

Lesson 36: The Prophet of Islam (Muhammad al-Mustafa)

Name: Muhammad.

Agnomen: Abu 'l-Qasim.

Title: Rasulu 'l-'ah; Nabiu 'l-'ah; Khatamu 'n-Nabiyyin.

Father: Abdullah bin 'Abdu 'l-Muttalib.

Mother: Aminah bint Wahab.

Birth: 17th Rabi'u 'l-Awwal, 1st year of 'umu 'l-Fil at Mecca; i.e., 53 years before the hijra.

Death: 28th Safar, 11 after hijra.

1. Birth to Bi'that

The last prophet of God is Muhammad al-Mustafa—upon whom be blessings and peace. He was born on 17th Rabi'u 'l-Awwal, 1st Year of 'umul Fil in Mecca amidst the family of Banu Hashim (of the tribe of Quraysh) who were considered the most honoured of the Arab families. Banu Hashim were descendants of Isma'il, the son of Prophet Ibrahim.

The Prophet's grandfather, 'Abdu 'l-Muttalib, was the chief of Banu Hashim and also the guardian of the Ka'bah. His father was called 'Abdullah and his mother, Aminah bint Wahab. His father passed away a few months before his birth. At the age of six, the Prophet lost his mother as well and was placed under the care of his paternal grandfather, 'Abdul Muttalib. But his grandfather also passed away after four years; and at this time the Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib, took charge of him and became his guardian, taking him to his own house. Thus the Prophet grew up in his uncle's house and even before reaching the age of adolescence used to accompany his uncle on business journeys by caravan.

The Prophet had not received any schooling; yet, after reaching the age of maturity he became famous for his wisdom, courtesy, trust-worthiness and truthfulness. He soon became famous as "as-sadiq al-amn" (the truthful, the trustworthy). Abu Talib used to say: "We have never heard any lies from

Muhammad, nor seen him misconduct himself or make mischief. He never laughs unduly nor talks untimely.”

As a result of his sagacity and trustworthiness, Khadija bint Khuwaylid, a Qurayshi lady wellknown for her wealth, appointed him as the custodian of her possessions and left in his hands the task of conducting her commercial affairs. The Prophet once journeyed to Damascus with Khadija’s merchandise and as a result of the ability he displayed was able to make an outstanding profit. Before long she asked to become his wife and the Prophet accepted her proposal. After the marriage, which occurred when he was twentyfive years old, the Prophet began the life of a manager of his wife’s fortunes, until the age of forty, gaining meanwhile a widespread reputation for wisdom and trustworthiness.

He refused to worship idols, as was the common religious practice of the Arabs of the Hijaz. And occasionally he would make spiritual retreats to the cave of Hir’ in the mountains of the Tihmah region near Mecca, in which he prayed and discoursed secretly with God.

2. The Beginning of the Mission

At the age of forty, when he was in spiritual retreat in the cave of Hir’, he was given the mission of propagating the new religion. At that moment the first five verses of s̄rah 96 were revealed to him. (This event is known as *bi’that* — being raised to proclaim God’s message.) That very day he returned to his house and on the way met his cousin, ‘Alī bin Abi T̄lib, who after hearing the account of what had occurred declared his acceptance of the faith. After the Prophet entered the house and told his wife of the revelation, she likewise accepted Islam. Soon after, Zayd ibn al-H̄rithah (a loyal slave whom he treated like his own son) also became a convert.

The first time the Prophet invited people to accept his message, he was faced with a distressing and painful reaction. Out of necessity he was forced henceforth to propagate his message secretly for three years until he was ordered again by God to invite his very close relatives to accept the message. He organized a family feast and invited forty of his kinsmen. At the gathering, Muhammad asked if they had ever found him lying? The general response was: ‘We have never found you lying.’ Then he asked, “If I were to tell you that your enemies have gathered beyond the sandhills to attack you, would you believe me?” They replied, ‘Yes.’ Then he said:

I know no man in all Arabia who can offer his kindred a more excellent thing than I now do. I offer you happiness both in this life and in the hereafter. God Almighty has commanded me to call you unto Him. Who, therefore, among you will assist me herein shall become my brother, my heir and my successor.

But this call was also fruitless and no one heeded it except ‘Alī bin Abi T̄lib, who in any case had already accepted the faith. According to the historical documents transmitted from the Imams of Ahlu ‘l-bayt and the extant poems composed by Abu T̄lib, Abu T̄lib had also embraced Islam; however,

because he was the sole protector of the Prophet, he hid his faith from the people in order to preserve the outward power he had with the Quraysh.

After this period, according to Divine instruction, the Prophet began to propagate his mission openly. With the beginning of open propagation the people of Mecca reacted most severely because the Islamic message —of worshipping One God and of equality among the believers without any distinction of race, colour or wealth— fared completely against the status quo. Most painful afflictions and tortures were inflicted upon the Prophet and the people who had become newly converted to Islam.

For example, Bilal, an Ethiopian slave who had accepted Islam, was taken by his master Umayya who tied him onto the burning sand of the Arabian desert and placed a large stone on his chest with the warning that he will be left in that state until he rejects Islam. But the only sound heard from Bilal's lips was: "*Ahad! Ahad!*" (One God! One God!)

The severe treatment dealt out by the Quraysh reached such a degree that a group of about 100 Muslims, under leadership of Ja'far bin Abi Tālib, left their homes and belongings, and migrated to Abyssinia. The Prophet had told them that they would find the Abyssinian king to be a just ruler. With the intention of stopping the spread of Islam, the Quraysh pursued them to Abyssinia seeking their extradition. But Ja'far eloquently presented the Muslims' case to the Abyssinian king, and the request of the Quraysh was rejected. Ja'far said:

O King! We were plunged in the depth of ignorance and barbarism; we worshipped idols, we lived in unchastity, we ate dead bodies and we spoke abominations; we disregarded every feeling of humanity and the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood; we knew no law, but of the strong — when God raised among us a man, of whose noble birth, truthfulness, honesty and purity we are aware; and he called us to the Unity of God and taught us not to associate anything with Him; he forbade us the worship of idols; and enjoined on us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of neighbours; he forbade us to speak evil of women or to eat the sustenance of orphans; he ordered us to fly from vice and to abstain from evil; to offer prayers, to render alms, to observe the fast.

We have believed in him, we have accepted his teachings and his injunction to worship God and not associate anything with Him.

For this reason our people have risen against us, have persecuted us in order to make us forgo the worship of God and return to the worship of idols of stone and wood and other abominations. They tortured and injured us, until finding no safety among them, we have come to your country and hope you will protect us from their oppression.

Back in Mecca, economic and social boycott was imposed against the Prophet and his family. Therefore, the Prophet and his uncle, Abu Tālib, along with their relatives from the Banu Hashim, took refuge for three years in the "mountain pass of Abu Tālib," a fort in one of the valleys of Mecca. No one had any dealings or transactions with them and they did not dare to leave their place of refuge.

The idol-worshippers of Mecca, although at the beginning they considered inflicting all kinds of pressures and tortures such as striking and beating, insult, ridicule and defamation of the Prophet, occasionally would also show kindness and courtesy toward him in order to have him turn away from his mission. They would promise him great sums of money or leadership and the rule of the tribe. But for the Prophet their promises and their threats only resulted in the intensification of his will and determination to carry out his mission. Once, when they came to the Prophet promising him wealth and power, the Prophet told them, using metaphorical language, that if they were to put the sun in the palm of his right hand and the moon in the palm of his left hand, he would not turn away from obeying the One God or refrain from performing his mission.

3. The Hijrah

About the tenth year of his prophecy, when the Prophet left the “mountain pass of Abu Tālib,” his uncle Abu Tālib, who was also his sole protector, died, as did also his devoted wife Khadijah. Henceforth there was no protection for his life nor any place of refuge.

Finally the idol-worshippers of Mecca devised a secret plan to kill the Prophet. At night they surrounded his house from all sides with the aim of forcing themselves in at the end of the night and cutting him to pieces while he was in bed. But God, the Exalted, informed him of the plan and commanded him to leave for Yathrib. The Prophet asked ‘Alī to sleep in his bed so that the enemy would not detect his absence; ‘Alī readily agreed to sacrifice his life for the Prophet and slept in the Prophet’s bed. Then the Prophet left the house under Divine protection, passing amidst his enemies, and taking refuge in a cave near Mecca. After three days when his enemies, having looked everywhere, gave up hope of capturing him and returned to Mecca, he left the cave and set out for Yathrib.

4. Establishing an Islamic Community

The people of Yathrib, whose leaders had already accepted the message of the Prophet and sworn allegiance to him, welcomed him with open arms and placed their lives and property at his disposal. In Yathrib, for the first time, the Prophet formed a small Islamic community and signed treaties with the Jewish tribes in and around the city as well as with the powerful Arab tribes of the region. He understood the task of propagating the Islamic message and Yathrib became famous as “Madinatu ‘r-Rasūl” (the city of the Prophet).

Islam began to grow and expand from day to day. The Muslims, who in Mecca were caught in the mesh of the injustice and inequity of the Quraysh, gradually left their homes and property and migrated to Medina, revolving around the Prophet like moths around a candle. This group became known as the “immigrants” (muhājirīn) in the same way that those who aided the Prophet in Yathrib gained the name of “helpers” (ansār).

The Prophet formulated the society on the basis of justice and equality among the believers.

Brotherhood —not just in words but in action— was established among the muhājirin and the ansār. The social system of Islam even extended its justice and protection to the non-Muslims under its rule.

5. Encounters on the Battlefields

Islam was advancing rapidly but at the same time the idol-worshippers of Quraysh, as well as the Jewish tribes of the Hijaz, were unrestrained in their harassment of the Muslims. With the help of the hypocrites of Medina who were among the community of Muslims, they created new misfortunes for the Muslims every day until finally the matter led to war.

Many battles took place between the Muslims and the Arab polytheists and Jews, in most of which the Muslims were victorious. There was altogether over eighty major and minor battles. In all the major conflicts such as the battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, Khaybar, Hunayn, etc., the Prophet was personally present on the battle scene. Also in all the major battles and many minor ones, victory was gained especially through the efforts of ‘Alī bin Abi Tālib. He was the only person who never turned away from any of these battles. In all the wars that occurred during the ten years after the migration from Mecca to Medina, less than two hundred Muslims and less than a thousand infidels were killed.

(A) The Battle of Badr

The Meccans continued their attempt to destroy Islam. They continued to harass the Muslims who remained in Mecca and also confiscated their property and belongings. Abu Jahl, the leader of the Meccans, even sent a letter to the Prophet threatening him of the attack by the Meccans. It was in response to such aggression that Allah gave the permission to fight the unbelievers of Mecca. He said, ***“Permission [for jihād] is granted to those who are being killed because they have been oppressed...those who have been expelled from their homes without a just cause...”*** (22:39-40)

In the **second** year of the hijra, the Prophet with about 300 ill-equipped Muslims confronted a well-equipped Meccan force of 1000 soldiers. Though outnumbered, the Muslims were able to defeat the unbelievers in their first armed encounter with the enemy.

(B) The Battle of Uhud:

To avenge their defeat at Badr, the Meccans raised another force in the **third** year after hijra and marched towards Medina. After reaching the hills of Uhud, 4 m. outside Medina, the Prophet took up his position below the hill. The army arrayed in fighting formations. Fifty archers were posted, under the command of ‘Abdullah bin Jubayr, at a pass between the hills to guard the Muslims from any rear attack. They had strict orders not to leave their post, no matter what the outcome of the battle.

The Muslims initially defeated the Meccans. The enemy, having suffered a heavy loss, fell back in disorder and the Muslims started gathering booties.

Thinking that the fight was over, most of the fifty archers guarding the hill passage left their posts against the orders of their commander. Kḥalid bin Waḷid, a commander of the Meccan forces, seized the opportunity and led his cavalry through the mountain pass and, after killing the few remaining archers, launched a furious attack upon the Muslims from the rear.

Because of the disobedience of a small group, the victory was taken away from the Muslims. Most fled from the battlefield. A few, especially ‘Alī, stood their ground and fought till the end. The Muslims finally retreated to the security of the heights of mount Uhud. Among the 70 Muslims who died in this counter attack of the kuffar was Hamzah bin ‘Abdul Muttalib, the courageous uncle of the Prophet. He was, indeed, the Lion of God (*asduḥ*).

(C) The Battle of Khandaq (Ahzab)

In the **fifth** year of the hijra, a Jewish tribe formed an alliance with the Meccans; and together they raised an army of 10,000 soldiers. It is known as Khandaq (i.e., ditch) because the Muslims had dug a ditch around their campsite to prevent the enemy from entering the city.

The Allied forces of the non-Muslims besieged Medina for a month. Except for a few famous soldiers, they were unable to cross the ditch. The Allied forces finally retreated after ‘Alī, in a one-to-one encounter, killed the most courageous of their fighters.

(D) The Bani Qurazah Battle

The Bani Qurazah had concluded a peace agreement with the Muslims, but they violated the agreement by joining the Meccans in the Battle of Ahzab. So, after the Battle of Ahzab, the Muslims proceeded towards the Bani Qurazah who finally surrendered to the Muslims. The Prophet proposed to them to accept the arbitration of Sa’d bin Ma’z. They agreed and were dealt with by his decision: to kill the fighters and confiscate their property.

(E) The Bani Mustalaq War

In the **sixth** year of the hijra, the tribe of Bani Mustalaq violated the rights of the Muslims. As a result, they had to face the Muslim forces at a place called Maris’a and were defeated.

(F) The Battle of Khaybar

A large number of Jewish tribes had settled in Khaybar forts and the surrounding area of northern Arabia. They had close ties with the Meccans and had constantly threatened the Muslims. In the seventh year of hijra, the Prophet decided to face the enemy. The Muslims marched to Khaybar, put it under siege and, finally, gained victory after ‘Alī marched forward, conquered the main fort and killed the most brave of the Jewish soldiers.

6. The Treaty of Hudaibia & the Fall of Mecca

In the **sixth** year of the hijra, the Prophet decided to go for pilgrimage to Mecca. The Meccans stopped the Muslims at a place called Hudaibia and did not allow them to enter the city. This encounter ended in a peace agreement between the Prophet and the Quraysh of Mecca. This peace agreement created a relatively safe environment for the Prophet to embark on extending the call of Islam to the tribes and people far away from Arabia.

As a result of the activity of the Prophet and the selfless effort of the muhajirin and ansar during that period, Islam spread through the Arabian peninsula. There were also letters written to kings of other countries such as Persia, Byzantine and Abyssinia inviting them to accept Islam. During this time the Prophet lived in poverty and was proud of it. He never spent a moment of his life in vain. Rather, his time was divided into three parts: one spent for God, in worshipping and remembering Him; a part for himself and his household and domestic needs; and a part for the people. During this part of his time he was engaged in spreading and teaching Islam and its sciences, administrating to the needs of the Islamic society and removing whatever evils existed, providing for the needs of the Muslims, strengthening domestic and foreign bonds, and similar matters.

One of the conditions of the peace treaty was that the Quraysh would not harm the Muslims or any of their confederates. This condition was, however, violated by the Quraysh when they helped Bani Bakr tribe against the Khuza'a tribe—the former an ally of the Quraysh and the latter an ally of the Muslims. The Prophet asked the Quraysh to respect the treaty, break their alliance with Bani Bakr and compensate the victims of their aggression. The Quraysh refused to abide by the terms of their treaty. The Prophet, with a well-equipped and well-disciplined force of 10,000 soldiers, marched to Mecca in the **eighth** year after the *hijrah* and conquered it without much resistance.

The city which has rejected his message, plotted against his followers and conspired to assassinate him was at his mercy. Prophet Muhammad asked the Meccans: “What can you expect at my hands?” “Mercy! Generous and Noble Sire!” they replied. If he had wished, he could have made them all his slaves. But Muhammad —“mercy for the universe” — said: “I will speak to you as Joseph spoke to his brethren. I will not reproach you today; God will forgive you, for He is Merciful and Loving. Go, you are free!”

With the fall of Mecca, the last barrier in the way of Islam had been removed. So many people and tribes of the Arabian Peninsula started accepting the message of Islam that the **ninth** year of hijrah is known as the “Year of Delegations” because of the unusual number of delegates coming to pay their homage to the Prophet at Medina.

7. The Last Pilgrimage & Death

In the tenth year of the hijrah, the Prophet decided to go for hajj (pilgrimage). He invited Muslims to join him and be acquainted with the hajj rituals. Over a hundred thousand Muslims joined him in the hajj. Although this was the first and the last hajj of the Prophet, it is known as “*al-Hajj^u l-wid^u*” — the Last Pilgrimage.” He seized the unprecedented gathering to remind the Muslims of many important values of Islam.

On the way back to Medina, he stopped at Ghadir Khumm and delivered a lengthy sermon in which he summarized the major teachings of Islam, informed the Muslims of his approaching death and appointed ‘Al^u bin Abi T^ulib as his successor.

After ten years of stay in Medina, the Prophet fell ill and died after a few days of illness. According to existing traditions, the last words on his lips were advice concerning slaves and women.

8. Lamartine’s Homage to the Prophet

An eighteenth century French historian, Lamartine, writes the following in his *Histoire de la Turquie* (1854) about the Prophet of Islam:

“Never has man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman: to subvert superstitions which had been interposed 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...

“If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the true criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?...

“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 standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?”

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This lesson has been compiled and edited by S. M. Rizvi from the difference sources including the following: *The Shi’ite Islam* by Tabataba’i. *A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles*, published by WOFIS, Tehran. *A Glance at the Life of the Prophet of Islam* by Dar Rah-e Haq. *The Early History of Islam* by S. Safdar Husayn.

Question Paper on Lesson 36

Question 1: [20 points]

Fill in the blanks from the list of words given below:

The Prophet was born in the 1st year of _____ to _____. His father _____ passed away a few months before his birth. After the passing away of his grandfather, his uncle _____ became his guardian.

The Prophet was well-known for being _____ and _____ even before the commencement of his mission at the age of _____. The first woman to accept Islam was _____ the wife of the Prophet. The first verses to be revealed on the Prophet were from chapter no. _____.

During the Meccan period, some Muslims migrated to _____ under the leadership of _____. The unbelievers of Mecca used _____ as well as _____ to stop the message of Islam. They even tortured some Muslims, the most famous of them is known as _____.

The Prophet migrated to _____ which later on became famous as _____. The Muslims in Medina were generally divided into two groups as the _____ and the _____. The battle in which the Muslims gained victory but then lost it was known as _____. The battle in which the Muslim had dug up a ditch is known as _____.

ninty-six Bilal

intimidation Khadija

Amul Fil Khandaq

Muhajirin Medina

Abyssinia Amina as-Sadiq

bribe Ja`far

Uhud Abdullah

Yathrib Ansar

al-Amin Abu Talib

forty

Question 2: [15 points]

True or False:

(a) The Prophet received schooling in Mecca.

(b) Hira was the Prophet's place of retreat for worship.

- (c) Abu Tālib had not embraced Islam.
- (d) Ja`far bin Abi Tālib migrated first to Medina and then to Abyssinia.
- (e) The Banu Hāshim spent five years in the “mountain pass of Abu Tālib”.
- (f) Hijrah means the commencement of the prophetic mission.
- (g) “Madinatu `r-Rasūl” means the city of the Prophet.
- (h) The Jewish tribes and the hypocrites created new misfortunes for Muslims until the matter led to war.
- (i) In all the wars during the Medinese period, more than ten thousand infidels were killed.
- (j) The Prophet conquered Mecca with 10,000 soldiers.

Question 3: [15 points]

Express your opinion about the statement of Ja`far bin Abi Tālib to the king of Abyssinia.

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