



## PROPHET MUḤAMMAD (PBUH)

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص)

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

### LESSON 1: THE EARLY STAGES OF THE PROPHET'S LIFE

In this unit, we will discuss many of the aspects of the Prophet's life before he moved from Mecca to Medina. We will learn a lot about the Prophet's life in Mecca and the great events that occurred there.

#### ARABS BEFORE ISLAM

We learnt in the previous years that the Prophet was sent to a very ignorant and ruthless Arab community. Their practices included:

- Considering newly born daughters to be an evil omen and thus burying them alive
- Families taking pride and boasting about the number of sons and cattle they possessed
- Women being treated as slaves who were expected to yield to any demand of the men's lust.
- Brutal wars being caused by very insignificant reasons with no party willing to compromise, leaving them to fight for years. Due to this bloodshed and instability, most Arabs lived a nomadic life moving from place to place in order to find safety and greener pastures for their cattle.

In the more populated regions, prostitutes hung white flags outside their homes as an indication that they were available for a customer. Heavy drinking and gambling was the norm while superstition and witchcraft was considered to be systems that ran the universe. Above all, the community suffered from anarchy and corruption; there were no systems in place to correct misdoings.

#### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand the environment at the time of the beginning of the Prophet's mission
- Appreciate and understand how and why the Prophet selected Ḥalima
- Be able to understand the false narrations from the true ones regarding the first revelation
- Understand the consequences of the first general invitation to Islam and the difficulties faced by the first Muslims
- Learn about the main events of the Prophet's life in Mecca
- Learn about the struggles of the early Muslims and their patience
- Know that Islam abolished all forms of racism and prejudice
- Learn about the economic blockade imposed by Quraysh against the Muslims, and how the Muslims suffered patiently through this
- Learn about patience and ways of achieving patience
- Learn briefly about the Prophet's ascent to heaven

To summarise, it can be said that the environment in which the Prophet's mission began could not have been any worse because not only were people indulging in every kind of uncivilised and inhumane act, but also were extremely resistant to any form of change and would go to the extent of eliminating anyone who proposed change.

## **THE PROPHET SELECTS HIS OWN WET NURSE**

Because the cities tend to be more polluted and disease-infested than the rural areas, mothers from the cities would send their babies away to the rural areas and pay a woman to breast feed their child. Such women who breast-feed and look after others' children are called wet nurses and such practice was very common in Arabia. The advantage was that the baby would be safe from pollution and would enjoy a healthier environment in the rural areas.

The Holy Prophet's mother *Āmina* was able to breast feed her son for only a few days due to a sickness, after which she began searching for a wet nurse for him. Traditions say that up to 480 wet nurses were offered to the Prophet but he rejected all of them. Like previous wet nurses, *Ḥalīma*, a pious lady from the tribe of *Sā'd* also tried her luck. She says that due to the drought at that time, she did not have any milk in her right breast and in the left one there was very little remaining. Out of desperation *Āmina* accepted for Mohammed to try her out.

*Ḥalīma* hugged the baby against her bosom and deliberately kept him away from her right breast in case *Āmina* would come to know of her situation. As much as *Ḥalīma* prevented him from doing so, Muhammad constantly turned towards her right side while rejecting the left. *Ḥalīma*, feeling very embarrassed, prayed to God to intervene as this was her last opportunity if she was to be successful in being the foster mother of the unique child.

*Ḥalīma* placed the child on her right and as soon as he touched her right breast milk began to flow like a fountain. *Ḥalīma* burst out in tears unable to believe what she was seeing since for several years she had no milk and all of a sudden milk was flowing from her breast freely.

Upon returning to her house with the Prophet, she also realised that her cattle began to produce a greater yield of milk despite the drought and she realised that all these blessings were received because the child was a special one!

One possible reason why the Prophet selected only *Ḥalīma* as his wet nurse was because out of all 480 women she was the only one who believed in one God. In order to prevent the evils of polytheism from affecting the purity of his faith, the prophet only chose a monotheist. Imam 'Ali (as) gives a reason for this selectivity:

*“Take into account who it is that suckles your children, for verily this is what a child grows on” (Mizan-ul-Hikmah, no: 2601)*

## **BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE TRADITIONS REGARDING THE FIRST REVELATION**

In the last lesson, we discussed some of the narrations regarding the first revelation that the Prophet ever received. By now you should be able to differentiate which narrations are authentic by checking them against the principles of Islam and our logical reasoning. We will very briefly go over the arguments.

Some Muslims believe that when the Prophet received the first verse of Surah 'Alaq from *Jibrā'il*, he became very frightened. He doubted what he saw, thought he had become insane and after a brief cessation of revelation, even contemplated suicide. According to the same sources<sup>i</sup>, the prophet rushed home and narrated the story to his wife Khadija who asked him to calm down.

Since the Prophet doubted whether what he saw in the cave was an angel or a devil, Khadija performed a test to determine which was true. Whilst accommodating the Prophet in her lap, she asked him whether he was seeing an angel or devil to which the Prophet says that he was unsure. Khadija then removed her head covering and asked the Prophet what he could see, to which he replied 'nothing'. Then Khadija tells the Prophet that he had definitely been seeing an angel because as soon as she removed her head-covering only an angel would feel ashamed and go away. <sup>ii</sup>

These narrations imply that:

- The Prophet was unable to distinguish angels from devils and needed his wife to guide him
- The Prophet was not aware of his purpose in life (due to the surprised reaction to Jibrāʾīl's message).

Also, could a man who was supposed to be the best example and the best leader for the whole of mankind ever think of committing suicide? How weak would such a leader be? Was Allah (SWT) not aware that such would be the condition of his beloved Prophet when he would receive this message? Furthermore, where did Khadija learn that test? Was Muḥammad so heedless that he could not tell the difference between a devil and an angel? Are angels responsible like men for lowering their gaze?

In contrast let us see what our Imams have told us about the incident. Imam al-Hādi (as) says:

*“...When Muḥammad (saw) reached the age of forty, Allah looked at his heart and found it the brightest and the softest heart. Thus, He ordered the Gates of Heaven to be opened for him. Then Allah sent the angels down to him. Muḥammad saw them. Muḥammad looked at Jibrāʾīl who was within an aura of brightness around him. Jibrāʾīl came to him and shook his hand and said to him: Recite! He said what should I recite? The angel said: Recite in the name of your Lord who created...”*

*Muhammad (saw) was overjoyed and excited. He came down from the mount and was wondering if the pagans of Quraysh would deny him. Thus, Allah willed to empower his Messenger with more certainty and hence he did not pass by any vegetation or rock but they greeted him as the ‘Messenger of Allah’...”* <sup>iii</sup>

Any clear-minded person would be able to judge which of the narrations are closer to reality.

## Review Questions

**Q1. When the Prophet (saw) received the first revelation:**

- a) He did not know an angel was speaking to him and he became very frightened and almost killed himself
- b) He went to ask his wife and her uncle what was happening to him because he did not know
- c) Knew he was chosen by God to start his mission, and although he felt great responsibility, he knew He was chosen as a Prophet

**Q2. Before the Prophet's message, Arabian society:**

- a) Was very advanced and had high morals
- b) Was very backwards and had terrible morals
- c) Was wealthy and had great technology

**Q3. The Prophet chose Ḥalīma as his wet-nurse because:**

- a) She was kind and gentle
- b) She was an experienced wet-nurse
- c) She was a believer in One God

## LESSON 2: THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE BEGINS

### GENERAL INVITATION TO ISLAM AND THE FIRST MUSLIMS

Three years after receiving the first revelation, the Prophet began inviting the general public to Islam. In those first three years, the Prophet invited his family and a select few companions to Islam. After this core had formed, he began to publicly preach the message of “There is no God but Allah” and “Muḥammad is His messenger”. He informed them of the hereafter and the system of reward and punishment therein.

Many people found his words very attractive because they conformed to reason and logic. At the same time, many reacted angrily towards him because they realised his teachings threatened their status and interests. They called him a magician who wished to create discord and disunity amongst them. They even urged their children to throw stones and rubbish at him as he walked in their alleys. With a lot of forbearance, Prophet Muhammad (saw) continued his message together with a few companions who had secretly accepted Islam before this general invitation. These include the likes of Bilāl, Abu-Dhar al Ghifārī, Salmān al Fārisī, Miqdād and Ammār ibn Yāsir. The Quraysh leadership, headed by Abu Sufyān, could no longer tolerate the Prophet's message and behaviour anymore and eventually decided to kill him and subject his companions to extreme torture with the hope of forcing them to surrender. We recount the torture they experienced briefly so that we can appreciate that we are Muslims today because of the enormous sacrifices the Prophet and his distinguished companions made.<sup>iv</sup>

## BILAL

Bilāl had undertaken the protection of the Prophet on himself, but his Master Umayya became furious and wanted to take revenge. He made Bilāl lie bare on the hot sand during the hottest days, placed a big red-hot stone on his chest and addressed him in these words: "I will not release you until you die in this condition or leave the faith of Muḥammad and worship Lāt and 'Uzza (idols)". Despite this torture, Bilāl replied with these words: "Aḥad! Aḥad! Aḥad!" (Professing the Oneness of Allah).

## 'AMMAR IBN YĀSIR

'Ammār and his parents Yāsir and Sumayya were amongst the first Muslims. They were tortured with the sword and flames of fire and were severely whipped. This persecution was repeated so many times that Yāsir and Sumayya became the first martyrs in Islam, but amazingly, they never forsook their belief in God and His Messenger.

Such was the faith of the close companions of the Prophet. Can we claim to be as strong in faith as them? Would we succumb to such pressures? Are we now putting to waste the blood that these men and women shed for Islam by following our own desires instead of following Islam and the Prophet's teachings? If not, are we desperately looking for ways to improve ourselves and help the cause of Islam before our time runs out and before we have to stand to answer our Prophet?

## THE PROPHET DID NOT TOLERATE DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

One of the main parts of the Prophet's message was that everyone, whether male or female, black or white, rich or poor, Arab or non-Arab, were all equal and only the more pious would enjoy greater superiority over others in the eyes of Allah (Quran 49:13). The Prophet did not differentiate between these classes and this was most annoying to the arrogant of Quraysh. They were asked to sit and dine together with the poor, accept their proposals of marriage to their daughters and also to share positions of leadership with them.

These messages were not taken very well by that community because it meant that they would have to change their old habits and attitudes at the onset of accepting Islam.

The oppressed loved these teachings but the oppressors detested them. The short incident below is an example of how particular the Prophet was in ensuring that equality prevailed.

Once a father arrived in the presence of Prophet Muḥammad (saw) accompanied by his two children. In his presence he kissed one child and ignored the other. Noticing this incorrect act Prophet Muḥammad (saw) commented: "*Why do you not treat your children equally?*"

Another story that also highlights this point:

A rich person dressed in clean and elegant clothes arrived in the presence of the Prophet (saw) and sat down before him. A short while later, a poor person wearing old and tattered clothes, appeared, saluted the assembly, and sat down upon finding a vacant place.

The Prophet (saw) had taught them that all Muslims were brothers and in an assembly one should sit wherever one finds a place, regardless of any status. Now, it so happened that this poor man was seated next to a very rich man. The rich man felt very disturbed and tried to collect the edges of his dress around himself, so that the poor man didn't touch them.

Having observed this, the Prophet (saw) remarked to the rich man: "Did you fear that the poor person next to you might make your clothes dirty?"

"No," replied the rich person.

"Then why did you behave so?" asked the Prophet (saw).

"I admit that was the most undesirable thing to do. It was an error and I confess my guilt. I have a companion (soul) that makes good deeds appear evil to me and vice-versa. O Prophet of Allah! As a punishment for this reprehensible act of mine, I gift half of my wealth to the poor man."

Turning to the poor man, the Prophet (saw) inquired, "Do you accept the offer?"

"No, O Prophet of Allah," said the poor man.

People present were taken by surprise, they thought that the poor man was a fool, but then he explained: "O Prophet of Allah, I refuse to accept this offer because I fear that I might then become arrogant and ill-treat my Muslim brothers the way he did to me."

## ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING

### EVIL

The Prophet (saw) taught the above morals and values, as well as many others, and he also tried his very best to encourage people to put them into practice. The Prophet's main obligation in implementing all these morals and teachings was to enjoin good and forbid evil. The Prophet (saw) was a master in this, and his life is full of lessons for us when we want to follow in his footsteps and do the same.

The Prophet (saw) has said:

*“He who sees wrong being done should redress the situation with his own hand, and if he cannot do so then with his tongue, and if he cannot do so then with his heart (disapproving the act), and that is the weakest level of faith.”<sup>v</sup>*

We should always remember the above narration. We should also remember that there is a correct way to go about this obligation. Here are some quick tips:

**Speak kindly to people:** This will encourage them towards doing good. For example, screaming at someone to offer their prayers is obviously not encouraging and if anything, will cause them to dislike praying.

**Educate:** If someone is listening to music or dancing, it is best to explain to them what the negative effects of music and dancing are in order for them to understand. This will be more effective than just saying that music is *ḥarām*.

**Limit to kindness?:** If you have explained numerous times to a person the reasons why something is wrong but they insist on their evil action or keep encouraging you to do that evil action, then frowning at them or avoiding them may be the only option left in order to protect yourself and others in the community.

## Review Questions

**Q1. The Prophet preached that:**

- Arabs should have priority over non-Arabs
- Men have more rights than women
- All people are equal, and we should only precedence according to faith

**Q2. The Prophet taught that:**

- We should enjoin good and forbid evil in any way we feel is right
- We should enjoin good and forbid evil but in the correct way as he did it
- We do not need to enjoin good and forbid evil, as long as we live a good life ourselves

**Q3. Which of the following were close and loyal companions of the Prophet (there may be more than one answer)**

- Salmān al-Fārisi and ‘Ammār
- Abu Hurayrah and Abu Bakr
- Miqdād and Bilāl

## LESSON 3: GREAT EVENTS IN THE PROPHET'S LIFE

So far, we have discussed the early part of the Prophet's message. We discussed the first revelation, and then the general invitation the Prophet made to Quraysh. We then saw how Quraysh tortured the Prophet and his companions in order to make them turn away from Islam. The companions remained steadfast however and continued to declare their faith in Islam and the Prophet (saw).

### THE ECONOMIC BLOCKADE

After several failed attempts to extinguish the light of Islam, the chiefs of Quraysh led by Abu Sufyan decided upon an economic blockade. They formed terms and conditions that every person belonging to the Quraysh had to follow. In brief, these conditions included a ban on:

- every sort of trade with the prophet and his supporters
- association with the prophet and his supporters
- marriage with the prophet and his supporters

The prophet and his companions were exiled and had to live in a valley known as the 'valley of Abu Talib'. They were forced to set up small houses and tents in this region. The blockade which lasted for three years placed immense pressure on the Muslims such that at times all they ate during the day was one date, and even that would have to be shared between two people.

Even in such intense conditions, the Prophet remained patient, calm and composed, placing his full trust in Allah (SWT). Whenever he got an opportunity to preach, he did so. It was also in these three years that the wealth of Khadija served to keep the Muslims alive. She exhausted all her wealth for the sake of Islam.

After three years of intense suffering, the Muslims returned to their homes and trade with the Quraysh was restored. However it was not long before that the Holy Prophet lost his dear uncle Abu Talib and just two months after his beloved wife Khadija passed away. This was a great loss for the Prophet- he called this the year of sorrow- because Abu Talib had taken care of the Prophet since he was young and therefore was a father to him. Even though the Prophet had lost two loved ones successively, he practiced high levels of patience and continued his responsibilities towards Allah undeterred.

Now let us briefly turn our attention to the virtue of patience and see how, where and when we should practice it.

## **PATIENCE (SABR)**

In a famous hadith, Imam 'Ali (as) states that:

*“Success will not be denied to one who is patient, even though it (success) may take a long time to reach him”.*

The truth of this can clearly be seen in the process of building Islam by the Prophet (saw) and the early Muslims. Today Islam is thriving in all corners of the world, after a lot of hardship and suffering in the early days –had the Prophet (saw) and early Muslims not been patient, Islam would not have survived over these generations.

## **SO WHAT IS PATIENCE?**

There are many definitions of patience, but the best and closest ones are the following:

The famous scholar Nasir al-Din al-Tusi said:

*“Ṣabr means restraining the self from agitation when confronted with undesirable events.”*

From this we understand that patience is the ability to tolerate a bad, hurtful or painful situation and to deal with it in a reasonable way without becoming angry, agitated or hopeless.

## **WAYS TO ACHIEVE PATIENCE**

Below is a piece of advice from Imam Khomeini (r.a) for achieving patience:

*“This world is a believer’s prison. Gather all the strength at your command and be patient and forbearing throughout its ups and downs. With courage and fortitude, stand against adversities and calamities. Make yourself understand that the agitation and anguish inside you, aside from involving a great disgrace by themselves, are futile in confrontation with sufferings and calamities. Be happy with God and don’t complain in front of creatures about His irresistible decrees and unavoidable ordainments.*

*During the times of hardships, turn your heart’s attention to God and you will witness its effects in this world itself and your heart will attain such an expanse that it will witness God’s Power. Richness and contentment will then spread through your heart such that everything related to this world will become worthless in your eyes. Patience, forbearance and restraint bring fair, plentiful rewards and have sublime and beautiful forms in the world of Barzakh (purgatory).*

*If you have faith in God and you believe that all the affairs lie in His mighty hands, you will not complain before God Almighty of the hardships of life and the adversities that strike you. Rather, you will accept them willingly, fulfil your duties and thank Him gratefully for His bounties.” (Forty Ḥadīth, Chapter 16, Ayatollah Khumayni)*

## **ME’RĀJ - THE HEAVENLY ASCENSION**

Now we come to another great even in the Prophet’s life which occurred while the Prophet was still in Mecca. The Prophet (saw) achieved the most lofty and sublime spiritual station by personifying great qualities such as patience. This led to a unique achievement for the Prophet, which was that of the heavenly ascension or Me’rāj.

Me’rāj was one of several unique distinctions given to the Holy Prophet by Allah (SWT). This was the physical journey of the prophet at night-time beginning from Masjidul Ḥarām in Mecca to Masjidul Aqṣā in Quds, and then to an unspecified spiritual realm where the heavens and hell and other realities were witnessed by him. The Qurān refers to Me’rāj:

*“Glorified be He who took His slave for a journey by night from Masjidul Ḥarām to Masjidul Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed in order that We might show him of our Signs. Verily, He is the All-hearing, the All-Seeing.” (17: 1)*

It is important to note that, the Me'rāj of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad has taken place more than once. As the Qurān mentions, the Prophet began his journey from Masjidul Ḥarām in Mecca to Masjidul Aqsa in Jerusalem. From this spot he then proceeded to the skies (heavens) where he observed the stars and the systems of the world and conversed with the souls of the previous prophets, and also with the angels of the heavens, peace and blessing be upon them all. Prophet Muḥammad (saw) saw the centre of the tortures and the blessings (hell and heaven) and became fully aware of the secrets of creation, the extent of the universe and the signs of the Omnipotent Allah (SWT).



**Figure 1 Masjid-ul-Aqsa in Al-Quds**

According to an old tradition, when the Prophet returned, the Quraysh asked the account of his journey, and Holy Prophet Muḥammad, not only described the physical particulars of Masjidul Aqsa, rather, to prove that he had gone to Jerusalem, he even informed them of the event that took place between Masjidul Aqsa and Mecca. The Prophet (saw) said to them that he met the caravan of such and such tribe who lost their camel and he asked them to give him water and that he drank from their water. It was not long after that the travellers (of that caravan) reported the exact events (as the Prophet had already reported).

A person asked Imam al-Sajjād (as): "Is there a particular place for Allah (SWT)?"

The Imam (as) replied: "no."

The man said: "Then why did He make his Holy Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessing be upon him and his progeny, journey through the skies?"

Imam al-Sajjad (as), replied: "He made him ascend so that he might become aware of the expanse of the universe and see and hear wonderful things, the like of which had not been seen and heard by the eyes and ears before."<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In our lessons this year, we have learnt a great deal about the Prophet's life while he was still living in Mecca. In future years, we will review this history and we will also learn about the Prophet's life after leaving Mecca and travelling to Medina, where the spread of Islam became very quick and the Prophet established a Muslim community.<sup>vi</sup>



**Figure 2 Masjid-an-nabawi in Medina**

## Review Questions

**Q1. Me'rāj refers to:**

- The Prophet's ascent to heaven during the night, both physical and spiritual, which happened only once
- The Prophet's ascent to heaven during the night, both physical and spiritual, which happened multiple times
- The prophet's great moral values

**Q2. Besides Imam 'Ali (as), the Prophet's main moral supporter during his life in Mecca was:**

- His grandfather Abdul Muttalib
- His distant cousin Abu Sufyan
- His uncle Abu Talib

**Q3. The Prophet's main financial supporter during his life in Mecca was:**

- His grandfather Abdul Muttalib
- His wife Khadija
- His cousin Ja'far

<sup>i</sup> Bukhari 1:3, Muslim 1:141, Tabari 2:47, Behar 18:206

<sup>ii</sup> Al-Kaaeml 2:31,

<sup>iii</sup> Behar 18:205

<sup>iv</sup> For a more comprehensive report, please refer to the book: THE MESSAGE by Ayatollah SubhĀni, under the chapter GENERAL INVITATION

<sup>v</sup> Scale of Wisdom, ĩadĀth number 4210

<sup>vi</sup> General Bibliography:

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