

Prophet Muhammad

By Imam Warith Deen Muhammad

When we study the history of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we can better understand why he is the perfect example for all to follow. He was born in Makkah, Arabia, April 20, 570 A.D., fifty-three years before the Hijrah (flight to Madinah), His father was 'Abdullah, who was the son of 'Abdul Muttalib of the tribe of Quraysh. His mother was Aminah, daughter of Wahb Ibn ' Abd Manaf Ibn Zuhruh, Chief of the tribe of Zuhruh. His father died seven months before he was born, and his mother when he was six years old. He was placed under the care and protection of 'Abdul Muttalib, his grandfather, after whose death his uncle, Abu Talib, was his sponsor.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lived during a time when there was no law or science in Arabia, and the Gentile world was so dominated by superstitions and ignorance that historians refer to the period as the "Dark Ages." Although the Dark Ages occurred throughout Europe and the Middle East, it has been reported that knowledge of civilization was more lacking in Arabia than in all other parts of the known world. It was in Arabia during this period that Allah revealed the Holy Qur'an, with its great light of truth and its universal message, to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Holy Qur'an says, "And lo! It is a Revelation from the Lord of the worlds, which the True Spirit has brought down upon your heart that you may be [one] of the warners, in plain Arabic speech." The Message of Light had overcome all of the ignorance which had come into Arabian society, ignorance which held the people down by enslaving their minds, their morality, and their spirituality.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) obeyed the upright, natural instinct for goodness within him. This instinct is the basis for obedience to Allah, and it is found in every human being. The Holy Qur'an did not come to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) because he had wealth, because he was the son of a great man or woman, or because he had worldly knowledge. He had a good heart, impeccable human character, and Allah chose him as the best example for humanity. In the forty years prior to becoming the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not isolate himself from the challenges of society, he met and overcame the challenges of society, he met and overcame them. He did not run from the slum areas and their problems of alcohol, prostitution, gambling, and filth. He was strong enough to live among the ignorant without falling victim to the corruption in the society, and to provide a living example of the way of life which Allah intended for human beings. He was sincere, truthful, honest, rational, and upright, and he was deeply troubled by the confusion, corruption, and misguided sentiments of his people. In his efforts to find ways to help them, Allah began to give him understanding. In time he went to the Cave of Hira (the Mount of Light) in the vicinity of Makkah. It was there that Allah sent him Revelation and the Light of Truth by way of the Angel Gabriel.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born a free native of Makkah, but because he refused to bow to the tribal gods, and because he guided the people to Allah and to one humanity, he was harassed and persecuted by the ruling clan, the Quraysh. When they began to plan his assassination, Allah guided him to flee to Madinah, where the inhabitants had invited his leadership and the religion of Al-Islam.

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) began his mission, he did not have many followers. However, after a few years, he was able to march back into Makkah with ten thousand strong-hearted Muslims. They were from many different nations and tribes, and they included Suhayb, the Romans; Salman, the Persian; Bilal, an Abyssinian, born in Makkah; and Usamah ibn Harithah, from the tribe of Kalb. Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) return brought an end to Makkah's tribal wars. He demonstrated the Mercy of Allah by declaring there would be no further bloodshed, instead of revenge, he gave amnesty; instead of exile, he allowed former enemies who would accept Al-Islam to participate in his administration. To families who had suffered and still wanted revenge, he taught in essence, "You must bury your differences and learn to live in peace with each other."

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a flesh-and-blood human being. He was not an angel or an unnatural spirit. He had a father and a mother. He has children. He had problems. He commanded an army and fought as a warrior. He was a conqueror, a judge, a ruler and law-giver. He operated businesses. He mended his own clothing, repaired his shoes, and milked his goats. He was humble and affectionate toward his family, and he lived among his friends as a sincere companion and devoted brother. He paid equal regard to the poor and to the rich, and he graciously accepted the invitations of those who asked him into their homes. He visited the sick and paid respects to the deceased.

All of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) actions and movements were characterized by the utmost simplicity and humility. When he walked, people would walk in front of him and behind him. When seated among his followers, who loved him more dearly than their lives, he would not occupy a special seat in order to make himself conspicuous. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had much wealth at his disposal. However, he never lost his compassion for the common man. During his lifetime, the poorest and wealthiest of men found company with him. He lived humbly and exercised perfect discipline. People could not say, "You are rich Muhammad, and we are poor." He uses his wealth to raise the living standards for Muslims and non-Muslims who respected the laws of Al-Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) placed such high value on education that he freed unbelievers captured in battle on the condition that they each taught ten Muslims to read and write. He made the way to knowledge easy for the common people, and he made the way to economic sustenance accessible to the poor.

One morning some of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) companions noticed that when he awoke, the imprint of the burlap [material] mattress frame he had slept on was showing on his

flesh. They felt sorry for him and asked him to allow them to get something more comfortable for him to lie on. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told them that he was, in respect to world, but a traveler. This was not his end in aspirations. This was not his final place. This was not where all his hopes lay. There was something beyond this that he was striving for. But he stopped under a tree of temporary [material] comfort and enjoyed its shade [appetite-soothing provisions].

Material comforts gives us protection from poverty and material inconveniences, just as the shade tree gives us comfort from the heat of the sun. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) likened himself to a traveler who just stopped under this tree for a while. He wanted to go beyond this life, so he did not want to overindulge and become too satisfied with the material comforts of this world. He refused to accept more because they would only enlarge his appetite, and he did not want that. He was saving the biggest part of his appetite for what lies beyond this existence.

It would not have been a sin for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to accept a cushion to lie on, but he wanted to establish an example for leaders then and now. His message was that leaders are directly under the weight of Allah's Commandment, and should therefore be examples for all the people. How can a leader be an example if he takes more for himself than most of his followers or other members of his society ask for themselves? Leaders have to lead by example. If we, as leaders, ask any man to sleep on the floor, we should be prepared to sleep on the floor ourselves. Al-Islam demands that our leadership set practical examples for us to follow, and that each believer should strive to achieve the full development of his latent virtues in the manner demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The material standard of living for the average person is much higher today than it was during his lifetime, but the same rules still apply.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) assisted the old and the young. He swept the floors for his wife. He was always concerned with the plight of the poor, as well as with the moral and spiritual development of the entire community. Once Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had six dirhams (a form of currency) left after he had distributed the money collected for charity. He forgot about them, and that night he awakened and was unable to go back to sleep. He asked his wife, Aisha, "What is the matter with me? I awakened this night and have not [since] slept." Aishah told him, "There are six dirhams remaining with you from the charity." He told her to bring them to him, and when she did, he sent them to be given to the poor. Then he slept until he snored. Though Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sometimes worldly matters, Allah blessed him to never forget the Holy Qur'an. Others had to constantly recite the Holy Qur'an to remember it, but this was not the case with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The society that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born into was a backward and ignorant one. There was little or no respect for justice, and most Arab men were proud, arrogant, boastful, and bullish. If they could not conquer others with their wealth or superstitions, they would try to control or kill them with their gangs. But Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not fall victim to the corruption within Arab society because Allah sent him with Revelation to correct its

injustices. He implemented Divinely Revealed principles, enforced Qur'anic injunctions, and promoted the use of all material resources to improve conditions for the good of the whole society.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) restored moral, intellectual, and spiritual freedom, dignity, and equality to women. Before his lifetime women in Arabia had very few rights. Arab men took great pride in the birth of sons, but often did not want daughters at all. History tells us that these men sometimes buried their infant daughters alive at birth. Most of them had no respect for their mothers or wives, and they viewed women merely as objects of sexual gratification. They even forbade a female from receiving inheritance from her father, husband or other relative.

Allah revealed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) a law which forbids the denial of inheritance to women. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also proclaimed the rights of women to receive religious instruction, to participate in Islamic businesses and in education, to vote, to express their ideas in public and to participate in the political affairs of the community. He called his society's attention to the fact that men and women are equal in biological nature because Allah created both from a single being. He also taught that men and women are equal in their potential for doing good or bad, and for achieving intellectual and spiritual excellence.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) praised the role of motherhood and gave women a liberty and status which befit their noble nature. As a result, the Muslim community has benefited greatly from the substantial contributions made by women in Al-Islam. Whenever we see women relegated to an inferior status in a Muslim society, we should be aware that it is practicing unenlightened traditions rather than the religion of Al-Islam.

In brief, the character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is exemplary in all walks of life. As the Holy Qur'an says, "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a most excellent pattern [of conduct] for anyone whose hope is in Allah and in the Final Day, and who engages much in the remembering of Allah." Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has thus set an example which can show us how to live our lives in the most spiritually and materially befitting manner.

I accept Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the universal leader. Over fourteen hundred years ago he stood up and spoke the truth. He was not concerned whether that truth offended Arabs or any others, whether they were black, white, brown or red. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that all of us were created from Adam, and Adam was created from dust. We are told in the Holy Qur'an, "The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created Adam from dust..." If any one of us is better than another, it is only because of his nearness to Allah by virtue of rightness, faith, and good deeds.