

In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful

## **PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH) - A MERCY FOR MANKIND**

By Um e Abdullah

Intelligence demands that one must always look at a situation from different angles. Without fail, it broadens the mind, offers solutions and inculcates deeper understanding. New horizons are discovered and misconceptions shrink away. We as Muslims invite you to examine things from a different point of view. We invite you to set all pre-conceived notions, inherited ideas and frequently heard clichés to one side and give this a fair, broad-minded, democratic hearing.

Let us tell you something about the man, **Muhammad (peace be upon him)** that the Danish press didn't. By the end of this article that consists mostly of quotes from non-Muslim writers, historians, Nobel Prize winners and the likes, you will be more than amazed. We believe, and have done so for 14 centuries, that every human deserves to hear about this man - **a man who perfected humanity, yet was perfectly human.**

The world has not hesitated to raise to divinity, individuals whose lives and missions have been lost in legend. Historically speaking, none of these legends achieved even a fraction of what Muhammad (pbuh) accomplished. And all his striving was for the sole purpose of uniting mankind for the **worship of One God** on the codes of moral excellence. Muhammad (pbuh) or his followers never at any time claimed that he was a Son of God or the God-incarnate or a man with divinity - but he always was and is even today considered as only a Messenger chosen by God.

He continues to inspire faith in more than a billion men and women. Vouched for as **the "Most historical of all religious personalities"** by **Encyclopedia Britannica**, it is an accepted fact that every event of his personal and public life has been immaculately recorded, even the minutest details preserved conscientiously for posterity. His life and works are not shrouded in mystery or doubt but open for all to study. Yet it is sad that instead of the truth becoming clearer with the growth in information and communication, many a times, fabrication overshadows and outspreads the truth. As **Thomas Carlyle, the author of Heroes and Hero-worship admits, "The lies which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man (Muhammad) are disgraceful to ourselves only."**

So let us see who Muhamamd (pbuh) really was, what was it about this man that he is accepted as the greatest sample of humanity by friends and foes alike. So many aspects of greatness did he cover, so many roles did he excel at, that it is difficult to summarize a lifetime of character in a few lines. **K. S. Ramakrishna Rao a professing Hindu, writes in his book 'Muhammad, The Prophet of Islam', "There is Muhammad, the Prophet. There is Muhammad, the Warrior; Muhammad, the Businessman; Muhammad, the Reformer; Muhammad, the Orator; Muhammad, the Refuge of orphans; Muhammad, the Protector of slaves; Muhammad, the Emancipator of women; Muhammad, the Judge; Muhammad, the Saint. All, in all these magnificent roles, in all these departments of human activities, he is alike a hero."**

Not a god, nor supernatural, not an angel nor omnipresent nor all-knowing, he was simply the servant of God and His Messenger. **In the words of Edward Gibbon and Simon Ockley, in the 'History of the Saracen Empire', "I believe in one God, and Mahomet, the Apostle of God,' is the simple and invariable profession of Islam. The intellectual image of the Deity**

**has never been degraded by any visible idol: the honours of the prophet have never transgressed the measure of human virtue: and his living precepts have restrained the gratitude of his disciples within the bounds of reason and religion.”**

### **MUHAMMAD-THE PRAISEWORTHY**

That is what Muhammad means-the one who is praised and the past and present have witnessed how people from all walks of life have praised him. Even his enemies could not deny his excellent qualities. When his enemy, Abu Sufyan was summoned by Heraclius to his court and questioned about the Prophet (saw), he was forced to admit his virtues. Even the Jews and those who did not believe in his message would come to him for arbitration in their disputes due to his justice and honesty. He was named “Al-Ameen’ ‘The Trustworthy’ and ‘As-Sadiq’ ‘The Truthful’ by his contemporaries. Even after centuries people admit his sterling qualities.

**In his book Michael H Hart ranked Mohammed first in the list of people who contributed towards the benefit and uplift of mankind: "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 religious and secular levels." (M.H. Hart, THE 100: A RANKING OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSONS IN HISTORY, New York, 1978)**

The world has had its share of great personalities. But these were one-sided figures who distinguished themselves in but one or two fields, such as religious thought or military leadership. The lives and teachings of these great personalities of the world are shrouded in the mist of time. There is so much speculation about the time and place of their birth, the mode and style of their life, the nature and detail of their teachings and the degree and measure of their success or failure that it is impossible for humanity to reconstruct accurately the lives and teachings of these men. Not so with Muhammad (pbuh).

**Lamar Tine, the renowned historian, speaking on the essentials of human greatness wonders: "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern 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, legislation, empires, peoples and 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 souls.... His forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire; His endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death; All these attest not to an imposture but to a firm conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma. This dogma was two-fold, 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 the words. Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images, the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is MUHAMMAD. As regards all the standards by which Human Greatness may be measured, we may well ask, IS THERE ANY MAN GREATER THAN HE?" (Alphonse de Lamar tine, HISTOIRE DE LA TURQUIE, Paris, 1854,Vol.II)**

### A NATION TRANSFORMED

When Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) appeared in the uncultivable, harsh nothingness of the Arabian desert in 570 AD, he only had the power of God's message and his lifelong struggle which completely transformed the barbaric Bedouins in just two decades, which shaped a new moral and religious civilization spanning 3 continents- Asia, Africa and Europe. Never would the world be the same again. It was destined not to be.

The people he invited to the submission of One God alone and to universal brotherhood were a people who loved warfare, fighting bloody and savage wars. One such war consumed 70,000 lives and went on for 40 years on the slightest provocation (a camel straying into the land belonging to the other tribe). Muhammad (pbuh) taught self-restraint, forgiveness and compassion to such people. He taught them to pray in the battlefield and laid down rules for battle, humanizing the battlefield itself. Islam teaches not to mutilate, not to kill minors, women and the old, not to breach trust even with the enemies, it teaches not to destroy farmland or fruit trees unnecessarily, not to molest monks and priests. And what was even more amazing was that Muhammad (saw) exemplified these teachings and so did many generations of Muslims. That is why even today, one hardly ever hears of Muslims desecrating a church or the Bible, or Muslims annoying nuns in their typical garb or Muslims blaspheming Jesus. Non-Muslim minorities have lived peacefully for hundreds of years under Muslim rule in many countries (like Spain, Jerusalem etc), their life, honour and freedom completely protected by the rulers.

At the advent of Islam, the Arabs were debauched gamblers, burying their daughters alive, treating their women as chattel. He taught them to pray side-by-side, to respect and love their women and to live a life governed by accountability before God. Islam bestowed on women innumerable rights 14 centuries back, when contemporary civilizations were still considering whether women could be regarded as a human being. Islam gave women a status the Western woman is still fighting for. Centuries ago women were given the right to life, honour (for which Hijab plays a major role), education, owning property (England only passed such a law 12 centuries later in 1881), receiving a compulsory marital gift from the husband, the right of inheritance, testimony and financial maintenance from the husband. **Thomas Carlyle was amazed, "How one man single-handedly, could weld warring tribes and wandering Bedouins into a most powerful and civilized nation in less than two decades."**

### EQUALITY AND BROTHERHOOD

The principle of the equality of mankind has been preached by all great religions, but the last Prophet put it into actual practice and achieved the greatest success.

**The famous poetess of India, Sarojini Naidu says: "It was the first religion that preached and practiced democracy; for, in the mosque, when the call for prayer is sounded and worshippers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and king kneel side by side and proclaim: 'God Alone is Great'... I have been struck over and over again by this indivisible unity of Islam that makes man instinctively a brother". (IDEALS OF ISLAM, vide Speeches & Writings, Madras, 1918)**

This is the miracle that history witnessed in Madina, when the Prophet migrated from his homeland of Makkah with his followers after facing severe persecution for proclaiming his message. The homeless migrants were united in a historical bond of brotherhood with the Madinites. The love, sacrifice, help and kindness that the emigrants received from these surrogate brothers went beyond the norms of human capacity. They shared everything that they

possessed, their properties, houses and incomes with their brothers in faith. Our present world has so much to learn from this history if we are to survive peacefully together.

It was Islam alone which first achieved an almost complete abolishment of slavery without passing a single bill or law. Thousands of slaves were freed at a time when slavery was the norm. These slaves were not just freed to face further discrimination in society but due to the moral education of the entire society, these very slaves went on to become scholars of Islam, commanders of Muslim armies and lived at par with their counterparts. This is all well documented in Islamic history. Prophet Muhammad appointed a black slave, Bilal to the office of proclaiming Adhaan 5 times a day calling Muslims to prayer. At the time of the last pilgrimage that the Prophet made to the Ka'aba, the holiest place in the Islamic world, this black freed slave stood on the roof of the Ka'aba and called out the Azaan. People of the caliber of Umar, known historically as Umar the Great, the 2<sup>nd</sup> caliph of Islam would welcome Bilal whenever he saw him saying, "Here comes our master, here comes our lord." Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) told Bilal that he had heard his footsteps in Paradise in a dream, thus giving him glad tidings of Paradise. This was complete equality, in this world and the next, based not on colour, creed or status, but on the level of piety. Compare this to how the Negroes are treated by the civilized white races of today, how even after centuries of struggle, they have not attained equal rights everywhere or atleast not in the hearts of their fair-skinned counterparts.

**In the words of Prof. Hurgronje, "The league of nations founded by the prophet of Islam put the principle of international unity and human brotherhood on such universal foundations as to show candle to other nations." He continues: "The fact is that no nation of the world can show a parallel to what Islam has done towards the realization of the idea of the League of Nations."**

Every year the world witnesses this amazing spectacle of unity and equality when millions of Muslims gather from all over the world for pilgrimage at the Kaa'ba. Leaving behind all worldly identities of race, colour and rank, this universal family of Europeans, Africans, Indians, Persians and Chinese all merge into one body, clad in white, bare-headed, throbbing with the pulse that unites them, "Here I am, O God; at Thy command; Thou art One and the Only One; Here I am."

### **PEACE**

The word '**Islam**' means 'submission' (to the Will of God) and is related to the word 'salam' (the daily greeting of the Muslims) meaning peace. Nothing in the teachings of the Prophet or his life represents anything other than peace. He is described in the Quran as '**mercy for the worlds**'. And he lived up to this title showing compassion to Muslims and non-Muslims, friends and foes, humans and animals alike. The first pact that he concluded with the Jewish minority on coming to Madina was a peace treaty. This was the main object why he allowed war – to unite human beings and to perpetuate peace. Since not all human beings in this world are in favour of maintaining peace and many would disrupt it for their own vested interests, sometimes force has to be used to maintain peace. This is why we have the police who use force against criminals and anti-social elements to maintain peace in the country.

Throughout his life the Prophet (pbuh) practiced such exemplary forgiveness and magnanimity that it has no parallel in human history. In his personal life, he never hit a woman or child, never scolded his servants, never held a personal vendetta. When he went to preach his message in the town of Taif, a few miles away from Makkah, the people set loose a mob of ruffians on him. They called him names and threw stones at him till his shoes were full of blood. God sent the

Archangel Gabriel to ask him if he wanted this town destroyed. Bleeding and beaten, he still forgave them.

He was forgiving not just in weakness but more so when he gained victory and had the power to punish. For 13 years he suffered inhuman torture at the hands of his people who rebuked him, beat him up, tried to kill him and when he was forced to migrate to Madina, waged many wars against him. When at last he returned to his hometown as a victor leading an army of 10,000, the city lay at his feet. Instead of a massacre in the name of 'jihad', plundering or even public beheadings what did this great man do? He forgave his bitterest enemies saying "This day there is no reproof against you and you are all free." Is this the image of a turbaned terrorist? Has the world ever seen such mercy? Compare this with what happened in the crusades, the mass killing of Muslims in different places, the rapes of Muslim women in occupied territories, the cruelty and havoc victorious armies wreck on the masses. Compare this to Guantanamo Bay, Iraq and Palestine.

As he entered Makkah, Muhammad (pbuh) was all humility. There was no jubilation, no pride, no terror displayed by any Muslim that day. He forgave Hind, who had mutilated his uncle's corpse after a battle and chewed his liver. He forgave Abu Sufyan who had fought bitter wars against him, he pardoned Habr bil Aswad, who had pushed his daughter Zainab off her camel as she was trying to migrate to Madina, causing her to miscarry and lose her child. The list goes on. He would have been justified by the laws of war to avenge the great cruelties he and his followers had suffered, yet all he had for his enemies was love and sincerity. Then how should the Muslims not be enraged at this cruel portrayal of such a man?

**Diwan Chand Sharma wrote, "Muhammad was the soul of kindness, and his influence was felt and never forgotten by those around him." (D.C. Sharma, THE PROPHETS OF THE EAST, Calcutta, 1935)**

In Madina, he constantly faced intrigues and setbacks at the hands of the hypocrites. They would spread rumours about his own wives, they withdrew their forces at the Battle of Uhud at the last moment, yet the Prophet dealt with them with forbearance and patience. When the leader of the hypocrites died he gave his own shirt for his burial and prayed for him at his grave.

He entertained the Christian delegation from Najran in Madina for 3 days; he was married to Maria the Coptic Christian and Safia the Jewess. Where does anyone find proof that he hated or terrorized non-Muslims?

It was his kindness and noble qualities that won people's hearts and not the sword. He was unlettered yet spoke with such eloquence and feeling as to melt the hearts of the listeners.

**Mahatma Gandhi said about Muhammad's (saw) character, "I wanted to know the best of one who holds today's undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind. I became more than 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 his 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 2nd volume (of the Prophet's biography), I was sorry there was not more for me to read of the great life."**

## **RULER OF HEARTS**

In spite of ruling more than a third of the then inhabited world he was a man of heartbreaking simplicity. After Islam spread far and wide, wealth began to accumulate, yet this king mended his own shoes, swept the floor and helped his wives in household chores. Many weeks would lapse before fire could be kindled in his house, his food being only dates and water. He would spend his nights standing in worship till his feet swelled and slept on a coarse palm mat. When he died all he left behind were a few coins and grain.

**Reverend Bosworth Smith remarks, "Head of the State as well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretensions, and Caesar without the legions of Caesar, without a standing army, without a body guard, without a police force, without a fixed revenue. If ever a man had the right to say that he ruled by a right divine, it was Muhammad, for he had all the powers without their supports. He cared not for all the dressings of power. The simplicity of his private life was in keeping with his public life."**

One of the tests of a person's greatness is whether he was found to be of true mettle by his contemporaries. Muhammad (pbuh) was loved and followed by men of the greatest caliber of his time. It speaks volumes of his sincerity and truth that his most intimate companions and relations believed first and most strongly in his message. He was not only followed by the weak and the downtrodden but soon by the noblest and best of society. Had they not found him upto his claim they would not have laid down their lives for him. On the other hand his followers braved excommunication, torture and even death for his sake.

**Encyclopedia Britannica confirms, "A mass of detail in the early sources show that he was an honest and upright man who had gained the respect and loyalty of others who were like-wise honest and upright men." (Vol. 12)**

Even after his death, his companions carried on his mission in the most scrupulous and dedicated manner as if he was still commanding their minds and hearts. Unlike other leaders, no skeletons in the cupboard were discovered, no scandals and deception, nothing to mar the image that Muhammad had left in the hearts of millions to come. **Thomas Carlyle praised him in the following words, "'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."**

## **THE LAST MESSENGER**

**The Quran says: "(The believers say) We make no distinction between one another of His (God's) Messengers." (Quran 2: 285)**

As Muslims, it is incumbent upon us that we accept all the Messengers of God and honour them equally. Not believing in even **ONE** of them is tantamount to disbelief. In other words our faith is not acceptable unless we believe in every one of the Messengers sent by God such as Moses, Jesus and the rest mentioned in the Quran.

Yet what distinguishes the last Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) from the rest is that while each Messenger was sent to a certain people in a specific time, he was the final Messenger and consequently his message was for all of mankind and for all times till eternity. God perfected and completed the guidance He wanted to give to humanity through His Final Messenger and made sure it would be preserved unchanged. The Quran is believed to be the literal word of God. Unlike the Bible, it has remained intact and undisputed even after 14 centuries. Not a word or alphabet has changed in it to date which is a miracle in itself. Countless prophecies and scientific facts stated in the Quran centuries ago have now been confirmed.

**Even a hostile critic like Sir William Muir admits, “There is probably in the world no other book which has remained 12 centuries (now 14 centuries) with so pure a text.”**

As such for Muslims, their book is not irrelevant at any time or their Prophet a mere historical figure, but for them these are their active guides at every point in their daily life. **‘In the words of George Bernard Shaw, “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.”**

### **LET US UPHOLD TRUTH AND JUSTICE**

A faith must never be judged by the actions of its followers. What Muslims or Christians have done should not be the criteria for judging their respective faiths or Prophets. Muslims are raised to love the Prophet more than their parents, children or their own self. This love is part of a Muslim’s faith. It deeply hurts the Muslims if their Prophet (pbuh) or any Prophet is insulted.

The Quran asks us to honour the symbols that others hold dear. No Muslim has responded in kind by insulting Jesus or the Bible, though some have resorted to violence which is regrettable. But before blaming the Muslims for the entire episode let us ask ourselves, would any person belonging to any faith accept humiliation of their most respected ones? Are Muslims the only ‘species’ that uses violence on provocation? More than a decade ago, a film called ‘The Last Temptation of Christ’ showed Jesus making love to a woman. In Paris someone set fire to the cinema showing the movie, killing a young man. Would anyone like their faith and Prophet degraded that too on the basis of untruth? What does the law call public defamation without proof? Libel, slander, discrimination? What does the heart, the internal lawgiver call it? Provocation, playing with emotions, hurting sacred sentiments?

Islam strongly condemns all such yellow journalism and scandal-mongering. To add insult to injury, we are told that this is freedom of the press. Wasn’t it this same freedom of press that caused Princess Diana’s death? Did you know that in some European nations such as France, Germany and Austria it is forbidden by law to deny acts of genocide such as saying that the Jewish Holocaust did not happen? Several European countries have anti-blasphemy laws that place limitations on speech, as do several states in the USA. In many countries, hate speech (such as holocaust denial, incitement to racial hatred, advocating genocide) is a criminal offense prohibited under incitement to hatred legislation. So it is infact impermissible to make certain statements in several countries including European nations. Hence freedom of speech is not unconditionally ‘free’, but subject to certain rules and limits. Freedom of expression must not be allowed to undermine human sentiments and human freedom or to disrupt peace. What about freedom to practice and propagate our religion? Shouldn’t that be a major consideration too? We must not forget that freedom of any sort does not mean transgressing the limits set by God or our own humanity.

### **ISLAM - A LEGACY TO THE WORLD**

Islam, misconstrued as a terrorist-producing faith, is infact far from it. Islam paved the way for a nation of barbarians to become pioneers of science and enlightened civilization.

**Robert Briffalut concludes in his well-known book, 'The Making of Humanity', "The debt of our science to the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries or revolutionary theories. Science owes a great deal more to the Arab culture: it owes its existence."**

**George Bernard Shaw said, "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." He also said, "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." (Sir George Bernard Shaw in 'The Genuine Islam,' Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936.)**

To say that Islam was spread by the sword is the greatest of myths. On an average, the Muslims ruled Arabia for 1400 years. Yet today, there are 14 million Arabs who are Coptic Christians i.e. Christians since generations. If the Muslims had used the sword there would not have been a single Arab who would have remained a Christian.

An article in Reader's Digest 'Almanac', year book 1986, gave the statistics of the increase of percentage of the major religions of the world in half a century from 1934 to 1984. At the top was Islam, which increased by **235 %**, and Christianity had increased only by **47 %**. May one ask, which war took place in this century which converted millions of people to Islam?

**The noted historian De Lacy O'Leary writes in the book "Islam at the cross road": "History makes it clear however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myth that historians have ever repeated."**

The world needs to benefit from this faith that many of their wise men have already hailed. **Carlyle bids the world to listen, "The word of such a man (Muhammad) is a voice direct from nature's own heart; men do and must listen to that, as to nothing else; all else is wind in comparison..."**

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