

MUHAMMED ﷺ
THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

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AL HASANAT
BOOKS PVT. LTD.

Edition: 2017

Published by:

**AL HASANAT
BOOKS PVT. LTD.**

3004/2 Sir Syed Ahmad Road,
Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002
Tel: 011-23271845, Telefax: 011-41563256
E-mail: alhasanatbooks@rediffmail.com

Printed by:

New Krishna Offset
Jagatpuri, New Dehli

MUHAMMAD, THE PROPHET OF ISLAM



In the desert of Arabia was Muhammad born, according to Muslim historians, on April 20, 571. The name means "highly praised". He is to me the greatest mind among all the sons of Arabia. He means so much more than all the poets and kings that preceded and succeeded him in that impenetrable desert of red sand.

When he appeared, Arabia was a desert- a nothing. Out of nothing of the desert a new world was fashioned by the mighty spirit of Muhammad- a new life, a new culture, a new civilisation, a new state which extended from Morocco to Indies and influenced the thought and life of three continents- Asia, Africa and Europe.

When I thought of writing on Muhammad the Prophet, I was a bit hesitant because it was to write about a religion one does not profess and it is a delicate matter to do so, for there are many persons professing various religions and belonging to diverse schools of thought and denominations even in the same religion. Thought it is sometimes claimed

that a religion is entirely personal yet it cannot be gainsaid that it has a tendency to envelope the whole universe seen as well as unseen. It somehow permeates, sometime or other, our heart, our souls, our minds, their conscious parts, unconscious or whatever part they contain or are supposed to contain. The problem assumes overwhelming importance when there is a deep conviction that our past, present and future all hang by the soft, delicate, tendersilked cord. If we further happen to be highly sensitive, the centre of gravity is very likely to be always in a state of extreme tension. Looked at from this point of view, the less said about others' religion the better. Let our religions be deeply hidden and embedded in the recesses of our innermost hearts fortified by unbroken seals on our lips.

But there is another aspect of this problem. Man lives in society. Our lives are bound with the lives of so many, willingly or unwillingly, directly or indirectly. We eat the food grown in the same soil, drink the water from the same spring, breathe the air of the same atmosphere. Even while staunchly holding our own views, it would be helpful, if for no other purpose, at least to promote proper adjustment to our surroundings, if we also know to some extent, how the mind of our neighbour moves and what are the main springs of his actions. From this angle of vision, it is highly desirable that one should try to know all religions of the world, in the proper spirit, to promote mutual understanding and better appreciation of our neighbourhood, immediate and remote.

Further, our thoughts are not scattered as they appear to be on the surface. They have got themselves crystallised around a few nuclei in the form of great world religions and living faiths that guide and motivate the lives of millions that inhabit this earth of ours. It is our duty, in one sense, if we have the ideal of ever becoming citizens of the world before us, to make a little attempt to know the great religions and systems of philosophy that have ruled mankind.

In spite of these preliminary remarks the ground in the field of religion, where there is often a conflict between intellect and emotion, is so slippery that one is constantly reminded of fools that rush in where angels fear to tread. It is also so complex from another point of view. The subject of my writing is about the tenets of a religion, which is historic, and its Prophet, who is also a historic personality. Even a hostile critic like Sir William Muir speaking about the Holy Quran says that "There is probably in the world no other book which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text". I may also add, Prophet Muhammad is also a historic personality, every event of whose life has been most carefully recorded and even the minutest details preserved intact for the posterity. His life and works are not wrapt in mystery. One need not hunt for the accurate information and embark on arduous expeditions to sift the chaff and husk from the grain of truth.

My work is further lightened because those days are

fast disappearing when Islam was highly misrepresented by some of its critics for reasons political and otherwise. Prof. Bevan writes in Cambridge Mediaeval History. "The accounts of Muhammad and Islam which were published in Europe before the beginning of the 19th century are now to be regarded as literary curiosities". My problem to write this monograph is easier because we are not generally fed now on this kind of history and much time need not be spent on pointing out our misrepresentations of Islam.

The theory of Islam and Sword for instance is not heard now frequently in any quarter worth the name. Principle of Islam that there is no compulsion in religion is well known. Gibbon, a historian of world-wide fame, says, "A pernicious tenet has been imputed to the Muslims, the duty of extirpating all the religions by the sword." This charge of ignorance and bigotry, says the eminent historian, is refuted by Quran, by the history of Musalman conquerors and by their public and legal toleration of Christian worship. The greatest success of Muhammad's life was affected by sheer moral force without the stroke of a sword.





To the Arabs who would fight for forty years on the slight provocation that a camel belonging to the guest of one tribe had strayed into the grazing land belonging to another tribe and both sides had fought till they lost 70,000 lives in all, threatening the extinction of both tribes, to such furious Arabs, the Prophet of Islam taught self-control and discipline to the extent of praying even on the battle-field.

When, after repeated efforts at conciliation had utterly failed, circumstances arose that dragged him into the battle-field purely in self-defence, the Prophet of Islam changed the whole strategy of the battlefield. The total number of casualties in all the wars that took place during his lifetime, when the whole Arabian Peninsula came under his banner, does not exceed a few hundreds in all. He taught the Arab barbarians to pray, to pray not individually but in congregations, to God Almighty even amidst the dust and storm of warfare. Whenever the time for prayer came and it comes five times every day the congregational prayer

had not to be abandoned or even postponed. A party had to be engaged in bowing their heads before God while another was engaged with the enemy. After finishing the prayers, the two parties had to exchange their positions.

In an age of barbarism, the battlefield itself was humanised and strict instructions were issued not to embezzle, not to cheat, not to break trust, not to mutilate, not to kill a minor child or a woman or an old man; not to hew down date palm nor burn it, not to cut down a fruit tree, not to molest monks and persons engaged in worship. His own treatment of his bitterest enemies was the noblest example for his followers. At the conquest of Mecca, he stood at the zenith of his power. The city which had refused to listen to his mission, which had tortured him and his followers, which had driven him and his people into exile and which had unrelentingly persecuted and boycotted him even when he had taken refuge in a place more than 200 miles away, that city now lay at his feet. By the laws of war he could have justly avenged all the cruelties inflicted on him and his people. But what treatment did he mete out to them? Muhammad's heart overflowed with the milk of love and kindness as he declared, "This day, there is no reproof against you and you are all free".

This was one of the chief objects why he permitted war in self-defence- to unite human beings. And when this object was achieved, even his worst enemies were pardoned.

Even those who had killed his beloved uncle, HUMZA, mutilated his dead body, had ripped it open and chewed a piece of his liver.

The principle of universal brotherhood and the doctrine of the equality of mankind which he proclaimed represent very great contribution of Muhammad to the social uplift of humanity. All great religions have also preached the same doctrine, but the Prophet of Islam had put this theory into actual practice and its value will be fully recognised, perhaps, sometime hence, when international consciousness being awakened, racial prejudices would disappear and stronger concept of the brotherhood of humanity comes into existence.

Sarojini Naidu, speaking about this aspect of Islam, says, "It was the first religion that preached and practised democracy; for, in the mosque, when the minaret is sounded and the worshippers are gathered together the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and ruler kneel side by side and proclaim, "God alone is great". The great poetess of India continues, "I have been struck over again by this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man instinctively a brother. When you meet an Egyptian, an Algerian, an Indian and a Turk in London what matters is that Egypt is the motherland of one and India is the motherland of another".

Mahatma Gandhi, in his inimitable style, says,

"Someone has said that Europeans in South Africa dread the advent of Islam, that civilized Spain: Islam, that took the torch of light to Morocco and preached to the world the Gospel of Brotherhood. The Europeans of South Africa dread the advent of Islam, as they may claim equality with the white races. They well dread it. If brotherhood is a sin, if it is equality of the coloured races that they dread, then their dread is well founded".

Every year, during the pilgrimage season, the world witnesses the wonderful spectacle of this international Exhibition of Islam in levelling all distinctions of race, colour and rank. Not only the Europeans, the Africans, the persians, the Indians, the Chinese all meet together in Mecca as members of one divine family, but they are all clad in one dress, every person in two simple pieces of white seamless cloth, one piece round the loin the other piece over the shoulders, bare-headed, without pomp or ceremony, repeating "Here am I, O God; at Thy command; Thou art One and the Only; Here am I. "Thus there remains nothing to differentiate the high from the low and every pilgrim carries home the impression of the international significance of Islam.

In the words of Prof. Hurgronje, "The league of Nations founded by the Prophet of Islam put the principle of international unity and human brotherhood on such universal foundations as to show candle to other nations".

He continues; The fact is that no nation of the world can show a parallel to what Islam has done towards the realisation of the idea of League of Nations ".

The Prophet of Islam brought the reign of democracy in its best form. Caliph Umar, Caliph Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, Caliph Mansur, Abbas, the son of the Caliph Mamun, and many other Caliphs and Kings had to appear before the judge as ordinary men in Islamic courts. Even today we all know how the black Negroes are treated by the civilized white races. Consider the state of Bilal, a Negro slave in the days of the Prophet of Islam nearly 14 centuries ago. The office of calling Muslims to prayer was considered to be a position of honour in the early days of Islam and it was offered to this Negro slave. After the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet ordered him to call for prayer and the Negro slave, with his black colour and his thick lips, stood over the roof of the holy KAABA, the most historic and the holiest place in the Islamic world, when some proud Arabs painfully cried aloud, "Oh, this black Negro slave, woe to him. He stands on the roof of holy KAABA to call for prayer".

As if to answer this outburst smacking of pride and prejudice, both of which the Prophet of Islam aimed at eliminating, he delivered a sermon in which he said:

"Allah is to be praised and thanked for ridding us of the vices and pride of the days of ignorance. O people! note that all men are divided in two

own shoes and coarse woolen garments, milked the goats, swept the hearth, kindled the fire and attended to other menial offices of the family. The entire town of Madina, where he lived, grew wealthy in the later days of his life. Everywhere there was gold and silver in plenty and yet in those days of prosperity many weeks would elapse without a fire being kindled in the hearth of the ruler of Arabia, his food being dates and water. His family would go hungry many nights successively because they could not get anything to eat in the evening. He slept on no soft bed but on a palm mat after a long busy day, to spend most of his night in prayer, often bursting with tears before his Creator to grant him strength to discharge his duties. As the reports go, his voice would get choked due to weeping and it would appear as if a cooking pot was on fire and boiling had commenced. On the day of his death his only assets were a few coins, a part of which went to satisfy a debt and the rest was given to a needy person who came to his house for charity. The clothes in which he breathed his last had many patches. The house from where light had spread to the world was in darkness because there was no oil in the lamp.

Circumstances changed, but the Prophet of God did not. In victory or in defeat, in power or in adversity, in affluence or in indigence, he was the same man, disclosed the same character. Like all the ways and laws of God, Prophets of God are unchangeable.





An honest man, as the saying goes, is the noblest work of God. Muhammad was more than honest. He was human to the marrow of his bones. Human sympathy, human love was the music of his soul. To serve man, to elevate man, to purify man, to educate man, in a word, to humanise man—this was the object of his mission, the be-all and end-all of his life. In thought, in word, in action he had the good of humanity as his sole inspiration, his sole guiding principle.

He was most unostentatious and selfless to the core. What were the titles he assumed? Only two, Servant of God, and His Messenger; Servant first and then a Messenger. A Messenger, and Prophet like many other Prophets in every part of the world, some known to us and many not known. If one does not believe in any of these truths one ceases to be a Muslim. It is an article of faith, with all Muslims.

"Looking at the circumstances of the time and the unbounded reverence of his followers" says a Western

writer "the most miraculous thing about Muhammad is that he never claimed the power or working miracles". Miracles were performed but not to propagate his faith and were attributed entirely to God and his inscrutable ways. He would plainly say that he was a man like others. He had no treasures of heaven. Nor did he claim to know the secrets that lie in the womb of future. All this was in an age when miracles were supposed to be ordinary occurrences, at the beck and call of the commonest saint and when the whole atmosphere was surcharged with supernaturalism in Arabia and outside Arabia.

He turned the attention of his followers towards the study of nature and its laws, to understand them and appreciate the Glory of God. The Quran says: "God did not create the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in play. He did not create them all but with truth. But most men do not know". The world is not an illusion, nor without purpose. It has been created with truth. The number of verses in the Quran inviting close observation of nature are several times more than those that relate to prayer, fast, pilgrimage, etc., all put together. The Muslims under its influence began to observe nature closely and this gave birth to the scientific spirit of observation and experiments which was unknown to the Greeks. While the Muslim Botanist, Ibn Baitar wrote on Botany after collecting plants from all parts of the world, described by Mayer in his *Gesch der Botanika* as a monument of industry, while Al Biruni travelled for forty years to collect mineralogical specimens,

and Muslim astronomers made some observations extending even over twelve years, Aristotle wrote on Physics without performing a single experiment wrote on natural history carelessly stating without taking the trouble to ascertain the most easily verifiable fact that men have more teeth than animals.

Galen, the greatest authority on classical anatomy, informed that the lower jaw consists of two bones, a statement which is accepted unchallenged for centuries till Abdul Lateef takes the trouble to examine a human skeleton. After enumerating several such instances, Robert Briffalut concludes in his well known book, *The Making of humanity*: "The debt of our science to the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries or revolutionary theories. Science owes a great deal more to the Arab culture: it owes its existence". The same writer says: "The Greeks systematised, generalised and Theorised but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation, experimental enquiry, were altogether alien to Greek temperament. What we call science arose in Europe as a result of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks..... That spirit and these methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs."





It is the same practical character of the teaching of Prophet Muhammad that has also sanctified the daily labours and the so-called mundane affairs. The Quran says that God has created man to worship him but the Word worship has a connotation of its own. God's worship is not confined to prayer alone, but every act that is done with the purpose of winning the approval of God and is for the benefit of humanity comes under its purview. Islam sanctifies life and all its pursuits provided they are performed with honesty, justice and pure intents. It obliterates the age-long distinction between the sacred and profane. The Quran says if you eat clean things and thank God for it, it is an act of worship. It is a saying of the Prophet of Islam that a morsel of food that one places in the mouth of his wife is an act of virtue to be rewarded by God. Another tradition of the Prophet says: "He who is satisfying the desire of his heart will be rewarded by God provided the methods adopted are permissible". A person who was listening to him exclaimed 'O Prophet of God, he is answering the calls of passions, he is only satisfying the cravings of his heart.' Forthwith came

the reply: "Had he adopted an unlawful method for the satisfaction of this urge, he would have been punished; then, why should he not be rewarded for following the right course?"

This new conception of religion that it should also devote itself to the betterment of this life rather than concern itself exclusively with supermundane affairs, has led to a new orientation of moral values. Its abiding influence on the common relations of mankind in the affairs of everyday life, its deep power over the masses, its regulation of their conceptions of rights and duty, its suitability and adaptability to the ignorant savage and the wise philosopher alike are characteristic features of the teachings of the Prophet of Islam.

But it should be most carefully borne in mind that this stress on good actions is not at the sacrifice of correctness of faith. While there are various schools of thought, one praising faith at the expense of deeds, another exhorting various acts to the detriment of correct belief, Islam is based on correct faith and right actions. Means are as important as the ends and ends are as important as the means. It is an organic unity. Together they live and thrive. Separate them and they both decay and die. In Islam, faith cannot be divorced from action. Right knowledge should be transferred into right action to produce that right result. "Those who believe and do good, they alone shall enter paradise." How

often these words come in the Quran? Again and again, not less than fifty times these words are repeated. Contemplation is encouraged, but mere contemplation is not the goal. Those who believe and do nothing cannot exist in Islam. Those who believe and do wrong are inconceivable. Divine law is the law of effort and not of ideals. It chalks out for the men the path of eternal progress from knowledge to action and from action to satisfaction.

But what is the correct faith from which right action spontaneously proceeds, resulting in complete satisfaction? Here the central doctrine of Islam is the Unity of God. There is no god but one God, is the pivot from which hangs the whole teaching and practice of Islam. He is unique not only as regards His divine being but also as regards His divine attributes.

As regards the attributes of God, Islam adopts here as in other things too, the law of the golden mean. It avoids, on the one hand, the view of God which divests the divine being of every attribute and rejects on the other, the view which likens Him to things material. The Quran says, on the one hand, there is nothing which is like Him; on the other, it affirms that He is Seeing, Hearing, Knowing. He is the King who is without a stain of fault or deficiency, the mighty ship of His power floats upon the ocean of justice and equity. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is the Guardian over all. Islam does not stop with this positive statement. It adds

further which is its most special characteristic, the negative aspect of the problem. There is also no one else who is guardian over anything. He is the mender of every breakage and no one else is the mender of any breakage. He is the restorer of any loss whatsoever. There is no god but one God, above any need, the Maker of bodies, Creator of souls, the Lord of the day of judgement and in short, in the words of Quran, to Him belong all the excellent qualities.

Regarding the position of man in relation to the Universe, the Quran says: "God has made subservient to you whatever is on the earth or in the Universe. You are destined to rule over the Universe." But in relation to God, the Quran says: "O man, God has bestowed on you excellent faculties and has created life and death to put you to test in order to see whose actions are good and who has deviated from the right path."

Inspite of free will which he enjoys to some extent, every man is born under certain circumstances and continues to live under certain circumstances beyond his control. With regard to this, God says according to Islam, it is My will to create any man under conditions that seem best to me. Cosmic plans, finite mortals cannot fully comprehend. But I will certainly test you in prosperity as well as in adversity, in health as well as in sickness, in heights as well as in depths. My ways of testing differ from man to man, from hour to hour. In adversity do not despair and do not

resort to unlawful means. It is but a passing phase. In prosperity do not forget God. God's gifts are given only as trusts. You are always on trial; every moment on test. In this sphere of life "their's is not to reason why, their's is but to do and die. "If you live, live in accordance with God; and if you die, die in the path of God. You may call it fatalism. But this type of fatalism is a condition of vigorous increasing effort, keeping you ever on the alert. Do not consider this temporal life on earth as the end of human existence. There is a life after death and it is eternal. Life after death is only a connecting link, a door that opens up hidden reality of life. Every action in life, however insignificant, produces a lasting effect. It is correctly recorded somehow. Some of the ways of God are known to you, but many of His ways are hidden from you. What is hidden in you and from you in this world will be unrolled and laid open before you in the next. The virtuous will enjoy the blessings of God which the eye has not seen, nor has the ear heard, nor have they entered into hearts of men to conceive of them. They will march onward reaching higher and higher stages of evolution. Those who have wasted opportunity in this life shall under the inevitable law, which makes every man taste of what he has done, be subjected to a course of treatment of the spiritual disease which they have brought about with their own hands. Beware, it is a terrible ordeal. Bodily pain is torture, you can bear it somehow. Spiritual pain is hell, you will find it unbearable. Fight in this life itself the tendencies of the spirit prone to evil, tempting to lead you into iniquitous ways.

Reach the next stage when the self-accusing spirit in your conscience is awakened and the soul is anxious to attain moral excellence and revolts against disobedience. This will lead you to the final stage of the soul at rest, contented with God, finding its happiness and delight in Him alone. The soul no more stumbles. The stage of struggle passes away. Truth is victorious and falsehood lays down its arms. All complexes will then be resolved. Your house will not be divided against itself. Your personality will get integrated round the central core of submission to the will of God and complete surrender to His divine purpose. All hidden energies will then be released. The soul then will have peace. God will then address you, 'O thou soul that art at rest, and retest fully contented with thy Lord, return to thy Lord, He is pleased with thee nad thou be pleased with Him; So enter among my servants and enter into my paradise.

This is the final goal for man; to become on the one hand the master of the Universe and on the other to see that his soul finds rest in his Lord, that not only his Lord will be pleased with him but that he is also pleased with his Lord. Contentment, complete contentment, satisfaction, complete satisfaction, peace, complete peace will result. The love of God is his food at this stage and he drinks deep at the fountain of life. Sorrow and frustration do not overwhelm him and success does not find him vain and exulting.

Thomas Carlyle, struck by this philosophy of life writes:

"And then also Islam - that we must submit to God; that our whole strength lies in resigned submission to Him, whatsoever He does to us, the thing He sends to us, even if death and worse than death, shall be good, shall be best; we resign ourselves to God" The same author continues "If this be Islam", says Goethe, "do we not all live in Islam?" Carlyle himself answers this question of Goethe, "Yes, all of us that have any moral life, we all live so. This is yet the highest wisdom that heaven has revealed to our earth."

