

Explore Islam

Issue 2 | Free magazine | November 2013

FEATURING:

**Zheng He and the voyage
to Africa**

Human Rights in Islam

**Views of Western thinkers
on Prophet Muhammad**

**Was Islam spread by the
Sword?**

**Abhorrence of domestic
violence in Islam**

Modern perspectives on life, culture and society



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ISLAM

رابطة العالم الإسلامي
الهيئة العالمية للتعريف بالرسول ونصرتة

Editorial

Exhibition Islam

Exhibition Islam is an independent, UK registered charity that specialises in promoting a greater understanding of Islam in the international arena.

Exhibition Islam utilises alternative educational resources and rare Islamic artefacts to deliver highly professional "museum style" exhibitions that allow visitors to discover the richness and intensity of the Islamic faith in a friendly environment.

Exhibition Islam has exhibited at over 1300 venues, including major exhibition centres in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, UAE, Qatar and South Africa. Having attracted in excess of 1 million visitors over the past 15 years, Exhibition Islam has established its name as one of the leading Islamic exhibition providers in the World.

The Global Commission for Introducing the Messenger

The Global Commission for Introducing the Messenger specialises in introducing the Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) to the non-Muslim population. The aim of this organisation is to clear misconceptions about the character and message of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

This magazine has been commissioned by HE Dr. Abdullah Bin AbdelMohsen Al Turki Chairman (General Secretary of Muslim World League) and HE Pro. Adel Bin Ali Al Shlddy (Secretary General of the Muslim World League).

We would like to bid you a warm welcome to the second edition of **Explore Islam**, a new quarterly magazine which aims to cover a broad spectrum of contemporary issues as well as highlighting the life and true message of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who is revered by Muslims as the final Messenger sent to mankind. It is strange that despite being voted the most influential person in history (The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History by Michael H. Hart), and with Islam being the fastest growing religion in the world, many misconceptions still continue to circulate about the Islamic faith and its most prestigious and most famous personality.

It is a little known fact that Islamic civilisation has played an integral role in the history of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Muslims have contributed significantly to the scientific and cultural development of humanity. From the architectural splendour of Al Hambra in Spain to the enchanting silk routes of Northern China, the world is beginning to appreciate the contribution that Muslim societies have made towards the current 'modern' era. With the advent of new communication and easy travel, many people are able to increasingly venture and interact with the Muslim world and enjoy the famed traditional Muslim hospitality.

Due to the increasing role of Muslim communities in mainstream Europe, coupled with the fact that we are living through an economic crisis that is placing families in greater insecurity, questions are being raised as to the viability of incorporating specific Islamic principles that can help to build stronger, more cohesive societies.

Explore Islam aims to provide an insight into various aspects of Islamic life and culture. In this second edition, we discuss some of the more topical issues that are being debated in Europe. What does Islam say about human rights? Was Islam spread through the world by brute force? Does Islam endorse domestic violence.? Read on to find out more!

Yours Sincerely,

Umar Ansari & Mumtaz Alam
Editorial Team

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Zheng He and the Voyage to Africa



The Need for Money

When people think of great explorers, they think of Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, Christopher Columbus and others, but little is known about one of the most interesting and influential explorers of all time - Zheng He. Zheng He was born in 1371 in the southern China region of Yunnan to a Hui (ethnic Muslim) family. His birth name was Ma He (Ma translates to Muhammad in the Chinese language).

At a young age, his town was raided by the Ming Dynasty's army. He was captured and transported to the capital, Nanjing, where he served in the imperial household. In Nanjing, Zheng He, befriended one of the princes, Zhu Di, and when Zhu became the emperor, Zheng He rose to the highest positions in government. At this time, he was given the honorific title "Zheng" and thus known as Zheng He.

Expeditions

In 1405, emperor Zhu Di decided to send out a giant fleet to explore and trade with the rest of the world. Zheng He was chosen to lead the expedition. This expedition was huge, with nearly 30,000 sailors dispatched on each voyage. Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He led 7 expeditions that sailed to present day Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Iran, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Kenya, and many other countries.

Zheng He was not the only Muslim on these expeditions. Many of his advisors and were also Chinese Muslims, such as Ma Huan, a translator who spoke Arabic and was able to converse with the Muslim peoples they encountered on their journeys. He wrote an account of his journeys, titled the Ying-yai Sheng-lan, which is an important source today for understanding 15th century societies around the Indian Ocean.

The ships that Zheng He commanded stretched up to 400 feet long, many times the size of Columbus's ships that sailed across the Atlantic. Archaeological evidence from the shipyards where they were built in the Yangtze River indicate that these ships could have been larger than modern football pitches. Everywhere they sailed, they commanded the respect (and sometimes fear) of the local people, who offered tributes to the Chinese emperor. Because of this tribute and trade with all the peoples they encountered, Zheng He would sail back to China with exotic goods such as ivory, camels, gold, and even a giraffe from Africa.

During the same period, wealthy coastal East African towns had increased their importation of Chinese wares such as porcelain as the usual supply of pottery from the Middle East was unsettled by the 13th century Mongol invasion of the Middle East.

Zheng He's 4th expedition was not destined to sail to the African coast in 1414. Originally it was headed for the Gulf. The interest in Africa was triggered by members of Zheng He's crew discovering a giraffe in Bengal.

While taking a break in India, one of Zheng He's junior staff took a unit to Bengal where he was surprised and fascinated by a giraffe that was recently brought to the Bengali kingdom by envoys from Malindi. Zheng He's crew was able to persuade the Bengali king to part with his animal and it was shipped off to the Chinese emperor as a present from Bengal. They also managed to persuade the Malindi envoys to supply



them with a second giraffe which they would ferry to a suitable rendezvous point somewhere on the Gulf, before the giraffe would be brought to one of the ships of Zheng He's fleet. Thus by October 1415, a giraffe arrived in Peking with Malindi ambassadors beside it, showing evidence of being cast in strips.



Some historians suggest that Zheng He may have also met a party of merchants from Mogadishu around the time he collected the ambassadors from Malindi and the giraffe. He invited these merchants to organize a mission to Peking. These envoys, now from Mogadishu were finally able to make it to China a year after in 1416 and arrived at the Chinese court bringing with them a deputation from Brava, a state to the south of Mogadishu.

After their short stay in China, Zheng He was instructed to escort the delegations from Mogadishu and Brava back to their region. This would be the first formal visit backed by the Chinese government to Africa and this happened 450 years before the first Chinese envoys reached Europe.

From information derived from Chinese records, Zheng He and his crew explored the Northern and East African coast. They visited Mogadishu, Brava and even a settlement called Zhubu which is thought to have lain near the Juba River near the Kenyan border. They entered into relations with 'Sumalier' (different Somali nomads from the hinterland).

Fei Xin a man who had been drafted into military service and had travelled with Zheng He's fleet. Having spoken to fellow shipmates about their observations from East Africa, he recorded these observations in his memoir. Describing Somalia he mentioned, that there were houses of "heaped up stones" with "kitchens, lavatories and reception rooms all on the upper floors". The place had barren fields and few crops but very deep wells, the community made its living catching fish.

The language barrier between Zheng He and the locals was quite complicated and a double translation was normally required from Chinese to Arabic and then from Arabic to the local dialect.

It is to be noted that Zheng He and his fleet, in spite of reaching Africa nearly 70 years before the Europeans and having significantly more resources than the Europeans, did not ever try and colonise Africa. Their voyage to Africa was peaceful and non-aggressive, as opposed to those who landed on the shores of Africa in the centuries after them.



Africa with courtesy, respect and restraint, as instructed by the Islamic faith.

There are several suggestions that some ships may have gone southwards. A nautical chart generally agreed to have been used by navigators from Zheng He's crew in either the 6th or 7th voyage shows a long strip of the African coastline scattered with place names. Some of the places mentioned include Mombasa, the Mafia Island off southern Tanzania and the Quitangonha Island off northern Tanzania.

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Zheng He's expedition was an expression of symbolic acquiescence and it dealt with Africa with courtesy, respect and restraint, as instructed by the Islamic faith.



Photo: The Great Mosque of Djenné is the largest mud brick or adobe building in the world and is considered by many architects to be the greatest achievement of the Sudano-Sahelian architectural style. The mosque was originally built in the reign of King Mansa Musa of the Mali Empire in the 13th century and is located in the city of Djenné, Mali, on the flood plain of the Bani River.

Tawheed

God of Mercy or Punishment?

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was sent as a mercy to all creation, and taught his followers that God has many names which He has revealed to His creation. Of these names, the Merciful and Beneficent are the most cited attributes in the Qur'an and two of the most important.

Every chapter (except one) in the Qur'an begins by the invocation: "In the name of God the Merciful, the Beneficent." In fact, the name "Merciful" (al-Rahman) as a name for God was not known to the Arabs when it was first revealed in the Qur'an. It was introduced to them by revelation and when they asked what it referred to, it was revealed: "Call upon Allah or Call upon al-Rahman. Whatever name you call upon, to Him belongs the most beautiful names" (17:110).

Moreover, the name "Merciful" is not just one of God's many beautiful names; it holds a very important place in Islam. Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon

him) has reported that Allah Almighty has proclaimed "My Mercy overcomes my Wrath." There are numerous verses and reports from the Prophet of Islam that establish the centrality of God's mercy and compassion. For example, the Prophet states that "Allah is compassionate and loves compassion. He provides for compassion in a way he does not for harshness."

In another report, the Prophet states, "Allah has one hundred portions of mercy and He has sent one to the world and divided it amongst his creation. So by it, they treat each other with compassion and mercy. He has held back 99 portions with Himself so that he may have mercy on his servants on the Day of Judgment."

Indeed God's mercy not only pervades the cosmos, but it is also a fundamental legal and ethical principle in Islam. The scholars have shown that God's mercy is manifest in the legal rules that have been revealed to humanity.

One can also see mercy in the Prophet's teaching of the hereafter, that is heaven and hell. The very nature of hell as a place of human suffering and punishment is often cited as a reason to support the conclusion that God is vengeful. However, a closer analysis of the way heaven and hell is described in the Qur'an, as well as their purpose, will offer a glimpse of God's mercy even in the world to come.

The Qur'an indicates that hell has not been created for arbitrary reasons. Rather, the Qur'an, while describing hellfire, often complements the descriptions with reasons as to why its dwellers ended up there in the first place. In many places, the reasons concern one's social behaviour, such as being uncharitable to the poor or unjustly exploiting people. It is interesting to note that many of these sins involve the wrongdoer and other people, and are not just "sins against God." Therefore punishment and hellfire itself is related to justice, and by extension, God's mercy. Should a merciful God allow for criminals to go unpunished? Should He allow for the wrongs perpetrated against victims to go unaddressed? Of course not!

Therefore, hell and punishment is in itself a mercy to the victims of wrongdoing, and a necessary aspect of justice.

Keeping within the parameters of justice, the Prophet was clear to note that punishment will not take place until all the procedures of a fair trial are complete: records will be presented, witnesses will be called, even our eyes, ears and joints will give testimony. No one shall be wronged. Moreover,

while God through His mercy will reward in great abundance those that are righteous to exponential degrees, He will not punish the wrongdoers except for their crimes and bad deeds – no more.

The Qur'an states: "Whosoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain [further] good therefrom; but as for any who shall come with an evil deed – [know that] they who do evil deeds will not be requited with more than [the like of] what they have done". (28:84).

Even while the Qur'an speaks about punishment and hellfire, it often concludes the statements with ideas of God's mercy and forgiveness, usually mentioning that "He is the most Merciful, the Most Forgiving." Even when addressing wrongdoers and criminals, God encourages them not to despair from His infinite Mercy and forgiveness. As God states: "O My servants! Those of

you who have committed sins in great excess against their own souls never despond from the mercy of God! For indeed God forgives sins, one and all. Indeed it is He alone who is All-Forgiving, the Mercy-Giving" (39:53).

In this light, the Prophet's teachings show that punishment can even be seen as a merciful action of God. There are Prophetic traditions that indicate that for many people entering hell, it would prove to become a mode of purification, whereby sinners will finally enter heaven after paying for their evil deeds. Therefore, from the above, one can see that Prophet Muhammad's teachings show God not to be vengeful, but Merciful and Compassionate, in this world and the next.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated:

“Allah has divided mercy into 100 parts, and He retained with Him 99 parts, and sent down to earth 1 part. Through this one part creatures deal with one another with compassion, so much so that an animal lifts its hoof over its young lest it should hurt it.”

Recorded by Al Bukhari





Photo: The Al-Hambra in Granada. This ancient complex of buildings served as a mosque, palace and fortress of the Muslim rulers of Granada, in southern Spain (known as Al-Andalus when the fortress was constructed). Occupying a hilly terrace on the south-eastern border of the city of Granada, it was the residence of the Muslim rulers of Granada and their court. It is currently a museum exhibiting Islamic architecture. The situation of the Al-Hambra is one of rare natural beauty; the plateau commands a wide view of the city and plain of Granada, towards the west and north and, of the heights of the Sierra Nevada towards the east and south.

Belief in Prophets

The Brotherhood of the Prophets

In the Islamic belief system, all prophets are designated as brethren, assigned by Allah to guide humans and take them from the darkness of polytheism to righteousness and light of monotheism and true faith. Consequently, Allah made it an integral part of faith to believe in all prophets and messengers for He says, "Say (O Muslims), "We have believed in Allah, and whatever has been sent down to us, and whatever was sent down to Ibrahim, and Isma'il, and Ishaq, and Ya'qub, and the Grandsons, and whatever was brought to Musa and Isa, and whatever was brought to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him are Muslims." [Al Baqarah (The Cow) 2: 136].

Hence, a denial of a single prophet yields disbelief in Allah and belying to His Prophets. A Muslim would only be regarded as a believer once he or she believes in ALL the prophets and messengers of God Almighty.

Allah Almighty, sent humanity prophets and messengers at various intervals of human history to remind them of their true purpose of life.

Hence, all the prophets transmitted a message that emanated from the one and same source – Allah Almighty. In essence, the message sent by Allah to humanity was to worship Him Alone, without ascribing other gods as partners with Him, and at the same time for humanity to establish upon the earth Divine Laws that would compose a morally upright society. To this effect the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Both in this world and in the Hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary, The prophets are like brothers from the same father with different mothers. Their Religion is one although their Shari'ah (rules of the Religion) differed."

Accordingly, they are but brothers by the same father but different mothers, i.e., all doctrines and faiths promoted by prophets and messengers have the same origin; monotheism, yet, their respective laws are not. They made a common cause in terms of origins of monotheism, but ramifications of laws are naturally various.

Allah Almighty states in the Quran : "And, "He (Allah) has ordained for you the same religion (Islam) which He ordained for Noah, and that which We have inspired in you (O Muhammad), and that which We ordained for Abraham, Moses and Jesus saying you should establish religion (i.e. to do what it orders you to do practically), and make no divisions in it (religion). Intolerable for the polytheists, is that to which you (O Muhammad) call them. Allah chooses for Himself whom

He wills, and guides unto Himself who turns to Him in repentance and in obedience. [Qur'an, 42:13] Out of respect, the Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade prophetic comparison. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) forbade comparison between the prophets. It is narrated on the authority of the Prophet's companion Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), that he said, "A man came to Prophet saying, 'O you, the best of human race.' The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "This description applies to Abraham, peace be upon him."

Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "No one may say 'I am better than Yunus (Jonah) son of Matta (Mathew).'"

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was once asked, "Messenger of Allah, who is / are the best among human race?" "The most pious," he replied. "This is not our point," they said. "Then it is Yusuf (Josef), the prophet of Allah, son of the prophet of Allah, son of the prophet of Allah, son of the most outstanding bondman of Allah," he replied. "This is not our point," they said again. "Then about Arabs' cores you ask?" he said, adding, "The best among them in the Pre-Islamic era are the best in Islam, should they gain knowledge".

From the Islamic standpoint, believing in the Oneness of God means to realise that all prayer and acts of worship should be exclusively to God. None have the right to be invoked, supplicated,

sworn upon or prayed to but God alone. Nothing else is worthy of worship: not statues, crosses, tombs, the sun, the moon, stars, temples, animals, Prophets, Messengers, saints, priests, leaders or religious scholars. All of these things are created and limited, hence imperfect – they are not worthy of worship in Islam, whereas Allah is perfect. The Qur'an reminds us of the falsity of all alleged gods as follows:

"Surely those you call upon besides Allah, are only slaves like yourselves." (Qur'an, 7:194)

1- Reported by Al Bukhari and Muslim

2- Exegesis of Sahih Muslim, by An Nawawi

3- Reported by Muslim

4- Reported by Al Bukhari and Muslim

5- Reported by Al Bukhari and Muslim







Photos: A masterpiece of architecture, the magnificent Umayyad mosque in Damascus. Built in the 8th century, it remains to this day one of the great symbols of Islamic civilisation.



The background of the slide is a blue-tinted photograph showing the silhouettes of several people in a mosque, performing the prayer of Tawarruk. They are prostrating on the floor with their foreheads touching the ground. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

Human Rights in Islam



Freedom Of Expression

Islam gives the right of freedom of thought and expression to all citizens of the Islamic state on the condition that it should be used for the propagation of virtue and truth and not for spreading evil and wickedness. The Islamic concept of freedom of expression is much superior to the concept prevalent in the West. Under no circumstances would Islam allow evil and wickedness to be propagated. It also does not give anybody the right to use abusive or offensive language in the name of criticism.

Freedom Of Conscience & Conviction

Islam has laid down the injunction: "There should be no coercion in the matter of faith." (Quran, 2:256)

On the contrary, totalitarian societies totally deprive the individuals of their freedom. Indeed, this undue exaltation of the state authority curiously enough postulates a sort of servitude, of slavishness on the part of man. At one time slavery meant total control of man over man - now that type of slavery has been legally abolished but in its place totalitarian societies impose a similar sort of control over individuals.

"O believers, be you securers of justice, witness for God. Let not detestation for a people move you not to be equitable; be equitable - that is nearer to God-fearing."
(Quran, 5:8)

The charter, the proclamations, and the resolutions of the world governing bodies cannot be compared with the rights sanctioned by Allah; because the former are not applicable on anybody while the latter are applicable on every believer. They are a part and parcel of the Islamic

Faith. Every Muslim or administrator who claims to be Muslim, will have to accept, recognize and enforce them. If they fail to enforce them, and start denying the rights that have been guaranteed by God or make amendments and changes in them, or practically violate them while paying lip service to them, the verdict of the Holy Quran for such government is clear and unequivocal, as shown in the Quranic verse opposite.

The Security Of Life And Property

In the address which the Prophet delivered on the occasion of the Farewell Hajj, he said: "Your lives and properties are forbidden to one another till you meet your Lord on the Day of Resurrection." The Prophet has also said about the dhimmis (the non-Muslim citizens of the Muslim state): "One who kills a man under covenant (i.e., dhimmi) will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise."

Protection Of Religious Sentiments

Along with the freedom of conviction and freedom of conscience, Islam has given the right to the individual that his religious sentiments will be given due respect and nothing will be said or done which may encroach upon his right.

Protection From Arbitrary Imprisonment

Islam also recognizes the right of the individual not to be arrested or imprisoned for the offences of others. The Holy Quran has laid down this principle clearly: "No bearer of burdens shall be made to bear the burden of another." (35:18)

Equality Before Law

Islam gives its citizens the right to absolute and complete equality in the eyes of the law. A woman belonging to a high and noble family was arrested in connection with theft. The case was brought to the Prophet, and it was recommended that she might be spared the punishment of theft. The Prophet replied: "The nations that lived before you were destroyed by Allah because they punished the common man for their offences and let their dignitaries go unpunished for their crimes; I swear by Him Who holds my life in His hand that even if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, had committed this crime, I would have amputated her hand."

The Protection Of Honour

The Holy Quran lays down: "You who believe, do not let one (set of) people make fun of another set. Do not defame one another. Do not insult by using nicknames. Do not backbite or speak ill of one another." (49:11-12)

Sanctity And Security Of Private Life

The Quran has laid down the injunction: "Do not spy on one another." (49:12) and "Do not enter any houses unless you are sure of their occupant's consent." (24:27)

The Security Of Personal Freedom

Islam has laid down the principle that no citizen can be imprisoned unless his guilt has been proven in an open court. To arrest a man only on the basis of suspicion and to throw him into a prison without proper court proceedings and without providing him a reasonable opportunity to produce his defence is not permissible in Islam.

The Right To Protest Against Tyranny

Among the rights that Islam has conferred on human beings is the right

to protest against tyranny.

Referring to it the Quran says: "Allah does not love evil talk in public unless it is by someone who has been injured thereby." (4:148)

In Islam all power and authority belong to Allah, and with man there is only delegated power which becomes a trust; everyone who becomes a recipient of such a power has to stand in awful reverence before his people toward whom and for whose sake he will be called upon to use these powers.

Who is Muhammad?

(peace be upon him)

Quotes from Famous Personalities



Prophet Muhammad's mission was to propagate the worship of the One and Only God (in Arabic Allah), the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. His mission was essentially the same as that of earlier Prophets of God. In the historical context, many such terminologies about Muhammad, Islam, and Muslims were borrowed from earlier European writings of the Eleventh to the Nineteenth century, a time when ignorance and prejudice prevailed. The quotations below attest to the facts.

Thomas Carlyle in 'Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History,' 1840.

"The lies (Western slander) which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man (Muhammad) are disgraceful to ourselves only. "A silent great soul, one of that who cannot but be earnest. He Was to kindle the world, the world's Maker had ordered so."

A. S. Tritton in 'Islam,' 1951

History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of sword upon conquered

racess is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever repeated.

Gibbon in 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' 1823

The picture of the Muslim soldier advancing with a sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other is quite false.

De Lacy O'Leary in 'Islam at the Crossroads,' London, 1923.

The good sense of Muhammad despised the pomp of royalty. The Apostle of God submitted to the menial offices of the family; he kindled the fire; swept the floor; milked the ewes; and mended with his own hands his shoes and garments. Disdaining the penance and merit of a hermit, he observed without effort of vanity the abstemious diet of an Arab.

Edward Gibbon and Simon Oakley in 'History of the Saracen Empire,' London, 1870

"Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman; to subvert superstitions which had been imposed between man and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry, then existing. Never has a man undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he (Muhammad) had in the conception as well as in the execution of such

a great design, no other instrument than himself and no other aid except a handful of men living in a corner of the desert. Finally, never has a man accomplished such a huge and lasting revolution in the world, because in less than two centuries after its appearance, Islam, in faith and in arms, reigned over the whole of Arabia, and conquered, in God's name, Persia Khorasan, Transoxania, Western India, Syria, Egypt, Abyssinia, all the known continent of Northern Africa, numerous islands of the Mediterranean Sea, Spain, and part of Gaul.

"If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astonishing results are the three criteria of a human genius, who could dare compare any great man in history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples, dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. "On the basis of a Book, every letter which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blend together peoples of every tongue and race. He has left the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality the hatred of false gods and the passion for the One and Immaterial God.

"The idea of the unity of God, proclaimed amidst the exhaustion of the fabulous theogonies, was in itself such a miracle that upon it's utterance from his lips it destroyed all the ancient temples of idols and set on fire one-third of the world. His life, his meditations, his heroic revelings against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying the furies of idolatry, his firmness in enduring them for fifteen years in Mecca, his acceptance of the role of public scorn and almost of being a victim of his fellow countrymen... This dogma was twofold the unity of God and the immateriality of God: the former telling what God is, the latter telling what God is not; the one overthrowing false gods with the sword, the other starting an idea with words.

"Philosopher, Orator, Apostle, Legislator, Conqueror of Ideas, Restorer of Rational beliefs.... The founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?"

Mahatma Gandhi, statement published in 'Young India,' 1924.

I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today an undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind.... I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle. When I closed the second volume (of the Prophet's biography), I was sorry there was not more for me to read of that great life.

Sir George Bernard Shaw in 'The Genuine Islam,' Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936.

"If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe within the next hundred years, it could be Islam."

"I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make itself appeal to every age. I have studied him - the wonderful man and in my opinion for from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Savior of Humanity."

"I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world he would

succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it the much needed peace and happiness: I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today."

Michael Hart in 'The 100, A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons In History,' New York, 1978.

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the secular and religious level. ...It is probable that the relative influence of Muhammad on Islam has been larger than the combined influence of Jesus Christ and St. Paul on Christianity. ...It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.

Dr. William Draper in 'History of Intellectual Development of Europe'

Four years after the death of Justinian, A.D. 569, was born in Mecca, in Arabia, the man who, of all men, has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race... To be the religious head of many empires, to guide the daily life of one-third of the human race, may perhaps justify the title of a Messenger of God.

Arthur Glyn Leonard in 'Islam, Her Moral and Spiritual Values'

Background picture: Courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, KSA.

Did Muhammad write the Quran?

Over the years, a common charge has been levelled against the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), once that accuses him of writing the Quran himself. There is a long and deep-rooted tradition in Western literature that views the Qur'an as the work of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Thus, we will look at this issue, though extremely briefly, in light of well-documented historical facts, logic, as well as with respect to the Prophet's personality, life and career.

The Prophet Muhammad is perhaps the most fully documented person in antiquity and history. This fact enables us to examine closely the claim that he wrote the Qur'an himself. This is a topic of volumes, as scholars have discussed in detail hundreds of strong evidences that establish the divine origin of the Qur'an.

Firstly, it was well-known among the early Arabs of Mecca that the Prophet Muhammad did not read or write, and was not formally educated. The Qur'an itself states that the Prophet was unlettered, specifically in the sense that he could not read or write. No one in the Meccan community attempted to deny this claim of the Qur'an: "Believe,

then, in God and His Messenger – the unlettered Prophet who believes in God and His words – and follow him, so that you might find guidance!" (7:158)

As is recorded in his biography, when the angel Gabriel approached the Prophet for the first time at the age of 40, and revealed to him the first verse of the Qur'an, "Read!", the Prophet's response was that he was unable to read. Thus even at the start of revelation, the Prophet was in no position to compose a book. Indeed as the Qur'an states, the Prophet's being unlettered was itself a matter of divine wisdom: "Never have you recited Scripture before this (Qur'an)! Nor have you transcribed one with your right hand. For then, the progenitors of falsehood would have had cause to doubt (the revelation)." (29:48)

Secondly, in various instances in the life of the Prophet Muhammad where a problem arose, he was unable to find a solution until it was revealed to him by God. In many of these instances, the answer was delayed often causing the Prophet great anxiety. If the Prophet had devised the answers himself, why would he need to wait on revelation?

Here are a few examples:

- The leaders of Quraysh (non-Muslim foes of Prophet Muhammad) once asked the Prophet a few questions in order to test him and to see if he really is the Messenger of God. They asked about stories and issues, such as the Seven Sleepers, Dhul Qarnain, the nature of the spirit, etc. Weeks had passed and the Prophet would not give any answers, because he did not have knowledge of them at that time. As a result of the delay, the Prophet was accused of being a liar by the Quraysh. Finally, the Prophet received by revelation a whole chapter of the Qur'an, called the Cave (Chapter 18), as well as other verses, answering all the questions asked to the Prophet by the Quraysh.

- In the early days of Islam, the Muslims used to face Jerusalem while praying. The Prophet wished and wanted to change the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. But he did not instigate the change himself; instead, he waited for a command from his Lord, raising his head towards the heavens in anticipation. The Qur'an states: "We have seen you (O Prophet) often turn your face towards heaven..." (Qur'an 2:144).

Thereafter God's commands arrived, and Muslims immediately turned their faces towards the direction of Mecca, turning from North to South. In these incidents and many others the Prophet did not act until revelation came to him with an explicit answer or command. This was the case even though the delay caused him to be rebuked and accused of being a false Prophet. If the Qur'an were from the Prophet, surely he could have "revealed" the verses earlier. This shows the Quran is a revelation from God, and not from Muhammad's own imagination.

Thirdly, the Arabs, both Muslims and non-Muslim, have testified to the high calibre and literal mastery of the Qur'an:

- Umar bin al Khattab used to be a judge of the poetry festival in Mecca. His mastery of the Arabic language was superb. Nonetheless, when he heard a portion of the Qur'an, he was spellbound, and because of it embraced Islam. How could the Prophet produce such a literal masterpiece at the age of 40 when he had never shown such talent before?

- Similarly, there were many others like At-Tufayl bin Amr al-Dawsi, Utbah bin Rabiha and others who had such experiences when they heard portions of the Qur'an. They would repeat statements such as, "I have heard words of such that I never heard before. By God, it is not poetry, nor magic, nor divination." This was often their first impression. This shows that the Qur'an was something beyond the Prophet's talent or genius, as its origin was other than the Prophet Muhammad.

Fourthly, there is a marked difference between the Prophet's sayings and Qur'anic verses. The Prophet's sayings are recorded in volumes, called hadith, which are more voluminous than the Qur'an. When he spoke, his sayings were not accompanied with any extraordinary experiences, but when he received the revelation he would often experience abnormal sensations.

When verses were revealed to him, sometimes he would sweat even on cold days, his face would become red, his body would become heavy, etc. Was he just acting? Definitely not! How could he have lived such a pretentious and complicated life for 23 years? This is indeed the difference between the hadith and the Qur'an. As for the Qur'an, he received it by revelation from God verbatim, and as for the hadith, they were his own words.

Another crucial point in this respect is the huge difference between the linguistic style of the Qur'an and

that of hadith. A comparison of both suggests unequivocally that the author of the Qur'an is entirely different from that of the hadith. It is also recorded authentically that the Arabs themselves were surprised by the language of the Qur'an because the Prophet was not known to have composed any literal piece before its revelation. Even non-Arabic speaking people can see this vast difference in style and language between the Qur'an and the hadith, even by reading translations.

Fifthly, a good portion of the Qur'an includes stories of previous Prophets and their nations. Always, the concluding remark is that the Prophet had no previous knowledge of any of those stories or historical events, and that he only knew of them through revelation, for example:

- After relating the story of Moses and Pharaoh the Qur'an states: "You were not (there, O Prophet,) on the western mountainside (of Tur) when We decreed to Moses the Commandments. Nor were you (there among those) of the Children of Israel who bore witness (to these events). Furthermore, We brought forth (many) generations (after Moses), such that the life spans (of heedlessness) that stretched over them grew (so very) long – (until they forgot God's Covenant). Moreover, you were not (there with Moses when he was) dwelling among the people of Midian, conveying Our message unto them..." (28:44-45)

- The Qur'an also states after the story of Jesus and Mary: "This account of something that was beyond the reach of your perception We [now] reveal unto you: for you were not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary's guardian, and you were not with them when they contended [about it] with one another." (3:44)

Verses like the above appear routinely after the stories in the Qur'an. Thus, if the Prophet had learned these stories from Jews and Christians, why should he ascribe them to God? Is he such a blatant liar?

Sixthly, the Qur'an severely criticized the Prophet on several issues:

- The Prophet was once sitting with some of the leaders of Quraysh, inviting them to Islam. A blind man, Abdullah bin Umm Makhtum, who was already a Muslim, came to the Prophet to ask him some questions regarding Islam. The Prophet ignored him, as he was busy delivering the message of Islam to the leaders of Quraysh, hoping they would come to Islam. Thereupon the revelation came reproaching and reprimanding him: "He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him. Yet for all you did know (O Muhammad) he might perhaps have grown in purity?" (80:1-3).

There are many other incidents in which the Prophet was reproached and reprimanded by God. The logical question here is why would the Prophet make up these verses? Even if someone had revealed these verses to him, why would he retain them while having a firm belief that these verses will be recited and read throughout the ages? The logical and factual answer is that these are not the words of the Prophet, and he is not the author of the Qur'an.

If the Prophet was really the author of the Qur'an, why did he have to state these words? Was he a sheer liar to the extent that he both concocted the Qur'an and devised threats against himself? History and logic would refute this claim, especially since the Prophet was known never to have uttered a lie in his whole life. Before Prophethood, even the pagan idolaters attested to his truthfulness, and he was known as the "Trustworthy" and "Truthful".

Did Prophet Muhammad spread Islam by the sword?

It is widely believed that Islam was spread by the sword. Despite of innumerable refutations of this false accusation, there are two main reasons proving that this is not the case.

Firstly, the Messenger of Mercy, Prophet Muhammad, proclaimed that he would adhere to God's commandments. And contrary to forcing people to accept Islam, God explicitly prohibited forced conversion: "There is no compulsion in faith" (Qur'an 2:256)

There is an interesting story related to the revelation of this verse. A man, who was among the companions of the Prophet, had two sons who embraced Christianity before the emergence of the religion of Islam. The two sons came to the city of Medina among a group of Christians, and at that time their father insisted that they both should become Muslims. However, they refused their father's request and brought the matter before the Prophet. The father asked, "Oh Prophet of Allah, how could part of me enter hell while I am watching?" It was then that God revealed the above verse forbidding any compulsion in religion. Thus, the man's two sons were free to remain Christians. The Messenger of Mercy did not force them to become Muslims according to their father's wish.

In another verse, the Qur'an says: "But had your Lord so willed, all who are on the earth would have believed in your message, each one of them and all of them together - will you then be the one to compel people so that they become believers, O Prophet?" (10:99). All admit, even those who accuse the Prophet of forced conversions, that the Prophet was a God-fearing person who obeyed God whole-heartedly in everything. How, then, can he violate these explicit divine commands?

There are even authentically recorded incidents in which the Prophet advised some individuals not to accept Islam for a time being, due to



their safety. In one instance, a person by the name of Amr bin Abasa As-sulami came from a far distance to Mecca to embrace Islam. It was a time when Muslims were persecuted in Mecca and it was extremely difficult to meet the Prophet. Somehow, Amr managed to find the Prophet and he expressed his desire to embrace Islam. The Prophet, however, told him that he should not embrace Islam at that time, since the situation between the Prophet and his people was dangerous. The Prophet then advised Amr to go back to his family until the victory of the Prophet becomes apparent. It was not until approximately 7-8 years later that Amr met the Prophet again to embrace Islam. Surely, had the Prophet been only concerned with converting people despite their own safety, he would not have advised Amr to return to his family on account of the imminent danger.

It is true that the Prophet was extremely keen to convey God's message and to lead people to salvation. The Qur'an describes this eagerness: "Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message?" (18:6). But this eagerness never prompted him to convert even a single person against his will. Second, there is no historical evidence suggesting that the Prophet Muhammad acted contrary to the principle that there should be no compulsion in religion. There is not a single recorded instance in the Prophet's thoroughly documented life of such an incident.

Although some early Western historians advanced such claims, more recent studies have shown that conversions did not happen suddenly at the point of the sword, but when people living alongside Muslims gradually and genuinely accepted the faith voluntarily. Indeed, it is as the Orientalist George Sale said: "Whoever says that Islam spread by the power of the sword, his/her word is a pure allegation, because the sword

was not even mentioned in many countries and Islam spread there."

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation of India, once said, "I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place in Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for his pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and his own mission."

The famous French historian Gustaf Lobon stated in his book, Arab Civilization, "Power was not a factor in the spread of Islam; that's because Arabs left the people they vanquished free to practice their own religion."

Another famous European writer, Thomas Carlyle, said: "Accusing [the Prophet] of relying on the sword for people to respond to his preaching is incomprehensible nonsense!"

History, logic, objectivity, and scholarly research all reject the notion that the Prophet Muhammad forced his religion on unwilling masses. It was voluntary acceptance and the utter conviction of the truth of Islam that caused mass conversions in many countries. Indonesia, Malaysia, China and several South Asian countries are telling examples of this reality.

We can see a glimpse of this today – though in a less dramatic way – in Europe and North America where in those continents Islam is being accepted by many members of the indigenous population.



Abhorrence of domestic violence in Islam

Home or household violence is unfortunately a global issue that has ruined many lives and caused a great deal of pain and misery. This issue was addressed both in the Quran and by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself over 1400 years ago. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) repeatedly called for mutual mercy, forgiveness, overlooking of minor mistakes as much as possible, and highlighting positive deeds and recognising them.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated that "A male believer should not dislike a behaviour of a female believer; if he really comes to dislike some behaviour, another (one of her behaviour) he would surely like."

In so doing, the Prophet (peace be upon him) reminded husbands to be nice to their wives, for a husband should not dislike his wife for a single misconduct. Instead, he is advised to highlight and appreciate her good manners that may well be much more than the bad ones he dislikes.

He also said, "The best of you are the best to their households, (i.e., wives), and surely I am the best among you to my household."


It is reported on the authority of Mu'aweyah ibn Haydah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said, "I came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) saying, 'What do you say about our women?' The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: 'Feed them of what you eat, dress them of what you dress, do not beat them and do not uglify them.'"

The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised on women's nature which go separate ways from violence as saying, "You are strongly recommended to act well to women for women are created from a rib; the highest (point) of a rib is the most curved so that if you go to straighten it, you will break it; but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved. Therefore, you are strongly recommended to act well to women."

All the reasons behind home violence have been addressed by the Prophet (peace be upon him), top among which is anger, which is a direct cause thereof. The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised a man who asked, "Advise me." The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied "Do not become angry." The man repeated his request several times, but the Prophet's command was the same every time.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said "He who holds back his anger, Allah shall shelter his faults; and he who suppresses his wrath, yet being capable of releasing it if he so wills, Allah shall fill his heart with contentment on the Day of Judgment." Insulting, cursing and obscenity in argument are strongly discouraged since these are but reasons for physical violence. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "A believer is not a slanderer, a curser, obscene or vulgar." The Prophet (peace be upon him, was the best husband to his wives. On the authority of Anas, the servant of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), he said, "The Prophet (peace be upon him) has never beaten a servant or a woman."

Further, the Prophet (peace be upon him) led by example in terms of kindness and leniency, being as far as possible from violence and harshness with his wives. Jaber (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was a lenient man, if his wife, Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) likes something, he would go with her for it."



The above example shows how careful and kind the Prophet (peace be upon him) was to his wives at a time where women almost had no rights. Omar ibn Al Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "I swear to Allah, in the pre-Islamic era we thought nothing of women; i.e., we deemed them insignificant, until Allah has sent down about them what He has sent down and ensured them what He has ensured"

Domestic violence against women remains a major concern in today's society. The problem is so severe that it affects people from all ways of life regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, age and religion. Domestic violence comes in different shapes and forms and effects a whole multitude of people.

The problem exists in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. The worship of God, which Muslims believe is the sole reason for their existence, is an all-encompassing concept that applies equally to one's relationship with God as well as with His creation. In Islam, one cannot perfect their Worship to God, unless they perfect their relationship with others. The kind treatment of others, including one's spouse, can therefore not be ignored as an obligatory act of Worship and a sign of piety to God. Islam teaches the individual to constantly consider which deeds and behaviours will be pleasing to Allah and to interact with others in way that will



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