss them and their contribution to events. These noble verses truly show how hypocritical and deceitful they were, even towards those whom they counted as their allies and friends. Allah says,

﴿ Did you not see the hypocrites saying to their brothers, those among the People of the Book who are unbelievers, "If you are driven out, we will leave with you—we will never obey anyone to your detriment. And if you are fought against, we will help you"? Allah bears witness that they are truly liars. If they are driven out, they will not leave with them. If they are fought against, they will not help them. And if they did help them, they would turn their backs, and then they would not be helped. ﴾ Al-Hashr, 59:11-12

The Uprising of the Banū al-Muṣṭaliq and the Role of the Hypocrites

When news reached him that the Banū al-Muṣṭaliq were mobilising their forces and getting ready to launch an attack on the Muslims, the Messenger ﷺ assembled a small army and set out to nip their rebellion in the bud. But of greater importance than the short battle itself, is the light shone on the treacherous nature of the hypocrites and the very real danger they posed to Islam and the Muslims. And, even more important still, is the glimpse we get into how the Messenger ﷺ dealt with his enemies and foes, and the depth of the wisdom displayed by his approach.

The books of *Sīra* mention that when the Messenger ﷺ and his men set out to quell the uprising of this group of insurgents outside Madinah, he was accompanied by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy and a number of the hypocrites. When the Muslims reached the

area in which the insurgents lived, and set siege to them, an argument broke out between one of the men of the Anṣār and one of the Emigrants over who should have access to a well.

This argument grew so heated that the former called for his fellow Anṣārīs to come to his aid and the latter called on his fellow Emigrants, stirring up and enflaming the feelings of tribal loyalty and partisanship that everyone thought had disappeared. The two sides were on a collision course until the Messenger ﷺ intervened decisively, saying, "What is this call from the time of Ignorance?! Abandon it, for it is rotten to the core."

The Messenger ﷺ considered attempts to stir up tribal feeling and call people to action on that basis to be "a call from the time of Ignorance", a harmful relic of pre-Islamic culture that Islam had sought to bury completely. And he ﷺ described it with a very interesting word—"muntin"—a word that means rotten, decaying and foul-smelling. So, by extension, any form of talk that discriminates against other Muslims, or creates division among them, on the basis of race or tribe, is offensive and rotten.

But 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy had found precisely what he had been looking for—a way to dig up the smouldering embers of the time of Ignorance and re-open wounds that had closed—so he continued to incite his followers, and said, referring to the Emigrants, "Have they not done all of this to you? They have come into our lands, caused us great bother and crowded us out!" Then he added, directing his words towards the Anṣār, "This is something you have brought upon yourselves, for it was you who invited them into your land and you who shared with them your wealth. But, by Allah, were you to withhold what you have from them, they would leave and go somewhere else."

He hoped that his words would incite them to rise up against

the other Muslims and stop paying zakat, for he considered zakat to be a form of economic oppression. He sought to divide the ranks of the Muslims and weaken their unity.

Then he made an oath, saying, "By Allah, when we return to Madinah, the mighty will drive out the weak!" meaning that he himself would drive the Messenger ﷺ from the city.

Immediately, Allah sent down verses from His Noble Book, making it clear that the might of the Messenger ﷺ and the might of the believers stemmed directly from the might of Allah:

❖ They say, "If we return to Madinah, the mightier will drive out the inferior." But all might belongs to Allah and to His Messenger and the believers. But the hypocrites do not know this. ﴿Al-Munāfiqūn, 63:8

‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy did not stop there, but continued to speak badly about the Messenger ﷺ, proving, beyond a shadow of doubt, that he was an unbeliever.

The Messenger ﷺ already knew him to be a deviant hypocrite, and probably also knew him to be an unbeliever, but the Messenger ﷺ never denounced him for his unbelief, for it was his *Sunna* to only judge by the outward and leave the secrets of the Unseen in the world of the Unseen. Belief resides in the heart, and no one can know with absolute certainty what lies in the heart aside from Allah. The Messenger ﷺ was to say, "I have been commanded to only judge according to what lies in the outward." This is an important lesson for us all. If the Muslims of the world were to properly heed and follow this Prophetic injunction, much of the injustice we see in Muslim societies would be avoided, to say nothing of the radicalism and extremism that has taken root in many places.

When ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard how ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy had insulted the Prophet ﷺ, he could no longer hold back his rage and asked the Messenger ﷺ to order Ibn Ubayy’s death. The response of the Prophet ﷺ illustrates perfectly the extraordinary degree of his forgiveness and tolerance. He said, “No, ‘Umar, lest people start to say that Muḥammad kills his Companions!”

When ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy’s son, ‘Abd Allāh, heard what his father had said, he immediately came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said, “It has reached my ears that you have decided to have (my father) ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy executed. If that is indeed the case, then let me be the one to do it, for I could not bear to see the man who killed my father walking free. I would feel compelled to kill him and then I would have killed a Muslim and be destined for the Hellfire as a result!” The Messenger ﷺ replied, “That is not something I would have you do! No, let him be, and as long he continues to live in our midst, we will treat him well.”

After the campaign finished and they started on their way back to Madinah, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy went ahead and stood by the gate to the city, waiting for his father to arrive. The moment his father stepped through the gate, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh drew his sword, pointed its tip at his father’s chest, addressed him, saying, “By Allah, you will not enter this city before Muḥammad ﷺ, and you will not enter it before he gives you permission to do so!” This response by the son to the rudeness of the father showed wisdom beyond his years, and ensured that it was the mightier who entered the city first and the hypocrite, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, who followed.

This story shows the devotion the Muslims had towards their Messenger ﷺ. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd Allāh was ready to cut off the

head of his father should his Messenger ﷺ have commanded it, a manifestation of the deep love the Messenger ﷺ had planted in their hearts. But, the Messenger did not require that of him. Instead, despite everything that this great hypocrite had done, he instructed him to treat him well and with courtesy.

This abuse toward him ﷺ met with no response except kindness and courtesy. And not just common courtesy, but courtesy of the highest kind, for when 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy was on the point of death, his son came to the Messenger ﷺ, to ask him for his shirt to use as a funeral shroud, and the Messenger ﷺ gave it to him. Then he asked him to perform the funeral prayer over the body of his father and ask forgiveness for him, and the Messenger ﷺ said that he would.

And the Messenger ﷺ did as he said and went to pray the funeral prayer over him. So, 'Umar said to him, "Messenger of Allah, are you really going to pray over this man, given who he was, and knowing that it was he who was behind the slander! Did your Lord not forbid from doing this?" The Messenger ﷺ replied, saying, "Allah left the choice up to me, for He said,

﴿ You can ask forgiveness for them, or not ask forgiveness for them. ﴾ At-Tawba, 9:80

I choose to pray over him, and I will ask for his forgiveness more than seventy times!"

The position the Prophet ﷺ took in this matter was not a contravention of the commands of Allah, for such a thing would not be possible for His Messenger ﷺ. Rather, he ﷺ sought by it to show Muslims—and, indeed, non-Muslims—the true spirit of tolerance and forgiveness that his religion embodies and represents. He provided us here with another illustration of the

true meaning of good character.

As things would have it, in this instance, Allah endorsed the position suggested by 'Umar, and sent down the following verse, reinforcing what He had already said about the matter in Sūrat at-Tawba:

❖ Never pray over any of them who die or stand at their graves. They rejected Allah and His Messenger and died as deviators. ❖ At-Tawba, 9:84

But this does not negate the wisdom of the position taken by the Prophet, for a number of scholars have noted that the course of action chosen by him had a positive outcome, for almost one thousand idolaters became Muslim when they saw the magnanimous and honourable way in which the Messenger ﷺ treated his greatest enemy in Madinah, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy.



The Battle of the Trench: A Turning Point in the Course of History

The Battle of the Trench, also known as the “Battle of the Confederates”, was more a battle of faith and nerves than it was an armed encounter, but, even so, the results of this battle changed the course of Islamic history. After the Banū an-Naḍīr had been exiled from Madinah, the only Jewish tribe left in the city was the Banū Qurayṣa, although the pact they had signed with the Messenger ﷺ guaranteed them security, stability and peaceful coexistence in Madinah.

When the exiled Banū an-Naḍīr arrived in Khaybar, the Jews there gave them a hero's welcome, and Khaybar was transformed into the largest concentration of Jews in the peninsula. To all intents and purposes, it became the centre for the Zionism of the age. The two groupings, the Banū an-Naḍīr and the native Jews of Khaybar, formed the nucleus of a broad confederacy that they hoped would include Quraysh and other tribes hostile to the Messenger ﷺ. The avowed aim of this confederacy was to deal a crushing blow to the Muslims in Madinah and be rid of them

once and for all.

This newly formed Jewish coalition in Khaybar decided to send a delegation to Makkah to enlist their support. This delegation comprised two men of the Banū an-Naḍīr, Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab and Kināna ibn ar-Rabīʿ ibn abī al-Ḥuqayq, and two men of the Banū Wāʾil, Hawdha ibn Qays al-Wāʾilī and Abū ʿAmmār al-Wāʾilī.

They approached Quraysh with their malevolent project, suggesting to them that they join forces against Muhammad. "In this way," they said, "we will finally bring an end to him and his followers." This proposal was exactly what Quraysh had been waiting for, and Abū Sufyān welcomed it warmly, saying, "Welcome! There are no people dearer to us than those who help us in our war against Muhammad!"¹

Then he said to them, "Tribe of Jews, you are the people of the first book, and know the differences we have had with Muhammad, so tell us, whose religion is better: his or ours?"² The very fact that Quraysh asked this ignorant question of the Jews shows that they were already starting to have doubts about their idolatrous beliefs. How would the Jews respond? Would they tell the truth even though they themselves had rejected it?

The Jews opted for dishonesty. They replied, "Your religion is better than his religion, and you are far closer to the truth than

¹ See al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 379; Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Maʿārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 185.

² Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 380; Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Volume 3, Dār al-Maʿārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 418.

him!” How could a people who believe in the Oneness of Allah see idolaters as being better in the eyes of Allah than those who follow a religion that calls to One god and prohibits the ascribing of partners to Him, a religion that forbids wrongdoing and vile deeds? But, could one really expect anything different from these Jews who had long spread corruption on the earth? It was almost inevitable they would treat the religion of Allah with hostility and prefer idol worshippers to Muslims.

These plots and alliances did not go unnoticed by Allah and He did not fail to draw His Messenger’s attention to them and make His position clear: that His curse was upon them. Allah says in Sūrat an-Nisā’,

❖ Do you not see those who were given a portion of the Book believing in idols and false gods and saying to those who disbelieve, “These people are better guided on their path than the believers”? Those are the ones Allah has cursed. And if someone is cursed by Allah you will not find anyone to help him. ❖ An-Nisā’, 4:51-52

The agreement was made and the coalition was formed, incorporating, alongside Quraysh and the Jews, four of the main tribes of idolaters: the huge Banū Ghaṭafān, the Banū Fizāra, the Banū Murra, and the Banū Ashja’. These tribes came in under the banner of Quraysh, and their alliance with the Jews was officially ratified at the beginning of the fifth year after the Hijra. It came to be known as the “Treaty of the Confederates”.

These confederates took a solemn oath that they would not pull out of the pact and would not leave Madinah alone until they had wiped all trace of Islam and the Muslims from the surface of the Earth. Then they set forth from Makkah for Madinah, ten thousand heavily armed warriors under the leadership of Abū

Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, a journey of four hundred kilometres in front of them, a distance they were to cover in approximately ten days.

The moment Muslims learnt that this huge army was on its way, they readied themselves to fight, but the total number of fighting men available to them was little more than three thousand. This huge discrepancy in size between the two armies undoubtedly was the cause of a great deal of worry and concern for the Muslims, but, thanks to the suggestion of Salmān al-Fārisī, they came up with a solution to protect themselves and offset that difference. They dug a trench almost six kilometres long, four metres deep and four metres wide, around the city. This trench was dug across the areas where the approach to the city was open and lacking in natural barriers. It was imperative that this defensive project be completed before the enemy arrived. In other words, the Muslims had less than ten days to build a trench.

It is a well-known fact about the city of Madinah that it is surrounded on most sides by natural fortifications. The volcanic rock formations that were found almost everywhere around the city provided it with a ready-made defence against attack from most directions, for they were largely impassable to camels and horses and any other form of cavalry. There was only one direction from which the city could be easily accessed, and that was the plain below Mount Uhud. So, the Muslims worked, night and day, to make that area safe, and it was extraordinary how much they got done, despite having little in the way of tools. Indeed, many used just their bare hands or the most makeshift of shovels.

The Messenger ﷺ himself worked on the project as hard as anyone else, lugging away rocks and sand. It was a community effort, and everyone did what they could. No man was above such work, even those who had been ranked among the highest nobility

of their people. Take 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: He carried away rocks from the trench in his clothes, that being his only means of carrying them. Before Islam, this man would not even have lifted a single small stone for all the gold of the peninsula, and yet here he was today, a true symbol of humility and sacrifice. Such was the change wrought by the Prophetic education on the way such men viewed the world.

The trench was completed just as the invaders approached, and they were shocked and confused to find this unexpected barrier barring their progress on Madinah. A direct attack was now impossible and victory was no longer assured, for the guarantee of victory had been contingent on two things: an overwhelmingly huge army and a lightning fast attack, and that option was no longer on the table. Their plans of a swift and decisive victory had evaporated, and their morale was dented. Most battles of that era typically took a day or two at most to produce an outcome, as we saw at Badr and Uḥud, but here was a battle of a totally different sort. It could not be resolved quickly, and whenever conflicts dragged on, new factors came into play, and results became harder to predict or anticipate.

Salmān al-Fārisī's presence in Madinah was clearly part of the Divine Plan. It was for this vital task that he had been brought to Madinah, that he had endured all he had endured in his search for the Truth, and that he had met the Prophet and become Muslim. No one else could have initiated this but him, for the concept of a trench was alien to the Arabs. The only people of the time who used them as a tool of defence were the Persians, his fellow countrymen.

As soon as the idolaters and Jews realised it was no longer possible to launch a direct attack, they amassed their forces a short

distance from the trench and began to look for possible weak points through which they might enter the city. In the meantime, there were a few isolated skirmishes and the two sides engaged intermittently in exchanges of arrow fire.

The advance of the enemy had been stopped, it is true, but the fears of the Muslims in Madinah had yet to be allayed. They still had just cause to be afraid, for not only were they heavily outnumbered, but the enemy at the door meant that the well-being of their Prophet and religion was threatened, as was that of their families and children. It was what would happen to their loved ones that pre-occupied them, for they lived in an age when civilians captured in war were sold into slavery. Moreover, their supplies and provisions were dwindling and there was almost nothing left in the city to eat.

During one of these isolated skirmishes, three Qurayshi warriors succeeded in breaking through the defences of the Muslims and getting into the city. Two of these warriors were famed for their prowess in battle: the universally feared 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wudd, and 'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl. As soon as 'Amr entered the city square, he immediately began to show off his warrior skills, challenging all-comers to single combat.

When no one came forward to take up his challenge, he raised his voice and said in a mocking tone, "What is this? Are you all scared? Where is this Paradise of yours about which you always speak? Do you not wish to go to your Paradise? Come! I will send you there!" Seeing that no one else had taken up the challenge, 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib stepped forward to face him. When 'Amr saw 'Alī, he reckoned him a callow youth and considered him unworthy of facing him. How could such a one as he dare face the greatest warrior of Quraysh, a man worth a thousand

men?

‘Alī addressed ‘Amr, saying, “‘Amr, do you not remember that you once promised Allah that no man of Quraysh would ever invite you to one of two things except that you would choose one of them?” ‘Amr said, “Yes, I did indeed say that.” So ‘Alī said, “Then I invite you to Allah and His Messenger and to Islam.” ‘Amr replied, “I have no need of that.” So ‘Alī said, “Then I invite you to single combat!”

It is in moments such as these that the worth of the Muhammadan education truly reveals itself. This youth, who was young enough to be one of his grandchildren, stood directly in front of this fearsome warrior of Quraysh and unhesitatingly invited him to Islam. And then, when the warrior rejected the invitation, calmly invited him to single combat!

‘Amr had been a close friend of his father, Abū Ṭālib, and so he said to him, “By Allah, ‘Alī, I do not want to kill you!” ‘Alī replied, “But I would love to kill you!” These words enraged ‘Amr. Who would dare say such a thing to him? So he dismounted from his horse and hamstrung it, indicating his absolute resolve to fight to the death.³

But this fearsome sight did not unsettle ‘Alī in the slightest. Instead, he remained calm and composed. This young man filled with unwavering belief and confidence faced off against this mighty idolater filled with arrogance and anger. Everyone present was afraid for ‘Alī, but after only a few short moments of thrust and parry, ‘Amr fell to the ground, dead. The moment the Muslims saw this, a great *takbīr* reverberated through their ranks.

³ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 193.

They could scarce believe their eyes. One of Quraysh's main symbols of arrogance and pre-Islamic ignorance had fallen. As soon as the other two saw this, they turned and fled. The Companions chased after them and succeeded in killing one, but the other, the archenemy of Islam, 'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl, made good his escape.

This was a notable setback for Quraysh and started their campaign off badly, but, for the Muslims, it was a moral-boosting victory. The moment Quraysh learnt of 'Amr's demise, they sent word to the Messenger ﷺ, asking for the return of his body in exchange for ten thousand *dirhams*. The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Take him for free! We do not derive profit from the dead!" They thought that the constrained circumstances in which the Muslims found themselves might make them accept a derisory offer such as that, but the Messenger ﷺ taught them a lesson in dignity, honour and self-respect.

A Predictable Treachery

Disaster follows disaster. In this case, it was the treachery of the final Jewish tribe in Madinah, the Banū Qurayẓa. They chose this moment to abandon their pact with the Messenger ﷺ and publicly ally themselves with his enemies, thereby putting the entire Muslim community at risk, for suddenly a huge hole had been torn open in their defences.

When Huyayy ibn Akhtab, a Khaybari Jew known for his bitter hostility against the Muslims, had come to the leader of the Banū Qurayẓa, Ka'b ibn Asad al-Qurazī, in order to try and persuade him to ally himself with the invading forces, Ka'b had initially refused, saying, "I have signed a pact with Muḥammad and given him my word and I will not go back on it. He has

always been straight with me and has never been anything but truthful.”

Ḥuyayy interrupted him, saying, “Woe to you, Ka‘b! I have brought you the strength and might of the age. I have brought you Quraysh and Ghatafān, and they have given me their word that they will not stop and will not leave until we have wiped Muḥammad and his followers from the face of the Earth!” Ka‘b replied, “By Allah, what you have brought is the humiliation and abasement of the age! Go away and leave us to our treaty.”

But, Ḥuyayy would not give up, and continued to work away at him until he weakened his resolve. Finally, Ḥuyayy made him a solemn promise, saying, “If Quraysh and Ghatafān leave without having defeated Muhammad, then I will stand by you and come here to your fort and share with you in your fate.” These were the words that finally persuaded Ka‘b ibn Asad, and he immediately announced his rejection of the pact with the Muslims and his alliance with the Confederates.”⁴

Despite their candid acknowledgement that they had only ever known Muḥammad ﷺ to be true to his word from the first moment they had met him, still they showed disdain and disregard for the contract they had made with him. They put aside the charter of Madinah which had guaranteed their rights to security and stability, because they knew that, by its terms, they were duty-bound to come to the aid and defence of their fellow signatories in the event of an invasion.

Their rejection of the contract was a rejection of the principle

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 190; al-Jazā‘irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, p. 199.

of peaceful coexistence, a principle which had hitherto protected their standing in Madinah and kept them safe. They committed the very worst form of treachery, but it would cost them dearly as they were soon to discover. They had no excuses, for they knew exactly what had happened to the two tribes before them, the Banū an-Naḍīr and the Banū Qaynuqā'. They knew that acting against the Muslims never ended well. Whoever did so would pay the price and bring down the ruling of Heaven on them.

When the Messenger ﷺ heard of the treachery of the Banū Qurayẓa, he was disappointed and deeply upset. But he was not prepared to give up on them yet, so he sent Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, a man who had at one time been their close friend and ally, to go and speak with them and try to get them to put things right before it was too late.

When Sa'd reached them, he reminded them of the pact they had drawn up with the Messenger ﷺ and the peace and security that it had brought them in Madinah. Then he asked them not to embark on a course of action that would pose a threat to the Muslims. But they shut their doors in his face and responded rudely to his reminders and requests, telling him, "Muḥammad has no treaty with us!" Then they went back to bulking up their fortifications and making their preparations for war.

The Prophet ﷺ had never seriously expected the Jews to physically take part in the defence of Madinah, even though that was one of the terms of the Charter of Madinah, and had never asked that of them. All he required of them was for them to maintain their neutrality. In the circumstances, that itself would have been a victory of sorts. But, unfortunately, they reverted to type, and resumed their age-old practice of disrespecting pacts and covenants.

By abandoning their pact with the Messenger ﷺ, the Banū Qurayẓa opened a breach in the Muslims' defences through which the invading forces could now enter, for their territory opened up directly onto the city. Their alliance had the potential to nullify the effect of the trench.

The Banū Qurayẓa started first by helping the invading army in small ways, sending them regular consignments of foodstuffs and provisions, although a significant portion of these consignments were intercepted by the Muslims.

The Jewish betrayal raised the anxiety level of the Muslims. So perilous was the situation that Abū Bakr was later to say, "We were more afraid for our children in Madinah from the Banū Qurayẓa than we were afraid of Quraysh."

The Muslims had no option but to face the forces of evil on all fronts and it was indeed a heavy trial. Allah describes the situation in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, saying,

﴿ When they came at you from above you and below you, when your eyes rolled and your hearts rose to your throats, and you thought unworthy thoughts about Allah, at that point the believers were tested and severely shaken. ﴾
Al-Aḥzāb, 33:10-11

The enemy army came upon the Muslims from above and below, and surrounded the Muslims on all sides. Their army not only outnumbered the army of the Muslims, but all the inhabitants of the city. Had not the trench prevented them from launching the direct assault they had planned, they could have overrun the entire city and all those in it.

But, without a shadow of doubt, Allah was bound to come to the rescue of His Messenger ﷺ and protect him and those who

stood by him. Allah did not send His Messenger ﷺ just for him to then be defeated in battle, and He did not guide the Muslims to Islam just for them to then be wiped out. No, He had very different plans for them, so He revealed the following verse to set their hearts at rest:

❖ Allah will not give the unbelievers any way against the believers. ﴿An-Nisā', 4:141

The condition for a people to receive Allah's aid is that they be believers, true believers, not just Muslims, for there is a huge difference between a Muslim and a believer.

The Messenger ﷺ only came to bring the Message of Heaven to believers—it is up to them to prove themselves worthy of carrying it. And, indeed, it is only believers who are able to bear the trust, not those who are merely Muslim.

So, they had to pass through this crucible that their Lord had decreed for them in His infinite wisdom so that they could then metamorphosise and emerge with purified hearts on the other side, finally acquiring the degree of faith Allah had always wanted for them.

Aside from a few exchanges of arrow fire, the two sides had yet to clash in a meaningful way. Both sides were waiting for something to happen that might change the course of events and influence the eventual outcome. It was a battle of nerves in which the Muslims had the advantage. They trusted in Allah with the firm conviction that He would reward those who fought in His way or died supporting His noble Messenger ﷺ. The idolaters, on the other hand, despite their huge army, had no faith or inner conviction.

During one of the brief exchanges of arrow fire that

characterised this battle, the close friend of the Messenger ﷺ, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, was struck by an arrow and badly wounded. In this critical condition, he made a famous supplication, "O Allah, if You have willed that this war against Quraysh is to last longer, then allow me to live to fight it, for there is no people I like fighting better than a people who have harmed and rejected your Messenger ﷺ and expelled him from his land. But if you have brought an end to the war between us and them, then grant me my martyrdom. But do not let me die until I have seen the Banū Qurayẓa dealt with in a manner pleasing to me!"⁵

Allah answered his supplications. Following the victory of the Muslims at the Battle of the Trench, Quraysh never fought another war against the Muslims and the unbelievers never again invaded Madinah. And when the time came to deal, once and for all, with the treacherous Banū Qurayẓa, he himself was given the responsibility of passing judgement over them. Everything for which Sa'd asked his Lord was granted to him.

The Role of the Political Factor

Looking for a way to ease their predicament, the Messenger ﷺ thoughts turned towards the Banū Ghaṭafān, the largest of the tribes to ally itself with Quraysh. If he could somehow convince them to return to a position of neutrality and pull out of the coalition and take their troops home, it would disrupt the enemy's unity and significantly weaken their frontline. He approached his Companions with this idea, suggesting that they gave the Banū Ghaṭafān an incentive by offering them half of that year's date

⁵ Al-Jazā'irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, p. 201.

crop. Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, one of the Companions whom the Messenger ﷺ consulted, asked, "Is this something that you yourself have come up with and you would do for us, or is it something that Allah has commanded of us and which we have no recourse but to obey?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "It is something that I would do for you, and, by Allah, I only do it because the Arabs have united against you and strike at you from every direction. I want to break up this coalition that has formed against you." So, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh said, "Messenger of Allah, when we were idolaters, these people had no chance of even getting a single date from us. So, now that Allah has guided us to Islam and made us mighty on account of it, should we then turn around and give them our produce?! No, by Allah, from now until the day that Allah judges between us, they will get nothing from us but the sharp tips of our swords!"⁶

The Messenger ﷺ could have made any decision he wanted, and not one of his men would have failed to carry out his command even if they themselves had initially vehemently opposed it. Indeed, not only would they do as he instructed, they would have done it gladly. But the noble Messenger was not a tyrant and never acted in a high-handed manner. On the contrary, he rejected authoritarianism and despised those who engaged in it. And, for that reason, he ﷺ readily acquiesced to the counsel of his Companions.

This story shows that consultation is a central principle in

⁶ Al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2013, p. 407.

Islam, in times of war as much as in times of peace, for even the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself, the wisest of all Allah's creatures and the one least in need of advice, engaged in it.

As fate would have it, at almost the exact same time as these discussions were taking place, one of the wisest men of Ghaṭafān, Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd al-Ghaṭafānī, came to see the Messenger ﷺ. Unbeknownst to the people of his tribe, Nu'aym had become Muslim, and he was now unsure as to what he should do, so he came to the Messenger ﷺ seeking advice. The Messenger ﷺ replied, "If you stay here among us, you will just be one more man. So, go back to your people and see what you can do there. But act as if you have no connection to us, for war is deception."

Having received the Messenger's blessing, Nu'aym went forth to fulfil his divinely ordained role in the affair which was to singlehandedly break apart the coalition and split the ranks of the enemy. His first move was to go to the Banū Qurayẓa, with whom he had long had a close relationship. He said to them, "Banū Qurayẓa, you know how much I love you and the special relationship that we enjoy." "Yes, we know it well", they replied.

"Then heed my words!" Nu'aym said, "Your situation is very different to that of Quraysh and Ghaṭafān. Madinah is your homeland—everything you own is here, your wives and children are here. You cannot simply pack up and leave. But the same is not true for Quraysh and Ghaṭafān. They may have come here to fight Muḥammad and his Companions, and they may be your allies for the moment, but there is nothing tying them to this place, for their lands and families are elsewhere. They will grab the opportunity to defeat Muḥammad should it arise, but should it not, then they will return home and leave you to fight the Muslims alone, and you are not powerful enough to defeat them

singlehandedly.”

These words of his rang true, so the Banū Qurayza asked him for his advice. He replied, “I think you should refuse to fight alongside them unless they first send you some of their men to remain with you as hostages as a sign of good faith that they will not leave until the Muslims have been defeated” They replied, “You have advised us well!” So, he asked them to keep his part in the matter secret and they promised to do so.

From there, he moved on to Quraysh, where he was granted an audience with Abū Sufyān and a few other notable tribal leaders. He started by saying to them, “You know how much I love you, and you know my position towards Muhammad?!” They replied, “Yes, of course we do.” So he said, “Something has come to my attention which I feel duty-bound to tell you about, but please do not let anyone know that it was me who told you! As you know, the Jews deeply regret having broken their agreement with Muhammad. Well now they have taken steps to remedy that. They have sent word to him to apprise him of their regret and to ask him if he would take them back and restore the terms of the original covenant if they took a number of the leading men of Quraysh and Ghatafān hostage and surrendered them to him so he could put them to the death. They would then join forces with him to repel the invaders. And Muḥammad has sent back word agreeing to their proposal!”

“So,” Nu‘aym said, “my advice to you is this: if the Jews come to you asking you to send them some of your men as a sign of good faith, do not send them even a single man!” When he finished speaking, Quraysh warmly thanked him for his advice.

Then Nu‘aym moved on to his own tribe, the Banū Ghatafān, and told them exactly the same thing he had told Quraysh. And

because he was one of them, they believed him without question.

Soon after, the leader of Quraysh, Abū Sufyān sent word to the Banū Qurayẓa, asking them to prepare to fight the decisive battle the following day. But it so happened that the following day was the Sabbath, so the Banū Qurayẓa replied, "We cannot fight alongside you tomorrow. Firstly, it is the Sabbath, and secondly, we will not line up alongside you unless you demonstrate your good faith to us by sending us some of your men as hostages. We do not trust that you will not leave us to fight him alone should this attack fail."⁷ Naturally, Quraysh rejected this offer out of hand. Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd's clever efforts to split the ranks of the enemy and sow the seeds of discord in their midst had succeeded.

The Impassioned Supplication of the Messenger ﷺ

The heaviness of the trial the Muslims endured during the course of this battle is a lesson in itself. Indeed, a study of Prophetic *Sira* leaves one in no doubt that it is in those moments when the trials are at their hardest that the root of belief puts forth its shoot and illuminates the hearts of the right-acting. If Muslims want victory, then it is incumbent that they become true believers, not just Muslims. And that can only be achieved through purification and engendering a state of absolute faith and pure belief in the Oneness of Allah with an awareness and acceptance of the Will of Allah. The Qur'ān itself tells us that "Allah is with the believers".

The Muslims had never faced as intense a trial as that they faced during the battle of the Trench, and, just like at Uhūd, the

⁷ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, pp. 197-198.

situation was to get worse before it got better. As we mentioned before, one of the main purposes of trials is to distinguish the true believers from the hypocrites who always seem to find a way of insinuating themselves into the ranks of the Muslims. The trial at the battle of the Trench could be seen as an earthquake, come to purify the Muslims, in the same way that red-hot fire refines gold and removes the dross. By this process, Muslims become the believers their Lord wants them to be.

While the Messenger ﷺ never lost focus on what was going around him, his heart never ceased to be connected to Heaven and expectant of his Lord's mercy. He made sure that the morale of his men never dropped and gave them confidence and belief that they would emerge out of this trial strengthened and unbowed. And when the day finally did come when the trial was lifted, it represented a tremendous victory from Allah. The Prophet ﷺ used to frequently make supplication to his Lord, saying, "O Allah, You who send down the Book, You who are swift at reckoning, bring defeat to the confederates! O Allah, defeat them and shake them to their cores!"

Among the encouragements the Messenger ﷺ gave to his Companions to keep their hopes up, one truly stands out. When things were at their hardest and everything was seemingly against them, he brought them the most positive piece of news imaginable. He ﷺ said, "By the One who holds my soul in His hand, Allah will grant you relief from all these difficulties you see before you. I have high hopes that I will do *tawāf* of the Ancient House in safety and that Allah will place the keys to the Ka'ba in my hands. I have high hopes that Allah will destroy Chosroes and Caesar and that you will take their treasures and spend them in the way of Allah."

The Messenger ﷺ only ever spoke the truth and his prophecies invariably came true in the exact manner foretold. For he did not speak from whim, especially in circumstances as serious as these, a battle whose outcome was critical for the future of Islam and the Muslims. Every word that came from his noble mouth stemmed from direct revelation or inspiration from his Lord.

The believers knew this, and, for that reason, these prophecies lifted their spirits and brought peace and tranquillity to their hearts. But these words had a very different effect on the hypocrites. When they heard the Messenger ﷺ utter these words, they could not hide their incredulity and a lot of what they had kept hidden came floating to the surface. Exactly as Allah planned it, it suddenly became much easier to tell them apart from the true believers.

Some of these hypocrites withdrew from the army on the pretext that their homes were in danger, as if the act of defending the city would not protect their homes in the same way that it protected the homes of the Muslims! Others took the opportunity to mock the Prophet ﷺ, saying, "Here is Muhammad, promising us access to the treasures of Chosroes and Caesar, when none of us today can even go out and defecate in safety!"⁸ The Divine response came immediately: Allah says in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb,

﴿ At that point the believers were tested and severely shaken. When the hypocrites and people with sickness in their hearts said, "What Allah and His Messenger promised us was mere delusion." And a group of them said, "People of Yathrib, your

⁸ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 426.

position is untenable, so return!" some of them asked the Prophet to excuse them, saying, "Our houses are exposed", when they were not exposed; it was merely that they wanted to run away. ﴿ Al-Aḥzāb, 33:11-13

By means of these noble verses, Allah brought to light the secret and innermost thoughts of the hypocrites, for Allah knows people's secrets and what they think they have kept concealed. This was one of the positive things to result from this huge "earthquake"—it caused the hypocrites to come forth from the ranks of the believers like rats from a sinking ship, leaving only the right-acting Muslims behind, that chosen elite whom Allah had purified and readied for the Rabbānī journey with His most noble Prophet ﷺ.

A Miracle from Heaven

Three weeks after this trial had begun, Allah decreed that the time had come for the natural elements to intervene and help bring about His heavenly decree that the Muslims be saved. What happened next was a miracle as spectacular as the trials had been hard. From seemingly nowhere, a devastating wind appeared, the like of which had never before been seen in the region, and blew through the enemy camp. In a matter of minutes, it had blown out all their fires and sent their tents and provisions flying, filling their hearts with fear and terror.

So powerful was this wind that the soldiers could barely stand let alone move, and the same was true for their camels and horses. To maintain a siege had become an impossibility, for they were utterly exposed to the ravages of the storm and lacked even rudimentary shelter to protect themselves now that their tents had blown away and they could not sustain a fire long enough to cook

any food. Moreover, they were terrified that the Muslim army, who looked on the wind as a gift from Allah, would take the opportunity to launch an attack they would not be able to withstand given the damage the storm had dealt them.

A state of panic swept through the ranks of the unbelievers. Their leader, Abū Sufyān, was so afraid that he immediately issued the command to break off the siege and return home, without consulting or informing any of his allies. Indeed, he himself was one of the very first to saddle his camel and ride away, not even waiting for his own men. It was at this moment that Allah revealed the following verses in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, emphasising that He was with the Messenger ﷺ and the Muslims and would never disappoint them or fail to be there when they needed Him most:

❧ You who believe, remember Allah's blessings upon you when forces came against you and We sent a wind against them and other forces you could not see. Allah sees what you do. ﴿Al-Aḥzāb, 33:9

The Muslims woke up to a miraculous dawn, a dawn of mercy and divine victory. The sun had not yet risen, but the wind had ceased to blow and the sky was clear. And not a single enemy could be seen in the area in front of them—it was as if they had never been there at all. There were no men, no tents and no camels—everything had disappeared and not even a single trace of their presence remained.

It was in this moment that the Muslims truly came to appreciate the scope of Allah's solicitude and concern for them, that they truly got a taste of His Divine mercy. Tranquillity settled on their hearts and they breathed a deep sigh of contentment and relief. The Messenger ﷺ looked upon his Companions, light radiating forth from his face, and said to them, "There is no god

but Allah alone. He has been true to His promise and given victory to His slaves. He alone has defeated the Confederates. He surpasses everything!" Then he ﷺ said, "Now, we will be the ones who attack them and they will (never again) attack us."

Duwaydār writes, "Strictly speaking, this Battle of the Confederates was not a war fought on the battlefield, for there were no real military encounters to speak of during its course. Rather it was a battle of nerves and a test of heart and resolve. This is the reason the hypocrites failed and the believers succeeded and won. Throughout this encounter, the despair, doubt and weakness of the hypocrites was matched and exceeded by the steadfastness, patience and strength of the true believers, showcasing the extraordinary strength of resolve granted by faith. Allah wanted to test the believers and test their faith by means of this hardship, and when they passed this test, Allah extended His hand towards them, granting them mercy and rescuing them from their enemies."⁹

Sūrat al-Aḥzāb describes the position of Heaven towards the hypocrites. Allah says,

❖ When the believers saw the Confederates, they said, "This is what Allah and His Messenger promised us. Allah and His Messenger told us the truth." It only increased them in faith and in submission. Among the believers there are men who have been true to the contract they made with Allah. Some of them have fulfilled their pact of death and some are still waiting to do so, not having changed in any way at all. So that Allah might recompense the truly sincere for their sincerity and punish the hypocrites, if He wills, or turn towards them.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 431.

Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Allah sent back those who disbelieved in their rage without their achieving any good at all. Allah saved the believers from having to fight. Allah is Most Strong, Almighty. ﴿Al-Aḥzāb, 33:22-25

Allah did indeed spare the believers the iniquity of fighting. The only thing that saved the believers from being wiped out completely was Divine Providence and Solitude, although the Muslims had first put into place in their own hearts all the ingredients and means necessary for Allah's Mercy to descend upon them. So, when Allah tested them and forced them to undergo this collective hardship, and when He revealed the hypocrites for who they were and separated them from the ranks of the believers, the true believers remained firm and the moment arrived when He extricated them from their predicament and brought the trial and test to an end.

﴿It is Our duty to help the believers.﴾ Ar-Rūm, 30:47

They emerged from the trial as Allah intended for them to emerge—with purified hearts, refined souls and iron wills. All that remained was for them to ready themselves for the third Muhammadan stage. The call to Allah had started in Makkah and shone forth in its second stage in Madinah. And now, today, following the Battle of the Trench, it was to once again make its way back towards Makkah to begin the third Prophetic stage, so that Allah could complete His blessings to the Muslims.

The Banū Qurayẓa: Treachery and Punishment

It is possible to summarise the entire story of the Banū Qurayẓa in two words: treachery and punishment. Treachery has reared its head throughout Jewish history, and divinely ordered punishment

has followed on its heels. Just like the Banū an-Naḍīr when they tried to kill the Prophet ﷺ, the Banū Qurayẓa betrayed the Messenger ﷺ and broke their contract with him, allying themselves instead with his enemies, among whom were the Banū an-Naḍīr and the Jews of Khaybar. These enemy forces were under the leadership of Quraysh, and their avowed purpose was to wage war on the Muslims and wipe Islam from the face of the Earth.

The books of *Sira* mention that after the enemy army left, frustrated and defeated by the Decree of Allah, the Muslims, including the Messenger ﷺ, returned to their homes and put their weapons aside. The Muslims had not had a moment's rest for weeks and desperately needed to recuperate with their families and children.

But, they would have to wait a while, for that same day, a Wednesday according to the account of Sayyida 'A'isha, shortly after midday, Jibrīl came to the Messenger ﷺ and said to him, "What? Have you set aside your weapons, Messenger of Allah?" "Yes", replied the Messenger ﷺ, so Jibrīl said to him, "Allah, Mighty and Majestic, commands you, O Muhammad, to go now to the Banū Qurayẓa, for I am going there and I will make them shake and tremble."

So great was Allah's anger at these Jews who had formed an alliance with those who sought to wipe out the Muslims in Madinah, that He did allow His Messenger ﷺ even a single night's respite. Instead, He commanded him to head straightaway to the area of the Banū Qurayẓa and punish them for their treachery, and the Messenger ﷺ conveyed those instructions faithfully to his Companions, telling them to take up their weapons once again and to reform their ranks.

Then, placing ‘Alī ibn abī Ṭālib in charge of the army, the Messenger ﷺ addressed them, saying, “Let none of you pray ‘Asr until he gets to the lands of the Banū Qurayṣa!” So, the army set forth for the forts of the Banū Qurayṣa. As soon as they drew near, ‘Alī heard curses and hurtful comments about the Messenger ﷺ issuing forth from behind their walls, so he hurried back to intercept the Messenger ﷺ before he got there and begged him to stay back and not get too close. “Why not?” asked the Messenger ﷺ, “Is it because of the hurtful things you hear them say about me?” “Yes, Messenger of Allah”, replied ‘Alī. (“That is the reason.”) So the Messenger ﷺ said, “As soon as they catch sight of me, they will immediately stop saying those things.”

It was not possible for the Muslims to let the Jews be and act as if nothing had happened. Their actions had been tantamount to thrusting a poisoned spear into the back of the Muslims. They gone back on their word to the Muslims and shown the utmost disrespect for the covenant they had signed with them that guaranteed them security and stability and allied themselves with the enemy in wartime, the worst betrayal. No worldly law would accept such behaviour, so how could it be accepted by Heaven?!

The Muslim army surrounded the lands of the Banū Qurayṣa, leaving no avenue for escape, and then sent the demand to surrender themselves to the judgement of Allah. The Banū Qurayṣa looked to each other for ways out of their predicament, but they had no answers. As the days passed, the siege started to take more and more of a toll until, on the fifteenth day, they sent their representative, Shās ibn Qays, to negotiate with the Messenger ﷺ. They said, “Ask the Messenger ﷺ to give us the same deal that he gave the Banū an-Naḍīr. Tell him we will leave our weapons, take our women and children and possessions, and

go into exile.” But when he put the proposal to him, the Messenger ﷺ refused. So Shās said, “Then spare our lives and let us take just our women and children. We will leave all our possessions behind.” But, once again, the Messenger ﷺ refused, telling him that their only recourse was to surrender to the judgement of Allah. So Shās went back to his people and told them of the Messenger’s final decision concerning them.

They knew now that they had no option but to submit themselves to the judgement of Allah. Their leader, Ka’b ibn Asad, a man who himself had admitted that he had never known Muḥammad ﷺ to be anything but honest and truthful, chose this moment to address his people, saying, “My people, there are but three viable options before us. Choose whichever one seems fit. “Our first option is to accept this man and become Muslim, for, by Allah, he clearly is a Prophet sent from Heaven. He matches the description found in our Books. If we take this option, then our lives and the lives of our women and children will be safe.” However, his people refused this option, saying, “We will never abandon the judgements of the Torah.”

So Ka’b said, “If you do not like this first option, then our second option is to kill our women and children and then go out to fight Muḥammad and his Companions with our heads held high and our swords in our hands. Let us depart from here as true men, leaving behind nothing to tie us to this world and leaving it to God to judge between us and Muhammad. If we are killed, then we will have gone to our deaths leaving behind no loved ones about whom we must worry. And if we win, then, by my life, there are plenty more women and children out there for us!” They replied, “What good would life be were we to kill these poor creatures?”

So Ka'b moved on to his final option, "If you do not like this option, then hear my third. As tonight is the night of the Sabbath, Muḥammad and his men will feel safe from us and will not be on their guard. So let us use that as an opportunity to launch a surprise attack upon them!" They replied, "Would you have us profane the Sabbath?!" When he heard their response, Ka'b shouted at them in exasperation, saying, "There is not one man among you who has ever in his entire life shown a single ounce of resolve or determination!"

In the end, no option remained but for them to surrender and submit themselves to the judgement. During the course of that night, four Jewish men became Muslim, three of whom were not part of the Banū Qurayza and one of whom was. He became Muslim and then left, removing the traces of his passage as he went. The Messenger ﷺ said of him, "That was a man whom Allah saved on account of his honesty."

The next morning, when the Banū Qurayza surrendered and submitted themselves to the judgement of the Messenger ﷺ, some men from the tribe of Aws came to the Messenger ﷺ to ask him to go easy on them. The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Tribe of Aws, if the man I appoint to pass judgement on them is one of you, would you be satisfied with that?" They replied that they would, so he said, "Then that man shall be Sa'd ibn Mu'adh." Sa'd was the chief of Aws.

So, a group of them went to fetch Sa'd ibn Mu'adh from his tent near the Mosque of the Messenger ﷺ. Sa'd had been severely wounded during the Battle of the Trench and so had not been able to join the rest of the Muslims in conducting the siege. They now carried Sa'd back to the territory of the Banū Qurayza so that he could pass judgement on them. After having received assurances

from both sides that they would comply with whatever sentence he issued, Sa'd ruled that all the men who were capable of carrying arms be put to death, and all the women and children be taken into slavery. When he had finished passing judgement, the Messenger ﷺ said to him, "The judgement you have passed on them is that of Allah from above His seven heavens!" And the sentence was carried out just as he instructed, with the men being executed and the rest being taken into captivity.

There are no exact figures as to how many were killed, although there are more than a dozen different narrations that discuss the matter, including some Jewish accounts. But such accounts are known to falsify and distort, even when they succeed in insinuating themselves into the books of Ḥadīth and, sometimes, even into the books of *Sira*. Some of these accounts state that there were eighty men, and others that there were more than three hundred.

However, according to the most authentic Muslim sources, the correct figure was closer to twenty-three. This figure makes sense, for their men had taken refuge in a single house immediately prior to the sentence being issued, and the houses of Madinah of that time could typically hold no more than twenty people.

Whatever the case, after the sentence of execution was carried out, the Messenger ﷺ took their homes and distributed them among the poor of the Muslims. As for Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, he was to die later that night. Allah had granted him his wish not to die until he had seen the Banū Qurayza dealt with in a manner pleasing to him.

The penalty for treason is invariably death—that has ever been the case in nearly every code of laws, even in this modern era

when the death penalty has largely been abolished. This instance was no different, and not only that, but Sa'd's judgement, in terms of its particulars, almost exactly matched the judgement found in the Torah itself: It says in Deuteronomy 20:12,

“When you advance on a town to attack it, first offer it terms for peace. If it accepts the terms for peace and opens its gates to you, then all the people there are to be put to forced labour and made your servants. However, if they refuse to make peace with you but prefer to make war against you, you are to put it under siege. Then, when your Lord hands it over to you, you are to put every male to the sword. But as for the women, the little ones, the livestock, and everything in the city, even the spoils of war, you shall take that as booty for yourselves ...”¹⁰

In his discussion of this event, Duwaydār asks, “If the Jews could do something like this, then could the Muslims ever have been properly safe from them? Did it really make sense for the Muslims to leave them thus in their midst, privy to all their secrets and broadcasting those secrets to their enemies? Would it have been wise to banish them as they had banished the Banū an-Naḍīr, leaving them free to regroup and incite the tribes against the Muslims and form coalitions and confederacies to attack them and invade their homes? The Banū Qurayẓa had already done this once at the Battle of the Trench, so what was there to stop them doing it again? That battle almost succeeded in wiping out Islam and the Muslims, had a miracle not come from Allah and saved them! If we view things in this light, then was there really anything wrong in what the Muslims did, laying siege to these

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 441.

traitors until they surrendered and wiping them out as they themselves had hoped to wipe out the Muslims?!"¹¹

The Calm after the Storm

After the Battle of the Trench had ended and the Banū Qurayza had been eliminated, there was a period of calm, both political and military, and the Muslims finally felt safe. For the first time since their state had been established, they knew a degree of stability. The Madinan experiment had come of age and was now truly an Islamic state in the fullest sense of the word.

It may have been only five short years since the Muhammadan state had been established, but much had happened and been achieved during that time. Those struggles and experiences had finally born fruit, producing a society with an exceptional level of social and religious stability, and a group of people who exhibited unprecedented spiritual advancement and development. Islam had fully consolidated its standing within the Peninsula, and was now in a position to take steps to purify the entire peninsula of the stain of idol worship.

It was during this period that two important figures from Quraysh entered Islam: Khālid ibn al-Walīd and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ. Their conversion constituted a great victory for Islam. 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ's story is particularly noteworthy, but strangely absent from the majority of contemporary works of *Sīra*.

Ibn Hishām mentions that, following the conclusion of the Battle of the Trench, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ decided that the time had come for him to go and spend some time at the court of the

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 435.

Negus, the king of Ethiopia. The situation in the world lacked clarity, and he wanted to wait things out until he could better see towards whom the balance of power would tilt: the Muslims or the idolaters in Makkah. So he met with a number of his closest friends and convinced them to go with him, saying, "I think we should go to the Negus and spend some time there in his court. Then, we can see from afar how things turn out. If Muḥammad proves victorious, then we can stay there with the Negus indefinitely, since it would be preferable to live under his rule than under that of Muhammad. And if our people prove victorious, only good will await us from them." Agreeing to his proposal, they collected gifts to give the Negus and made the journey to Abyssinia.

The moment they arrived, 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ went straight to the audience chamber of the king to greet him, for he had long enjoyed a close and warm relationship with him. But, as he went, he passed Muhammad's emissary to the Negus, 'Amr ibn Umayya ad-Ḍamīrī, on his way out. After he had exchanged greetings with the king and the king had expressed how very pleased he was to see him, 'Amr said, "That man who just left is one of the emissaries of our greatest enemy, so please give him over to me so that I may kill him!" The king was shocked by these words and became extremely angry.

'Amr was taken aback by the strength of the king's reaction, and so he immediately apologised and tried to mollify him. But his efforts were in vain, and the king's anger at his old friend did not subside. When he finally managed to compose himself, the king gave his answer by asking 'Amr a question. He said, "Are you asking me to give to you the emissary of a man to whom the great Namus has come, the same Namus that came to Mūsā, so that you

can kill him?!" 'Amr replied, "Is that who he truly is, O King?"

The Negus said, "Woe to you, 'Amr! Listen to me and follow him, for, by Allah, he is in the right and following what is true, and he will triumph over all who oppose him, in the same way Mūsā triumphed over Pharaoh and his armies." When he heard this, 'Amr asked the Negus, "Will you then take my pledge of allegiance to Islam?" The Negus replied that he would, so 'Amr stretched out his hand and the Negus took hold of it. Then 'Amr gave him his pledge of allegiance to Islam.¹²

What an extraordinary scene! A man—and not just any man, but a man famed among the Arabs for his cleverness—becoming Muslim at the hands of a king whom he had supposed to be Christian, for the king had never made his Islam public and 'Amr had no reason to suppose him to be Muslim.

While there is much to this story that is astonishing, it leaves one in no doubt that this virtuous king had a great deal of knowledge about Islam and a tremendous love and respect for the Messenger ﷺ. 'Amr came to the palace of this "Christian" king an idolater, holding nothing but enmity and ill will in his heart towards the Muslims, and left it a Muslim!

The strength with which the Negus defended the Messenger ﷺ, his absolute certainty that Muḥammad would triumph over Quraysh in the same way that Mūsā, peace be upon him, triumphed over his enemies, and his advice to 'Amr to follow Muhammad, as well as him being the one to personally accept 'Amr's conversion to Islam, indicate that the Negus was a Muslim. But for certain reasons, he preferred to keep his Islam hidden.

¹² Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawīyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 225.

‘Amr left the presence of the king and went back to his Companions, keeping the fact that he had become Muslim from them. Then he left Abyssinia, and headed for Madinah. On the way there, he came upon Khālid ibn al-Walīd. When he saw, he said to him, “Where are you going, Abū Sulaymān?” Khālid replied, “It has all finally become clear to me, ‘Amr. I know now that Muḥammad is the Prophet and I am going to him to become Muslim.”

‘Amr said, “That is the exact same reason for which I have come!” And so it happened that when Khālid ibn al-Walīd came to see the Prophet, he was in the company of his compatriot, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ. Both men stood before the Messenger ﷺ at the same time and gave him their pledge of allegiance to Islam.

Khālid ibn al-Walīd later told Abū Bakr about a recurring dream he had had that had brought him to Islam. In this dream, he saw himself living in a barren and drought-stricken land. Then he saw a path leading out from that land to another land that was green and verdant. Khālid understood the meaning and took the path that led to good by setting out for Madinah.

Khālid ibn al-Walīd’s conversion to Islam was a triumph. While ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ can be considered one of the greatest political masterminds of Islamic history, Khālid ibn al-Walīd was one of the greatest strategists and military geniuses this world has ever seen. He led his armies into a hundred battles and never lost a single one.

Indeed, a few short years later, he was to be responsible for liberating Iraq from Persian occupation and the Levant from Byzantine occupation, bringing huge swathes of territory under the control of the Muslims. These two victories were the two greatest victories documented in early Islamic history. ❖❖❖

The Trip to Make 'Umra and the Pledge

Now the Islamic state had achieved social cohesion and political stability, the alliances of the idolaters started to fall apart and their morale was draining away.

With their enemies within Madinah eliminated and finally ensured full security, the Messenger ﷺ sent forth a few raiding parties to undertake punitive expeditions against the tribes who had taken part in the Battle of the Trench on the side of the Confederates, and it would not be long before he and the Muslims were in a position to reduce their enemies to size, one after the other.

Once he had accomplished everything he had set out to do, the Messenger ﷺ announced his intention to go to Makkah to do the voluntary pilgrimage ('Umra). This would be no easy matter since Makkah was under the control of the idolaters of Quraysh. But, still, this was something the Muslims had long dreamt of, so when they heard the Messenger ﷺ say this, they leapt for joy. The Emigrants were especially excited, since it would be their first visit back to their homeland since they been forced to flee and leave it

behind over seven years before.

So, the Messenger ﷺ set forth for Makkah, taking fourteen hundred men and women with them, all of them dressed in simple pilgrim garb, carrying only light arms with them. Reaching Ḥudaybiyya, an area less than ten kilometres distant from Makkah, they set up camp and sent their sacrificial animals out to pasture.

When Quraysh heard that Muḥammad had come to Ḥudaybiyya, they mobilised their forces for war, thinking that Muḥammad had come to fight. A delegation from the tribe of Khuzā'a was sent to the Prophet ﷺ to ask him why he had come, so he ﷺ told them he had only come to visit the House and carry out his 'Umra.

So they went back to Quraysh and told them, "You have acted with undue haste, for Muḥammad has not come to fight, he has only come to visit the House." But this assurance was not enough for Quraysh, so they said, "No, by Allah! He will never enter this city against our will, nor shall the Arabs ever say that we allowed it!" All Quraysh were really worried about was what the Arabs would say about them!

The next man to come from Quraysh to see the Prophet ﷺ was 'Urwa ibn Mas'ūd. He told the Messenger ﷺ that Quraysh would never give him permission to enter Makkah and that they were making ready to fight him. While he was in the Muslim camp, 'Urwa witnessed how the Companions were with their Prophet ﷺ and it made a lasting impression on him. He could not help but admire the depth of their love and respect for him.

When he returned to Quraysh, he told them that he too did not believe Muḥammad had come to fight but rather only to do

‘Umra. Then he said, “Tribe of Quraysh, I have been granted audiences with Chosroes, Caesar and the Negus and visited them in their palaces, but never have I seen a leader more revered and respected among his people than Muḥammad is among his Companions!”¹

In the meantime, the Messenger ﷺ sent ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān to Makkah to try and convince Quraysh of the peaceful intentions of the Muslims. ‘Uthmān had standing with Quraysh, given that he was part of the Banū Umayya and closely related to Abū Sufyān. When he arrived, he met with the Qurayshi leaders and promised them that the Muslims had not come to fight, only to do the ‘Umra. Then he asked them to allow the Muslims into the city to carry out their rites, but they once again refused. “But”, they told him, “if you yourself want to go and do your *ṭawāf*, you are more than welcome.” ‘Uthmān replied, “I will never do *ṭawāf* before Muḥammad has done it!”

During this standoff, Quraysh sent out a small mounted regiment of about forty men to go and harry the Muslims, but before they even reached the Muslims’ camp, they were surrounded, captured and disarmed. But, as soon as they were brought before the Prophet ﷺ, he commanded that their weapons be returned to them and that they be released and sent on their way as a demonstration of the peaceful intent of the Muslims.

‘Uthmān, on the other hand, was detained and prevented by Quraysh from going back to the Messenger ﷺ. And, as a result, a rumour started to circulate that he had been killed. When this rumour reached the ears of the Prophet ﷺ, he assembled all his

¹ *Ibid.* p. 286.

followers and asked them to give him their pledge of allegiance that they would fight. And, to a man, they made their pledge to the Messenger ﷺ that they would gain access to Makkah whatever the cost, for no Messenger could ever allow an emissary of his to be killed without mobilising an army in response.

In these crucial moments, a noble verse of Qur'ān was revealed, endorsing this pledge: Allah says,

❖ Those who pledge you their allegiance pledge allegiance to Allah. Allah's hand is over their hands. He who breaks his pledge only breaks it against himself. But to him who fulfils the contract he has made with Allah, We will pay an immense reward. ❖ Al-Fath, 48:10

The pledge of allegiance to the Messenger ﷺ was a pledge of allegiance to Allah, and the hand of Allah was over their hands, meaning that He himself was the One to whom allegiance was effectively being given. The Messenger ﷺ promised all those who gave the pledge of allegiance that the Garden would be theirs. Everyone who was present at the first battle of Islam, the Battle of Badr, were forgiven all past and future wrong actions, and the same applied to everyone who gave the pledge of allegiance at Ḥudaybiyya. This pledge of allegiance was to become the legal and moral benchmark for all pacts and pledges of allegiance between Muslims.

When Quraysh heard of this pledge of allegiance, they understood its significance. They knew that it meant the Muslims had resolved to enter the city, and that they would not stop nor rest until they had achieved their aim, so they immediately released 'Uthmān in order to stave this off and permitted him to go back to his people. When 'Uthmān arrived back at the camp safely, the Messenger ﷺ was overjoyed to find him still among the

living, for 'Uthmān's standing among the Muslims, as his son-in-law, was even greater than his standing with Quraysh.

'Uthmān wasted no time in delivering his news to the Messenger ﷺ. He told him that Quraysh were still refusing to grant access to the Muslims and showed no sign of relenting. Then he too gave his hand to the Messenger ﷺ and pledged allegiance to him to enter Makkah alongside him.

In the meantime, in a somewhat surprising development, Quraysh had a change of heart. They realised the gravity of the situation facing them and they knew the Messenger ﷺ could not be deterred once he had made his mind up. So, they sent another envoy to the Messenger ﷺ. This time, their envoy was Suhayl ibn 'Amr, a man with whom the Messenger ﷺ was well acquainted. When the Messenger ﷺ saw him approaching, he said, "If the people have sent this man, it means that they are now willing to compromise."

❖ If they incline to peace, you too incline to it, and put your trust in Allah. ❖ Al-Anfāl, 8:61

Although Suhayl ibn 'Amr had come to negotiate, Quraysh had taken one option off the table completely. They would not allow the Muslims to enter Makkah that year, for they feared that it would be taken as a sign of weakness by the rest of the Arabs. "By Allah," Quraysh said, "the Arabs must never be allowed to say of us that we stood by and let Muḥammad and his followers enter Makkah against our will!" So Suhayl instead offered the Muslims a deal whereby they could return and do their 'Umra the following year.

Given the nature of the longstanding feud between Quraysh and the Muslims, the Messenger ﷺ understood their position and

agreed to draw up a treaty to that effect. So he called for 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib and asked him to put the agreement into writing. The precise details of what was written in this agreement are mentioned in the following account:

"The Messenger ﷺ said, 'Write, "In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, All-Merciful."' The representative of Quraysh, Suhayl ibn 'Amr, said, 'We do not know who this "All-Merciful" is! Instead, write, "In Your Name, O Allah."' So the Messenger ﷺ instructed 'Alī to write, 'In Your Name, O Allah.'

"Then the Messenger ﷺ said, 'Now, write, "This is a peace treaty between the Messenger of Allah ..."' Suhayl immediately interjected, 'By Allah, if we accepted that you are the Messenger of Allah, we would never have fought against you nor stopped you from entering the Sacred House. Instead write, "Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh."' So the Messenger ﷺ said, 'Write, "In the peace treaty between Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh and Suhayl ibn 'Amr, the following has been agreed:

1. That there will be a ten-year armistice between Quraysh and the Muslims, during which time members of each side will be forbidden from taking up arms against each other and will be guaranteed safe passage in each other's lands.
2. That anyone who comes to Muḥammad from Quraysh without permission of his guardians will be extradited back to Makkah, while anyone who comes to Quraysh from Muḥammad will be free to stay and will not be extradited.
3. That anyone who wants to will be free to establish a treaty with Muhammad, and anyone who wants to will be free to establish a treaty with Quraysh.

4. That Muḥammad and his people will turn back and go home without entering Makkah this year on condition that they be allowed to enter the city the following year. Quraysh will evacuate the city and give Muḥammad and his Companions no more than three days to complete their 'Umra. During that 'Umra, they will not be permitted to bear arms, apart from swords, and those swords must be kept in their scabbards at all times..."²

The deal was made and the treaty was signed, but some of the Companions, notably 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, were unhappy with the concessions the Messenger ﷺ had seemingly made to Quraysh, especially the second provision. And they were also unhappy that the envoy of Quraysh had refused to allow 'Messenger of Allah' to be written in the document, for it seemed to them that the Prophet ﷺ was compromising on the uncompromisable.

So 'Umar came to Abū Bakr and said to him, "Abū Bakr, is Muḥammad not the Messenger of Allah?" Abū Bakr replied, "Yes, of course he is." So 'Umar said, "Are we not Muslims?" "Yes, of course we are", replied Abū Bakr. So 'Umar said, "And are they not idolaters?" "They are indeed", replied Abū Bakr, so 'Umar said, "Then why are we giving in to them and letting them humiliate us in matters of our religion?" Abū Bakr replied, "Bear with it, for I testify that he is the Messenger of Allah."

Then 'Umar went to the Messenger ﷺ and asked him the exact same questions. The Messenger ﷺ replied, "I am the slave of Allah and His Messenger. I never oppose His Commands and He

² Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Maktabat al-Mawādd, Cairo, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 171.

never lets me down." In a matter of such importance, the Messenger ﷺ would never have embarked on a course of action without first knowing that it was pleasing and acceptable to Allah. But what had complicated matters somewhat in this instance, and made it so hard to accept for some of the Muslims, was the situation with Abū Jandal, the son of Suhayl, the envoy of Quraysh.

Abū Jandal, who had been Muslim for some time, arrived in the Muslim camp just as these proceedings had concluded, having finally succeeded in escaping Quraysh. His unexpected arrival surprised everyone, Suhayl as much as the Muslims, so Suhayl turned to the Messenger ﷺ and said, "The treaty between us is signed, and the second provision states that you must return to us anyone who comes to you fleeing from Quraysh. You cannot back out now!" The Messenger ﷺ admitted that this was true, so he himself went to Abū Jandal and said, "Abū Jandal, stay steadfast and put your trust in Allah. He will give you and other poor Muslims in a position like you a way out in due course. But, as for now, we have just signed a treaty and made a pact with them before Allah, and we cannot break our word." In this way, the noble Messenger ﷺ taught us how much emphasis Islam places on honouring one's contracts and keeping one's word.

As was often the case, Allah's confirmation soon followed, with the revelation of the following verses of Sūrat al-Fath:

﴿ Truly We have granted you a clear victory, so that Allah may forgive you your earlier errors and any later ones and complete His blessings upon you, and guide you on a straight path, and so that Allah may help you with a mighty help. ﴾

Al-Fath, 48:1-3

Allah considered the treaty to be a victory because, first and

foremost, the treaty finally brought about peace between the Muslims and their long-term enemies. Peace is, in of itself, an achievement of the highest order, so when they inclined to peace, the Messenger of peace inclined to it too. The Messenger ﷺ teaches us here that wisdom lies in making compromises for the sake of peace, for peace is something from which everyone benefits. Whenever possible—and so long as it is equitable and fair—the Muslim should always seek peace.

With respect to this particular peace treaty, there were a number of ways in which it was to prove advantageous to the Muslims:

Firstly, it was the first time the idolaters had publicly recognised the nascent Islamic state, and that helped consolidate its status and expand its influence. Furthermore, the ten-year ceasefire the Muslims had agreed with Quraysh gave them the respite they needed to focus their efforts and energies on dealing with the hostile tribes around about them. This was to eventually pave the way for them to conquer Makkah.

Secondly, by creating a safe zone, the treaty made it possible for many Arab tribes to openly enter Islam without fear of consequence or reprisal. The Banū Khuzā'a, a tribe that lived in close proximity to Makkah itself, was one of the first of those tribes to do so.

Finally, the treaty almost immediately received the blessing of Allah, and those verses in Sūrat al-Fath gave the Muslims the good news of the imminent conquest of Makkah.

Initially, some of the Companions were unable to see the wisdom of the decision, asking one another how it could possibly be classed a victory when they had not even been able to visit the

Ka'ba. They based their judgement on first appearances, and were blind to the treaty's long-term benefits. But Allah and His Messenger ﷺ see to the heart of things, and understand what they mean in the long term. Allah says,

﴿ It may be that you hate something when it is good for you. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:216

It quickly became clear to the Muslims though that what the Messenger ﷺ had achieved through this treaty was a political triumph of the highest order. It is narrated from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab that he felt so chastened when these verses of victory were revealed that he spent the rest of his life seeking forgiveness from His Lord through *ṣadaqa*, fasting and prayer on account of what he said on that day.

The Muslims had spent more than ten days on this 'Umra without having been able to do any of its rites, and now, with this treaty signed, they were obliged to go back to Madinah without entering Makkah. But the Messenger ﷺ performed the rites that accompany the completion of a successful 'Umra at Ḥudaybiyya, for despite the fact that they had not been able to carry out their 'Umra as intended, Allah ultimately rewards a person's intention. And, as they had all come with the express purpose of doing the 'Umra, Allah assigned to each and every one of them the reward for a completed 'Umra. (As the Prophet ﷺ said,) "Every man gets what he intends."

When the Muslims saw their Messenger ﷺ change out of his pilgrimage clothes and shave his head in the same manner he would have done if he had actually completed the rites of 'Umra, they immediately followed his example, and it felt to them as if they had properly carried out their 'Umra. Then they headed

home to Madinah.

Shortly after the Messenger ﷺ returned to Madinah, a Muslim man called Abū Buṣayr arrived, having succeeded in escaping from Makkah. A short time later, two men from Quraysh came and demanded his return, citing the terms of the treaty that has just been signed. The Messenger ﷺ duly gave him into their custody. But then, on the way back to Makkah, Abū Buṣayr succeeded in getting free and managed to kill one of the two men. The other man fled. (As for Abū Buṣayr, he set up base in a village that abutted the main caravan routes.) Abū Jandal ibn Suhayl, whom the Messenger had given back to Quraysh at Ḥudaybiyya, heard about Abū Buṣayr and escaped Makkah once again to link up with him, as did nearly every other man who succeeded in getting away from Quraysh. These men joined forces and became a band of highwaymen, waylaying the Qurayshi caravans as they passed by, becoming a major thorn in their sides. They succeeded in cutting off Quraysh's supply route almost completely and Quraysh were at a loss as to what to do. Eventually, they sent word to the Messenger ﷺ, begging him to release them from the clause in the treaty that required him to hand back all the Muslims who came to him from Makkah. "Take them into Madinah!" they said, "They will be safe from us from now on. We will not demand their return!"

These following verses from Sūrat al-Faṭḥ were revealed shortly after:

﴿ It is He who held their hands back from you, and your hands from them in the valley of Makkah, after giving you the upper hand over them. Allah sees what you do. ﴾
Al-Faṭḥ, 48:24

Thus came true the promise the Messenger ﷺ had given Abū

Jandal, when he said to him, "Allah will in due course give you and other poor Muslims in a similar position to you a way out." Thereafter, it became a regular occurrence for Muslims to emigrate from Makkah, and Quraysh ceased to stand in their way. Muslims were free to go in peace and link up with their fellow Muslims in Madinah whenever they wanted.

The Letters of the Messenger ﷺ

At the time in history when the Messenger ﷺ appeared, two major powers, the Persians and the Byzantines, controlled much of the surrounding world, with the former occupying Iraq, Bahrain and parts of Yemen, and the latter the whole of the Levant. These two empires tended to rule by proxy, appointing local rulers to rule in their stead. Although the rulers were from the local populace, the regions in question were influenced, politically and religiously, by the empires that ruled over them. This meant that the Magian faith had spread throughout Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen and Christianity had spread throughout Syria and Egypt. Indeed, in Egypt in particular, the rulers were almost always chosen from the ranks of the Christian Copts.

With the peace treaty with Quraysh signed, the Messenger ﷺ could now dedicate himself to two main tasks: firstly, ridding the Arab peninsula of the Jewish and Arab tribes hostile to Islam; and secondly, sending emissaries to the kings and rulers of the various lands and empires to deliver letters to them inviting them to Islam.

Four letters, due to the importance of those to whom they were sent, are the most significant. These letters are those to the Muqawqis, the Patriarch of the Copts in Egypt; Chosroes, the King of Persia; the Negus, the King of Ethiopia; and, finally, the

Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius.

The envoy sent by the Messenger ﷺ to the Patriarch of the Copts in Egypt was Ḥaṭīb ibn abī Balta'a. After receiving the letter with great respect and deference, the Muqawqis asked Ḥaṭīb, "If he is a Prophet, then what has stopped him from supplicating against those who opposed him and expelled him from his land?" Ḥaṭīb replied, "What stopped 'Īsā, peace be upon him, from supplicating against his people when they took him off to be killed?" The Muqawqis smiled and said, "What an excellent response! You are a wise man sent by another man of great wisdom!"

Then Ḥaṭīb said, "The Prophet ﷺ came to call people to Islam. Those who treated him most harshly were Quraysh, the most bitter of his enemies were the Jews, and those who came closest to him were the Christians. By my life, Mūsā's prophecy of the coming of 'Īsā is no different from 'Īsā's prophecy of the coming of Muhammad, and his calling us to the Qur'ān is no different from his calling the people of the Torah to the Gospel."³ Muqawqis was greatly moved by how positively Islam viewed Christians, and treated the envoy and his letter with great respect. Then he sent him back to the Messenger ﷺ with his reply, a letter almost as positive as the one he received.

If such a cultured and well-mannered response might be expected of a Christian such as the Muqawqis, the response of the Persian king, Chosroes, was completely different. He responded in the rudest and most insolent way imaginable, and that dumb-

³ Al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad, *Fiqh as-sīra*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2006, p. 358.

headedness was to cost him his throne. His letter was delivered to him by 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥudhāfa as-Sahmī.

The kings of that time were almost like demigods, enjoying the worship and adulation of their people. So, when 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥudhāfa arrived and entered the emperor's courtroom, his outward appearance caused a great stir, for it was unimaginable to the Persians who made up the king's retinue that someone dressed so humbly could walk into the palace with his head held so high, showing total disregard for all the customs and protocols of potentates and rulers. 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥudhāfa held a staff in his right hand, and the sound that it made as it struck the marbled floor reverberated through the courtroom and shattered the atmosphere of awe and majesty that had been carefully constructed around the Persian "god".

Everyone looked on with astonishment and bewilderment at this impoverished Arab man before them, unable to believe their eyes.

When 'Abd Allāh was instructed to prostrate before the king, he replied, "We prostrate to no one but Allah." Then he delivered his letter into the hand of the king without even bowing, for such was the dignity, composure and self-respect that the Messenger ﷺ had nurtured in his followers.

The contents of this letter were as follows: "In the Name of Allah, All-Merciful, Most Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah to Chosroes, the ruler of Persia. Peace be upon all those who follow the guidance, believe in Allah and His Messenger, and bear witness that there is no god but Allah, One without partner, and that Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger. I call you to Allah, for I am the Messenger of Allah to all mankind. I bring warning to the living and bring the true word to all

unbelievers. Become Muslim and you will know peace, reject our call and you will bear the sin of all the Magians.”

As the letter of the Prophet ﷺ was read out to him, the king's blood began to boil and his face became redder and redder, until he could no longer contain his anger at this unlettered upstart of an Arab Prophet. How dare he address the King of Kings in this impertinent way?! How dare he ask him to change his faith?! And even more, how dare he place his own name before the name of the king?! How dare this man speak to me like this when I am the emperor who appoints the rulers of major Arab lands such as Najran, Bahrain and Iraq?! So he snatched up the letter and tore it into little pieces. Then he commanded that the man who brought it to him be removed forthwith from his sight.⁴ When the Messenger ﷺ was told what Chosroes had done with his letter, he said, “May Allah rip his kingdom to pieces!”

⁴ In some of the books of *Sīra*, there is another very important account involving ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥudhāfa, this time with the Byzantine emperor. In the nineteenth year after the Hijra, during the Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, a group of Muslims were taken prisoner by the Byzantines, among whom was ‘Abd Allāh. When he was brought before the Byzantine emperor, the emperor offered him his freedom in exchange for him becoming Christian, but ‘Abd Allāh refused. So, they threatened him and tortured him, but he held firm. Then they threatened to throw him into a vat of boiling oil, like they had done to the two prisoners before him, but again he refused. Then the emperor said to him, “If you kiss my forehead, I will pardon you.” ‘Abd Allāh replied, “I will only kiss it if your pardon extends to all the other prisoners.” The emperor agreed and that is what happened. Later, when he returned to Madinah, he told the Caliph, ‘Umar, what had happened, ‘Umar said, “Every Muslim must go and kiss ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥudhāfa on the forehead, and I will do it first!”

The enemies of the Messenger ﷺ in the peninsula—the idolaters of Quraysh and the Jews—observed these events from afar with relish and glee, thinking that the Chosroes would take care of the Messenger ﷺ and his followers for them, and finally rid them of him and his Message. And Chosroes did indeed take steps towards that end, sending word to his deputy in Yemen, Bādhān, instructing him to send two of his mightiest men to go and fetch “this man who claims Prophethood and dares to address me directly” and bring him to him. Incredibly, this Bādhān was as foolish as his Magian master, and did not hesitate to obey his commands. So, he immediately dispatched two of his mightiest men to fetch the Prophet and take him to their king.

So, these two men set forth for Madinah. But, while all this was going on, Allah answered the supplication of His Messenger ﷺ, for the king’s son, Shīrawayh, had risen against his father, killed him and taken over the country.

When the two warriors arrived in Madinah, they went to the Messenger ﷺ to demand that he accompany them back to Chosroes. He ﷺ replied, “Woe to you. Who gave you such an instruction?” One of them replied, “Our lord gave us this instruction.” So, the Messenger ﷺ said to his translator, “Tell him that my Lord killed his lord yesterday.”

When the ruler of Yemen, Bādhān, received the news that Chosroes had been killed just as the Prophet ﷺ had said he would be, he and all those with him became Muslim. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, may Allah have mercy on him, mentions that, in the wake of this event, Islam spread quickly among the people of Yemen, both among its Christians and among its

Magians.⁵

Those who are familiar with the blessed life story of the Prophet ﷺ will have noted that every battle or crisis the Muslims were made to endure was always followed by a fresh victory and success. Such trials were inevitably the prelude to a fresh wave of expansion for Islam. And, as we well know, only a few short years later, during the Caliphate of 'Umar, the Persian empire was destroyed.

The third of these letters from the Prophet ﷺ was sent to the close and honoured friend of the Messenger, the King of Abyssinia, Aṣḥama, also known as the Negus. He had first learnt of Islam through Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, when Ja'far brought the first group of Emigrants to Abyssinia, and he learnt about Islam by observing the Muslims at close quarters and seeing how they comported themselves. He observed the ways in which they worshipped and transacted and recognised their truthfulness and sincerity, and this paved the way for him himself to become Muslim.

We should remember that it was he who convinced 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ to become Muslim, and he who took his *shahāda*. The books of *Sīra* mention that the Negus, Aṣḥama, was the first of those to whom the Messenger ﷺ sent letters to become Muslim. Indeed, it is believed that he became Muslim at the hands of Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib all those years before. Shortly after receiving his letter, the Negus sent a delegation of his fellow bishops and priests to Madinah to publicly recognise the Islamic faith. When the

⁵ Al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad, *Fiqh as-sīra*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2006, p. 361.

delegation arrived, the Messenger ﷺ personally served them and saw to their needs.

When the Companions saw this, they said, "Messenger of Allah, let us do it for you." He replied, "They treated my Companions with great honour and I would like to do the same for them." Besides showing us how extraordinarily concerned the Messenger ﷺ was for his guests, this account also teaches us about the importance of humility and fulfilling one's debts. This is yet another example of what Muhammadan character truly means.

After the Messenger ﷺ recited for them a few verses from the Qur'ān, this delegation of Christians became Muslim, whereupon the following verse was sent down, concerning them:

❧ Our Lord, we believe in what You have sent down and have followed the Messenger, so write us down among the witnesses. ﴿٣٥﴾ *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:53

Proof for the strength of the relationship between the Messenger ﷺ and the Negus and the great love they felt for one another is found in many accounts. The following is one such example, and it harks back to when the Messenger ﷺ asked the Negus to act as his proxy in his wedding to Umm Ḥabība bint abī Sufyān, the chief of Quraysh and his most inveterate opponent. Umm Ḥabība had emigrated to Abyssinia with her husband, 'Abd Allāh ibn Jaḥsh, but he had become Christian after they arrived, causing them to separate. He remained in Abyssinia as a Christian until he died.

The Messenger ﷺ wanted to compensate Umm Ḥabība for all the hardship she had been made to endure throughout all those years of exile since she first emigrated for the sake of Allah, so he decided to honour her by making her one of the mothers of the

believers. So the Negus acted as proxy for the Messenger ﷺ and married her to him, giving her a dowry of four hundred gold dinars from his own pocket. The fact that he was prepared to do this tremendous service for the Messenger ﷺ shows the depth of their friendship and the scale of their mutual love and appreciation.⁶ Umm Ḥabība was to stay in Abyssinia for a number of years until those who had emigrated there, including Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, finally made the journey to Madinah.

The books of *Sīra* mention that when the Negus died later that same year, that is, in the ninth year after the Hijra, the Messenger ﷺ said, "Today, a right-acting man has died. Stand and pray for your brother, Aṣḥama." So, the Muslims went to the mosque and prayed the funeral prayer in absentia for him.⁷

It is well known that the funeral prayer is only prayed on a Muslim, so this strongly indicates that the accounts mentioning the Negus becoming Muslim are sound and accurate. The Negus who succeeded Aṣḥama, however, was hostile to the Messenger ﷺ.

Those who reflect deeply on the *Sīra* will note the wisdom, respect and tolerance which marked all the Messenger's dealings with his opponents and enemies throughout the course of his life, for he ﷺ never failed to put into practice the Words of Allah

﴿ Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair admonition, and argue with them in the kindest way. ﴾

An-Nahl, 16:125

⁶ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 3, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 266.

⁷ *Ibid.* and Ibn Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut, 2005, p. 59.

While this nobility of spirit informed all his dealings with opponents throughout his time on this earth, still, it is important to note that it never stopped him from being firm and decisive when the circumstances demanded it.

The next letter was sent to the ruler of Bahrain, al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā, who was a Magian and governed the land on behalf of Chosroes. This letter from the noble Messenger ﷺ was a striking example of his great wisdom and respect, for, in it, he wrote, "O Mundhir, you are a man who has been blessed with a great intellect in this world, so do not sell the Next World short. This Magianism is the very worst form of faith ... for it brings nothing to the Arabs, not nobility and not the knowledge of the people of the Book. They marry those whom one would be ashamed to marry, eat what one would shy away from eating and worship in this world the fire that will consume them on the Day of Rising! You, a man of not inconsiderable intellect and good sense, must reflect long and hard. Should we not believe the word of one in this world who never lies? Should we not place our trust in one who never acts treacherously, and put our faith in one who never breaks his promise?"

This letter to al-Mundhir was delivered to him by al-'Alā' ibn al-Ḥaḍramī. When he read it, he found its logic compelling, and so, straight away, accepted the invitation to become Muslim. Then, he went out to his people, the people of Bahrain, and invited them to join him in Islam, and many accepted and became believers alongside him. As for those who rejected and remained Magians and Jews, he imposed the *jizya* tax upon them.⁸

⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh as-sīra*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2006, p. 361.

At the same time, the Messenger ﷺ sent 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ to deliver a letter to Jayfar and 'Abd, the two sons of al-Julandā, the joint rulers of Oman at that time, calling them to Islam. These two men and their people immediately accepted the invitation of the envoy of the Messenger ﷺ and became Muslim on the spot. Oman was the first country in history to accept Islam without hesitation, so the Messenger ﷺ made a special supplication for them, saying, "May Allah have mercy on the people of al-Ghubayrā' who believed in me without even seeing me."

The Questions of Heraclius

We would like to conclude our discussion of the letters of the Messenger ﷺ with the letter he sent to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor of the time. Although this letter was much the same as the letters that were sent to the other rulers, what is interesting in this case is the interest Heraclius appeared to take in the Messenger ﷺ.

This letter was brought to Heraclius by Dihya ibn Khalifa al-Kalbī, and was delivered to him in Jerusalem, where he had come to conduct a state visit. Heraclius's response is highly noteworthy and indicative of his intelligence and political acumen: he showed great favour to the Prophet's envoy, showering him with gifts, and, according to some, left him with the impression that he had become Muslim before bidding him farewell.

But, perhaps the most significant thing about this encounter are the astonishing questions he asked about the Messenger ﷺ. After carefully reading the letter the Messenger ﷺ had sent to him, he commanded some officials in his army to search the lands of the Levant for anyone with close family ties to the Messenger ﷺ so that he might ask them about the Messenger ﷺ and learn more

about how this religion of his had come about. So they did as he commanded and found a group of Qurayshi merchants in Gaza and brought them to the emperor.

When Heraclius met with them, the first thing he did was to ask which of them was most closely related to the Messenger ﷺ. Abū Sufyān, who happened to be one of the men in the party, replied, "Of all the people here, I am most closely related to him." So Heraclius told the others to leave and go about their affairs and then bade Abū Sufyān stay behind. Then he started to quiz him about the Messenger ﷺ, speaking in terms that left one in no doubt that it was a topic that was of special interest to him. He asked Abū Sufyān about the Messenger's personality, his attributes, his exploits and the progression of his call to Allah. He himself summarised everything that he asked Abū Sufyān, saying,

"When I asked you about his lineage, you said he was from one of your noblest families. Such is the case with all Messengers—they always come from the best families of their people.

"When I asked you whether any of you had ever said anything similar before him, you replied that no one had said anything like him. Were anyone to have said such things before him, I would have said that he was simply an imitator, not bringing anything new.

"When I asked you whether any of his ancestors had been kings, you replied that they had not. Were that to have been the case, I would have said that he was simply a man looking to restore the kingdom of his forefathers.

"When I asked you if he had been a known liar before he started to call people to his Lord, you replied that he had not.

Were he someone known for telling lies against people, how could he not tell lies against Allah.

“When I asked you who typically followed him: the elite or the downtrodden, you replied that it was the downtrodden. I say that it is they who are the majority of a Messenger’s followers.

“When I asked you whether the numbers of his followers were increasing or decreasing, you replied that they were increasing. I say that that is how it is with true belief until it has been completed.

“When I asked you whether any of his followers had left him after joining him in his religion, you replied that they had not. I say that that is how it is with faith when it permeates the hearts.

“When I asked you if he ever acted in an underhand manner, you replied that he did not. I say that that is how it is with Messengers—they never betray their trusts nor act in an underhand manner.

“When I asked you what he commands you to do, you replied that he commands you to worship Allah and associate no other with Him, forbids you from worshipping idols, and commands you to prayer, virtue and charity.

“If all that you say is true, then his kingdom will surely grow to encompass this land that lies beneath my feet! I knew that a Prophet was coming, but I never imagined that he would be from among you.” Then Heraclius concluded his remarks by saying, “Were I sitting today in his presence, I would wash his feet!”⁹

But, despite the incredible level of insight and astuteness he

⁹ Al-Mulyabārī, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Sīrat sayyid al-bashariyya*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Kerala, India, 2001, p. 271.

demonstrated here and despite speaking about the Messenger ﷺ so glowingly, Heraclius, for reasons known only to Allah, was never to become Muslim. But what he said was tantamount to a prediction that his armies would be defeated by the Muslims, and that is indeed what happened a few short years later, when 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb travelled north to receive the keys to the city of Jerusalem from its bishop after the armies of Islam had liberated it from Imperial Byzantine rule.

Khaybar: Subduing the Jews of the Peninsula and Carrying out the Compensatory 'Umra

After the Peace Treaty had neutralised Quraysh as an enemy, the Muslims turned their full attention to those who had incited the tribes against them: the Jews of Khaybar. It was they, along with the Banū an-Naḍīr, who were the primary instigators of the Battle of the Trench, a battle which almost succeeded in wiping out the Muslims completely. Their continued presence in the Peninsula represented a clear and present danger to the Muslims.

So, at the beginning of the seventh year after the Hijra, the Muslims mobilised their forces and set forth for Khaybar, a town some one hundred kilometres north of Madinah. The Jews had been expecting this move on the part of the Muslims, ever since they signed their peace treaty with Quraysh, and so they had been shoring up their fortifications. They moved all their people into a series of seemingly impregnable citadels, manned by well-armed and well-prepared warriors, and stocked with all the weapons necessary to fight off invaders. They were as prepared as they could possibly be to face the Muslim army.

When the Muslim forces arrived, the Messenger ﷺ put his nephew, 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, in charge of the army. 'Alī, who was

still only in his early twenties, had already become one of the best-known champions of Islam. He marched on Khaybar, establishing a perimeter around each of the enemy fortresses and laid siege to them for approximately twenty days. Then he attacked and stormed each fortress, one after the other, until all the fortresses had fallen. As soon as that happened, the remaining forces of Khaybar surrendered, having lost more than ninety of their men in the fighting.

In exchange for their lives and safe passage, they offered to evacuate the area completely, taking their women and children with them, but leaving all their wealth and possessions behind, and the Messenger ﷺ agreed to their terms. But later, some of them came to the Prophet ﷺ with a different proposal, suggesting that he allow them to continue to live there in exchange for half their yearly date harvest. This second proposal seemed to the Messenger ﷺ to be of even greater benefit to the Muslims than the first and so he readily agreed to it.

The lessons of Khaybar were not lost on the Jews of Fadak, and no sooner had they heard what happened there than they sent word to the Messenger ﷺ, offering him peace in exchange for half their yearly date harvest. This was, in effect, the same deal that had been offered to Khaybar, but without the need of having to go to war first, and so the Messenger ﷺ agreed.

In this way, the Muslims succeeded in eliminating the most dangerous of their enemies after Quraysh, and it was now clear that the Muslims were unassailable in the Peninsula. The period of their weakness and vulnerability was now at its end.

Another major event was to take place in this seventh year after the Hijra, namely the Recompensatory 'Umra. Exactly one year to the day after the Muslims had tried to go to Makkah to do

the 'Umra but had been denied entry by Quraysh, the Muslims came back to Makkah to do their 'Umra as had been agreed upon in the terms of the Treaty.

This time, they entered the city in peace, while Quraysh locked themselves into their houses or headed for the hills for the duration of the Muslims' visit to avoid any friction or conflict. The Messenger ﷺ and his followers spent three days in Makkah, and some of the people of Quraysh watched on with wonder and admiration at the way the Muslims carried out the rites of the pilgrimage and did their *ṭawāf* and prayers.

While he was in Makkah, the Messenger ﷺ arranged to marry Maymūna bint al-Ḥārith. As he was about to begin the wedding, Ḥuwayṭib ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā came to tell the Messenger ﷺ that the period of time allotted to him to complete 'Umra had expired. So the Messenger ﷺ said to him, "What harm would it do you to allow me to stay a little longer and marry Maymūna here? Then you can all come and attend the wedding feast." Ḥuwayṭib rudely replied, "We have no need of your food. Get out!"

The Messenger ﷺ tried to make good use of his time in Makkah, and thought that his wedding feast might be a good way to clear the air, and maybe even promote peace between the two parties, but they rejected the noble hand that he offered them. So, the Muslims headed home to Madinah.

Mu'ta: The Byword for Courage and Faith

The town of Mu'ta is located in Greater Syria or, more precisely, in Jordan, for Syria then comprised all of present-day Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. Like all the other lands of the Levant, Mu'ta was under the rule of the Byzantine emperor, although it was governed on his behalf by local Arab kings from

the Ghassanid tribe, appointed by the emperor from his seat of power in Constantinople.

Among the many envoys that the Messenger ﷺ had sent, one of them had been to the ruler of Buṣrā, al-Ḥārith ibn abī Shammir al-Ghassānī, inviting him to Islam. But, on his way there, the envoy was unfortunate enough to pass through the town of Mu'ta. Mu'ta was ruled by another of the emperor's vassal rulers in the Levant, Sharḥabīl ibn 'Amr al-Ghassānī, and as soon as he found out about the presence of the Messenger's envoy, he immediately had him killed. This was an unforgiveable crime, for the life of emissaries is sacrosanct in every culture. And this was not just any emissary, it was the emissary of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

When the Messenger ﷺ heard what had happened, he immediately assembled an army to send against him. He ﷺ placed this army of nearly three thousand men under the command of Zayd ibn al-Ḥāritha¹⁰, and instructed that were Zayd to be

¹⁰ The story of Zayd ibn al-Ḥāritha merits reflection. Why did the Messenger ﷺ place the army under a man of little-known lineage, who had been given to him as a gift by Sayyida Khadija and whom he had then freed and adopted as his own son? why did he prefer him with the leadership of an army comprising more than three thousand Muslim men, among whom were his own cousin and one of the great champions and heroes of Islam, Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, and the best known of all the Arab generals, Khālīd ibn al-Walīd. The answer lies in the fact that the Messenger ﷺ wanted to use this to teach us all another important Muhammadan lesson: that all men are equal, regardless of fame or family, and that there was no difference between Zayd or Ja'far or Khālīd. Yes, they each held their own special place in his great heart, but, before Allah, they were equals, like the teeth of a comb.

Sometime later, shortly before passing on, the Messenger ﷺ was to send Usama ibn Zayd, a youth of no more than seventeen years, at the head

wounded or killed, the mantle of leadership would pass to Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib, and were Ja'far to be wounded or killed, to 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa.

Then, before sending the army on its way, he addressed the men, giving them one of his most famous sets of instructions, saying, "I counsel you to have fearful awareness of Allah, and be good to the Muslims who are with you. Fight in the Name of Allah and the way of Allah all those who deny Allah. Do not act unfaithfully nor go to excess. Do not kill children nor women nor the old and infirm, nor those who keep to themselves in the monasteries. Do not harm date palms nor cut down trees, and do not destroy people's homes."

With these immortal words, the Messenger ﷺ outlined Islam's rules of engagement in war, highlighting the value Islam attaches to justice and respect for human life and the environment, for they are all a part of Allah's creation. It is upon the principles espoused in this ḥadīth that modern-day international laws of warfare and rules of engagement are clearly based. The difference, however, is that these laws were applied and put into practice in those times, whereas today they are ignored and trampled underfoot.

The army set forth, and the Messenger ﷺ himself came to see them off. Then, when they reached the region of Mi'ān, they received word that the Byzantine emperor had assembled a huge army to fight them, comprising almost two hundred thousand men, half of them Byzantines and the other half Christian Arabs, and had set up camp in the region of Ma'rab. So the Muslim army

of an army that was once again to engage the Byzantines in battle.

stopped their advance and stayed at Mi'ān for two nights, discussing among themselves what course of action they should take. The choice they faced was not an easy one, for the disparity in size between the armies was huge. The Muslim army was tiny compared to the enemy forces that faced them, so they debated whether they should write to the Messenger ﷺ to ask his advice, or possibly to ask him for reinforcements.

In the midst of this debate, 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, the third-in-command of the army, stepped up and issued his famous statement, "It is not by our numbers, size or strength that we fight people, rather it is by this religion that Allah has generously bestowed upon us. So, go forth against them and one of the two preferable things will be yours, either victory or martyrdom!"¹¹ These stirring words raised the morale of the Muslims to new heights, and they entered into battle without worrying about relative strength or numbers. The only scale with which they were concerned was that of faith and belief.

The fighting between the armies continued for either three straight days, according to some accounts, or seven straight days according to others, in a scene of unmatched bravery and heroism. First, the first-in-command, Zayd ibn Ḥāritha was killed, and then the mantle of leadership passed to Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib. And he, still a young man in his twenties, continued to fight until both of his arms were cut off. Some of the books of *Sīra* state that when he fell and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar came to him to offer him water to drink, he refused, telling him that he was fasting. Some accounts say that he said, "I am fasting and I will not break my

¹¹ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 318.

fast until I am in Paradise!”

Ja'far had only just returned from the emigration to Abyssinia after the defeat of the Jews at Khaybar in the seventh year after the Hijra, shortly before this battle. The moment the Messenger ﷺ saw him, he welcomed him warmly, saying, “I do not know which brings me greater joy: the victory at Khaybar or the return of Ja'far!” It seems almost as if he only came back from Abyssinia to become a martyr and achieve an even higher rank and greater standing with His Creator.

Then the third-in-command, 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, was killed, and, at dawn the following day, Khālīd ibn al-Walīd took command of the army. Throughout the entirety of that day, his army fought the enemy. Then, in the hours before dawn the next day, Khālīd swapped his forces around, adopted different formations and bade his men carry different banners and flags to those they had been carrying before. These manoeuvres made it seem like it was a totally different army. So, when the enemy woke up the next morning, the sight that confronted them across the battlefield convinced them that the Muslims' reinforcements had arrived, so they drew back and retreated. This was the opportunity Khālīd had been waiting for, so he quickly gathered his forces and got them to safety.

While this was an astonishing use of tactics, what was even more astonishing was the number of casualties suffered by the Muslim army, with some accounts stating that they lost only twelve men. The enemy, on the other hand, suffered tremendous losses. It is said that the Messenger ﷺ was kept up to date with what was happening at the battle in such detail it was as if he were there.

He ﷺ would then relay these details to his Companions in the

mosque, describing who fell in battle and how. And, naturally, the Companions had sleepless nights, worrying about the army. But Khālīd brought them home safely, and the Messenger ﷺ was overjoyed at his return, naming him the “Sword of Allah”.

Despite this, however, and despite the unparalleled bravery the army had shown and the sacrifices they had made, the people of Madinah considered it unacceptable that they had withdrawn and retreated from the field of battle. So they greeted the army—an army made up of their own sons and brothers—with protests and harsh words, shouting at them as they made their way back into the city, “Runaways! Fugitives! Deserters! Have you run away in the way of Allah?!”

But the noble Messenger ﷺ, who was proud of the resistance and defiance of this small army of his, an army which had faced down an opponent fifty times its size and had not left the field of battle until it had inflicted heavy losses upon it, responded on their behalf, saying, “No, they are not runaways, they are simply ones who have regrouped to rejoin the fight, if that is what Allah wills.”

The reality is that the army withdrew from the battle with gains, not losses, and that is why its retreat cannot be considered a defeat, but must instead be considered a victory. Similarly, the fact that the army was kept safe and intact was itself a victory. As for the harsh reception given to the army by the people of Madinah, while it was not justified in this instance, it shows the extraordinary spirit of sacrifice, underpinned by a deep sense of honour and pride, that characterised the Muslims of that age.

Moreover, the fighting spirit of this small army left its mark on the Byzantines—their generals could not help but be impressed by this formidable foe, for they had witnessed at first-hand the

Muslims' will to fight and love of martyrdom. And it would not be long before Khālid and his men faced off against them once again.

The actions of this small army also made an impact on the Arabs of the peninsula, earning the Muslims their respect and carving out a place for them in their collective consciousness.



Makkah:

“Truly We have granted you a clear victory”

The conquest of Makkah had not been planned for this year—that is, the eighth year after the Hijra—but Allah decreed that this was to be the year of the ‘clear victory’. In this year, Allah’s promise to His Messenger ﷺ, that he would conquer Makkah, was to be fulfilled. It was the year of the Muslims’ triumph over the idolaters, when Makkah was cleansed and purged of idols and idol worship. Makkah was to recover its sanctity and majesty and be restored to the original purpose for which it had been established by Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, a bastion of pure Unitarianism, purified by Islamic laws and made blessed by Muhammadan rites.

Two years before, in the sixth year after the Hijra, the Messenger ﷺ had signed a treaty with Quraysh at Ḥudaybiyya. He had fulfilled its terms in both spirit and letter, as fitting of Allah’s emissary on the earth, for those in such positions do not lie, break contracts or act in an underhand manner. Such contemptible behaviour ill befits any right-acting slave of Allah, let alone a

Prophet or Messenger.

But, as fate would have it, a man from the tribe of Khuzā'a, motivated by an ancient tribal grievance, assaulted a man from the tribe of Banū Bakr. This tribe of Khuzā'a, which had become Muslim shortly after the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya and lived on the outskirts of Makkah, had formed an alliance with the Messenger ﷺ, while the Banū Bakr had joined forces with Quraysh at the same time. This dispute escalated swiftly, and what had started as a personal grievance became a full-blown tribal dispute.

Quraysh then broke their treaty with the Messenger ﷺ and took the side of their allies, the Banū Bakr, and provided them with weapons and arms. And, not only that, but some of their men, including Ṣafwān ibn Umayya and 'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl, participated in the fighting against the men of Khuzā'a.

After a number of their men were killed in the fighting, Khuzā'a began to fear that none of them would be left alive, so they took refuge at the Ka'ba. The Ka'ba was acknowledged by all as a sanctuary in which human life was sacrosanct, so they thought that in this way they could escape the killing. One of them announced his intention, calling out to one of the men of Banū Bakr who was pursuing him, "Nawfal, we have entered the sanctuary, so be mindful of your gods! Be mindful of your gods!" But Nawfal was of no mind to listen and so impudently replied, "Today there is no god!"

The Banū Bakr completely ignored the sanctity of the area and continued to strike down their enemies within the Noble Sanctuary. So, Khuzā'a at the last resort sent their envoy, 'Amr ibn Sālim al-Khuzā'i, to tell the Messenger ﷺ what was going on and ask him for his aid and support. The Messenger ﷺ responded immediately, offering his support and telling him, "Your

deliverance has come, 'Amr ibn Sālim!"

The Messenger of the Muslims could not abandon any Muslim or anyone with whom he had formed an alliance and leave them to fight their enemies on their own. He ﷺ was bound to come to their support. And Quraysh could not be allowed to rip up the treaty they had made with the Muslims without reprisal. Quraysh were blinded by their arrogance and had neglected to take the consequences of their actions into account, particularly with respect to how it would impact on their treaty with the Messenger ﷺ. They realised too late that the Messenger ﷺ would never accept what had happened to the Muslims of Khuzā'a. By breaking the terms of the treaty, Quraysh had released the Messenger ﷺ from the constraints the treaty had placed upon him.

It was only two years since the treaty was signed, but they had been two years in which the Muslim state had made tremendous advances and accomplished amazing things. Islam had spread to all four corners of Arabia and the Jews of the peninsula had finally submitted to Muslim rule, starting with the Jews of Khaybar and finishing with the Jews of Fadak. The triumphs and achievements of the Muslims and their reputation was starting to precede them in the region and beyond. Everyone now looked upon them with newfound respect.

This was a matter of extreme urgency. The Messenger ﷺ assembled an army and prepared to move out. But he told no one where they were going or why they had been assembled, not even the three men closest to him: Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Alī. He kept the purpose of this army a secret from everyone, and this of course meant that Quraysh had no idea about the preparations being made by the Muslims. But what they knew for a fact was

that Muḥammad ﷺ would punish them in his own way for what they had thoughtlessly and pridefully done.

In the meantime, the chief of Quraysh, Abū Sufyān ibn Umayya, had hurried to Madinah to meet the Messenger ﷺ, in the hope that there might be some way to repair the rift that had developed following the strike against the tribe of Khuzā'a and perhaps renew the peace treaty with the Messenger ﷺ that they had unthinkingly broken. The danger had to be real for a man such as Abū Sufyān to make such a move.

The first thing he did upon entering Madinah was to go to the house of his daughter, Umm Ḥabība bint abī Sufyān, who had married the noble Messenger ﷺ following the death of her husband in Abyssinia. But she did not receive him in the manner he expected or hoped. When he made to sit next to her on the mattress she had laid on the ground, she swiftly picked up the mattress and folded it away. He was astonished at her behaviour and asked her why she had done that. She replied, "This is the mattress of the Messenger ﷺ, and you are an idol worshipper, impure and unclean!" So he said, "Some evil has taken hold of you since last I set eyes on you!"

Then he left her house, still in shock, and went to the Prophet ﷺ, but the Prophet ﷺ refused to meet with him. So he passed by Abū Bakr and asked him to intercede with the Prophet ﷺ on his behalf, but Abū Bakr gave him the cold shoulder, and when he tried 'Umar, 'Umar did the same. Abū Sufyān started to feel as if the world had turned against him, so hard was the time he was having, so he decided to try one last time with 'Alī ibn abī Ṭālib. When he came to him, he said, "'Alī, you are my closest relative here and I come to you in dire need, so do not dash my hopes. Let me go back with something! Please intercede on my behalf with

the Messenger of Allah!”

‘Ali replied, “Woe to you, Abū Sufyān. When the Messenger ﷺ has made up his mind, it is not for any of us to intervene.”¹ As soon as he heard ‘Alī’s response, Abū Sufyān lost all hope and could see no positive outcome. Turning around, he headed back to Makkah, a defeated and disappointed man.

When he got back to Makkah, he told Quraysh that the situation was dire and that they should expect a response. And lo, on the tenth of Ramadan in the eighth year after the Hijra, an army of ten thousand men set out from Madinah for Makkah, and set up camp just beyond the city limits.

On the way there, the Messenger ﷺ met his uncle, al-‘Abbās on the road, heading for Madinah to announce his Islam. When he saw him, he said to him, “You are the last of the Emigrants and I am the last of the Prophets.” As for al-‘Abbās, when he saw the huge size of the army, he said, “An ill-fated morning for Quraysh! If the Messenger of Allah enters Makkah against their will, and they do not come to him to seek his protection before he arrives, then that will be the absolute end of Quraysh!”

The Prophecy of Mūsā (Peace Be upon Him)

That night, to show their strength and strike awe, the army lit campfires from one end of their huge camp to the other, creating a scene unlike any seen in the region. Wherever they turned, whichever direction they looked, all Quraysh could see were campfires, seemingly without end, and fear and panic swiftly set in. The Prophetic message was well and truly delivered! Abū

¹ *Ibid.* p. 336.

Sufyān, who was the then leader of Quraysh, commented that he had never in his life seen so many fires.

Thus did the prophecy of Mūsā, peace be upon him, come true, when he said, "The (light of the) Lord came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; It shone forth from Mount Paran, And it came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them" (Deuteronomy 33:2). These (ten thousand) were the men chosen by Allah to travel alongside their Prophet ﷺ to fulfil this great and blessed task: to liberate Makkah and purify it of association and idol worship.

That evening, al-'Abbās left the camp to go on a reconnaissance mission and encountered Abū Sufyān, who had himself come out to scout out the Muslim army. Al-'Abbās hailed him and said, "This is the Messenger of Allah and he has brought ten thousand people with him!" Abū Sufyān asked, "What do you suggest I do?" Al-'Abbās replied, "Come with me now! I will take you to the Messenger and ask him to grant you immunity, for, by Allah, if you go back and resist him and he defeats you, he will cut off your head."

Abū Sufyān did not hesitate a moment longer, for he recognised the truth in al-'Abbās's words, and accompanied al-'Abbās back to the Messenger ﷺ. But the Messenger ﷺ refused to meet with him that night, and asked al-'Abbās to bring him back the next day. So, al-'Abbās brought Abū Sufyān to the Messenger ﷺ at dawn the next day, and the leader of Quraysh became Muslim at the hands of the Messenger ﷺ.

When this happened, al-'Abbās turned to the Messenger ﷺ and said to him, "Abū Sufyān is a man who likes to brag, so give him something to brag about." So, the Messenger ﷺ said, "Let him enter Makkah and tell the people there that whoever enters the

house of Abū Sufyān shall be safe, whoever enters the Mosque shall be safe, and whoever stays in his own house behind closed doors shall be safe." The Messenger ﷺ granted the leader of his enemies an honour he could not have expected: his house was to become a refuge, a place of peace and safety.

Then he ﷺ instructed al-'Abbās to take Abū Sufyān and wait with him beside the gate to Makkah before going into the city to deliver to them the message of the Prophet. Shortly thereafter, the Muslim army started its march, with each tribe forming its own division and raising high its own banner and flag. And, as each division passed by where the two men were standing, Abū Sufyān would ask his companion al-'Abbās about it, and al-'Abbās would tell him the name of the tribe under whose banner they fought. Abū Sufyān was shocked and surprised that all these tribes had joined the army of the Messenger ﷺ.

Eventually, the Messenger ﷺ himself passed by them at the head of his green battalion, the largest of the army's divisions, under whose banner fought the Emigrants and Anṣār. As they passed, Abū Sufyān asked al-'Abbās who they were. He replied, "This is the Messenger ﷺ, leading the division that comprises the Emigrants and the Anṣār!" For Abū Sufyān, this was an awe-inspiring and sobering sight, so he turned to al-'Abbās and addressed him, saying, "By Allah, Abū al-Faḍl, your nephew's power has grown great!" "It is Prophethood, Abū Sufyān!" replied al-'Abbās. Abū Sufyān said, "Yes, it is!" Then al-'Abbās said to him, "Now it is time for you to go back to your people and tell them what you saw."

But, before he was able to get back to Makkah to tell Quraysh of what he had seen, one of the leaders of the battalions, Sa'd ibn 'Ubadā, approached and addressed him, saying, "Today is the day

of the great battle! Today is the day when violating the sacred and inviolate will be made permissible! Today is the day Allah will visit disgrace upon Quraysh!" When the Messenger ﷺ was told what Sa'd had said, he angrily replied, "No! Today is the day of the great mercy, the day upon which the greatness of the Ka'ba will be restored! Today is the day Allah will bring glory to Quraysh!" And he ﷺ immediately commanded 'Alī to take Sa'd's place as the standard-bearer.

The noble Messenger ﷺ refused to allow talk of revenge or hear calls for retribution, for the Messenger of Mercy had not come seeking vengeance. No, he ﷺ had come to deliver the message of peace, and this was the greatest opportunity the noble Prophet ﷺ had yet had to show the world the true nature of his message of love and mercy. To show them what good character and tolerance meant. To show them the truth about Muhammadan Islam. It was through witnessing this Prophetic conduct and behaviour that the people of Makkah were to come flocking to Islam and take immense pride and satisfaction in their newly acquired religion. He ﷺ desperately wanted the conquest to be a peaceful one. It was, as he ﷺ himself was to say, "A day for the fulfilment of promises." And he ﷺ gave strict instructions to his army that not a single drop of blood was to be spilt in Makkah.

In the meantime, Abū Sufyān returned to Quraysh, deeply affected by what he had seen, and said to them, "Muḥammad has come and he has brought an army you will not be able to resist! Whoever enters the house of Abū Sufyān shall be safe, whoever enters the Mosque shall be safe, and whoever stays in his own house behind closed doors shall be safe." His wife, Hind bint 'Utba, who had been standing by his side as he uttered these words, let out a mighty shriek and grabbed him by the beard,

saying, "Kill this fat old fool! What sort of leader is he? He brings such shame to Quraysh!"

Abū Sufyān paid her no heed, however, but instead continued to say what he had come to say: "Woe to you and let not yourselves be deluded as to your own might! He has brought with him a force the like of which not one you have seen!" If it is the leader of a people himself who is the one giving the warning, then how must it be for those being warned? A few went to the Sacred House as directed by the Messenger ﷺ, but most dashed back to their homes and shut themselves in."²

The Messenger ﷺ divided his army into four main divisions and gave each commander detailed instructions as to where and how his division was to enter the city, for he wanted the four divisions to enter Makkah through its four main gates at the same time. And he ﷺ gave each of them orders not to resort to arms under any circumstances except self-defence. And, as a result, the entry into the city was peaceful, or at least semi-peaceful anyway, for while three of the divisions encountered no resistance whatsoever, the fourth, under the command of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, met with armed resistance on the outskirts of the city. When a faction of Qurayshis, under the command of the last of the arrogant old guard, 'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl, attacked, Khālīd was forced to fight back, killing at least fourteen of them. The rest, including 'Ikrima, fled the city. When the Prophet ﷺ heard about this incident, he was saddened that what he hoped would not happen on that blessed day had come to pass, but he understood

² Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Maktabat al-Mawādd, Cairo, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 220; al-Jazā'irī, Abū Bakr Jābir, *Hādhā al-ḥabīb Muḥammad*, Maktabat al-'Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, Madinah, 2004, pp. 259-261.

that it had been necessary.

Prostrations of a Conqueror

The conqueror entered Makkah, riding his camel, followed by the massed ranks of the Emigrants and Anṣār, and, behind them, the rest of the divisions of his army, an army ten thousand strong, marching into the city. But he ﷺ did not enter as conquerors typically enter, with a haughty expression, looking down disdainfully upon his enemies, or with his sword held aloft in a triumphant celebration of victory, but instead entered prostrating on the back of his camel.

He was prostrating in humility and out of gratitude to Allah, to show his respect for Makkah and out of recognition for its standing with Allah. It was a sight to set hearts atremble, a scene laden with religious meaning and significance, of fineness and sublimity, unrivalled in human history.

Makkah's sanctity and dignity had been restored, and the spirit of Sayyid Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, had been brought back. The first thing he ﷺ did upon entering was to do *ṭawāf* of the Ka'ba on his camel. He held a wooden staff in his right hand, and every time he passed close by one of the three hundred and fifty idols stored there, he would nudge it with his staff so that it would fall over and smash. Then he would declare, "Truth has come and falsehood has been vanquished! Truth has come and falsehood has been vanquished!"

Then he ﷺ commanded that the interior of the Ka'ba be purified, cleansed and emptied of idols. After all the traces of idolatry and association had been removed, he stepped inside and prayed the two *rak'āt* of greeting the Sacred Mosque.

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Then he ﷺ came back outside and stood beside the door of the Ka'ba, facing the throngs of people who had come out of their homes, having received assurances that they would not be harmed. They came flocking to the Ka'ba to hear the first public address given in Makkah by its conqueror. He ﷺ said to them, "There is no god but Allah. His promise has come true and He alone has vanquished the Confederates!" Then he added, "Tribe of Quraysh, today Allah has taken from you the haughty and arrogant ways of the Days of Ignorance and its excessive veneration of forefathers, for all people are from Ādam and Ādam was from clay!"

Then he ﷺ recited to them the following noble verse from Sūrat al-Hujurāt:

﴿ Mankind, We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other. The noblest among you in Allah's sight is the one with the most *taqwā*. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware. ﴾ Al-Hujurāt, 49:13

Then, he ﷺ asked his erstwhile enemies how they thought he should deal with them. They replied, "(We think you will treat us) Well, generous brother and son of a generous brother." So, he said, "No blame at all will fall on you today. Go! You are all free." And peace and tranquillity reigned in Makkah.

The conqueror entered Makkah in prostration and offered a full and unconditional pardon to all its inhabitants. He pardoned enemies who had violently opposed him and tried to kill him on numerous occasions, enemies who had even tried to wipe all trace of the religion he had brought from the face of the Earth. But, when he entered their city a conqueror, he never once thought of revenge. Instead he allowed his vast Muhammadan character to

come to the fore and applied the principles of tolerance and forgiveness in a manner that astonished those who had only ever viewed him with hostility.

At this point, it would be useful to remind ourselves of the speech he ﷺ gave the day after arriving in Madinah, when he stood in the centre of the city's square and called on the people to spread peace and love, view one and another as brothers and sisters, and make mercy and compassion the basis for their relationships. It was upon these spiritual principles that he built his city. And now, today, almost a decade later, when he entered Makkah as a conqueror, he pardoned and forgave one and all.

In his victory speech after the conquest of Makkah, he ﷺ did not speak of Islam in terms of what is lawful and unlawful, nor did he seek to frighten his listeners with talk of hellfire, punishment and an evil destination. Instead, he spoke to them of the values and essential qualities of Islam: equality, justice and respect for the human being. He spoke to them of the need to reject discrimination and racism, trying to cleanse them and purify them of their arrogant pre-Islamic mindset and way of thinking, and plant the seeds of a culture of love and peace in their hearts.

The people of Makkah were naturally very afraid, for their long-time enemy had utterly defeated them and the Muslims had occupied their city. But, from the very first moment they met the Prophet ﷺ after his conquest, they were touched by the sublime manifestations of his Prophetic spirit and could not help but feel safe and reassured. In no time at all, an air of peace had settled over Makkah and the Messenger ﷺ had found his way into their hearts.

The wisdom of these kind words and this tolerant approach swiftly made itself apparent in the fact that nearly all of the

inhabitants of the city became Muslim. They did not do so because they were forced or compelled, but of their own volition, out of love of Islam and love for its Prophet ﷺ. Hearts thirsty for the language of peace and love became Muslim without hesitation, enchanted by the humble aspect of the Messenger ﷺ and his evocative and divinely inspired words.

When the keys to the Ka'ba were delivered into the hands of the Messenger ﷺ, he immediately called for 'Uthmān ibn Ṭalḥa, a man whose family had been in charge of looking after the keys throughout pre-Islamic times. When 'Uthmān arrived, the Messenger ﷺ gave him back the keys, saying, "Take your keys, 'Uthmān! Today is a day for the fulfilment of contracts and promises!" After the Messenger ﷺ gave him back the keys, he asked him if he remembered what he had said to him twenty years before. 'Uthmān replied, "I remember, and I testify that you are the Messenger of Allah!"³

'Uthmān had been reminded of an exchange that took place between him and the Messenger ﷺ soon after the Prophet's mission had first begun. One day, the Messenger ﷺ had come to see him, hoping that he might be granted access to the Ka'ba, but 'Uthmān had blocked him from entering. 'Uthmān said, recounting the story, "I spoke rudely to him and insulted him, but he remained calm, and spoke to me with gentle words, saying, 'Uthmān, it might be that one day you will find those keys in my hands and it will be me who will be able to give them to whomsoever I want.' So I replied, 'The day that happens will be the day Quraysh is destroyed and laid low!' He said, 'No! The day

³ Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Maktabat al-Mawādd, Cairo, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 222.

that happens will be the day Quraysh is brought alive and her glory restored!"

Then the conqueror ﷺ took his seat outside the Ka'ba and invited the people to come to him and give their pledges of allegiance to Islam. After all the men had finished giving their pledges, it was the turn of the women. One of these women was Hind bint 'Utba, she who had cut open the chest of his uncle, Ḥamza, and chewed his liver. She came to him incognito, fearful and ashamed, with her face completely veiled. But when she spoke, he ﷺ immediately recognised her voice and asked, "Are you Hind?" She replied, "Yes, I am Hind. Pardon the past so that Allah might pardon you!" Then she gave him the pledge of allegiance of Islam and left. As for the Prophet ﷺ, he did not say to her even so much as one single hurtful word.

Bilāl: The First Call to Prayer in Makkah

When the time of the *zuhr* prayer arrived, the Messenger ﷺ asked Bilāl to give the call to prayer. So, for the first time in history, Bilāl climbed onto the roof of the Ka'ba and raised his voice loud and called out the Name of Allah. Hearing this sound, the people of Quraysh began to emerge from their homes to see what was happening, and lo, they were greeted with this astonishing spectacle: here was Bilāl, a former slave of theirs who had been tortured right here in Makkah so badly that he almost died, standing atop the Ka'ba and calling out the words "*Lā ilāha illa-Llāh*" (There is no god but Allah).

Islam had brought Bilāl back to them, but this time as a free man of great nobility, calling on people to prostrate to their Creator. Some of these idolaters, listening to this call to prayer for the first time, could not believe their eyes or their ears. The first

reactions of a number of these idol worshippers revealed the depth of their pre-Islamic arrogance and racism: the sister of 'Ikrima, Juwayriyya bint abī Jahl, said, "Allah did my father a great service by having him die before he could witness Bilāl braying from atop the Ka'ba!"

Elsewhere, a second group of Qurayshi men had gathered together in the open courtyard in front of the Ka'ba, including the former leader of Quraysh, Abū Sufyān. One of the men, Khālid ibn Asad, said, "Allah did my father a service by having him not be here to see this day!" Another, al-Hārith ibn Hāshim, said, "Were I to have known that he following what is true, I would have followed him." Hearing what the men were saying, Abū Sufyān said, "I will not say anything. For were I to say something, even these grains of sand would report my words back to him!" A few minutes later, the Messenger ﷺ walked up to them and said, "Your every word is known to me." Then, he repeated every word of their conversation back to them, leaving nothing out. When al-Hārith heard this, he said, "We bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah!"⁴

Another interesting account is that of Suhayl ibn 'Amr. This account is found in many of the great works of *Sīra*. Suhayl said, "(When the Muslims entered Makkah,) I went straight home and locked myself in, for I could not help but think back to the position I had adopted towards Muḥammad when I was negotiating the terms of the peace treaty with him, and I could not help but remember that I had been part of the armies of Quraysh that fought against the Muslims at Badr and Uḥud. Then I asked

⁴ Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, p. 350.

my son, 'Abd Allāh ibn Suhayl, to go to the Messenger ﷺ to ask him for his protection. So 'Abd Allāh went to the Messenger ﷺ and asked him, "Will you grant my father protection, Messenger of Allah?" The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Yes, he is safe from us and under the protection of Allah." Then the Messenger ﷺ turned to those beside him and said, 'If you should meet Suhayl ibn 'Amr, do not look harshly upon him, for, by my life, Suhayl is a man of great intellect and nobility, and such men never long remain ignorant of Islam.'"

Not only did the Messenger ﷺ guarantee his physical safety, he also warned his Companions not to look at him in a manner he might find distressful! When his son came back to him and told him what the Messenger ﷺ had said, Suhayl said, "By Allah, he has always been a man who keeps his word and honours his commitments. That was true in his youth and is still true in his old age."

Amazingly, however, Suhayl remained an idol worshipper for some time after this, not becoming Muslim with the first wave of Makkans who embraced Islam. But still, even so, the Messenger ﷺ, who had pardoned him and granted him amnesty, never once adopted a negative stance towards him. Quite the opposite, in fact. He always treated him with the utmost respect and had a great deal of appreciation for his intellect and social standing. Moreover, he even allowed him to take a place by his side at the battle of Hunayn against the idol-worshipping insurgents. And, in the end, it was how the Messenger ﷺ treated him that made him love Islam. So when he did eventually become Muslim, he became Muslim gladly and of his volition. In this way, the Messenger ﷺ taught us how to put into practice another of Allah's clear instructions: "There is no compulsion in religion."

Another noteworthy story is that of 'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl, the notorious enemy of Islam. He had been part of the group of insurgents who attacked the division commanded by Khālid ibn al-Walīd as they tried to enter Makkah. After Khālid put down their uprising, 'Ikrima fled and headed for Shu'ayba, a port not far from Jeddah, hoping to find passage across the sea. But his wife, Umm Ḥakīm, who had become Muslim, came to see the Messenger ﷺ and told him that her husband had only fled because he feared for his life. Then she asked the Messenger ﷺ to guarantee his safety, and he replied that he was safe and would not be harmed.

So she set out to find him, and when she eventually found him in the port of Shu'ayba, she said to him, "Cousin, I come to you from the very best of men, a man who keeps his oaths and honours his ties of kinship like no other. Stop destroying yourself! I have asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to guarantee your safety, and he has guaranteed it!" 'Ikrima was shocked and amazed that a man he had spent his entire life trying to kill had pardoned him. But his wife managed to convince him that she was telling him the truth, so he returned with her to Makkah, finally at peace with himself. Before he arrived, the Messenger ﷺ, who somehow knew that he was coming, said to his Companions, "'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl is coming here now, an emigrant and a believer, so do not curse his father. When you curse the dead, your curses hurt the living and never even reach the dead."⁵ Not only did the Messenger ﷺ

⁵ It is worth mentioning here that 'Ikrima ibn abī Jahl had been one of the seven whose blood the Prophet ﷺ had declared it lawful to spill in Makkah, for he had been an inveterate enemy of the Muslims and inflicted untold damage upon them. Wahshī, the man who had killed Ḥamza, and Hind bint

pardon him, but he sought even to spare his feelings, not wanting for him to hear even so much as one hateful word from the mouths of the Muslims directed against his father.

As soon as 'Ikrima arrived, his wife took him to see the Messenger ﷺ and he made his Islam public. Then the Messenger ﷺ bestowed the greatest possible honour upon him, saying, "Whatever you ask of me today, if it is in my power to give it, I will give it you!" So 'Ikrima said, "Then I ask you to ask forgiveness for me for every time I fought against you and every time I spoke ill of you, whether directly to your face or behind your back!" So the Messenger of Allah ﷺ straight away lifted his hands in supplication and asked Allah to forgive 'Ikrima for everything he had ever done or said.

After 'Ikrima became Muslim, he became one of the greatest fighters in the way of Allah. This archenemy of Muḥammad ﷺ was transformed into one of his most loving Companions. He became a man devoted to worship, an ascetic, a man ready to fight jihad in the way of his Lord until such time as he would be granted martyrdom. Moreover, he made a pact with himself, telling the Messenger ﷺ that he would spend in the way of Allah at least double what he spent throughout his time fighting against Islam, and that he would fight in the way of Allah many times more than he fought against Islam. And he was to be true to his word and covenant, giving all that he possessed to the Muslims, and spending the entire remainder of his life fighting to raise high the banner of Islam. He was finally martyred at the Battle of

'Utba, the woman who had mutilated the body of Ḥamza, were also among these seven, but the Messenger ﷺ gave them all a full pardon after they became Muslim.

Yarmūk in the year 15 AH while fighting under Khālīd ibn al-Walīd against the Byzantines.

The accounts given by the books of *Sīra* of his part in the battle are incredibly instructive. They state that when the fighting was at its most intense, he jumped from his horse, broke his scabbard, and charged towards the ranks of the enemy. When Khālīd saw what he was doing, he called out to him, saying "Don't do it, cousin, for it will be a hard day for the Muslims if you are killed!" and stood in his way. 'Ikrima replied, "Step aside, Khālīd. Having risked my life fighting against the Messenger of Allah, should I now strive to keep it safe while fighting for Allah and His Messenger?!" Then he called out to the Muslims, "Who will give me their pledge to fight to the death alongside me?" And more than four hundred of the Muslims gave him their pledge, including his own uncle al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām ibn al-Mughīra and Ḍirār ibn al-Azwar, and each and every one of them fought with unparalleled courage and heroism. It is said that every single one of them without exception was granted martyrdom in the course of that historic battle.

These stories we have mentioned here contain important lessons for us all. They teach us how the Messenger of peace ﷺ dealt with enemies who spent all their time and energy trying to harm him and his message. In response, he pardoned them unconditionally and showed them only tolerance and respect, and as a result, those same men transformed into upright right-acting men who not only loved Allah and His Messenger, but fought in His way with exceptional bravery, and earned martyrdom under the banner of the Islamic state.

Even Waḥshī, the Ethiopian slave who had killed the uncle of the Messenger, Ḥamza, at the Battle of Uhūd, was granted a full

pardon when he came to him as a Muslim. But, in this one case, the Messenger ﷺ asked him to leave and never show his face in his presence again. And so, for the entire duration of his life, Waḥshī never again saw the Messenger ﷺ.

Waḥshī became a fighter in the Islamic army and happened to be in Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq's army during the wars of apostasy. And, according to some accounts in the Books of *Sīra*, it was he who killed Musaylima, the liar who claimed to be a Prophet, during the course of the battle. After he killed him, he said, "I killed him, so, even though I killed the best of men, I also killed the worst of men." He hoped that, in this way, he might atone for his killing of Ḥamza ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib.

The Messenger ﷺ only spent a few short days in Makkah, but on one of those days, when he went alone to do *ṭawāf* of the Ka'ba, a man called Fuḍāla ibn 'Umayr came up behind as he did *ṭawāf*, hoping to find an opportunity to kill him. This wretched man dared entertain thoughts of killing the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, having the temerity to plot the death of this conqueror of Makkah, in the midst of his ten thousand men. Most of the people of Makkah had already become Muslim, but it appears that Fuḍāla was one of the few wicked idolaters remaining.

When he neared the Messenger ﷺ, the Messenger ﷺ knew exactly who it was, despite never once turning around, so he said, still without turning around, "Is that Fuḍāla?" Fuḍāla replied, "Yes, Messenger of Allah, it is Fuḍāla." So the Messenger ﷺ said, "What have you been whispering to yourself?" Fuḍāla replied, "Nothing! I have simply been engaging in remembrance of Allah!" The Messenger ﷺ laughed and then said, "Seek forgiveness of Allah."

Then he turned to face Fuḍāla and placed his hand upon his

chest, and in that moment peace descended upon the heart of Fuḍāla and his face changed, a look of wonder and joy transforming it. The Messenger ﷺ left him a few moments later, but Fuḍāla remained standing where he was, speechless and unable to move. Then he quickly made his way back to his group and told them what had happened. He said, "By Allah, by the time he had removed his hand from my chest, he had become the most beloved of all Allah's creation to me!"

The fact that Makkah was conquered did not mean that the Messenger ﷺ was able to rest on his laurels, for there were pressing matters to attend to before he could return to Madinah. The traditional enemies of Quraysh, the Hawāzin and the Thaḳīf, had gathered their troops to take advantage of what they perceived as the internal fighting of the Quraysh that might have left them weakened. So he set out from Makkah and met them in battle at Ḥunayn, and brought an end to their uprising.

This time he spent in Makkah was a very productive one, during which he accomplished much of great historical importance. Once he had finished seeing to these matters and had done all that needed to be done, he heard several of the Anṣār saying, "Now that Allah has given him back his homeland, Muḥammad ﷺ will move back here to live among his people and forget all about us and Madinah." So he ﷺ said to them, "Allah forbid! It is among you that I live and among you that I will die!" Then, following the conclusion of the battle of Ḥunayn and the siege of aṭ-Ṭā'if, he ﷺ accompanied the Anṣār back to Madinah, a city that had become the capital of the Islamic state.

The Return to Madinah

By conquering Makkah, the Muslims had, in effect, conquered the whole Arabian Peninsula, such was its importance to the Arabs. Allah's promise had come true and His Prophet's most ardent wish had been granted. The whole of the tribe of Quraysh entered Islam and the Age of Ignorance in the peninsula finally came to an end. The conquest of Makkah represented his crowning achievement, capping off a series of notable successes throughout the preceding eight years, and it left the remaining tribes of the peninsula with little choice but to fall in line. And in the next period, they submitted to their fate, surrendered to the Messenger ﷺ and adopted his religion.

In this way, the entire Arab peninsula became the first Islamic state, and the Muslims succeeded in placing themselves on the map of the world. They were now a force to be reckoned with. And, as for Madinah, it became their capital and seat of power, and began to host a never-ending series of delegations. The books of *Sīra* mention that in the second half of the ninth year after the Hijra alone, the city was visited by more than ninety delegations.

Most of these delegations came from within the peninsula and their purpose in coming was either to announce their entry into Islam or to swear fealty to the Muslim state, for, naturally, there were some regions that preferred to keep their old religion and beliefs. These regions were required to pay the *jizya* tax in exchange for being defended by the Muslim polity, but, in any case, still, they had submitted to Muslim rule.

The noble Messenger ﷺ would explain the Islamic faith to all the delegations that came—he would tell them of its pillars of action and its pillars of belief and teach them its obligations and

modes of religious observance. Then he would leave it up to them whether they wanted to become Muslim. It should be remembered here that the Muslims were in the ascendancy and it would have been easy for them to do as they pleased. But, despite that, the Messenger ﷺ never once forced anyone to enter Islam against his will. If they did become Muslim of their own free will, then the Messenger ﷺ appointed one of them to rule over them, so long as there was a person among them worthy of taking on that role. Then, when they left to return home, he sent an emissary with them to educate them in the faith and explain its rules and laws.⁶

In the context of these delegations, it is worth noting that when the Christian delegation from Najrān wanted to do their prayers in the Prophetic mosque, some of the Companions tried to prevent them. But when the Prophet ﷺ himself heard of their request, he immediately gave them permission, saying, "Let them do their prayers!" There can be no mistaking the wisdom and tolerance of this position, just as there can be no denying the bond of brotherhood between Islam and Christianity that it indicates.

This bond of brotherhood was very real, and there is an abundance of evidence to show that, especially during the Age of the rightly guided Caliphs, all of whom drank deeply from the well of Muhammadan knowledge and inherited from him his Prophetic ways. If you look at the humane and ethical way the Muslims treated the Christians, you will see that, as 'Alī says, "Even though they are not our brothers in faith, they are still brothers in humanity."

⁶ Duwaydār, Amīn, *Ṣuwar min ḥayāt ar-Rasūl*, Vol. 4, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1987, p. 211.

The books of history tell us that the Caliphs developed a system of social security for old and needy Christians, setting aside for them a portion of what was collected by the treasury. Moreover, it is well known that 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the grandson of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, used to use state treasury money to pay for the weddings of young Christian men who wanted to get married, and pay off the debts of Christians and Jews who did not have the means to pay back what they owed. This is the true face of the Islam about which we have been speaking.

The Farewell Ḥajj: "O Allah, be my witness!"

When the time of Ḥajj arrived in the tenth year after the Hijra, the Messenger ﷺ decided the time had come for him to carry out the obligation of Ḥajj, alongside all those who wanted to do Ḥajj with him. The Messenger ﷺ sensed his impending demise and felt that this was probably the last opportunity he had to do the Ḥajj.

Word was sent out to all the tribes in every corner of the peninsula, and they flocked towards Madinah in the hope that the great honour of taking part in this special Ḥajj alongside their Messenger ﷺ would be theirs. So many of these tribes congregated in Madinah that the number of pilgrims reached close to one hundred thousand, though some reports have the number a little smaller and others a little larger. Whatever the exact number, this was the largest gathering of people the peninsula had ever seen.

The Farewell Ḥajj was a religious and educational event unlike any other Ḥajj in history. It was a Ḥajj in which the final laws of Heaven were revealed and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ finally completed the task with which he had been entrusted on earth.

No sooner had this great assembly of men and women set out from Madinah behind their beloved Messenger ﷺ than their voices started to ring out with the great refrain of Ḥajj:

*Labbayka-llāhumma labbayk,
Labbayka lā sharīka laka labbayk,
Inna-l-ḥamda wa-n-ni'mata laka wa-l-mulk,
Lā sharīka lak.*

"Here I am at Your service, O Allah. Here I am.
Here I am at Your service. You have no partners.

Here I am. To You belong all praise and all blessing.
Sovereignty is Yours alone.
You have no partners."

When the noble Messenger ﷺ and his entourage reached Dhū al-Ḥulayfa, an oasis some eight kilometres distant from Madinah on the road to Makkah, the throngs of pilgrims set up camp for the night. Then, the next morning, following the example of their guide and teacher, they put on their *iḥrām* clothing. Then he ﷺ made the intention of Ḥajj and started to chant its supplications, and the Muslims followed suit, repeating the supplications after him and following his every step.

Then they moved on to Makkah to begin the rites of Ḥajj. When the Messenger ﷺ set eyes on the Ka'ba, he said, "O Allah, increase this House in honour, greatness and veneration, and increase all those who go on Ḥajj or 'Umra in honour, greatness, nobility, veneration and piety." Then he carried out all the rites of Ḥajj—its pillars and its supplications—and the Companions copied him, putting his teachings into practice. In this way, these Muhammadan rites entered directly into their consciousness and became an essential part of the way that they worshipped their

Lord.

The culmination of this historic Hajj was the Prophet's Farewell Sermon. In this sermon, the noble Messenger ﷺ bade farewell to the Sacred House and bade farewell to his Muslim Companions. This sermon was his testimony that he had completed the Message and fulfilled the Divinely appointed task with which he had been entrusted. He bade the Muslims farewell and then asked them to testify to the fact that he had delivered the Message of Heaven to them in full. It is reported that he said, "People, do you know what month this is? (Do you know) What day this is?"

They replied, "This is a sacred day in a sacred month in a sacred land!" So he ﷺ said, "Your blood, property and honour must be as sacred to you—until such time as you meet your Lord—as this sacred day of yours, in this month of yours, in this land of yours! When you go to meet your Lord, He will surely ask about your actions and what you have done. Have I conveyed my message to you?" They replied, "Yes", so he said, "O Allah, be my witness!"

Thereupon, the following verse in Sūrat at-Tawba was revealed:

❖ There have been twelve months with Allah in the Book of Allah, from the day He first created the heavens and earth. Four of them are sacred. That is the True faith. So do not wrong one another during them. However, fight the idolators totally just as they fight you totally, and know that Allah is with the God-fearing. ﴿٣٦﴾ At-Tawba, 9:36

Then he ﷺ continued with his sermon, stressing the importance of returning whatever is held on trust to its rightful owner and paying off debts. Then he emphasised the absolute

impermissibility of usury and told people that such practices were a residue of the Age of Ignorance and must be left behind. Then he added, "That is the True faith. So do not wrong one another during them. And do not return to unbelief after I am gone nor fight among yourselves! Have I conveyed my message to you?" They replied, "Yes", so he said, "O Allah, be my witness!"

Then he ﷺ reminded the Muslims of the high standing of women in Islam and the importance of treating them with honour and respect, saying, "You have taken them only as a trust from Allah, and you have made the enjoyment of their bodies lawful for you by means of the words of Allah. So fear Allah with respect to your womenfolk and do right by them." Then he ﷺ added, "People, the believers are brothers, and no Muslim may take the property of his brother except when his brother gives it to him of his own volition. People, you have One Lord and you are all descended from one person: all of you are from Ādam and Ādam was created from clay. The most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most God-fearing. The Arab is no better than the non-Arab except when he exceeds him in fear of Allah. Have I conveyed my message to you?" They replied, "Yes", so he said, "O Allah, be my witness!"

Then he ﷺ concluded his words with a recommendation and a warning, saying, "I am leaving you with two things: the Book of Allah and the *Sunna* of His Prophet. If you hold fast to them, you will never go astray. You all shall be asked about me. When you are asked, what shall you say?" They replied, "We bear witness that you have conveyed (the Message), discharged (the ministry of Prophethood) and given sound counsel." Then the Prophet ﷺ raised his forefinger to the sky and said, "O Allah, be my witness!"

O Allah, be my witness!"⁷

After he ﷺ finished conveying his Message and asked his people to bear witness to the fact that he had carried out his Lord's instructions in full, the following valedictory verse was revealed:

❦ Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My blessing upon you and I am pleased with Islam as a religion for you. ❧ Al-Mā'idā, 5:3

The completion of the legislation of heavenly laws signalled the completion of Allah's blessing to creation, the blessing of Heaven on earth. The lights of the fully revealed Qur'ān shone bright and the Prophetic life was perfected and completed, and when a person follows these two things, he will never be wretched and never go astray.

Only two decades earlier, the Messenger ﷺ had started out with but a handful of believers. Now, that day, the entire peninsula and much of the surrounding area had come under the sway of Islam. The Messenger's journey had begun when he called on people to testify that there was no god but Allah, and came to its end when he called on the Muslims to bear witness to the fact that he had conveyed the Message and discharged his duty. So, Allah Himself hereby testifies that His Messenger ﷺ had completed his Message in the best manner possible, and affirms that he asked the Muslims to bear witness to the fact that he had conveyed the Message and that they did indeed bear witness to that fact.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 216-226; Ibn Hishām, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 2012, pp. 509-511; an-Nadwī, Abū al-Ḥasan, *as-Sīra an-nabawiyya*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 2010, pp. 398-400.

Upon the conclusion of the Farewell Hajj, the Messenger ﷺ returned to Madinah, and all that remained for him to do was to await his meeting with his Lord. It was at this point that the final verses of the Noble Qur'an were revealed:

﴿ Have fear of a day when you will be returned to Allah. Then every self will be paid in full for what it earned. They will not be wronged. ﴾ Al-Baqara, 2:281

Shortly before his death, the Messenger ﷺ went to visit his Companions buried in the al-Baqi' cemetery and, after greeting them, promised them that he would see them soon. Then he returned home and said to the Companions who had gathered around him, "Convey my greetings of peace to all those of my community who follow me from now until the end of time."

Sometime later, Jibril, peace be upon him, asked the Prophet's permission for the Angel of death to enter. So the Prophet ﷺ said, "Give him my permission, Jibril." A few minutes later, the Prophet ﷺ was heard to say to the angel of death, "Rather, to the highest company! Rather, to the highest company!" Then he closed his eyes and left us to go to the highest company.



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Dr Hussein Ghubash is the author of several books and former U.A.E ambassador to UNESCO. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Nanterre Paris X.

Front cover calligraphy of Sūrat al-Anbiyā', 21:107
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