

Who is the Prophet Muhammad?

Recent current events concerning the Islamic faith and more specifically the Prophet of Islam have led to many people asking the question, "Who is Muhammad and what makes him so beloved to the Muslim people?" In an attempt to make people in the west more aware of the life and character of the Prophet of Islam this CD was put together focusing on not only the biography of Muhammad, but more specifically on his merciful, gentle and tolerant disposition. It is hoped that through the information presented here that listeners will gain a deeper appreciation of both the true values of the Islamic faith and the true nature of the Prophet Muhammad.

Before discussing the life of Muhammad though, I thought it would be beneficial to share with you the thoughts of some leading western personalities of recent times regarding Muhammad. They too were unaware of the noble qualities of this admirable man before they read his biography and studied his statements. Let's see what they had to say:

George Bernard Shaw, the British playwright said: *"The world is in dire need of a man with the mind of Muhammad; religious people in the Middle Ages, due to their ignorance and prejudice, had pictured him in a very dark way as they used to consider him the enemy of Christianity. But after looking into the story of this man I found it to be an amazing and a miraculous one, and I came to the conclusion that he was never an enemy of Christianity, and must be called instead the savior of humanity. In my opinion, if he was to be given control over the world today, he would solve our problems and secure the peace and happiness which the world is longing for."*

Michael Hart, author of *'The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History'* said: *"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."*

Annie Besant, wrote in *'The Life and Teachings of Muhammad'*: *"It is impossible for anyone who studies the personality of the great Prophet of the Arabs, and come to know how this prophet he used to live, and how he taught the people, but to feel respect towards this honorable prophet; one of the great messengers whom Allah sent"*

The British philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, who won the Nobel Prize for his book *'The Heroes'* wrote: *"It is a great shame for any one to listen to the accusation that Islam is a lie and that Muhammad was a fabricator and a deceiver. We saw that he remained steadfast upon his principles, with firm determination; kind and generous, compassionate, pious, virtuous, with real manhood, hardworking and sincere. Besides all these qualities, he was lenient with others, tolerant, kind, cheerful and praiseworthy and perhaps he would joke and tease his companions. He was just, truthful, smart, pure, magnanimous and present-minded; his face was radiant as if he had lights within him to illuminate the darkest of nights; he*

was a great man by nature who was not educated in a school nor nurtured by a teacher as he was not in need of any of this."

And so goes the statements of many other authors, thinkers, politicians and lay people who discovered the beauty, simplicity and greatness of the life of the Prophet of Islam.

Looking into the Islamic scriptures though, one can get an even better idea as to the character of Muhammad both through the words of God Almighty in the Islamic holy book, the Quran, and also through Muhammad's statements to his disciples or companions as they were known. Amongst the different ways that God describes His Final Prophet, the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an, we see the following words:

And We have not sent you forth except as a mercy to the universe. (21:107)

Muhammad was born in the sixth century of the Common Era, or about 1400 years ago. His father died while he was but an infant and his mother died of illness when he was only five or six. Yet, despite being orphaned at such a young age, he still grew up to be "a mercy to the universe" when he was selected at the age of forty by the one God, known in Arabic as Allah, to be the Final Messenger and Prophet to humanity.

The Prophet Muhammad is the Prophet of Mercy, sent by God as a mercy to all mankind; believers, non-believers, and hypocrites. His mercy sheltered all of humanity: men, women and children. As a family man, he raised four daughters, loving them and providing for them, and he cherished the memory of their mother and his wife of 25 years, Khadijah, till the end of his life. Muhammad was also merciful to all creatures including animals and plants. He taught that feeding an animal can take one to Heaven whereas mistreating it could take one to Hell.

When he began calling his townspeople in Makkah to worship God alone as opposed to their many idols, he faced immediate resistance from many sectors of his society including some of his own relatives. When people began submitting themselves to the worship of God alone, the basic essence of the word Islam, his townspeople – the people of Quraish as they were called – only escalated their resistance to him and began actively persecuting Muhammad and his followers. There are many stories from the Islamic history that tell of the torture, humiliation and abuse faced by the first believers and by Muhammad himself.

One such heartrending story from the Prophet's life is when one day he went out to pray in the open and when he had bowed his face down in worship one of the idol worshippers came and poured a large bucket of animal intestines over Muhammad's head while. Witnessing this tremendous abuse, his young daughter Fatimah ran over to her father and wiped away the filth from over his head with tears running down her young cheeks. Later the pagans tried to kill Muhammad and his followers both secretly and openly to stop the spread of Islam. In fact, the first person ever killed simply because of their belief in Islam was an elderly woman named Sumayyah who was killed in the first decade of the spread of Islam after she refused to go back to the worship of idols.

The seriousness of the torture to the early Muslims and the threat of death to Muhammad and his followers led to their migration from their home town of Makkah to the city of Madinah about 13 years after the Prophet first received revelation from Almighty God. It was there that Muhammad established a city-state and it was there that Islam took a strong foothold from where it would later grow to cover almost half of the world.

Almost ten years after leaving Makkah, the Prophet Muhammad returned with a force of 10,000 Muslims to conquer it and rid it of the worship of idols. Knowing that they could never fight or resist such a force, those people who had abused and tortured the Prophet and his followers wondered what would be their fate. Would he punish them or even execute them for their serious crimes? Yet, the Prophet's response to their crimes was to set his enemies free on that day declaring Makkah to be a city of peace, a sanctuary and refuge for all. It was on that same day that one of his Companions said, "Today is the day of the battle. Today God will humiliate the people who drove us out." Yet the Prophet objected to this and corrected him by saying, "No. Today is the day of mercy. Today God honors the Quraish."

Years before that when he had just started preaching the call of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad went to Ta'if, a lush town of green palm trees, fruits and vegetables, just southeast of Makkah. He was hoping that perhaps the people of this nice city would be receptive to his message, which had been rejected by most of the Makkans for more than a decade.

However, the people of Ta'if proved just as cruel and intolerant as his own people. Not only did they scorn his message of worshipping Allah alone, but they even turned their youth against him who hurled stones, garbage and insults at him as he sadly left the city. In the face of continued disappointment, the Archangel Jibreel came to Muhammad and said, "God Almighty has heard the sayings and accusations of your people and He, the Almighty, has commanded the angel of the mountains to obey any order from you against them. The angel of the mountains called out to the Prophet Muhammad and said, "If you wish, I will crush the town of Taif between the surrounding mountains."

Bleeding from head to toe, battered and exhausted, the Prophet was faced with a choice. Should he or should he not seek to destroy the people who had just humiliated him by having their children chase him out of town while throwing stones at him? And for what crime? All he wanted to do was convey the message of the One God to His creation and seek to benefit for his own people.

Yet, though they hurt him, Muhammad looked beyond his own wounds and forgave them, replying to the angel of the mountains, "No do not destroy them, for I hope that Allah will bring out of their offspring people who worship Him alone without associating any partner with Him in worship." He could have done it. He could have asked that those children who pelted him with stones be finished off along with their hardhearted parents, but he didn't! He chose forgiveness and mercy. Instead of cursing the people of this town,

he prayed for their salvation. Would we have done the same even in lesser circumstances?

That is just one of so many examples of how this man, whom Allah describes as a "mercy to the universe" dealt with those who opposed him. It is just one of the many examples in the life of a person who faced constant death threats, assassination attempts, as well as abuse and humiliation at the hands of those threatened by his simple yet profound message: there is nothing worthy of worship except for Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.

The people of Ta'if were not the only ones who tasted this mercy. It was his habit to pray for his enemies much of the time. Two of his most bitter enemies, Abu Jahl and `Umar were also the objects of his prayers and Allah accepted his prayers for one of those individuals, Umar, by guiding his heart to Islam where he later became one of the greatest and most righteous personalities in Islamic history.

The Prophet made similar prayers for his own people on a regular basis: "O Allah! Guide my people, for they know not," he would pray, as he and his followers were beaten, humiliated, scorned and ridiculed. When the people of Makkah made things difficult for him, persecuted him and his companions and injured his face, he could still be heard saying while wiping blood from his face, "O Allâh! Forgive my people for they know not what they are doing."

On another occasion, some Companions came to the Prophet and said: "O Messenger of Allah! The tribe of Daws have committed disbelief and disobeyed you. Pray to God that he destroy them!" Contrary to the people's expectations, the Prophet said: "O Allah! Guide Daws and let them come to us", which in fact they did do shortly thereafter.

These are just a few glimpses of how the Prophet dealt with those who opposed him. His opponents were not just people who fought his message on an intellectual level, they were individuals bent on destroying him, his family, his followers and Islam itself.

Indeed, the Prophet was true to the words he himself used to advise others with when he would say, "Allâh will show mercy to those who show mercy to others. Show mercy to those on earth, and the One Who is in Heaven will show mercy to you."

Looking further into the life of this noble man, we see how he used to also defend and stand up for his brothers amongst the Prophets and Messengers sent by God before him. While some of the ignorant people amongst the Children of Israel were describing Jesus with the ugliest and most demeaning words imaginable, Muhammad was teaching humanity:

"And Remember when the angels said: O Mary! Truly Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Himself whose name will be the Christ, Jesus the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and in the Hereafter and of those nearest to Allah." [3:45]

While these same people were accusing the Virgin Mary of adultery, Muhammad was teaching the people:

"And Mary, the daughter of `Imrân, who guarded her chastity. And We breathed into her of our spirit and she testified to the truth of the words and scriptures of her Lord and was one of the devout servants." [66:12]

And even now do we still find people bent on attacking the Prophets, yet now they focus their insults on the persona of the Prophet Muhammad by calling him a murderer and butcher. Yet it was this same man, Muhammad, who taught his followers the following words of Allah from the Quran:

"Whoever kills another soul for any reason except as a punishment for murder or spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he has killed all of humanity." [5: 32]

He taught humanity mercy and justice, even during war, though he came at a time when the world was steeped in barbarism. There were no treaties, accords, or international laws back then to regulate battle. He was sent by God with laws of justice that were to be applied during all times - both in peace and in war. He prohibited abuse during war as well as mutilation, and he forbade the killing of women, children and innocent people as well as the destruction of property and trees in times of war.

His Mercy with Children, Orphans, Widows, and the Sick

It is authentically narrated in Islamic scriptures that the Prophet Muhammad said, "I start the prayers, intending to lengthen them. I then hear a child crying so I make them shorter, knowing that a mother will be distressed by her child's cries."

He also treated all children with love, mercy and gentleness. It was mentioned his wife Aishah that the Prophet Muhammad kissed his grandsons on the forehead once while a villager was present. So the villager said with surprise, "I have ten children. I have never kissed any of them!" Prophet Muhammad looked at him and said, "He who does not have mercy will not have mercy upon him."

Another example of his mercy was his weeping on the death of his son Ibrahim. When the Prophet entered his son's room while he was dying, his eyes immediately flooded with tears. Then one of his companions said, 'Even you, O' Messenger of Allah?' Then he said 'It is but mercy.' He continued (crying) some more and then said, "The eyes weep, the heart is full of grief, yet we say nothing except that which pleases our Lord. Indeed, we are deeply saddened by your departure O! Ibrahim."

On another occasion, the Prophet was handed his daughter's son who was dying, and again his eyes filled with tears. His companion Sa'd then told him, "What is this, Prophet

of God?” He said, “This is a mercy that the Almighty has made in the hearts of His servants. And surely God has mercy to the merciful ones among His servants.”

From his mercy is that he was never too proud to walk along with a widow or with a poor person and fulfill their needs. He used to visit weak and sick Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, and attend their funerals. He used to treat orphans with the greatest reverence and with extreme kindness. And he used to go even further by advising people to sponsor orphans and treat them with excellence stating, “I and the sponsor of an orphan will be together in Paradise.”

His Mercy with Animals

The Prophet Muhammad’s mercy also extended to animals as he used to advise his followers to treat them with mercy and not abuse them. He used to forbid his companions from hurting them, tiring them, overburdening them with heavy loads for long periods, torturing them, or pushing them beyond their limits, for all of that is mistreatment and abuse of God’s gifts.

For example, the Prophet Muhammad warned against any human being distressing a bird about her little chicks. Once, someone took two chicks of a bird, and when the bird returned to her nest and didn’t find her babies she became distressed. The Prophet Muhammad at that point asked, “Who has distressed this bird by taking its chicks?” Then he asked the responsible person to return the chicks to their mother.

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad called for mercy and perfection in the slaughter of animals for meat. He once saw a person preparing a lamb for slaughter by laying it down while he was still sharpening the knife in front of the animal. The Prophet Muhammad then exclaimed with displeasure, “Do you want to kill it twice? Sharpen your knife before you lay it down!”

Other Examples of his Mercy:

Another moving episode from the life of the Prophet Muhammad was that of his concern for his Jewish neighbor and his dying son. Many non-Muslims are often surprised to learn that most of Muhammad’s neighbors in Madinah were Jews. Even more surprising is the fact that although Muhammad was the leader of the Muslim city-state of Madinah, he patiently tolerated the abuse of many of his neighbors, who openly insulted and abused him out of hopes that such patience would lead them to see the truth of his message.

One day it is recorded that the Prophet was with his Companions on the opposite side of Madinah when word reached him that his neighbor’s son was deathly ill and about to die. Many others may not have cared much and maybe even thought that this was a sort of punishment for years of ridicule and abuse, but this was not Muhammad’s response.

Instead, upon hearing this news the then fifty-five year old Muhammad immediately began sprinting with all of his speed to get to the boy before his death. Breathless, he soon reached the boy's side and looked into his eyes recognizing that the boy had only a few moments of life left in his weak body. He then told him with his soft and gentle voice, "Proclaim that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah and that I am His Messenger."

The boy shifted his gaze from Muhammad's kind face and looked to his father for guidance – wanting to testify, but afraid of his father's disapproval. His father, no doubt filled with despair and sadness as he hopelessly watched his son's life slip away, knew that Muhammad was indeed speaking the truth and that this testimonial would be what would save his dear son on the Day of Judgment. With this understanding, he looked down at his beloved son and nodded his head softly whereupon his son made the testimony of faith and entered into the safety and success of Islam only seconds before he passed away.

The Prophet Muhammad then slowly walked out of the room to give the father some time to be alone with his son. He then told his Companions who had watched the whole event, "Praise and thanks be to God who allowed this boy to be saved through me." He never allowed the enmity and bitterness of his neighbors to get in the way of his ultimate mission and this boy had just been saved because of that exact courage and mercy.

Another similar story occurred with another one of his Jewish neighbors, this time a woman who used to try to annoy Muhammad by throwing her garbage over Muhammad's walkway in front of his house. This continued every day for months until one day Muhammad awoke and upon walking outside he found no trash. Again, many of us would have probably wished under our breath that the old woman had died or something, but this was again not the response or attitude of the man who was sent by God as a mercy to the Universe. Instead, he decided to go and visit the woman to find out if she wasn't feeling well.

He knocked on the door and the woman's servant answered and told Muhammad that indeed the old woman was sick. He requested permission to come and see if he could do anything for her. Upon seeing him there in her house, asking her with the utmost respect and courtesy whether he could bring her anything to make her feel better or to relieve her illness, the old woman suddenly was overcome by shame over her mistreatment of this kind and honorable man. She immediately realized that this was not an ordinary person, but indeed a Prophet of God sent with the truth and she herself then joined many of the pure-hearted and sincere Jewish people of Madinah before her and entered into the religion of Islam with the statement, "There is nothing worthy of worship except the One True God and Muhammad is His Prophet and Messenger."

Indeed, whenever people sought to harm him or abuse him personally, the Prophet Muhammad bore it with patience and frequently prayed to Allah for their guidance. Yet when that harm extended to others on a grander scale he was quick to put a complete and definitive stop to it, yet always in a way filled with mercy and justice.

The Quran furthermore epitomizes this attitude of tolerance when it teaches Muslims never to ridicule or insult those gods worshipped in other faiths, stating:

And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, for in that case they may then out of spite abuse Allah ignorantly. Thus have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they used to do. [6:108]

So even though the Prophet Muhammad was often persecuted and attacked by people who worshipped idols, he never stooped to their level by attacking that which they held sacred. Indeed as Muslims living in the west today, we can only commend the American media for their thoughtful restraint. We also commend President Bush for his standing up to declare that the disrespectful and derogatory depiction of respected religious figures is contrary to the spirit of freedom of speech characteristic of a civilized society.

The Prophet's Mercy with His Community

Before ending this short introduction to the life and character of the Prophet Muhammad though, one cannot forget to mention the area where Muhammad's mercy and kindness were most apparent - and that was with the believers. Indeed, God almighty describes Muhammad's sympathy, kindness, and mercy to his community of believers by saying:

Now comes to you a Messenger from amongst yourselves: it grieves him that you should suffer: he is so anxious over you: to the Believers is he most kind and merciful. (9:128).

No doubt, the Prophet Muhammad was so concerned over the condition of his followers and always wanted what was easier and most beneficial for them. His wife Aishah said, "Never was the Prophet left to make a choice between two matters but he would prefer the easier among them." Yet again in another part of the Quran, Allâh comments on the gentle and tolerant attitude of the Prophet Muhammad when He says,

And by the Mercy of Allâh, you dealt with your Companions gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from around you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allâh's) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in your decisions. (3:159)

He was also known to tell his people: "He is not one of us who shows no compassion to our young ones and does not respect and honor for our elders." And he specially encouraged the Muslims to be good to their own families, especially their mothers, wives and daughters saying, "The best among you are those who are best to their wives and their families."

Yet although he always looked for ease, love and security for his followers, the one area where the Prophet Muhammad was most concerned for the believers was the area of guidance and success in the hereafter. Allah mentions that the Prophet would go to such a great extent in seeking to guide his people that he was literally about to die from his intense concern for them. Allah states in the Quran,

Yet it may be, if they believe not in this Message, that you O' Muhammad will torment your soul with grief over their denial. [18:6]

And from the hadith revelations it is recorded that the Prophet Muhammad said, "The example of me and you is like that of a man who kindled a fire. Grasshoppers and butterflies start falling into the fire although the man was struggling to protect them from falling into it. I am trying so hard to hold you back from falling into the fire and you are slipping out of my grip." (Bukhârî and Muslim)

But maybe the greatest example of his love for the Muslim people is the fact that although every Prophet was given one prayer during their life that would unconditionally be accepted by God, the Prophet Muhammad reserved his one prayer for the Day of Judgment knowing that his people would be most in need for it on that ominous day. On that day he will ask God to forgive his people their sins and make special intercession with God for them to help them as much as possible. So, it is hoped that you might now have a small glimpse as to how this gentle and loving man was indeed a mercy to everything around him not only in his life, but even into the Hereafter where his love, concern and compassion will still know no bounds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by the time the Prophet Muhammad died at the age of 63 the greater part of the Arabian peninsula had accepted Islam. Within two hundred years of his death, Islam had spread as far west as Spain and as far east as China. It was clear that his monotheistic message was not limited to Arabs alone; it was for the whole of humanity. Lastly, it must be made very clear that although Muhammad is deeply loved, revered and followed by Muslims as God's final Messenger, he is not an object of worship nor is he part of God in any way. His message was pure, simple and clear: we should only worship the One True God, devoting every act of worship from prayer to trust and hope to seeking help, all of it should be only for God. And Muhammad is the Prophet and Messenger of God.

We hope that this program has given you a better understanding of both the Prophet Muhammad and his Message. We invite you to learn more about him and about Islam by visiting the website, www.theprophetofmercy.com where you can read more articles about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad as well as listen to and order other audio programs of interest.