

The Splendor of the Prophet of Islam

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Previous Prophets mentioned some of the characteristics of the Prophet of Islam in their heavenly books, giving their followers the glad tidings of his future appearance. As the Quran says: "Those to whom We sent books (the Jews and the Christians) know well of Muhammad and his truthfulness, just as they know their own children, but some of them obstinately hide the truth, although they are well aware of it." (2:145)

In the troubled world of those days, cultural and moral decline, together with polytheism and idolatry and all their ramifications had submerged the whole globe. Even the heavenly religions that had followers in different parts of the world had undergone radical change in the course of time; not only had they lost all vitality and ability to guide mankind, but their most creative elements had fallen prey to decline. There was no hope of infusing a new spirit of life in them, of making blood course once again through their hardened arteries.

The People of the Book were therefore waiting for some profound eruption and the emergence of a new heavenly personality who would bear on his capable shoulders the heavy burden of guiding mankind, leading them away from decaying systems of thought to a new and progressive teaching.

The world had reached the end of its tether in the midst of all that confusion and unrest. It longed for a whole new environment, different from the poisoned one in which it lived, and waited for a hand to emerge from the sleeve of the unseen which would destroy the crumbling structure of the old order and build a new one on its ruins.

Each of the peoples and nations that were then dominating the world had in some way fallen prey to anarchy and confusion. The Arabs who lived at the crossroads of the great powers of that age and whose broad homeland was traversed by the caravans of international commerce felt more powerfully each day their weakness and impotence vis-a-vis their powerful neighbors. The danger of complete extinction that faced the Arabs because of their lack of an organized political structure and because of the power of their oppressive neighbors, was plain to any farsighted person.

It was under these circumstances that the promised deliverer Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was born at dawn on Friday, the seventeenth day of the month of Rabi' al-Awwal, fifty three years before the migration (hijra), corresponding to the year 570 of the Christian era, in the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula. It was a land of stifling repression, the very symbol

of a sick and decadent society where ignorance was actively cultivated. It was like a swamp where the waters of corruption stagnated, a pit in which humanity had been buried. It was in such a place that the Prophet first set eyes on the world and the light of his splendor first shone on the horizons of human life; it was there that this quintessence of being who was destined to bring human thought to maturity generated a new energy and an inexhaustible vitality in mankind.

None could reach his level of excellence in the qualities he possessed, and all expectations were fulfilled with his coming. He appeared at a time that society was prepared for him because it needed him. Not only the Arabian peninsula but the world at large was prepared for his coming, because the whole of the ancient world was longing with all of its being for the appearance of a man who would take it by the hand and guide it to its goal.

The sphere of the heavens, in its prolonged and ceaseless rotation had never been able to bring forth a creature like him whose substance was pure and free of all defect, who was completely untainted by all imperfection. History bears witness that this blessed infant, whose splendor shone forth from the arms of his mother, Aminah, over the whole world, came to establish the most creative of all faiths and the purest, most profound and pervasive of impetus, for the cultivation of knowledge and spirituality.

By prohibiting flattery and subservience before the thrones of the emperors and the powerful, he awakened to new life the dormant minds of human beings and created a suitable environment for their cultivation. He drove away idols from the threshold of their veneration, instructing them instead in the mysteries of Divine unity and teaching them how to live and die with dignity.

As a result of his teachings, idolatry gave way to monotheism and the worship of the one true God; ignorance yielded to knowledge and science, brotherliness, compassion, and other human virtues took the place of hostility, hatred and discord; and those who had been reared in an atmosphere of corruption and ignorance became the choicest specimens of humanity.

Abdullah, the father of the Prophet, was a descendent of Ishmael. His was a truly human heart, a heart that overflowed with love, fidelity and mercy. After marrying Aminah, he went trading in Syria, accompanying a caravan that was leaving Mecca. Aminah was already pregnant and impatiently awaited the return of her husband. But a severe illness laid hold of Abdullah, drawing the life out of him so that he died far away from his homeland.

He closed his eyes on the world and its pleasures, full of painful regret that he would be unable to see Aminah again or the child that she was to bear him. After a time, the young mother learned that in the sixteenth year of her life she had been widowed and left alone with a small

infant.

Her father-in-law, Abd al-Mutallib, took her and the infant to his own house, and then decided to send his newborn grandson to the Banu Sa'd in the desert, to be suckled by them and to grow up in the pure air of the desert.

Four months had passed after the birth of the Most Noble Prophet when the wetnurses of the Banu Sa'd came to Mecca and one of them, a woman of pure disposition called Halimah, declared herself ready to suckle the orphaned Muhammad.

Halimah returned to the desert with the child to take care of him there and he stayed among the Banu Sa'd continuing to grow until he was weaned. Still, however, his grandfather continued to leave him in the care of the tribe until he was five years old, and throughout this period the kindly wetnurse took good care of him and paid attention to his upbringing. He learned the best and most authentic dialect of Arabic,

and imbibed the most eloquent forms of Arabic speech. Halimah took him to see his mother two or three times, and on the last of these occasions she turned him over to his mother. When a year had passed, Aminah left Mecca, taking him with her to show him to the wetnurses who lived in the villages between Mecca and Yathrib. Full of joyous satisfaction, she reached the dwelling places of the wetnurses, but she was not destined to return to Mecca.

Aminah died in the course of her return journey and was buried where she died. Her infant orphaned son, now six years of age, was left alone at the side of her grave.

He had never seen his father nor had he fully enjoyed the kindness and affection of his mother for just as he was about to begin benefiting from her upbringing, fate snatched her away and left him alone in the awesome expanse of the desert.

At the time of the death of his mother, the infant Prophet had reached the age when intellectual and spiritual characteristics begin to develop. His grandfather, Abd al-Mutallib, for whom he was the only reminder of his own son, Abdullah, and a source of consolation for his weary heart, then assumed responsibility for his care and fulfilled this trust worthily until his death.

This period in which the Prophet enjoyed the care and protection of his grandfather, which were like a soothing balm placed on his wounds, did not last long. Just as he reached the age of eight the life of Abd al-Mutallib came to an end. A new grief assailed the Prophet, lines of sorrow and pain became apparent in his face, and the powerful spirit that was never troubled by the perils he faced throughout his life was gripped by the pain of bereavement.

However, Divine favor had bestowed on him the ability to accept and endure these setbacks. For an orphan who was due to become the father of humanity and the comforter of all the burdened and oppressed in the world had to become acquainted, from childhood onward, with

all forms of deprivation and affliction; he had to have a spirit as firm and resistant as a mountain in order to carry on his shoulders the otherwise unbearable burden of the Divine message. The ability to resist and withstand all kinds of obstacles and difficulties was essential for him, and his lofty and expansive spirit was a sign that he possessed precisely this ability.

The orphaned boy next moved to the house of his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, a great and noble person who was the full brother of his father. Although he was surrounded by the kindness of his cousins in his uncle's house, Muhammad, upon whom be peace, naturally felt lonely. One morning he learned that his uncle Abu Talib was planning to journey to Syria, leaving him behind. Muhammad, upon whom be peace, then approached his uncle and asked him for permission to accompany him, but his uncle refused, since he was still too young to endure the rigors of travel.

When the caravan was about to depart, Muhammad's eyes filled with tears, and Abu Talib was deeply moved by the sad expression on his face. He was compelled to take him with him on his journey to Syria, and thus it was that at the age of twelve he set out on a journey to distant lands.

Before the Quraysh caravan reached its destination, it passed through the city of Bostra where the party met a monk called Buhayra. Buhayra passed his days engaged in devotion in his cell, and being a man deeply learned in Christianity, he was revered by all of the Christians. As soon as Buhayra caught sight of Abu Talib's nephew, he found himself profoundly attracted by him. His piercing and mysterious glances seemed to indicate some secret hidden in his heart. Finally Buhayra broke his silence and asked to whom this child belonged. The party pointed to his uncle, and Abu Talib said, "This is my nephew." Buhayra then said: "This child has a brilliant future in front of him.

This is the promised Messenger whose coming and prophethood have been foretold in the scriptures, and I see in his person all the signs mentioned in those books. He is that true Prophet whose name and family I have read of. I know where this great personality will rise to fame and how the Divine religion he brings will conquer the whole world. However, you must conceal him from the view of the Jews, because they will destroy him once they become aware of this."

Historians have clearly discerned in all dimensions of his person great spiritual energy and power, together with all the other qualities that are fitting in a great leader sent by heaven. No researcher or scholar can claim that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, fell prey at any point in his life to moral or spiritual deviation or to nervous excitement. Although the

characteristics of the Prophet of Islam are more clearly and fully known than those of other people who have left their mark on history, in the near or distant past, history cannot point to the slightest rebelliousness, ill-temper or evil conduct on his part, nor even to a single error or sin.

The remarkable life of the exalted Prophet of Islam is clearly and completely known in all of its aspects: the period before his birth, his infancy, his youth, his moral characteristics, his travels, his marriages, his conduct in war and peace.

Recorded history bears witness that the slightest trace of corrupt belief cannot be found to have clouded his brilliant visage. Although he had no access to any form of instruction, he had no connection with the Age of Ignorance surrounding him, and vice was never able to take root in him.

The creedal environment in which he grew up was a compound of polytheism and idolatry, as is shown by the strong resistance of the Arabs to his summons to monotheism.

The entirety of his early life was spent in the midst of an ignorant, evil-living and oppressive people and he never left that environment before the beginning of his mission with the exception of two journeys outside the Arabian Peninsula, once in childhood, in the company of Abu Talib, in the early part of the second decade of his life, and once in his mid-thirties when he went trading with the goods of Khadijah. Nonetheless, we find not the least affinity between his personality and the society in which he lived.

The aspect of his personality that was particularly valuable in that corrupt and polluted environment was his honesty, trustworthiness and unfailing sense of justice, together with his hostility to all the forms of humiliation from which mankind was suffering.

Muhammad, upon whom be peace, captivated the hearts of his contemporaries with his nobility of character and his kindness toward the weak and the afflicted. Friend and enemy are agreed that none of the men of his age even approached him in the perfection of his attributes and spiritual characteristics.

For example, Zayd b. Haritha, who had been separated from his family at an early age and was given by Khadijah to the most Noble Messenger, upon whom be peace, as a slave, spent his entire life with him. After a time, Zayd's father came looking for him in order to reclaim him. Now Zayd had been emancipated by the Prophet, upon whom be peace, but he was still a slave to the love the greatness and the splendor of the Prophet, and captivated by the excellence of his conduct and behavior. So although he was free to return to his family, he preferred to remain with the Prophet and serve him.

Eloquence and profundity of speech, fairness in judging, superior intelligence and perception,

heavenly disposition and brilliance of thought - all these were abundantly evident in the being of this great personage. They shone forth in all the varied scenes of his life, and he so lived that years before the beginning of his prophetic mission, he was awarded the title "amin", 'trustworthy', an eloquent description of his whole mode of conduct.

During one of the religious festivals of the Quraysh, an incident occurred that struck a blow at the rule of the idolators. In the middle of the festival, while the people were gathered around an idol and rubbing their foreheads in the dust in front of it, a few clear-minded and pure-hearted people such as Waraqa b. Nawfal, who were distressed by the corruption prevailing in Mecca, began to discuss the situation. They asked themselves how much longer it could continue and when the time of delivery would come. Why were those people prostrating in front of objects, and why had they distorted the religion of their forefather Abraham?

One of the things they said was this: "What is that piece of stone around which they are walking? A thing that neither sees nor hears, that does not breathe, that can give no benefit and inflict no harm!" [4]

As the Prophet grew into maturity of the body and mind, he became inclined to periodic retreat and withdrawal. His profound inward thoughts, together with the unsuitability of his environment, impelled him to seek solitude.

In his evaluation of phenomena he was never hasty nor dependent on his own ideas and perceptions. He clearly saw a hand that inscribed its will on the pages of nature, and this was itself an indication of the profundity of his vision and the exaltation of his thought.

He would spend the month of Ramadan alone in the cave of Hira, on the outskirts of Mecca, benefiting fully from the darkness and silence. Far removed from men and their corruption, he engaged in supplication and armed himself with the weapon of faith. He developed his spiritual personality through humble worship in the presence of the Majestic Creator that enveloped his whole being, and through cultivating the thoughts that welled up from the depths of his spirit. In the morning, overflowing with faith and certainty, with spiritual enthusiasm and vigor, he would leave the cave to engage in his daily tasks.

Love of God animated his kind and tranquil face, and he was greatly distressed by the polytheism and foolishness of his people who would prostrate before the idols they had manufactured themselves. He began to struggle against this idolatry, remaining steadfast in the truth through all the trials and hardships he underwent.

As his age approached forty, signs of anxiety and distress became marked in his behavior and speech, and he told his loving wife of sounds that were continually re-echoing in his ear and of

.a dazzling light that would envelop him