

Signs of Prophethood in the Noble Life of Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad's Early Life

“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of God and last of the prophets. And God has knowledge of all things.” (Quran 33: 40)



When a person accepts Islam, reconfirms his or her faith or prays any of the five daily prayers, they also affirm their belief in Muhammad as a prophet of God; the final prophet. In addition to this over 1.5 billion people the world over believe that Prophet Muhammad's life is worthy of being emulated and aspired to. However many people embrace Islam without really knowing Prophet

Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. Perhaps all they know is that he was born and lived in the Arabian Peninsula and received the literal word of God in the form of the Quran. In the following two articles we will look at the noble life of Prophet Muhammad, learn to know and love him just a little bit more. We will achieve this by looking at the signs of Prophethood in his noble life.

In Arabic the word prophet (nabi) is derived from the word naba which means news. Thus we deduce that a prophet spreads the news of God and His message, they are in a sense God's ambassadors on earth. Their mission is to convey the message to worship One God. This includes, calling the people to God, explaining the message, bringing glad tidings or warnings and directing the affairs of the nation. All the prophets were anxious to convey God's message sincerely and completely and this included the last prophet, Muhammad. During his final sermon Prophet Muhammad asked the congregation three times whether he had delivered the message, and called on God to witness their answer, which was a resounding "yes!".

As well as the essence of their call to One God, another accepted sign of the truth of the prophets is how they live their lives. The accounts of Prophet Muhammad's life that we have inherited from our righteous predecessors illustrate that Muhammad's Prophethood was guided by God from the very beginning. Long before, Prophethood Muhammad was being prepared to guide humankind to the straight path and his life experiences stood him in good stead for such a weighty mission. Then at the age of 40 when Prophethood was bestowed upon him, God continued to support and affirm his mission. Any account of Muhammad's life is filled with examples of his exemplary character; he was merciful, compassionate, truthful, brave, and generous, while striving solely for the rewards of the Hereafter. The way Prophet Muhammad dealt with his companions, acquaintances, enemies, animals and even inanimate objects left no doubt that he was ever mindful of God.

Muhammad's birth was accompanied by many so called miraculous events and the talk of the extraordinary events no doubt functioned as signs of Prophethood, however we must be cautious about believing unreservedly in those extraordinary events. Not all of the events are accepted by all of the biographers and historians of Islamic history thus although they indicate an extraordinary beginning and a life destined to be guided by God, they may be embellished or exaggerated.

Special but not unique circumstances surrounded childhood of Prophet Muhammad and these undoubtedly had a bearing on his character. By the time he was eight years old he had suffered through the death of both his parents and his beloved grandfather Abdul Muttalib. He was left in the care of his uncle and great supporter Abu Talib. Thus even as a young boy he had already suffered great emotional and physical upheaval. Both the many chroniclers of Muhammad's life and the Quran acknowledge his disrupted life.

Did He not find you (O Muhammad) an orphan and gave you a refuge? (Quran 93:6)

Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib was poor and struggled to keep his family fed, thus during his adolescence Muhammad worked as a shepherd. From this occupation he learned to embrace solitude and developed characteristics such as patience, cautiousness, care, leadership and an ability to sense danger. Shepherding was an occupation that all the prophets of God we know of had in common. '...The companions asked, "Were you a shepherd?" He replied, "There was no prophet who was not a shepherd."' ^[1]

In his teens Muhammad sometimes travelled with Abu Talib, accompanying caravans to trade centres. On at least one occasion, he is said to have travelled as far north as Syria. Older merchants recognized his character and nicknamed him Al-Amin, the one you can trust. Even in his youth he was known as truthful and trustworthy. One story that is accepted by most Islamic scholars and historians is the account of one of Prophet Muhammad's trips to Syria.

The story goes that the monk Bahira foretold the coming Prophethood and counselled Abu Talib to "guard his nephew carefully". According to biographer Ibn Ishaq, as the caravan in which Prophet Muhammad was travelling approached the edge of town, Bahira could see a cloud that appeared to be shading and following a young man. When the caravan halted under the shadow of some trees, Bahira "looked at the cloud when it over-shadowed the tree, and its branches were bending and drooping over the apostle of God until he was in the shadow beneath it." After Bahira witnessed this he observed Muhammad closely and asked him many questions concerning a number of Christian prophecies he had read and heard about.

The young Muhammad was distinguished among his people for his modesty, virtuous behaviour and graceful manners, thus it was no surprise for his companions to see him, even as a youth many years before Prophethood, shun superstitious practices and keep away from drinking alcohol, eating meat slaughtered on stone altars or attending idolatrous festivals. By the time he reached adulthood Muhammad was thought of as the most reliable and trustworthy member of the Meccan

community. Even those who concerned themselves with petty tribal squabbles acknowledged Muhammad's honesty and integrity.

Muhammad's virtues and good moral character was established from a young age, and God continued to support and guide him. When he was 40 years old Muhammad was given the means to change the world, the means to benefit the whole of humanity.

In the following article we will look at how Muhammad's life changed after Prophethood and conclude that it is unreasonable to give credence to those who claim that Muhammad was a false Prophet. He did not claim Prophethood to attain comfort, wealth, greatness, glory or power.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

After Prophethood



At age 40, Prophet Muhammad was an established trader and family man given to periods of contemplation and reflection. He was a well-respected citizen of Mecca and the people were accustomed to coming to him to settle disputes, for advice and to look after their valuables. All this however was about to change because during one of his periods of isolation and contemplation he was visited by the angel Gabriel and the verses of Quran began to be revealed to him. His mission had begun; his life was no longer his own - it was now devoted to spreading the word of Islam.

Perhaps now some of the events in his life began to make sense. Perhaps he could see that God had planned things for him, for in retrospect we can see that the signs of Prophethood had been visible in many aspects and scenarios throughout Prophet Muhammad's life. Before his mission Muhammad's life was relatively easy. He had a good and happy marriage, children, no financial worries and no doubt was surrounded by friends and family who loved and respected him.

Declaring his Prophethood soon made him poor, a social outcast and his life was threatened on more than one occasion. Greatness, power, wealth and glory were the furthest thing from his mind. In fact he already had these things, albeit on a small scale. He had nothing to gain from declaring a Prophethood and mission that were not true. Prophet Muhammad, his family and his followers were ridiculed, derided and physically beaten, his lifestyle drastically changed for the worst.

One of Muhammad's companions, said, **"The Prophet of God did not see bread made from fine flour from the time God sent him (as a Prophet) until he died."**^[1] Another declared that **"When the Prophet died, he did not leave either money or anything else except his white riding mule, his arms, and a piece of land which he left to charity"**^[2].

Before he died Prophet Muhammad was the leader of an empire, with access to a national treasury but he lived simply, concerned only with completing his mission and worshipping God. Despite his responsibilities as a Prophet, teacher, statesman, general, judge and mediator, Muhammad used to milk his own goats, mend his clothes and shoes, as well as help with the general household work.^[3] Prophet Muhammad's life was an outstanding example of humility and simplicity. His dress and lifestyle did not differentiate him from his followers. When someone walked into a gathering there was nothing about Prophet Muhammad that distinguished him from the other men in the gathering.

In the early years of his mission, long before there was even a remote possibility of success, Muhammad received an interesting offer from the leaders of Mecca. Thinking that Muhammad must be making these claims of Prophethood for personal gain an envoy came to him and said "...If you want money, we will collect enough money for you so that you will be the richest one of us. If you want leadership, we will take you as our leader and never decide on any matter without your approval. If you want a kingdom, we will crown you king over us...". For any human being, in any historical period this would be a very hard offer to turn down; however Muhammad had no wish for personal gain or recognition. Although there was only one condition to this generous offer it was one that went against everything that Muhammad now stood for. The Meccan leaders expected him to give up his call to Islam and to cease worshipping God alone, without any partner.^[4] Prophet Muhammad flatly refused the offer.

On another occasion Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib feared for his nephew's life and begged him to stop calling people to Islam. Again Muhammad's answer was as decisive and sincere, he said, "I swear by the name of God, O Uncle!, that if they place the sun in my right-hand and the moon in my left-hand in return for giving up this matter (calling people to Islam), I will never desist until either God makes it triumph or I perish defending it."^[5]

Many means were taken by the disbelieving people of Mecca to tarnish Muhammad's character and to belittle the message he was trying to spread. They were particularly merciless when disparaging the Quran itself. They asserted vehemently that the Quran was not divinely revealed and that Mohammad wrote it

himself. This was done to discourage people from following Muhammad or believing his claim to be a Prophet of God. Prophet Muhammad did not write the Quran. He was an unlettered man, completely unable to read or write. He was unable to know or even guess some of the scientific facts that Quran mentions easily and often.

In addition to this it makes sense to say that if the Quran had been written by Muhammad he would have praised and mentioned himself a great deal more. The Quran in fact mentions both Prophet Jesus and Moses many more times by name than it mentions Prophet Muhammad. The Quran also reprimands and corrects Prophet Muhammad. Would an imposter prophet run the risk of making himself look like a person that can make mistakes?

Prophet Muhammad was an unlettered Arab trader. His life might have been unremarkable except that from the beginning of his existence God was with him, preparing him for Prophethood and preparing him to guide the whole of humanity into a new era of religious growth. As Muhammad grew up, he became known to be truthful, honest, trustworthy, generous, and sincere. He was also known to be very spiritual and had long detested the overt decadence and idolatry of his society.

When we look at the life of Prophet Muhammad from the distance of time we can see clearly that his life was one of service to God, his sole purpose was to deliver the message. The weight of the message weighed heavily on his shoulders and even at his final sermon he was concerned and asked the people to testify that he had delivered God's message. If Muhammad had wanted power or fame he would have accepted the offer to be the leader of Mecca. If he had been looking for riches he would not have lived a simple life, dying with barely any possessions, unlike any other powerful leader of an empire. The simplicity of Prophet Muhammad's life and his unwavering desire to spread the message of Islam are strong signs of the validity of his claim to Prophethood.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[2] *Ibid*

[3] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Imam Ahmad.*

[4] *Al-Serah Al-Nabaweyyah, Ibn Hisham, vol. 1.*

[5] *Ibid.*