

MUHAMMAD - MERCY TO THE WORLD

The Prophet Muhammad, s.a.w., was born on the 12th day of Rabi al-Awwal, the third month of the Muslim calendar. It signifies spring, the time when seeds split open to generate countless types of plants. Leaves, too, begin to grow in abundance while flowers start blooming.

The birth of the Prophet Muhammad also brought unimaginable joy to his close relatives and family friends. He was born an orphan. His father, Abdullah, died months earlier in Medinah while on the way back from a business trip to Syria. His uncle, Abu Lahab, later to become his number one adversary, was so delighted when he heard the good news that he decided to free his slave girl, Thuwaiba, who had brought him the news.

According to a saying of the Prophet narrated by Imam Bukhari, because of this good deed, Abu Lahab's punishment in the grave is reduced every Monday, the day the Prophet is born. This story inspired a scholar, Imam Shams al-Din al-Dimashqi, to write:

*If an unbeliever, condemned by the Quran to eternal
pain,
Can be relieved every Monday through his joy at
Ahmad (Mohammad),
Then what must a true servant of God hope to gain,
When with the truth of Tawhid he felt joy at
Ahmad?*

The milestones of Prophet Muhammad's life and times make an interesting reading. He lost his mother, Aminah, at the age of six. He started off his unique career as a young shepherd. Later, at the tender age of twelve, he was recruited into his uncle Abu Talib's business entity that plied the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. For the following thirteen years, under the tutelage of Abu Talib, Mohammad grew to become an astute businessman.

When he attained age twenty-five, he was offered a job by one of the most successful merchants of Makkah, Siti Khadijah. He was sent to trade in Syria. The first assignment for his new employer proved to be a complete success. Words of Mohammad's impeccable handling of business got around to Siti Khadijah. He was not only skilled but also ethical. In this way, he was able to attract more customers and generate a bigger profit.

The lady employer was so impressed with Mohammad's ability to produce results that she asked for his hand. He duly agreed, despite her being many years his senior. He was charmed by her ingenuity and honesty. They had a wonderful life together and were blessed with six beautiful children. Siti Khadijah was the first woman to acknowledge Mohammad's prophethood. She provided encouragement and support to her husband, even on her deathbed.

As a young man in Mekkah, Mohammad was known as al-Amin, or the 'Trusted'. A story was told about the time when the Black Stone was to be placed in its original position upon the completion of the new Kaabah building. The various tribes of Mekkah claimed superiority over one another in terms of the right to carry the stone. Their arguments did not lead them anywhere, and they decided to request arbitration from the first person to enter the vicinity. To their relief, it was Mohammad the 'Trusted'. He calmly spread out his turban, placed the stone in it, and asked every head of the tribes to hold on to the edge of the cloth. Together, they carried the stone, and the issue was amicably solved.

The most important event in the history of Islam was the story of Mohammad's sojourn in the Hiraq cave. Along came the angel Gabriel with a revelation from the Almighty, appointing him as His last prophet. Then came the trials, tribulations, and sufferings endured in calling men to the path of the Almighty. The saddest part of the Prophet's life was when his wife Khadijah and uncle Abu Talib passed away in succession. To make up for these great losses, he was taken on a visit to heaven during the Night Journey.

When he was able to garner a group of loyal and steadfast followers in Makkah, he was commanded by the Almighty to migrate to Madinah. Here, he was able to establish the first official Muslim administration. From Madinah, he led many great and heroic battles against the pagans and heretics of his homeland, Makkah, finally capturing the city that went on to become the focal point of Muslims' congregations.

Then there was the Farewell Pilgrimage, where the Prophet Mohammad proclaimed that the revelation had been completed and the religion of Islam had been perfected for mankind. Shortly after this last pilgrimage, the Prophet passed away, to be replaced by a long line of companions and followers who established a great civilisation that bridged the ancient Greek traditions with present-day modernity. The Almighty says in the Quran that He has sent Mohammad as "a mercy to the whole world".

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