

Hadrat Muhammad (S.A.W.), the Radiance that Shone Forth in the Darkness

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The World before Islam

The chaotic situation of the world prior to Islam is clearly reflected in the accurate mirror of history. The outline of decline, oppression, bloodshed, idol-worship is evident in this mirror.

Before Islam, it was as if mankind were leaning over the edge of the precipice of ruin and destruction, and there was the fear that at any moment it could roll down and be annihilated in it.

The Religions and Beliefs of the Peoples

a) In the Arabian Peninsula.

The Arabs prior to Islam were committed in their hearts to idols, and what they saw around themselves with their own eyes they made into idols. Not only did they lower their heads and prostrate before them, but also they donated everything they had, even gifts of agricultural produce, to their idols (see VI: 137).

They believed that apart from the life of this world there was no other life (see XLV: 24).

Obviously those who did not see the wretchedness of their idols whom they had chosen as their gods could not grasp the idea and truth of the resurrection.

So it was no wonder that they turned the House, which Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.) had built at the command of and in the name of Allah into quarters for their idols.

As for the origins of idol-worship in the Hejaz, some believe that the first person to introduce it was 'Amr ibn Luhayy.

Al-Ya'qubi writes in his history: "He (ibn Luhayy) journeyed to Syria and saw all of the inhabitants worshipping idols. When he asked about the virtues of the idols, they told him, 'They have befriended us, and they bring down rain for us.' He took a liking to them and asked them to give him an idol. They gave him Hubal and he took him to Mecca." Ibu Hisham writes that 'Amr ibn Luhayy brought this idol from Mu'ab. In any case, Hubal was the most famous of the gods in the Ka'bah; he was built in the form of man, and holy arrows, which the diviners used for casting auguries, were set in front of him.

The influence of idol-worship grew to the point where idols were built in the form of animals, plants, men, jinn, angels and stars; even stones were the objects of worship.

'Al-Lat' was in Ta'if in the form of a cubic stone, and had a special field and meadow near Ta'if which was a holy place, and cutting trees, hunting and the spilling of blood were not lawful in its vicinity; the people of Mecca and other places made pilgrimage to it.

'Al-uzza' was a very powerful god equivalent to the planet Venus, and was situated in Nakhlah east much more honour than the other idols. The sanctuary of al-'Uzza took the form of three trees and human sacrifices were offered to it.

Manat was the god of predestination, and its original place of worship was a black stone at Qudayd (on the road between Mecca and Medina).

It belonged specially to the tribes of Aws and Khazraj (see lesson 20).

Ba'1 was the embodiment of the spirit of wells and underground waters.

Sometimes a well with clean, invigorating water became worshipped in the dry desert a cave, when it had connections with the gods and the underground powers, was also sanctified. The temple of Ghabghab in Nakhlah (see above) was in such a place.

In Nakhlah, and in some years the Meccans made pilgrimage there.

Dhu 'sh-shara was respected in the form of a heap of black shining cubic stones.

The spirit of arable lands was the god of good works and sacrifices had to be made to it. The spirit of barren land was a wicked devil that had to be avoided.

They had idols made of wood or metal or stones with no definite form round which they made several turns whenever they went into their houses, and from which they took permission when they went out on a journey, and then took with themselves.

The town of Harran, where Ibrahim had started his campaign against star-worship, was the center of the Sabians. In this town, stars were the objects connection between the movements of the stars and earthly destiny was very strong. Each star was the god of one event. Images of Mars, Jupiter, Venus, etc. were erected in the temples, and they asked for help from them, and sometimes sacrificed to them.

The thoughts of the Sabians sometimes turned to angels and jinn. The angels were the daughters of god, and were thought to influence events. They imagined that god had a wife who was one of the jinn.

b) In Iran

In Iran also many religions were being practiced, but the one which most people followed was Zoroastrianism, the official religion.

If we accept that Zoroaster was a true prophet acknowledge that his true teachings had been changed by the passage of time. Gradually, they changed their direction and even their form and identity to the benefit of the ruling classes.

Its very general and pleasant maxims were covered by a veil behind which the foundations and principles were transformed by the Magi and the priests to the advantage of themselves and the ruling classes. Thus it was that tawhid became polytheism, and the pure sweet and excellent teachings did not stay: the shell remained, but the nut was thrown out, and the empty shells were filled with the ancient gods of the first times of the Aryan tribes,

c) In Europe.

The religious situation in Europe was like it was in Iran. Christianity had given up its original form, and had become stuck in polytheism and the dogma of the Trinity.

In France, Britain and Spain, people did not believe in a Unique God.

d) In India: There were various religions, but idolatry prevailed.

Class and Racial Differences.

In Iran people were divided into classes, and each class had special restrictions and privileges.

The class connected with the ruling council had the most privileges. Similarly in Europe and India, society was divided into classes and the right to possess land, to trade, and the exemption from taxes was the prerogative of the nobility.

At that time also, everyone of the people of the over everyone else.

The Situation of Women in Pre-Islamic Society

In Arabia, woman was a commodity, counted in the wealth of the father, husband or son; and after death she was inherited like the other possessions and became the property of the descendents.

It was a disgrace to have a daughter, and in some tribes the family buried this shameful thing with their own hands (see XVI: 59). In Iran, also, the form of class society did not bring anything better for women.

In Greece, woman was a creature of perpetual filthiness, a child of Satan, similar to an animal. In India, throughout her life, she was under the control of her father, husband or son, and had to address her husband as god, master and lord, and the death of her husband she had no right to take another husband. The revolting custom of Sati, the burning of the widow alive with the funeral pyre of her husband, was also practiced at that time.

In Japan, as well, woman was under the control of her father, husband or son for the whole of her life, and the daughter had no share in inheritance.

In China the father was master of the house and had so much power that he could sell his wife and children into bondage and slavery, and sometimes he even had the right to kill them. On top of this, daughters had no esteem and sometimes they were left in the desert to be the prey

of the wild pigs.

The Romans also considered women to be the incarnation of evil and as harmful spirits, and kept them like children under their control.

It was, was sunk in darkness, decline and oppression. Throughout the whole of the world, no glow or gleam of light met the eye, and although the desire for goodness and virtue still flickered in the depths of the heart of human nature covered by a dark opaqueness, it had been almost extinguished on the one hand in the blackness and gloom of humiliations, passions and oppression, and on the other hand in the prominent features of poverty and wretchedness. It could not illuminate the path for the seekers after light, purity and felicity. A darkness like a thick heavy cloud in the sky had submerged the daily life of all societies of the time in a deep sleep; and a horrible, powerful obscurity reigned which only the rising of a radiant sun could disperse.

This darkness was more overpowering in Arabia invaded to the depths of degradation and debasement.

Hear what Imam 'Ali (A.S.) says about those days: ". .You people of Arabia followed the worst religion; you dwelt amongst rough stones and poisonous serpents. You drank putrid water and ate filthy food. You shed the blood of one another and played no heed to relationships. Idols were established among you, and sins clung to you." (Nahjul al-Balaghah, Sermon 26).

The Birth of Hadrat Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.)

Muhammad (S.A.) opened his eyes to the world on the 17th of Rabi' al-awwal of the 53rd year before the Hijrah (A.D. 570).

His father, 'Abdullah, was from the family of Hazrat Isma'il, and had died before he could see his son. His mother was one of the most pious women of that time.

Muhammad (S.A.) was entrusted to a virtuous woman called Halimah, who suckled him and nursed him.

One day, Muhammad (S.A.), who had not yet reached the age of four years, asked Halimah if he could go into the desert with the other boys... Halimah said: "I bathed Muhammad and anointed his hair with oil. I put collyrium on his eyes and hung a Yemenite stone on a string and put it round his neck so that no harm could come to him from the spirits of the desert. But Muhammad tore the stone from his neck and said, 'don't worry about me. My God is taking care of me!'"

So we see that from childhood he was the object of God's favour and grace, and was always

guided by Divine power and help in works that were in their right time and place.

Muhammad's behavior and speech in childhood were such that everyone's attention was attracted. In his youth, also, he was far from that which tainted those people in his environment. He took no part in their riotous poetry gatherings. He drank no wine, was an enemy of the idols; he was perfect in speech and act. Years before he became a prophet, the people called him 'al-Amin' (the trustworthy one). He had a pure mind and radiant intellect, and a godly and heavenly character. Every year for one month he went to the cave of Hira and was with God in His mysteries and in prayer. At the end of the month, before returning to his home, he went to the Ka'bah and made seven or more circumambulations.

At the age of forty, while busy in worship in the cave of Hira elevated to the station of messenger ship.

For three years the Prophet of Islam (S.A.) received no command to call people openly to Islam, and during that time only a few people had faith in Muhammad (S.A.). Among men, the first person who loved and followed him was Hazrat 'Au (A.S.), and among women, Khadijah. Then after three years he received the command to invite people openly to Islam, and he called his close family to be his guests; about forty of these people assembled together. The food, which the Prophet (S.A.) had prepared, was no more than enough to satisfy the appetite of one man, but by the power of God that little food filled everyone, and this was the cause of much amazement. Abu Lahab, without thinking what he was saying, cried out: "Muhammad is a magician!" That day the relatives dispersed before the Prophet could speak, so he called them again the next day. After they had partaken of the food and hospitality, he spoke: "O Sons of Abdul-Muttalib! No youth has brought to his people better than what I bring to you. I have brought you the best of this world and of the world of the resurrection. I have been cannonaded by Allah to call you to Him. Which of you will extend his help to me and become my brother, executor and successor?" Apart from 'Au (A.S.), no one answered. The Prophet placed his hand on 'Ali's shoulder and said: "This is my brother, executor and successor among you. Listen what he says and obey him!"

One day the Prophet (S.A.) went up on Mount Safa and called the people around him. He said:

"If I told you that an enemy, was going to fall on you this morning or this evening, would you trust me?" All together they replied: "Yes!" He said: "I warn you of a severe torment that is soon to fall on you." Out of fear that the speech of Muhammad (S.A.) would take effect in the hearts of those present, Abu Lahab broke the silence and said to him: "Did we assemble here just to listen to this nonsense?"

The Prophet of Islam (S.A.) started his call with the slogan of tawhid and the worship of one

God, and established tawhid as the basis of all other beliefs. He made known to men Allah, who is nearer to man than man himself; he abolished religion. Meanwhile, the Quraysh (the most powerful tribe in Mecca, to which Muhammad (S.A.) belonged) were becoming ill at ease with the progress he was making and tried hard to stop his preaching, even once trying to kill him; but with the help and protection of Allah and with His care and intercession all their tortures, persecutions and schemes were without effect and came to nothing. Day by day the call to Islam, and also the acceptance by people, spread, even to those who came from outside Mecca. People rose up with their souls in answer to this Divine invitation.

In the eleventh year of the prophet hood, some people from Medina belonging to the Khazraj tribe accepted, with this promise that when they went back to Medina they would call the people to Muhammad's religion. They went to Medina and spread around the invitation of the Prophet (S.A.). The next year twelve Medinese accepted the faith of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.) at 'Aqaba and resolved: not to associate any with Allah, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to indulge in infanticide, not to bring malicious accusations against anyone, not to disobey the Prophet in any thing which he indicated. Then the Prophet sent a man by the name of Mus'ab along with them to teach the Qur'an, and thus a large group in Medina pledged their faith in the Prophet

The Holy Prophet's Migration (Hijrah)

Till the thirteenth year of his mission, the Islam, and stood firm when faced with the persecutions of the Quraysh. Eventually he got to know that the Quraysh had hatched an incredible plot to kill him, so he put Hazrat 'Au (A.S.) to sleep in his bed in his place and left Mecca at night; he hid in a cave, and then migrated from there to Medina. The Hijrah of the Prophet opened an entirely new chapter in the history of Islam from which a stimulating and surprising leap forward was made. For this very reason, the Hijrah of Muhammad (S.A.) became the beginning of the dating system of the Muslims. With the presence of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.) in Medina, the tribes of Aws and Khazraj became brothers for life in the shadow of the teachings of Islam, and a blessed sincerity and the example of Muhammad's behavior, his spiritual and moral superiority, and the naturalness of his pure religion, caused the people to come to Islam by the score, and in the end to accept it.

The Prophet of Islam (S.A.) was from the people and with the people, and did not maintain a distance from them. He shared with them in their gains and losses. He firmly criticized oppression and aggression, and refrained from and prevented them. He set forth all the principles which were, in the light of Islam, effective for the development of the position of

women, and put an end to the tyranny they had been subjected to previous to Islam, but he also vehemently fought against their unchastely and licentiousness, for he wanted them to attain their real development on the basis of the true principles of Islam.

He defended the rights of slaves, and had broad comprehensive programmes for their freedom. The Prophet of Islam created a society where black and white, rich and poor, great and small, were all-equal and could enjoy the benefits of being human beings. In such an atmosphere, there could be no question of 'racial discrimination', for there was a much higher basis in virtue, knowledge, piety, human values and ethical greatness.

Let us look at a clear example of the great teaching of the Prophet (S.A.): Juwayber was a young man, poor and rather ugly. He came to Medina with a great enthusiasm for Islam, and accepted it. The Prophet (AS) gave him a place in the mosque, and later in a place by the mosque (named al-Suffa). One day the prophet told him: It is good for a man to take to himself a woman, and to choose a wife, so that he may keep his chastity and have a home-life."

"May God bless you, but I am poor and ugly; in what woman could there be such a desire that she would take me as her husband, especially as I am not from a noble family?"

"Juwayber, with the coming of Islam all the nobility of the age of ignorance (before Islam) has been broken down together with all the standards of greatness and have been melted together. Black and white, Arab and non-Arab have all come from Adam, and God made Adam from the earth.

"For this reason today there is no black and white, nor even any results from imperfection "The dearest person to God is the most virtuous person.

"Now go to the house of Ziyad and ask for his daughter, Dhulfa' on my behalf."

Juwayber did what the Prophet had told him, but Ziyad, who was one of the nobles of the Ansar group, did not accept, and said, "We only give our daughters to people like ourselves and the Prophet himself knows that very well; so go back till I have consulted with him and give my apologies myself."

He turned to go back, but because of his anger he cried out, "I swear by God, neither the Qur'an nor the Prophet have said that one must give one's daughter to someone who is of equal status in family and in wealth!"

Dhulfa' heard the voice of Juwayber, and sent someone to her father. He came to her and she asked him, "What have you said to that young man that has made him angry?"

"The Prophet sent him to me to take you, my daughter, with my agreement.

"Juwayber would not tell a lie; send him back and go yourself to the Prophet so that he may clarify the matter for you."

Ziyad did what his daughter had said. He sent Juwayber back, and himself hurried to the Prophet and said, 'Juwayber brought a message from you. I want to remind you that I am an Ansari, and that we do not give our daughters in marriage except to men of equal status from the same tribe.'

'Juwaybar is a believer and a man of faith, and a man with faith is the equal of a woman with faith. Give him your daughter as a wife.' Ziyad then returned home and told his daughter what the Prophet had commanded.

The daughter said, 'Father! To disobey the prophet's command is against the religion. And I am ready of my own accord, so accept Juwayber as your son-in-law' Ziyad brought Juwayber in front of the people of his tribe and gave him in marriage to his daughter on the basis of the command of Islam. He even gave the dowry to his daughter from his own pocket, and gave them a house with all necessities so that they would live happily.

Truly, this light was dazzling; this source of warmth-giving radiance lit up a flame in every heart that was a guide to all pure hearts on the path. And thus it was that the muddled souls of the people were led forth from the harassment of the gloom and darkness of that time, like moths who wing their way towards the brilliant flame, and turned in their hundreds towards Islam, seeking the protection of the illustrious, illuminating system of the Qur'an