

# ISLAMICA

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**MUHAMMAD**<sup>SAW</sup>

*A Prophet for our*

**TIME**

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## **Advocates abuse free speech**

*By Saif Ansari*

*“Everybody Draw Muhammad Day” does not defend right but instead violates it*

There is no need to abuse or disrespect others in order to show that one cares about the right to free speech. And, although it is within your rights to insult or taunt, you shouldn't. So it is curious indeed that some advocates of free speech, in an attempt to defend it, support exactly what the right to free speech permits but certainly does not condone: the abuse of others in its name.

In response to a canceled South Park episode depicting the Prophet Muhammad, cartoonist Molly Norris declared May 20 “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day.” Episode 201 was canceled because South Park's creators were threatened by members of a website called Revolution Muslim. Norris, at the time, argued that, unless supporters of free speech band together in its defense, the freedoms we all cherish will soon be smothered by free speech-hating Muslim extremists.

Norris is a dolt and forgets that the only death threats that South Park creators received were from some goofy website ran by a handful of lunatics (who, notably, do not enjoy any support in the general Muslim community). She forgets also that South Park has a history of poking fun at the Prophet. In fact, Muhammad appears in a South Park episode from 2001, in which he is shown to team up with other holy figures in a crusade against evil. The fact that no other Muslim Americans have threatened Comedy Central since implies that, for the most part, they do not hate and oppose America's liberties.

No doubt many Muslims in America and elsewhere have reacted shamefully to depictions of Muhammad and Muslims in the past, burning down embassies, murdering filmmakers and angrily denouncing the West. But to devote an entire day to insulting a figure that over a billion people around the world – most of whom have not participated in violent protests against depictions of the Prophet in the past – value, admire and revere is no defense of free speech; it is juvenile and only antagonizes and abuses those who otherwise respect it.

To be clear, it is within the rights of every advocate of “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day” to participate in it and to voice his opposition to Revolution Muslim and others who seek to suppress the right to free speech. I oppose “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day,” however, not because it violates any right, but because it abuses one.

The senseless acts of a few do not license attacks on the rest. “Imagine for a moment, if an African-American blogger complained about an unfair stereotype in a cartoon in the same crass manner as the Revolution Islam folks,” said Shahed Amanullah, editor-in-chief of altmuslim.com, in The Huffington Post. “Would free speech advocates respond by hosting a contest to draw as many vile stereotypes of blacks as they could?”

Of course not. And even if some African Americans did react violently to the cartoon, it would still be inappropriate to organize such a contest.

Shame, then, on the those who now plan to ridicule others on Thursday in the name of some perverse duty, on those who believe that, in participating in “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day,” they form the last bastion against the perceived onslaught of Muslim extremists. The right to free speech needs its defenders, but the help of Norris and her cronies it does not.

If advocates take umbrage at Comedy Central's decision to cut the South Park episode, then by all means they should reprimand it for acquiescing to Revolution Muslim's demands. They should condemn Revolution Muslim and those that support censorship and oppose free speech. But instead they are organizing an event that does not explicitly criticize either.

Traditionally, Muslims are prohibited from depicting Muhammad in the form of images and statues because they are feared as possible objects of worship and idolatry.

But it is no longer sixth century pagan Arabia, and the likelihood of people beginning to worship Muhammad today is low. And, because non-Muslims do not revere the Prophet as Muslims do, they cannot be incriminated for portraying him respectfully for, say, historical or artistic purposes anyway.

But Muslims and non-Muslims both can and should hold accountable those who support “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day,” not because it promotes idolatry, or because it violates some right, but because it is demeaning and designed specifically to ridicule and offend.

The media is also responsible for sensationalizing the whole issue. Because it involves Muslims, it immediately becomes newsworthy, even though death threats and accusations of censorship are made all the time in relation to other free speech issues.

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*The life of the Prophet Muhammad was as crucial to the unfolding Islamic ideal as it is today. His career revealed the inscrutable God's activity in the world, and illustrated the perfect surrender (in Arabic, the word for "surrender" is islam) that every human being should make to the divine*

Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time

By: Karen Armstrong

The history of a religious tradition is a continuous dialogue between a transcendent reality and current events in the mundane sphere. The faithful scrutinize the sacred past, looking for lessons that speak directly to the conditions of their lives. Most religions have a figurehead, an individual who expresses the ideals of the faith in human form. In contemplating the serenity of the Buddha, Buddhists see the supreme reality of Nirvana to which each of them aspires; in Jesus, Christians glimpse the divine presence as a force for goodness and compassion in the world. These paradigmatic personalities shed light on the often dark conditions in which most of us seek salvation in our flawed world. They tell us what a human being can be

Muslims have always understood this. Their scripture, Qur'an, gave them a mission: to create a just and decent society, in which all members were treated with respect. The political well being of the Muslim community was, and is, a matter of supreme importance. Like any religious ideal, it is almost insuperably difficult to fulfill, but after each failure, Muslims have tried to get up and begin again. Many Islamic rituals, philosophies, doctrines, sacred texts, and shrines are the result of frequently anguished and self-critical contemplation of the political events of Islamic society

The life of the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570-632 CE) was as crucial to the unfolding Islamic ideal as it is today. His career revealed the inscrutable God's activity in the world, and illustrated the perfect surrender (in Arabic, the word for "surrender" is islam) that every human being should make to the divine. Beginning during the Prophet's lifetime, Muslims had to strive to understand the meaning of his life and apply it to their own. A little more than a hundred years after Muhammad's death, as Islam continued to spread to new territories and gain converts, Muslim scholars began to compile the great collections of Muhammad's sayings (ahadith) and customary practice (sunnah), which would form the basis of Muslim law. The sunnah taught Muslims to imitate the way Muhammad spoke, ate, loved, washed, and worshipped, so that in the smallest details of their daily existence, they reproduced his life on earth in the hope that they would acquire his internal disposition of total surrender to God

At about the same time, in the eighth and ninth centuries, the first Muslim historians began to write about the life of the Prophet Muhammad: Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 767); Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Waqidi (d. c. 820); Muhammad ibn Sa'd (d. 845); and Abu Jarir at-Tabari (d. 923). These historians were not simply relying on their own memories and impressions, but were attempting a serious historical reconstruction. They included earlier documents in their narratives, traced oral traditions back to their original source, and, though they revered Muhammad as a man of God, they were not entirely uncritical. Largely as a result of their efforts, we know more about Muhammad than about nearly any other founder of a major religious tradition. These early sources are indispensable to any biographer of the Prophet

The work of Muhammad's first biographers would probably not satisfy a modern historian. They were men of their time and often included stories of a miraculous and legendary nature that we would interpret differently today. But they were aware of the complexity of their material. They did not promote one theory or interpretation of events at the expense of others. Sometimes they put two quite different versions of an incident side by side, and gave equal weight to each account, so that readers could make up their own minds. They did not always agree with the traditions they included, but were trying to tell the story of their Prophet as honestly and truthfully as they could. There are lacunae in their accounts. We know practically nothing about Muhammad's early life before he began to receive what he believed were revelations from God at the age of forty. Inevitably, pious legends developed about Muhammad's birth, childhood, and youth, but these clearly have symbolic rather than historical value

There is also very little material about Muhammad's early political career in Mecca. At that time, he was a relatively obscure figure, and nobody thought it worthwhile to make note of his activities. Our main source of information is the scripture that he brought to the Arabs. For some twenty-three years, from about 610 to his death in 632, Muhammad claimed that he was the recipient of direct messages from God, which were collected into the text that became known as the Qur'an. It does not contain a straightforward account of Muhammad's life, of course, but came to the Prophet piecemeal, line by line, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Sometimes the revelations dealt with a particular situation in Mecca or Medina. In the Qur'an, God answered Muhammad's critics; he reviewed their arguments; he explained the deeper significance of a battle or a conflict within the community. As each new set of verses was revealed to Muhammad, the Muslims learned it by heart, and those who were literate wrote it down. The first official compilation of the Qur'an was made in about 650, twenty years after Muhammad's death, and achieved canonical status

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The Qur'an is the holy word of God, and its authority remains absolute. But Muslims know that it is not always easy to interpret. Its laws were designed for a small community, but a century after their Prophet's death, Muslims ruled a vast empire, stretching from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees. Their circumstances were entirely different from those of the Prophet and the first Muslims, and Islam had to change and adapt. The first essays in Muslim history were written to address current perplexities. How could Muslims apply the Prophet's insights and practice to their own times? When the early biographers told the story of his life, they tried to explain some of the passages in the Qur'an by reproducing the historical context in which these particular revelations had come down to Muhammad. By understanding what had prompted a particular Qur'anic teaching, they could relate it to their own situation by means of a disciplined process of analogy. The historians and thinkers of the time believed that learning about the Prophet's struggles to make the word of God audible in the seventh century would help them to preserve his spirit in their own. From the very start, writing about the Prophet Muhammad was never a wholly antiquarian pursuit. The process continues today. Some Muslim fundamentalists have based their militant ideology on the life of Muhammad; Muslim extremists believe that he would have condoned and admired their atrocities. Other Muslims are appalled by these claims, and point to the extraordinary pluralism of the Qur'an, which condemns aggression and sees all rightly guided religions as deriving from the one God. We have a long history of Islamophobia in Western culture that dates back to the time of the Crusades. In the twelfth century, Christian monks in Europe insisted that Islam was a violent religion of the sword, and that Muhammad was a charlatan who imposed his religion on a reluctant world by force of arms; they called him a lecher and a sexual pervert. This distorted version of the Prophet's life became one of the received ideas of the West, and Western people have always found it difficult to see Muhammad in a more objective light. Since the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, members of the Christian Right in the United States and some sectors of the Western media have continued this tradition of hostility, claiming that Muhammad was irredeemably addicted to war. Some have gone so far as to claim that he was a terrorist and a pedophile

We can no longer afford to indulge this type of bigotry, because it is a gift to extremists who can use such statements to "prove" that the Western world is indeed engaged on a new crusade against the Islamic world. Muhammad was not a man of violence. We must approach his life in a balanced way, in order to appreciate his considerable achievements. To cultivate an inaccurate prejudice damages the tolerance, liberality, and compassion that are supposed to characterize Western culture

Strangely, events that took place in seventh-century Arabia have much to teach us about the events of our time and their underlying significance-far more, in fact, than the facile sound bites of politicians. Muhammad was not trying to impose religious orthodoxy- he was not much interested in metaphysics-but to change people's hearts and minds. He called the prevailing spirit of his time jahiliyyah. Muslims usually understand this to mean the "Time of Ignorance," that is, the pre-Islamic period in Arabia. But, as recent research shows, Muhammad used the term jahiliyyah to refer not to an historical era but to a state of mind

that caused violence and terror in seventh-century Arabia. Jahiliyyah, I would argue, is also .much in evidence in the West today as well as in the Muslim world

Paradoxically, Muhammad became a timeless personality because he was so rooted in his own period. We cannot understand his achievement unless we appreciate what he was up against. In order to see what he can contribute to our own predicament, we must enter the tragic world that made him a prophet nearly fourteen hundred years ago, on a lonely mountain top just outside the holy city of Mecca

Excepted from "Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time" by Karen Armstrong

## **What They say About Muhammad**

*By islam101.com*

During the centuries of the crusades, all sorts of slanders were invented against Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). But with the birth of the modern age, marked with religious tolerance and freedom of thought, there has been a great change in the approach of Western authors in their delineation of his life and character. The views of some non-Muslim scholars regarding Prophet Muhammad, given at the end, justify this opinion.

But the West has still to go a step forward to discover the greatest reality about Muhammad (pbuh) and that is his being the true and the last Prophet of God for the whole humanity. In spite of all its objectivity and enlightenment there has been no sincere and objective attempt by the West to understand the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh). It is so strange that very glowing tributes are paid to him for his integrity and achievement but his claim of being the Prophet of God has been rejected explicitly or implicitly. It is here that a searching of the heart is required, and a review of the so-called objectivity is needed. The following glaring facts from the life of Muhammad (pbuh) have been furnished to facilitate an unbiased, logical and objective decision regarding his Prophethood.

Up to the age of forty, Muhammad was not known as a statesman, a preacher or an orator. He was never seen discussing the principles of metaphysics, ethics, law, politics, economics or sociology. No doubt he possessed an excellent character, charming manners and was highly cultured. Yet there was nothing so deeply striking and so radically extraordinary in him that would make men expect something great and revolutionary from him in the future. But when he came out of the Cave (HIRA) with a new message, he was completely transformed. Is it possible for such a person of the above qualities to turn all of a sudden into 'an impostor' and claim to be the Prophet of Allah and invite all the rage of his people? One might ask: for what reason did he suffer all those hardships? His people offered to accept him as their King and he would leave the preaching of his religion. But he chose to refuse their tempting offers and go on preaching his religion single-handedly in face of all kinds of insults, social boycott and even physical assault by his own people. Was it not only God's support and his firm will to disseminate the message of Allah and his deep-rooted belief that ultimately Islam would emerge as the only way of life for humanity, that he stood like a mountain in the face of all opposition and conspiracies to eliminate him? Furthermore, had he come with a design of rivalry with the Christians and the Jews, why should he have made belief in Jesus Christ and Moses and other Prophets of God (peace be upon them), a basic requirement of faith without which no one could be a Muslim?

Is it not an incontrovertible proof of his Prophethood that in spite of being unlettered and having led a very normal and quiet life for forty years, when he began preaching his message, all of Arabia stood in awe and wonder and was bewitched by his wonderful eloquence and oratory? It was so matchless that the whole legion of Arab poets, preachers and orators of the highest calibre failed to bring forth its equivalent. And above all, how could he then pronounce truths of a scientific nature contained in the Qur'an that no other human being could possibly have developed at that time?

Last but not least, why did he lead a hard life even after gaining power and authority? Just ponder over the words he uttered while dying: "We the community of the Prophets are not inherited. Whatever we leave is for charity."

As a matter of fact, Muhammad (pbuh) is the last link of the chain of Prophets sent in different lands and times since the very beginning of the human life on this planet. Read the following writings of the Western authors:

"If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of

men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and souls. . . his forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire; his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death; all these attest not to an imposture but to a firm conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma. This dogma was twofold, the unity of God and the immateriality of God; the former telling what God is, the latter telling what God is not; the one overthrowing false gods with the sword, the other starting an idea with words."

"Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?"

Lamartine, HISTOIRE DE LA TURQUIE, Paris, 1854, Vol. II, pp. 276-277.

"It is not the propagation but the permanency of his religion that deserves our wonder, the same pure and perfect impression which he engraved at Mecca and Medina is preserved, after the revolutions of twelve centuries by the Indian, the African and the Turkish proselytes of the Koran. . . The Mahometans have uniformly withstood the temptation of reducing the object of their faith an devotion to a level with the senses and imagination of man. 'I believe in One God and Mahomet the Apostle of God' is the simple and invariable profession of Islam. The intellectual image of the Deity has never been degraded by any visible idol; the honours of the prophet have never transgressed the measure of human virtue, and his living precepts have restrained the gratitude of his disciples within the bounds of reason and religion."

Edward Gibbon and Simon Ockley, HISTORY OF THE SARACEN EMPIRE, London, 1870, p. 54.

"He was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without Pope's pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar: without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue; if ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right divine, it was Mohammed, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports."

Bosworth Smith, MOHAMMAD AND MOHAMMADANISM, London, 1874, p. 92.

"It is impossible for anyone who studies the life and character of the great Prophet of Arabia, who knows how he taught and how he lived, to feel anything but reverence for that mighty Prophet, one of the great messengers of the Supreme. And although in what I put to you I shall say many things which may be familiar to many, yet I myself feel whenever I re-read them, a new way of admiration, a new sense of reverence for that mighty Arabian teacher."

Annie Besant, THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF MUHAMMAD, Madras, 1932, p. 4.

"His readiness to undergo persecutions for his beliefs, the high moral character of the men who believed in him and looked up to him as leader, and the greatness of his ultimate achievement - all argue his fundamental integrity. To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves. Moreover, none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad."

W. Montgomery Watt, MOHAMMAD AT MECCA, Oxford, 1953, p. 52.

"Muhammad, the inspired man who founded Islam, was born about A.D. 570 into an Arabian tribe that worshipped idols. Orphaned at birth, he was always particularly solicitous of the poor and needy, the widow and the orphan, the slave and the downtrodden. At twenty, he was already a successful businessman, and soon became director of camel caravans for a wealthy widow. When he reached twenty-five, his employer, recognizing his merit, proposed marriage.

Even though she was fifteen years older, he married her, and as long as she lived, remained a devoted husband.

"Like almost every major prophet before him, Muhammad fought shy of serving as the transmitter of God's word, sensing his own inadequacy. But the angel commanded "Read." So far as we know, Muhammad was unable to read or write, but he began to dictate those inspired words which would soon revolutionize a large segment of the earth: "There is one God."

"In all things Muhammad was profoundly practical. When his beloved son Ibrahim died, an eclipse occurred, and rumours of God's personal condolence quickly arose. Whereupon Muhammad is said to have announced, "An eclipse is a phenomenon of nature. It is foolish to attribute such things to the death or birth of a human being." "At Muhammad's own death an attempt was made to deify him, but the man who was to become his administrative successor killed the hysteria with one of the noblest speeches in religious history: "If there are any among you who worshipped Muhammad, he is dead. But if it is God you worshipped, He lives forever."

James A. Michener, "ISLAM: THE MISUNDERSTOOD RELIGION," in READER'S DIGEST (American edition), May 1955, pp. 68-70.

"My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular level."

Michael H. Hart, THE 100: A RANKING OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSONS IN HISTORY, New York: Hart Publishing Company, Inc., 1978, p. 33.

## **Heraclius And Abu Sufyan**

*By Abul hasan 'Ali Nadwi*

Heraclius decided to satisfy himself about the contents of the Apostle's letter. He ordered to search for a man from Arabia who could tell him about the Prophet. Abu Sufyan happened to be there on a business trip and so he was summoned before him. The question raised by Heraclius on this occasion showed that he had a deep insight into the scriptures and the teachings of the prophet of yore and he knew how and when God sends them and the way they are usually treated by their people. Abu Sufyan, too, acted like a true Arab for he considered it below his dignity to tell the Emperor anything but truth.

The conversation between Heraclius and Abu Sufyan is significant enough to be quoted here in extenso or at full length.

Heraclius: Tell me about his lineage.

Abu Sufyan: He comes of the best lineage.

Heraclius: Did anybody before him make the claim he does?

Abu Sufyan: No.

Heraclius: Had there been any king in his family?

Abu Sufyan: No.

Heraclius: Who have followed him? Are they the poor and the weak or the nobles?

Abu Sufyan: They are all poor and weak.

Heraclius: Are his followers increasing or deserting him?

Abu Sufyan: Their numbers are growing.

Heraclius: Do those who enter his religion despise and leave him?

Abu Sufyan: No.

Heraclius: Did you find him telling lies before he made the claim?

Abu Sufyan: No.

Heraclius: Did he ever break the word given by him?

Abu Sufyan: Not as yet, but we will see what he does in the future.

Heraclius: Did you ever fight against him?

Abu Sufyan: Yes.

Heraclius: What was the result?

Abu Sufyan: The fortunes have varied, sometimes in our favor, sometimes in his.

Heraclius: What is it that he teaches?

Abu Sufyan: He asks to worship One God, and not associate ought with Him. To offer prayers, be virtuous to speak the truth, and be kind to the kinsmen.

Heraclius then asked the interpreter to tell Abu Sufyan: “I asked you about his lineage and you replied that it was the noblest among you. Prophets always come from the best lineage, I asked you if any man in his family had made a similar claim and your reply was ‘No.’ If anybody had made a claim to apostleship in his family, I would have thought that he was imitating him. Then I asked if there had been a king in his family, and you said ‘No.’ Had it been so, I would have surmised that he was trying to recover his lost kingdom. And I inquired if you knew him to be untruthful before making the claim, and you said ‘No.’ I know that it is not possible for a man to be truthful to the people but to mince the truth in regard to God. Then I asked you if his followers were drawn from the people of rank and distinction or they were the poor and the weak, and you replied that they were humble and meek. Prophets are always followed by the humble and poor in the beginning. And I asked if his followers were increasing and you said that they were gaining in numbers. Faith is always like that for it goes on increasing until it is triumphant. Then I asked if anybody had turned away from him and rejected his faith and your reply was ‘No’. The faith once settled in the heart never leaves it. And then I asked if he ever broke his word and you said ‘No.’ Prophets never break their promises. Then I asked about his teachings and you told me that he asked you to worship One God, not to associate ought with Him; bade you to turn away from the idols and to speak the truth; and to be virtuous and to glorify the Lord. Now, if you have told me the truth about him he will conquer the ground that is beneath my feet. I knew that a prophet was about to be born but I had never thought he would come from Arabia. If it had been possible I would have called upon him, and if I had been with him, I would have washed his feet.”

Heraclius summoned his chiefs and courtiers and got the doors of his chamber closed upon them. Then, turning he said, “Ye Chiefs of Rome! If you desire safety and guidance so that your kingdom shall be firmly established, then you follow the Arabian Prophet.” Whereupon they all started off but found the doors closed. When Heraclius saw them getting sore, he was despaired of their conversion, so he ordered to bring them back. He said, “What I had said before was to test your constancy and faith and I am now satisfied of your firmness and devotion.” The courtiers lowered their heads and were pleased to hear him speaking thus.

Heraclius lost the golden opportunity as he preferred his kingdom over the eternal truth. As a consequence, he lost even his kingdom after a few years during the time of Caliph ‘Umar.

Who were the Ariseen? – Araisiyan or ariseen is the word used by the Apostle in his letter to Heraclius. No other letter written to any other Arab and non-Arab king and potentate contains the word whose significance is disputed by the scholars of Traditions and lexicographers. According to one version it is the plural of Arisi which means the servants and the peasants.<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Manzoor makes it out as a synonym for cultivators in the Lisan-ul-Arab and cites Th’alab as the authority for holding this view. He also quotes Ibn al-‘Arabi in his support while at the same time cites a quotation from Abu ‘Ubayda to show that the word also means the chief or the elder who is obeyed or whose orders are carried out.<sup>2</sup>

Now the question arises that if ariseen means peasants, it should have been employed to denote the subjects of Chosroes rather than the population of Byzantine Empire. The class of cultivators was by far more numerous under the Persian Empire and formed the chief source of its revenues. Ibn Mazoor has cited Azhari who says, “the people of Iraq who followed the religion of Chosroes were peasants and countrymen. The Romans were artisans and craftsmen and, therefore, they had nicknamed the Magis as Ariseen which meant that they were peasants. Arabs also used to call the Persians as fallaheen or the peasants.”<sup>3</sup>

Ariseen has also been interpreted to denote Arians or the follower of Arius (280-336) who was the founder of a well-known Christian sect. The doctrine of Arius which hovered for a long time between acceptance and rejection as the official creed of the Byzantine Empire, upheld the Unity of God and denied the co-substantiality of the Son with the father. In other words

Arianism maintained a complete distinction between the Creator and the creature, emphasizing the inferiority of the latter. In short, Arius held that the characteristics of the One and Only God are solitude and eternity and He puts forth nothing on the earth from His own substance. God brought into being an independent substance as the instrument by which all things were created. This being is termed, according to Arius, as Wisdom, Son, Image, Word, etc. in the scripture. The Son is not truly God, but is only the so-called Word and Wisdom. Like all rational beings, the Son is endowed with free will. He is not absolute but only relative, he is knowledge of the father.<sup>4</sup>

James Mckinon writes in his book 'From Christ to Constantine':

"Arius insisted that God alone is primeval, eternal and infinite; None is co-substantial with Him. He it is who brought the Son into existence and, therefore, the Son is not eternal. God was not father always; a time was there when the Son did not exist at all. The Son has an independent substance not shared by God for the Son is susceptible to change and contingencies. He cannot, therefore, be called God although he has perfection in his being. At any rate, he is a perfect being."<sup>5</sup>

The church of Alexandria had, by the fourth century adopted the view that the Father and Son were identical in nature, and that the Son was equal to, independent of, and contemporaneous with the father. Arius, the presbyter of the district of Baucalis, disputed this view and was condemned by a local synod which met at Alexandria in 321 A.D. Arius left Alexandria but the controversy between him and Bishop Alexander continued to be fought out only among the longshoremen. After trying hard to stay out of the verbal tussle, and urging the bishops to stop discussing it, Constantine realized that it required to be settled, but he did not succeed in his efforts. He summoned in 325 A.D., the first council of the whole of church, a council called ecumenical, at Nicaea, across the strait from Constantinople which was attended by 2030 bishops. Constantine was inclined to the divinity of Christ, as God the Son, and he gave his decision in its favor although a large majority of the Bishops preferred the doctrine of Arius. Only 326 bishops are reported to have cast their votes in favor of the view held by the King. Arius was banished to Illyricum, his writings were burnt and their possession was declared a crime, but the decree of Nicaea did not dispose of Arianism as the official creed of the realm although Arius died suddenly.<sup>6</sup>

In his History of conflict between Religion and Science, John William Draper says that in the fourth century alone there were thirteen councils averse to Arius, fifteen in his favor, and seventeen for the semi-Arians – forty five all in all.<sup>7</sup>

Formulation of One God in three person was, as a matter of fact, not solidly established in Christian life and in its profession of faith prior to the end of the fourth century. The mystery of Trinitarianism was truly unraveled by the second half of the nineteenth century when Biblical theologians came around to acknowledge that when "one does speak of an unqualified Trinitarianism, one has moved from the period of Christian origins to, say, the last quadrant of the fourth century. It was only then that what might be called the definitive Trinitarian dogma: "One God in three persons," became thoroughly assimilated into Christian life and thought."<sup>8</sup>

The Nicene dogma of Trinity violated the plain and simple teachings of Christ. Both competed, for a long time, to capture and win the minds of the people. A large number of Christians, especially in the eastern parts of the Byzantine Empire, continued to deem the Arian doctrine as the trustworthy dogma of faith. Until Theodosius the great (346-395) summoned yet another council of the bishops at Constantinople which finally set its seal on the divinity of Christ or unity in the Trinity of Godhead. Arianism was thereafter made a capital offense and suppressed ruthlessly. Arians went underground but traces of Arianism remained in the Christendom for a couple of centuries after the Council of Nicaea.

The word 'Arisiyyin' used in the Apostle's letter to Heraclius can, therefore, be reasonably deemed to stand for Arians since Heraclius was himself faithful to the dogma of Arius which approached nearest to the Unity of God among the Christians.

Strangely enough, some of the learned scholars of the earliest times have also favored this interpretation of the word in question, for example, Imam Tahawi (d. 321 A.H. writes in *Mushkil al-Athar*:

“Some of the knowledgeable scholars say that a sect among the courtiers of Heraclius, known as Ariseen, believed in monotheism and the created nature of Christ. They did not accept what the Christians say about the divinity of Christ. They relied upon the Gospels and acted on its commandments, but the Christians disputed their faith. If that be so, the sect could be called Araisiyan or Ariseen, as known to the scholars of Traditions.”<sup>9</sup>

Nuwawi (d. 676 A.H.) the commentator of the *Sahi Muslim*, has also expressed a similar opinion in this regard. He says:

“Others say that they were Jews and Christians who followed ‘Abdallah B. Aris’.”<sup>10</sup>

**Footnotes:**

1. See *Nawawi's Commentary on Muslim and Majm'a Bahar-ul Anwar by Muhammad Tahir Patni*.
2. *Lisan-ul-Arab*, See “Ars”.
3. *Lisan-ul-Arab*, See “Ars”.
4. *Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics, Vol. I, Art. 'Arianism' p. 777*
5. *James Mackinon, from to Constantine, London, 1936, (Rendered from Urdu Translation)*.
6. *Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics, art. Arianism*.
7. *J.W. Draper, History of Conflict between Religion and Science, London (1910), p. 205*.
8. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia (1967) art. "The Holy Trinity", Vol. 14, p. 295*.
9. *Mushkit-wal-Athar, Vol. p. 399*
10. *Nawawi, Sharah Muslim, Vol. II, p. 98*.

## **Abdullah Ibn Sailam**

Al-Husayn ibn Sailam was a Jewish rabbi in Yathrib who was widely respected and honoured by the people of the city even by those who were not Jewish. He was known for his piety and goodness, his upright conduct and his truthfulness.

Al-Husayn lived a peaceful and gentle life but he was serious, purposeful and organized in the way he spent his time. For a fixed period each day, he would worship, teach and preach in the temple. Then he would spend some time in his orchard, looking after date palms, pruning and pollinating. Thereafter, to increase his understanding and knowledge of his religion, he would devote himself to the study of the Torah.

In this study, it is said, he was particularly struck by some verses of the Torah which dealt with the coming of a Prophet who would complete the message of previous Prophets. Al-Husayn therefore took an immediate and keen interest when he heard reports of the appearance of a Prophet in Makkah. He said:

"When I heard of the appearance of the Messenger of God, peace be on him, I began to make enquiries about his name, his genealogy, his characteristics, his time and place and I began to compare this information with what is contained in our books. From these enquiries, I became convinced about the authenticity of his prophethood and I affirmed the truth of his mission. However, I concealed my conclusions from the Jews. I held my tongue...

Then came the day when the Prophet, peace be on him, left Makkah and headed for Yathrib. When he reached Yathrib and stopped at Quba, a man came rushing into the city, calling out to people and announcing the arrival of the Prophet. At that moment, I was at the top of a palm tree doing some work. My aunt, Khalidah bint al-Harith, was sitting under the tree. On hearing the news, I shouted:

'Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! (God is Great! God is Great!' When my aunt heard my takbir, she remonstrated with me: 'May God frustrate you...By God, if you had heard that Moses was coming you would not have been more enthusiastic.'

'Auntie, he is really, by God, the 'brother' of Moses and follows his religion. He was sent with the same mission as Moses.' She was silent for a while and then said: 'Is he the Prophet about whom you spoke to us who would be sent to confirm the truth preached by previous (Prophets) and complete the message of his Lord?' 'Yes,' I replied.

Without any delay or hesitation, I went out to meet the Prophet. I saw crowds of people at his door. I moved about in the crowds until I reached close to him. The first words I heard him say were:

'O people! Spread peace...Share food...Pray during the night while people (normally) sleep... and you will enter Paradise in peace...'

I looked at him closely. I scrutinized him and was convinced that his face was not that of an imposter. I went closer to him and made the declaration of faith that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

The Prophet turned to me and asked: 'What is your name?' 'Al-Husayn ibn Sailam,' I replied.

'Instead, it is (now) Abdullah ibn Sallam,' he said (giving me a new name). 'Yes,' I agreed. 'Abdullah ibn Sailam (it shall be). By Him who has sent you with the Truth, I do not wish to have another name after this day.'

I returned home and introduced Islam to my wife, my children and the rest of my household. They all accepted Islam including my aunt Khalidah who was then an old lady. However, I

advised them then to conceal our acceptance of Islam from the Jews until I gave them permission. They agreed.

Subsequently, I went back to the Prophet, peace be on him, and said: 'O Messenger of God! The Jews are a people (inclined to) slander and falsehood. I want you to invite their most prominent men to meet you. (During the meeting however), you should keep me concealed from them in one of your rooms. Ask them then about my status among them before they find out of my acceptance of Islam. Then invite them to Islam. If they were to know that I have become a Muslim, they would denounce me and accuse me of everything base and slander me.'

The Prophet kept me in one of his rooms and invited the prominent Jewish personalities to visit him. He introduced Islam to them and urged them to have faith in God...They began to dispute and argue with him about the Truth. When he realized that they were not inclined to accept Islam, he put the question to them:

'What is the status of Al-Husayn ibn Sallam among you?'

'He is our sayyid (leader) and the son of our sayyid. He is our rabbi and our alim (scholar), the son of our rabbi and alim.'

'If you come to know that he has accepted Islam, would you accept Islam also?' asked the Prophet.

'God forbid! He would not accept Islam. May God protect him from accepting Islam,' they said (horrified).

At this point I came out in full view of them and announced: 'O assembly of Jews! Be conscious of God and accept what Muhammad has brought. By God, you certainly know that he is the Messenger of God and you can find prophecies about him and mention of his name and characteristics in your Torah. I for my part declare that he is the Messenger of God. I have faith in him and believe that he is true. I know him.'

'You are a liar,' they shouted. 'By God, you are evil and ignorant, the son of an evil and ignorant person.' And they continued to heap every conceivable abuse on me..."

Abdullah ibn Sallam approached Islam with a soul thirsty for knowledge. He was passionately devoted to the Quran and spent much time reciting and studying its beautiful and sublime verses. He was deeply attached to the noble Prophet and was constantly in his company.

Much of his time he spent in the masjid, engaged in worship, in learning and in teaching. He was known for his sweet, moving and effective way of teaching study circles of Sahabah who assembled regularly in the Prophet's mosque.

Abdullah ibn Sallam was known among the Sahabah as a man from ahl-al-Jannah "- the people of Paradise. This was because of his determination on the advice of the Prophet to hold steadfastly to the "most trustworthy handhold" that is belief in and total submission to God.

## **Celebrating The Prophet's Birthday (Pbuh)**

*Written by Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid*

### **Question:**

Why some people accept and some unaccept the celebration of the prophet (Sal-Allahu Alayhi wa Sallam)? What is your opinion?

### **Answer**

Praise be to Allaah.

There is nothing in the Qur'aan to say that we should celebrate the Mawlid or birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The Prophet himself (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not do this or command anyone to do it, either during his lifetime or after his death. Indeed, he told them not to exaggerate about him as the Christians had exaggerated about Jesus (upon whom be peace). He said: "Do not exaggerate about me as the Christians exaggerated about the son of Maryam. I am only a slave, so say, 'The slave of Allaah and His Messenger.'" (Reported by al-Bukhaari). What has been reported is that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) made the day of his birth a day of worship, which is different to celebration. He was asked about fasting on Mondays, and he said: "That is the day on which I was born and the day on which I was entrusted with the Mission or when I was first given Revelation." (Reported by Muslim, al-Nisaa'i and Abu Dawood).

Moreover, we know that the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) were the people who loved the Prophet most. Was it reported that Abu Bakr, who was the closest of people to him and the one who loved him the most, celebrated the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)? Was it reported that 'Umar, who ruled for twelve years, or 'Uthmaan, did this? Was it reported that 'Ali, his relative and foster son, did this? Was it reported that any of the Sahaabah did this? No, by Allaah! Is it because they were not aware of its importance, or did they not truly love the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)? No one would say such a thing except one who has gone astray and is leading others astray.

Did any of the imaams – Abu Haneefah, Maalik, al-Shaafi'i, Ahmad, al-Hasan al-Basri, Ibn Seereen – do this or command others to do it or say that it was good? By Allaah, no! It was not even mentioned during the first and best three centuries. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in a saheeh hadeeth: "The best of mankind are my generation (or my century), then those who come after them, then those who come after them. Then there will come a people who will not care if their testimony comes before their oath or vice versa (i.e., they will not take such matter seriously)." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Muslim and al-Tirmidhi). The celebration of the Prophet's birthday appeared many centuries later, when many of the features of true religion had vanished and bid'ah had become widespread.

Thus this celebration became a sign of one's love for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)? But can it be possible that the Sahaabah, the imaams and the people of the best three centuries were unaware of it, and it was only those who came later who were aware of its importance?! What the Qur'aan tells us is that love of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is demonstrated by following the guidance he brought. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Say (O Muhammad): 'If you (really) love Allaah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allaah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Say: 'Obey Allaah and the Messenger.' But if they turn away, then Allaah does not like the disbelievers." [Aal 'Imraan 3:31-32]

The first aayah explains that love is just a claim, but the proof of sincerity is following what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) brought. The second aayah reaffirms the importance and necessity of obeying Allaah and His Messenger. Hence Allaah ended the aayah with a very stern warning in which those who refuse to obey are described as kaafirs, and Allah does not love the disbelievers. We ask Allaah to keep us safe from that. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told us of the danger of not obeying him, and the danger of adding to what he brought. The celebration of Mawlid or his birthday is indeed an addition to what he brought – as all the scholars agree. He said: “The best of speech is the Book of Allaah, and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The most evil of things are those which are newly-invented (in religion), and every innovation is a going .(astray.” (Reported by Muslim and al-Nisaa’i

We ask Allaah to protect us from bid’ah and to bless us by helping us to follow. Allaah knows .best. May Allaah bless our Prophet Muhammad

### **Islam Q&A**

*Sheikh Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid*

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