

Guide for all of creation

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SYED ASHRAF ALI

ON the 12th of Rabiul Awal in *Amul Fil*, or the Year of Elephant (570 Anno Domini), the benighted world was blessed. Ahmad Mujtaba Muhammad Mustafa (peace be upon him) was born as a Guide for all of creation. "The advent of this great teacher, whose life from the moment of his Ministry is a verifiable record," says Syed Ameer Ali in *The Spirit of Islam*, "was not a mere accident, an unconnected episode in the history of the world. The same causes, the same evils, the same earnest demand for an 'assured trust' in an all-pervading Power, which led to the appearance on the shores of Galilee, in the reign of Augustus Caesar, of a Prophet, operated with greater force in the sixth and the seventh centuries."

The end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries were epochs of disintegration. They pointed to the necessity of a revelation of Divine Government. The holy flames kindled by Zoroaster, Moses, and Jesus (peace be upon them) had unfortunately been drenched in the blood of man. The sublime and glorious moral teachings of Gautama were almost hidden from view.

Mrs. Rhys Davies points out: "Theories grew and flourished, each new step, each new hypothesis demanded another, until the whole sky was filled with forgeries of the brain and the nobler and the simpler lessons of the founders of the religions were smothered beneath the glittering masses of metaphysical subtleties."

Distorted versions of the great religions had "stifled the voice of humanity, and turned some of the happiest portions of the globe into a veritable Aceldama. Incessant war for supremacy, perpetual internecine strife, combined with the ceaseless wrangling of creeds and sects, had sucked the life-blood out of the hearts of nations, and the people of the earth, trodden under the iron heels of a lifeless sacerdotalism, were crying to God from the misdeeds of their masters. Never in the history of the world was the need so great, the time so ripe, for the appearance of a Deliverer."

Such indeed was Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), whose Mission was not for the Arabs alone. He was not sent for an age or clime, but "for all mankind to the end of the world." God, in His infinite Mercy, sent Muhammad (pbuh) as *Rahmatul-lil-Alameen* -- mercy not only for the entire humanity but also for every creation in the universe.

The holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), with the amazing soberness and incomparable self-control with which he entertained his all-absorbing visions, rose to the occasion with all the sincerity, conviction and determination under the sun. The challenge was daunting, the task stupendous. "Many a less sincere man, many a real hero," says Major Arthur Glyn Leonard in Islam: *Her Moral and Spiritual Value*, "would have shrunk from and succumbed before an ordeal so terrific, a contest so supremely titanic. But Mohammed was made of a sterner stuff,

of the spirit gods are made of. Failure was a word that he did not recognise. With God at his back, success was an absolute certainty -- a foregone conclusion."

It was indeed a unique success. Even a devout Christian like Rev. Bosworth-Smith unhesitatingly admits in *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*: "Islam is the most complete, the most sudden and the most extraordinary revolution that has ever come over any nation on Earth." Thomas Carlyle says this beautifully in *On Heroic, Hero Worship and The Hero in History: The Hero As Prophet*: "A poor shepherd people roaming unnoticed in the deserts since the creation of the world. A Hero Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe. See, the unnoticed becomes world noticeable, the small has grown world great, within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Granada on this, and Delhi on that; glancing with valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world." Phillip K. Hitti also acknowledges in *History of the Arabs*: "The sterile Arabia seems to have been converted as if by magic into a nursery of heroes, the likes of whom, both in number and quality, is hard to find anywhere."

The teachings of Muhammad (pbuh) had indeed wrought a marvellous and mighty work. The symbolic meaning given to Arabia to commune with a power above flesh and blood in Mohammed became more than a symbol. Arabia itself became the land of the hour, the Prophet of Islam its concentrated word.

There must be something so fascinating, so arresting in the personality of this great Arabian who without any standing army, without any palace, without any huge resources to fall back upon, without the slenderest human backing and against the heaviest material odds could so effectively revolutionise the social, political, moral, and spiritual outlook of the wild hordes, the barbarous savages of Arabia, creating a new orientation, developing a new phase of action, a new angle of vision, giving a new direction to human thought, a new interpretation of human life and destiny.

There must be something chivalrous about this giant among men that, alone among the great teachers of mankind, he conferred the first legal status of honour and responsibility upon women making them *Sui Juris*, ensuring their economic independence and providing them opportunities in all spheres of human activity, guaranteeing their rights in the properties of the deceased parents and of the dead husband and children.

There must be something so generous and magnanimous about this Seer of Arabia that alone among the prophets of God he sympathised with slaves in their deep distress and did not merely liberate them after the Battle of Hunain and inspired his companions to emulate his noble example, but also laid down the principles with proper religious sanctions with a view to emancipating them for good.

There was something so noble and humane in this orphan child of the desert,

bereft in his infancy of the father's care and the mother's affection, that he responded so readily to the cry of distress from orphans, soothed their troubled hearts, enjoining upon his followers genuine sympathy and punctilious regards for their just rights, giving strict orders against encroachment upon their rights and properties in any shape or form, creating the noblest urge for the establishment of orphanages all over the world.

There was something so creative in the amazing genius of this great man of vision and imagination that he reconciled the divergent claims and conflicting interests of all classes and conditions of people, combining various aspects of human life -- the individual with the social, the national with the international, the material with the spiritual, the herewith with the hereafter -- laying down principles for all stages and conditions of human society aiming at the perpetual growth of the human race.

There was something so rational, so dynamic, so material, nay so original, in his magnificent conception of God and His relation with man and the system of universes that he could with his simple humility, with his democratic conception of the Divine Great, with his appeal to reason and the ethical faculty of mankind, lay the foundation of the modern world, establishing liberty, equality and fraternity, both in theory and practice, twelve hundred years before the French Revolution.

There was something not only original but unprecedented in his concept of the ethics of war and principles of warfare, which had never been conceived of before, that furnished the guidance for conduct of warfare.

No wonder that it is not the Muslims alone who claim that the holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the greatest and most influential among the salt of the earth in the annals of civilisation. Even non-Muslim saints and seers unhesitatingly admit that there was none greater than the Prophet of Arabia.

John William Draper, who claims that the Renaissance owed its birth to Islam, acknowledges in unambiguous terms in *A History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*: "Four years after the death of Justinian, in AD 569, was born at Mecca in Arabia, the man (Muhammad) who, of all men, has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race."

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* unhesitatingly testifies in the article on the Koran in its 11th edition: "Muhammad is the most successful of all prophets and religious personalities."

The renowned astronomer and historian Michael H. Hart declares in *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*: "My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and the secular levels. It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in history."

Alfred De Lamartine sums up the great virtues and the excellent qualities of the last and the greatest Prophet in *Histoire de la Turquie*: "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 history with Mohammed. Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without image; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Mohammed. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, 'is there any man greater than he?'"

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The perfect man

"Utter servanthood untainted by any lordship whatsoever, can only belong to the perfect man, while lordship totally untainted by servitude can only belong to God," explained the mystic sage Ibnul Arabi. Emphasis in the holy Koran on "Abduhu" reminds Muslims always to remember that Muhammad (peace be upon him) remained a created being, a human.

SYED REZAUL KARIM

IT was the Andalusian sufi sage Hazrat Ibnul Arabi (1165-1240 AD) who coined the phrase *Insane Kamil* -- the perfect man, and elaborated on it. In his *Fusus- l- Hikam*, the sufi master says that when Allah willed His attributes to be displayed, he created the perfect man, through whom His consciousness (*sirr*) is manifested to Himself. More generally, *insane kamil* is defined by the famous scholar Professor Nicholson in the following words: "We may describe the perfect man as a man who has fully realised his essential oneness with the Divine Being in whose likeness he is made (*Studies in Islamic Mysticism*)."

This experience is only enjoyed by prophets and saints, and is the basis of Sufi theosophy. It was Hazrat Bayezid al Bistami (875 AD) who defined the perfect and complete man as the one who, after having been invested with Divine attributes, becomes unconscious of them. Hazrat Bayezid belonged to what is being described as the ecstatic school of sufi saints, whose goal was the annihilation of the self to merge in the ocean of Oneness.

It is not possible for human beings to know the Divine Essence of Almighty God. But it is possible to acknowledge His attributes. Therefore, the path of proximity to God is to acquire, absorb and assimilate His attributes. Since the soul of man was breathed into him by God, there are possibilities of viewing and absorbing them in the corporeal existence of man. It is through the acquisition of Divine attributes, then, that man is brought near to God and loves Him. In order to do that, man has to abandon his "lower self" -- nafs -- and purify body, mind and soul.

For the ordinary people, the question is how to love God and edge towards His presence. The holy Koran in its verse Al-Imran (31) declares an admonition to mankind: "Say (O Mohammad, to mankind) if you love Allah, follow me. Allah will love you and forgive your sins." This reflects the conviction that Divine mercy manifests itself in and through the Prophet. Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (peace be upon him) did not claim or display any supernatural powers. The Koran describes the Prophet (in Sura Fatir 23/24): "Thou art but a warner. Lo! We have sent thee with the Truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner."

But was not *shaitan* created by God, and is not the world lured by him? When the Prophet was asked about *shaitan*, the base faculties and carnal appetites of man, he answered: "*Aslama shaitani*, my *shaitan* has handed himself over to me completely and does only what I order him (quoted from *Diwan* by Rumi, translation by Anne Marie Schimmel)." That means, remarks Professor Schimmel: "The perfect man has tamed his instincts and passions in such a way that he uses them exclusively for positive, godly works, obeying the will of God every moment of his life in thought and action."

The Prophet has been addressed many times in the holy Koran as servant (*abd*).

The Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) was first God's servant, then His messenger (*abduhu wa rasuluhu*), whom every Muslim invokes in performing daily prayers. In the holy Koran, Sura Al Isra begins: "Glorified be he who carried His servant by night from the inviolable place of worship to the far distant place of worship." This is in reference to the Prophet's night journey from Masjidul Haram to Masjidul Aqsa on the beginning of his ascension to heaven, which is known as Miraj.

The position of a servant is one of lowliness and poverty, it is not a Divine attribute. "The highest station with God is that God should preserve in His servant the contemplation of His servanthood whether or not He should have clothed him in one of his clothes of lordship. Utter servanthood untainted by any lordship whatsoever, can only belong to the perfect man, while lordship totally untainted by servitude can only belong to God," explained the mystic sage Ibnul Arabi. Emphasis in the holy Koran on "Abduhu" reminds Muslims always to remember that Muhammad (peace be upon him) remained a created being, a human. However, God had exalted him and glorified him.

Another attribute of the prophet not belonging to God is his poverty. It was said that someone came to the prophet and said: "I love you, O messenger of God." To which he replied: "Be ready for poverty." Hence, this love of the poor became a sign of love for the prophet. God Almighty is Gani (he who has no need). On the other hand, the prophet said: "Poverty is my pride." This is understood not merely as destitution but rather as a spiritual stage that consists in man's knowledge of his own lowliness and poverty before God.

Part of the mystical poverty is gratitude. Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (peace be upon him) says a beautiful pun on the double meaning of the Arabic word *bala*, meaning "yes" on the one hand and "suffering" on the other. After breathing the soul into man, God asked: "Am I not your Lord?" The soul answered "*Bala*" -- yes. Maulana asks how do you thank God for this "yes." By *bala* -- suffering.

It is always mentioned that the prophet was an unlettered (*ummi*) man. God, is the All Knowing, *Azizul Hakim* -- possessor of highest wisdom. But the prophet's knowledge and wisdom were innate, not acquired; it is the "universal intellect." Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani (peace be upon him) says: "The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the secret of the world of the book of the angel, the meaning of the letters -- creation of the world and heaven. He is the pen of the Writer who has written the growing of the created thing. He is the one who suckles at the teats of revelation and carries the eternal mystery; he is the translator of the tongue of the eternity (from *And Mohammad is His Messenger Annemarie Schimmel*)."

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Death on the road: How long do we turn a blind eye?

A survey conducted by the BRTA in the recent past revealed that about 5 lakh of these drivers did not pass the driving test and were issued licences on the basis of the list provided by labour union. On the other hand, traffic police, because of their alleged unholy alliance with the bus and truck drivers, can hardly curb this nuisance and indiscipline on the road.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

HAMIM, a five-year old Kindergarten student of Willes Little Flower School was crushed under the wheels of a bus in front of the school in the city on February 3 morning as he, escorted by her mother, was crossing the road. The tragic death of Hamim sent shock waves across the country. Hamim's mother who was also hurt in the accident might be at fault for not using the nearby foot-overbridge but the recklessness and haughty attitude of the driver overshadowed all other lapses.

Firstly, the driver was picking up passengers at Kakrail bus intersection which is not a designated bus stand. Moreover, reports revealed in the dailies, quoting the confession of the driver in police custody, suggested that the bus did not have a mirror on the left hand side and he just depended on his helper, a young and immature boy, to

manoeuvre the bus in the congested road all the time.

It seems that total disregard for traffic rules and recklessness of bus drivers is causing such considerable number of deaths on the city roads. Hardly the protest and indignation against the tragic death of Hamim have died down, newspapers and electronic media ran the news of the death of another young girl Sumi Akhter (7), on the airport road near Falcon tower by another killer bus, just two days later. Sumi, escorted by her mother, was crossing the road when the reckless bus hit her and her mother. Sumi died after being taken to hospital; the mother and her 14-month old baby were struggling for life in the hospital bed.

On February 6 last, the same day, a garment factory worker was fatally run over and killed by a minibus at Sonargaon Hotel roundabout in the city. People might recall that Saif Ahmed Arnab (20), nephew of lawmaker Tarana

Halim died in a road accident near Rampura about two months back. Surely, all these deaths were not acts of nature, heightened on each passing day because of the indifference, recklessness and nonchalant attitude of vehicle drivers.

As people have noticed, several companies have put their buses on the same route and the drivers are in a mad rush to overtake the buses of rival companies in a bid to pick as many passengers defying road safety. Most of the accidents occur as these drivers pick up passengers from unscheduled bus stops and try to speed off to reach the next stop to pick up more passengers. Vehicle owners often don't care if the drivers they are recruiting have a valid driving licence or not. In the case of Hamim's killing, the driver Shamsur Rahman, who was nabbed by the pedestrians while fleeing and handed over to the police, admitted to having a fake driving licence and that he was driving vehicles for the last two years unchallenged.

It was revealed through interrogation by the police that Shamsur Rahman caused many accidents in the past and every time he escaped by paying compensation and kick-backs. With law enforcement personnel going soft or compromising, every month, as reports reveal, about 45 people are killed in road accidents caused by buses. Sadly true, there are many such drivers like

Shamsur Rahman. This is evidenced by the recent disclosure of the DMP commissioner to The Daily Star that over the last three months 500 fake driving licences have been seized.

Our experiences suggest that enforcement of traffic rules, easing congestion and jams could hardly be achieved because of the shortage of trained, competent and committed traffic police personnel. Traffic police personnel posted at different road intersections move their hand right and left no doubt to divert traffic but hardly achieve the required objective simply because they do not have the determination or willingness to discipline the rowdy drivers. People might recall that Syed Shafiqul Ahmed, a retired Pubali Bank official traveling by a Gulistan-bound bus from Mirpur met the tragic death in front of GPO on January 24 last because of the driver and helper. The bus sped off before Shafiqul could get down properly and his head struck the pavement and he died on the spot.

Most people have seen that operators of buses (drivers and helpers) would pick up passengers from as many places as they can but hardly help the passengers get down with ease through the narrow gate with no space to place the foot and in most cases they ask the passengers to get down while the bus is still running without giving any thought that the passenger might be hit by a car

or other vehicle coming from behind.

The hard truth is that the operators indulge in competition to make more money with as many trips as possible. To avert such unhealthy competition of making money putting commuter's life at risk, the authorities concerned must assign a particular route to a single operator with adequate number of road worthy buses in its fleet to meet the transport need of the public. Of the total 380 deaths occurring in a year on the city roads, as revealed by Prof. Md. Shamsul Hoque, director of Accident Research Institute, BUET, 75 percent are of pedestrians. And the most shocking revelation came from the deputy commissioner (traffic, west zone): while conducting a random seizure of driving licences in the last week of January, the D.C found only six licences genuine out of 92 he seized! This points to the extent of corrupt practices resorted to.

Khondakar Rafiqul Hasan Kajal, the President of the Association of Bus Companies (ABC) tried to correlate accidents, rowdiness and indiscipline in the bus service sector with extortion. Many believe this was just a trick to sidetrack their responsibilities. People are not blind to the fact that a large number of the buses plying the city streets are nor road worthy. A report published in the Bangla daily Prothom Alo on December 27 last revealed that there are

12.5 lakh vehicles plying the roads of the country and the number of drivers including genuine licence holders, semi professional and fake licence holders, comes to about 8 lakh.

A survey conducted by the BRTA in the recent past further revealed that about 5 lakh of these drivers did not pass the driving test and were issued licences on the basis of the list provided by the labour union. On the other hand, traffic police, because of their alleged unholy alliance with the bus and truck drivers, can hardly curb this nuisance and indiscipline on the road and things as such run with little solution in sight.

But no sensible government should allow these shocking things go unchecked. Unfortunately, the maximum punishment for killing a person on road is three years jail sentence and in most cases the offenders get off through the loopholes of investigation. Lawmaker Tarana Halim in a notice to the speaker of the Parliament now in session called for amending the existing section 304 (kha) by life sentence. It appears that because the law is soft, investigation is shoddy and lengthy, and seldom there is an instance that the culprits have been booked, such criminal offences go on.

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