



I couldn't sleep. And decided to go out of my bedroom window.

Passing through the lonely dark alleys with faintly lit lamps, I can see across a tall building, with no other building or house adjoining to it. Beautifully glittering in lights, the building stood with a welcoming sign. So I saw the lights, the heavy curtains and the large blue door appealed to me. On moving closer to the entrance, I saw a notice written in block words in a yellow board.

"One room hotel for you, attended by 2 very best hosts."

I couldn't resist anymore, and my temptation to know my 12 hosts was just overwhelming. I lifted the latch, and then the door opened with a creak. "Oh! I murmured in surprise as I stepped in a long hall which was expensively decorated by an attractive red carpet with glittering lights and a golden white coloured counter. I moved towards the counter and rang the golden bell. I heard some kind of bustling and shouting coming from the door behind the counter. "No I shall go, you idiot!" cried a gruffly voice in irritation.

Then a tall hunch-backed man came out of the door smiling. "Oh! A girl, guest this time he seemed to tell himself. "You must" then he said to me, "have come for a room, I mean the room." "Yes!" I started and was about to explain my reason, but was interrupted. "Never a moment late," said he gruffly but with a humorous twinkle, as he held out a golden key with a white key ring. "Everything seems to be golden and white here!" I told myself.

Now I had a clearer look of the man as he hurriedly tried to hand the key. He was quite old, broad across the shoulder, had a large face with thin whiskers along the wide lips. He had gloomy eyes which were almost covered by the thick caterpillar-like brows. The most extraordinary thing was his ears. As I took the key from him, I saw his right ear suddenly curl up. I was totally lost in bewilderment. I looked again, thinking I was wrong, but no the ear was all curled up. I kept on looking, until a stream of faint sounds reached me. "Would you please go with my son Groval?"

"Ah — yeah, sure," I said not taking my glances off the man. Then I started to think that the ear must have been like that in the first place. As I was about to leave I saw the other ear curl up too. For the first time since I arrived there, I was frightened. So avoiding to see anything weird, I almost ran.

I timidly followed the son. He was a sickly looking weak, slim person, very tall and very pale. He also had stupid eyes, and ever shaking legs. I was escorted to an expansive looking room which was all decorated

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 levels.

Of human origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and pervasive.

The majority of the persons in this book had the advantage of being born and raised in centres of civilisation, highly cultured or politically pivotal nations. Muhammad, however, was born in the year 570 in the city of Mecca, in southern Arabia, at that time a backward area of the world, far from the centres of trade, art, and learning.

Orphaned at age six, he was reared in modest surroundings. Islamic tradition tells us that he was illiterate. His economic position improved when, at age twenty-five, he married a wealthy widow. Nevertheless, as he approached forty there was little outward indication that he was a remarkable person.

Most Arabs at that time were pagans, who believed in many gods. There were, however, in Mecca, a small number of Jews and Christians; it was from them no doubt that Muhammad first learned of a single, omnipotent God who ruled the entire universe. When he was forty years old, Muhammad became convinced that this one true God (Allah) was speaking to him, and had chosen him to spread the true faith.

For three years, Muhammad preached only to close friends and associates. Then, about 613, he began preaching in public. As he slowly gained converts, the Meccan authorities came to consider him a dangerous nuisance. In 622, fearing for his safety, Muhammad fled to Medina (a city some 200 miles north of Mecca), where he had been offered a position of considerable political power.

This flight, called the Hegira, was the turning point of the Prophet's life. In Mecca, he had had few followers. In Medina, he had many more, and he soon acquired an influence that made him a virtual dictator. During the next few years, while Muhammad's following grew rapidly, a series of battles were fought between Medina and Mecca. This war

MY TWELVE HOSTS

by Resmin Haq: Jesmin Haq

in white and golden.

"My mother shall bring you a cold soda in a few moments" informed Groval dully. He was about to leave, and I was just going to look around, when suddenly he turned back, looking very ferocious, and in blank anger said "and dinner shall be served in 15 minutes". I hardly heard him, because I was totally terrified. One of his stupid eyeballs squinted and changed colour. Before I could say or do anything he left. Thank God! I tried hard to make myself come and believe what I saw was nothing but mental illusions.

"A wash would make me feel fresher" I told myself as I pushed a white door of a room, which I presumed to be a washroom. The door opened in a flash! My heart gave the greatest leap, that one can experience. Then it bounced back like a jellyball, as I saw an extremely attractive person with a graceful figure in a long white satin dress standing in the bathroom. She had somehow

realised my presence and faced me. She was a young girl with deep blue eyes, a sweet mouth and lovely crimson coloured long hair.

"Hello! you are then our next customer" she said sweetly. "Yes!" I replied, and was going to ask her how did she know, but my words curled up back in my tongue, because the beauty princess was no cute one, but disguised sorceress. As she slipped her hand in the tube full of water, it immediately turned as red as blood and then again it vanished in a moment. I felt my mind had gone wacky when I saw all these. The girl turned and said, "See you at dinner".

"Hello! God! I must have gone mad" I told myself as I stood at the tub, now empty, leaving no traces of water as any evidence to what I have seen.

A loud knock came on the door and in came a large fat woman with heaps of curly hair that seemed to have been intentionally fixed for the small

head of hers.

By seeing the glass of potion in her hand, I understood she was the host mum. "Hello dearie" she said, grinning with her tarter full of teeth. "Here's your drink." Slowly I took the glass from the grip of the thick fingers (expecting something to happen). "You drink on while I tug along fixing the dinner," said the host mummed, as her greenish eyes sparkled with interest. She had just turned and moved towards the door, when in a fraction of a second her whole bunch of curled hair turned into disgusting horrendous black snakes. I could not believe this wasn't true, and screamed out of terror. Surprisingly, the woman didn't even turn to see why I had screamed!

She gingerly left the room. I didn't drink what they gave me in fear that something terrible might happen.

A while later, I was called downstairs. Slowly I walked to the table, arranged with creepy looking tall 13 chairs lined along it. Everything now seemed to be black. The curtains were black, mirrors black, decoration black, lights were black, everything black and there was no food laid on the large table for eating.

My stomach gripped with terror and I reluctantly set on my tall black chair, that was opposite to the head of the host's chair. One by one my hosts appeared in unbelievable scopy apparels. The hosts who first arrived were not those whom I had met, but scary looking ones, each came and gave me a horrid glance, which made my whole body stiffen under fear.

Soon all my 12 hosts were seated. They made a weird toast for me without drinks. And then the real part came. The host father (I still could see his ears curled up) declared to start eating. But to my real surprise, there was no food there and no food was coming which I expected. Then suddenly, I could see the greedy teeth of my host, and their mouth full of water. My heart almost jumped out of my throat in fear, as instinct told me that I was the dinner of my hosts.

The room grew darker and darker as seconds ticked away. The impatient appetite grew larger and larger and the eaters came closer and closer to me! For several moments I couldn't move, but when alarm inside me hooted, nothing could stop me from running. I leaped out of a window like a thief and ran like a deer, away from the tiger's den. I didn't stop for anything until I jumped into my bed in my room and fainted. I woke by God's grace the next morning, thinking whether it was a dream or not. But surely, I had learned a lesson for night adventures.



Muhammad From A Different Angle

Michael H Hart is a distinguished historian and the writer of the book, "The 100". In this book, he has categorically ranked notabilities according to their influences on society and mankind. A man with a different set of religious convictions, Michael H Hart has placed Muhammad at the apex and has eloquently stated his reasons behind it. Here is an abridged account of what he has said in the 100.



ended in 630 with Muhammad's triumphant return to Mecca as conqueror. The remaining two and one-half years of his life witnessed the rapid conversion of the Arab tribes to the new religion. When Muhammad died in 632, he was the effective ruler of all of southern Arabia.

The Bedouin tribesmen of Arabia had a reputation as fierce warriors. But their number was small; and plagued by disunity and internecine warfare, they had been no match for the larger armies of the kingdoms in the settled agricultural areas to the north. However, unified by Muhammad for the first time in history, and inspired by their fervent belief in the one true God, these small Arab armies now embarked upon one of the most astonishing series of conquests in human history. To the northeast of Arabia lay the large Neo-Persian Empire of the Sassanids; to the northwest lay the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman Empire, centered in Constantinople.

Nominally, the Arabs were no match for their opponents. On the field of battle, though, the invincible Arabs rapidly con-

verted all of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. By 642, Egypt had been wrested from the Byzantine Empire, while the Persian armies had been crushed at the key battles of Qadisiya in 637, and Nevahid in 642.

How, then, is one to assess the overall impact of Muhammad on human history? Like all religions, Islam exerts an enormous influence upon the lives of its followers. It is for this reason that the founders of the world's great religions all figure prominently in this book. Since there are roughly twice as many Christians as Moslems in the world, it may initially seem strange that Muhammad has been ranked higher than Jesus.

Courtesy: The 100, A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History by Michael H Hart.

My Likes and Dislikes

I like to play inside. But dislike to go outside. I like to play with dolls. But never with balls.

I'd love to pat a cat. But never a bat. I am bored sitting on a chair. I wish I could fly in the air.

I like having chocolate. But never a tablet. I love to have a pie. But I am afraid to die.

by Shahana Rahmatulla (Annie)

Threatened Migratory Birds

sands of kms — and the variety of sensitive habitats on which they rely, according to the report.

The greatest current threat to migratory birds is the loss of habitat due to human activity, including the destruction of forests, drainage of wetlands, water pollution, and the development of coastal areas, the report says.

And, like the unfortunate canary taken down into the coal mines to warn miners of methane gas, migratory birds are telling humans that the earth's climate is changing, according to a report released in Washington Nov. 16 by the world wildlife fund, reports BSS.

Global warming will undoubtedly wreak havoc with the migration cycle of many bird species," according to Adam Markham, author of the new report which calls for governments to commit themselves to strict limits on the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases."

The report, part of a WWF campaign on global climate change, comes amid growing concern over the impact of global warming on human populations and health, even as oil and gas companies and human populations and health, even as oil and gas companies and some oil-producing states insist that there is still no conclusive proof that the burning of fossil fuels contributes to the phenomenon.

According to most climatologists and atmospheric scientists, such emissions are expected to warm the earth's surface by as much as 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the next century.

In a major policy change in

July, the administration of US President Bill Clinton announced that it will seek a binding treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at an international conference in Tokyo late next year.

Until then, Washington had supported a 1992 accord that set non-binding targets for reducing emissions.

Most industrialised countries, including the United States, have failed to meet those targets which is why Washington is now calling for mandatory reductions.

Migratory bird species are especially vulnerable to climate change, because of both the enormous distances they travel — in some cases, tens of thou-

sares of kms — and the variety of sensitive habitats on which they rely, according to the report.

"The birds are likely moving now, but their habitat is not," says Dr. Jeff Price, Director of the American bird conservancy's important bird area.

The specific climate-related threats faced by the birds include rises in sea level and coastal flooding; changes in the timing of the seasons; and drier weather in certain regions, according to the report.

Coastal wetlands are among the ecosystems that are most vulnerable to climate change, according to the report. Tidal deltas, sandy beaches, barrier islands, mudflats, salt

marshes, mangroves, and lagoons all provide rich feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds, providing them with the nutrients they need to cover great distances.

During the last century, sea level has risen by between 10 and 25 cms, and the rate of rise is expected to be two to five times that over the next 100 years. Apart from the flooding of coastal areas, sea-level rise can destroy coastal freshwater systems, according to the report.

The results is rapid changes in the vegetation and animal life of these sensitive coastal areas in such a short span of

marshes, mangroves, and lagoons all provide rich feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds, providing them with the nutrients they need to cover great distances.

Already, scientists and birdwatchers are reporting changes in bird migrating patterns, much as one recent study of a butterfly, the edith's checkerspot, found that its migrating range had shifted 150 kms to the north over the last century as average tempera-

ture rises.

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The Great Sphinx of Egypt was once a hill of rock left over from the building of the Great Pyramid. Later it was carved into a huge lion with the head of a man. It stands 20 metres high with a length of 73 metres. It was probably carved to resemble the face of a king called Chephren, a king of the fourth Egyptian dynasty.

In ancient times, lions lived in the desert just beyond the valley of the Nile. Because they

were strong and beautiful, Egyptian sculptors carved statues of them to guard the entrances to temples. Later on, instead of a lion's head, they carved the head of a king.

In ancient Egypt, the kings were considered to be descended from the Sun God, who was called Ra. When a king died, he himself was supposed to become the sun god. So the Great Sphinx represents the kings as the sun god guarding the pyramids.

Although there is no other sphinx as large as the Great Sphinx at Giza, many kings had their likenesses carved as sphinxes. In one case, a sphinx was made with the face of a woman, Queen Hatshepsut, who seized the throne and ruled the country. This sphinx was given a beard to represent Queen Hatshepsut's power.

All Egyptian obelisks came from a granite quarry near Aswan. Some were over twenty-four metres tall. How were the Egyptians able to move these tremendous shafts? No one knows exactly. It has been estimated that more than twenty

thousand men would be needed to pull one. From the quarry the obelisks were dragged to the Nile River. They were loaded on to barges and shipped to different cities.

Throughout history, Egyptian obelisks have been sent all over the world. The ancient Romans were very impressed by them. After the Romans conquered Egypt in 30 B.C., they moved about fifteen obelisks to Italy. No one knows exactly how they did this.

The obelisk that stands in front of St. Peter's cathedral in Rome was brought to Rome at about that time. Sixteen centuries later, in 1585, it was moved to the square in front of the cathedral. The operation took nearly a year!

In the nineteenth century three obelisks were moved from Egypt. The first was set up in the Place de la Concorde in Paris in 1836. The second obelisk was set up on the banks of the Thames in London in 1880. The third was placed in Central Park in New York City in 1881. The London and New York obelisks are both called Cleopatra's Needle.

As you know, one of the greatest civilizations of all time was the one of ancient Egypt. A long time ago, man had already begun to unearth monuments and buildings and treasures of all sorts going back to ancient Egypt. There was a strange kind of writing found with many of these objects and buildings, but no one could read it. And there seemed to be no way to figure out what it meant.

The early Greeks believed that Egyptian priests produced these writings for sacred purposes, so they called them hieroglyphs, which meant "sacred carvings". And this type of writing came to be known as hieroglyphs, which meant "sacred carvings". And this type of writing came to be known as hieroglyphs.

After the Greeks, no big effort was made to understand these writings until the seventeenth century, when many scholars worked on the problem. But they had no success.

Then in 1799, a wonderful discovery was made. A black slab of basalt was found, which had lain for centuries near one of the mouths of the river Nile. It

was named the Rosetta Stone after the town where it was found.

Now what made the Rosetta Stone so valuable was that it had a message written in three different languages. One was Greek, a second, hieroglyphics, and the third, a late form of Egyptian writing called demotic, a sort of abbreviated hieroglyphic.

Many years of study of these writings now began. The Greek text could be read and understood, and by comparing it to the others the long-lost secret of hieroglyphic writing was finally revealed. The man who accomplished this in 1822 was a brilliant young Frenchman called Jean Francois Champollion.

As a result of his discovery, it has been possible for historians to trace the life, customs, and religion of the Egyptians as far back as 3500 B.C. This was because hieroglyphics were the earliest form of Egyptian writing and one of the oldest-known systems of writing.

Each picture represents an object. As this writing developed