

Chapter 1: Smashing the Idols of Tribalism

﴿وَجَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَاداً لِّيُضِلُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ قُلْ تَمَتَّعُوا فَإِنَّ مَصِيرَكُمْ إِلَى النَّارِ﴾

And they set up (idols) as equal to Allah, to mislead (men) from His Path! Say, 'Enjoy [for a while], for indeed your destination is towards the Fire!' (Holy Qur'an, 14:30)

As befits the final Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad was born into the noblest Arab family of his region, the tribe of Bani Hashim in Arabia, in the sixth century. His prestigious lineage stretched back to Prophet Ibrahim, and his ancestors distinguished themselves through integrity, (belief in) monotheism, and bravery.

His virtues were visible amongst the Quraysh tribes who entitled him as “Muhammad, the Truthful and the Trustworthy One (*As-Sadiq al-Ameen*).” When Allah called upon Prophet Muhammad to publicly declare his prophethood, these virtues assisted him to bring forth the message of Islam.

For that environment, the revolutionary message of Islam shattered tribal, ethnic, and imperial barriers. In a society where ancestry dictated respect and exclusiveness, the Prophet proclaimed the opposite, he said, “Anyone who has an atom’s weight of prejudice in his heart will not enter Paradise.”¹ In stark contrast to the highly stratified society to which Islam came, the Prophet paralleled the rich with the poor, the desert nomads with the urban dwellers, and the rulers with the ruled, side by side in prayer to Allah at the Holy Ka’abah.

Their monotheism came at a time when the Ka’abah, initially reconstructed by Prophet Ibrahim had been usurped for idol worshipping, and members of the Prophet’s extended tribe, the Quraysh relied upon the revenue from the pilgrims who flocked to the House of Idols. Needless to say, the majority of the Quraysh were less than pleased with the idea of destroying the statues and lucrative income for the sake of restoring the foundation of monotheism.

Understandably then, despite his noble roots, the tribal relation with the Prophet became chafe as he

rapidly spread the messages of unity, equality, and monotheism. Accustomed to their status as the highest of the high, the Quraysh were less than thrilled with the proclamation from God that read:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ۗ

O Mankind! We created you from a male and a female and then made you into nations and tribes only that you might recognize each other; verily, the most honoured of you before Allah is the most righteous. (49:13)

While the sincere people, such as the Prophet's cousin, 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, 'Ali's father who was also the uncle of the Prophet, Abu Talib, and the Prophet's uncle, Hamzah Ibn Abdul Muttalib immediately recognized the truth and devoted their lives to it, the majority of the Prophet's tribe (Quraysh) threw all of their might and fury against the Prophet. War, sanctions, murder, and exile were the welcome that they gave their kinsman in return for his dedication towards Allah and for many years, they proved to be the staunchest enemies of Islam.

Since the early Muslims were few, the Quraysh were secure in their ridicule of the Prophet, whom they considered as an insane maniac. However, Allah states otherwise,

“And you are not, by the grace of your Lord, possessed.” (68:2)

However, his movement progressed from a diminutive posture to a fast growing threat against the powerful figures of the Quraysh. Increasingly, the Prophet and his mounting followers became incessantly persecuted. The Prophet saw no choice but to leave his beloved birthplace of Mecca and take up the invitation by the people of Madinah² to foster Islam.

The move to Madinah became a decisive maneuver. Nothing could have aided Islam more because the inhabitants of Madinah were ready and willing to join the cause of Islam and bring forth Islam from the inner-personal to the public sphere. Even military oppositions by the Quraysh could not stop the exploding spread of the message of Islam. After nine years of exile, at the command of Allah, the Muslims were prepared to retake the seat of monotheism and restore Mecca to the rule of the Prophet, rather than the rule of idolaters.

Even after the final conquest of Mecca by the Muslims, most of the Quraysh still vehemently opposed the message of Islam. Thus, two options faced those who opposed Islam – either merge with the Muslims or become marginalized.

Many of the harshest enemies of Islam who had hitherto, at the least, thrown trash and stones at the Holy Prophet, artificially converted to Islam. Swiftly some of his formidable foes became his closest

companions. Commanders who had staunchly fought against him for many years now feigned to his side, such as Abu Sufyan from the clan of the Bani Umayyah and Khalid Ibn al-Waleed. Since they could not defeat the Prophet, his enemies saw no other choice but to superficially join him.

Undoubtedly, many of these conversions were sincere and the Qur'an testifies to this,

“And as to the foremost from among the Muhajireen (Immigrants from Mecca) and Ansar (Helpers from Madinah) and those who followed them in goodness, Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him...” (9: 100)

In fact, Muslims today owe a great deal of gratitude to those who initially fought for and supported Islam. Their sacrifices led to the success of Islam's survival and continuous drive. Nonetheless, as evinced by *Surah al-Munafiqun (The Hypocrites – c. 63)* and *Surah al-Taubah (The Repentance – c. 9)* faith did not enter all of their hearts:

إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ قَالُوا نَشْهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُهُ وَاللَّهُ
يَشْهَدُ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَكَاذِبُونَ

When the hypocrites come to you, they say, ‘We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of Allah.’ Surely, Allah knows that you are indeed His messenger, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars. (63: 1)

وَمِمَّنْ حَوْلَكُم مِّنَ الْأَعْرَابِ مُنَافِقُونَ وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْمَدِينَةِ مَرَدُوا عَلَى النِّفَاقِ لَا
تَعْلَمُهُمْ نَحْنُ نَعْلَمُهُمْ سَنُعَذِّبُهُمْ مَّرَّتَيْنِ ثُمَّ يَرُدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ عَظِيمٍ

Round about you [Muhammad and his community] and among you in Madinah are hypocrites and they are obstinate in hypocrisy. You do not know them, We know them, twice shall We punish them and in addition they shall be sent to a grievous penalty. (9: 101)

1. Al-Kulayni, Al-Kafi, Vol. 2; Bab al-Asabiyah, p. 308, hadith 3.

2. The original name of Madinah was Yathrib, but it later became known as Madinatul Nabi (the City of the Prophet) after the migration (Hijrah) of the Prophet from Mecca to Madinah.

<https://www.al-islam.org/when-power-and-piety-collide-sayyid-moustafa-al-qazwini/chapter-1-smashing-idols-tribalism>