

أَمَا بَعْدُ:

يَقُولُ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ: (يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَآمِنُوا بِرَسُولِهِ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ) [الحديد:28].

عِبَادَ اللَّهِ:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ غَيْرِ وَحْيٍ يَهْدِيهِ، وَلَا عَقْلٍ يَنْتَفِعُ بِمَا فِيهِ، أَشْبَهُ مَا يَكُونُ بِالْحَيَوَانِ، بَلِ الْحَيَوَانُ أَحْسَنُ حَالًا مِنْهُ؛ لِأَنَّهُ لَمْ يُؤْتِ عَقْلًا فَعَطَلَهُ، وَلَمْ يُكَلَّفْ بِشَرِّعٍ فَأَهْمَلَهُ؛ وَلِذَا كَانَ مَنْ لَمْ يَهْتَدِ بِوَحْيِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَيَلْتَزِمُ شَرِيعَتَهُ أَضَلَّ مِنَ النَّهْيَمَةِ السَّائِمَةِ (أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنْ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا) [الفرقان:44].

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ حَالُ الْبَشَرِيَّةِ قَبْلَ مَبْعَثِ النَّبِيِّ ۝ إِلَّا تَارِيخًا مِنَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ، وَضُرُوبًا مِنَ الْمَعِيشَةِ الْبَهِيمِيَّةِ؛ حَيْثُ فَسُوَ مَظَاهِرِ الْجَهْلِ، وَمُصَادِرَةُ الْعَقْلِ، وَضَلَالَاتُ جَرَعَتُهُمُ الدَّلَّ، إِلَّا بَقَايَا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ، وَقَلَّةٌ كَانُوا عَلَى مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۝، فَعَنْ عِيَاضِ بْنِ حِمَارٍ ٢ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ۝ قَالَ: «وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ نَظَرَ إِلَى أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ فَمَقَنَّهُمْ عَرَبَهُمْ وَعَجَمَهُمْ إِلَّا بَقَايَا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ» [أَخْرَجَهُ مُسْلِمٌ]، وَحِينَ بَلَغَ الضَّلَالُ مُنْتَهَاهُ، وَسَادَ الظُّلَامُ أَرْجَاءَ الْمُعْمُورَةِ، أَدْرَأَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى بِصُبحٍ قَرِيبٍ، وَذَلِكَ بِيَعْنَةِ النَّبِيِّ الْكَرِيمِ، وَنُزُولِ الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ؛ لِيُنْقِذَ الْبَشَرِيَّةَ مِمَّا أَصَابَهَا، وَيُطَهِّرَهَا مِنْ عِلَلِهَا وَأَوْصَابِهَا، وَيُخَلِّصَهَا مِنْ ضَلَالِ أَهْلِ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ، وَأَنْجِرَاقَاتِ الْيَهُودِيَّةِ وَالنَّصْرَانِيَّةِ، فَكَانَ مَا أَرَادَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى؛ حَيْثُ انْتَسَرَ النُّورُ، وَانْتَصَرَ نَبِيُّهُ ۝ عَلَى أَهْلِ الْكُفْرِ وَالْفُجُورِ، وَقَامَتْ بَعْدَ دَوْلَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ، وَكَانَ الْمُصْطَفَى لَهَا خَيْرَ إِمَامٍ، يَقُولُ اللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ: (لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ) [آل عمران:164].

هُوَ الرَّسُولُ فَكُنْ فِي الشَّعْرِ حَسَانًا *** وَصُغْ مِنَ الْقَلْبِ فِي ذِكْرَاهُ أَلْحَانًا

ذَكَرَى النَّبِيُّ الَّذِي أَحْيَا الْهُدَى وَكَسَا *** بِالْعِلْمِ وَالنُّورِ شَعْبًا كَانَ عُرْيَانًا

أَطْلَ فَجْرُ هُدَاهُ وَالذُّجَى عَمِّمٌ *** بَاتَ الْأَنَامُ وَظَلُّوا فِيهِ عُمِيَانًا

هَذَا يُصَوِّرُ تِمَثَالًا وَيَعْبُدُهُ *** وَذَلِكَ يَعْبُدُ أَحْبَارًا وَكُهَّانًا

إِخْوَةَ الْإِسْلَامِ:

لَقَدْ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ۝ مَثَلًا أَعْلَى لِلْقُلُوبِ الطَّاهِرَةِ، وَفِدْوَةً حَسَنَةً لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالذَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ، فِي شُؤْنِ الْحَيَاةِ كُلِّهَا؛ بِقِيَّتِهَا وَجَلَّتْهَا. كَانَ أَعْظَمَ النَّاسِ مُرُوءَةً، وَأَحْسَنَهُمْ حَيَاءً، وَأَطْيَبَهُمْ نَفْسًا، ذَا صَفْحٍ جَمِيلٍ، وَعَفْوٍ فَضِيلٍ، مِنْ ذَلِكَ: عَفْوُهُ عَنِ الْيَهُودِيَّةِ الَّتِي وَضَعَتْ لَهُ السُّمَّ، فَعَنْ أَنَسِ ٢ أَنَّ امْرَأَةً يَهُودِيَّةً أَتَتْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ۝ بِشَاةٍ مَسْمُومَةٍ فَأَكَلَ مِنْهَا، فَجِيءَ بِهَا إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ۝ فَسَأَلَهَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ، فَقَالَتْ أَرَدْتُ لِأَقْتُلَكَ، قَالَ: «مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَسْطَلِكَ عَلَى ذَاكَ»، قَالَ: قَالُوا أَلَا تَقْتُلُهَا؟ قَالَ: «لَا» [مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ]، وَكَيْفَ لَا يَعْفُو وَهُوَ الْقَائِلُ ۝: «مَنْ كَظَمَ غَيْظًا وَهُوَ يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يُنْفِذَهُ دَعَاهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَى رُؤُوسِ الْخَلَائِقِ حَتَّى يُخِيرَهُ فِي أَيِّ الْحُورِ شَاءَ؟» [أَخْرَجَهُ أَبُو دَاوُدَ وَالتِّرْمِذِيُّ وَابْنُ مَاجَةَ عَنْ مُعَاذِ بْنِ أَنَسٍ الْجُهَنِيِّ ٢].

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ هَذَا الْعَفْوُ الْجَمِيلُ عَنْ ضَعْفٍ وَهَوَانٍ، بَلْ كَانَ نَابِعًا عَنْ قُوَّةٍ وَشَجَاعَةٍ نَادِرَتَيْنِ، فَحِينَ فَرَّ سَرَّعَانَ النَّاسِ يَوْمَ حُنَيْنٍ، تَبَّتِ النَّبِيُّ ۝ كَالْجَبَلِ، لَا يَتَزَّرَعُ وَلَا يَتَزَّلُزَلُ، عَنِ الْبِرَاءِ بْنِ عَازِبٍ ٢ أَنَّ رَجُلًا قَالَ لَهُ: يَا أَبَا عَمْرَةَ وَلَيْتُمْ يَوْمَ حُنَيْنٍ ؟ قَالَ:

«لَا وَاللَّهِ مَا وَلى النَّبِيُّ مُحَمَّدٌ وَلَكِنْ وَلى سِرْعَانُ النَّاسِ فَلَقِيَهُمْ هَوَازِنُ بِالنَّبْلِ، وَالنَّبِيُّ مُحَمَّدٌ عَلَى بَعْلَتِهِ الْبَيْضَاءِ، وَأَبُو سُفْيَانَ بْنُ الْحَارِثِ أَخَذَ بِلِجَامِهَا، وَالنَّبِيُّ مُحَمَّدٌ يَقُولُ: أَنَا النَّبِيُّ لَا كَذِبَ، أَنَا ابْنُ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ» [مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ].

إِنَّ الشَّجَاعَةَ وَالسَّمَاخَةَ حَلَّتَا *** مِنْهُ بِأَفْضَلِ سَيِّدٍ مِفْضَالٍ

بِرِتَاحٍ لِلْمَعْرُوفِ إِذْ هُوَ أَهْلُهُ *** فَيَهْشُ لِلْإِنْعَامِ وَالْإِفْضَالِ

إِخْوَةَ الْعَقِيدَةِ وَالْإِيمَانِ:

لَقَدْ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ مُحَمَّدٌ أَعْظَمَ النَّاسِ إِيْمَانًا، وَأَكْثَرَهُمْ خَشِيَةً لِرَبِّهِ وَإِدْعَانًا، حَامِيَّ حِمَى التَّوْحِيدِ، وَالْقَاهِرَ لِلشَّرِكِ وَالتَّنْذِيدِ، لَمْ تُثْبِتْهُ إِغْرَاءَاتُ الْمُشْرِكِينَ، وَلَمْ يُوهِنَهُ تَخَاذُلُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ، وَلَمْ يَصُدَّهُ مَكْرُ الْيَهُودِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ، بَلْ صَبَرَ وَصَابَرَ، حَتَّى أَعَادَ لِلْحَنِيفِيَّةِ نُورَهَا وَضِيَاءَهَا، وَلَقَدْ سَطَرَ مَعَ مُشْرِكِي مَكَّةَ أَعْظَمَ الْمَوَاقِفِ، فَلَمْ يَصْرِفْهُ عَنْ قَوْلِ الْحَقِّ أَيُّ صَارِفٍ، يَقُولُ ابْنُ إِسْحَاقَ وَهُوَ يَحْكِي مُحَاوَلَةَ إِغْرَاءِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ لِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ مُحَمَّدٍ: «فَإِنْ كُنْتَ إِنَّمَا جِئْتَ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ تَطْلُبُ بِهِ مَالًا جَمَعْنَا لَكَ مِنْ أَمْوَالِنَا حَتَّى تَكُونَ أَكْثَرَنَا مَالًا، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ إِنَّمَا تَطْلُبُ بِهِ الشَّرَفَ فِينَا سَوَدْنَاكَ عَلَيْنَا، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تُرِيدُ بِهِ مَلِكًا مَلَكْنَاكَ عَلَيْنَا»، فَأَجَابَهُمُ النَّبِيُّ مُحَمَّدٌ بِكُلِّ قُوَّةٍ وَتَبَاتٍ: «مَا أَدْرِي مَا تَقُولُونَ، مَا جِئْتُكُمْ بِمَا جِئْتُكُمْ بِهِ لِطَلَبِ أَمْوَالِكُمْ، وَلَا الشَّرَفِ فَيْكُمْ، وَلَا الْمَلِكِ عَلَيْكُمْ، وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ بَعَثَنِي إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا، وَأَنْزَلَ عَلَيَّ كِتَابًا، وَأَمَرَنِي أَنْ أَكُونَ لَكُمْ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا، فَبَلَّغْتُكُمْ رَسُولَةَ رَبِّي، وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ، فَإِنْ تَقَبَلُوا مِنِّي مَا جِئْتُكُمْ بِهِ فَهُوَ حَظُّكُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ، وَإِنْ تَرَدُّوا عَلَيَّ أَصْبِرْ عَلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ حَتَّى يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ».

أُمَّةُ التَّرْبِيَةِ وَالْأَخْلَاقِ:

لَقَدْ كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ سَيِّدَ الْمُرَبِّينَ، وَإِمَامَ الرَّحَمَاءِ وَالْمُؤَدِّبِينَ، مِلْؤُهُ الْعَطْفُ وَالرَّحْمَةُ وَاللِّينُ، زَكَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَقَالَ سُبْحَانَهِ: (وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَى خَلْقٍ عَظِيمٍ) [القلم: 4]، وَقَالَ تَعَالَى: (فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ) [آل عمران: 159]، جَلَسَ مَعَهُ غُلَامٌ عَلَى مَائِدَةِ طَعَامٍ، وَبَدَأَ الْغُلَامُ تَطْيِيشُ فِي الْإِنَاءِ، فَمَا نَهَرَهُ وَلَا زَجَرَهُ، وَإِنَّمَا قَالَ لَهُ بِرَفْقٍ: «يَا غُلَامُ: سَمَّ اللَّهُ وَكُلَّ بِيَمِينِكَ وَكُلَّ مِمَّا يَلِيكَ» [مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ حَدِيثِ عُمَرَ بْنِ أَبِي سَلَمَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا]، وَدَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ الْيَهُودُ فَقَالُوا: السَّامُ عَلَيْكَ [يَعْنُونَ: الْمَوْتَ]، فَقَالَ: «وَعَلَيْكُمْ»، فَقَالَتْ عَائِشَةُ: «السَّامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَنَكُمْ اللَّهُ وَعَضِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ»، فَقَالَ مُحَمَّدٌ: «مَهْلًا يَا عَائِشَةُ عَلَيْكَ بِالرَّفْقِ، وَإِيَّاكَ وَالْعُنْفَ أَوْ الْفُحْشَ، قَالَتْ: أَوْلَمْ تَسْمَعْ مَا قَالُوا؟، قَالَ: أَوْلَمْ تَسْمَعِي مَا قُلْتُ؟، رَدَدْتُ عَلَيْهِمْ فَيَسْتَجَابُ لِي فِيهِمْ، وَلَا يُسْتَجَابُ لَهُمْ فِيَّ» [مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ]، فَلَيْسَ فِي قَامُوسِ حَيَاتِهِ مُحَمَّدٌ كَلِمَةً نَابِيَّةً، وَلَا فِي مُعْجَمِ آدَبِهِ عِبَارَةٌ فَاحِشَةٌ، وَإِنَّمَا هُوَ طَهْرٌ وَنَفَاءٌ كُلُّهُ، رَحْمَةٌ مُهْدَاةٌ، وَنِعْمَةٌ مُسَدَّاءٌ، وَبَرَكَهَةٌ عَامَّةٌ، وَخَيْرٌ مُتَّصِلٌ.

وَكَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ يُرَبِّي أَصْحَابَهُ بِالْفِدْوَةِ الْحَيَّةِ، فَيَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى التَّقْوَى وَهُوَ أَتْقَاهُمْ، وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الشَّيْءِ فَيَكُونُونَ أَشَدَّهُمْ حَذَرًا مِنْهُ، وَيَعْظُمُهُمْ وَدُمُوعُهُ عَلَى خَدِّهِ الشَّرِيفِ، وَيُنَادِيهِمْ إِلَى الْبَدْلِ وَالْعَطَاءِ ثُمَّ يَكُونُ أَسْخَاهُمْ يَدًا، وَيَنْصَحُهُمْ بِحُسْنِ الْعِشْرَةِ مَعَ الْأَهْلِ، ثُمَّ تَجِدُهُ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسِ لِأَهْلِهِ رَحْمَةً وَعَطْفًا وَأُطْفًا، وَهُوَ الْقَائِلُ مُحَمَّدٌ: «خَيْرُكُمْ خَيْرُكُمْ لِأَهْلِهِ، وَأَنَا خَيْرُكُمْ لِأَهْلِي» [أَخْرَجَهُ التِّرْمِذِيُّ وَابْنُ مَاجَةَ مِنْ حَدِيثِ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا].

بَارَكَ اللَّهُ لِي وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ،

الخطبة الثانية

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ - أَتَّبَاعَ النَّبِيِّ الْكَرِيمِ -، وَاعْرِفُوا لَهُ قَدْرَهُ الْعَظِيمَ، فَوَاللَّهِ مَا تَقْدِيرُهُ إِلَّا بِالْحُبِّ وَالْإِتِّبَاعِ، وَمُجَانِبَةِ الْمَعْصِيَةِ وَالْإِبْتِدَاعِ، وَنُصْرَةِ دِينِهِ وَنَشْرِهِ فِي الْأَصْقَاعِ. وَلَكُمْ أَنْ تَقْدَرُوا مَحَبَّتَهُ ρ لِأُمَّتِهِ، فِي حَدِيثِ الشَّفَاعَةِ الطَّوِيلِ: «فَأَسْتَأْذِنُ عَلَى رَبِّي فَيُؤْذِنُ لِي، وَيُلْهِمُنِي مَحَامِدَ أَحْمَدُهُ بِهَا لَا تَحْضُرُنِي الْآنَ، فَأَحْمَدُهُ بِئِلَكَ الْمَحَامِدِ، وَأَخْرُ لَهُ سَاجِدًا، فَيُقَالُ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ ارْفَعْ رَأْسَكَ، وَقُلْ يُسْمِعْ لَكَ، وَسَلِّ تَعْطُ، وَاشْفَعْ تُشْفَعُ، فَأَقُولُ: يَا رَبِّ أُمَّتِي أُمَّتِي» [مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ] مِنْ حَدِيثِ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ ρ، وَتَكْفِيهِ شَهَادَةُ رَبِّهِ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيداً (لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ) [التوبة:128] فَيَا لَهُ مِنْ شُعُورٍ عَظِيمٍ، أَنْ يُبَادِلَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ρ الْوَفَاءَ وَالْمَحَبَّةَ، بِنُصْرَةِ دِينِهِ وَاتِّبَاعِ أَمْرِهِ، وَالِدَّفَاعَ عَنْ عَرْضِهِ وَأَعْرَاضِ صَاحِبِهِ!، وَيَا سَعَادَةَ مَنْ اِمْتَنَلْ!، وَيَا خَبِيَّةَ مَنْ اِنْحَرَفَ وَضَلَّ!؛ عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى ρ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ρ قَالَ: «إِنَّمَا مَثَلِي وَمَثَلُ مَا بَعَثَنِي اللَّهُ بِهِ كَمَثَلِ رَجُلٍ أَتَى قَوْمًا فَقَالَ: يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ الْجَيْشَ بَعَيْنِي، وَإِنِّي أَنَا النَّذِيرُ الْعُرْيَانُ فَالْتَّجَاءُ، فَاطَّاعَهُ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ فَأَدْلَجُوا فَانْطَلَقُوا عَلَى مَهْلِهِمْ فَتَجَّوْا، وَكَذَّبَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ فَأَصْبَحُوا مَكَانَهُمْ فَصَبَّحَهُمُ الْجَيْشُ فَأَهْلَكَهُمْ وَاجْتَنَحَهُمْ، فَذَلِكَ مَثَلُ مَنْ أَطَاعَنِي فَاتَّبَعَ مَا جِئْتُ بِهِ، وَمَثَلُ مَنْ عَصَانِي وَكَذَّبَ بِمَا جِئْتُ بِهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ» [مُتَّفَقٌ عَلَيْهِ]، يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: (لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا) [الأحزاب:21].

صلوا وسلموا

The Prophet (saas) as a Role Model

Have you ever heard of Moses, Jesus, Confucius, Krishna or the Buddha? How about Gandhi, Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King? If you live in the West, there's a good chance that you know a bit about these people and their accomplishments. In man's eternal search for immortality and meaning, many leaders and heroes, both true and false, have made their appearance on the world stage. The respect and reverence shown to such figures among people of every nationality, in every age, points to a deep human need to believe in someone greater than oneself, in an attempt to transcend the confines of one's own limited existence. We see this theme recur in world myths, legends, hero stories, and in the idealisation of people who have been raised by their followers to superhuman or godly status.

Most educated people today are sceptics, and view such stories as the charming remnants of a simpler age. And with globalisation and the steady stream of new religions and ideologies that people are exposed to, it may be hard to know what to believe. Some find it easier to ignore spiritual questions altogether, focusing instead on their relationships, careers and 'getting ahead'. Yet we know that excessive materialism stifles the mind and spirit; despite technological advances, the deep yearning to believe in a Higher Power, true leadership, and an ultimate purpose in life remains. In this day and age, who can be trusted as a guide in both spiritual and worldly matters?

There is one leader, still largely unknown to the West, who is an extraordinary role model that people of all backgrounds can relate to: the Prophet Muhammad. The details of Muhammad's remarkable life have been carefully preserved and have been subjected to the scrutiny of historians, east and west. In contrast to others who have achieved renown for their accomplishments in a limited sphere of activity, Muhammad's achievements span all major areas of life. The historian Michael H. Hart wrote:

"My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels." [Hart, Michael, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*]

Why does the average European or American know so little about a man whose life was so exceptional? Irrational fears and negative propaganda, dating back to the Crusades and exaggerated by the media, have created a 'mental block' for many people against all things Arab or Islamic, and the two terms are often mistakenly confused. As we enter the age of the global village, is it not time for those who pride themselves on being unprejudiced, independent thinkers to put aside these mental relics from a bygone era? We invite you to take a few minutes to explore a new understanding of religious leadership, and in so doing, to catch a glimpse of a man who is loved by one-fifth of the people on this planet.

For a Muslim, a Prophet does not primarily imply someone able to foretell the future - although most of Muhammad's predictions have already been fulfilled in astonishing ways - but a man sent by God to call people to repent, have faith, and dedicate their lives to doing good, thereby helping them rediscover the purpose for which they were created. Prophets are not considered to be Divine, and are not prayed to or worshipped - though they were men of outstanding character and spirituality who were protected from committing sins, performed miracles, received revelation and communed with God. Islam teaches that God is One, without partner or associate; no human being

can share in any of the qualities that are unique to the Intelligent Creator and Sustainer of our vast and complex universe. Muhammad was no more than God's honoured servant and Messenger, yet he embodied the best of human potential, and that is what continues to make him so appealing and accessible today. Last in a line of Prophets and Messengers sent by God to all people on earth - including Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus - who effected the large-scale transformation of individuals and society, Muhammad was unsurpassed as teacher and guide. Speaking of his own role as the last true Prophet before Judgement Day, he said:

'The parable of me in relation to the Prophets who came before me is that of a man who built a house beautifully and well, except that one brick in its corner was missing. The people went around it and wondered at its beauty, but said: "If only that brick were put in its place!" I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets.'

For Muhammad (saas), religion was not a matter of personal conviction alone but a complete way of life, and Madinah flourished under his leadership. The Madinan model of government, based on justice, respect for human dignity and God-consciousness, became the template to which Muslims have looked for guidance and inspiration ever since. The Prophet drew up the world's first constitution in which the rights of religious minorities were protected, and entered into treaties and alliances with neighbouring tribes. He sent letters to the rulers of the Persians, Egyptians, Abyssinians and Byzantines, announcing his message of pure monotheism and inviting them to accept Islam. For the first time in history, women, children, orphans, foreigners and slaves were granted extensive rights and protection.

Many of the Prophet's concerns seem surprisingly 'modern': he condemned racism and nationalism, saying 'there is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, or a white man over a black man, except in righteousness.' He established laws protecting animals, trees and the environment. He encouraged free trade and ethical investments, but secured workers' rights and forbade usury. He worked for peace, but defined the parameters of the judicious use of force, when force was needed. He convinced people to give up alcohol, drugs, prostitution and crime, and promoted healthy living. He condemned domestic violence, encouraged his wives to speak their own mind, and granted Muslim women many rights not dreamed of in Europe until centuries later, including the right to own property, reject arranged marriages, and seek divorce because of incompatibility. And the Prophet encouraged his followers to seek beneficial knowledge wherever it could be found, with the result that Muslims never experienced a conflict between science and religion, and led the world in many fields of learning for centuries afterwards. Although his enduring legacy can be observed in everything from art to politics, Muhammad's greatest achievement by far was to re-establish pure monotheism. As simple and straightforward to understand as the nucleus at the centre of an atom, the concept of One God lies at the heart of Islamic culture. Muslims turn to their Creator for guidance, without the need for intermediaries, or the loss of dignity that idolatry and superstition bring.

The Prophet accomplished all this through the strength of his character and personal example; he inspired in his followers a love, devotion and sense of awe that was unparalleled. While other men would have been corrupted by the absolute power that he wielded in his later years, Muhammad remained humble, ever aware of the Source of his blessings. 'I am just God's servant,' he said, and 'I have only been sent as a teacher.' Although he spent his days in serving people and his nights in

prayer, he preached religious moderation and balance; he forbade his followers to adopt a monastic lifestyle and preferred that they establish strong families and engage themselves in bettering the world around them, while remaining deeply conscious of God.

In the brief space of one generation and during his own lifetime, the Prophet Muhammad* successfully transformed the faith, mentality and culture of the people of Arabia; within 100 years his message had touched the hearts and lives of millions in Africa, Asia and parts of Europe. The Prophet foretold that each succeeding generation would be worse than the one before it, and true to his prediction, Muslims have not always understood or honoured his example. But Muhammad's teachings, speeches and customs were carefully noted down by his Companions, and compiled into books of authentic sayings which are available in translation. Along with the Qur'an, they form the holistic foundation of a satisfying way of life for practising Muslims, while for others, they provide a fascinating glimpse into the heart and mind of an exceptional man and role model from whom much can be learned.

As we realise when reading all this, the Prophet glorified God in the most comprehensive forms. Perhaps no one ever consistently praised God in such a way, reiterating God's oneness in the clearest of terms, and acknowledging man's need for His help and forgiveness. It is through such recognition that a Muslim develops his awareness of God's presence in every situation. Thus he begins to watch God in all that he does. This is the essence of fearing God, which is the key to every good action.

We ask Allah (swt) to open our hearts to the great wisdom and knowledge that is the biography of this truly great man, so that we can adopt him as our role model in all our affairs. Ameen.

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