

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) before forty.

Outline.

The first revelation of the Qur'an came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the cave of Hira, when he was forty years old. This marked the official, public announcement of Muhammad's *Nabuwwa*. The aim of the talk is;

- To ask why the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was given the first revelation at this age (and perhaps not before).
- To highlight what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was like before this age. What was his personality like? Was he special?
- To ask whether the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) knew he was going to be the final Messenger before this age?

Part One; The age of forty.

Different prophets and messengers declared their *Nabuwwa* publicly at different ages. For example:

- Jesus (peace be upon him) announced his *Nabuwwa* as a small child in the cradle:

قال اني عبد الله اتاني الكتاب و جعلني نبيا

'He said: I am the slave of Allah! I have been given the Book and I have been made a Prophet' (19: 30).

- Yusuf (peace be upon him) too was given *Nabuwwa* during his youth.
- But Allah deemed it appropriate for our Messenger to delay the public announcement until forty. What is the reason behind this?
 - a. Forty has been described the age of maturity. Allah says:

حتي اذا بلغ أشده و بلغ اربعين سنة

'...till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years' (46: 15).

Even in the western culture, people say that 'life begins at forty'. It is at this age where the effects of youth wean off and man shows more maturity, wisdom and insight in his words and sayings.

Incidentally, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) identified this same age as the watershed moment in a person's faith. Ibn Abbas reports that he said:

'Whoever reaches the age of forty and his good acts do not outnumber his bad acts, then let him be prepared for the fire of hell'¹

b. A period was required to prove the perfect character of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Allah wanted people to be assured of his truthfulness, integrity and radiant character. The best way to do this was to spend forty years in the presence of the Makkans as a truthful and trustworthy individual. Once the public announcement would appear, then the previous forty years would serve as a reminder to the Makkans; if he has never lied before in his life, why would he do it now when he preaches the oneness of Allah? Allah says:

فقد لبثت فيكم عمرا من قبله أفلا تعقلون

'Verily I have stayed amongst you a lifetime before this. Do you not have sense? (10:16).

During this period, they never saw the Prophet read or write. So this shows that the Qur'an must be the word of Allah.

During his youth, the Makkans testified that he never committed sin. So why would he commit sin now (by lying) at the age of maturity?

So what did the Makkans see from the character of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?

Part two; His character in general before the age of forty.

His religious outlook.

- Ibn Hajar reports that even in his youth, the Prophet was immune from bad character and from the bad morals associated with the time of Jahiliyya. For instance:
 - he never participated in their festivals.
 - he never even touched an idol, let alone worship them.
 - he never took an oath in their name of the idols.
 - he never consumed food upon which the name of the idols had been invoked.

His moral outlook.

● In short, the Prophet led a perfect life. He possessed all praiseworthy characteristics. He was:

- i. Trustworthy. Other prophets – Nuh, Hud, Salih, Lut and Shu'ayb – told their people that they were trustworthy (amin). Our Prophet never had to do that; his people themselves that the Prophet he was the Amin.
- ii. Universally-liked.
- iii. Fair.
- iv. Approachable.
- v. Chaste.

¹ Tafsir Zia al-Qur'an, 4: 486.

- When the first revelation came to the Prophet, Khadija (may Allah be pleased with her) informed him why he was most deserved of being the last messenger. She said to the Prophet that so far in his life, he had shown great character; She said:

انك لتصل الرحم

You certainly join bonds between relatives.

و تحمل الكل

You lift the burden of the weak.

و تكسب المعدوم

Financially, you help the needy.

و تقري الضيف

You are hospitable to guests.

و تعين علي نواب الحق

You help those who are right.

In short, the Prophet proved himself as a good person to the Makkans before forty through his Akhlaaq, (morals) not through his miracles and through his excessive worship. He was known as the Sadiq and the Amin not the Sufi, the Aabid and the Zakir.

Part Three; Key events in the Prophet's life before the age of forty.

a. *Shaqq Sadar*.

Although the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was publicly honoured with prophecy at the age of forty, he had always been in the protection and care of his Lord. The *Shaqq Sadar*, or the splitting of the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) chest, was just one episode that highlighted the special status and rank reserved for the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), from a very early age.

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates that the Archangel Jibril (peace be upon him) came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once (in his young age) when he was playing with children. Jibril (peace be upon him) grabbed him and shook him. He then split his chest and removed his heart from within. Then from the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) heart, he removed a small piece of flesh and said 'this is the devil's part'. He then washed it in a gold basin full of Zamzam water. He repaired it and then placed the flesh back in its place. The children were shocked by what they saw and ran to the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) suckling mother and cried: 'Muhammad has been killed'. They all ran to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and found him pale-skinned.

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), the narrator of this Hadith, added that he himself later saw the stitch-marks on the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) chest. (*Sahih Muslim; Book of Faith*)

The scholars write that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was probably in his teens when this episode occurred. Furthermore, they add that the splitting of the Prophet's chest also occurred on the Night of Ascension (Layla al-Isra wa al-Mi'raj).

b. The trip to Syria.

When the Prophet was about twelve years old, he went on a trading trip to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib. Their caravan reached a place called Busra. A Christian monk called Bahira lived here. Normally, he did not take any interest in passing caravans, but when he saw Muhammad (peace be upon him), he wanted to meet him and learn more. He knew he was special because he saw a cloud over his head at all times, protecting him from the sun's heat. Therefore he decided to invite all the members of the traveling caravan for a meal that evening.

As the guests left, Bahira called Muhammad over and talked to him.

Bahira: Swear by Laat and Uzza that you will answer all my questions correctly.

Muhammad: Do not ask me anything for the sake of these idols. By God! I have never hated anything more!

Bahira: Then tell me in the name of Allah.

Muhammad: Now ask me whatever you want to ask, I shall answer you correctly.

Bahira asked many questions, including about his sleep. He lifted his shirt and saw the sign of *Nabuwwa* on his back, which he kissed. He then approached Abu Talib and asked him his relationship to Muhammad. He told him that he was his son. Bahira immediately said: 'He is not your son, for his father cannot be alive.' Abu Talib then said that he was Muhammad's uncle.

Bahira instructed Abu Talib to return him to Makka as soon as possible and to protect him from the Jews. 'Your nephew will have glory; this is what is written in our books and in what our ancestors have told us.'

c. Hilf al-Fudul.

Before the appearance of Islam, the land of Hijaz had a climate of lawlessness, injustice and oppression. There was no law, no code of justice, no courts or no police. It was in essence 'survival of the fittest'. One's fate largely depended on tribal affiliation.

The Prophet was about twenty when he joined an alliance established by Abd Allah ibn Jad'an (from Banu Jurhum), whose aim was to 'help the oppressed, rich or poor'. The name of this alliance was 'Hilf al-Fudul', which means 'the oath of the Fadals'. This is because three men in this alliance had the name Fadal; Fadal ibn Fadala, Fadal ibn Wara'a and Fadal ibn Harith. They cemented this alliance by drinking Zamzam water washed from the Black Stone.

The alliance was very successful in helping the oppressed. Once a villager came to Makka with his daughter. A rich man kidnapped her and refused to return her. Thanks to the constant pressure from the alliance, the man was forced to return the daughter unharmed.

On another occasion, an outsider came to Makka for trading purposes. Aas ibn Wa'il took the commodities and then refused to pay. Hilf al-Fudul played an important and pivotal role in ensuring that justice was done.

In short, it was a very successful movement which the Prophet later remembered with great fondness. The alliance tells us that:

- a. The Prophet was a lover of justice before and after forty.
- b. Living in a non-Muslim society, you can and should seek peace and security.
- c. The Prophet had great power in his diplomacy and his ability to persuade others. This could only be if he possessed a radiant and flawless character.

Part Four; only the public announcement came at forty, he knew he was a Prophet before then.

Our belief is that Muhammad (peace be upon him) always knew he was destined to be the final messenger of Allah. Forty merely marked the public announcement of this *Nabuwwa*. This contrasts with some Muslims who say Muhammad was an ordinary man who was suddenly given the title of Prophet at forty, and that it all came to a shock to him. Here are just a few points to prove our beliefs in this matter:

- Imam al-Tirmidhi reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked when *Nabuwwa* had been given to him. he replied ‘when Adam was a mixture of clay and soul’

متي وجبت لك النبوة؟ قال و ادم بين الروح و الجسد

- The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Indeed I certainly know a stone in Makka that would greet me (with the words O Messenger of Allah) before I was given the *Nabuwwa* (publicly).²

اني لاعرف حجرا بمكة كان يسلم علي قبل ان ينزل علي

It is inconceivable that a stone knew of Muhammad’s *Nabuwwa* and he himself did not.

- The events that occurred at his birth.
 - On this night, all the statues and idols that were in the Ka’ba tumbled and fell to the ground.
 - At the time of the Prophet’s (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) birth, a shining light appeared by which Sayyida Amina (may Allah be pleased with her) could see the palaces of Persia.
 - In Iran on this night, a fire-temple that had remained lit for one thousand years suddenly went out and fused.

These events do not indicate the birth of an ordinary man; it indicates the birth of the mercy of all mankind.

² *Zia al-Nabi*, 2: 189.

Part five: Conclusion.

When politicians intend to stand for election, then immediately the media begin to scrutinise his past. They check the biography and see if they can find anything detrimental or controversial. When David Cameron stood to be Conservative leader, he was continuously asked whether he took drugs at Eton College. In the USA, the drop-out rate for potential political candidates is alarming, precisely because the media always find a weak part of his previous life.

When this idea is applied to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), we find that he was the same, after forty and before. He was honest, trustworthy and likeable after forty, and the same is the case before forty. He hated idols and abhorred Shirk after forty and before this age too. He liked seclusion, *Zikr* and time for reflection after forty and he liked this before forty too.

This analysis shows that the Prophet was not an ordinary man who was given the duties of *Nabuwwa* at forty suddenly. *Nabuwwa* is a special gift which ensures divine-protection at all times. He was an extraordinary person from his very first moment on earth. He knew he was going to be a Prophet, only the public announcement was delayed.

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