

PROPHET (PEACE BE UPON HIM)

MERCY TO THE WORLDS

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This is the month of Rabi al-Awwal, when Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last and the final Prophet of Almighty Allah, was born in Makkah. The Holy Qur'an, the Final Revealed Book, was revealed to him through Angel Gabriel. I was reading a book: The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad, (peace be upon him) by Tariq Ramadan and I am presenting some of his thoughts and ideas through this column. "He (The Prophet) received and transmitted the last revealed book, the Qur'an, which repeatedly insists on the eminent and singular position of the Messenger of God, all at once a prophet, a bearer of news, a model, and a guide. He was but a man, yet he acted to transform the world in the light of Revelation and inspirations he received from God, but also fully accepted his own humanity in what makes Muhammad an example and a guide for the Muslim faithful." (page ix)

Intimate relationship of trust and love While pointing out the intimate relationship of love and trust, Professor Ramadan wrote: The essence of the Islamic message is wholly expressed in this intimate relationship of trust and love with the Most High, establishing a direct link between the individual and his or her Creator, Who has chosen to demonstrate exemplary behaviour through a messenger, a human being, whom He has set as a model. Three verses were later to synthesize the exact substance of this teaching: "When My servants as you concerning Me; I am indeed close [to them]: I respond to the prayer of every supplicant when he or she calls on Me." (Al-Qur'an; 2:186)

"Say [O Messenger]: If you love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins (Al-Qur'an) The Prophet (peace be upon him), at the heart of this intimate relationship, opens the way. The Messenger taught his Companions to love God, and the Qur'an taught them in return: "Say [O Messenger]: If you love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins." (Al-Qur'an; 3:31)

The Prophet is the epitome of the human being aspiring to the divine beyond the finitude of life: Al-Qur'an says: "You have indeed in the Messenger of God an excellent example for the person who hopes in [aspires to get close to] God and the final Day and who remembers God intensely." (Al-Qur'an; 33:21)

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him): Mercy to the Worlds

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is called "Rahmatul lil aalimeen" The famous commentator of the Qur'an, Allama Mahmud Alloosi used a metaphor to explain the meaning and said, "He is the root and the world is the branch." This metaphor emphasizes the eminent position of the Messenger of God. Dr. Musharraf Hussain in his article, "The Benefactor of Mankind" mentioned about this metaphor and said, "The root not only provides an anchor and stability to the plant but the nourishment needed by the trunk, the branches, leaves, buds, flowers and the fruits. All these need the root. Without the root they would wither and die."

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is 'the mercy to the worlds' in this sense that through him everything derives sustenance and divine mercy. Rahmat means to do a favour to someone, to give benefits to others, to have pity and show kindness. In this context the implication is that Muhammad (peace be upon him) has enormously benefited not only the Arabs and Muslims but also the entire world, therefore he is the Benefactor of Mankind. Allah is "the Lord of all worlds" and He has made his beloved Messenger (peace be upon him) the "Mercy to all Worlds," mentioned Dr. Hussain.

His Personality, Character and Behaviour Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born in a social situation of the pre-Islamic period where prostitution and indecency were rampant and in full operation. Drinking was another vice to which the whole of Arabia was hopelessly wedded. Gambling was another curse which had a firm hold on the Arab society. One writer summed up the situation in Arabia like this: "The Arabs of the pre-Islamic period were groping about in the dark and ignorance, entangled in a mesh of superstitions paralyzing their mind and driving them to lead an animal-like life. The woman was a marketable commodity and regarded as a piece of inanimate property. Inter-tribal relationships were fragile. Avarice for wealth and involvement in futile wars were the main objectives that governed their chiefs' self-centred policies." The Qur'an sums up succinctly this utter deterioration that embraced every phase of life in a single sentence: "You were on the brink of a pit of fire..." [The Qur'an, 3:103.]

Though Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born in such a demoralised society, he was not touched by all these vices. Rather in the

course of a few years, the Noble Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emancipated them from all these shackles of hereditary bondage and elevated them to the pinnacle of morality, learning and culture! The Holy Prophet (pbuh) raised this fallen humanity to the highest level of moral rectitude.

Writing about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) Dr. Ziauddin Sardar wrote in his book: Muhammad: "He was a man of integrity, with an innate modesty and warm personality. Despite being the centre of attention, the inescapable person of renown, he was devoid of all forms of pomposity or snobbery. Khadija's servant, Maysara, who accompanied Muhammad (PBUH) on the trading mission to Syria, gave a glowing report not just of his conduct of business but also of how well he had treated him, a human detail that stands behind the more elaborate signs and portents that Maysara is said to have reported. And the same characteristic is found in the words of Anas bin Malik, Muhammad's (peace be upon him) servant much later in his life: "He served me more than I served him. He was never angry with me. He never treated me badly". And Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself said: "The dearest one in a society is the one who always serves others." If someone sent a servant to summon Muhammad (peace be upon him) he would follow behind rather than assume a dominant position insistent on leading the way; most often, he would walk hand in hand with the servant. This characteristic of humility and respect for others can be seen in Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a husband and father, friend, social reformer and community builder." (Ziauddin Sardar, Muhammad, Hodder Education, page 126)

Top in List of 100 Most Noble and Influential Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative.

He was not only Prophet of God, but aside from that, he was one of the best leader in the "Top in List of 100 Most Noble and influential and successful person of history". In recent times, a book has been published in America titled "The 100," or the Top One hundred, or the Greatest Hundred in History. A certain Michael H. Hart, described as a historian, mathematician and astronomer has written this novel book. He has searched history, seeking for men who had the greatest influence on mankind. In this book he gives us The hundred most influential men, including Ashoka, Aristotle, Buddha, Confucius, Hitler, Plato, and Zoroaster. He does not give us a mere chart of the topmost "One Hundred" from the point of view of their influence on people, but he evaluates the degree of their influence and rates them in order of their excellence from No. 1, through to No. 100. The most amazing thing about his selection is that he has put our Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as No. 1, the first of his "100!" Thus confirming, unknowingly, God's Own testimony in His Final Revelation to the World:

Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) has been favoured by God to all mankind as a blessing from Him.

"Indeed, Allah conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves" (Aale 'Imraan 3:164)

Whenever Muslims mention the name of Muhammad, they add peace be upon him. The ritual is based on a verse from the Qur'an, which states: "God and His Angels bless the Prophet - so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace." (Al-Qur'an 33:56).

Professor Tariq Ramadan in his book, mentioned earlier, spoke of three important lessons through three incidents; i) Not to compromise principles for wealth and power; ii) Begin every act invoking the name of Allah the Almighty and iii) Remember God's Infinite Power and never pronounce final judgement on anybody.

Not to compromise principles for wealth and power

In the early years in Makkah when the situation was getting increasingly difficult for Muslims, when insults, rejection, and ill-treatment became the rule, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) began looking for a solution to alleviate the trials and suffering endured by the first Muslims. He was thought of approaching Walid, the chief of the Makhzum clan. Professor Ramadan wrote the story thus: "While he was setting forth his arguments and trying to win Walid's support, the Prophet was interrupted by a blind man, poor and old, who had already converted to Islam and was asking him to recite some surahs from the Qur'an for him. Muhammad first turned aside calmly, but he soon became irritated by the insistence of this old man, who was preventing him from presenting his case to Walid. The chief, full of contempt, eventually refused even to hear the matter. A surah was to be revealed as a result of this incident, requiring Muslims to draw a lesson from it

for eternity:

Commenting on this Professor Ramadan wrote: "No one must ever let power or social, economic, or political interests turn him or her away from other human beings, from the attention they deserve and the respect they are entitled to. Nothing must ever lead a person to compromise this principle of faith in favour of a political strategy aimed at saving or protecting a community from some peril. The freely offered, sincere heart of a poor, powerless individual is worth a thousand times more in the sight of God than the assiduously courted, self-interested heart of a rich one." (page 48-49).

"History, with its many examples of how the thirst for power and wealth has led individuals to compromise their principles, has since taught us how true this intuition was. In this respect, another of the Prophet's warnings echoes in our minds, addressing his spiritual community for the centuries to come: "For every [spiritual] community there is an object of discord, tension, and disorder [fitnah], and for my community, this object is money.", quoted by Professor Ramadan (page 49).

Begin every act invoking the Name of Allah the Almighty

While writing the biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Professor Ramadan mentioned another incident. The Quraysh were at a loss about how to prevent the Prophet's message from spreading further. They decided to send a delegation to Yathrib to ask Jewish dignitaries. The Rabbis suggested the people of Makkah should ask him three key questions. Back in Makkah, they went to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked him the three questions. The Prophet replied almost instantly: "I shall answer your questions tomorrow!" (page 57)

But the next day, the Angel Gabriel did not appear. There was no Revelation. Nor did the Angel come the day after. Professor Ramadan said, "Two weeks later, he received a Revelation and an explanation: "Never say of anything, "I shall do that tomorrow," except: "If God so wills," and remember your Lord [Rabb, "Educator"] when you forget, and say: "I hope that my Lord will guide me ever closer than this to the right course." (Al-Qur'an; 18:23-24)

"This Revelation once again involved and a teaching: it reminded the Prophet that his status, his knowledge, and his fate depended on his Rabb, on the One and Sovereign God, and that he must never forget it. This is how one should understand the meaning of the phrase Insha Allah, "if God so wills": it expresses the awareness of limits, the feeling of humility of one who acts while knowing that beyond what he or she can do or say, God alone has the power to make things happen. This is by no means a fatalistic message: it implies not that one should not act but, on the contrary, that one should never stop acting while always being aware in one's mind and heart of the real limits of human power. For the second time, the Prophet was called to account by the Transcendent. Whatever adversity one faces, one's strength and freedom on earth consist in remaining constantly aware of one's dependence on the Creator." (page 57)

"Only later was the Prophet to receive the answers to the three questions he had been asked. The delay was paradoxically to strengthen the believers' conviction and to baffle the Prophet's interlocutors: his initial inability to answer and then the belated communication of Revelation proved that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not the author of the Book that was being constituted and that he did actually depend on his Rabb's will," wrote Professor Ramadan (Page 58).

Remember God's Infinite Power and never pronounce final judgement on anybody While narrating the story of Umar's conversion, Professor Ramadan wrote: Umar had gone out of his home determined to kill the Prophet, blinded by his absolute negation of the One God; there he was, a few hours later, changed, transformed, as the result of a conversion induced by a text and the meaning of God. He was to become one of the most faithful Companions of the man he had wished dead."

Commenting on Umar's conversion, Professor Ramadan wrote: "This heart's revolution was a sign, and it carried a twofold teaching: that nothing is impossible for God, and that one should not pronounce final judgements on anything or anybody. This was a reminder of the need of humility in all circumstances: for a human being, remembering God's infinite power should mean healthy self-doubt as to oneself and suspending one's judgement as to others. Thus, the more he moved forward with God, every day becoming more of a model for his Companions and for eternity, the more the Prophet was attaining humility and modesty as expressed in being, knowledge, and judgement." (Page 65).

Key to Paradise

Last year, in 2013, during the month of Rabi al-Awwal, I read a book, Biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him) written by Shaikh Abdullah Ibn Al-Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab, translated by Sameh Strauch and published by Darussalam, in 2006.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to Mu'az, "Oh, Mu'az! You are going to People of the Scripture and they will ask you regarding the keys to Paradise; tell them that the keys to Paradise are the words: "La ilaha illallah" (None has the right to be worshipped except Allah). These words pass through everything until they reach Allah, and there is no barrier between Him and it. Whoever comes on the day of Resurrection with these words, sincerely, they will outweigh his sins." (Vol. II, page 859)

Equality before law

During the Conquest of Makkah, a woman from Banu Makhzoom stole something and the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was informed of it and he ordered that her hand be cut off, as reported in the authentic Hadith. Her people hastened to Usamah Ibn Zaid Ibn Harithah to ask him to intercede for her with the Prophet (peace be upon him). When Usamah interceded for her with the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), the colour of the face of Allah's Messenger changed and he said, 'Do you intercede with me in a matter involving one of the legal punishments prescribed by Allah?'

In the afternoon, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) got up and delivered a sermon to the people. He praised Allah as He deserves to be praised and then said; "Amma Badu (To proceed): The nations prior to you were destroyed because if a noble person amongst them stole, they used to excuse him, and if a poor person amongst them stole, they would inflict the legal punishment on him. By Him in Whose Hand is Muhammad's soul, if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad stole, I would cut off her hand." (Vol. II, page 689).

Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a Prophet This year, 2014, during Rabi al-Awwal, I was reading two books, one entitled Muhammad: Prophet for our Time by Karen Armstrong, published by Harper Books, London, 2006 and another Muhammad: Man and Prophet by Adil Salahi, published by The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 2010. Long before the birth of Muhammad (peace be upon him), it was known to the people of the Revealed Books about his arrival. Learned theologians of both Christianity and Judaism were aware of the fact. The Jews in Madinah used to tell the polytheist Arabs there that a Prophet would soon be appearing in Arabia

"That Christians and Jewish theologians should know in advance of the coming of the Prophet is not surprising, because both the Gospel and the Torah include references to Muhammad as the last of God's messengers and Prophets," mentioned Adil Salahi in his book Muhammad: Man and Prophet, page 60. Mr. Salahi also mentioned about a Jewish scholar, named Ibn Al-Hayyaban, who came to Madinah from Syria before the advent of Islam. He was a very devout person. Mr. Salahi explained that he came to Madinah only because it was time for a new Prophet to appear and that Madinah would be the place to which he would emigrate. "I hoped," he said, "that he would appear before I died so that I could follow him. His appearance is very imminent, so let no one follow him ahead of you." (pages 621-62)

Prophet's (peace be upon him) non-violent policy

When international community praised and acknowledged Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for his personality, good moral character and non-violent policy, there is an animosity among some people who used all kinds of abuses against him as the people of Jahiliyya used to do in the seventh century. Karen Armstrong wrote: "We have a long history of Islamophobia in Western Culture that dates back to the time of the Crusades. In the twelfth century, Christian monks in Europe insisted that Islam was a violent religion of the sword, and that Muhammad was a charlatan who imposed his religion on a reluctant world by force of arms; they called him a lecher and a sexual pervert. This distorted version of the Prophet's life became one of the received ideas of the West, and Western people have always found it difficult to see Muhammad in a more objective light." (pages 17-18).

Karen Armstrong also mentioned, "Western critics also persist in viewing the Prophet of Islam as a man of war, and fail to see that from the very first he was opposed to the jahili arrogance and egotism that not only fuelled the aggression of his time but is much in evidence in some leaders, Western and Muslims alike, today. The Prophet, whose aim was peace and practical compassion, is becoming a symbol of division and strife - a development that is not only tragic but also dangerous to the stability on which the future of our species depends." (pages 22-213)