

Abu Sufyan

It was an age when the whole of the Hijaz (Arabia) was covered in darkness and oppression and full of ignorance and corruption. It was a country where debauchery, wrong action and evil deeds were considered to be honourable. It was a time when women were deprived of all privileges in life, denied freedom and access to any spirituality.

In those days baby-girls were even denied the right to live and buried alive. It was to such a culture and way of behaving that the noble Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) came: he appeared amongst the people carrying a life-giving message of peace and prosperity from his lord, Allah. His message was this:

Say: (O people), there is no god, but Allah, so that you may achieve success.

The first action of the noble Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was to destroy and remove the false and superstitious gods of the idol-worshippers which they had made out of stone, wood, date-palms and other materials. Then, he affirmed that there was no god, only Allah and that men must submit to Him only and to no other power. Thus the noble Prophet (s.a.w.a.) relying only on Allah for support began calling the people to the correct way of life: he feared nothing, neither person nor political force.

In the same way, however, as darkness opposes itself to light and the forces of evil to truth, so there existed in opposition to this figure of truth and spiritual reality the satanic figures of darkness of that age, namely, the men of the Quraysh tribe. To avoid conflict he kept his message hidden from these pharaonic-like people at the initial stages of his mission. The first to accept the faith of Islam was Khadijah, the noble wife of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.); then Abu Talib, the uncle and guardian of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and Ali (a.s.), his cousin and faithful supporter, both accepted.

These distinguished servants of Allah worshipped and prayed out of sight of the mushrikin (the pl. of mushrik: polytheists) of Mecca, especially the rich and powerful amongst the tribe of the Quraysh. The holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) used every opportunity to call the poor servants and slaves of the Qurayshite nobles to worship Allah, the One, the Unique, and to keep them from worshipping the idols of falsehood and magic which had been erected by the chiefs of the Quraysh.

Gradually however, from all quarters of Mecca murmurings of discontent began, then the cry of anger and revolt of the pleasure-seeking nobles was to be heard, loud and clear. The kafirun (the pl. of kafir; the disbelievers) amongst the nobles of Mecca feared that the slaves would be roused and incited by the call of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) and as a result they would be unable to keep them in slavery.

Day by day the voice of criticism grew louder until the name of the Messenger of Allah became known to every tribe in the Hijaz and in every corner of every town people could be heard talking about a certain man who had brought a new din (a divine code for living and worshipping) and was boldly challenging the existence of the accepted gods.

The chiefs and nobles of the Quraysh, whose tyrannical leader was Abu Sufyan, complained to Abu Talib the paternal uncle and guardian of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.). They asked him to advise his nephew to stop slandering and challenging their gods. Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) was not to be deterred from his mission.

It was during this period of psychological warfare between the forces of truth and falsehood that Allah revealed to the Prophet that he should begin to openly call the people to Islam, to the worship of the One, Unique God and to prevent his family and relatives from worshipping the idols:

وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ

And warn your nearest relations; (Qur'an, 26:214).

Acting on this divine order he told Ali (a.s.) to organize a meeting and invite both his close family and the rest of his kin. Ali (a.s.) sent out letters of invitation to his own relatives and to those of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) calling them to an evening meal at his own house. One after the other the important members of the Quraysh, who were all related to the holy Prophet, arrived at the meeting; Ali (a.s.) received and served on them.

When everyone had finished the meal the noble Prophet (s.a.w.a.) began to speak: "Oh leaders of the Quraysh! Cease to worship idols! Put an end to your evil actions, corruption, debauchery, tyranny, usury and every-thing which is haram (forbidden according to the divine code), fear God, for on the Day of Judgement each person will be rewarded according to his actions . . ."

Silence fell on the meeting; the mushrikun were so angry that they gnashed their teeth and would have torn the noble Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) to pieces had they been able; they feared Abu Talib however and so restrained their evil desires. It was at this moment that the Messenger of Allah turned to face the sons of his paternal uncle 'Abdul-Muttalib and said: "Listen, sons of 'Abdul-Muttalib. In truth, I do not believe that any other Arab has brought you something better than I have brought you. You must realize, that I desire nothing for you but the best of this world and the next. Oh young men of Mecca! Do not listen to the words of these ignorant old men who pass their miserable lives in idol-worship, magic,

shirk (associating partners with Allah), tyranny and who strive to keep the people from knowing the Truth."

It was at this point in the speech of the noble Prophet that the men of importance amongst the Quraysh, their pride deeply wounded by these words, began to laugh and make fun of him, uproar then broke out in the meeting and they got up from their places and left.

After this, the noble Messenger (s.a.w.a.), carrying out the divine order, called the closest members of his tribe to the worship of the One, Sublime God. He continued the task, sometimes openly, sometimes secretly, amongst both the common and the elite, taking advantage of every appropriate occasion until another more definitive message came from Allah via Jibril (Gabriel):

فَاصْدَعْ بِمَا تُؤْمَرُ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

So declare openly what you are bidden and turn aside from the polytheists; (Qur'an, 15:94).

After hearing this divine order, he went up the Safi mountain near Mecca gathering the nobles and leaders of the different tribes around him and with words full of beauty and meaning and declaring the ayat (the pl. of ayah, verses of the Qur'an) which had been revealed to him by Allah, he began to advise them: "O people, O leaders of the Quraysh! I demand nothing of you but that you say: "there is no god, but Allah".

Nobody from amongst the distinguished assembly dared to speak except for Abu Lahab, the uncle of the noble Prophet, who at the instigation of Abu Sufyan cried out: "O Muhammad! Woe to you. Have you invited us here to listen to those same words you were saying before? O Muhammad, cease talking like this: don't ruin our lives. From the day you came to us and began to call the people to your god, a god which is unfamiliar to us, our slaves and servants have been taken away from us or they have deserted them-selves. O Muhammad, why don't you leave the people alone? Why don't you stop talking like this?"

Abu Sufyan laughed at himself, satisfied at how well his instigation of Abu Lahab had worked, and how Muhammad was powerless to do anything. The holy Prophet remaining polite and patient, looked at Abu Lahab with a pleasant smile; but he said nothing. The ignorant people stole glances at each other, bent their heads muttering and left the presence of the noble Messenger Muhammad (s.a.w.a.).

From among this crowded assembly, however several persons, who possessed a pure heart and spirit were attracted, as bees to the nectar, towards the noble Prophet, and accepted his message. These persons were 'Ammar ibn Yasir and his mother and father, and Bilal, the Abyssinian. It was from this moment on, that the leaders of the Quraysh, in particular the most influential from amongst them, Abu Sufyan, the deceitful plotter of Mecca, began to work together to form a counter-force to Muhammad (s.a.w.a.).

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