

THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

By
Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi

Translated by
Khurshid Ahmad

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THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

If one were to close one's eyes and imagine oneself in the world of 1400 years ago, one would find that it was a world completely different from ours, having not even the least semblance with the rough and tumble that we find around ourselves. How few and far between were the opportunities for the exchange of ideas! How limited and undeveloped were the means of communications! How little and meagre was man's knowledge! How narrow was his outlook! How engrossed he was in superstition and wild ideas!

Darkness held the sway. There was only a faint glimmer of learning which could hardly illumine the horizon of human knowledge. Neither was there wireless nor telephone, neither television nor cinematograph. Railways motor-cars and aeroplanes were unknown. Hand written books or copyists alone supplied whatever scanty literary material was there to be transmitted from generation to generation. Education was a luxury, meant only for the most fortunate; and educational institutions there hardly existed.

The store of human knowledge was scanty, man's outlook was narrow, and his ideas of men and things were confined to his limited surroundings. Even a scholar of that age lacked by in certain respects the knowledge possessed by a lay-man of today, and the most cultured person was less refined than a man in the street of the present time.

Indeed, humanity was steeped in ignorance and superstition. Whatever light of learning there was, seemed

to be fighting a losing battle against the darkness prevailing all around. What are considered to be matters of common knowledge today could hardly be acquired in those days even after years of calculated and patient research. People used to undertake hazardous journeys—and spend a whole lifetime struggling to acquire that modest information which is everybody's heritage in the present age of learning. Things which are classed as 'myth' and 'superstition' today were the unquestionable truths of that age. Acts which we now regard as heinous and barbarous were then the order of the day. Methods which appear obnoxious to our moral sense today constituted the very sense of morality, and one could hardly even imagine in those days that there could be different way of life. Incredulity had assumed such mighty proportions and had become so wide-spread that people refused to consider anything as lofty and sublime unless it appeared in the garb of the super-natural, the extraordinary, the uncanny. They had developed such complex that they could never imagine a human being to possess a pure and uncorrupted soul or a true saint to be a human being.

ARABIA – The Abyss of Darkness

In that benighted era, there was a territory—Arabia—where darkness lay heaviest and thickest. The neighbouring countries of Persia, Byzantine and Egypt possessed a glimmer of civilization and a faintlight of learning. But Arabia had received no share from their cultural heritage. It stood isolated, cut off by vast oceans of sand. Arab traders, plodding great distances which took them months, carried their wares to and from these countries but they could hardly acquire any grain of knowledge on their journey. In their own country, they did not have a single educational institution or library. None seemed to be

interested in the cultivation and advancement of knowledge. The few who were literate were not educated enough to have anything to do with the existing arts and sciences. They did possess a highly-developed language capable of expressing the finest shades of human thought in a remarkable manner. They also possessed literary taste of a high order. But the study of the remnants of their literature reveals how limited was their knowledge, how low was their level of culture and civilization, how saturated were their minds with superstitions, how barbarous and ferocious thoughts and customs, and how uncouth and degraded were their moral standards and conception.

It was a country without a government. Every tribe claimed sovereignty and considered itself to be an independent unit. There was no law except the law of the jungle. Loot, arson and murder of innocent and weak people had become the order of the day. Life, property and honour were constantly at stake. Different tribes were always at daggers drawn with one another. Any trivial incident was enough to cause a war to blaze out in ferocious fury, which sometimes even developed into a country-wide conflagration ceaselessly continuing for several decades. Indeed, a Bedouin could not understand why he should let off a person of another tribe, whom he thought, he had every right to kill and plunder.

Whatever notions they had of morals, culture and civilization, were primitive and uncouth. They could hardly discriminate between pure and impure, lawful and unlawful, civil and uncivil. Their life was wild. Their methods were barbaric. They revelled in adultery, gambling and drinking. Loot and plunder were their motto, murder and rapine their very habits. They would stand stark naked before each other without any qualms of conscience. Even their women-folk would become nude at the ceremony of

circumambulation of the Ka'ba. Out of sheer foolish notions of honour, they would bury their daughters alive lest anyone should become their son-in-law. They would marry their step-mothers after the death of their fathers. They were ignorant of even the rudiments of everyday routine of eating dressing and washing.

As regards their religious beliefs, they suffered from the same evils which were playing havoc with religion the world over.

They worshipped stones, trees, idols, stars and spirits: in short, everything conceivable except God. They did not know anything about the teachings of the prophets of God. They had an idea that Abraham and Ishmael were their fore-fathers, but they knew next to nothing about their religious preachings and about the God whom they worshipped. The stories of 'Ad and Thamud were to be found in their folklore, but they contained no traces of the teachings of prophets such as Hud and Salih. The Jews and the Christians had transmitted to them certain legendary folk-tales relating to the Israelite prophets. They presented a harrowing picture of those noble souls. Their teachings were adulterated with the figments of their own imagination and their lives were tarred black. Even today, an idea can be had of the religious conceptions of those people by casting a cursory glance at those Israelite traditions which Muslim commentators of the Qur'an had conveyed to us. Indeed, the picture which had been presented of the institution of the Prophethood and of the character of the Israelite prophets is the very anti-thesis of all that those noble followers of truth had stood for.

THE SAVIOUR IS BORN

In such a dark age and in such a benighted country, a man is born. In his very childhood his parents die and, a few years later, the sad demise of his grandfather also occurs. Consequently, he is deprived even of that scant training and upbringing which an Arab child of his time could get. In his boyhood he tends the flocks of sheep and goats in the company of Bedouin boys. When of age, he takes to commerce. All his associations and all his dealings were with the Arabs alone, whose condition had been just described. Education has not even touched him: he is completely unlettered and unschooled. He never gets a chance to sit in the company of learned men, for such men were totally non-existent in Arabia. He did have a few opportunities to go out of his country, but those journeys were confined to Syria and were nothing more than the usual business-trips undertaken by Arab trade-caravans. If he met any learned man there or had the occasion to observe any aspect of culture and civilization, those random meetings and stray observations cannot be given any place in the making of his personality. For, such things can never have that profound influence on anyone which might lift him totally out of his environment, transform him completely and raise him to such heights of originality and glory that there remains no affinity between him and the society in which he is born. Nor can they be the means of the acquisition of that profoundly refined aesthetic outlook and moral sensitivity. Surrounded on all sides by stone-hearted people, he himself has a heart overflowing with the milk of human kindness. He helps the orphans and the widows. He is hospitable to travelers. He harms no one; rather, he goes all out to suffer hardships for the sake of others. Living among those for whom war is bread and butter, he is such a lover of peace that his heart melts for

them when they take up arms and cut each other's throats. He keeps aloof from the feuds of his tribe, and is foremost in bringing about reconciliation. Bred up in an idolatrous race, he is so clear-minded and possesses such a pure soul that he regards nothing in the heavens and the earth worth worshipping except the One True God. He does not bow before any created thing and does not partake of the offerings made to idols, even in his childhood. Instinctively he hates all kinds of worship of the creatures and objects besides God. In brief, the towering and radiant personality of this man, in the midst of such a benighted and dark environment, may be likened to a beacon-light illumining a pitch-dark night or to a diamond shining in a heap of dead stones.

A REVOLUTION COMES

After spending a great part of his life in such a chaste, pure and civilized manner there comes a revolution in his being. He feels fed up with the darkness and ignorance massed around him. He wants to swim clear of the horrible sea of ignorance, corruption, immorality, idolatry and disorder which surrounds him on all sides. He finds everything around him out of harmony with his soul. He retires to the hills away from the hum and drum of habitation. He spends days and nights in perfect seclusion and meditation. He fasts so that his soul and his heart may become still purer and nobler.

He muses and ponders deep. He is in search of such a light which might melt away the encompassing darkness. He wants to get hold of that power with which he might bring about the downfall of the corrupt and disorderly world of his day and lay the foundations of a new and better world.

Lo! A remarkable revolution comes over his person. All of a sudden his heart is illuminated with the Divine Light, giving to him the power he had yearned for. He comes out of the confinement of his cave, goes to the people and addresses them in the following strain:

The idols which you worship are a mere sham. Cease to worship them from now on. No mortal being, no star, no tree, no stone, no spirit is worthy of human worship. Therefore, bow not your heads in worship before them. The entire universe with everything that it contains belongs to God Almighty alone. He alone is the Creator, the Nourisher, the Sustainer and consequently, the real Sovereign before Whom all should bow and to Whom all should pray and render obedience. Thus worship Him alone and obey His commands only. Loot and plunder, murder and rapine, injustice and cruelty—all the vices in which you indulge are crimes in the sight of God. Give up your evil ways; He hates them all. Speak the truth. Be just. Do not kill anyone. Do not rob anyone. Take your lawful share and no more. Give what is due to others in a just manner. You are human beings and all human beings are equal in the sight of God. None is born with the slur of shame on his face, nor anyone has come into the world with the mantle of honour hung around his neck. He alone is high and honoured who is God-fearing and pious, true in words and deeds. Distinctions of birth and glory of race are no criteria of greatness and honour. The one who fears God and does good deeds is the noblest of all. One who is shorn of love of God and is steeped in bad manners is doomed. There is an appointed day after your death when you shall have to appear before your Lord. You shall be called to account for all your deeds—good or bad, and you shall not be able then to hide anything. The whole record of your life shall be an open book to Him. Your fate shall be determined by your

good or bad actions. In the court of the True Judge—the Omniscient God—the question of unfair recommendation and favouritism does not arise. You shall not be able to bribe Him. No consideration will be given to your pedigree or parentage. True faith and good deeds alone will stand you in good stead at that time. He who will be fully equipped with them shall take his abode in the Paradise of eternal happiness, while the one who is devoid of them shall be cast in the fire of Hell.

This is the message with which he comes. The ignorant nation turns against him. Abuses and stones are showered at his august person. Every conceivable torture and cruelty was perpetrated on him. And this continues not for a day or two but uninterruptedly for thirteen long agonizing years. At last he was exiled. But he is not given respite even there. He is tormented in various ways in his abode of refuge. The whole of Arabia is incited against him. He is persecuted and honoured down continuously for full eight years. He suffers it all, but does not budge an inch from the stand he has taken. He is resolute, firm and inflexible in his purpose and stand.

WHY ALL THAT ENMITY?

One might inquire; how is it that his nation became his worst enemy? Was there any dispute about gold and silver or other worldly possessions? Was it due to any blood feud? Did he ask for anything from them? No! The whole enmity was based on the fact that he had asked them to worship the One True God and to lead a life of righteousness, piety and goodness. He had preached against idolatry and the worship of other beings besides God and had denounced their wrong way of life. He had stricken out at the roots of priestcraft. He had inveighed against all distinctions of high and low between human beings, and had condemned the prejudices of clan and race as sheer ignorance. And he wanted to change the whole structure of society which had been handed down to them from time immemorial. In their turn, his countrymen told him that the principles of his mission were hostile to their ancestral traditions and asked him either to give them up or to bear the worst consequences.

One might ask, what for did he suffer all those hardships? His nation offered to accept him as its king and to lay all the riches of the land at his feet if only he would leave preaching his religion and spreading his message.¹

¹ Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had to face tempests of adversity for the sake of truth. He braced all the opposition and oppression with a smile on his lips. He stood firm, undeterred by criticism and coercion. When the natives felt that the threats failed to frighten him and the severest tribulations to which he and his followers were subjected could not move them even an

But he chose to refuse the tempting offers and to suffer for his cause, instead. Why? Was he to gain in any way if those people became godly, pious and righteous?

Why was it that he cared not a jot for riches and luxury, for kingship and glory, for ease and plenty? Was he playing for some higher material gains so that these blessings sank into insignificance in comparison with them? Were those gains so tempting that he could choose to go through fire and sword and bear tortures of the soul and torments of the body with equanimity for years? One has to ponder over it deeply to find any answer.

Can anyone ever imagine a higher example of self-sacrifice, fellow-beings benevolence and charity towards his fellow-beings than that a man would ruin his own happiness for the good of others while those very people for whose betterment he was striving to his utmost would stone him, abuse him, banish him and give him no quarter even in his exile, and that, in spite of it all, he would persist striving for their well-being?

inch, they played another trick – but that too was destined to doom. A deputation of the leading Quraish called upon the Holy Prophet and tried to bribe him by offering him all the worldly glory and riches that they could imagine. They said:

“If you want to possess wealth, we will amass for you as much as you wish: if you aspire to win honour and power, we are prepared to swear allegiance to you as our overlord and king; if you have a fancy for beauty, you shall have the hand of the most beautiful maiden of your own choice.”

But the reply of the Prophet was:

“O Uncle! Should they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, in order to make me renounce this mission, **IT SHALL NOT BE**, I will never give it up till it should please God to make it a triumph or I perish in the attempt.”

This was the character of the Prophet of Islam.

(Editor)

Can any insincere person undergo so much suffering for a false cause? Can any dishonest speculator and visionary exhibit such firmness and determination for his ideal so as to stick his guns to the very last and remain unruffled and unperturbed in the face of dangers and tortures of every conceivable description when a whole country rises up in arm against him?

This faith, this perseverance and this resolution with which he led his movement to its ultimate success is, therefore, an eloquent proof of the supreme truth of his cause, had there been the slightest element of doubt and uncertainty in his heart, he could never have been able to brave the storms which continued in all their fury for twentyone long years.

This is one aspect of the revolution wrought in his being. The other is even more wonderful and remarkable.

A CHANGED MAN AT FORTY-WHY?

For forty years he lived as an Arab among Arabs. In that long period he was not known as a statesman, a preacher or an orator. None had heard him imparting gems of wisdom and knowledge as he began to do thereafter. He was never seen discoursing upon the principles of metaphysics, ethics, law, politics, economics and sociology. Not to speak of being a great general he was not even known as an ordinary soldier. He had uttered no word about God, the angels, the revealed books, the early prophets, the bygone nations; the day of judgement, the life after death, the hell and the heaven. No doubt he possessed an excellent character and charming manners, and was highly cultured, yet there was nothing so deeply striking and so radically extraordinary in him which could make man except something great and revolutionary from him in

future. Of course he was known among his acquaintances as a sober, calm, gentle, law-abiding and good-natured citizen. But when he came out of the cave with a new message he was imbued with qualities that were unique and hitherto unsuspected: indeed he was completely transformed. Here is a glimpse of his personality:

When he began preaching his message the whole of Arabia stood in awe and wonder and was bewitched by his wonderful eloquence and oratory. It was so impressive and captivating that his worst enemies were afraid of hearing it, lest it should penetrate deep into the recesses of their hearts or the very marrows of their beings and carry them off their feet and make them bid good-bye to their old religion and culture. It was so matchless that the whole Arab legions of poets, preachers and orators of the highest caliber to bring forth its equivalent in beauty of language and splendour of diction when he threw the challenge to his opponents to put their heads together and produce even a single verse like the one he had recited.

HIS ALL-EMBRACING MESSAGE

Along with this, he now appeared before his people as a unique philosopher, a wonderful reformer, a revolutionary, moulder of culture and civilization, an illustrious politician, a great leader, a judge of the highest eminence and an incomparable general. This unlettered Bedouin, this dweller of the desert, spoke with such learning and wisdom the like of which none had said before and none could say after him. He expounded the intricate problems of metaphysics and theology. He delivered speeches on the principles of the decline and fall of nations and empires, supporting his thesis by the historical data of the past. He reviewed the achievements of the old

reformers, passed judgements on the various religions of the world, and gave verdicts on the differences and the dispute between nations. He taught ethical canons and principles of culture. He formulated such laws of social and economic organization, group conduct and international relations that even eminent thinkers and scholars can grasp their true wisdom only after life-long research and vast experience of men and things. Indeed, as man advances in theoretical knowledge and practical experience, so would their beauties progressively unfold themselves.

This silent and peace-loving businessman who had never handled a sword before, who had no military training, who had but once witnessed a battle and that also just as a spectator, turned suddenly into such a great warrior that he did not even once retreat in the fiercest of battles. He proved to be such a great military general that he conquered the whole of Arabia in nine years, in the days when the weapons of war were primitive and the means of communication, poorest. His military acumen and efficiency developed to such a high pitch the military spirit which he infused and the military training which he imparted to a motley crowd of Arabs (who had no equipment worth the name) wrought such a miracle that within a few years they overthrew the two most formidable military powers of the day and ultimately became the masters of the greater part of the then known world.

This reserve and quiet man who, for full forty years, had never given proof of any political interest or activity, appeared suddenly on the stage of the world as such a great political reformer and statesman that without the aid of radio and wireless and press he brought together the scattered inhabitants of a desert of twelve hundred thousand square miles, — a people who were warlike, ignorant, unruly, uncultured and plunged in internecine

tribal warfare – under one banner, one law, one religion, one culture, one civilization, and one form of government.¹

He changed their modes of thought, their very habits and their morals. He turned the uncouth into the cultured, the barbarous into the civilized, the evildoers and bad characters into pious, God-fearing and righteous persons. Their unruly, and stiff-necked natures were transformed into models of obedience and submission to law and order. A nation which had not produced a single great man worth the name for centuries, under his influence and guidance gave birth to thousands of noble souls who went forth to far-off corners of the world to preach and teach the principles of religion, morals and civilization.²

¹ Sir William Muir, an adverse critic of Islam, admits in his book, *Life of Muhammad* :

“The first peculiarity, then, which attracts our attention is the subdivision of the Arabs into innumerable bodies... each independent of the others; restless and often at war amongst themselves; and even when united by blood or by interest, ever ready on some insignificant cause to separate and give way to an implacable hostility. Thus at the era of Islam the retrospect of Arabian history exhibits, as in the Kaleidoscope, an ever-varying state of combination and repulsion, such as had hitherto rendered abortive any attempt at a general union... The problem had yet to be solved, by what force these tribes could be subdued or drawn to one common centre; AND IT WAS SOLVED BY MUHAMMAD.”
(emphasis ours). —Editor

² It would be instructive to refer here to an important speech of Jafar Ibn Abi Talib. When the oppression upon the Muslims of Mecca reached its limits, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) asked some of them to migrate to the adjoining state of Abyssinia. A group of Muslims migrated to that country. But the Quraish who were perpetrating every conceivable oppression upon the Muslims did not sit idle. They pursued the emigrants, asked King Negus of Abyssina to forcefully return his immigrants. In the court of King Negus, Jafar made a speech and threw light on the revolution that the Holy Prophet had brought about. An extract from his speech is given below:

“O King! We were ignorant people, given to idolatry. We were used to eat corpses even of dead animals, and to do all kinds of disgraceful

He accomplished this feat not through any worldly lure, or by means of oppression and cruelty, but by his captivating manners, his endearing character and his convincing teaching. With his noble and gentle behaviour he befriended even his enemies. He captured the hearts of the people with his unbounded sympathy and the milk of human kindness. He ruled justly. He did not oppress even his deadly enemies who were after his life, who have pelted him with stones, who had turned him out of his native place, who had pitched the whole of Arabia against him – nay, not even one who had chewed raw the liver of his dead uncle in a frenzy of vengeance.¹ He forgave them all when he triumphed over them. He never took revenge from anyone for his personal grievances for the wrongs perpetrated on his person.

In spite of the fact that he became the ruler of his country, he was so selfless and modest that he remained simple and sparing in his habits. He lived poorly, as before wore coarse clothes, ate the simplest food of the poor, and sometimes went without any food at all. He used to spend whole nights standing in prayer before his Lord. He came

things. We did not make good our obligations to our relations, and ill-treated our neighbours. The strong among us would thrive at the expense of the weak, till at last, God raised a prophet for our reformation. His descent, his righteousness, his integrity and his piety are well-known to us all. He called us to the worship of God, and exhorted us to give up idolatry and stone-worship. He enjoined us to speak truth, to make good our trusts, to respect ties of kinship, and to do good to our neighbours. He taught us to shun everything foul and to avoid bloodshed. He forbade all manners of indecent things: telling lies, misappropriating orphans' belongings, and bringing false accusations against the chastity of women. So we believed in him, followed him, and acted upon his teaching..." –Editor.

¹ On the occasion of the Battle of Uhud, *Hinda*, the wife of Chief of the Pagan Arabs, actually chewed the raw liver of the Prophet's uncle, *Hamza*.

to the rescue of the destitutes and the penniless.¹ He felt not the least insult in working like a labourer. Till his last moments there was not the slightest tinge of royal pomp and show or haughtiness of the high and the rich in him. Like a common man he would sit and walk with people and share their joys and sorrows. He would so mix up and mingle with the crowd that a stranger would find it difficult to single out the leader of the people and the ruler of the nation from the rest of the company.

In spite of his greatness his behaviour with the humblest person was that of an ordinary human being. In the struggles and endeavours of his whole life he did not seek any reward or profit for his own person, nor left any property for his heirs. Even his personal legacy was not for his family, it was left for the *Ummah*.

He did not ask his adherents to earmark anything for him or for his descendants so much so that he forbade his progeny from receiving the benefit of *zakat*, lest his followers at any future time may dole out the whole share of *zakat* to them.

¹ The Prophet said:

“Anyone who dies in debt or leaves behind dependents who are in danger of becoming destitutes, they should come to me because I am their guardian.” His whole life bears ample testimony to this. —Editor

HIS CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN THOUGHT

The achievements of this great man do not end here. In order to arrive at a correct appraisal of his true stature one has to view it in the background of the history of the world as a whole. That would reveal that this unlettered dweller of the desert of Arabia, who was born in the dark ages some 1400 years ago, was the real pioneer of the Modern Age and the true leader of humanity. He is not only the leader of those who accept his leadership but of those who also do not acclaim him as such; even of those who denounce him! The only difference is that the latter are unaware of the fact that his guidance is still imperceptibly influencing their thoughts and their actions and is the governing principle of their lives and the very spirit of the modern times.¹

¹ Arther Leonard says:

“Islam, in fact, has done a work. She has left a mark on the pages of human history, which is so indelible that it can never be effaced... that only when the world grows will be acknowledged in full.”

John Devenport, a leading scientist, observed: “It must be owned that all the knowledge whether of physics, astronomy, philosophy or mathematics which flourished in Europe from the 10th century, was originally derived from the Arabian schools, and the Spanish Saracen may be looked upon as the father of European philosophy.”

— quoted by A. Karim in *Islam's Contribution to Science and Civilization*.

Bertrand Russell, the famous British philosopher, writes:

“The supremacy of the East was not only military, Science, philosophy, poetry, and the arts, all flourished... in the Muhammedan world at a time when Europe was sunk in barbarism. Europeans, with

It was he who turned the course of human thought from superstition-mongering, love for the unnatural and the inexplicable and monasticism towards rational approach, love for reality and a pious, balanced worldly life. It was he who, in a world which regarded only supernatural happening as miracles and demanded them for the verification of the truth of a religious mission, inspired the urge for rational proof and the faith in them as the criterion of truth. It was he who opened the eyes of those who had been accustomed till then to look for the signs of God in the unusual, the extraordinary, the super-natural and, instead made them seek the signs of the Creator to the natural phenomenon spread all around the man. It was he who, in place of idle speculation led human beings to the path of rational understanding and sound reasoning on the basis of observation, experiment and research. It was he who clearly defined the limits and functions of sense-

unpardonable insularity, call this period "The Dark Ages"; but it was only in Europe that it was dark—indeed only in Christian Europe, *for Spain, which was Muhammedan, had a brilliant culture.*"

(Pakistan Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 3 Emphasis ours)

Robert Briffault, the renowned historian, acknowledges in his book *The Making of Humanity*: "It is highly probable that but for the Arabs, modern European Civilization would never have assumed that character which has enabled it to transcend all previous phases of evolution. For although there is not a single aspect of human growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable nowhere in which it is so clear and momentous as in the genesis of the power which constitutes the paramount distinctive force of the modern world and the supreme source of its victory—natural science and the scientific spirit... What we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation; measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs."

Standwood Cobb, founder of the *pressive* Education Association, says:

"Islam was the virtual creator of the Renaissance in Europe"—Quoted by Robert L. Gullick Jr. in *Muhammad the Educator*—Editor.

perception; reason and intuition. It was he who brought about a rapprochement between the spiritual and the material values. It was he who harmonized Faith with knowledge and Action. It was he who integrated the scientific spirit with the power of religion and who evolved true religiosity on the basis of the scientific spirit.

It was he who eradicated idolatry, man-worship and polytheism in all forms so thoroughly and inspired such a firm faith in the Unity of God that even those religions which were based entirely on superstitions and polytheism were compelled to adopt a monotheistic theme. It was he who changed the basic concepts of ethics and spirituality. To those who believed that asceticism and self-annihilation alone formed the standard of moral and spiritual purity — that purity could not be achieved except by running away from worldly life, disregarding all the urges of the flesh and subjecting the body to all types of tortures, it was he who showed the path of spiritual evolution. Moral emancipation and attainment of salvation through active participation in the practical affairs of the world around them.

It was he who brought home to man his true worth and dignity. Those who believed that none but God-in-carnate or a son of God could be their guide and leader were told that just a human being like them without any claims or pretensions to Godhead, could represent the heavenly kingdom and serve as viceregent of God on earth. Similarly, those who used to worship and pay homage to persons who happened to yield some power or authority were told not to degrade themselves since no man was superior to any other man. It was he who stressed the point that no person could claim holiness, authority and overlordship as his birthright and that none was born with the stigma of untouchability, slavery or serfdom on his person. It was he and his teaching which stimulated the

ideas of the unity of mankind, equality of human beings, true democracy and real freedom in the world.

Leaving aside this realm of thought and moving a bit further one will find countless practical results of the leadership of this unlettered person firmly impressed on the laws and ways of the world. So many principles of good behaviour, culture and civilization, purity of thought and deed which are prevalent in the world today, owe their origin to him. The social laws which he enunciated have infiltrated deep into the structure of man's social life and this process continues up to this day. The basic principles of economics which he taught have inspired many a movement for social reform in human history and hold out fresh promise for the future. The laws of government which he formulated brought about many an upheaval in the political notions and theories of the world and continue to assert their influence even today. The fundamental principles of law and justice which bear the stamp of his genius have influenced, to a remarkable degree, the administration of justice in the courts of nations, and from a perpetual source of guidance even for the jurists of the future. This unlettered Arab was the first person who set on foot for the first time practically the whole framework of international relations and regulated the laws of war and peace. For no one had previously even the remotest idea that there could also be an ethical code of war and that relations between different nations could be regulated on the ground of common humanity.¹

THE GREATEST REVOLUTIONARY

In the cavalcade of world history the sublime figure of this wonderful person towers so high above all the great

¹ For a detailed discussion see Abul A'la Maududi's *Al-Jihad fil-Islam* and Dr. Hamidullah's *The Muslim Conduct of State*.

men of all times who are famous as heroes of nations that they appear as dwarfs in his company. None of them possessed a genius capable of making any deep impression on more than one or two aspects of human life. Some are the exponents of theories and ideas but are deficient in practical action. Others are men of action but suffer from paucity of knowledge. Some are renowned as statesmen only, others are masters of strategy and manoeuvring. Some have concentrated on one aspect of social life in a manner that other aspects have been overlooked. Others have developed their energies to ethical and spiritual verities but have ignored economics and politics. Some others have taken to economics and politics, but neglected the moral and the spiritual aspects of life. In short, one comes across heroes who are adepts and experts in one walk of life only. His is the only example where all excellences have been blended into one personality. He is a philosopher and a seer and also a practical embodiment of his own teachings. He is a great statesman as well as military genius. He is a legislator and also a teacher of morals. He is a spiritual luminary as well as a religious guide. His vision penetrates every aspect of life and there is nothing which he touches and does not adorn. His orders and commandments cover a vast field from the regulation of international relations down to the habits of everyday life like eating, drinking and cleanliness of the body. On the foundations of his theories, he established a civilization and a culture and produced such a fine equilibrium in the conflicting aspects of life that there is to be found not even the slightest trace of any flaw, deficiency, or incompleteness. Can anyone point out any other example of such a perfect and all-round personality?

Most of the famous personalities of the world are said to be the products of their environment. But his case is

unique. His environment seems to have no part in the making of his personality. It also cannot be proved that historically his birth synchronized with the order of things in Arabia at that time. What one can say at the most is that the circumstances in Arabia cried aloud for the appearance of such a person who could weld together the warring tribes into nation and could lay the foundation of their economic solidarity and wellbeing by bringing other countries under their sway—in short, a national leader who would have had all the traits of an Arab of those days and through cruelty, oppression, bloodshed, deceit and hypocrisy, or by any other fair or foul means, could have enriched his own people, and left a kingdom as a heritage for his successors. One cannot prove any other crying need of the history of Arabia of that time.

What one can say at the most in the light of the modern idealistic as well as materialistic interpretations of history is that the time and the environment demanded the emergence of a leader who could create a nation and build up an empire. But these philosophies cannot explain how such an environment could produce a man whose mission was to teach the best morals, to purify humanity of all dross and to wipe out the prejudices and superstitions of the days of ignorance and darkness, who looked beyond the watertight compartments of race, nation and country, who laid the foundations of a moral, spiritual, cultural and political superstructure for the good of the world and not for his country alone, who practically and not theoretically placed business transactions, civics, politics and international relations on moral bases and produced such a balanced and temperate synthesis between the worldly life and spiritual advancement that even to this day it is considered a masterpiece of wisdom and foresight exactly in the same way as it was considered in his own life-time.

Can anyone honestly call such a person as the product of the all-pervading darkness of Arabia?

He does not only appear to be independent of his environment. Rather, when we look at his achievements we are irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that he actually transcends all limitations of time and space. His vision breaks through all temporal and physical barriers, passes beyond centuries and millenniums and comprehends within itself entire human activity and the whole of human history.

He is not one of those whom history has cast into its dustbin, nor is he praised only because he was just a good leader in his own time. He is that unique and incomparable leader of humanity who marches with the time, who is as modern in every age and in every era as he was in his own period of time. Truly, his teachings are as modern as tomorrow morn.

Those whom people style as “makers of history” are only “creatures of history”. In fact, in the whole history of mankind, he is the unique example of a “maker of history”. One may scan the lives and circumstances of the great leaders of the world who brought about revolutions and one will find that on each such occasion the forces of revolution were gathering momentum for the destined upheaval, were taking their course in certain directions and were only waiting for a propitious moment to burst out. In harnessing these forces in time for action the revolutionary leader played the part of an actor for whom the stage and the role are set beforehand. On the other hand, amidst all “makers of history”, and revolutionary figures of all times, he is the only person who had to find ways and means to bring together the wherewithal of revolution, who had to mould and produce the kind of men he wanted for his purpose, because the very spirit of revolution and its requisite

paraphernalia were non-existent in those people among whom his lot was cast.

He made an indelible impression on the hearts of thousands of his disciples by his foreful personality and moulded them according to his liking. By his iron will he prepared the ground for revolution, moulded its shape and features, and directed the currents of events into a channel as he wished and desired. Can anyone cite another example of a maker of history of such distinction, another revolutionary of such brilliance and splendour?

THE FINAL TESTIMONY

One may ponder over this matter and wonder how in the dark ages 1400 years back, in a benighted region of the earth like Arabia, an unlettered Arab trader and herdsman came to possess such light, such knowledge, such power, such capabilities and such finely-developed moral virtues?

One may say that there is nothing peculiar about his message. It is the product of his own mind. If it is so, then he should have proclaimed himself to be God. And if he had made such a claim at that time the people of earth who did not hesitate in calling Krishna and Buddha as gods and Jesus as the Son of God, just out of their own fancy, and who could, without compunction, worship even the forces of nature like fire, water and air – would have readily acknowledged such a wonderful person as the Lord God himself.

But lo! His assertion is just to the contrary. For he proclaimed that he was merely a human being like others. He said that he had not brought anything to them of his own accord: all had been revealed to him by God. He virtually proclaimed before his people: Whatever I possess belongs to Him. This message, the like of which the whole

humanity is not able to produce, is the message of God. It is not the product of my own mind. Every word of it has been sent down by Him, and all glory to Him whose message it is. All the wonderful achievements which stand to my credit in your eyes, all the laws which I have given, all the principles which I have enunciated and taught – none of them is from me. I find myself thoroughly incompetent in producing such things out of my sheer personal ability and capabilities. I look to Divine Guidance in all matters. Whatever He wills I do, what He directs I proclaim.

What a wonderful and inspiring example of honesty, integrity, truth and honour it is! A liar and a hypocrite generally tries to ascribe to himself all the credit for the deeds of others also even when the falsehood of his statement can be easily proved. But this great man does not appropriate the credit of any of those achievements to his own person even when none could contradict him, as there was no method of finding out the source of his inspiration.

What more proof of perfect honesty of purpose, uprightness of character and sublimity of soul can there be? Who else can be a more truthful person than he who received such unique gifts and embellishments through a secret channel and still he outrightly pointed out the source of all enlightenment and inspiration? All these factors lead to the irresistible conclusion that such a man was the true Messenger of God.

Such was the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He was a man of extraordinary merits, a paragon of virtue and goodness, a symbol of truth and veracity, a great apostle of God, His Messenger to the entire world. His life and thought, his truth and straightforwardness, his piety and goodness, his character and morals, his ideology and achievements – all stand as unimpeachable proofs of his

Prophethood. Any human being who studies his life and teachings without bias will testify that verily he was the true Prophet of God and that the Qur'an – the Book he gave to mankind is the true Book of Good. No unbiased and serious seeker after truth can escape this conclusion.

Furthermore, this must also be clearly understood that, now, through Muhammad (peace be upon him) alone can we know the straight path of Islam. The Qur'an and the life-example of Muhammad (peace be upon him) are the only reliable sources that are available to mankind to learn God's Will in its totality. Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Messenger of God for the whole of mankind and the long chain of prophets has come to an end with him. He was the last of the prophets and all the instructions which it was God's Will to impart to mankind through direct revelation were sent by Him through Muhammad (peace be upon him) and are enshrined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Now, whoever is a seeker of truth and anxious to become an honest Muslim, a sincere follower of the way of God, it is incumbent upon him to have faith in God's last Prophet, accept his teachings and follow the way that he has charted for man. This is the road to success and salvation.

