

# Lesson 11: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

Muhammad bin `Abdullāh is the last and final messenger of God. The message he brought from God is known as “al-Isīlām,” and the scripture he was given by God is known as “al-Qur’ān.”

## 1. Arabia at the Prophet’s Birth

The Arabs prior to Islam were idol-worshippers; they believed that apart from the life of this world there was no other life. It was a society in which respect depended on wealth and family. Woman was a commodity, counted as wealth of the father, husband and son; and after death she was inherited like the other possessions. It was a disgrace to have a daughter, and in some tribes the family buried this shameful thing with their own hands.

The situation of the poor, women and society was not much different in other parts of the world.

Every human society at that time was sunk in darkness, decline and oppression. Throughout the whole world, no glow or gleam of light met the eyes. A darkness like a thick heavy cloud in the sky had submerged the daily life of all societies in a deep sleep; and a horrible, powerful obscurity reigned which only the rising of a radiant sun could disperse.

This darkness was more overpowering in Arabia than in any other place, as if they had been invaded to the depths of degradation and debasement. See what Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) says about those days:

‘...You people of Arabia followed the worst religion; you dwelt amongst rough stones and poisonous serpents. You drank putrid water and ate filthy food. You shed the blood of one another and paid no heed to relationships. Idols are established among you, and sins cling to you.’ (*Nahju ‘l-Balāgha*, sermon 26.)

## 2. The Birth of the Prophet of Islam

Muhammad opened his eyes to the world on the 17th of Rabī'ū 'l-Awwal in the 53rd year before the hijrah (570 AD). His father, 'Abdullāh, was from the family of Prophet Ismā'il, and had died before he could see his son. His mother was one of the most pious women of that time.

Muhammad was entrusted to a virtuous woman called Halīmāh, who suckled him and nursed him.

One day, Muhammad (s.a.w.) who had not yet reached the age of four years, asked Halimah if he could go into the desert with the other boys. Halimah said, "I bathed Muhammad and anointed his hair with oil. I put collyrium on his eyes and hung a Yemenite stone on a string and put it round his neck so that no harm could come to him from the spirits of the desert. But Muhammad tore the stone from his neck and said, 'Don't worry about me. My God is taking care of me!'"

So we see that from childhood he was blessed with God's favour and grace, and was always guided by Divine friendship and help in works that were in their right time and place.

Muhammad's behaviour and speech in childhood were such that everyone's attention was attracted. In his youth, also, he was far from all the evil deeds which tainted those people in its environment. He took no part in their riotous poetry gatherings. He drank no wine, was an enemy of the idols; he was perfect in his speech and behaviour.

Years before he became a prophet, the people called him *as-Sādiq* (the truthful) and *al-Amin* (the trustworthy). He had a pure mind and radiant intellect, and a godly and heavenly character. Every year for one month he went to the cave of Hira and was with God in His mysteries and in prayers. At the end of the month, before returning to his home, he went to the Ka`bah and made seven or more circumambulations.

## 3. Commencement of the Mission

At the age of forty, while busy in worship in the cave of Hira, he was proclaimed as the Messenger of God.

For three years, the Prophet of Islam received no command to call the people openly to Islam, and during that time only a few people had accepted the message of God brought by Muhammad (s.a.w.). Among men, the first person who loved and followed him was Imam 'Ali (a.s.), and among women, Khadijah<sup>1</sup>.

Then after three years, he received the command to invite people openly to Islam. First he invited his relatives as guests; about forty of them assembled together. The food which the Prophet had prepared was no more than enough to satisfy the appetite of one man, but by the power of God that little food filled everyone, and this was the cause of much amazement. Abu Lahab, without thinking what he was

saying, cried out: “Muhammad is a magician!” That day the relatives dispersed before the Prophet could speak. So he called them again the next day. After they had partaken of the food and hospitality, he spoke: “O Sons of `Abdul Muttalib! No youth has brought to his people better than what I bring to you. I have brought to you the best of this world and of the here–after. I have been commanded by God to call you to Him. Which of you will extend his help to me and become my brother and successor?” Apart from ‘Ali (a.s.), no one answered. The Prophet placed his hand on ‘Ali’s shoulder and said, “This is my brother, the executor of my will and my successor among you. Listen to what he says and obey him.”<sup>2</sup>

One day the Prophet went up on to Mount Safa and called the people around him. He said, “If I told you that an enemy was going to fall on you this morning or this evening, would you trust me?” All together they replied, “Yes!” He said, “I warn you of a severe torment that is soon to fall on you.” Out of fear that the speech of Muhammad (s.a.w.) would take effect in the hearts of those present, Abu Lahab broke the silence and said to him, “Did we assemble here just to listen to this nonsense?”

The Prophet of Islam started his call with the slogan of *tawhīd* and the worship of one God, and established *tawhīd* as the basis of all other beliefs. He made known to men Allāh, who is nearer to man than man himself; he abolished all forms of idol–worshipping, revolutionized the atmosphere of Mecca, and drew people to his religion.

Meanwhile, the Quraysh (the most powerful tribe in Mecca to which the Prophet belonged) were becoming ill at ease with the progress he was making and tried hard to stop his preaching, even once trying to kill him; but with the help and protection of God all their tortures, persecutions and schemes were without effect and came to nothing. Day by day the call to Islam, and also the acceptance by people, spread, even to those who came from outside Mecca. People rose up with their souls in answer to this Divine invitation.

In the eleventh year of the prophethood, some people from the tribe of Khazraj of Medina came to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. The Prophet invited them to Islam and they accepted, with the promise that when they went back to Medina they would call the people to Muhammad’s religion. They went to Medina and spread the invitation of the Prophet. The next year, twelve Medinese accepted the faith of the Prophet of Islam at Aqaba and resolved: not to associate anything with Allah, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to indulge in infanticide, not to bring malicious accusations against anyone, not to disobey the Prophet in any thing which he indicated. Then the Prophet sent a man by the name of Mus`ab bin `Umayr with them to teach the Qur’ān, and thus a large group in Medina pledged their faith in the Prophet.

#### **4. The Prophet’s Migration (Hijrah)**

Till the thirteenth year of his mission, the Prophet called the people of Mecca to Islam, and stood firm when faced with the persecutions of the Quraysh. Eventually he got to know that the Quraysh had hatched an incredible plan to kill him, so he put Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) to sleep in his bed in his place and left

Mecca at night; he hid in a cave, and then migrated from there to Medina.

The hijrah of the Prophet opened an entirely new chapter in the history of Islam from which a stimulating and surprising lead forward was made. For this very reason, the hijrah of Muhammad (s.a.w.) became the beginning of the calendar of the Muslims.

The two tribes of Medina, Aws and Khazraj, were bitter enemies of each other for generations. But with the presence of the Prophet of Islam in Medina, they became brothers for life in the shadow of the teachings of Islam, and blessed sincerity and cordiality was established between them. The example of Muhammad's behaviour, his spiritual and moral superiority, and the natural aspect of his pure religion, caused the people to come to Islam by the score, and in the end to accept it.

The Prophet of Islam was from the people and with the people, and did not maintain a distance from them. He shared with them in their gains and losses. He firmly criticised oppression and aggression, which he refrained from and prevented. He set forth all the principles which were, in the light of Islam, effective for the development of the position of women, and put an end to the tyranny they had been subjected to previously, but he also vehemently fought against their unchastity and licentiousness, for he wanted them to attain real development on the basis of the true principles of Islam.

He defended the rights of slaves, and had comprehensive programmes for their freedom. The Prophet of Islam created a society where black and white, rich and poor, great and small, were all equal and could enjoy the benefits of being human beings. In such an atmosphere, there could be no question of 'racial discrimination,' for there was a much higher basis in virtue, knowledge, piety, human values and ethical greatness.

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This lesson has been adapted from Dar Rah-e Haq,  
*The Roots of Religion* (1981) Qum, Iran.

## Question Paper on Lesson 11

*Question 1:* [17 points]

True or False:

- (a) The Prophet of Islam was born in 560 AD.
- (b) Arabs, before Islam, followed a monotheistic religion.
- (c) The essential ingredient of the Prophet's message was the unity of God.
- (d) Before the commencement of his mission, the Prophet used to meditate in the cave of Thawr.
- (e) Prior to Islam, the Arabs were completely submerged in the darkness of ignorance and moral

degradation.

- (f) Abu Jahl repeatedly interrupted the Prophet when he was calling people to Islam on Mount Safa.
- (g) According to the historian, at-Tabari, Imam 'Ali was the first among men to accept Islam.
- (h) Muhammad (a.s.) commenced his prophetic mission at the age of 40.
- (i) The Prophet openly started inviting people to Islam when he was 43 years old.
- (j) The Prophet preached in Mecca for 11 years.
- (k) In the 11th year of prophethood, 12 people from Medina accepted Islam.
- (l) Aws and Khazraj were two historically friendly tribes of Medina who strongly supported the Prophet.
- (m) It was the universal truth of the Prophet's message and his superior moral qualities that attracted people to Islam in large numbers.
- (n) Islam strongly condemns mistreatment of women by their male counterparts.
- (o) Islam promotes equality, piety, peace and justice.
- (p) When the Prophet invited his family members to embrace Islam, Imam 'Ali, according to at-Tabari, was the only person to offer help in the prophetic mission.
- (f) The Prophet asked Imam 'Ali to sleep in his bed on the night of his migration to Medina.

*Question 2:* [12 points]

When the 12 Medinese accepted Islam at Aqaba, what were the six things that they promised they will never do?

*Question 3:* [6 points]

What are the two titles by which the Prophet of Islam was known among his people even before he proclaimed his prophethood.

*Question 4:* [15 points]

In a five line paragraph, describe in your own words the message of Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) and his teachings.

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1. At-Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 1159; Ibn Hisham, Sirah, vol. 1, p. 240-245.

2. At-Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 1171-1173.

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