

*Whenever we mention the name of the last and final Prophet, Muhammad, we always add the salutation, 'Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam' which means, may the peace & blessings of GOD be on him.

We begin with the beautiful lessons of Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) the last and final Messenger from ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) to all mankind. His birth, life, his appointment as a Prophet, the revelations from Angel Jibraeel (Radiallahu Anhum) and the many trials and tribulations he experienced in his life are all very dear and important to a Muslim. We follow the ways of the Prophet very closely as he gave meaning to the many commandments and directions of the revelations. He was regarded as "the living Qur'an," and also fulfilled the second half of the declaration of a Muslim, that is, "Muhammad is the messenger of GOD."

Before we begin with the message that he brought to all mankind, it is important to sketch a picture of the Arabian surroundings, the people, the human activity and the thoughts and practices of the people at that time, to create the setting that this noble Prophet found himself in when he made his appearance and undertook the superhuman task of changing it for the better. Let us fill you in on this vital background before talking about the birth and life of Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam).

HISTORY OF BECCA OR MAKKAH

Becca, or Makkah as it was later called, is situated in a valley about 80 kilometres east of the shores of the Red Sea. It is surrounded by mountains on the eastern and western side with an opening on the west to give it access to Jeddah, the port on the Red Sea. An opening on the northern side allows access to Palestine and Syria and the opening on the southern side, to Yemen. Historians believe that Becca was essentially a temporary resting place for the caravans travelling North, South and West. No one resided here, as it was barren with very little vegetation to support life. However, when Hajirah and Ismail (may peace be on them), were left there by Nabi Ebrahim (alayhis salaam) they made this area their home. Soon other people started settling there after the discovery of the continuous flow of water from the well of the Zam-zam. Here is the historical background taken from the 13th issue of Al Mujaddid.

Nabi Ebrahim (alayhis salaam) took leave of his first wife Sarah, in Palestine, and set off on foot, in the direction of Becca with his second wife, Hajirah. While on their long journey to Becca, Hajirah gave birth to a son. They called him Ismail. When they reached Becca, they found that it was barren, covered with sand, sand dunes and no vegetation or water. There were no people living there or nearby. When they reached the site where our Kaaba is today, Hajirah put Ismail down on the sand to rest. Ebrahim (Alayhis Salaam) left a bag containing some dates and a water skin bag containing a little water and in response to his calling, turned to walk away from his wife and his only son. He kept on walking without turning

around, until Hajirah called out to him to stop. "Where are you going, my husband? Are you going to leave us in this place where there are no people, no food and water?" Ebrahim (Alayhis Salaam) continued helplessly and did not reply. Hajirah pleaded with him and said, "Has ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) commanded you to do this?" "Yes," he replied, without turning around and continued to walk away. Hajirah responded, "If this is ALLAH'S (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) will, I accept it as I know that our LORD will look after us." When he reached the top of the hill (called Thaniya) and was out of sight, he prostrated himself and begged ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) with the following plea.

"O our LORD, I have some of my children live in this valley with no cultivation, by YOUR sacred House, the Kaaba, in order O LORD that they may offer prayer perfectly. So fill the hearts of some men with love towards them, and O ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks." (Qur'an 14:37).

The sun was hot in the desert and soon the little water that Hajirah had was used up. Ismail's restlessness and thirst prompted his mother to seek some relief. She started digging the sand for water but it was in vain. She knew that she had to look for water otherwise Ismail would die of thirst. When Ismail began tossing in agony she panicked. She put him down on the sand and started running up a nearby hill to see if she could find water or spot a traveler who could help her. When she reached the top

of this sand dune called "As Safa'a" and did not find any water or people, she turned around and ran down this hill and up the opposite hill called "Al Marwa". When she could not find any relief for her son she ran down this hill and up the first hill again in the hope of spotting a traveler. When the cries of her son grew louder and louder she frantically ran up and down these hills seven times. At the end of her seventh run she heard a gurgling sound of flowing water. When she looked down at her son, she noticed that Ismail was kicking away in the sand, and at his feet, water was flowing out of the ground making a gurgling sound of zamm.... zammm.... She quickly made a mud pool around the water, picked up the child and let him drink. She looked up and thanked ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) for HIS mercy shown to her and Ismail by providing them with the life saving liquid.

MAKKAH - PILGRIMAGE AND A TRADING CENTRE

The abundance of water from the well of the Zamzam made it possible for people to start settling there and seeing to the needs of the travellers who used Makkah as a convenient resting place and a half - way stop. This resting place also developed into a centre where goods were exchanged between traders from the northern, southern and eastern routes. The Jurhum tribe was one of the first to settle in Makkah.

Historians have indicated that the Kaabah temple was in existence before the arrival of Ismail and his mother. This Kaabah was also the object of pilgrimage for all the Arab tribes living in the Arab Peninsula. This house of worship served the needs of the travellers and the traders as they had a place to offer their prayers of thanks for their safe journeys and also for the protection of their goods. Makkah soon gained popularity and importance and was frequented by the Arab tribes to observe the holy months. This once - a - year assembly attracted large crowds when the exchange of goods took place. Makkah also became a place where the exchange of knowledge, cultures and the worship practices of the pagan tribes took place. Makkah soon became the most important centre in the whole of the Arab Peninsula.

WORSHIP OF IDOLS

Every tribe that gathered for the pilgrimage had a different and unique idol that they worshipped. People came to this shrine from all corners of the Arab Peninsula during the

annual pilgrimage. They brought with them replicas of their own statues or sacred stones to house at the Kaaba. They would circle the Kaabah in reverence to their idols before leaving on their journeys, or on their arrival. Miniature idols of their favourite gods were also made to accompany them on their travels.

The idolaters claimed that their idols had powers, which served as mediators between GOD and man. As a result, their approach to God became less and less direct and more remote until many of them ceased to believe in matters such as life after death. The Jurham tribe was partly responsible for this as they were in charge of Makkah. The descendants of Abraham's tribe accepted their rule as a mark of respect to Ismail, who was married to a woman from the Jurham tribe. The Jurham tribe was finally driven out when they started committing many injustices and engaging in non-acceptable behaviour. Before they were overpowered and driven out, they selfishly covered the well of the Zamzam as an act of revenge. The Khuza'ah, an Arab tribe, and descendents of Ismail, took over. The Khuza'ites made no attempt to uncover this well as other wells nearby served the needs of the travellers. It seemed that ALLAH'S

(Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala's) gift was no longer a necessity and the Holy Well became a forgotten memory. The Khuza'ites were equally guilty of promoting idol worship. They brought back a huge statue named Hubal, from Syria and placed it in a strategic place at the shrine of the Ka'abah. Hubal thus became the supreme idol.

RULERS OF MAKKAH

The Quraysh, a descendent tribe of Abraham was the most powerful Arab tribe at the time. A man from the Quraysh named Qusayy, married the daughter of Hulayl who was then the chief of the Khuza'ah. After a fierce battle, which ended in arbitration, it was decided that Qusayy should rule over Makkah and be the guardian of the Kaabah. Qusayy invited most of his close and also remote family to come and settle in and around Makkah. The next of kin, who settled in the valley, were known as the Quraysh of the Hollow, while his remote kinsmen who settled in the ravines, countryside and surrounding hills, were known as the Quraysh of the Outskirts. Qusayy ruled over them as king with undisputed power and they paid him a tax on their flocks every year. This enabled him to feed the pilgrims who were often too poor to provide for themselves.

The harmony that existed began weakening as Qusayy became old and control had to be handed over to one of his four sons. He appointed his eldest son Abd ad-Dar, who despite his incompetence, controlled the House of Assembly. Although this created unhappiness and dissatisfaction with his more capable son, Abdu Manaf, Abdu Manaf accepted his father's wishes. However, with the oncoming of the next generation, half the Quraysh supported Hashim, the son of Abdu Manaf and there was equally strong support for the clan of Abd ad-Dar. Hashim and his supporters dipped their hands in perfume, as tradition demanded, to swear a solemn oath that they would never abandon one another. This group became known as the 'scented ones'. Similarly, the allies of Abd ad-Dar took an oath of union and they were henceforth known as the Confederates. Violence was strictly forbidden in and for several miles around, the sanctuary of Makkah. Compromise and arbitration stopped the two clans from engaging in battle to settle their claims. It was agreed that the sons of Abd Manaf be entrusted with the collection of taxes to provide food and water to the pilgrims. The sons of Abd ad-Dar would retain the keys of the Kaabah and their house would continue to be the House of Assembly.

Hashim was held in high esteem both at home and abroad because of the important services he provided to the pilgrims and travellers. When Hashim died, his younger brother, Muttalib took over the rights of providing water to the pilgrims and levying the taxes to feed them.

Hisham also had a son, Shaybah, from Salma, a very influential woman who lived in Madinah. Muttalib was getting old and it was time to think of his successor. None of his children wanted to carry on their father's duties. He was thus forced to look towards Shaybah who had good leadership potential. On his visit to Madinah, he was impressed with Shaybah and he persuaded Salma, his mother, to part with her son who had a more prominent role to play. When Muttalib rode into Makkah with his nephew on the back of his camel, the people pointed to the younger passenger and called out, 'Abd al-Muttalib, the slave of Muttalib.' He angrily called out that this was his nephew, son of his brother. Although this was said in jest, this youth was affectionately known as Abd al-Muttalib.

Abd al-Muttalib soon showed his ability and expertise in the handling of the pilgrims when he took over from Muttalib. It came to pass among the people that Abd al Muttalib surpassed both his father and his uncle, in the fulfilment of this task.

To be continued in the next issue

THE RECOVERY OF THE ZAMZAM WELL