

PROPHETHOOD AND THE EARLY MUSLIMS

It was in the month of Ramadan when an incident took place, which would change the rest of Muhammad's life and the course of human history. The Prophet (pbuh) was forty years old and until now he had lived a relatively normal life. Until this day, he wasn't well known for anything apart from his honesty and good character.

The Prophet (pbuh) had dedicated a few days to Allah, away from the world, in seclusion. Muhammad (pbuh) was alone in a cave in mount Hira, on the outskirts of Makkah when suddenly the angel Jibrael appeared to him in the form of a man. The angel said to the prophet 'IQRA' which means to read, repeat or recite. The prophet (pbuh) was shocked and terrified when he saw the angel before him because he had been alone in the cave until then. The Prophet (pbuh) replied to the angel "I can not read." The angel grabbed the prophet (pbuh) and squeezed him, repeating the same words to the prophet (pbuh) - Iqra. The Prophet (pbuh) again replied, "I can not read!"

As we know very few people could read and write at this time in Arabia. Most people had very little education and this was also true for our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The word Iqra has a few meanings and this is the character of the Arabic language. Each word is taken from a root word that defines the meaning of this word.

The angel squeezed the prophet (pbuh) a second time and then repeated 'IQRA' for a third time. The Prophet (pbuh) replied with the same words "I can not read!" The angel squeezed the Prophet (pbuh) a third time and said Iqra, bismi rabi kalla zi...:

Read in the name of your lord who created
He created man from a clot of blood
Read and your lord is most bountiful
He who has taught by the pen
Taught man that which he knew not

The prophet (pbuh) afterwards talked of this experience and recalled how it was - as if these words were written on his heart. The prophet (pbuh) was scared and confused. He could not believe what had happened and he ran from the cave towards the house. On the way he heard a voice above him saying you are

Muhammad (pbuh) the messenger of Allah and I am Jibrael.

Muhammad (pbuh) turned around and saw the angel standing astride, filling the whole horizon. The prophet (pbuh) turned away and wherever he turned he could see the angel. The prophet (pbuh) heard the same words as before that you are Muhammad (pbuh) the messenger of Allah and I am Jibrael. Finally, the angel disappeared from the horizon and the prophet (pbuh) descended down the slope and ran home.

The prophet (pbuh) went home straight to his wife. He got home and said to Khadija , "Cover me, cover me." The prophet (pbuh) was trembling as he lay on the couch, covered by a cloak. He re-told the whole story to Khadija who listened to every word. She reassured him that he was a good man and that he was good to the orphans and helped the poor and needy. He looked after his guests and was always kind and generous to all. Allah did not want anything bad for such a person.

She then went to her cousin Waraqah who was old and had lost his sight. He was amazed at what he heard. He said this was the same Namus (i.e. Angel Jibrael) who had come to Musa. He also said that Muhammad (pbuh) was the messenger of Allah and that he would have joined him if he were young and able. Waraqah also said that the people would doubt you, ill treat you and drive you away from your home.

Many aspects of the life of the final messenger (pbuh) was foretold in the religious scripture of different religions. This is one of the reasons why some people accepted Islam very quickly. They could see the qualities and events about the prophet (pbuh) as described in their books. In many cases, they were waiting for a prophet (pbuh) to come.

Muhammad (pbuh) later received more verses from the Qu'ran which was followed by a period when there was no revelation coming to him. The Prophet (pbuh) was concerned that he might have said or done something to incur this silence from Allah. Khadija re-assured him that Muhammad (pbuh) was a good person and he did not do anything wrong.

After a while, the messages returned to the Prophet (pbuh) and he continued to practice Islam. Muhammad (pbuh) began to tell some of his close companions about what had happened and asked them to keep it a secret.

After Khadijah, the people that believed in the prophet (pbuh) were Ali and Zayd. Ali was only ten years old and Zayd was a slave who had no influence in the Makkah Society. After them Abu Bakr, from the tribe of Taym, accepted Islam. He was a well-mannered and liked person who was well respected by the Arabs of Makkah. He was also a successful merchant. He used to tell some of his close friends whom accepted Islam at his hands.

The early converts were people who knew the prophet (pbuh) very well. They knew his character and his good qualities. They also knew that he had always been truthful and did not doubt his word when he told them that revelation had come to him. They knew that he had never composed any words or poems in the past and the verses of the Qu'ran were a true master piece.

Another well known story, of conversion was that Uthman son of Affan, was sleeping in the desert whilst on a trade journey, when he heard a loud voice saying, "Sleepers, awake, Ahmad has come forth in Makkah." Uthman then hurried to Makkah where he met Talha on the way. Talha said that when he was in Syria, he met a monk, who had asked if Ahmad had come to the people of the sanctuary. When Talha quizzed the monk about Ahmad, the monk replied that Ahmad was the son of Abdullah the son of Abdul Muttalib.

Both Uthman and Talha went to Abu Bakr, who was known to be close to the Prophet (pbuh). They both related their stories. Abu Bakr then took them to the Prophet (pbuh) and both young men accepted Islam. These were some of the earliest converts to Islam.

One of these remarkable people who accepted Islam in the earliest stages was a young boy by the name of Ibn Masood. He attended sheep on the outskirts of Makkah when he was a young lad. One day, the prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr were passing by and asked the boy for some milk. Ibn masood refused them milk saying that they were not his sheep. The prophet (pbuh) asked him to bring him a young sheep that did not bear any milk. When Ibn Masood brought the sheep over, the prophet (pbuh) did a prayer and the udder was full of milk. The prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr drank the milk and afterwards the udder dried up. A few days later Ibn Masood accepted Islam and became one of the leading authorities in Islam with the regards to the Qu'ran.

The angel Jibrael appeared to Muhammad (pbuh) one day and taught him about Wudhu and salah. The angel cast his heel on the ground causing a spring to start

gushing from the ground. The angel then showed the prophet (pbuh) how to wash up for prayers (wudhu) and also showed Muhammad (pbuh) how to pray to Allah. It showed the prophet (pbuh) how to perform the Salah with all the different positions of bowing and sitting. The angel also told him what to say in the Salah. From then on the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) began to perform Salah.

Everything was going well for the prophet (pbuh). There were a few Muslim converts now but they were his close friends and family. What would happen when Allah asked him to deliver the message to the Makkans? The Makkans were war-like and stubborn, how would they react? Would they get angry and try to kill the Muhammad (pbuh) or would they accept Islam? What trials and tribulations would the Muslims face?

OPEN PREACHING OF ISLAM

The prophet (pbuh) only preached to a close group of friends and family. The ones who accepted Islam became dedicated to Islam and began to learn, worship and study. They would hold private meetings where they would learn the verses of the Qu'ran and the principles of Islam. They would learn to pray and would pray to Allah, just as the angel had taught the prophet (pbuh) to. This period of preaching lasted for three years.

However, during this period of preaching, the word got out about the prophet's message to the Makkans. Initially, the people were not too concerned about Muhammad (pbuh). Gradually they became concerned when they realised that the words of the prophet (pbuh) were having an effect on people. They would talk about this mission and the effects it would have on the Arabs and the religion of their forefathers.

After three years of this preaching, the prophet (pbuh) was commanded by Allah to start preaching to his own clansmen. Muhammad (pbuh) collected together all his clansmen so that he could explain to them about Allah and about his mission. The invited audience was of about forty-five Makkans from his clansmen. This was the first encounter with Abu Lahab, who became the fiercest enemy of Islam.

The prophet (pbuh) collected the people and was about to speak to them but Abu Lahab spoke out first. He advised the Muhammad (pbuh) that he should immediately stop his mission. He said it was better for his people to follow the

traditions of his forefathers than to face the rest of the Arabs. He said that the rest of the Arabs would destroy them. After Abu Lahab had finished attacking the prophet's mission, the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) kept silent and said nothing in that meeting.

The Prophet (pbuh) invited them to another meeting and this time stood up and delivered a short speech explaining his mission:

He said: "I celebrate Allah's praise, I seek His help, I believe in Him, I put my trust in Him, I bear witness that there is no god to be worshipped but Allah with no associate. A guide can never lie to his people. I swear by Allah, there is no god but He, that I have been sent as a Messenger to you, in particular and to all the people, in general. I swear by Allah you will die just as you sleep, you will be resurrected just as you wake up. You will be called to account for your deeds. It is then either Hell forever or the Garden (Paradise) forever."

The Arabs at the time did not think that they would need to account for their actions; instead they would die and not be raised again. They believed in Allah but also believed that Allah had many partners. These partners were the idols who, they thought, shared power with Allah! They prayed to Allah but also prayed to these Idols. They were deeply misguided and away from the belief in one God.

It was during this meeting that Abu Talib said he would look after and defend the prophet (pbuh), even though Abu Talib himself did not accept the Muhammad's teachings or Islam. Abu Talib was sticking to the path of his fore fathers; he did not want to leave those traditions for something new.

Abu Lahab tried his best to dissuade Abu Talib from offering any support to Muhammad (pbuh). He was advising Abu Talib to do the opposite by stopping Muhammad (pbuh) and his mission rather than offering him protection. Abu Lahab threatened him by saying that it was Abu Talib's responsibility to stop Muhammad (pbuh) before someone else did.

The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) went to Safa and called the people together. This was a usual custom at the time when some major event or announcement was going to be made. The people gathered together and the prophet (pbuh) said:

'O people of Quraysh, if I was to tell you that an army was advancing to attack you from the other side of this mount will you believe me?'

The people knew the character of Muhammad (pbuh), after all they had given him the title of Al-Amin (the truthful). They had seen this gentle child grow up in this world and had seen how well he dealt with people, his honest character and his trustworthiness. They had no reason to doubt him, so they replied:

'Yes why not? We have always found you to be truthful'

The prophet (pbuh) looked at the people assembled before him and said " O banu Abdul Muttalib, O banu Abd Manaf, O Banu Zuhra! I have come to you as a Warner and if you do not respond to my warning, punishment will fall upon you. I have been sent by Allah to warn you and I can not protect you in this world, nor can I promise you anything in the next world, unless you acknowledge and submit to the worship of the one Allah"

There was silence and then Abu Lahab, one of the more powerful individuals and the prophets uncle, again responded "May you perish, did you call us to this?" the crowd then dispersed.

This was one of many incidents which Abu Lahab used his influence to ridicule and mock Islam. He became an open enemy of the prophet (pbuh) and Islam. He continued to be a hindrance and had a strong opposition to the prophet during his sacred mission.

A major turning point was when the prophet (pbuh) was commanded to openly preach Islam to the people. The Arabs realised the effect this message could have on Arabia. They were concerned that the words and verses being taught were from a source beyond this world. These verses of the Qu'ran were luring some people to Islam away from the traditional Arab way of life. The Arabs believed in a multitude of gods and Idols but were getting taught to worship only Allah. They were getting taught that Idol worship was wrong and evil.

Indeed the truth did stand out clear and anyone who was exposed to this message was affected. They knew that the message could only be from Allah, the creator and sustainer and that Muhammad (pbuh) was indeed the messenger of Allah.

They turned to Abu Talib and asked him to stop Muhammad (pbuh). They said "O Abu Talib! Your nephew curses our gods; finds faults with our way of life, mocks at

our religion and degrades our forefathers; either you must stop him, or you must let us get at him." They explained that since they all followed the religion of their forefather, Abu Talib should let them get rid of Muhammad (pbuh)! Abu Talib tried his best to calm them down and make peace between them. The Prophet (pbuh) continued his mission by teaching, inviting to and practicing Islam.

There were only a few months until an important time for the Arabs - the pilgrimage to Makkah. They were worried that Muhammad (pbuh) might influence the pilgrims who were coming to worship these idols. They needed to stop Muhammad (pbuh) and do something to stop the spread of Islam. They decided to get together and join forces to stop the prophet and his message.

OPPOSITION TO ISLAM

The Makkans were not happy, in fact they were maddened with rage and fury. They had in their midst a kind and honest man who was preaching a simple message, which their own souls told them was the truth. These words and messages, however, went against everything they believed and were against the beliefs of their forefathers. This message told them that the worship of idols was wrong and only Allah alone is worthy of worship.

This gentle human being was Muhammad (pbuh) who had been selected by Allah, the lord of all Mankind, to deliver the message of truth. They could not do anything to stop him because he was from Quraish and had the protection and support of Abu Talib - a respected old man - the prophet's uncle. They wanted to stop this message from getting out because it preached that Allah is one without partners and sons. They believed in many gods and their city was dedicated to these 'gods'. They felt that the Arabs who came to perform the pilgrimage, came to see and worship these idols. If Muhammad (pbuh) told them that they were wrong and that Allah was one, then this city would begin to decline.

The Makkans got together to try and get rid of Muhammad (pbuh) and his teachings. They had already openly opposed it in public and had even tried to ridicule and slander the Prophet (pbuh). They had spoken to Abu Talib and asked him to withdraw his support and protection for Muhammad (pbuh). They had failed each time and Muhammad (pbuh) continued to preach and slowly the message was spreading.

There were only a few months until the pilgrimage would be performed and Makkah would be flooded with many Arabs from all over the peninsula. They wanted to get together and sort out Muhammad (pbuh) and his preaching. They wanted to get together and formulate a new plan! They wanted to minimise the effect of the teachings of Islam upon the pilgrims.

They didn't want to upset the tribes that came to perform the pilgrimage. They were worried in case the Arabs threw out the Quraysh from Makkah and appointed another tribe to look after the pilgrims. They knew that history had recorded this happening many times. They enjoyed this lofty position of looking after the pilgrims, which was a position of honour and respect amongst the Arabs.

They decided if they joined forces they might be able to sort out Muhammad (pbuh). They would make things up, spread rumours and lies so that people stay away from Muhammad (pbuh) and don't listen to his message. Someone suggested that they accuse Muhammad (pbuh) of being a sorcerer, using magic to trick and influence people. Another said they say that Muhammad (pbuh) is just a madman and is preaching nonsense. Another suggested they say that an evil spirit possesses Muhammad (pbuh) and that the Arabs should ignore him and keep away from him. Another suggested that they say that Muhammad (pbuh) was just a poet and the message of the Qu'ran was just poetry.

The fact of the matter was that none of these allegations were true and the Makkans knew this. How could they try and combat the message of Muhammad (pbuh) and how could they halt his message from being preached. They decided that they would consult Al-Waleed bin Al-Mugheerah - a very influential person in his tribe.

Al-Waleed listened to all these allegations against the prophet (pbuh) and dismissed them all. He, however, found that the most plausible way would be to suggest that Muhammad (pbuh) was a magician and that he used magic words to influence people. They said that his 'magic' words would separate a father from his son, a husband from his wife, a man from his clan... They finally decided that this was the best excuse they could use to discredit Muhammad (pbuh). They would tell the pilgrims that Muhammad (pbuh) was a powerful sorcerer and that they should avoid him at all costs.

So when the season of Pilgrimage came, the Makkans waited at the main roads

leading to Makkah. When the pilgrims came they would tell them about Muhammad (pbuh) and warn them to stay away from Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers. Abu Lahab, the prophet's uncle and enemy of Islam, would follow Muhammad (pbuh) about the market and tell the people that Muhammad (pbuh) was a madman and a liar! Abu Lahab would advise the people not to listen to any of his words or that they would be led astray.

Despite all their efforts Muhammad (pbuh) managed to win over some of the Arabs with this message of tawheed and goodness.

Abu Dharr was a highwayman who robbed caravans when they passed through his territory. He had heard of the prophet (pbuh) from his brother and was making his way to Makkah to speak to the prophet (pbuh). He wanted to see with his own eyes this man who claimed to be a prophet. He was stopped by the Makkans on the way to the city and they informed him that Muhammad (pbuh) was a sorcerer and to avoid him.

Abu Dharr did not worship idols and paid little heed to this warning. After asking a few people, he found out where the prophet stayed and went straight to the prophet's house. The Prophet (pbuh) was sleeping when Abu Dharr got to the house. He woke Muhammad (pbuh) up and asked if he could speak to him. He questioned Muhammad (pbuh) about his mission and about this 'poetry' he recited. The Prophet (pbuh) explained to him that he was the messenger of Allah and the 'poetry' was the actual words of Allah, known as the Qu'ran. These words were not poetry nor were they his own words. They were revelation that came from Allah, the Almighty. Abu Dharr listened to the wisdom and beauty of the words of the Qu'ran and accepted Islam by testifying to the Shahadah.

Another person who was approached by the Makkans was Tufayl, from the tribe of Bani Daws. Tufayl was a well-respected poet in his tribe and was frightened by what the Arabs had told him. He was so frightened that he stuffed cotton wool into his ears so that he would not hear the prophet (pbuh). However, when he entered the precinct of the Ka'bah, he saw Muhammad (pbuh) praying the Salah and became a little curious. Although the prophet (pbuh) was not reading the Salah aloud, he heard some of the verses from the Qu'ran.

Tufayl was impressed with these few words that he managed to hear through the cotton wool earplugs. He thought to himself, I am an intelligent person and indeed I am a gifted poet. I am not a child that I can't tell the difference between what is

good and what is false. If the verses are fair then I will accept them and if they are foul I will reject them. At this point Tufayl made up his mind to hear some of the Qu'ran and make his own mind up about these accusations the Makkans had frightened him with. Tufayl decided to follow Muhammad (pbuh) to his house.

Tufayl told the prophet (pbuh) about his encounter with the Makkans, in the desert outside the main entrance to Makkah. He told him that the Makkans had stopped him and warned him about Muhammad (pbuh). He then asked Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) about his mission and about the words he had recited in salah.

The prophet (pbuh) explained to him that he was a prophet of Allah and that the verses he had heard were the words of Allah - the Qu'ran. The prophet (pbuh) recited some more verses of the Qu'ran and Tufayl accepted Islam. He then went back to his people and tried to propagate Islam. Over a period of years he was successful in bringing the truth of Islam into the hearts and lives of his tribe.

During this period, Islam became much talked off throughout Arabia. Some spoke of Muhammad (pbuh) and his preaching in bad terms whilst others spoke of the truth of Islam very highly. Things in Makkah were certainly getting more difficult for the few Makkans that had accepted Islam. The Makkans considered Islam to be a threat to their way of life. Anyone who accepted the pure teachings of Islam was becoming a target for their aggression. They wanted to rid themselves of Islam and this man Muhammad (pbuh) who's teaching were a direct threat against their evil practices.

The Makkans wanted to put an end to these teachings: an end to Muhammad (pbuh) and to the people who had accepted Islam and now believed and worshipped only one God! They wanted to finish off Islam and its followers....

Source: www.musalla.org