

The Makkan Period

If the Prophet's emigration to Madina opened new vistas for the message of Islam and its eventual expansion over the Arabian peninsula, nonetheless the Makkah period despite the persecution and hardships, was instrumental in laying the firm foundations of Monotheism, which were to flower in Madina later on.

Briefly speaking, the major landmarks of the Islamic call in this period are explained underneath for our readers:

1. The First Revelation

The coming of the Archangel Gabriel with the tidings of Prophethood and the first revelation, as we have already explained.

2. Da'wat Dhul-Ashira

The invitation to his kinsmen the Bani Hashim to accept Islam. The event known as Da'wat Dhul-Ashira was a formal announcement of Muhammad's (S) mission and a turning point in the history of the divine message and its spread. Undeterred it set the tone for the making of the first group of dedicated Muslims, who despite severe persecution and hardships gathered around the Prophet to assimilate the teachings and principles of Islam.

3. Isra'

The night journey *Isra'* as described by the glorious verses of the Holy Qur'an.

***"Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque of which We have blessed the precinct..."* Holy Qur'an (17:1)**

What is meant by *Isra'* is the bodily ascension of Prophet Muhammad (S) from the Sacred Mosque (Ka'aba) to the Remote Mosque in Jerusalem¹ and thence to the heavens to the very presence of

Almighty Allah, and back to earth in a very short span of the same night.

It is related that Gabriel descended one night with the heavenly mount *Buraq* whose speed as the name suggests is far greater than the speed of light, and took the Prophet to the highest and furthest point of the heavens where no creature has ever set foot, and thence the wonder-struck Muhammad (S) proceeded alone to the very presence of the 'Magnificent Light', that only a curtain divided him from the Omnipotent Almighty.

Then Allah spoke with his servant and showed him the signs of His Majesty. The event also known as *Me'raj* confirms that no creature ever, not even the past prophets or any heavenly being either, like the Archangel Gabriel, had been so near to the Almighty's proximity, as the *Habibullah* (beloved of Allah) was summoned by Allah that night.

4. The First Martyrs

The idolaters maddened at Bani Hashim and other Makkans for accepting Islam, singled out some Muslims like Bilal the Abyssinian, Ichabab bin Art and Yasir, his wife Sumaiyya and their son Ammar for severe torture. Despite the barbarities inflicted, the new Muslims refused to forego their faith in monotheism and eventually Yasir and his wife Sumaiyya were savagely martyred at the hands of the infidels.

5. The Emigration to Abyssinia

When the Messenger of Allah felt the growing danger threatening the very lives of the infant Muslim community and its helplessness against the infidels, he instructed some of them to migrate to Abyssinia. The immigrants were led by the Prophet's cousin Ja'far bin Abu Talib, and upon arrival there, were allowed to settle and practice their faith by the Abyssinian ruler Negus.

6. Siege and Social Boycott

Alarmed at the growing number of Muslims and fearing to do bodily harm to the Prophet, because of Abu Talib's towering personality, the Makkan Jahiliyah devised a plan of social boycott of the whole Bani Hashim clan. Hence a total boycott was imposed on the Bani Hashim and the new Muslims to such an extent that all links or contacts whether commercial or social, including buying or selling of goods and even matrimonial alliances were severed.

But the faithful Abu Talib was determined to protect his nephew the Prophet, and together with all his clan members as well as the other Muslims retired to the valley known as Shi'b Abi Talib on the outskirts of Makkah, where together, they could easily override the difficulties and also protect themselves from any incursions. Steadfastly, the Muslims bore the consequences of the siege, enduring pain, hunger and other difficulties for three long years, and ultimately frustrated the infidel's efforts, which forced the

Makkan Jahiliyah to lift up the social boycott.

7. The Year of Great Grief

Shortly after the Bani Hashim and other Muslims emerged from Shi'b Abi Talib, a double calamity struck the Prophet. Umm al-Mu'mineen (mother of believers) Khadija al-Kubra who had given her husband unflinching support, sacrificing her great wealth and property for the cause of Islam, finally succumbed to the hardships and breathed her last. It was a great blow to the Prophet to lose his faithful beloved companion and the mother of his illustrious progeny. But another calamity was in store for Muhammad (S), and three days later that another great benefactor and sincere guardian, his uncle Abu Talib passed away from this mortal world.

These sad events occurred in the holy month of fasting, Ramadhan, three years before the Prophet's historic migration to Madina. Accordingly the year is known in the annals of Islamic History as the '*Year of Grief*'.

8. The Retirement to Ta'if

Aggrieved by the double loss of his loving wife and doting uncle, and faced with the prospect of renewed hostility from the Makkan idolaters, who were emboldened by Abu Talib's death, the Prophet set out for the oasis town of Ta'if. But in Ta'if the call to Islam fell on deaf ears. No one believed in Muhammad's (S) invitation except an old Christian farmer called 'Adhasu' who embraced Islam.

The Arabs of Ta'if ridiculed the Prophet, encouraging simpletons and ignorant children to pelt him with stones and obstruct his path, wherever he moved. The Messenger convinced that his divine mission would not make much progress with the stonehearted people of Ta'if, returned back to his birthplace Makkah.

9. Meeting with a Yathrib Delegation

Even though the arrogantly ignorant Quraishites and other tribes of Makkah and Ta'if had scoffed at the message, divine providence was already at work facilitating help and the spread of Islam from hitherto unknown quarters. In the eleventh year of the Prophetic mission, Muhammad (S) started contacts with delegations.

He came across a group of people from Yathrib led by As'ad bin Zurara of the Khazraj tribe and invited them to Islam. His words received an attentive response, and the group believing in the truthfulness of this great monotheistic call became very happy. The leader asked the Prophet to send a Muslim with him to Yathrib to preach Islam, and hoped that the divine call would unite his tribe with the rival tribe of Aws, knitting them into a single Muslim people.

10. The First Allegiance of Aqaba

On returning to Yathrib the group started preaching Islam among the local people and made some progress. The next year a 12-member delegation of Yathrib Arabs came to Makkah and met the Messenger of Allah at a place called 'Aqaba' and swore allegiance to him as Muslims. On returning to their city they started inviting people towards truth. Thus Islam began to take roots and spread in Yathrib which was destined to be the Prophet's seat of power and would eventually become famous as Madina – the shortened form of Madinat-an-Nabi (city of the Prophet).

11. The Second Allegiance of Aqaba

During the next year of pilgrimage following the first allegiance, 10 men and 2 women from Yathrib called on the Prophet at the same place of Aqaba and swore allegiance to him, promising to defend and spread Islam. The historic meeting was attended by the Prophet's uncle Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib as a witness to the allegiance. The event was instrumental in spreading belief among a greater part of Yathrib citizens, who rallied to the cause of Islam as 'Ansar' (Helpers). Makkan Muslims to protect their beliefs now gradually started migrating towards Yathrib.

12. Conspiracy to Assassinate the Prophet

The Makkan Jahiliyah alarmed at the growing impact of Islam and their abject helplessness to contain its radiant rays conspired to assassinate the Prophet. Moreover, the death of Abu Talib that devoted guardian of infant Islam had removed an obstacle from their path, emboldening the haughty ignorants to plot Muhammad's (S) murder. But Makkan arrogance had reckoned the whole thing without taking into account the Omnipotent Creator Who is always watching over peoples' words and deeds and is even aware of the thoughts they entertain.

The Almighty Allah sent Gabriel to inform the Prophet of the dirty plot. As commanded, the Prophet asked his faithful cousin Ali (a) to sleep in his bed that night, and himself set out for Yathrib taking along one of his companions, the aged Abu Bakr, whom for some reasons he considered it unwise to leave behind at Makkah. That epoch-making night which marked a turning point in the message of Islam, Imam Ali (a) lay on the Prophet's bed as calm and composed as ever, that even the scores of infidels besieging the house and peeping through the windows, not the least suspected the real identity of the sleeper.

It is related that each Makkan tribe or clan was represented in the gang of conspirators hovering around the abode of divine revelation in their vain bid to extinguish the eternal light, even Muhammad's (S) own infidel uncle Abu Lahab was there claiming to represent the Bani Hashim.

At last before the break of dawn, the unholy gang burst into the Prophet's house, full of confidence to

accomplish their dirty deed. But their all-night vigil proved as worthless as their stone-made gods, for to their utter surprise, the figure which calmly emerged from the covers and stood facing them was the Lion of Allah, Ali (a), and not whom they were seeking. Frustrated in their ungodly efforts, the infidels asked Ali the Prophet's whereabouts, to which they received the crisp and to the point reply: "Did you entrust him to me?" Thus Almighty Allah protected His Prophet from the evil of the idolaters, and escorted him safely away from their very midst, without the blind-hearted Arabs perceiving the least.

The event has another significance, for it brings into sharper focus the personality of Imam Ali (a) and his selfless devotion to the cause of Islam and to his cousin's life. He dauntlessly agreed to sleep on the Prophet's bed risking his life and limbs, If the late Abu Talib's personality had been until recently, a deterring factor for the Makkan polytheists from harming the Prophet, now his son the brave Ali had ably filled up the vacuum, showing readiness to sacrifice his own life for Muhammad's (S) sake. Almighty Allah rewarded Ali's selfless spirit of devotion by revealing the following verse of the Qur'an:

"And among people is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allah..." (2:207)

Thus the Almighty brought the stratagem of the plotters to nought. By the time the Makkan infidels recovered from their shock, the Prophet was safely out of Makkah and on his way to Yathrib. Cautious, not to be overtaken by the conspirators lest they start the chase, the Prophet along with his companion Abu Bakr, took refuge in a cave of a mountain called Thawr, three miles south of Makkah.

The Quraish hastily set out to trace the Prophet, and a party of unbelievers arrived at the very cave of Thawr. Strangely, just as the idolaters neared the place, Abu Bakr, perhaps sensing danger suddenly started crying. His unwarranted cries, had not Almighty Allah descended tranquillity on him that very moment making him tight-lipped, would have been enough to lead the Quraish party to the Prophet's hide-out, periling the whole brave selfless episode.

The polytheists arrived at the cave's mouth with an expert tracker and looked everywhere around, but by Allah's command a spider had spun a cobweb over its entrance and a bird had come and laid eggs, presenting the semblance of an undisturbed virgin spot, where no soul had ventured of late.

Satisfied that no one was in the cave, the unbelievers turned back giving up all hope of finding the Prophet. Thus the Prophet safely proceeded to Madina. The *Hijra* (Migration) to Madina also marks the start of the Muslim Lunar Calendar and according to historians it took place on the 1st of Rabi-al-Awwal.

Yathrib – A Brief Description

It was an old oasis town with plenty of springs and wells and the brush surroundings abounded with date palms, vineyards and orchards of pomegranates and other fruits. Situated 450 kilometres north of Makkah it was inhabited by the idol worshipping Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Certain Jewish tribes

like Bani Quradha, and Bani Mugheer and Bani Qainqa'e also dwelt in Madina and had migrated to the town centuries before, to await the last Messenger of Allah, whom they found foretold in their Scriptures.

Deep enmity and a constant state of internecine warfare had sapped the energies of the two idolatrous Arab tribes, who had devastated each others' wealth and properties, in their blind hatred. In addition there was no love lost between the Arab and Jewish tribes. The Jews flaunting their sacred books used to mock the pagan Arabs, saying that soon a Prophet will emerge in Arabia and come to Yathrib and will put an end to their wicked ways.

But strangely enough when Prophet Muhammad (S) did finally proclaim his Prophethood and emigrate to Yathrib, it were the Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj who renounced idolatry and accepted Islam, while the chauvinistic Jews, whose forefathers had come to Arabia, for this very occasion, rejected the Prophet. Their pretext was he was an Arab descended from Prophet Abraham's (a) elder son Ishmael (a), rather than Isaac (a) and therefore unacceptable to the racist Jews.

On the other hand, on Prophet Muhammad's (S) historic entrance into Yathrib, the Aws and Khazraj recalling the Jews' prophecy hastened towards him and accepted Islam, burying once and for all the bloody hatchet of tribal rivalry. Almighty Allah filled their hearts with unity, which Arabia had never known before, and gathered them under Islam's majestic banner. The Jews, treacherous as ever, turned away from Prophet Muhammad (S) as they had rejected and betrayed Prophet Jesus (a) 6 centuries ago.

1. Bayt-ul-Muqaddis or simply Al-Quds in today's Zionist occupied Jerusalem.

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