

Birth of the Prophet

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born in 570 A.D., in the land of Arabia. Much of Arabia is desert—vast, silent, barren regions where the stars loom large at night and where people depend for their survival upon shade, water and each other’s goodwill. There were three major towns: Yathrib, a large oasis now called Madinah; Taif, a cool refuge in the mountains famous for its grapes; and Makkah which, by contrast, lay in a barren valley. It was in Makkah that the Prophet ﷺ first saw the light of day.

Now Makkah is famous as the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the focal point

of the Hajj pilgrimage, but in those days it was important because it was at the junction of many trading routes. It was even more important as the home of the Kabah, where people came from far and wide to worship. The original Kabah was built by the Prophets Ibrahim عليه السلام and Ismail عليه السلام (Abraham and Ishmael), whose lives were particularly devoted to Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad’s father, Abdullah, died two months before his birth, and his mother, Aminah, was naturally very sad. But still, she felt strong and well as she waited for her baby to be born. When he came into the world, Aminah sent word to her father-in-law, Abd al-Muttalib, who was sitting near the Kabah as he always did.

Abd al-Muttalib was the head of the Quraysh tribe, guardian of the Kabah and protector of the pilgrims who visited this holy place. He was respected and admired by all. But he was not like the other Arabs who had drifted away from the teachings of the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام and had begun again to worship idols. He was one of the hanifs, or pious people, who believed in Allah, the one true God, with all his heart. He was happy to hear the news of the birth and began to think of a name for the baby boy. Finally he decided upon Muhammad, an unusual name that means “often praised,” or “worthy of praise.”

For some time before his birth, believers had prayed for a prophet to come, and there had been signs that Allah had heard their prayers. Jewish scriptures told of a prophet that was to come. On the night of the Prophet’s birth a learned Jew in Yathrib saw a brilliant star he had never seen before. He called people together around him and, pointing to the star, told them that a prophet must have been born. Word spread quickly.

An Example to All Human Beings

Allah sends prophets into the world to show us how to live. That is why Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ into the world also. But He did not want him to live like a hermit, to give up the world and go and live by himself in a mountain cave, or in a forest. Granted, it is much easier to lead a pure life and to think about the Almighty when you are not troubled by worldly matters and you are away from people and temptations. But because Allah wanted the Prophet ﷺ to be a shining example to humanity, He destined him to live amongst other human beings, like any other ordinary man – to have a family, to work for his living and to have his share of troubles, joys and sorrows.

The original Kabah was built by the Prophets Ibrahim عليه السلام and Ismail عليه السلام, whose lives were entirely devoted to Allah. But over the centuries people began to drift away from the One God and set up idols there to many other gods. In the days of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Kabah was surrounded by 360 altars, statues and cult objects of these various deities. The most important tribe living in and around Makkah was the Quraysh. They were merchants who had control of both the Kabah and Makkah’s water supply. They profited greatly from giving protection and catering to the needs of the vast numbers of traders who came from far and wide to buy and sell, and the thousands of pilgrims from many different countries. It was into this tribe that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born.



Nursed in the Desert

It was the custom in those days, in Makkah, for mothers to send their babies into the desert to be nursed by paid foster mothers from among the people who tended sheep. The weather in the desert, away from the city, was considered more healthy. Aminah, too, did this, and so the little Muhammad ﷺ spent the first years of his life with a woman named Halimah and her family of the Banu Sa'd tribe.

Halimah worried that she would not be able to care properly for the baby Muhammad ﷺ. They were very poor, and because of the previous year's famine, she had hardly enough milk to feed her own baby. But as soon as she began nursing Muhammad ﷺ, her milk increased. After they got back home, many things began to change for the better. The land became green, and the date palms grew heavy with fruit. Dates were one of the family's main foods. The sheep and

camels regained their health. Halimah and her husband knew that these blessings were because of the baby Muhammad ﷺ.

Muhammad ﷺ grew well during his stay with Halimah and her family. He played with her children, and together they would take the sheep to graze. When Muhammad ﷺ returned to Aminah, he was a strong and healthy three year old.

The Prophet's Advice to His Daughter

'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, related how Fatimah, his wife and also daughter of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, had to do all the housework herself. Her hands used to become blistered from working a millstone, her clothes became dirty from sweeping the floor, and she had a mark on her neck from having to bring water from far away in a large leather bag. Once when the Prophet ﷺ had many servants come to him, 'Ali suggested to Fatimah that she go and request her father to give her one of them. But there were many people gathered at his house, so she returned home without meeting him. The next day the Prophet ﷺ came to the house of 'Ali and Fatimah and asked what she had wanted to discuss, but Fatimah remained silent.

Then 'Ali told the Prophet ﷺ the whole story. The Prophet ﷺ did not, however, say yes to their request. "Fear God," he said, "and fulfil your duty to the Lord. Continue to do your housework and, when you go to bed at night, glorify Allah 33 times, praise Him the same number of times and exalt him 34 times. That makes 100 times altogether. That will do you more good than a servant will." (Al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb)

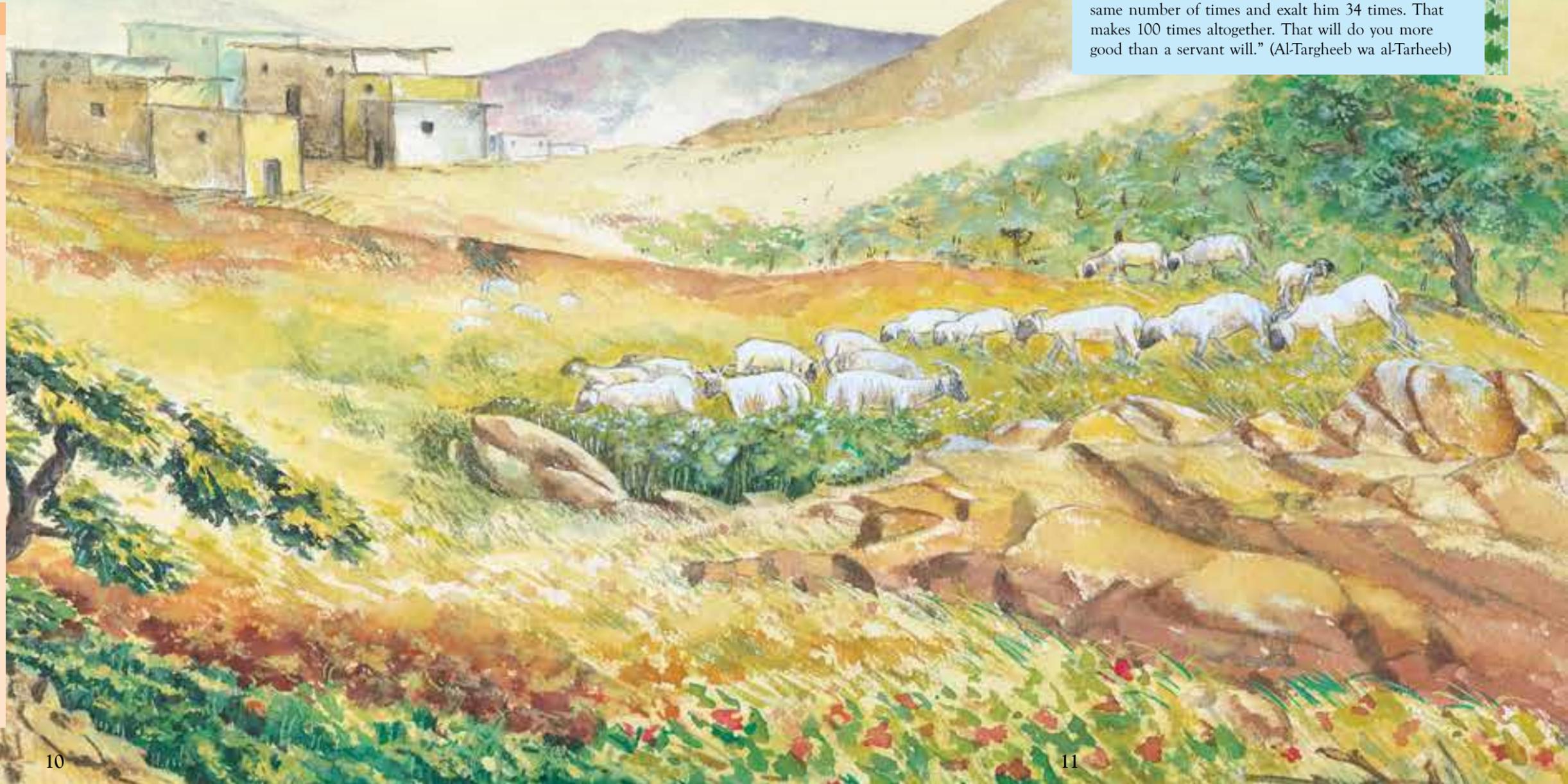
Good Family Ties

The Prophet ﷺ revered parents. He would say: "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers," and "God's pleasure is in the father's pleasure; and God's displeasure is in the father's displeasure." Those, he believed, who served their parents well, were deserving of Paradise. A man once asked the Prophet ﷺ, "Who rightfully deserves the best treatment from me?" "Your mother," said the Prophet ﷺ. Then the man said, "Who comes next?" "Your mother," said the Prophet ﷺ. "Who is after that?" asked the man, "Your mother," was the Prophet's answer. "Who comes next?" insisted the man again. "Your father," said the noble Prophet ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ gave great importance to family ties. He said, "The best man is he who is best to his wife."



▲ A desert outside Makkah. It was one such area where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ spent his early days.



A Thoughtful Boy

We learn from the stories of his life that Muhammad ﷺ was a very thoughtful boy. He took good care of his family's sheep, and played with the other children. But he also spent much time alone, wondering about the mysteries of nature. He thought about the people around him, how they lived and how they behaved. Even when he was a very little boy, Halimah said that she often found him sitting by himself.

There are stories about how, even as a youngster, Muhammad ﷺ believed in one God, the God of Ibrahim ؑ. He never

worshipped idols and refused to swear by them as other Arabs had come to do. These stories also tell us that Muhammad ﷺ was troubled by the fact that people always seemed to be struggling for power and money, and that once rich and powerful, they became arrogant and showed no generosity to the poor and needy.

We do not know exactly what Muhammad ﷺ looked like, but his cousin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, has given us some idea. 'Ali said Muhammad ﷺ was of medium

height, broad-shouldered, and had curly hair and a thick beard. His walk conveyed strength and resolution: he walked softly but firmly, with large swift strides, and bent slightly forward. Some say the ground seemed to roll itself up for him, and his disciples had to work hard to keep up with him even when the Prophet ﷺ walked at a leisurely pace.

The Prophet's skin was tawny and his eyes shown light brown from under bushy eyebrows. The Prophet's eyes did not wander

around, looking at this and that. They were usually downcast. But when he did look up at something he would look straight into it.

By the time he was 25 years old, Muhammad ﷺ had a reputation for honesty. He was known among the Quraysh as the bravest and most gentlemanly person. He was a good neighbour, tolerant and always truthful. He always kept aloof from quarrels and quibbles, and never used foul language or abuse. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib once said, "All who came close to him grew to love him."

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men of sense; those that remember God when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth."

—Surah al-'Imran, 3:190-191



The Pledge: A Leader of Men

Even as a boy, Muhammad ﷺ was concerned about his fellow men. One day a trader from Yemen had his goods stolen by a group of wicked Makkans. The trader called out for help, but no one came forth. So the trader wrote a poem that made fun of the Makkans' bad behaviour, and recited it out loud in public for all to hear. When Zubayr, one of Muhammad's uncles, heard this poem, he felt ashamed.

Zubayr called the city elders to a meeting, and an organisation was formed to protect the oppressed people of Makkah. This included foreign visitors as well as the people who had always lived there. Muhammad ﷺ became an enthusiastic member of the group, called Hilf al-Fudul, who pledged themselves to be courteous and considerate towards others, especially those weaker than themselves.

Many years later, Muhammad ﷺ still kept this promise to Hilf al-Fudul, saying: "I am not prepared to break my promise, even against a herd of camels; if somebody should appeal to me even today, by virtue of that pledge, I would hurry to his help."

The Prophet Muhammad's sense of justice, his prompt understanding of problems and his real interest in his fellow men combined to make him a leader. He could always be relied upon to judge fairly and was more and more sought out to help settle disputes. His fame got a mighty boost by an incident that took place when Muhammad ﷺ was not more than 35 years old.

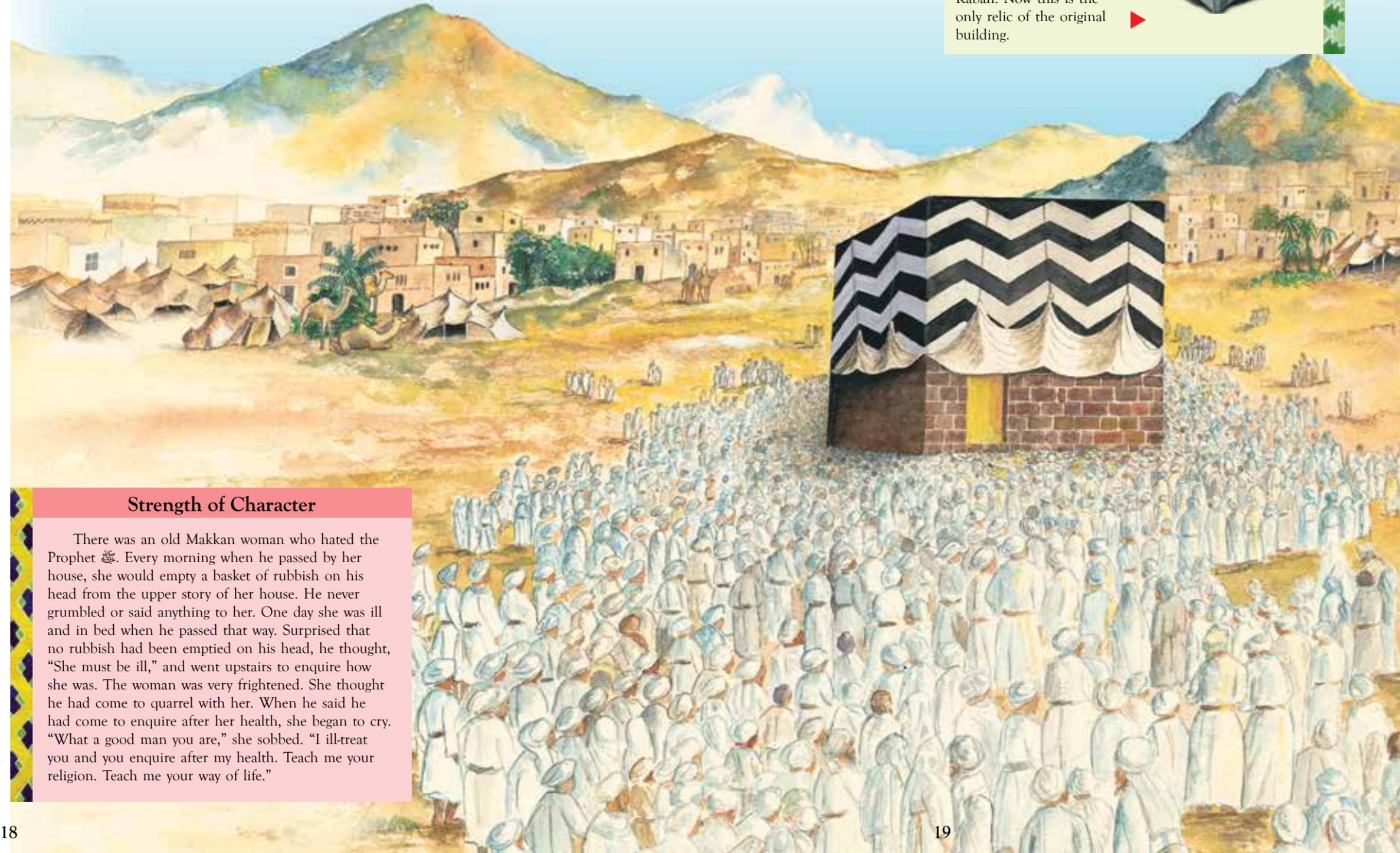
The Kabah caught fire and burned to the ground. All the tribes of Makkah took part in repairing it and building it up again, but when it was time to put back the sacred Black Stone first laid by the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام, there was a crisis. Each of the four leading families of Makkah claimed that they alone should have that honour. Finally, it was agreed that the first man to enter the courtyard of the Kabah would settle the issue. That man was Muhammad ﷺ.

It seemed like a problem which could not be solved, but Muhammad ﷺ had a simple idea that saved the honour of everyone concerned. He spread out a white sheet on the ground and placed the sacred stone at its center. Then he instructed the elders of each clan to lift a corner of the sheet and carry the stone to its site. Then Muhammad ﷺ, the peacemaker, fixed the stone in its place with his own hands.

The Black Stone

At the eastern corner of the Kabah, about 5 feet above the ground, there is an oval black stone of about 18 cm in diameter fixed in the wall.

This stone was originally set there by the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام to mark the spot from which to begin the tawaf of the Kabah. Now this is the only relic of the original building.



Strength of Character

There was an old Makkan woman who hated the Prophet ﷺ. Every morning when he passed by her house, she would empty a basket of rubbish on his head from the upper story of her house. He never grumbled or said anything to her. One day she was ill and in bed when he passed that way. Surprised that no rubbish had been emptied on his head, he thought, "She must be ill," and went upstairs to enquire how she was. The woman was very frightened. She thought he had come to quarrel with her. When he said he had come to enquire after her health, she began to cry. "What a good man you are," she sobbed. "I ill-treat you and you enquire after my health. Teach me your religion. Teach me your way of life."

The Search for Truth

The Prophet Muhammad's marriage with Khadijah gave him every opportunity to lead a comfortable life as a wealthy and respected noble of Makkah. And, indeed, for a few years Muhammad ﷺ did lead a calm and quiet life as a merchant. But he soon gave up all worldly activity and set himself to searching for the truth.

Instead of meeting people all the time in their homes and at gatherings, and trying to gain for himself a position among the nobles of Makkah, Muhammad ﷺ would wander into the barren hills of the desert. He would sit for hours and ponder the mysteries of creation. The vast silence of the desert, with endless sand and sky and, at night, equally endless darkness, alive only with the twinkling of millions and millions of tiny stars, seemed to bring one very close to the Creator.

Often Muhammad ﷺ would stay alone for days in the Cave of Hira, which was near the top of Jabal al-Nur, or the Mountain of Light, three miles from Makkah. He would return home only for more supplies of food and water, and then go back to the solitude of nature to pray and meditate, asking the Maker of the heavens and the earth for answers to the questions that surged in his mind. What is man's true role in life? What does the Lord require of us, as His servants? From where does man come, and where will he go after death?

On the twelfth of February, 610 A.D., Muhammad ﷺ, now forty years of age, went to the Cave of Hira to spend Ramadan, the traditional month of retreat. He was sitting all alone in this cave, when he had an extraordinary experience.



▲ The Cave of Hira, where the first revelation of the Quran was made to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The cave, which is large enough for a man to say his prayers, is situated at the summit of the Jabal al-Nur, or the Mountain of Light, to the north east of Makkah, on the road to Mina.

Laws of Islam

Here are some of the laws which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught his followers.

- Control your anger, then forgive your brother. Do you not wish to be forgiven?
- Do not hate each other, envy each other or provoke each other.
- Do not spy on each other, or betray each other's trust.
- Do not speak ill of your friend behind his back.
- Give the labourer his wages before his sweat dries.
- Do not drink alcohol, and do not gamble—it opens the door to the devil.
- Do not steal the property of another.
- Do not cheat each other.
- Do not charge interest on money loaned to those who need it.
- Do not take part in corrupt practices or do anything of which you would be ashamed if it became known.
- Do not reveal your friends' weaknesses. Cover up their failings if you wish God to cover up yours.
- Do not pay bribes to get what is not lawfully yours.
- Do not be cruel to animals.
- Gladden the heart of the afflicted, feed the hungry, give comfort to the sorrowful and remove the wrongs of the injured.

The Messenger of God

These astonishing events were at first difficult for people to understand. They were still living in an age which is now called the “Days of Ignorance.” And remember that after the first revelation, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself had been totally shaken by the experience. It had only been very gradually, with Khadijah’s help, that he had come to understand and accept what had happened—that he had been chosen by Allah as His messenger to mankind.

Like Khadijah, the Prophet’s family and friends realized he was an intelligent, kind and down-to-earth person. The revelations he received were not tinged with selfishness,

hatred or ill-will. They were a clear guide to righteousness, and an insight into the kingdom of God.

Khadijah was the first to respond to the call of the Prophet ﷺ. Her cousin, the wise man Waraqah, explained to her that just as Jibril had come to Musa ﷺ earlier on Mount Sinai and told him to guide his people, so too would Muhammad ﷺ be the Prophet of his people. But Waraqah also warned that not all the people would listen to the Prophet ﷺ, and some would even try to harm him and his followers. Muhammad ﷺ would need great courage and patience, he said. Khadijah understood, and became the strongest help and support to Muhammad ﷺ in the trials that followed.

The next to respond to the Prophet ﷺ was his cousin, ‘Ali. Zayd, his foster son, was the third. The first convert from outside the family was Abu Bakr, a respected merchant who became the Prophet’s closest Companion. At first Muhammad ﷺ taught Khadijah and the small group of friends how to pray, and they would pray together.

At a certain point, after the Prophet ﷺ had been doing this for three years, the angel Jibril commanded Muhammad ﷺ to speak openly, and he began to hold public meetings. Slowly the message of Allah, the Maker of heaven and earth and all the things in heaven and on earth, began to spread.

The Divine Message

The message the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ brought was not to the liking of many Arabs. He preached that they should worship only one God. He told them they must show proper respect for women and should not lie, or cheat, or take money which rightfully belonged to the poor and to orphans. Nor should they lend money at a high rate of interest. They must stop drinking and gambling and killing for revenge.

He impressed upon people that there really was a life after death, and there would come a time of judgement when they would be rewarded or punished according to how they had lived. Had they thought only of money-making and their own comfort and luxury? Or had they given freely to orphans, widows, the sick, the hungry and the needy? Had they bowed humbly to God in worship and prayer?

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had to convince everyone that, even if they did not believe in life after death, they would be forced to do so once they experienced it. By that time it would be too late to feel sorry and beg forgiveness. The most important quality a person could develop in relation to good and evil was taqwa, that is, being conscious of God at all times and being careful not to overstep the limits set by Him.

True, Allah was merciful and knew all about everyone and their reasons for behaving the way they did—and if people were truly sorry for their bad thoughts and actions, they would be forgiven. But God was also perfectly just—if people who had passed a lifetime doing bad things were still not sorry about them by the time they died, they would not be forgiven.

The Quraysh of Makkah felt particularly threatened. The Prophet’s message that there was only one God, and that all men were brothers who served Allah, challenged the way the Quraysh had come to live. They worshipped many different idols, believed in all kinds of magic, fought amongst each other for worldly gain, upheld the code of blood-feud or vengeance, and oppressed and mistreated those who were poorer and weaker than they.

The Prophet’s own tribe, the Quraysh, were in charge of the Kabah with its idols, and when they realized that he was trying to stop people from worshipping them, they were furious because they thought their profit was in danger.

Justice

Before Islam, the blood feud prevailed: when a member of a group was injured or killed by a person from another group, the first group had the right of vengeance, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. But the Quran praised the Muslim who accepted a penalty less severe on the criminal than was warranted by his

crime, or who forgave altogether. The Quran also decreed that if a believer deliberately killed another, he would be punished in Hell; if accidentally, he would pay blood money.

The Quraysh tried in many ways, including the use of force, to dissuade the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from his path, and to stop the message from spreading. They were determined to crush the movement at all costs, because they were too proud to admit the error of their ways and change their beliefs and practices.

So the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was subjected to every kind of cruelty and insult. Thorns were strewn in his path, stones were thrown at his house, and he was pelted with dirt and rubbish. He was laughed at and ridiculed. Once, when he was praying in the Kabah, a sheet was thrown round his neck and pulled with such force that he fell on his face.

The Prophet Muhammad's Companions, too, faced all kinds of persecution. For example, when Bilal ibn Rabah, a slave, entered the fold of Islam, he was tortured by his master. He was thrown down on the sand under the burning sun, and kept there with a heavy stone on his chest. "Ahad! Ahad! Ahad!" (Allah the One, the One, the One) were the only words he uttered. Later Abu Bakr was able to free Bilal.

Salah—The Importance of Prayer

Give glory to your Lord before sunrise and before sunset. Praise Him day and night, so that you may find comfort. (20:130)

In Islam, everyone faces God alone, on a one-to-one basis. There is no priest, no special knowledge, no sacrifice or ceremony needed to put one in touch with God. This is why salah, or prayer is such an important part of Islam. It is meant to bring people close to Allah, to purify their hearts and bring about moral and spiritual growth.

The performance of salah—always done facing the Kabah in Makkah—is based on the way the Prophet himself prayed. In its movements and words, its practice is more like worship than the personal appeals we usually think of as prayer. Each cycle of it is called a rakah. Though it is a ritual in form, only the purity of heart and mind, and the humility of the worshipper give it meaning. Some of the words are part of the regular routine, and others are chosen by the individual from the Quran.

One of the most famous prayers of the Prophet ﷺ is known as the 'Prayer of Light': O Allah, place light in my heart, light in my sight, light in my hearing, light on my right and on my left, light above me, light below me. O Allah, Who knows the innermost secrets of our

hearts, lead me out of the darkness into the Light.

Muslims can pray alone wherever they are at the prayer times, or they can join all other worshippers who are saying prayers at the mosque. The Friday midday prayer at the mosque is compulsory for all Muslim males to attend. When many people pray together at this time, this is called 'congregational' prayers.

The preparation for prayers is also part of the salah, and this is meant to train believers in cleanliness, punctuality and self-discipline, and in having the ability to rise above personal worries or passing fancies. Of first importance is niyah, or intention; and this refers to the process of closing one's mind to worldly distractions, cleaning one's body and choosing a clean place to pray. The ritual cleansing, called wudu, is done in a quiet and prayerful way.

The Prophet, being a very considerate person, did not want worshippers to suffer any unnecessary hardship while saying their prayers. One day he went into the mosque and saw a rope stretched between two pillars. "What is this rope?" he asked, and was told that it belonged to Zaynab. She clung to it when weakened by fatigue. The Prophet said, "Untie it! Let each of you pray while you have the energy to do so and then sit down when you are tired."

An Extraordinary Experience

At this bitter moment, when the Quraysh seemed to be on the verge of crushing Islam, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had an extraordinary experience—al-Isra and al-Miraj, the Night Journey and the Ascension.

One night, as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ slept next to the Kabah, in the same spot where Abd al-Muttalib used to sleep, the Archangel Jibril woke him and took him on a strange, white winged animal, called Buraq (lightning), from Makkah to al-Aqsa mosque in far away Jerusalem. There the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ met Ibrahim عليه السلام, Musa عليه السلام and Isa عليه السلام and the other prophets, and they prayed together.

Then Jibril took the Prophet ﷺ through Heaven's gates, where he saw countless angels.

One was Malik the Keeper of hell, who never smiles. Malik gave the Prophet a glimpse into Hell to let him see the misery of those who suffered there. The angels then took the Prophet ﷺ through the Seven Heavens, one by one.

Beyond the seventh heaven, the Prophet ﷺ passed through the veils covering that which is hidden, until at last he came into the divine Light of Allah's Presence. The Prophet ﷺ looked upon that which the eyes cannot see and minds cannot imagine, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Time, thought and feelings vanished; there was only

great peace and the brilliance of pure light.

Too soon, the experience ended and he was brought back to earth. The Prophet ﷺ was amazed to find the spot where he had lain was still warm, and the cup he had tipped over was still emptying. This incredible experience had taken place in less than a moment!

The next morning, the Prophet ﷺ told the Quraysh what had happened. They didn't believe him. Many Muslims were amazed and wanted the Prophet ﷺ to explain how such a thing could happen. But the Prophet's description of Jerusalem, and the caravans he had seen on the way back to Makkah, convinced them he was telling the truth.



▲ Qubbat as-Sakhrah, or the Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem. The Dome, which stands at some distance from al-Aqsa Mosque, is built on the rock from which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ascended to the Seven Heavens and was brought to the Divine presence.

The Isra And Mi'raj

For the Prophet ﷺ, the Night Journey and the Ascension was a turning point. After years of persecution and the terrible sadness of losing both Khadijah and Abu Talib, the experience gave him great comfort and the strength to go on. He became convinced that Allah was always with him.

This experience of the Divine Presence is important for us: though we may never have the good fortune to experience God with our whole being, both spiritual and physical, as the Prophet did, the inward, spiritual aspects of the experience can still be striven for and shared by every Muslim who is God-fearing and good.

It was during this experience that Allah's commandment on prayer was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He reported that Allah wanted men to pray fifty times a day, but that on the Prophet Musa's advice, he had appealed for a less difficult routine. At last Allah resolved that there should be five prayers a day. That has remained Muslim practice ever since.

The Prophet's Companions recorded this and all of the other important events in the Prophet's life, along with his observations and words of wisdom, with great faithfulness and precision. These records came to be known as the *hadith* (traditions or sayings of the Prophet ﷺ), and served as an ideal guide to righteous living.

One collector of Hadith stands out from the others. He was a cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, by the name of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas. He was only thirteen when the Prophet died. It is said that he memorized no less than 1660 sayings of the Prophet ﷺ, and would go to as many as thirty Companions to make sure that his version of each *hadith* was correct.

Once, when he went to check on a *hadith* previously unknown to him, he found the Companion having his afternoon nap. Not wishing to disturb him, the boy waited outside in the heat and dust. When the Companion came out, he said: "O cousin of the Prophet ﷺ! What is the matter with you? If you had sent for me, I would have come to you."

"I am the one who should come to you," replied 'Abdullah, "for knowledge is sought—it does not just come."

The Migration to Madinah

The Prophet's message was spreading far and wide and his following was growing. No longer all alone and easy to attack, the Prophet ﷺ became the target of a murder plot hatched by the Quraysh, who wanted to stamp out Islam. In the meantime, the Lord commanded him to leave Makkah and go to Yathrib (now known as Madinah), to which many Companions had already migrated, and where he would be offered protection.

Under cover of darkness, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Abu Bakr slipped away on camel-back, leaving 'Ali ibn Abi Talib lying in the Prophet's bed, so that the Quraysh would not realize he had left Makkah. When the Quraysh came to know, they offered a large reward for the capture of the Prophet ﷺ and sent out search parties.

Guessing that the Prophet ﷺ intended to go to Yathrib (about 250 miles north of Makkah), most of the search parties headed in that direction. But the Prophet ﷺ and Abu

Bakr went south, having arranged that a shepherd would cover their tracks with his flock of sheep. They decided to hide in the Cave of Thawr, just outside Makkah, until the search parties had given up.

On their third day in this cave, the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr heard the flapping of wings, and the sounds of men's voices and footsteps approaching. "If any one of them looks at his feet he will find us," whispered Abu Bakr. "No," said the Prophet ﷺ, "We are



▲ The Quba Mosque in Madinah, the first mosque to be built in Islam. The Quran called it a place of worship which was founded upon piety from the very first day...wherein are men who love to purify themselves. Allah loves the purifiers. (9:108)

not two but three, for, do you not know, Allah is with us. He will surely protect us." When the search party came to the entrance of the cave, Abu Bakr and the Prophet ﷺ could hear them talking quite clearly. Someone called out, "Forget it. There's no one in there." Then the footsteps were heard receding. The danger had passed!

After some time, the Prophet and Abu Bakr looked out from the entrance of the cave, where they were amazed to see that a spider had spun a web across its opening and a dove had made a nest just to one side of it. It was

she who had flapped her wings at the approach of the search party. How could anyone have suspected that two men were hiding inside, when a delicate web covered the entry and a dove nested peacefully there?

Somewhat later, when they felt it to be safe, the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr continued on their journey to Yathrib. Because they took a long, winding route, and travelled only under cover of darkness, their dangerous and difficult journey took seven days.



▲ The Cave of Thawr outside Makkah, where the Prophet ﷺ and his Companion, Abu Bakr, took shelter during his migration. The Quran says: "When these two were hiding in the cave, he (Muhammad ﷺ) said to his companion: 'Do not despair, Allah is with us.'" (9:40)

The Spirit of Migration

Hijrah—migration—is never for gain, but for the higher purpose of serving Allah. The first great example was the Prophet's move from Makkah to Madinah, where the Muslims were now able to establish an important Islamic centre, and carry out the work of da'wah much more successfully than in Makkah. After the death of the Prophet, inspired by his well-known "Final Sermon", most of the Companions, and many others, migrated, and wherever they went, they engaged in da'wah work. Under their influence, whole societies, whole nations changed their faith, their culture and even their languages.

With the end of Muslim rule in Spain, the Muslims, to escape oppression, fled to the nearby lands across the Mediterranean. This stepped up the process of da'wah and led to the Islamization of North Africa. On the Indian subcontinent too, many migrant Muslims from Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, etc., carried on da'wah work, so that now almost half of the total world Muslim population lives on the subcontinent. It was this Hijrah of the Companions after the Prophet's death which helped to create the vast Islamic domain, now commonly referred to as the Arab world. There are now more than one billion Muslims spread across the globe.

Inviting to Islam

The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah was a great victory, because it gave the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ time to turn his attention to the other tribes of Arabia and the Kings and Emperors of the countries bordering Arabia, to tell them the message of Islam. With the treaty, the Muslims were also able to return to Makkah for the pilgrimage, and though they could stay only three days, they made a deep impression on the people of Makkah, who saw the simplicity and devotion of their lives, the kindness and respect with which they treated

each other, and the love they had for their leader, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Within just two years, the number of people siding with the Prophet ﷺ had risen from 1500 to 10,000, including several leading men of Makkah.

The Quraysh were again furious, and regretted having signed the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. But if they broke the Treaty openly, they would clearly look like villains, so they began breaking it secretly, by supplying weapons on the quiet to the Muslims' enemies. Aware of this betrayal, the Prophet ﷺ knew that he must take over Makkah.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ wanted to avoid bloodshed, so he did not tell any of his followers of his plans to capture Makkah.

He gathered the biggest possible army – ten thousand in all – for he aimed at frightening the Makkans into submission, so that the city could be captured without any need for fighting. When they reached the outskirts of Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ ordered them to spread out and told each man to light a fire. The sight of so many fires in the night would persuade the Makkans that they were surrounded by a huge army and that it was useless to try to fight. In fact, seeing them, and hearing the report of the Muslims' readiness from one Makkan scout, one of the Quraysh exclaimed, "Who has the power to confront them?"

Indeed, no one did. The capture of Makkah was, as the Prophet had planned, a totally bloodless victory.



▲ The Mosque of the Prophet ﷺ at Madinah. The mosque and its surrounding plazas can hold over a million worshippers at a time.

Letters of the Prophet ﷺ

After the Treaty of al-Hudaibiyyah, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sent letters to neighbouring kings. These letters, short and simply written, gave the basic message of Islam. Here is the letter which the Prophet ﷺ wrote to Khusru, the King of Persia: In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent. From Muhammad, Allah's messenger, to Khusru, the leader of Persia. Peace be to him who follows right guidance, believes in Allah and His messenger, and declares that there is no deity save Allah, the only God, Who has no partners, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. I wish to convey to you Allah's call, for I am Allah's messenger to all mankind, sent with the task of warning all those who are alive that doom will befall on those who reject the truth. If you submit to Allah, you will be safe. If you refuse, you shall bear the responsibility for the Magians (i.e. your people).

A Forgiving Conqueror

Victors are usually proud and happy to take revenge on their victims, but not the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. After his conquest of Makkah the Prophet ﷺ displayed the utmost humility. When he entered Makkah, his head was bowed so low that people could see his beard touching the camel's saddle. Standing at the door of the Kabah, the Prophet ﷺ delivered an address:

There is none worthy of being served save the One, Allah. He has fulfilled His promise and offered help to His servants. He alone has brought the hosts of enemies low.

The Prophet ﷺ did not claim any credit for the victory: he said it was entirely Allah's doing. And he went on to forgive the Quraysh: *I say to you as Yusuf said to his brothers: Let no reproach be upon you this day. Go, you are free.*

Even Uthman ibn Talhah who had once refused the Prophet's entry to the Kabah and persecuted him, was later given back the key to the shrine, and it remains with his family to this day.

Then the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ turned to the Kabah and pointed to the idols that had been placed there. He recited from the Quran:

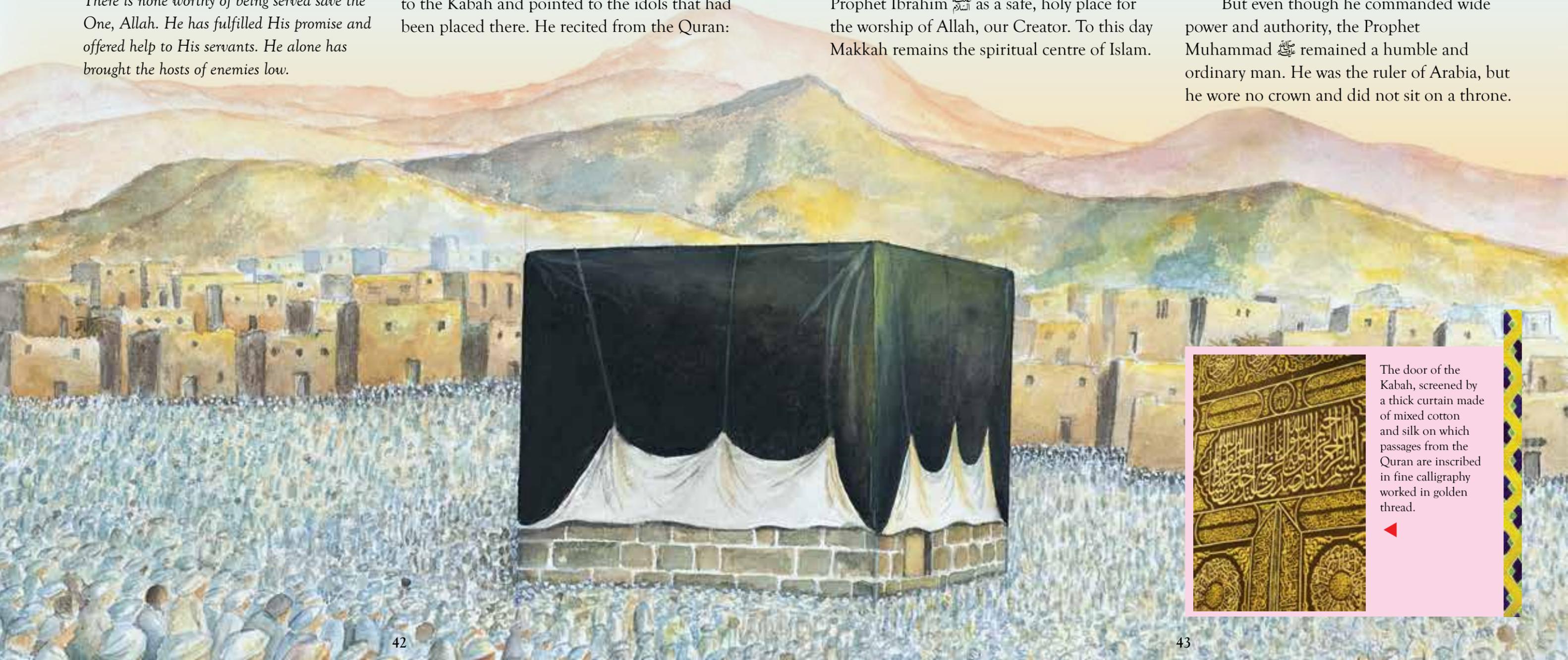
In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful... Truth has come and falsehood has vanished away. Lo! Falsehood is ever bound to vanish.

All of the idols crashed to the floor. The Prophet ﷺ and his followers then cleaned and purified the Kabah, and Bilal, who had a strong and beautiful voice, was ordered to climb to its top and give the call to prayer.

The Kabah, the House of Allah, was at last restored to the purpose for which it had been built thousands of years before by the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام as a safe, holy place for the worship of Allah, our Creator. To this day Makkah remains the spiritual centre of Islam.

The Prophet ﷺ returned to Madinah, and the Quraysh became Muslim, and one by one, the rest of the tribes in Arabia declared their faith. As each tribe joined Islam, the Prophet ﷺ sent people acting on his behalf to teach them about Islam, which seemed new to them, but which was actually the completion of the prophetic tradition beginning with Adam and continued by Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa and Isa, upon all of whom be peace. The Prophet ﷺ himself continued teaching, guiding and conveying Allah's instructions to his followers.

But even though he commanded wide power and authority, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ remained a humble and ordinary man. He was the ruler of Arabia, but he wore no crown and did not sit on a throne.



The door of the Kabah, screened by a thick curtain made of mixed cotton and silk on which passages from the Quran are inscribed in fine calligraphy worked in golden thread.



A Simple Man

Despite his position as leader, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ never behaved as if he was greater or better than other people. He never made people feel small, unwanted or embarrassed. He urged his followers to live kindly and humbly, releasing slaves whenever they could and giving in charity, especially to very poor people, orphans and prisoners, without any thought of reward.

The Prophet ﷺ himself was never greedy. He ate very little and only simple foods. He preferred never to fill his stomach. Sometimes, for days on end, he would eat nothing but raw food. He slept on a very simple mattress on the floor and had almost nothing in the way of home comforts or decorations. One day Hafsa, his wife, tried to make him more comfortable at night by folding his reed mat

double—without telling him—to make it softer for him. That night he slept peacefully, but he overslept and missed the pre-dawn prayers. He was so distressed when he found out that he never slept like that again.

Simple living and contentment were the key teachings in the Prophet's life: "When you see a person who has been given more money and beauty than you, look then to those who have been given less." In so doing, we will thank Allah for His blessings, rather than feel deprived.

People used to ask his wife, 'Aishah, the daughter of his first and most loyal Companion Abu Bakr, how he lived at home. "Like an ordinary man," she would answer. "He would sweep the house, stitch his own clothes, mend his own sandals, water the camels, milk the goats, help the servants at their work, and eat his meals with them; and he would go to fetch what we needed from the market." He seldom

had more than one set of clothes, which he washed himself.

He was a home-loving, peace-loving human being. "When you enter a house, ask God to bless it," he would say. He greeted others with the phrase: *As-salamu alaykum*—which means: "May peace be upon you"—for peace is the most wonderful thing on earth. He was a firm believer in good manners, always greeting people kindly, and showing respect to elders. He once said: "The dearest of you to me are those who have good manners."

All his recorded words and actions reveal him as a man of great gentleness, kindness, humility, good humour and excellent common sense, who had a great love for animals and for all people, especially his family. Above all, he was a man who practised what he preached. His life, both private and public, was a perfect model for his followers.

The Prophet ﷺ did not have many children. His two sons by Khadijah died when

they were very small, and another baby boy, whom he had later on, also died. However, he had four daughters, all of whom married and had children. Of them, the most famous, was his youngest daughter, Fatimah, who married his nephew 'Ali and gave him two grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, and two granddaughters, Zaynab and Umm Kulthum.

Truth and Paradise

Once a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: "O Prophet, by God, it is my earnest desire to go to heaven. Tell me what I should do for this to happen." The Prophet ﷺ replied, "Speak the truth." When man speaks the truth he does good deeds. His heart is lit up with the light of faith, and when the heart is blessed with the wealth of faith, he can be sure of entrance to God's paradise.

— Nuqush-e-Seerat
by Hakim Muhammad Sayeed



▲ The seven mosques complex in Madinah, an example of simple architecture during the early days of Islam.

Prayers of the Prophet

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us that prayer is a way of saying how we need God's grace for every single thing we have, and how God's power over all things is total. There are different kinds of prayers. Some are to praise Allah for all the wonderful things in the world and some are to thank Him for His blessings. We often ask Allah to forgive us, telling Him of our fears and worries. At other times we pray for others to be helped and cared for.

The Prophet ﷺ advised people to pray in times of peace and plenty, and not just in times of difficulty. One of his favourite prayers in the Quran was for parents: "My Lord, have mercy on them, as they have raised me up when I was little." He also said brotherly love was a great virtue. In his prayers to his Creator for all of humanity, he would say: "O Lord, all Your servants are brothers."

The Prophet ﷺ urged his followers to ask Allah for forgiveness: "Allah holds out His hand at night for those who have done wrong during the day to repent. And He holds out His hand during the day for those who have done wrong at night to repent."

To have God's special protection, he would pray, "Allah, save me from leprosy, insanity and incurable diseases. O Allah, save

me from want, poverty and being humbled. Save me from doing wrong or being wronged."

The Prophet ﷺ forbade believers to pray for their own deaths or even to think about suicide. "If anyone is in a very dreadful state," said the Prophet ﷺ, "let him pray, 'O Allah, keep me alive so long as life is good for me, and take away my soul to Yourself when death is best for me.' "

One who prays for another in his or her absence will most probably have his prayers fulfilled for, as the Prophet ﷺ explained, to every believer Allah has assigned an angel who says, "Amen! And to you the same." His own selflessness is shown by his praying even for those who harmed him.

The Prophet ﷺ, a keen observer of nature, regarded all natural things with a great sense of wonder. For example, seeing a new moon, he would pray, "O Allah, let its rays bring us security, peace and submission." Speaking to the moon, he would continue, "My Lord and Your Lord is Allah. May this be a crescent of guidance and goodness."

The Prophet ﷺ would urge people to remember Allah constantly, as he believed that "one who remembers his Lord and one who does not remember his Lord are as unlike as the living and the dead." Therefore, the Prophet ﷺ would urge his followers to remember Allah by day and by night, even if only by saying a few words. To make it easy for them to do this, he taught them a short prayer, saying: Two phrases are light on the tongue yet heavy in the Balance

and beloved by the Merciful:
Subhan Allah wa bihamdihi,
Subhan Allahil-Azeem.

(Glory be to God and all Praises are His, Glory be to God, the Magnificent.)

▲ The Mosque of the Two Qiblas, or Masjid al-Qiblatayn, in Madinah. Here the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, while leading the faithful in prayer, was asked in a revelation of the Quran to turn towards the Kabah in Makkah instead of Jerusalem, which was the earlier qibla.