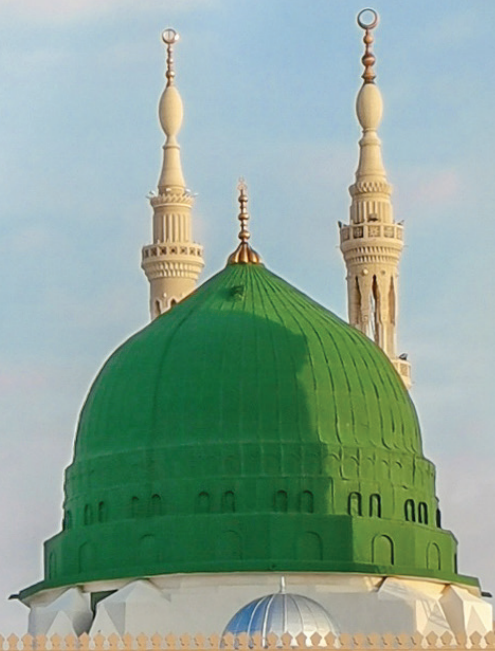


PROPHET
MUHAMMAD
THE PROPHET OF PEACE



FARIDA KHANNAM

PROPHET MUHAMMAD
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LIFE OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

In 570 AD., Prophet Muhammad was born in the desert of Arabia. At that time, there were three major towns, Yathrib, a large oasis now called Madinah; Taif, a cool refuge in the mountains famous for its grapes; and Makkah, which by contrast, lay in a barren valley. It was here, in this town, that Prophet Muhammad was born. Makkah was important for two reasons: first, the Kabah was located there, and secondly, it was a great trading centre, with people coming from far and wide to worship and sell their wares. The original Kabah was built by the prophets Abraham and Ishmael, who were the ancestors of Prophet Muhammad.

Prophet Muhammad's father died two months before he was born. Shortly after his birth, his mother, Aminah, sent him to Abdul Muttalib, his grandfather sitting near the Kabah then. Abdul Muttalib was the head of the Quraysh tribe, guardian of the Kabah and protector of the pilgrims who visited this holy place. He was respected and admired by all. He was overjoyed

at the news of the birth and gave his grandson the name Muhammad, meaning “the praised one”.

As was the practice of the Makkan nobility in those days, the newborn babies were sent to the desert to be nursed by paid foster mothers. The desert area was far from the city and was considered healthier. Muhammad was handed over to a wet nurse, Halima Al-Sadiya, who belonged to the Banu Sad tribe. Muhammad remained in charge of Halima until the age of five. He learnt Arabic in its purest form from her tribe. When he returned from this desert life to his mother after five years, she decided to take him to visit his uncles in Yathrib. Yathrib (now known as Madinah) is an oasis famous for its palm groves. Aminah was accompanied on the trip by Umm Aiman, her servant. After a month’s stay in Yathrib, Aminah set out to return to Makkah. However, on her way back, she fell ill and died. She was buried in Abwa. Muhammad was brought back home by Umm Aiman.

Muhammad’s grandfather adopted him and took care of him. He looked after him with great affection.

However, Abdul Muttalib, too, died when Muhammad was just eight years old. After his death, Muhammad was adopted by his uncle, Abu Talib, a merchant. Once, he went with Abu Talib to Syria on a trading journey. There he met a Christian monk named Bahira, living in a monastery. This monk had read a book about the emergence of a prophet and recognised the signs of prophethood in Muhammad. Therefore, he advised Abu Talib to return immediately with his nephew and protect him from enemies.

When Muhammad grew up, he had a reputation for honesty, good morals, a gentle nature, and sincerity. He kept aloof from quarrels and never used foul language or abused anyone. Ali ibn Abi Talib once said: "All those who came close to him loved him." (*Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* - Ibn Hisham, Vol. 2, p. 35)

He was called Al-Amin (the trustworthy one) and As-Sadiq (the truthful one) by the Makkans.

When Muhammad was twenty-five years old, he had become so well thought of that he came to the

attention of Khadijah, a wealthy 40-year-old widow from a merchant family. She regularly employed men to do her trading and rewarded them with a share of the profits. So, in the same way, she hired Muhammad to take her goods to Syria to trade.

Muhammad handled the trading very well, bringing back greater profits than Khadijah had ever made. Moreover, Khadijah's servant, Maysarah, who accompanied Muhammad to Syria, had come to admire and respect him greatly and gave a glowing report to her mistress about what a superior person Muhammad was.

His virtues deeply impressed her and expressed her desire to marry him. After discussing this with his uncle, Muhammad accepted her marriage proposal. Khadijah became his first wife, and he had no other wife during her lifetime. Except for Ibrahim, who died in infancy, all his children were born to Khadijah. Of the daughters, Ruqaiyyah, Zaynab, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah lived on long enough to accept Islam and migrate to Madinah with the Prophet.

Prophet Muhammad's marriage with Khadijah allowed him to lead a comfortable life as a wealthy and respected noble of Makkah. Muhammad led a calm and quiet life as a merchant for a few years. However, he soon gave up all worldly activities and started his quest for the truth.

The fact that Prophet Muhammad was a well-respected member of the Quraysh can be seen from an incident. The Quraysh decided to rebuild the Kabah after a sudden flood had shaken its foundations and cracked its walls. So, the old structure was pulled down, and the new construction began. When the walls rose from the ground, the time came to put the famous Black Stone (*Hajr-e-Aswad*) in its place on the east wall. *Hajr-e-Aswad* is an oval black stone of about 18 cm in diameter fixed in the wall of the Kabah. This stone was first set there by Prophet Abraham to mark the spot from which to begin the ritual of walking (tawaf) around the Kabah. At present, this is the only portion which is left of the original building.

The question arose about which clan would put the

stone back in place. This led to a dispute among the clans since each clan wanted that honour. Since no peaceful solution seemed possible, it almost led to a civil war. Finally, it was agreed that the first man to enter the courtyard of the Kabah would settle the issue. That man was Muhammad.

Although the problem seemed insoluble, Muhammad's sound judgement saved the honour of everyone concerned. First, he spread a white sheet on the ground, placing the sacred stone at its centre. Then he instructed the elders of each clan to lift a corner of the sheet and carry the stone to its site. Then Muhammad, the peacemaker, fixed the stone in its place with his hands. This settling of the dispute to everybody's satisfaction prevented a bloody clash.

PEACEFUL BEGINNING OF THE PROPHETIC MISSION

Instead of meeting people in their homes and at gatherings and trying to gain a position among the

nobles of Makkah, Muhammad would wander into the barren hills of the desert. He would sit for hours and ponder over the mysteries of creation. The vast silence of the desert, with endless sand and sky during the days and equally endless darkness at night, alive only with the twinkling of millions and millions of tiny stars, seemed to bring him very close to the Creator.

Muhammad often stayed alone for days in the Cave of Hira, near the top of Jabal al-Nur, or the Mountain of Light, three miles from Makkah. He would return home only for more supplies of food and water and then go back to the solitude of nature to pray and meditate, asking the Maker of the heavens and the earth for answers to the questions that surged in his mind. What is man's true role in life? What does the Lord require of men as His servants? From where does man come, and where will he go after death?

It was to find answers to these difficult questions that he went off into the stillness of the desert. With these questions in mind, worldly gain, loss, comfort and distress did not concern him. Instead, he urgently

wanted the answers to these essential questions about the truth. For nothing less than the truth could satisfy his soul. This phase of the Prophet's life is referred to in the Quran in this verse:

“Did He not find you wandering and give you guidance?” (93:7)

He spent the whole month of Ramadan in the Cave of Hira. Finally, after the Prophet had spent six long months in the cave, God turned to him in mercy to guide him to the path of truth. At age 40, on 12 February 610 AD, the Prophet was sitting alone in his cave when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in human form, bringing the first message from God. The Prophet's quest had finally been rewarded. God had granted him guidance and chosen him as His Prophet. The first revelation received by the Prophet forms part of the beginning of the ninety-sixth chapter of the Quran:

“Read! In the name of your Lord, who created:
created man from a clot [of blood]. Read! Your

PEACEFUL BEGINNING OF THE PROPHETIC MISSION

Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” (96:1-5)

These were the first words of the Quran. The Prophet felt these lines were written on his heart. However, the experience left him surprised and confused. He even thought that he might be falling ill. So he rushed back to his wife, Khadijah.

Being very kind and understanding, Khadijah tried her best to reassure him.

She said: “By God, I pray and hope that you will be the Prophet of this nation. By God, He will not let you down. You are kind to your relations. You speak the truth, help the poor bear their burden, honour guests, and help those in distress. Surely, God will never let you fail.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3)

Khadijah then suggested they go and consult her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who had become a Christian hermit.

When Waraqa heard the entire account from the Prophet, he told him that the revelation he had

experienced was from the same source as the messages of the Prophet Moses and Jesus. Then, gradually, he began to understand—his quest had finally been rewarded. His restless soul had been joined with his Lord. The Prophet continued to receive divine revelations from time to time over the next twenty-three years when the Archangel Gabriel would come to him in different forms. Sometimes he would be huge and fill the whole horizon, and sometimes he would be just a pair of eyes watching him. At other times he remained invisible, and only his voice could be heard. Sometimes the voice was muffled, like a ringing in the Prophet's head. However, the meaning was always evident.

Khadijah was the first to respond to the call of the Prophet. Her cousin, the wise man Waraqah, explained that just as Gabriel had come to Moses earlier on Mount Sinai and told him to guide his people, so would Muhammad become the Prophet of his people. However, Waraqah also warned that not all the people would listen to the Prophet, and some would even try

to harm him and his followers. Therefore, the Prophet would need great courage and patience. Khadijah understood and became the Prophet's most substantial help and support in the following trials.

The next to respond to the Prophet was his cousin, Ali. Zayd, his foster son, was the third. Finally, Abu Bakr, a respected merchant, was the first convert outside the family to become the Prophet's closest companion. To begin with, the Prophet taught Khadijah and the small group of friends how to pray, and they would pray together.

This small group of the faithful were the first believers of Islam. In the first stage, the Prophet was asked to spread the message of Islam quietly to avoid arousing any hostility.

Being an influential merchant, Abu Bakr brought some of his friends, also wealthy merchants, into the fold of Islam. However, most of the conversions occurred among the weak and the poor.

In the second stage, the Prophet received the command

from God to spread the message publicly, but first to his kin.

When Prophet Muhammad started communicating his mission to the general public, he met with a strong reaction. The people considered Islam's teachings as insulting their forefathers' religion. Some remarked that he had gone mad. Soon they all went away without considering the Prophet's words.

There was one main reason for the Quraysh to oppose the Prophet and keep him from spreading his message. Makkah was a pilgrimage centre because the Kabah housed 360 idols of the neighbouring tribes and nations. Since Islam believed in only One God, the Quraysh feared that once the concept of One God became popular, the tribes would stop visiting the Kabah to pay homage to the idols. This would deprive them of the respect they commanded as guardians of the Kabah. Besides, the prosperity of Makkah depended mainly on these idols, to whom offerings were made all year round by significant numbers of the neighbouring tribespeople. Trade flourished alongside

the pilgrimage, which was good for Makkah, for the townspeople had no other way of making money; farming or planting orchards in such a desert area was out of the question. The Kabah was their sole asset. However, not all of the Makkans were hostile. Some gave serious thought to the message of the Quran and gradually began to accept Islam. There were about 200 Makkans, as well as people from the neighbouring settlements, who entered the Islamic fold.

The Quraysh, who enjoyed the Makkan leadership, considered the teachings of the new religion an insult to the religion of their forefathers. In Islam, they saw a danger to their leadership. Such leaders as Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab were the most hostile to the Prophet. They began to give serious thought to the matter. Islam was fast gaining ground, so they thought they could not afford to postpone taking action. They had to nip this 'menace' in the bud.

The chiefs of different clans gathered to discuss the matter. They all felt that if Abu Talib did not come their way, they would have no difficulty in finding a solution

to this problem. So they all came to Abu Talib to tell him to stop Muhammad from spreading his message.

They warned him, “Tell Muhammad to stop spreading his message, or you will abandon him. If you fail to do so, you should be ready to suffer for the deeds of your nephew.”

Abu Talib, an old man, felt he could not resist their wrath. So he told the Prophet what the Quraysh chiefs had said to him and then added, “My dearest nephew, look to your safety and the safety of your uncle, and do not cause me to carry a burden I cannot bear.”

For a while, the Prophet stood motionless. On the one hand, there was his old uncle, weakened by the people’s opposition, and on the other hand, he was responsible for proclaiming the truth till his last breath. Moreover, his faith and conviction in the truth were the only sources of strength. So he decided to discharge his duty, whatever the cost. In a firm and calm voice, and with tears in his eyes, he said:

“O, uncle! By God Almighty, I swear that even if they

THE OPPOSITION INTENSIFIES

were to place the sun on my right and the moon on my left, I would not give up my mission. I must go on carrying it out until I die.”

Abu Talib, touched by the sincerity and force of the words uttered by his nephew, remained motionless for a while. Then he turned to the Prophet and said:

“My nephew, go your way. Do your duty. Let my people turn against me. I am with you. No one shall harm you as long as I live.” (*Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* - Ibn Hisham, Vol. 1, p. 240)

THE OPPOSITION INTENSIFIES

When the Quraysh saw that the pressure on Abu Talib had failed, they made life unbearable for the Prophet and his followers. Slaves, the weakest sections of society, were the worst sufferers. Their masters beat them brutally, and some were beaten to death. However, they suffered all this patiently. So Abu Bakr spent much of his wealth on freeing these enslaved people.

Even wealthy Muslims were not spared. They were also persecuted. Their relatives turned against them. After the death of Abu Talib and Khadijah, the people felt nothing was left to stop them from persecuting the Prophet. They threw garbage at him as he passed through the streets. They spread thorns in his path. They made noise when the Prophet stood up at the Kabah to pray.

The Makkans did all they could to turn the people against the Prophet. However, despite all their efforts, Islam continued to spread. Some of the most powerful men of Makkah accepted Islam. Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, famous for his bravery, and Abu Dharr Ghifari were among them.

The Makkan chiefs were more enraged than before. They made life so difficult for the Muslims that many migrated to nearby Abyssinia with the Prophet's permission. At first, fifteen men and women migrated to Abyssinia. Slowly, the number reached eighty-three.

With time, the Makkan chiefs became more and more

bitter. They felt that the Prophet's clan, the Banu Hashim, headed by Abu Talib, was responsible for all this misery and that if they had given up Muhammad, all his activities could have been stopped without delay. So they told the Banu Hashim they would suffer the consequences if they did not surrender to Muhammad.

The tribes of Makkah agreed. They agreed to cut off all dealings with the Banu Hashim. No one was to sell anything to them. The agreement was signed and hung up in the sacred Kabah. This was the seventh year of prophethood.

This boycott period was a great hardship for the Banu Hashim and the Muslims. While this ban was in force, Abu Talib, the chief of the Banu Hashim, had to take refuge in a narrow valley, which came to be known as Abu Talib's Pass. The Prophet and his relatives lived in this valley for three years. Many Muslims joined them. All supplies to the valley were cut off. The Banu Hashim had to live on the leaves and roots of trees.

Finally, certain kind-hearted Makkan leaders took

pity on them. They tore the agreement hanging in the Kabah to pieces so the Banu Hashim could return to their homes. However, Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, died soon after this. His health had suffered during the three years of hardship. Nevertheless, although Abu Talib had not accepted Islam, he protected the Prophet from his opponents as head of his clan.

After his death, Abu Lahab, another uncle of the Prophet, became head of the Banu Hashim. He was the bitterest enemy of Islam and Muslims. He made it clear to the Quraysh that Muhammad no longer had the protection of his clan. Moreover, in those days, no one could survive without such protection.

Khadijah, the faithful wife of the Prophet, also died soon after the ban was lifted. Both these deaths took place in the tenth year of prophethood.

The loss of Abu Talib and Khadijah saddened the Prophet, for they had been great sources of strength to him. It was their deaths that made the enemy bold enough to persecute him. One day when the Prophet

was praying in the Kabah, Abu Jahl put a piece of cloth around his neck and twisted it hard. He would have strangled the Prophet had not Abu Bakr rushed to his help in time.

Day by day, the situation worsened. So the Prophet decided to go to Taif, a neighbouring town about 40 miles from Makkah, to spread God's word. He was accompanied only by his servant, Zayd. He spoke to the leaders of Taif and invited them to accept Islam. They paid no heed to his message. They were such evil people that they did not stop at that. When the Prophet left the town in a sad state, these chiefs sent street urchins to chase him. They abused him and threw stones at him as he walked out of the town. They continued to pelt stones at him until it became too dark for them to see him. He stopped on the way in an orchard to rest. He was severely hurt, bleeding profusely. However, he only prayed for the guidance of his foes. He did not curse them. In all humility, he said thus:

“I rather hope that God will raise from among their descendants people who will worship God

the One, and will not ascribe partners to Him.”

(*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3231)

ISLAM SPREADS TO YATHRIB (MADINAH)

The Prophet regularly conveyed the message of Islam to people from outside Makkah. In the eleventh year of his prophethood, in 620 AD, six men from the tribe of Khazraj of Yathrib (which later came to be known as Madinatun-Nabi, The Prophet's City) accepted Islam during their pilgrimage to Makkah. The following year twelve more men from Yathrib accepted Islam. This time they took an oath pledging allegiance to the Prophet. This oath is known as the First Pledge of Aqabah, named after the Aqabah pass at Mina, near Makkah, where they had sworn to accept Islam. They requested the Prophet to send Musab bin Umayr, a companion of the Prophet, to Yathrib to convey the message of Islam to the inhabitants. There the divine message was immediately well-received, and within a year, many people accepted Islam due to the preaching of Musab ibn Umayr.

In the thirteenth year of prophethood, seventy-two Muslims from Yathrib came for the Hajj. On behalf of their people, they invited the Prophet to make Yathrib his home. During the pilgrimage, they also took the oath known as the Second Pledge of Aqabah. These men from Yathrib, of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj, pledged to protect the Prophet from his enemies. However, for all this sacrifice on their part, they wanted the Prophet to promise them only one thing: that when he had gained power, he would not leave them and return to Makkah. The Prophet replied:

“You have that assurance. I am yours, and you are mine.” (*Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* - Ibn Hisham, Vol. 1, p. 442)

Then the Muslims began to emigrate to Yathrib in large numbers to escape persecution at the hands of the Quraysh. Finally, only the Prophet, Abu Bakr and a few Muslims were left in Makkah.

This enraged the Quraysh, for Islam was strengthening its roots in Yathrib. They were greatly alarmed that their enemies were gaining a firm foothold. There was

nothing more dangerous than that. So they resolved to remove the danger once and for all. They said:

“Kill Muhammad, and Islam will die with him.”

(*Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* - Ibn Hisham, Vol. 1,
p. 482)

The Makkans then plotted against the Prophet's life, and the young men with whom the Quraysh had planned to carry out the murder collected on that fateful night to put their plan into action. However, God had another plan—and who can overrule the plan of God? And that was to command the Prophet to leave for Yathrib. So the Prophet first called Ali, gave him the people's deposits, and asked him to return them to the depositors. Then he made Ali lie in bed while leaving the house at midnight.

The Prophet had already informed Abu Bakr, his closest friend, of the plan to emigrate, to be conducted in total secrecy. So they left Makkah before dawn, riding on two camels which Abu Bakr had kept ready to carry them across the desert. About five miles from the city, they took shelter in a cave called Thawr.

THE PROPHET ARRIVES AT MADINAH

When the Makkans learnt of the Prophet's escape, they were enraged. They offered a prize of one hundred camels to anyone who captured Muhammad. So several horse riders raced out into the desert. One of them even managed to reach the very mouth of the cave of Thawr. Abu Bakr was stricken with fear lest they harm the Prophet. However, the Prophet reassured him, saying:

“Fear not. We are not just two in this cave. There is a third—God.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4663)

The Prophet and Abu Bakr lay hidden in this cave for three days and nights. Finally, on the fourth day, they came out and continued the journey with Abdullah ibn Urayqit, their guide.

THE PROPHET ARRIVES AT MADINAH

After six days, the Prophet reached Quba, a village three miles from Madinah. At that time, the people of Madinah had been waiting impatiently for his arrival.

The Prophet stayed for two weeks in Quba, where he built the first mosque of Islam.

People came out of the city each morning and watched the road from Quba. Then, at last, the great day arrived. He set off for Madinah on a Friday morning. When he entered the town, he found that all the people, men, women and children, had turned out to receive him. The women stood on the house-tops and sang songs of joy.

They had all lined both sides of the street to receive him. Everybody wanted him to be his guest when the Prophet entered the city. The more zealous held the reins of the camel and wanted the Prophet to dismount in front of their doors and enter their houses. However, the Prophet refused politely and said:

“Leave my camel alone. She is under the command of God; she will stop where God wants her to stop.” It finally stopped at a site that belonged to two orphans, Sahal and Suhail, of the Banu Najjar tribe. The Prophet dismounted, saying: “It seems that this is where God

wants us to stop.” (*Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* - Ibn Hisham, Vol. 1, p. 494)

The Prophet bought that land to build a mosque and some rooms for his wives. After settling this matter, the Prophet asked who lived nearest the site. Abu Ayyub Ansari said his house was the closest and requested the Prophet to be his guest. So the Prophet stayed in his house for about seven months. In the meantime, his house was built.

From the day the Prophet came to Yathrib, it came to be called Madinatun-Nabi or “The City of the Prophet”.

The Prophet entered Yathrib on 17 September 622 AD. This year was later designated by Caliph Umar as the first year of the Islamic era, for this event was considered the most important in the history of Islam.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ISLAM

The first problem faced by the Prophet was that of the Makkan refugees. They had neither homes nor money. Most of them had been well-to-do in Makkah, but

they had left everything behind. So the first important thing the Prophet had to do was settle them in their new surroundings.

The solution to this problem was found in the concept of brotherhood in Islam. The Prophet collected the Muslims and suggested that one Ansari Madinan Muslim and one refugee Makkan Muslim should become linked together as two brothers.

They immediately accepted the suggestion of the Prophet. Each Ansari took one Makkan Muslim as his brother. This bond between the two became even more powerful than a blood relationship. The Ansari gave his Makkan brother half of his possessions—house, land, money and other belongings.

THE PROPHET'S MOSQUE

The next most important task for the Prophet was to build a mosque. This mosque was built on the land he had bought from the orphans. It had mud walls and a roof of palm leaves. Huts were built right next to the mosque for the Prophet's family.

A platform with a thatched roof was built in one corner of the mosque. Poor people who had no home or family lived here. They spent their time in worship and prayer. They were fed by those Muslims who could afford to do so. They also sometimes earned their living by collecting wood from the jungle and selling it in the market. These people came to be known as *Ashab-e-Suffa*, the people of the bench. Abu Hurayrah, also one of the *Ashab-e-Suffa*, was the most constant attendant of the Prophet. He related more traditions of the sayings and doings of the Prophet than any other companion.

Yathrib was inhabited mainly by the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Both tribes rapidly entered the fold of Islam. Some Jewish tribes also lived in the city. They were rich, owned orchards and were very powerful.

Now the Prophet turned his attention to the vital task of establishing friendly relations with various tribes. The Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza were the Jewish tribes that were neither friendly nor hostile towards the Aws and Khazraj. However, now that the Aws and Khazraj had accepted Islam, making a

new treaty to determine each other's rights and duties in the new scheme of things was necessary, with the Prophet as their leader.

This pact dictated by the Prophet granted full religious freedom to the Jews. The Muslims and the Jews had to live in peace and amity together as brothers, helping one another in times of need.

After the conclusion of this treaty, Islam found a safe home in Yathrib.

THE PROPHET'S FAMILY

The Prophet had a large family. Most of his wives were widows. Two of his wives were Jewish, and one was Christian.

In those days, men could have several wives, but Islam restricted the number of wives to four. In that period, when men were often killed in battle, the women left behind had to be looked after. So taking several wives was like taking helpless refugees into one's home. They were treated kindly and generously. Muslim men were

encouraged to look after the widows of friends who had died in battle, give them separate homes, and treat them equally.

The Prophet's wives shared his pious way of life. They made great personal sacrifices, bearing patiently with all kinds of hardships in the path of God. So they came to be known as the mothers of the faithful. The Prophet's sons had died in infancy. However, four daughters Khadijah bore survived infancy, grew to adulthood, married and bore children. They were Fatimah, Umm Kulthum, Ruqayyah and Zaynab.

The Prophet was a man of peace. His main task was to tell the people about the divine message; he needed an atmosphere of peace and goodwill in which to do so. So he urged his companions to ask God for peace. However, the Quraysh did not allow him to work in peaceful conditions. When they saw the Muslims becoming more powerful, they resolved to wage war and crush them altogether.

THE BATTLE OF BADR

The Quraysh marched to Madinah with a thousand-strong army. They camped at Badr, about eighty miles from Madinah. It was the month of Ramadan, 2 AH. On hearing the news of the enemy camping at Badr, the Prophet marched out of Madinah at the head of an army of 313 Muslims. There were few horses, and the Muslims had no armour. The Makkans, on the other hand, were well-armed and had 300 horses and 700 camels.

The battle, in which the Makkans were seriously outnumbered, began on Friday, the 17th of Ramadan. The fighting lasted only a few hours, during which the Prophet prayed all the time for divine help. God then sent angels to help the Muslims. The Muslims won the battle, and the Quraysh suffered a total rout.

THE BATTLE OF UHUD

The defeat, however, did not teach the Quraysh a lesson. On the contrary, it only made them angrier.

Bent on wiping out the shame of their defeat, they began to prepare for a second attack on a much larger scale. They raised an army of more than 3000 warriors and, mad with revenge, marched to Madinah, led by Abu Sufyan.

The Battle of Uhud took place in 624 AD. The enemy numbered 3000, while the Prophet's men numbered only 700. However, the Muslims successfully drove back their attackers with God on their side. The enemy started retreating, leaving behind large quantities of booty. The Muslims were about to win the battle when forty archers, whom the Prophet had sent to the hillside to guard the pass, saw the retreating army and thought that if they remained on the hill, they would lose their share of the booty. So most of them ran away from their posts. This left the way open for a counter-attack.

When Khalid bin Walid, still a non-Muslim, saw the pass undefended, he led his men behind the hill and killed the few archers who stood guard. Then he fell upon the Muslims from the rear. Seeing this, the

fleeing Quraysh leaders turned back. The Muslims were thrown into utter confusion. The Prophet himself was wounded. However, the Muslims stood like a solid stone wall around the Prophet and beat back all attacks with superhuman courage. Many fell dead, and several were wounded. They had gone to the extent of sacrificing their lives to save the Prophet from the enemy onslaught. Slowly the enemy was beaten back.

The Quraysh lost 14 men, while the Muslims lost 70. Among the dead was Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle. First, the Prophet grieved over the loss of this brave soul. Then, the martyrs were buried with deep sorrow, and the Muslims returned to Madinah.

The Quraysh knew at heart that the Muslims would have won the battle had not the fateful mistake of a few Muslims turned their victory into defeat. So for two years, they did not attempt to invade Makkah.

THE BATTLE OF THE TRENCH

The enemies and hypocrites had been plotting all this while. Finally, they managed to bring together all the opponents of Islam. They were able to assemble a mighty force of 24,000. In the fifth year of Hijrah, this large army started marching towards Madinah. The Prophet consulted his companions. One of them, Salman Farsi, a Persian, suggested that a trench be dug around Madinah to stop the enemy's advance. The Sassanids had already used this strategy on similar occasions. It took three thousand men working for twenty days to dig the trench.

The allied forces of 10,000 marched to Madinah under the command of Abu Sufyan. The Madinans numbered only 3,000. The trench stopped the Makkan cavalry. However, they had plenty of food supplies, so they decided to lay siege to the city.

On the 27th day of the siege, a cyclone hit Madinah. The storm continued for three days and nights, bringing

very heavy rain. All the tents were blown away, and the provisions became unusable due to the rain.

The soldiers began to voice their grievances. Discouraged, the Quraysh abandoned the siege.

THE TREATY OF HUDAYBIYYAH

The Prophet felt that war was not the solution. Therefore, he adopted another strategy. Guided by a dream, he left for Makkah to perform Umrah accompanied by 1,400 companions. He camped at Hdaybiyyah, a short way from Makkah. It was an entirely peaceful march. However, the Makkan leaders objected to it. They felt they were being made to look very small because the people they had forced out of Makkah were coming to the city again to perform the rites of Umrah openly and in such large numbers.

The Prophet halted at Hdaybiyyah and began peace talks with the Makkan leaders. The Quraysh finally agreed to sign a peace treaty. However, at the Prophet's suggestion, a clause was included which said that,

CALL TO THE WORLD

for the next ten years, no war would occur between the Muslims and the Makkans. By the terms of this treaty, the Muslims were to go back without visiting the Kabah. They were to return the following year and stay in Makkah for three days.

The treaty appeared to be a victory for the Quraysh, for the Prophet had accepted all their conditions without demur. However, it soon proved to be otherwise. There was no war danger; people could mix freely with any tribe they liked. This allowed the non-Muslims to have a closer look at Islam. During this period of free mixing, Islam became a subject for everyone to discuss. As a result, the call for Islam spread rapidly. The Arabs, impressed by the virtues of Islam, began to enter its fold in large numbers. Within the next two years, the number of Muslims increased significantly.

CALL TO THE WORLD

Now that there was peace, the Prophet took full advantage of its opportunities. He sent his companions

with letters to the rulers and kings of countries right next to or very close to Arabia. The companions delivered these letters to Iran, Byzantium, Abyssinia, Egypt and the rulers of Syria. These letters contained the basic teachings of Islam, and the rulers were invited to accept Islam.

Some of them, like Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, accepted Islam, while others rejected it, but they accepted the letters graciously and sent presents to the Prophet. Only the Emperor of Iran, Khusro Parvez, tore up the Prophet's message in his arrogance. He considered it below his dignity to accept such a letter. When the Prophet received this news, he said: "The Emperor of Persia has himself torn his Kingdom into pieces." (*Al-Bidāya wan Nihāya*, Vol. 6, p. 485) This prediction was fulfilled during the rule of Caliph Umar when Iran came under Muslim rule.

THE FALL OF MAKKAH

Two years after the signing of this treaty, the Quraysh broke their word. The Prophet then announced that the peace agreement was no longer in force. Later, on the 10th day of Ramadan, he left for Makkah accompanied by 10,000 companions. This march was conducted in complete secrecy. Only when they encamped a few miles from the city did the Makkans come to know of their arrival. The Makkans were utterly taken by surprise. Faced with this numerical strength, the Makkans found themselves helpless. Therefore, they conceded their defeat without any resistance. Makkah was thus conquered without any armed encounter. The Muslims had strict orders to shed no blood. The Makkans were told they would be safe if they kept indoors or took refuge in the Kabah or Abu Sufyan's house.

After the fall of Makkah, the Kabah was purified of all the idols placed in it. Then Bilal, the black companion of the Prophet, went up onto the roof of the Kabah and

gave the call to prayer (*Azan*). Then the companions said the thanksgiving prayer, led by the Prophet.

PARDON FOR ALL

The Makkan leaders sat in the compound of the Kabah. They were, without exception, the worst types of criminals. Therefore, even if all of them were to be put to death, the punishment would have been fully justified. However, the Prophet, being of a noble character, did not act against them. On the contrary, he pardoned them all, saying: “Go, you are all free.” (*Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* - Ibn Hisham, Vol. 2, p. 412)

The Makkan idolaters could hardly believe their ears. This excellent treatment of the fallen foe won all hearts, including those of the most bitter enemies of Islam. After their hearts were conquered, the Makkan idolaters had no choice but to embrace Islam. All the insolent Makkans surrendered and joined the Prophet in his mission as companions. All opposition had just vanished.

BATTLE OF HUNAYN

The fall of Makkah was not taken kindly by all the tribes. The Banu Tha'qif and the Hawazin, who lived between Makkah and Taif, were greatly upset by the developments in Makkah. Sensing the danger to their freedom and to their position as the most important tribes of the region, they turned hostile and collected a large army. This army was encamped in the valley of Hunayn, to which a narrow pass was the only entrance.

Expert archers hid behind rocky crags. The Prophet arrived with an army of 12,000. The Muslims, filling between the narrow rocky walls of the pass, panicked under the sudden heavy rain of arrows from the hidden archers. About 11,000 of the 12,000-strong Muslim army turned and fled, unprepared for this sudden attack. However, the Prophet and some of his close companions showed no signs of panic, putting their entire trust in God. God sent His help as promised. Thus, despite this first setback, the course of the battle was altered. The Muslims won an extraordinary victory. 6,000 members of the Hawazin tribe were

taken prisoner. They were proven war criminals, and, according to the prevailing custom, they should all have been put to death. But the Prophet pardoned them all and set them free without setting any conditions.

This extraordinary and unexpected pardon impressed these insolent people so much that they all entered the fold of Islam. After the conversion of the Hawazin tribe, the rebel Thaqif tribe of Taif lost courage. But, within one month, they all surrendered and embraced Islam.

THE FIRST HAJJ UNDER ISLAM

The first Hajj under Islam took place in the 9th year of Hijrah. The Prophet did not lead it but sent Abu Bakr in his place. The 9th year of Hijrah witnessed a rapid spread of Islam. Representatives of tribes inhabiting far-off parts of Arabia poured into Madinah. They had a two-fold purpose—to convert to Islam and to establish relations with the newly formed Islamic state. These delegations came in such large numbers that the

year became known as the year of delegations. In this way, one after another, all the tribes of Arabia entered the fold of Islam.

THE FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE

After stabilising the situation in Arabia, the Prophet set out to perform *Hajjatul Wida*, his Farewell Pilgrimage. It was the last year of his life. He left Madinah for Makkah accompanied by Madinan Muslims. When the news spread that the Prophet would perform the pilgrimage, various tribes living in Arabia began pouring into Makkah.

Therefore, when the Prophet of Islam performed his first as well as his last pilgrimage, he was joined by 1,25,000 Muslims. During this pilgrimage, he was given revelations about the rules of the Hajj. All Muslims follow them to this day. When the Prophet arrived at Mount Arafat, he gave his words of wisdom to the people present. These teachings are preserved in the form of the 'Farewell Sermon'.

During the Sermon of Arafat, the last passage of the Quran was revealed:

“Today I have completed your religion for you and completed My blessing upon you. I have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (5:3)

This proved to be the Prophet’s last visit. That is why it came to be called the “Farewell Pilgrimage”. Only three months after returning to Madinah, he fell ill and stayed in Aishah’s house with the consent of his wives. He had fever and headache. He remained ill for about two weeks and breathed his last on 12 Rabiul Awwal 10 AH. He continued leading prayers till he became too weak to go to the mosque. However, before his death, he said his last prayer in the Masjid-e-Nabawi and made Abu Bakr, his closest companion, the Imam of this prayer. This was a clear sign that he wanted Abu Bakr to succeed him as the leader of the believers.

The Prophet Muhammad became ill in the 11th year after the hijra and died several days later (8 June 632 AD). He was 63 years old when he died. Prophet

TEACHINGS OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Muhammad did not leave anything for his family. Instead, he left the Quran that was revealed to him in preserved form, his teachings and his sublime character, which is called khuluqin azim in the Quran (68:4). These are invaluable sources of knowledge and wisdom for the believers.

TEACHINGS OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Concept of God

God is one. God is an eternal, ever-living reality. He is all in all. Everything is from God. God is not from anything. God is the Creator of all things and Manages the entire universe.

The Quran puts it thus: “God: there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the Earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all that is before them and all that is behind them. They can

grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and their upholding does not weary Him. He is the Sublime, the Almighty one!” (2:255)

Then there is another chapter in the Quran which has this to say about God: “Say, ‘He is God, the One, God, the Self-sufficient One. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him.’” (112:1-4)

This short chapter of the Quran describes the oneness of God in a pure and unadulterated form. The concept of the one God is the central concept of Islam: this belief is the essence of Islam and the sole source of all of its teachings.

The Message of the Quran

The Quran is the book of God. Therefore, preserved in its original form, the Quran is a reliable source of divine guidance.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran. Everything laid down in the Quran can be summed up thus: an

individual should believe in the one God and hold himself accountable to Him alone. He should discover that the Prophet Muhammad was a messenger who conveyed God's guidance to humanity.

The Quran is a sacred book sent by God for everyone. It is a book for all because God, the Creator of all humanity, has sent it.

The Quran is not the only revealed book. It is, in effect, a preserved version of the previous divine books brought by different prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad. In this sense, the Quran is a book for all human beings and all nations. The Quran manifests God's mercy for all. It is the message of God sent by Him for everyone. The Quran is a light of guidance for the whole world, just as the sun is a source of light and heat for the entire world.

Five Pillars of Islam

After belief in God and the Prophet, four practices enjoy the status of pillars of Islam—fasting, prayers, zakah (almsgiving) and the hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah).

The Prophet Muhammad has said:

“The foundation of Islam has been laid on five principles: to bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is His Prophet; to offer prayers (salah); to give alms (zakah); to perform the Hajj and to keep the fast during Ramadan.”

These five principles form the pillars of Islam. Just as a house stands on pillars, so does the Islamic faith on these tenets. However, the performance of these rituals is not all that is desired. Much more important is the true spirit in which these are performed. Without the spirit, the form is meaningless. All these different observances—faith, prayer, fasting, charity, and Pilgrimage—are not mere rituals but are the source of receiving the choicest divine blessings.

Prayer is an exercise in physical and mental prostration before God, aimed at banishing all notions of personal greatness. Fasting teaches one to be steadfast in one’s trust in God. Charity entails recognising the claim of others upon oneself, and sharing God’s bounty with

others. The Pilgrimage serves to unite God's servants around their Maker.

The Spirit of Salah

The spirit of these five daily prayers is humility. One who bows before his Creator in the true spirit will be devoid of pride and ego. The prayers are prescribed five times throughout the day—at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. The prayers consist of recitations from the Quran and the glorification of God. A sequence of movements accompanies these: standing, bowing, kneeling, touching the ground with one's forehead, and sitting. Worshippers face the Kabah while offering prayers.

Muslims have been advised in the Quran to be steadfast in their prayer (29:45), for prayer keeps away indecency and evil. One who performs his prayer in its true spirit cannot become forgetful of God after his prayer is over. The actions of prayer manifest the fact that one's heart is full of fear and love for God. Therefore, if prayers are said in their true spirit, one's prayer will surely fend

off indecency and evil and bring him closer to God by purifying the worshipper's soul.

The Spirit of Fasting

The Arabic term for fasting is *sawm'*, which means to abstain. It is aimed at detaching oneself from the world and devoting one's life entirely to God (73:8). The outer sign of fasting is the abstention from food from morning till evening. But in its essence, it is to withdraw from all worldly attachments and reduce all mundane necessities to a minimum.

This fasting aims at weakening man's material aspect and strengthening his spirituality. Man is made up of body and soul. Just as the body requires physical nourishment, so must the soul be nourished spiritually. To be sure, fasting results in physical discomfort. But God has nothing to gain from causing human beings unnecessary trouble, and man has to satisfy his material needs; but if he wants to discover the truth, it is essential, at least for a few fixed days, to retire from

the material world to develop the spiritual part in him, so that he will be able to attain spirituality.

The Spirit of Zakah

Zakah, in reality, is a form of sacrifice meant to underlie those ethical values known in Islam as Huququl Ibad, that is, the fulfilment of one's responsibilities towards others. Thus the spirit of Zakah is the service of humanity.

It requires an annual contribution of 2.5 per cent of an individual's wealth and assets, not merely a percentage of his yearly income. In Islam, the true owner of things is not man but God. People are given their wealth as trust from God. Therefore, Zakah, far from being viewed as "charity", is an obligation—for those who have received their wealth from God—to help the weaker members of the community: "...the poor, orphans, and widows, to free slaves and debtors, and to support those working for the cause of God" (9:60).

The Spirit of Hajj

The root meaning of “Haj” is to set out or make a pilgrimage. However, canonically it has come to refer to the act of worship performed annually in the month of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

At least once in their lifetime, every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able must sacrifice time, money, and comforts, becoming a pilgrim totally at God’s service.

The pilgrims wear simple garments, two seamless white clothes for men and a dress that covers the body, except the face and hands, for women. These coverings symbolise purity and the unity and equality of all believers.

Some essential rituals to be performed during the Hajj are as follows:

- Tawaf (circumambulation), i.e. going around the Kabah seven times.

- Saee: the pilgrims walk briskly between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kabah.
- Standing on Arafat: the pilgrims gather at Arafat and pray to God throughout the day, reciting the Talbiyah. This standing on the 9th day of Dhul Hijjah is very important. According to tradition, standing at Arafat is the culmination of the Pilgrimage.

At Arafat, the Prophet delivered his farewell sermon to his people from the Mount of Mercy, a hill in the middle of the plane.

Among all Muslim acts of worship, Hajj holds a pre-eminent position. In one Hadith, the Prophet called it “the supreme act of worship”, But it is not just the rites of Pilgrimage that constitute this importance; it is the spirit in which Hajj is performed. Hajj has been prescribed to inspire us with a new religious fervour. To return from Hajj with one’s faith in God strengthened and rekindled—is the hallmark of a true pilgrim. Hence, Hajj reigns supreme among all acts of devotion.

Concept of Peace in Islam

The Quran has this to say about the Prophet of Islam:

We have only sent you as a mercy to all humanity.
(21:106)

The Prophet enjoined believers to greet one another by saying *Assalamm-o-Alaikum*. This shows that mutual relationships should be based on peace and security.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam defined a believer thus:

A believer is one from whom people are safe as regards their lives and property. (Musnad Ahmad).

According to this Hadith, the way of the faithful is to live as peaceful citizens in society. No one should harm others' lives, property or honour. In no circumstances should one take the way of violence. The love of peace is a noble human virtue, whereas the love of violence brings the human being down from a high ethical plane to the level of brutishness.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "The believer

is like a gentle plant. Whenever the wind blows, it inclines accordingly, and when the wind stops blowing, it returns to its upright position.” (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith no. 5644) In this way, it saves itself from the impact of the wind.

The Quran is undoubtedly a book of peace. Its opening invocation is: “In the name of God, the Most beneficent, the Most Merciful”, and this verse has been repeated in the Quran no less than 114 times. This indicates that the greatest attribute of the Supreme Being who sent this book to humanity is Mercy. Of the 6666 verses of the Quran, there are hardly forty verses, which deal with the injunction to wage war, and then only in self-defence; that is, even less than one per cent. To put it more precisely, only 0.6%.

The Quran records God’s many names or attributes, one being As-Salam, that is, Peace. This is because God loves peace and security so much that He chose Peace as one of His names. That is to say, God, Himself is the embodiment of peace.

Alkhattabi has explained this verse in these words:

“God is the Being from Whom all people feel safe and secure. From Whom people have the experience only of peace, not of violence.” (Al-Qurtubi, Part 18, p. 46)

God has set the highest conceivable standards. That is, when God’s dealings with human beings are based on peace and security, man should also deal with other human beings in a peaceable manner, not harshness or violence.

The Creation Plan of God

God has a plan for human beings. The plan is that every human being is put in this world for a limited period to test him, and then whoever measures up to the test is accepted and rewarded by God. Those who do not pass this test will be rejected outright.

To meet the exigencies of the test, a person has been given freedom in his life in this world. Here what an individual receives is not his rights: it is only a test paper. Every situation is a test paper; in every situation, one has to rise to the occasion.

It is improper for a person to be carried away by his whims and desires. The right attitude for him is that he should try to understand the creation plan of God and, accepting that, build his life accordingly.

By misusing his freedom in this world, he can deviate from the divine plan, but he cannot save himself from the consequences.

And in such a situation, it is in the interests of everyone to be extremely prudent in determining the course their life will take. Instead of being guided by his wishes, a person should be guided by God's will. Instead of chasing after his desires, he should lead a life by divine principles.

Every human being is a divine creation, but at the same time, he is subject to the creation plan of God. In complying to this, he will discover the secret of human progress.

The World Hereafter

Human beings have been created as eternal creatures. However, God has divided a person's lifespan into two

parts. A tiny part of his lifespan has been destined to be lived out in the present world, while the rest has been destined for the world after death. The present world is a place for action, while the world Hereafter is where the rewards for that action will be reaped.

Where the present world is imperfect, the world Hereafter is perfect. The Hereafter is a limitless world. There all things have been provided in an ideal state.

God has placed Paradise in the world of the Hereafter. Therefore, Paradise is full of all kinds of blessings. Those who prove to be true worshippers of God and who lead virtuous lives will enter this world of Hereafter. When they enter this world of the Hereafter, the door of Paradise will be opened to them for all eternity.

But those who lead a life of unmindfulness of God in the present world or who lead lives marked by arrogance and insolence are sinners in the eyes of God. Therefore, all such people will be denied the blessings of the Hereafter.

Death is not the end of life for a person; instead, it is

the beginning of the next stage of life. Death is the middle stage when a person leaves today's temporary world and reaches tomorrow's permanent world. He leaves the ephemerality of this world and enters the eternal world. This stage of the Hereafter will be faced inevitably by everyone. No one can save himself from being called to account in the Hereafter.

The People of Paradise

The Prophet of Islam was asked what counted as more important for a person to find a place in Paradise. The Prophet replied: "Fearing God and having the best moral character." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2004)

The greatest success for a person is that he should lead such a life in this world that when he dies, he finds a place in Paradise where he will have a life of eternal happiness. The secret of this successful life has been explained in this tradition.

The essential things in this connection are the acceptance of the greatness of God, remaining ever mindful of Him and regarding oneself as accountable

to Him, believing that one cannot save oneself from God's chastisement, for all one's deeds, open or hidden, are in the knowledge of God, and that no strategy can save oneself from standing before God after death.

The whole life of one convinced of this truth changes. The permissiveness of his life is replaced with restraint. In all matters, he avoids irresponsible behaviour, which obviates egoism, arrogance and other feelings. On all issues, he becomes an obedient servant of God.

Another quality of a God-fearing person is that he comes to possess a heavenly character. He starts leading his life in this world just as the people of Paradise will live in the Hereafter. In his heart, he cherishes feelings of well-wishing for everyone.



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PROPHET MUHAMMAD

THE PROPHET OF PEACE

Michael H. Hart (b. 1932), an American author, wrote in his book titled, The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History, “Muhammad was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.” (The 100, New York, 1978) Michael Hart has chosen Prophet Mohammad as the most influential person in human history. He is a Prophet of Peace and a beacon of light for seekers of truth.

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