



Revelation and The Quraysh: why did they reject?

the nature of the first revelations and the real reasons for the rejection by Quraysh of the message which prophet Muhammad (saw) brought

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Introduction:

The Quraysh knew Muhammad (pbuh). He had been raised amongst them, and his impeccable character had become well known in a corrupt and immoral society, earning him the nicknames of 'the Honest' and 'the Trustworthy'. Muhammad (pbuh) was a perfect example of morals, noble character, courage and religious faith; he bore the character and nature of a prophet for his whole life before the first revelation. Further, Muhammad (pbuh) was recognised through this and the numerous traits of the promised final messenger which he possessed, by numerous scholars and priests who had studied prophecies of his coming. And finally, the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) never once bowed to an idol or participated in a pagan ritual before the first revelation, going against almost the entire Meccan society, saying, '*I always knew that what they were upon was disbelief.[i]*' In light of all this, Muhammad's (pbuh) assumption of the prophetic office should not have been a surprise to any with knowledge, and should not have been objectionable to anyone. Yet the majority of the Quraysh rejected his message vehemently, even to the point of losing their lives in battle to fight against it.

Why reject?

The question is, what fuelled their rejection? It could not have been a moral objection to Islam, as it appeals only to the natural instinct for good that resides within every soul [ii]. Even in a society that was completely amoral, the individuals harboured the spark of this natural disposition within them and a recognition for the beauty of justice, compassion and nobility that was testified to by their love of Muhammad's (pbuh) character. As Lings puts it, '*the Arabs were in favour of the man but against the message'[iii]*. The character of the prophet (pbuh) had always been living Islam, even before the first revelation; the love of him harboured by many of the Quraysh is indicative of their acceptance of Islamic morality. Nor was the faith he brought a religion that advocated blind faith and falsehood; the verses of the first revelation clearly indicate the high status of learning and wisdom in Islam [iv]. The faith had its foundation in knowledge-seeking [v], and welcomed any scrutiny of its doctrine or verses; which no false religion would invite, let alone emerge intact from. The faith was centred about the welfare of the society and no other; the prophet (pbuh) invited to Islam with the statement that, '*my position is like that of a watchman, who observes an enemy at a far off point and immediately runs to his people for their safety and warns them of the impending danger...'[vi]* The innate love all humans hold for the moral basis of Islam was suppressed by the Quraysh in light of another reason.

Did they think he wanted fame?

None amongst the Quraysh could suggest that this new religion was founded upon paying tribute to the prophet (pbuh). His every action indicates no trace of self-glorification or greed: Muhammad (pbuh) invited to Islam slowly but surely in the early days, appealing to a few people of sound intellect [vii] and not seeking to fool the masses with dazzling displays and propaganda. In fact, the prophet (pbuh) had been a monotheist since his youth, denying the idols when asked to swear by them [viii]; yet he never once so much as attempted to convince another of his beliefs, but instead distanced himself from their polytheistic rituals. At the advent of revelation the prophet (pbuh), who had never before sought fame or influence, didn't rush to proclaim his status to the Quraysh but was instead frightened and agitated [ix], doubting himself [x], and he rushed instead to his home asking his beloved wife to cover him [xi]. After the initial shock had subsided, the prophet (pbuh) kept to this course of action seeking no great following or status, praying with his cousin Ali (as) alone for a period of seven years [xii], and performing pilgrimage secretly [xii]. These are not the actions of someone who planned to use the revelation to become famous. Further, he never spoke once of himself [xiv] and was completely and utterly unswerving in his proclamation of the faith. When the Quraysh offered to, '*place enormous wealth at his disposal [xv]*', the prophet (pbuh) refused it flatly, stating, '*I don't desire anything from them*', instead saying that rulership of Arabs and non-Arabs would belong to the Quraysh if they would accept monotheism [xvi]. ***If his intent was fame or personal gain, the prophet (pbuh) would have sought to amass as large a following as possible, jumping at the offers of Quraysh for wealth and status, and would have changed his preaching to please the mob.*** Instead, the holy prophet (pbuh) endured unspeakable hardships for the sake of his faith, without once giving in or compromising a single letter of his message, saying, '*I swear by Allah that even if they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand, I shall not desist from propagating my religion and pursuing my object, and shall continue my efforts until I overcome the difficulties and achieve my final goal or lay down my life for its sake*' [xvii].

Did they doubt his character?

At their own testament, the reasons of Quraysh could not have been rooted in doubt of the character of the prophet. One of the consequences of the prophet's (pbuh) impeccable character was that no man could question his honesty; he had never been known to lie once, not even in childhood [xviii]. When first inviting the general populace to Islam, the prophet (pbuh) asked the crowd if they would believe him if he were to tell them an army was lying in ambush on the other side of their hill, they replied, '*we have never heard anything false from you throughout our lives*' [xix]. Yet when the prophet (pbuh) invited them to monotheism and Islam, the almost immediate rejection came without any debate or discussion about the nature of his claim to prophethood. Their reasons for rejection could not have been suspicion, as none present made any attempt to investigate the claims made by the prophet (pbuh); rejecting them instantly as if there was a hidden agenda spurring them.

Did they doubt the Revelation?

The fact that a man who was unable to read, had no formal education, and never once composed a line of poetry brought verses of such amazing composition and incredible style was a great argument for Muhammad's (pbuh) message. ***The Quran has a number of miraculous characteristics that indicate its divine origin; the amongst which is its inimitable eloquence and perfection [xx], which no man has been able to parallel.*** The Quran issues a challenge to all who doubt it, to produce verses similar to it [xxi], which has been accepted but never met by several people over time, notably an intelligent and experienced Qurayshi named Nazar bin Harith whose attempts failed miserably [xxii], and four of the most eloquent men amongst the unbelievers in the time of imam Jafar as-Sadiq (as), who returned after a year

without even having attempted to write one verse between them [xxiii]. It also possesses the miracle of its structure, form and style. In the early days of Islam, the Quraish called upon one of their most learned and eloquent men, Waleed bin Mughira, to surpass the verses of the Quran. He went to visit the prophet (pbuh), who recited a few verses at Waleed began to tremble, his hair stood on end and he immediately returned to his house [xxiv]. His nephew Abu Jahl, fearing he had become a Muslim, rebuked Waleed and asked him about the verses. 'Is it poetry?', he asked, to which Waleed answered no. When asked if it was oratory, Waleed replied, 'no, for an oration is a connected discourse, but what Muhammad [pbuh] recites is unconnected, the parts unlike each other, yet it possesses indescribable beauty and melody.' Abu Jahl then asked if it owed its power to magic, to which Waleed replied no; and asked for time to consider what it could be. He pronounced it enchantment the next day, for, he said, 'it ravishes the hearts of men' [xxv]. Similarly, one of the elders of Quraysh named Utbah bin Rabiyya heard some verses of the Quran and remarked, 'By Allah! I have heard from Muhammad a speech which I have never heard from anyone. By Allah! It is neither poetry, nor magic, nor divination' [xxvi]. By their own admissions, the Quraysh did not believe the verses to be magic or poetry, their most learned men confirming that, 'what Muhammad says is not like the soothsayers', and that, 'no signs of insanity are found in him' [xxvii]. Their rejection of the message could not have been based upon doubts of the Quran, as its heavenly verses held such an attraction and sparked such a deep recognition of truth that Christians like Negus, the king of Ethiopia [xxviii], and Umar ibn al-Khattab, who was once one of the fiercest enemies of Islam, could be converted upon hearing just a few lines of it [xxix]. **Recognising its power, the leaders of Quraysh passed a law making any conversation with Muhammad (pbuh) illegal, yet some of the very men to make this law, who were the worst enemies of the prophet (pbuh), could not resist hiding and listening to Muhammad recite in his night prayers** [xxx].

Were they loyal to their faith?

Perhaps we could argue that it was loyalty to their religion that caused the Quraysh to reject the prophet's (pbuh) message, in spite of all the proof in its favour. Yet that doesn't explain the fact that Muhammad (pbuh) was well liked amongst the Quraysh before his assumption of the prophethood, despite reviling their idols on several occasions and refusing to participate in any ritual in their honour [xxxi]. **The Quraysh made no attack upon him for these beliefs, and didn't try to convert him to their faith.** Additionally, the Quraysh had contact with monotheists such as Jews and Christians, one of the latter group being Waraqa bin Nawfal, the uncle of Khadija, and had never formed campaigns to attack them because of their beliefs. Yet the harshness and extended duration of the Quraysh attacks upon Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers was unprecedented [xxxii], despite their inability to bring even one argument to refute the claims of the prophet (pbuh). From their own words, we can tell that these attacks were not spurred by loyalty to their faith; insulting the honour of their idols was absolute last on their list when they complained to Abu Talib saying, 'Muhammad has scattered our united ranks and has created dissension amongst us. He laughed our intellect down and has ridiculed us, and our idols' [xxxiii]. This quote spells out the order of their complaints about the Prophet (saw): first they object to the restructure of society and loss of their own power, next they complain that their egos have been bruised by him, and then finally a passing mention of their idols. **Their main objection was about their loss of influence: they hated the threat that Islam would dismantle the idolatrous and immoral society they were so comfortable and respected in.** 'Islam was penetrating and expanding day after day, and the spiritual rapture of the religion of the Prophet and the attractive and eloquent words of the Heavenly Book...were lending support to it' [xxxiv]. **This is what the Quraysh recognised and feared, what caused them to reject Islam and what drove them to commit numerous despicable acts against Muhammad (pbuh) and all who believed in him.**

Protecting their interests

This much is evident from every action of the Quraysh. Before the general invitation to Islam, the Quraysh paid little attention to Muhammad (pbuh) [xxxv], yet they began to worry when the Muslims made themselves known and began to associate freely with those who responded to the prophet's (pbuh) public invitation [xxxvi]. Instead of debating with Muhammad (pbuh) over his claims, the Quraysh decided on a course of action that indicates their total lack of any rational reason for opposing Islam, and started a series of attacks against the prophet and his followers. Several stupid individuals showed their jealousy of Muhammad (pbuh) and greed for status by wishing to be the prophet themselves, one even informing Muhammad (pbuh) arrogantly that he was more suited to the task of prophecy [xxxvii]. They used insults and violence, once even strangling the prophet (pbuh) with his turban and dragging him through the street [xxxviii]. They could not take the risk that Muhammad's religion would succeed, and did not want to contemplate the possibility that their actions were in fact leading them to damnation [xxxix]. The Quraysh launched a merciless ten-year campaign against Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers, trying to kill the prophet (pbuh) on several occasions [xl], and drawing up a pact against them which resulted in a 3 year economic blockade that forced the Muslims to leave their homes, live in a valley outside Mecca and suffer incredible hardships. The Quraysh banned every form of trade and business with the Muslims, to the extent that they would even purchase an item they had no use for at a higher price, just to prevent a Muslim buying it. The Muslims didn't even have adequate means to feed themselves, often having to share a single date amongst two people, and had few helpers since the Quraysh leaders had planted spies on the route to the valley to make smuggling supplies to them very difficult. The pact against Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers was instigated by the leaders of the Qurayshi society, but was so harsh that many were not happy with it, until finally a few men decided to tear the agreement up [xli].

Divine victory

And when they went to the ka'bah to destroy the agreement, they found a termite had eaten up the entire sheet, except for the words, '*In the name of the Lord*' [xlii]. Allah, the Almighty, provided the final word in testimony for the prophets veracity (pbuh) with this act. The prophet's (pbuh) endurance of terrible hardships for the sake of his Lord did not go unnoticed, his reliance upon the mercies of the Beneficent did not leave him disappointed: Allah had chosen Muhammad (pbuh) for this task, and would not let any evil come to him. When Abu Jahl planned to kill the prophet (pbuh) as he prayed, he was overcome by fear, seemingly for no reason, and left without doing any harm [xliii]. When the Quraysh chased Muhammad (pbuh) to prevent his journey to Madina, they passed by his hiding place when they saw a bird nesting nearby and a large spider's web covering the entrance [xliv]. Despite every effort of the Quraysh, Islam blossomed through the beauty of the prophet (pbuh) and the truth of his message, gaining followers who embraced it and were even willing to suffer in its cause. Uthman bin Maz'un had fled Mecca but returned under the protection of Waleed bin Mughira, and upon seeing the plight of his fellow Muslims asked Waleed to renounce him publicly so that he might share the fate of his brothers. When Uthman was attacked, Waleed rebuked him for declining the protection, to which Uthman replied, '*I am under the protection of Almighty Allah*', and when Waleed offered his protection again, Uthman told him, '*I shall not accept it at all*' [xlv]. ***The early believers endured tortures sometimes even to the point of death, but clung and returned to the message of Islam knowing that with it came real life, and to be tortured and live as a Muslim was infinitely preferable to being comfortable but spiritually dead*** [xlvi].

Conclusion

The Quraysh's rejection of the message was not on moral grounds; Lady Khadija (sa),

the most noble lady amongst the Quraysh, believed so strongly that she gave up her vast wealth for the cause of Islam. Their reason was not in doubt over the prophet's character; Abu Talib (ra), a respected member of community, supported the prophet (pbuh) publicly and refused to adopt another in his place [xlvi]. Nor did they deny the amazing qualities of the Quran [xlviii], nor that the advent of another prophet was due [xlix]. And by their own admission, insults to their idols was the least of their troubles, unless they were inciting the public against Muhammad (pbuh), at which point it became their primary concern [i]. If they had been sincere in following a religion, the Quraysh would have reacted like Negus (Nejashy), or Umar, or Tufayl, who started off with cotton wool in his ears, and ended with the declaration, 'by Allah! I had never heard a narration more appealing and had never seen a law more moderate!'[li]. But they were driven by greed and self-superiority, and had no interest in obeying a religion that outlawed what they enjoyed and gave them no special status over their fellow men. So instead, they set about trying to demolish Islam through attacks and propaganda, not realising that their vain attempts would not deter the prophet (pbuh) or his faithful followers, who knew that all victory and success comes from Allah alone.

[i] *Life of the Messenger*, An-Nawawi, tr. Abu Rumaysah, Daar-us-Sunnah publications (2001), p.22

[ii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.11, 'The First Manifestation of Reality: A Patent Example'

[iii] *Muhammad, His life based on the earliest sources*, M. Lings, Millat Book Centre (India), p.57

[iv] Holy Quran, 96:1-5

[v] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.11, 'The First Manifestation of Reality: Commencement of Revelation'

[vi] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.15, 'The General Invitation'

[vii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.14, 'Cessation of Revelation: Holy Prophet commenced reformation from a limited circle'

[viii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.12, 'The First Revelation: The Faith of the Prophet before the prophetic mission'

[ix] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.11, 'The First manifestation of reality: Trail of revelation'

[x] *Muhammad, His life based on the earliest sources*, M. Lings, Millat Book Centre (India), p.45

[xi] as 9 above, and *Muhammad, His life based on the earliest sources*, M. Lings, Millat Book Centre (India), p.44

[xii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.13, 'Who were the first persons to embrace Islam?: The third evidence'

[xiii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.12, 'The First Revelation: The faith of the prophet before the prophetic mission'

[xiv] Holy Quran

[xv] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.15, 'The General Invitation: Quraysh try to allure the Holy Prophet'

[xvi] as 15 above

[xvii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, ch.15, 'The General Invitation: Steadfastness and Fortitude of the Holy Prophet'

[xviii] 'The Life and Religion of Muhammad, *Hiyat al Qulub*', M. B. Al-Majlisi, tr. Rev. L. J. Merrick, Ansariyan Publications – Iran, 1st ed., (1997), pp.52-3

- [xix] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'The General Invitation'*
- [xx] '*The Life and Religion of Muhammad, Hiyat al Qulub*', M. B. Al-Majlisi, tr. Rev. L. J. Merrick, Ansariyan Publications – Iran, 1st ed., (1997), pp.108-9
- [xxi] Holy Quran, REF!
- [xxii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.18, 'Rusty Weapons: Imposture of Nazar bin Harith'*
- [xxiii] as 20 above, p.109
- [xxiv] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.16, 'Judgement of Quraysh about the Holy Quran: Judgement of Walid'*
- [xxv] '*The Life and Religion of Muhammad, Hiyat al Qulub*', M. B. Al-Majlisi, tr. Rev. L. J. Merrick, Ansariyan Publications – Iran, 1st ed., (1997), pp.109-110
- [xxvi] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.16, 'Judgement of Quraysh about the Holy Quran: Another Example'*
- [xxvii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.18, 'Rusty weapons: Undue Calumnies'*
- [xxviii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.17, 'the First Migration: Mission of the Christians'*
- [xxix] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation: Umar Ibn Khattab embraces Islam'*
- [xxx] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.18, 'Rusty Weapons: The Law-breaking Legislators'*
- [xxxi] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.12, 'The First Revelation: the faith of the Prophet before the prophetic mission'*
- [xxxii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.20, 'Economic Blockade: The Pitiabile condition of Bani Hashim'*
- [xxxiii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation: Quraysh try to allure the Holy Prophet'* and a similar statement can be found in *Muhammad, His life based on the earliest sources*, M. Lings, Millat Book Centre (India), p.52
- [xxxiv] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation: steadfastness and fortitude of the Holy Prophet'*
- [xxxv] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.14, 'Cessation of Revelation: Holy Prophet commenced reformation from a limited circle'*
- [xxxvi] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation: steadfastness and fortitude of the Holy Prophet'*
- [xxxvii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.16, 'Judgement of the Quraysh about the Holy Quran'*
- [xxxviii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation: an example of the tortures and persecution by Quraysh'*
- [xxxix] as 37 above
- [xl] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation: Abu Jahl lies in ambush for the Holy Prophet'*
- [xli] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.20, 'Economic Blockade, the pitiabile condition of Bani Hashim'*
- [xlii] as 39 above
- [xlili] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation, Abu Jahl lies in ambush for the Holy Prophet'*
- [xliv] Holy Quran, REF!
- [xlv] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.17, 'The First Migration: Return from Ethiopia'*
- [xlvi] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.16, 'Judgement of Quraysh about the Holy Quran'*

[xlvii] *The Message*, J. Subhani, *ch.15, 'General Invitation'*

[xlviii] as 25 above

[xlix] *Muhammad, His life based on the earliest sources*, M. Lings, Millat Book Centre (India), *p.44*

[l] as Abu Jahls speech prior to his plot to assassinate the prophet (pbuh), as 43 above.

[li] As 22 above under '*Another Example*', and *Muhammad, His life based on the earliest sources*, M. Lings, Millat Book Centre (India), *p.55*