The Prophetic Mission in Makkah

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

The First Revelation

The Holy Prophet (S) use to spend a lot of his time in the cave of Mount Hira, which is a mountain overlooking the Holy Ka'ba, some three miles north of Makka. It was his habit to sometimes spend a few days continuously in the cave in prayers, and his wife Bibi Khadija (A) would bring him some food and water.

One night when he was in the cave of Mount Hira, he heard a voice calling his name and suddenly there was a dazzling light in the cave. The Holy Prophet (S) sat at his place calmly and saw that a man was approaching him. The person was none other than Angel Jibraeel (A) in human form. Jibraeel (A) came very close to the Holy Prophet (S) and asked him to read what was written in a silken scroll that he had in his hands. The Holy Prophet (S) read the words which were the first revelation from Allah, and which later became the first five verses of Surah al-Alaq. These were: In the Name of Allah the Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

Read! In the Name of your Lord Who created (everything in the Universe). He created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Honourable. (He) Who taught (to write) with the pen. (He) taught man what he knew not. Surah al-Alaq, 96:1-5

When the Holy Prophet (S) had finished reciting, the angel announced, "O Muhammad! there is no doubt that you are the Apostle of Allah and I am his angel Jibraeel." After saying this, the angel disappeared. This event told the Holy Prophet (S) that it was now time to start his mission. At this time he was 40 years old. The date was 27th of Rajab, 610 A.D. Also at this time, Allah blessed the Holy Prophet (S) with such a memory that, whatever he heard only once from Jibraeel (A), remained in his heart forever.

The Holy Prophet (S) then left the cave to return home, where he would begin his mission to preach the Unity of Allah and to invite all mankind to the path of worshipping only One God.

THE FIRST PEOPLE TO BECOME MUSLIMS

When the Holy Prophet (S) returned from the cave in Mount Hira after the first revelation, he immediately went home. The Holy Prophet (S) lived with his wife Bibi Khadija (A) and his young cousin Imam Ali (A). Abu Talib could not afford to support his four sons due to his poor financial state. As a result, his son Ja'far was looked after by his brother Abbas, and his son Ali

(A) was brought up by the Holy Prophet (S). In addition, when Imam Ali (A) was born, the Holy Prophet (S) had just lost his own son and Abu Talib's wife Fatima binte Asad promised him that as soon as her child was a little older, she would turn it over to him. Imam Ali (A) was 9 years old when he came to live with Bibi Khadija (A) and the Holy Prophet (S).

When he reached his home, the Holy Prophet (S) informed his wife about what had happened, and she immediately believed in his mission and became a Muslim. The next person the Holy Prophet (S) spoke to was Imam Ali (A), who was only 12 years old at the time. Imam Ali (A) also accepted Islam on hearing the experiences of the Holy Prophet (S).

Thus Bibi Khadija (A) was the first woman to become a Muslim, and Imam Ali (A) the first man. The third person to become a Muslim was Zaid bin Harith, who was the Holy Prophet's (S) freed slave and adopted son. The Holy Prophet (S) received further revelations from Allah and he gradually began to spread the religion of Islam. For the first three years of his mission, he did not make a general invitation to everybody, but selected certain special people who he saw were ready to embrace the religion of Allah.

As a result of his limited activity only 30 people became Muslims in these first three years. The Quraish and their leader Abu Sufyan knew what was going on, but they were not bothered by the Holy Prophet's (S) activities at this time. They thought that this new religion would soon die out just like when Waraqah and Umayyah returned to idol worship after having become Christians for a short time after reading the Injeel.

During the three years, the Quraish did not harm the Holy Prophet (S), and continued to respect him. In return, he did not openly criticise their idols and remained busy in keeping in contact with his small group of Muslims. The attitude of the Quraish remained relaxed until the day when the Holy Prophet (S) began to preach the religion of Islam openly on the command of Allah.

THE INVITATION OF ZUL ASHIRA

Three years after his mission had started, the Holy Prophet (S) received the following revelation from Allah :

And warn your nearest relatives... Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26:214 When this command came, the Holy Prophet (S) called Imam Ali (A) and instructed him to arrange a meal and to invite the sons of Abdul Muttalib so that he could deliver to them the words of Allah. Following the invitation, some forty men from the children of Abdul Muttalib gathered near the mountain of Safa. Amongst them were the Holy Prophet's (S) uncles Abu Talib, Abbas, Hamza and Abu Lahab.

The Holy Prophet (S) commanded Imam Ali (A) to serve the food to the guests. Imam Ali (A) kept the food - which was hardly enough to feed even one man - in front of the assembled guests. The Holy Prophet (S) blessed the food with the Name of Allah and asked the people to eat. Everyone of the forty guests had his fill and yet the food remained the same.

After the feast was over, the Holy Prophet (S) wished to speak to the assembly, but Abu Lahab said to the people that the Holy Prophet (S) had displayed great magic and so the people all left.

The next day, the Holy Prophet (S) asked Imam Ali (A) to make the same preparations as before, but again the same thing happened. On the third day, the Holy Prophet (S) again invited the same group for a meal. This time, he stood up immediately the eating was over and said to the gathering: "O sons of Abdul Muttalib! I swear by Allah, besides Whom there is no god, that I have been sent by Him as His Messenger. O my relatives! One day you will die as if you were going to sleep and some time later you will be brought back to life to be judged according to your deeds. The good people will live in Heaven, while those who are evil-doers will be put in Hell forever. No human being has ever brought a better thing for his people than that which I have brought for you. My Lord has ordered me to invite you towards Him. Which one of you will support me so that he may become my brother and successor after me?"

When the speech of the Holy Prophet (S) reached this point, the entire assembly remained silent. Suddenly Imam Ali (A), who was only 15 years old, stood up and said, "O Prophet of Allah! I am prepared to support you." The Holy Prophet (S) asked him to sit down, and repeated the question three times. Each time, however, none but Imam Ali (A) stood up to support him. After the third time the Holy Prophet (S) hugged Imam Ali (A) and holding his hand up high, he said, "People! This young man is my brother and successor amongst you. Listen to his words and follow him." At this stage, the meeting came to an end and some of those present turned to Abu Talib and teased him saying, "Muhammad has directed you to follow your own son and to take orders from him and has declared him to be your elder."

However, the words of the Holy Prophet (S) proved to be true and many times in his life he repeated the same words about this special position of Imam Ali (A).

THE PERSECUTION OF MUSLIMS

After introducing Islam to his relatives, the Holy Prophet (S) began to tell all the people of Makka about his mission. He called all the tribes to the mountain of Safa, and then said to them, "If I tell you that an enemy is hiding behind this mountain ready to attack you all, would you believe me?" All of them replied, "Yes, because we have never heard you tell a lie." Then the

Holy Prophet (S) said, "Save yourself from the punishment of Hell fire. Believe that there is no god but Allah, and you will be successful in your life." When they heard this message, there was confusion amongst the people and Abu Lahab said loudly, "You have wasted our time with all this nonsense."

The people of Makka forgot that they themselves used to call the Holy Prophet (S) "as-Sadiq", which means "the Truthful one". Instead they began to call him a liar and a mad man. They began to make life difficult for him by spreading thorns on his path and getting children to throw stones at him. Sometimes they would throw rubbish on him as he passed under their windows.

All these acts had no effect on the Holy Prophet (S), and he did not give up preaching belief in One God in place of the countless gods worshipped by the Makkans. When the number of Muslims began to slowly increase, the chiefs of some tribes became worried, and they came to Abu Talib, the uncle and guardian of the Holy Prophet (S), and asked him to stop his nephew from preaching his religion.

They offered to give the Holy Prophet (S) money, power or anything he wanted, as long as he would give up talking against their gods. When Abu Talib told the Holy Prophet (S) about their message, he said, "By Allah, even if these people put the sun in my one hand and the moon in the other, I would not give up what I have been commanded by Allah to do."

The Bani Umayyah, who were the enemies of Bani Hashim, began to harass the Holy Prophet (S) all the time. The main trouble makers included Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, and Utba bin Rabee'. Although they could not attack him openly because of the power and influence of Abu Talib, they took every opportunity to create difficulties for him.

Once, when the Holy Prophet (S) was offering prayers next to the Holy Ka'ba, Abu Jahl got some members of Quraish to throw the intestines of a goat on his shoulders while he was in Sajdah. After the Holy Prophet (S) had finished his prayers, he prayed to Allah to curse each one of them. History tells us that all the people who had taken part in this act, including Abu Jahl and Utba bin Rabee', were killed in the battle of Badr, which was the very first battle of Islam.

The Makkans then turned their attention to the new Muslims. Some Muslims came from powerful tribes, so they were safe from trouble. However, many Muslims were poor or slaves, and these began to face the most terrible cruelties at the hands of the Makkans.

Abu Zar Ghiffari was one of the early Muslims. When he declared that he had accepted Islam, the Quraish beat him up so badly that he was half dead. When the uncle of the Holy Prophet (S), Abbas, passed by and saw what they were doing, he reminded the Quraish that Abu Zar

was from the tribe of Bani Ghiffar who used to live next to the route of the trade caravans. If they learnt that a member of their tribe had been tortured by the Quraish, they would not let the trade caravans pass safely. On hearing this, the greedy Quraish left Abu Zar alone.

Bilal Habashi was the Mu'azzin (prayer caller) of the Holy Prophet (S). He was the slave of Umayya bin Khilaf. When Bilal accepted Islam, his cruel master was very angry and began to torture him mercilessly. He would make Bilal lie bare-backed on the hot sands of the desert and place a large stone on his chest so that he could not escape the burning sand. At other times he would tie a rope around his neck and get him dragged around the hills of Makka. Despite these cruelties, Bilal continued to say "Ahad, Ahad", which means that "Allah is One". Finally, the Holy Prophet's (S) uncle Abbas bought him and then freed him.

Lubeena Khatun was the slave maid of Umar bin Khattab, who later was made Caliph of the Muslims. When Lubeena became a Muslim, he would beat her so much that he himself would get tired.

Ammar bin Yasir and his parents Yasir and Sumayya were amongst the first Muslims. The unbelievers tried to make them change their minds but they refused. The three of them were taken to the desert and beaten and tortured. This was repeated many times until at one time, Yasir died. When his pregnant wife Sumayya complained to Abu Jahl about this inhuman treatment he took his spear and thrust it into her heart.

Then they turned to Ammar and beat him so terribly that he was about to die. They threatened to kill him unless he declared that he was no longer a Muslim. To save his life, Ammar had to agree. Later, the Holy Prophet (S) approved his action saying that as long as Ammar had the faith in his heart, it did not matter what he was forced to say. Despite the tortures suffered by the Muslims, none of them changed their faith and their numbers increased day by day.

THE HIJRAT TO ABYSSINIA

The unbelievers of Makka had made life very difficult for the Muslims. The Holy Prophet (S) was worried and concerned about the condition of the Muslims, so he advised a group of his followers to migrate to Abyssinia (Ethiopia), which was ruled by a kind Christian king whose name was Negus. This was the first Hijrat in Islam and 10 people took part in it. It happened in the fifth year of Prophethood. A second, larger group of Muslims also migrated soon afterwards, under the leadership of Ja'far bin Abu Talib, the brother of Imam Ali (A). The Muslims were welcomed with much kindness in Abyssinia and found the life there very pleasant and comfortable.

When the chiefs of Makka found out that the Muslims had migrated and were living peacefully in Abyssinia, they became worried that the Muslims might turn Negus, the king of Abyssinia,

towards Islam. They decided to send some gifts to the king and his ministers, and try to convince him to send the Muslims back to Makka. They sent two men after the Muslims. When the two men reached Abyssinia, they first met the ministers and gave them expensive gifts. They convinced the greedy ministers to support their mission by backing them in the court of the king. On the following day, they met Negus, and after presenting him with gifts, they said: "A group of our young men have gone against the beliefs of our forefathers and have invented a new religion. These people have now run to your country. I request you to hand them over to us so that we can take them back to Arabia." As soon as this speech was over, the ministers loudly declared their support for this request. However, Negus took no notice of them and asked whether the Muslim refugees had killed anyone, or stolen anybody's property or had committed any crimes in Makka. They replied that their only crime was inventing a new religion.

The king then announced, "I cannot hand over the people who are living under my protection without a proper investigation." He sent a message to the Muslims that their leader should come to the court. Ja'far bin Abu Talib came to present the case for the Muslims. The king turned to Ja'far and asked, "Why have you given up the beliefs of your forefathers and started a new religion?" Ja'far replied, "We used to be ignorant people who worshipped idols. We ate dead bodies and committed bad deeds. We had no respect for our neighbours and fought amongst ourselves. The weak and helpless were bullied by the strong. We spent a long time in this manner, until a person from amongst us, who had a faultless character, invited us to worship One God.

He taught us to respect other people's property, to behave well with our relatives, to respect our neighbours and women and to avoid lying. He ordered us to offer prayers, to fast and to pay religious tax on our wealth. We have believed in him and worship Allah. However, the Quraish have behaved very cruelly towards us. We resisted them for some time, but now we have come to live here to save our beliefs. The fame of your kindness has brought us to your country and we have perfect faith in your justice."

The king was very impressed with the sincere speech of Ja'far, and he asked him to recite something from the Heavenly Book of the Muslims. Ja'far recited and explained some verses from Surah Maryam of the Holy Qur'an.

When the king and bishops heard the words of Allah about the virtues of Bibi Maryam (A) and Prophet Isa (A), tears came to their eyes as they recognised the truth. King Negus declared that he would never surrender the Muslims to the Quraish and asked them to leave his court. One of the Makkans, who was a very cunning man, decided to try another approach. He knew

that the Christians believed that Prophet Isa (A) was the son of God. The next day he went to the king and said that the Muslims had special beliefs about Prophet Isa (A) that were totally different to the basic belief of the Christians, and so they were a danger to the official religion of Abyssinia. King Negus again called Ja'far and asked him what the Muslims thought about Isa (A). Ja'far replied, "Our belief regarding Isa (A) is that which has been taught to us by the Holy Prophet (S). He was the servant and Prophet of Allah, and the Spirit of Allah with which He blessed Bibi Maryam (A)." The king was pleased with this answer, and he praised the beliefs of the Muslims and allowed them full freedom to practise their religion in his country.

He returned the presents of the Quraish back to them and said, "God has not taken any bribe from me while giving me authority over the people. It is not right that I should gather wealth by means of your bribes." The two men had no choice but to return to Makka, having totally failed in their attempt to bring back the Muslims. The Muslims continued to live in Abyssinia peacefully for a long time and only returned after the

Holy Prophet (S) had migrated to Madina.

THE BOYCOTT OF BANI HASHIM

The chiefs of Quraish were very disturbed to see that the religion of Islam was gaining strength in spite of all their efforts. By now, well respected people like Hamza, the uncle of the Holy Prophet (S), and some powerful men of Quraish had become Muslims. The chiefs could not bear to stand by and watch Islam advancing in this manner and so they held a meeting to plan a way to stop it. They decided to boycott all the Muslims and in this way stop their activities. An agreement was drafted and hung on the walls of the Holy Ka'ba, and the community of Quraish was told to act according to it. The agreement stated that:

All trade and business with the supporters of Muhammad shall be banned. Any association with them is strictly prohibited. Nobody is allowed to marry their daughters or sons to those of the Muslims. All those who oppose Muhammad should be supported in all circumstances.

This agreement was signed by all the chiefs of the Quraish and was put into action straight away. Abu Talib, the uncle of the Holy Prophet (S), pledged the support of the entire Bani Hashim clan to his nephew. Abu Talib also advised all the Muslims to move out of Makka into a valley in the mountains. Thus, the Muslims moved out of their homes into the place known as the "Valley of Abu Talib", and set up small houses and tents. To protect themselves from a sudden attack from the Quraish, some men were posted as guards. The Muslims were forced to remain in the valley for three years. During this time they suffered terrible hardships. Food was in very short supply, and many had to survive on a single date or less per day. The Bani

Hashim were only allowed out of the valley during the special months of Rajab and Zilhaj when fighting was not allowed. During these times they came to Makka to buy food and other necessities. However some Makkans, like Abu Lahab, made things more difficult for them by encouraging the shopkeepers to raise the price of food so that the Bani Hashim could not afford to buy very much.

Throughout their difficult times, the Muslims did not lose heart and remained strongly attached to Islam and the Holy Prophet (S). Finally some of the Makkans began to regret their shameful action against the Muslims, who after all were their relatives. They became ashamed for having signed the agreement and began to look for a solution to the problem. They called a meeting of the Quraish proposing to end the boycott and allow the Muslims to return home.

Although Abu Jahl was not in favour of allowing them back, he was outvoted by the rest and had to remain quiet. The chiefs decided to tear down the agreement. When they brought it down from the Holy Ka'ba, they noticed that the entire sheet had been eaten away by termites and only the words "In the Name of our Lord" remained.

After being informed of the developments by his uncle Abu Talib, the Holy Prophet (S) decided to leave the valley and the Muslims returned to their homes in Makka once again. The patience .and reliance on Allah in the face of hardships by these early Muslims is a great lesson to us all

THE DEATH OF ABU TALIB AND BIBI KHADIJA (A)

After the boycott on the Muslims had been lifted they returned to their previous lives in Makka. After three difficult years, they looked forward to improving their condition. However, certain events occurred that year that left the Holy Prophet (S) extremely sad and the Muslims shared in his sorrow. In that year the Holy Prophet (S) lost first his uncle Abu Talib (A), and then his wife Bibi Khadija (A) one month later. His sorrow and grief knew no bounds and he named this year "Aamul Huzn", the Year of Grief.

Abu Talib (A) had been the supporter and defender of the Holy Prophet (S) since the death of his father, Abdul Muttalib. He treated him better than his own sons. In order to protect the Holy Prophet (S) from being murdered by his enemies, Abu Talib (A) used to make one of his sons, usually Imam Ali (A), sleep in the bed of the Holy Prophet (S).

Abu Talib (A) believed so much in the excellence of the Holy Prophet (S) that he used to request the blessings of Allah by using his nephew's name. Once, when the Quraish were faced with a terrible drought, they came to Abu Talib (A), begging him to pray for rain. Abu Talib (A) held the hand of the Holy Prophet (S), who was then only a young boy, and raised his head to the skies, saying, "O Lord, send down rain for the sake of this young boy, and favour us with your blessings". This prayer was hardly over when rain began to fall heavily.

As the Holy Prophet (S) grew older, Abu Talib (A) involved him in his trade caravans, giving him experience in dealing with people. When he was 25 years old, it was Abu Talib (A) who arranged for a proposal of marriage to be sent to Bibi Khadija (A).

During the marriage ceremony, he declared the superiority of his nephew compared to all other youth and recited the marriage formula himself. When the Holy Prophet (S) declared his mission, Abu Talib (A) stood faithfully by his side, never stepping back from the defence of his nephew. Although Abu Talib (A.S.) began to lose his position amongst the Quraish because of his support for the Holy Prophet (S), he did not for one moment think of asking him to hold back the message of Islam.

The actions of Abu Talib (A) throughout his life confirm that he was a Muslim and believed in the religion of Allah. Some people have said that he was an unbeliever, but the following fact is enough to prove that this is not true. A Muslim woman cannot remain married to an unbeliever. It is a fact of history that Fatima binte Asad was one of the first women to accept Islam. She was also the wife of Abu Talib (A), and remained his wife till he died. If he had not been a Muslim, it would have been unlawful for her to remain his wife.

It was no wonder that the Holy Prophet (S) missed his uncle so much. Abu Talib (A) had been his guardian for 50 years. In the same year, the Holy Prophet (S) lost his dear wife Bibi Khadija (A), the mother of his beloved daughter, Fatima Zahra (A). Bibi Khadija (A) had been the richest woman in Arabia when she married the Holy Prophet (S). She was 40 years old when the marriage took place. When the Holy Prophet (S) declared his Prophethood 15 years later, she was the first woman to believe in him and accept Islam.

Thereafter, she gave her entire wealth for the sake of Islam. The Holy Prophet (S) used her wealth to spread the religion and to buy the freedom of many slaves who had become Muslims. The Holy Prophet (S) always used to remember her saying that she believed in his message when everyone around him was calling him a liar.

The double tragedy was a bitter blow to the Holy Prophet (S), at a time when he needed the encouragement and support of his loved ones. THE ASCENSION (MI'RAJ) OF THE HOLY PROPHET (S)

Mi'raj is a very important event in the history of Islam. It is the occasion when Allah raised his beloved Prophet (S) to the heavens and showed him the marvels of His creations. This great honour had never been given to any of Allah's other Prophets (A). The Holy Qur'an says: Glory be to Him Who made His servant go by night from Masjidul Haraam to Masjidul Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We might show him some of Our signs. He alone hears all and sees all.

Surah Bani Israa'il 17:1

The great journey began from the house of Umme Hani, a sister of Imam Ali (A). The Holy Prophet (S) was resting there when he was awakened from his sleep by Angel Jibraeel (A). He was asked to mount on a winged animal called Buraaq. He then went from Makka to the mosque of al-Aqsa in Baytul Muqaddas (now known as Jerusalem). On the way he stopped at the mountain of Sinai and offered 2 raka'at prayers there, because it is the mountain on which Allah spoke with Prophet Musa (A).

On the second part of his journey, the Holy Prophet (S) rose from Masjidul Aqsa through the seven heavens with Jibraeel (A). Here he met the Prophets Isa, Musa, Nuh and Adam (A). He also saw the places of blessing and pleasure (Heaven) and the places of torture and suffering (Hell). After this he came to the place known as Sidratul Muntaha where Jibraeel (A) left him. From here the Holy Prophet (S) was alone in the presence of Almighty Allah. He received from Allah all the rules of Islam including the new order to all Muslims to perform the five daily prayers. He then returned the same way he had come, first to Baytul Muqaddas, and then to Makka.

On the way to Makka the Holy Prophet (S) met a trading caravan of the Quraish who had lost a camel and were making a search for it. He drank some water from one of their containers and then continued onwards to Makka. He reached the house of Umme Hani at the time of daybreak.

On the next day the Holy Prophet (S) talked about his experiences to a large group of people in Makka. Many were amazed and believed his account but there were some who did not believe him. They asked him to describe the mosque at Baytul Muqaddas as proof of his truthfulness. When the Holy Prophet (S) gave the detailed description of the mosque, some people who had been to the place confirmed that it was true. The Holy Prophet (S) then told the disbelieving Quraish that he had met one of their trade caravans at Tanim, and they had been looking for a lost camel.

He also told them that the caravan was being led by a brown camel and that the group would soon enter Makka. In was not long before a caravan, as described by the Holy Prophet (S), entered Makka. The leader of the caravan, Abu Sufyan, confirmed everything that the Holy Prophet (S) had said. Now the people had no doubt that the Holy Prophet (S) had indeed made the miraculous journey, and word spread like wild fire around Makka about the events of Mi'raj. The leaders of the Quraish were very upset at the whole issue, especially because a lot of people became Muslims as a result of it.

It is important to understand that the journey was an actual physical one and not a spiritual

dream as claimed by Ayesha, one of the wives of the Holy Prophet (S). She stated that he was asleep in her house the whole night. This report is untrue, because at the time of Mi'raj, Ayesha was not yet married to the Holy Prophet (S), and only became his wife one year after the Hijrat to Madina. Muawiya, the son of Abu Sufyan, also claimed that the Mi'raj was a "true dream". He made up his story because he was an enemy of the Holy Prophet (S). He was not born at the time and did not convert to Islam until 9 years after Hijrat so he could not know all the facts about the Mi'raj.

The time taken for the entire Mi'raj was one third of the night or slightly less. The reason why the Holy Prophet (S) was taken to Baytul Muqaddas, which was a centre for Jews and Christians was to show that Islam was a continuation of the message of Prophets Ibrahim, Musa and Isa (A). It also showed that the religion was universal and not confined to Makka and Madina only. Amongst the things that were revealed to the Holy Prophet (S) during his time in the heavens were:

The appointment of Imam Ali (A) as the leader after him. This gives us an idea of the importance of planning beforehand for leadership. Five times daily prayers. The Wajib Namaaz as we know them today only became compulsory for the Muslims after the event of Mi'raj. The Holy Prophet (S) was also taught some Du'as and special prayers. It is a measure of the closeness of the Holy Prophet (S) to Allah that he was given an opportunity to see and hear wonderful things, the like of which have never been seen or heard before.

THE JOURNEY TO TA'IF

After the death of Abu Talib, the Holy Prophet (S) was faced with increasing difficulties and problems in Makka. Without his uncle's protection, his life was in constant danger, and there was not much opportunity to spread Islam. He decided to try to preach Islam outside Makka. In those days the town of Ta'if was a busy and important centre of trade. The Holy Prophet (S) went to Ta'if alone and contacted the tribe of Bani Saqeef with a view to invite them to Islam. After arriving in Ta'if, he met the chief and elders of that tribe and explained to them the belief in One God and asked them for their support. However, his words did not have any effect on them and they rejected his message. The Holy Prophet (S) realised that the people of the town could become a threat to him because he was alone and away from his home town. He therefore took a promise from the Bani Saqeef that they would not talk about his presence in Ta'if.

The elders of Bani Saqeef did not keep their promise to the Holy Prophet (S) and instead asked the loafers and hooligans of the town to harass him. The Holy Prophet (S) found himself suddenly surrounded by a mob who began to insult him. When they began to throw stones, he

was forced to retreat and take refuge in a garden. The garden belonged to two wealthy people of the Quraish. The Holy Prophet (S) had sweat on his face and parts of his body were hurt from the cruel attack. He sank down under a tree for some rest, and began the following prayer: "O Lord! I present my weakness and lack of strength before You. You are the kind Nourisher and the Helper of the weak. To whom are You abandoning me?"

Although the owners were idol worshippers and enemies of Islam, they were moved by the condition of the Holy Prophet (S) and felt sorry for him. They told a Christian slave to take a plate of grapes to him.

When the Christian presented the grapes to the Holy Prophet (S), he took one and ate it, saying, "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful". The Christian was very surprised to hear these words and remarked that he had not heard the Arabs pray to anyone but Laat and Uzza, the great idols.

The Holy Prophet (S) asked him about his birth place and his religion. He replied that he came from Naynivah and was a Christian. On hearing his answer, the Holy Prophet (S) stated, "That is the place where my brother Yunus (Jonas) son of Mata (Matthew) lived". The Christian was very surprised to hear these names. He asked, "How do you know Yunus son of Mata? Nobody in this country has heard of them". The Holy Prophet (S) then said, "Yunus was a Prophet of Allah like myself".

The words of the Holy Prophet (S) had a great effect on the slave and he immediately bowed and kissed the hands of the Holy Prophet (S) and expressed his faith in him. When he returned to his masters, they asked him what the conversation was all about. He replied, "The person who is sitting in your garden is the chief of all humanity. He has told me things that only a Prophet can know." This reply annoyed them very much but all they said to him was that his own religion was better than Islam.

The Holy Prophet (S) left Ta'if disappointed that he had not been successful in bringing these stubborn and ignorant people to the right path. He decided to return to Makka. However, he could not enter Makka in safety because his life was in danger. He therefore sent word to Mu'tam bin Adi, a powerful Makkan, for help. Mu'tam was an idol worshipper but agreed to provide security for him, due to his respect for his family. He sent a message to the Holy Prophet (S) to enter Makka and come straight to his house.

On the next day Mu'tam told his sons to arm themselves and escort the Holy Prophet (S) to the Holy Ka'ba. When Abu Sufyan and others who wanted to harm him saw that he had the protection of Mu'tam, they were disappointed, but did not harm him. After performing Tawaaf, the Holy Prophet (S) went to his own home. Soon afterwards, the Holy Prophet (S) migrated to

Madina. In the later years, the Holy Prophet (S) was to take over Ta'if and defeat the Bani Saqeef. However, he never forgot the services of Mu'tam in his time of need, and when news of Mu'tam's death reached Madina, the Holy Prophet (S) remembered him for his goodness.

The journey of the Holy Prophet (S) to Ta'if in difficult circumstances shows us how committed he was to his duty to spread the religion of Islam.

THE PLEDGES OF 'AQABAH

During the Haj season, tribes from all over Arabia came to Makka to perform their pilgrimage. Although their worship was not anything like the Haj that Islam has taught us, they regarded the Holy Ka'ba as an important building. The Holy Prophet (S) took advantage of this time of the year by meeting the visitors and introducing the teachings of Islam to them. The people of Madina, which was called Yathrib in those days, also used to come to Makka every year. The two main tribes in Madina were the Aws and the Khazraj. They were great enemies of each other and many battles had been fought between them.

In the eleventh year after the beginning of the Holy Prophet's (S) mission, he met 6 people from the tribe of Khazraj in Makka during the Haj season. When he spoke to them about Islam, they were very interested because they had heard from the Jews of Madina, that one day there would be a Prophet who would come from Arabia. The Jews knew this because it was written in their Holy Book, the Tawrat, which had been revealed to Prophet Musa (A). The people of Khazraj believed that this was the very same Prophet and so they became Muslims. On their return to Madina they made efforts to teach people about Islam and soon many people wanted to know more about this new religion.

In the following year, 12 people came to Makka to meet the Holy Prophet (S). The meeting took place at 'Aqabah and resulted in the first Islamic agreement. After embracing Islam, they took a pledge not to associate anyone with Allah, not to steal and not to bury their daughters alive. They promised not to slander one another and to perform good deeds."

The Holy Prophet (S) promised them that if they acted according to the pledge they would be rewarded with Paradise by Allah. This agreement is called the "First Pledge of 'Aqabah". The 12 people returned to Madina, their hearts filled with faith. They wrote back to the Holy Prophet (S) asking him to send someone to Madina who could teach them more about Islam. The Holy Prophet (S) sent Mus'ab bin Umayr and Ibne Umme Maqtoom to teach them.

The missionaries did their work so well that there was a great change in thinking in Madina. The people eagerly awaited the Haj season so that they could meet the Holy Prophet (S) and personally declare their readiness to help Islam. The next year a Haj caravan consisting of 500

people, mainly from the tribe of Khazraj, left Madina for Makka. It included 73 Muslims, two of whom were women. The rest of the people were those who wanted to find out more about the religion before becoming Muslims. They met the Holy Prophet (S) on the 13th of Zilhaj at 'Aqabah.

During the meeting, the Holy Prophet (S) addressed them and recited verses from the Holy Qur'an. The words of the Holy Prophet (S) made a great impression on all the listeners and they all were ready to express their faith in Islam at his hands. Everyone swore the oath of allegiance (Bay'at) at the hands of the Holy Prophet (S). This event is known as "the Second Pledge of 'Aqabah." The Holy Prophet (S) then promised the people that he would soon come to Madina himself. Once the ceremony was over, the people left for their homes.

A point to note is the fact that so many people of Madina had accepted Islam after only a few years of being introduced to the religion, while in 13 years of preaching only a few Makkans had become Muslims. There can be two reasons for this: The people of Madina had heard about an Arabian Prophet from the neighbouring Jewish tribes. The Jews claimed that when that Prophet would appear he would preach Judaism. In any case, the Aws and Khazraj tribes were more prepared to believe the Holy Prophet (S) when he claimed to have been appointed by Allah.

The people of Aws and Khazraj were tired of the endless quarrels between their tribes, who had been at war on and off for over 120 years. They looked forward to the arrival of an authority who would bring peace to their region. The time was now ripe for the Holy Prophet (S) to leave his home in Makka. Life in that city was becoming more and more difficult for the Muslims, who faced endless persecution at the hands of the Quraish.