



Strengthening the New Religion

A discussion of the measures taken by the Prophet (saw) to protect the nascent religion of Islam

To Medina...

The prophet (pbuh) undertook the 4000 kilometre journey¹ leaving the dry, barren and unreceptive land of his birth behind for a new beginning in the fertile stretches of Medina. The seeds of faith, that lie dormant within the hearts of all men, had already been stirred to life in many of the city's inhabitants; before the prophet's (pbuh) arrival they removed all signs of idolatry from their homes, streets and bazaars²; yet the atmosphere was still far from stable ground for an Islamic community. Although the majority had embraced Islam, tensions remained between various groups within Medina on account of their previous enmity; most notably between the Aws and Khazraj, whose 120 year war had ended only a short time before³. When the prophet (pbuh) first arrived in Medina, every chief in the city flocked around his camel and insisted that he stay with him; the prophet (pbuh) could not accept the invitation of one over the other, and simply let his camel choose where he would dismount⁴. When reminded of past conflicts, a group of Bani Aws and Bani Khazraj almost started battle again, until the prophet (pbuh) rushed to them and said, '*Islam has made you brothers of each other and has made all the enmities and grudges a forgotten thing of the past*'⁵. In order to establish a community, the prophet (pbuh) would have to unite not only the various factions of the Ansar in Medina, but also the dozens of Muhajirun that had arrived in the city with no possessions or means of sustaining themselves or their families. In addition, the new Islamic community was not immune to corruption through resurgence of pre-Islamic attitudes, as exhibited by Sawdah when she saw her chief amongst some captives⁶, or the influence of hypocrites from within, such as Abdullah bin Ubay who held a grudge against the prophet (pbuh) over his lost status⁷. If left unchecked these aspects would weaken the Muslims at Medina, leaving the community open and vulnerable to malicious attacks from both the Quraysh of Mecca and the Jews of Medina, who were hostile towards the rise of Islam.

Brotherhood in Faith

The prophet (pbuh) first set about stabilising the precarious situation by uniting the Muslims under the common banner of faith, and demolishing the barriers of tribe and class. To unite the believers, the prophet (pbuh) decreed that every man from the Ansar should take himself a brother from the Muhajirun, who would be nearer to him than any other, and share his home and property⁸. To dispel the divisions of class, the prophet (pbuh) stated that, '*the criterion of superiority is piety, and a Muslim woman is equal to a Muslim man*'⁹. The prophet (pbuh) brought home the message of these words with the example of his own sublime conduct, by adhering to the same standards he expected from the believers. He refused to forgo the ransom of any of the Qurayshi war captives on account of their status or closeness to him¹⁰, and let the Muslims decide the fate of his own son-in-law, not even taking back the necklace given to his daughter Zainab by her mother Khadija on her wedding day, until the Muslims had agreed to remit it¹¹. He divided the spoils of war equally amongst all participants, no matter the rank, even setting aside a portion for the successors of those that had been martyred in the battle¹². He asked both the Muhajirun and Ansar if they wished to fight before engaging in each battle¹³, and accepted the advice of his companions in matters that had not been divinely decreed¹⁴. He persuaded his cousin Zainab to marry his

freed slave Zaid¹⁵, then later married her himself once the couple had been divorced¹⁶, which served to illustrate that the former wives of adopted sons are not prohibited to men in Islam. He refused to marry his daughter Fatima to the many rich and influential men who asked for her hand, instead obeying the wishes of his Lord and choosing his cousin Ali; the best of men who had only the simplest of possessions¹⁷. Contrary to the traditions prevalent at the time, the prophet (pbuh) asked for only a small dowry for his daughter¹⁸, as an example to make marriage a practical alternative to the adulterous practices of the past. The prophet (pbuh) delicately approached the issue of drinking which was prevalent in Arabia, by patiently reciting the verses that were gradually revealed to him, until the collective attitude towards alcohol turned and the majority of people were happy to give it up¹⁹. Although he encouraged prayer and devotion, the prophet (pbuh) never once asked the population to refrain from satisfying any physical needs they may have, only encouraging them to do so in the right manner²⁰. The prophet (pbuh) replaced every past pleasure with a practical alternative, every arrogance over status with brotherhood in faith, and every unjust division within the society with equality for all. The prophet (pbuh) said, '*...I have been appointed to the prophetic mission to uproot all imaginary discriminations and privileges and to replace them by equality in the rights of men*'²¹.

The Mosque: centre of the community

Soon after arriving in Medina, the prophet (pbuh) started building the mosque, which would serve as the structural centre of the community. Within its walls the Muslims found not only a place to pray, but a school, a literary centre, and a meeting place for the Islamic government²²; promoting management of political and social affairs through the core guidance of religion. In contrast to the tribe-governed chaos that was common to the whole Arabian peninsula, the new Islamic state in Medina had an organised governmental system, with laws set by Allah and headed by the prophet (pbuh), who had a network of helpers and representatives²³. This improvement did not go unnoticed by certain groups who were hostile towards Islam, such as the Jews residing in Medina, who tried to incite enmity between the Muslims to weaken their ranks. The changing of the qiblah from Jerusalem to Mecca²⁴ afforded Islam a greater independence from the influence of the Jews, who would not embrace Islam and insisted on schemes to slander and ridicule the Muslims. One such scheme resulted in the expulsion of all Jews in Medina following a siege, which restored political unity and brought almost the entire city unanimously under the banner of Islam²⁵. The change of qiblah also allowed the prophet (pbuh) to identify those of his own followers that may be double-minded and hypocritical, who could abandon him when the situation turned against their pleasure²⁶. Yet the Muslims still faced danger at the hands of the external enemy, the Quraysh in Mecca; who were still violently opposed to any stabilisation of an Islamic presence within Arabia. With freedom from the oppression they had suffered in Mecca, the prophet (pbuh) directed the Muslims through their first offensive measures, to build their physical strength from the firm foundation of the spiritual.

Islamic attitudes

The prophet (pbuh) started by gathering information of the activities of the Quraysh, asking Abdullah bin Jahsh to bring him news of their caravans. When Abdullah returned with some of the Quraysh possessions, the prophet (pbuh) refused to take a share, establishing the rule of sanctity of the sacred months above any material gain²⁷. He later allowed the Muslims to take possession of one of the Quraysh caravans, and keep it unless the Quraysh agreed to return the property of the Muhajirs which they had unlawfully kept²⁸. When two men had been captured from the Quraysh army, the prophet (pbuh) chided his companions for beating them during interrogation until they said what their captors wished to hear²⁹. The prophet (pbuh) was a perfect example of Islamic morals even in times of war; only killing the ringleaders amongst the war-captives, ransoming the rest³⁰, and ordering that no harm should come to those who had helped the Muslims through their vulnerable time in Mecca³¹. Through his example, the prophet (pbuh) combated some of the pre-Islamic attitudes still present in his followers. Although Muslim, they were still sometimes swayed by greed and doubt; which prompted the majority to disobey

the prophet's (pbuh) orders at Uhud to collect the booty, then to flee the scene when being attacked from behind despite being called back by him. The battle of Badr was the first great military victory of Islam, spreading a formidable reputation for the Muslim army over the Arabian Peninsula, and depriving the Quraysh of some of the most prominent amongst their chiefs³². The battle of Uhud taught the Muslims a vital lesson; that standing and fighting for Allah and Islam no matter what the odds would never lead to defeat, which was the only destination of materialistic intentions and disobedience to the prophet (pbuh). Their faith and intentions were what separated the Muslims from the Quraysh, and the only thing that could ensure their victory³³. Following the events at Uhud, the class system had been fully replaced by status according to faith; the handful of true believers who had remained to fight even if they thought the prophet (pbuh) was dead, those who had fled out of a momentary lapse, and those hypocrites whose faith was so weak that they wished to seek refuge with the idolaters instead of the Almighty³⁴. It became clear to the believers that the status of any Muslim was not fixed by birth, but proportional to his efforts in Islam, with the clear distinction between the rank of hypocrites and that of believers serving as a warning against two-facedness and those who practice it. This would encourage many to atone for their past mistakes with renewed vigour, while strengthening the core of the Muslim community from the influence of hypocrites within, who were of the lowest status and as such did not deserve to be listened to.

Leading by example

The radiant example of the Prophet (pbuh) and his family strengthened and inspired the Muslims to greater heights of devotion and courage. Many of them had fled Mecca, leaving behind all of their possessions in favour of their faith, and faced at Badr the prospect of battle to ensure their status and position against those who had persecuted them. The Quraysh had sent an envoy of around 1000 men to guard the caravan, three times the number of men in the Muslim army³⁵, with most of the chiefs of the Quraysh present amongst them³⁶. The prophet (pbuh) and those closest to him faced all this alongside the Muslims, and were willing to make a stand against the enemy; the Muslims chose to follow their example and fight, telling the prophet (pbuh) that none of them would lag behind in following him even if he were to lead them into the sea³⁷. Unlike the leaders of the Quraysh who tried to avoid battle, such as Abu Lahab who paid for a man to go in his stead, and Umayyah who only joined the army when shamed with accusations over his woman-like behaviour³⁸, the prophet (pbuh) never shied from his duty. He went out himself to acquire information about the activities of the Quraysh³⁹, he donned his mail and fought on the front lines with his men, such that no one was '*nearer to the enemy than he*'⁴⁰. He personally straightened the ranks of his men before battle, and thought of them as equal to him, such that when one soldier protested at the prophet's (pbuh) strike, he did not hesitate to lift up his shirt and ask the man to inflict the same injury upon him⁴¹. He listened to the opinions of his followers, whether favourable to him or not⁴², when possible conducting matters in accordance to their wishes above his own⁴³. He led his men courageously when they were outnumbered 3 or more to 1 at Badr, and nominated his own family members Hamzah and Ali to take part in the traditional single combat before the battles at Badr⁴⁴ and Uhud⁴⁵. He and those closest to him never once thought of fleeing as an option, even when almost abandoned at Uhud, and sustained terrible injuries but never lost their composure or faith⁴⁶. The Prophet (pbuh) never acted out of emotion in spite of reason, even towards the killer of his own dear uncle, who later came before him to embrace Islam⁴⁷. Through all of the hardship, the prophet (pbuh) never lost sight of his aim, and was firm in the knowledge that his Lord has power over all.

The strength of Faith

The Muslims were inspired to an immeasurable degree by this. The prophet (pbuh) feared none but Allah, and asked only Him for support⁴⁸, and was answered with verses⁴⁹ and divine aid; a host of angels to fight beside him⁵⁰. Here was the prophet (pbuh), fighting, risking his life alongside his men, but untouched by even the slightest fear, doubt or hesitation. He trusted his Lord; the Muslims beheld what could only be the result of complete sincerity in faith through the every action of the prophet (pbuh), and understood that death was not to be feared, and that life would not be worth living unless they followed

him. Liberated from all irrational fears, the Muslims saw clearly that *'both killing and being killed were blessings of Allah'*⁵¹, and through this knowledge acquired a strength far beyond their own. When Mu'adh's arm was all but severed at the battle of Badr, he pulled it off and continued to fight until martyred⁵². When Umayr heard that being killed was all that stood between him and paradise, he immediately got up and prepared for combat, being one of the first to fight⁵³. Awf and others stripped off their mail then heedlessly plunged into the fray, concerned only with earning Allah's pleasure⁵⁴. Many left their families and loved ones without a second glance back, even praying that they would not return from the battle and would meet martyrdom there⁵⁵. When Abu Dujanah was absolved from his allegiance to the prophet (pbuh) at the most difficult point in the battle of Uhud, he wept bitterly and said, *'where should I go? Should I go to my wife who has to die? Should I go to my house which will be ruined? Should I go to my wealth and property which will be destroyed? Should I run towards death which must come?'*⁵⁶. Even the lowliest followers of the prophet (pbuh) were transformed through the brilliant light of their beliefs into heroes and champions for the cause of Islam; children, old men, women, willing to fight until their last breath despite weakness or injury. And more, the strength of faith manifested itself not only in the heat of battle, but amongst the mothers and wives and sisters who patiently bore the loss of their loved ones, content with what their Lord had decided⁵⁷, and those who were willing to give up their every possession in servitude of the prophet (pbuh) without a second thought. Those beautiful few were firm in faith through victory and defeat, meeting the taunts of the enemy with the words, *'our slain are in Paradise, yours are in the Fire'*⁵⁸.

Heroes amongst men

Through this faith, the Muslims were eager to meet their death for the sake of their Lord both in war as soldiers, or in peace as missionaries sent to hostile tribes, with the words, *'I don't wish that even a thorn may prick the foot of the Prophet, although I may be set free in lieu thereof'*⁵⁹. They were willing to fight against their blood relatives, preferring the kinship of Islam⁶⁰. They had learnt that the actions of an individual could make a difference if he fought on the side of truth; like Ali, who fought and dispersed almost every unit that attacked the prophet (pbuh) in Uhud, fighting until his sword broke in two. Or Abu Dujana, who made himself a human shield from the prophet (pbuh), and flatly refused to be absolved of his allegiance, preferring death in honour. Or Hamza, one of the most loyal and brave men in Arabia, who fought like a lion for the sake of Islam, his only object to defend truth irrespective of the danger involved. Or Nasibah, who came only to give water but found herself compelled to act when she saw the prophet (pbuh) under attack, repelling blows with whatever came to hand, fighting and encouraging her son to fight despite painful injuries. As long as their intentions were pure and their actions for Allah, the Muslims would not fail. And whether aided by a host of angels, or tried with great loss, the sincere believers understood that it was the will of the Almighty and were content in that.

The result

The saplings that grew from the seeds of faith, in many cases, would not have survived if not for the efforts of the prophet (pbuh). He prepared the foundations within which they could grow, the community and government built around a core of Islam. Through military activities he pushed away and fenced in the thorns of the Quraysh and Jews, and made clear the hypocrites, the weeds amongst the community. As the rain of divine mercy struck the parched land and restored it to life, the light and warmth of the prophet's (pbuh) brilliant example shone down upon the believers, inspiring them to erupt into growth and soar upwards, branches extended towards the heavens. They were strengthened through both the victories and defeats, and fought in the way of Allah with every ounce of their being, such that their reputation alone deterred the idolaters from further direct attacks⁶¹, and their attitude inspired belief within the hearts of those who until then had resisted Islam⁶².

- ¹ J. Subhani, *The Message*, ch. 25, under 'Schedule of the Journey'
- ² as 1 above, 'Tumult and glamour of joy in Madina'
- ³ as 1, ch. 26, 'Another plan to overthrow the government of Islam'
- ⁴ as 2 above
- ⁵ as 3 above
- ⁶ M. Lings, 'Muhammad, his life based on the earliest sources', Millat Book Centre (India), p.155
- ⁷ as 2 above
- ⁸ REF!! Hiyat maybe?
- ⁹ As 1, ch. 36 'Zayd marries the prophet's cousin'
- ¹⁰ as 6 above, p.155
- ¹¹ as 1 above, ch. 30, 'final decision about the captives'
- ¹² as 11, 'after the battle of Badr'
- ¹³ as 6 above, p.140-1
- ¹⁴ 6 above, p.143
- ¹⁵ as 9 above
- ¹⁶ as 9, 'Marriage for banning another wrong custom'
- ¹⁷ as 1, ch. 28, 'the prophet campaigned practically against these difficulties'
- ¹⁸ as 17 above, 'The Dowry of the Prophet's daughter'
- ¹⁹ as 1, ch. 35, 'Prohibition of Alcoholic drinks'
- ²⁰ as 6 above, p.165-6
- ²¹ as 11, 'after the battle of Badr'
- ²² as 1, ch. 26
- ²³ as 1, ch. 31, 'ghazwatul Kadar'
- ²⁴ as 1, ch. 29, 'change of Qiblah'
- ²⁵ as 1, ch. 31, 'the fire of war kindles with a spark'
- ²⁶ as Abdullah bin Ubay did before Uhud, as 6 above, p.178
- ²⁷ as 6 above, p.136
- ²⁸ as 1, ch. 30, 'the battle of badr'
- ²⁹ as 6 above, p.142
- ³⁰ as 6 above, p.152
- ³¹ as 28, 'regard for rights'
- ³² as 28 above.
- ³³ As 1 above, ch. 31
- ³⁴ as 33 above
- ³⁵ as 28, 'the forces of truth and falsehood face eachother'
- ³⁶ as 28, 'procurement of information about the enemy'
- ³⁷ as 28 above.
- ³⁸ as 6 above, p.139-40
- ³⁹ as 28 above.
- ⁴⁰ as 28 above.
- ⁴¹ as 6 above, p.146
- ⁴² as 28 above, 'War consultations'
- ⁴³ as 6 above, p.174
- ⁴⁴ as 28 above
- ⁴⁵ as 1 above, ch. 32, 'the Battle Begins'
- ⁴⁶ as 45 above, 'five persons conspire to kill the holy Prophet'
- ⁴⁷ as 1 above, ch. 32
- ⁴⁸ as 28 above
- ⁴⁹ Holy Quran, 8:7
- ⁵⁰ as 6 above, p146-7
- ⁵¹ as 28 above
- ⁵² as 6 above, p149
- ⁵³ as 6 above, p147
- ⁵⁴ as 6 above, p148
- ⁵⁵ as 47 above
- ⁵⁶ as 47 above
- ⁵⁷ as 6 above, p152
- ⁵⁸ as 6 above, p190
- ⁵⁹ as 1, ch.32
- ⁶⁰ as 60 above
- ⁶¹ as 1, ch.35
- ⁶² as 6 above, p.157-8 and 170-1