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## Lesson Ten: Beginning of the Mission

Finally the appointed moment arrived, the moment which had been foretold by previous Prophets to their followers. At the age of forty, the orphan son of Abdullah attained the exalted station of messengerhood. It was he alone, that time had prepared for guiding the world with his message for only this great and heavy responsibility could call for such qualities and virtues as he possessed.

Only in such a vast enterprise could the energies of that quintessence of all existence unfold, for the entire being of Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was prepared to undertake the grave task of prophethood. If he had not been prepared, in the best possible way, to assume that sacred and fateful responsibility, there would have been none other in the world capable of conveying the Divine mission in all its dimensions. It was only the being of Muhammad, upon whom be peace, that was capable of stilling the thirst of the world.

While engaged in worship in a corner of the cave of Hira in the heart of the night, the Prophet who had never studied or attended a school, was suddenly shaken by the summons, "O Muhammad!" followed by the command to recite, this being the beginning of revelation. A wave arose from the limitless ocean of Divinity, rent the breast of the Prophet, bewildered and anxious, and filled to the brim the cup of his spirit.

The shining of a light from the realm of the unseen covered and enveloped his being and shone forth on his fair features, giving rise to new and bright life in the darkness of the night. Then, with a painful tumult in his heart and bearing on his shoulders the heaviest responsibility conceivable, he set out for home from the cave of Hira, destined to become the teacher of all human beings and to assume the leadership of humanity on its long march forward. [1](#)

What force was it that had disquieted him despite his infinite patience, made him anxious despite all his tranquil courage, and plunged his whole being into painful turmoil? Thereafter the envoy of revelation came repeatedly, reciting verses to him, profound and astounding verses that bore no resemblance from the point of view of style and content either to the words of the Prophet himself, eloquent as they were, or to the conventional prose and poetry of the age.

Although the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance knew neither how to read nor how to write and had no historians, philosophers or scholars, they were famed for the excellence of their poetry and the eloquence of their speech. The Prophet, however, had never participated before the beginning of his mission in the cultivation of the arts of poetry and eloquence.

His conduct, on the one hand, and the verses of the Qur'an, on the other, both testify that he made no compromises in conveying his message. He conveyed the message that he had been ordered to deliver clearly, unambiguously and in utter contradiction both with the beliefs and inclinations of the people and with his own immediate interests. He loudly proclaimed the revelation he had received to the evil and the ignorant, to a people made degenerate and corrupt by the worship of the idols they had fashioned themselves, and he informed them that their sole salvation lay in the worship of the One God.

The new factor that appeared at a particular time in the life of the Prophet and caused him to engage in unprecedented forms of activity was the wondrous phenomenon of revelation, the heavenly message which he as the most lofty and qualified of men had been chosen to receive. Before then, no preliminary effort or particular inclination had been seen on his part that might have led to the bringing about of the sudden and remarkable transformation of the world he was now about to accomplish.

The factor that had this profound effect on Muhammad, that changed that quiet and reflective man into an explosive source of revolutionary energy and enabled him to bring about such a profound transformation of humanity, from within the intense darkness of the Arabs' Age of Ignorance, was nothing other than revelation. It was a call that penetrated the very depths of the souls of human beings that melted the marrow of their bones, and directed all their strivings to the attainment of perfection.

The command of revelation negated all the false and lying criteria which human beings had regarded as the measure of goodness and considered the sole means of evaluating human characteristics and habits, while, in fact, clothing falsehood in the garment of truth. It brought into operation new and clear criteria which showed human beings the goals to which they should strive to advance and brought about creativity in their lives. The veil of ignorance and silence was torn apart, the human beings' energies were set to work, the power of thought within them was aroused, and their spirits were borne aloft toward the infinite summit of being.

The people who in their ignorance and lowliness would tear each apart on account of the most insignificant things and had lost all virtue, thanks to their various forms of enslavement, now became, through Islam and its great concept of monotheism – the true pillar of humanity and the breaker of idols – so elevated of spirit and so self-sacrificing that they happily abandoned both their lives and their property. The remarkable stories of self-sacrifice on the part of those early Muslims will stand eternally as examples of true nobility.

The Prophet of Islam had the vision and belief of a world leader, but he began to proclaim his Divine summons to monotheism in a relatively restricted sphere, a closed environment where tribal institutions

exercised great influence and idols were counted as the most sacred and beloved of objects. It was an environment that was not in any way prepared to accept the message of Divine unity.

The heavenly teachings of Islam and the culture to which they gave rise were superior not only to the intellectual atmosphere prevailing in the idolatrous society of the Arabs but also to all the religious doctrines and cultures of that age.

The program for reforming systems of thought and culture that had become corrupt was laid down by a man who had never studied, who was unlettered, and who knew nothing of the religious books or the civilization of his age.

At first he invited his relatives to worship the Creator, and then the people of Mecca and the Arabian Peninsula. Finally he proclaimed to the entire world his mission as the last of the Prophets.

'Ali bin Abi Talib, upon whom be peace, was the first man to accept his religion, and his wife, Khadijah, was the first woman to believe in his heavenly mission. Gradually others, too, proclaimed their belief in the new religion.

'Ali, upon whom be peace, said: "One day the Prophet summoned his relatives and addressed them as follows: 'Children of Abd al-Mutallib! I bring you something more excellent than anything the Arabs have ever brought you. I bring you as a gift the means of your salvation in this world and the hereafter, a Divine Command to which I invite your submission. Which among you will help me, so that he will be my brother, my successor and my legate among you?'

"All remained silent but I, who was younger than all of them, said: 'O Messenger of God, I will help you!' Muhammad, upon whom be peace, then said: "This is my brother, my successor and my legate among you; listen to this words and accept them." [2](#)

With his extraordinary powers of leadership and mature political sense, the Prophet began to refashion human beings by concentrating on their inner beings. He strove to awaken the sense of monotheism that was innate in them by drawing their attention to the mysteries of creation and acquainting them with the infiniteness of the universe.

The Prophet had been born into an environment where human beings engaged in empty boasting out of their shortsightedness and tribal mentality, where privileges were based on unjust social conditions and prejudices.

Now he arose and swept aside all those false privileges. He established new values and concepts with respect to labor, life and social relations, in the framework of a series of rules and ordinances, and strove to concentrate all the goals and thoughts of the human being on a program for liberating peoples from slavery, and delivering the oppressed from the tyranny of emperors and kings. Even for those who do not regard these exalted aims as having a heavenly origin will admit that they are among the most

exalted and previous values observable in human history.

The preaching of the Prophet remained hidden for three years. He established Islam secretly. Throughout the thirteen years that he concentrated his mission on Mecca, the leaders of the polytheists, who understood well the gravity of their situation, resisted him with obstinate hostility, doing their utmost to preserve the beliefs and customs of the Age of Ignorance and to silence the liberating cry of Islam. They conducted themselves with extreme ferocity against all who had converted to Islam.

They fettered and chained those defenseless ones for their crime of having accepted Islam and left them lying hungry and thirsty on the ground beneath the burning sun of Mecca. They placed heavy stones on their bare breasts in an effort to make them forswear the religion of Muhammad. Yasir and Sumayyah, those two heroes, were subjected to the most barbaric of torturers and every day endured the weight of the heavy stones the Quraysh used to place on their breasts beneath the fiery rays of the sun.

These were the first martyrs of Islam: the husband died under torture and the wife was martyred by Abu Jahl. [3](#)

By applying these methods, the idolaters wanted to stifle Islam while it was still in the cradle. For it was a life and death struggle: if the call of the Prophet were to advance, they would lose forever their sovereignty and the empty privileges they had enjoyed. Envy, too, played an important role in intensifying their hostility to Islam.

The continuation of this unpleasant situation turned the city of Mecca into a prison and a place of torture for the defenseless Muslims. The polytheists made it forbidden even to listen to the verses of the Qur'an, and they appointed certain people to go out and meet incoming caravans and warn them not to make contact with the Muslims.

Because of the pressure and cruelty of the Quraysh, a number of Muslims decided to leave Mecca and migrate to Ethiopia, in order to have there a safe and tranquil environment in which to practice their religion, and worship the One God, free from harassment by the unbelievers.

Even then the opponents of Islam did not abandon their persecution of them. The Quraysh sent two envoys to the ruler of Ethiopia in order to persuade him to send back the Muslims. But the ruler received the migrants hospitably and extended his protection to them, so that they were able to carry out their devotional duties in freedom in the land of Ethiopia.

When the envoys of Quraysh presented gifts to the Emperor in an effort to have the refugees sent back to Mecca, he answered that since they had chosen him out of all rulers which whom to seek refuge, he could not expel them without first investigating them.

When Ja'far bin Abi Talib, the spokesman of the migrants, spoke of the beliefs of the Muslims concerning Jesus, upon whom be peace, the Emperor was much impressed and said: "I swear by God that Jesus

had no station beyond what these Muslim say."

Although the corrupt ministers of the Emperor were displeased by his words, he praised the beliefs of the Muslims and gave them complete freedom, turning over to them the gifts that the Qurayshi envoys had brought. He said that when God had given him power, He had not required any bribe of him, and that it was therefore inappropriate that he should now benefit from such gifts. [4](#)

Thus light triumphed over darkness, and the forces of polytheism and ignorance retreated in defeat and despair.

## [The Tactics of the Enemy](#)

When the enemies of Islam saw that their power was crumbling in the face of the new order of monotheism and realized that Islam was felling all their idols, both material and mental, just like an axe felling trees, they first resorted to threats. When they saw that threats were useless, they tried by means of promises and the award of privileges to turn the Prophet back from the path on which he had embarked.

But these efforts, too, proved fruitless as he rejected with disgust all their promises of power and wealth, with all the firmness demanded of the bearer of a heavenly mission. He proclaimed: "I swear by God that if you were to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, I would never abandon my mission until the religion of God spreads over the globe or I lose my life in propagating it." [5](#)

Ya'qubi writes as follows in his history: "The Quraysh told Abu Talib that his nephew was vilifying their gods, accusing them of insanity and proclaiming that their ancestors were in error. They asked him to tell the Prophet that they would give him all of their wealth if he would abandon his preaching. Muhammad, upon whom be peace, answered: 'God did not raise me up as a Prophet in order that I might accumulate the wealth of this world; rather, He raised me up to convey His message to mankind and to call men to Him.'" [6](#)

Then the enemy changed its tactics once more, and employed every conceivable weapon against this movement in order to destroy the newly constructed edifice of Islam.

Old enemies made peace with each other in order to destroy the Prophet. By attempting to blacken the fair name of the Prophet and sully his reputation, they wished both to quench the fire of hatred they felt in their hearts and to neutralize his summons and call.

Everywhere they proclaimed that he was a magician, a sorcerer, a madman, a poet, and they stirred up the ignorant against him. This is the same satanic strategy that the enemies of truth always use in order to undermine and defeat great personalities.

The Qur'an makes it plain that this strategy was not peculiar to the Age of the Prophet of Islam. It

proclaims:

***"Never was a Prophet raised up for earlier peoples without men saying that he was a sorcerer or mad. Is this a legacy of denial they have transmitted from one age to the next? No, these people are themselves rebellious and transgressors." (51:52–53)***

The Prophet, however, consistently refrained from adopting an attitude of anger toward his enemies. Although their fanatical prejudice, their shortsightedness, their blind traditionalism, and their calumnies increased the difficulties that he was facing, they were never able to arouse his anger. Instead, he sought always to bring them to see the truth, by means of spiritual instruction.

Neither pressure nor promises, neither deprivation nor difficulty, were able to shake the determination of the Prophet. Nor did the spreading of cunning and baseless accusations yield any result, for the compelling logic of the Qur'an and its re-echoing melody were too profound and too exalted not to leave an effect on the mind of whoever heard it; or to captivate and transform them. Even enemies were sometimes compelled to admit the truth.

Tabarsi writes in his commentary on the Qur'an: "When Walid, the celebrated sage of the Arabs, heard the Prophet recite the verses of Surah Fussilat, he was profoundly affected. The Banu Makhzum gathered around him and he described the Qur'an to them as follows: 'It has a distinctive charm and a unique beauty. Its branches are laden with fruit and roots are blessed. It is an elevated form of speech, higher than all others.' Thus he spoke and went on his way, and the Quraysh thought he had embraced the religion of Muhammad, upon whom be peace." [7](#)

Although the Prophet had vast resources of patience, he was sometimes distressed by the foolish conduct of his people. He would go into a corner until Divine command summoned him back to his grave responsibilities, for to desist for a single instant in striving toward the sacred goals that had been set for him was impermissible; he had to shun all rest and retreat.[8](#)

One of the distinctive factors enabling the Prophets to succeed in the movements they launched was their steadfastness and power of endurance. The Qur'an mentions the method followed by the Prophets in their struggles as follows:

***"Ishmael, Idris and Dhu 'l-Kifl were all steadfast and patient in fulfilling their missions." (21:85)***

All the envoys of God endured hardship and suffering when they were faced with denial and rejection, but they remained steadfast until the aid of God secured them their triumph.

[1.](#) Mas'udi, Muruj adh-Dhahab, Vol. I, p. 400

[2.](#) Tarikh-i Tabari, Volume II, page 1172; Ibn Athir, al-Kamil, Volume II, page 40; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, page 111.

[3.](#) Halabi, Sira, page 334.

[4.](#) Sirat ibn Hisham, Volume I, page 338.

[5.](#) Ibid., page 278.

6. al-Ya'qubi, Tarikh, Vol. II, p. 17.

7. Majma' al-Bayan, Volume I, page 387.

8. See 74: 1-4.

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