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Lesson 19: Muhammad, the Radiance that shone forth in the Darkness

The World before Islam

The chaotic situation of the world prior to Islam is clearly reflected in the accurate mirror of history. The outline of decline, oppression, bloodshed, idol-worship is evident in this mirror.

Before Islam, it was as if mankind was leaning over the edge of the precipice of ruin and destruction, and there was the fear that at any moment it could roll down and be annihilated in it.

The Religions and Beliefs of the People

a) In the Arabian Peninsula

The Arabs prior to Islam were committed in their hearts to idols, and what they saw around themselves with their own eyes they made into idols. Not only did they lower their heads and prostrate before them, but they donated everything had, even gifts of agricultural produce, to their idols¹.

They believed that apart from the life of this world there was no other life². Obviously those who did not see the wretchedness of their idols whom they had chosen as their gods could not grasp the idea and truth of the resurrection.

So it was no wonder that they fumed the House, which Hazrat Ibrahim had built at the command of and in the name of Allah into brightly coloured quarters for their idols.

As for the origins of idol-worship in the Hijaz, some believe that the first person to introduce it was 'Amr ibn Luhayy. Alwrites in his history: "He (ibn Luhayy) journeyed to Syria and saw all of the inhabitants worshipping idols. When he asked about the virtues of the idols, they told him, 'They have befriended us, and they bring down rain for us.'¹ He took a liking to them and asked them to give him an idol. They gave

him & teal and he took him to Mecca.” Ibn Hisham writes that ‘Amr ibn Luhayy brought this idol from Mu'ab (Iraq). In any case, Hubab was the most famous of the gods in the Ka'bah: he was built in the form of man, and holy arrows, which the diviners used for casting auguries, were set in front of him.

The influence of idol-worship grew to the point where idols were built in the form of animals, plants, men, jinn angels and stars; even stones were the objects of worship.

'Lat' was in Ta'il in the form of a cubic stone, and had a special field and meadow near Taif which was a holy place, and cutting trees, hunting and the spilling of blood were not lawful in its vicinity; the people of Mecca and other places made pilgrimage to it.

Uzza was a very powerful god equivalent to the planet Venus and was situated in Nakhlah east of Mecca, and was worshipped there. It was given much more honour than the other idols. The sanctuary of Uzza took the form of three trees and human sacrifices were offered to it.

Manat was the god of predestination, and its original place of worship was a black stone at Qudayd (on the road between Mecca and Medina). It belonged especially to the tribes of Aws and Khazraj.

These gods were female and were like angels.

Ba'l was the embodiment of the spirit of wells and underground waters.

Sometimes a well with clean, invigorating water became worn— in the dry desert.

A cave, when it had connections with the gods and the underground powers, was also sanctified. The temple of Ghabghab in Nakhlah (see above) was in such a place.

Dhat Anwat, from which things were hung, was in Nakhlah and in some years the Meccan made pilgrimage there.

Dhu sh-Shard was respected in the form of a heap of black shining cubic stones.

The spirit of arable lands was the god of good works and sacrifices had to be made to it. The spirit of barren land was a wicked devil who had to be avoided.

They had idols made of wood or metal or stones with no definite form round which they made several turns whenever they went into their houses, and from which they took permission when they went out on a journey and then took with themselves.

The town of Harran where Ibrahim had started his campaign against star-worship, was the centre of the Sabaeans. In this town, stars were the object of veneration. Belief in the stars and in the connection between the movements of the stars and earthly destiny was very strong. Each star was the god of one event. Images of Mars, Jupiter, Venus, etc. were erected in the temples, and they asked for help from them, and sometimes sacrificed them.

The thoughts of the Sabeans sometimes fumed to angels and jinn. The angels were the daughters of god, and were thought to influence events. They imagined that god had a wife who was one of the jinn⁴.

b) In Iran

In Iran also many religions were being practised, but the one which most people followed was Zoroastrians, the official religion.

If we accept that Zoroaster was a true prophet who had a religion based on tawhid, we must also acknowledge that his true teachings had been changed by the passage of time. Gradually, they changed their direction and even their form and identity to the benefit of the ruling classes.

A veil behind which the Magi and the priests to the advantage of themselves and the ruling classes transformed the foundations and principles covered its very general and pleasant maxims. Thus it was that tawhid became polytheism, and the pure sweet and excellent teachings did not stay: the shell remained, but the nut was thrown out, and the empty shells were filled with the ancient gods of the first times of the Aryan tribes.

c) In Europe

The religious situation in Europe was like it was in Iran. Christianity had given up its original form, and had become stuck in polytheism and the dogma of the Trinity.

In France, Britain and Spain, people did not believe in a Unique God.

d) In India

There were various religions, but idolatry prevailed

Class and Racial Differences

In Iran people were divided into classes, and each class had special restrictions and privileges. The class connected with the ruling council had the most privileges. Similarly in Europe and India, society was divided into classes and the right to possess land, to trade, and the exemption from taxes was the prerogative of the nobility.

At that time also, every one of the people of the world thought themselves superior in terms of race over everyone else.

The Situation of Women in Pre-Islamic Society

In Arabia, woman was a commodity, counted in the wealth of the father, husband or son; and after death

she was inherited like the other possessions and became the property of the descendants

It was a disgrace to have a daughter, and in some tribes the family buried this shameful thing with their own hands⁵. In Iran, also, the form of class society did not bring anything better for women.

In Greece, woman was a creature of perpetual filthiness, a child of Satan, similar to an animal. In India, throughout her life, she was under the control of her father, husband or son, and had to address her husband as god, master and lord, and, like a slave, she had no right to ownership – after the death of her husband she had no right to take another husband. The revolting custom of Sati the burning of the widow alive with the funeral pyre of her husband was also practised at that time.

In Japan, as well, woman was under the control of her father husband or son for the whole of her life, and the daughter had no share in inheritance

In China the father was master of the house and had so much power that he could sell his wife and children into bondage and slavery, and sometimes he even had the right to kill them. On top of this, daughters had no esteem and sometimes they were left in the desert to be the prey of the wild pigs.

The Romans also considered women to be the incarnation of evil and as harmful spirits, and kept them like children under their control.

So every human society at that time, wherever it was, was sunken in darkness, decline and oppression. Throughout the whole of the world, no glow or gleam of light met the eye, and although the desire for goodness and virtue still flickered in the depths of the heart of human nature covered by a dark opaqueness, it had been almost extinguished on the one hand in the blackness and gloom of humiliations, passions and oppression, and on the other hand in the prominent features of poverty and wretchedness. It could not illuminate the path for the seekers after light, purity and felicity. A darkness like a thick heavy cloud in the sky had submerged the daily life of all societies of the time 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.

Hear what that best of men '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.'⁶

The Birth of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam (S)

Muhammad (S) opened his eyes to the world on the 17th of Rabi' al-awwal of the 53rd year before the

Hijrah (570 AD).

His father, Abdullah was from the family of Hazrat Isma'il, and had died before he could see his son. His mother was one of the most pious women of that time.

Muhammad (S) was entrusted to a virtuous woman called Halimah, who suckled him and nursed him.

One day, Muhammad (S) 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 anoint 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 the object of 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 that 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 was perfect in speech and act. Years before he became a prophet, the people called him 'al-Amin' (the trustworthy one). 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 Hirah and was with God in His mysteries and in prayer. At the end of the month, before returning to his home, he went to the Ka'bah and made seven or more circumambulations.

At the age of forty, while busy in worship in the cave of Hirah he was elevated to the station of Messengership.

For three years the Prophet of Islam (S) received no command to call people openly to Islam. And during that time only a few people had faith in Muhammad (S). Among men, the first person who loved and followed him was Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), and among women, Khadijah⁷ .

Then after three years he received the command to invite people openly to Islam, and he called his close family to be his guests; about forty of these people assemble together. The food, which the Prophet (S) 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 you the best of this world and of the world of the resurrection. I have been commanded by Allah 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 and my executor among you. Listen what he says and obey him!"⁸.

One day the Prophet (S) 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) 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 (S) started his call with the slogan of tawhid and the worship of one God, and established tawhid as the basis of all other beliefs. He made known to men Allah, who is nearer to man than man himself; he abolished all forms of idol-worship, revolutionized the atmosphere of Mecca, and drew people to his religion.

Meanwhile, the Quraysh (the most powerful tribe in Mecca, to which Muhammad (S) belonged) were be 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 Allah and with His care and intercession 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 Medina belonging to the Khazraj tribe came to Mecca to perform the ceremonies of Hajj. The Prophet invited them to Islam and they accepted, with this promise that when they went back to Medina they would call the people to Muhammad's religion. They went to Medina and spread around the invitation of the Prophet (S) "fine next year twelve people from Madina accepted the faith of the Prophet of Islam (S) at Aqaba and resolved: not to associate any with Allah, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to indulge in infanticide, not to bring malicious accusations anyone, not to disobey the Prophet in anything which he indicated. Then the Prophet sent a man by the name of Mus'ab along with them to teach the Qur'an and thus a large group in Medina pledged their faith in the Prophet.

The Prophet's Migration (Hijrah)

Till the thirteenth year of his mission, the Prophet (S) called the people in 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 plot to kill him, so he put Hazrat '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 leap forward was made. For this very reason, the Hijrah of Muhammad (S) became the beginning of the dating system of the Muslims.

With the presence of the Prophet of Islam (S) in Medina the tribes of Aws and Khazraj became brothers for life in the shadow of the teachings of Islam, and a blessed sincerity and cordiality was established between them.

The example of Muhammad's behaviour, his spiritual and moral superiority, and the naturalness 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 (S) 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, and refrained from and prevented them. 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 previous to Islam. But he also vehemently fought against their unchastely and licentiousness for he wanted them to attain their real development on the basis of the true principles of Islam.

He defended the rights of slaves, and had inroad comprehensive programs 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.

Let us look at a clear example of the great teachings of the Prophet (S):

Juwaybar was a young man, poor and rather ugly. He came to Medina with a great enthusiasm for Islam, and accepted it. The Prophet gave him a place in the mosque, and later in 'Saqifah', a garden that was under the control of the Prophet, and made him its overseer.

One day the Prophet told him: "It is good for a man to take to himself a woman, and to choose a wife, so that he may keep his chastity and have a home-life."

"May God bless you, but I am poor and ugly; in what woman could there be such a desire that she would take me as her husband? Especially as I am not from a noble family."

"Juwaybar, with me coming of Islam all the nobility of the age of ignorance (before Islam) has been broken down together with all the standards of greatness and have been melted together. Black and white, Arab and non-Arab have all come from Adam, and God made Adam from the earth. "For this reason today there is no black and white, nor even any results from imperfection or excess in something:

"The dearest person to God is the virtuous person.

"Now go to the house of Ziyad and ask for his daughter, Dhalifa on my behalf."

Juwaybar did what the Prophet had told him, but Ziyad who was one of the nobles of the Ansar tribe, did

not accept, and said, “We only give our daughters to people like ourselves – and the Prophet himself knows that very well; so go back till I have consulted with him and give him my apologies myself.”

He fumed to go back, but because of his anger he cried out, “I swear by God, neither the Qur’an nor the Prophet have said that one must give one’s daughter to someone who is of equal status in family and in wealth!”

Dhulfa heard the voice of Juwaybar and sent someone to her father. He came to her and she asked him, “What have you said to that young man that has made him angry?”

“The Prophet sent him to me to take you, my daughter, with my agreement.”

Juwaybar would not tell a lie; send him back and go yourself to the Prophet so that he may clarify the matter for you.” Ziyad did what his daughter had said. He sent Juwaybar back and himself hurried to the Prophet and said, Juwaybar brought a message from you. I want to remind you that I am an Ansar and that we do not give our daughters in marriage except to men of equal status from the same tribe.”

Juwaybar is a believer and a man of faith and a man with faith is the equal of a woman with faith. Give him your daughter as a wife.”

Ziyad then resumed home and told his daughter what the Prophet had commanded. The daughter said, “Father! To disobey the Prophet’s command is against the religion. And I am ready of my own accord, so accept Juwaybar as your son– in–law!”

Ziyad brought Juwaybar in front of the people of his tribe and gave him in marriage to his daughter on the basis of the command of Islam. He even gave the dowry to his daughter from his own pocket, and gave them a house with all necessities that they would live happily.

Truly, this light was dazzling; this source or warmth–giving radiance lit up a flame in every heart that was a guide to all pure hearts on the path. And thus it was that the muddled souls of the people were led forth from the harassment of the gloom and darkness of that time, like moths who wing their way towards the brilliant flame, and fumed in their hundreds towards Islam seeking the protection of the illustrious, illuminating system of the Qur’an.

Questions

1. What do we discover from the beauty in certain objects?
2. What would draw our attention to the designer and the engineer?
3. Is our understanding of these things by our external senses?
4. Why and on what basis do we believe in the existence of the designer and engineer?

5. How do we come up with two categories of objects of our perception?
6. Which objects fall under the second category?
7. How do we learn that objects 1–6 exist?
8. When, how, and by whom was infrared radiation discovered?
9. When, how, and by whom was ultra–violet radiation discovered?
10. How do we learn about supersonic sounds?
11. How do we learn about our intelligence?
12. Can our imagination be perceived by the four senses?
13. What can we build in our mind?
14. Can our will and our decisions be perceived by any of the four senses?
15. Can love or hate be perceived by any of the four senses?
16. Can our senses perceive life? How?
17. What do the above scientific examples establish?
18. Why should we not reject the existence of things that the four senses do not perceive?
19. In what do we learn about the existence of God?
20. What should we say to those who do not except the existence in things?
21. What is the basic idea written about the sign of God?

1. see VI: 137.

2. see XLV: 24.

3. See lesson 20

4. Taken from “Jihan dar 'Asr Bihat Muhammad Rafsanjani Tehran 1335.

5. See XVI: 59.

6. Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 26

7. Tarikh at–Tabni vol. 3, p 1159; Sinan ibn Hisham vol. 1, p. 240–245.

8. Tarikh at–Tabari vol. 3, p. 171–1173.

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