

Muhammad: Prophet Of God

By

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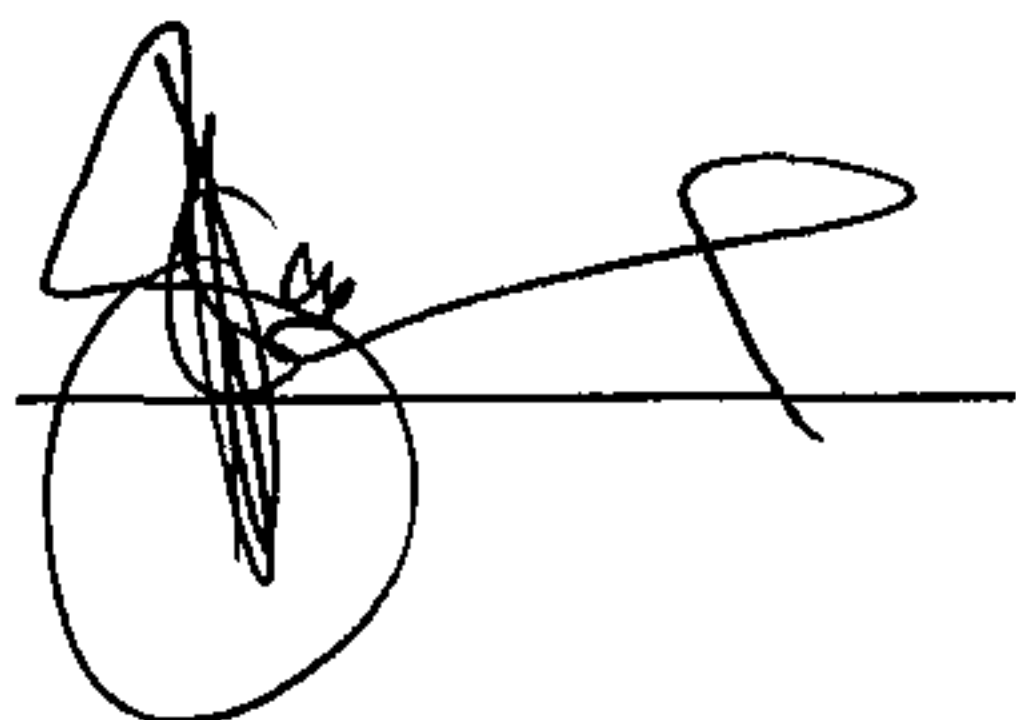
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I declare that *Muhammad: prophet of God* is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized 'M' and 'P' that are interconnected. The signature is written over a horizontal line.

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## Summary

This dissertation seeks to capture Muhammad's emergence as Prophet. It starts from the premise that he located himself as a Prophet within a fraternity of prophethood. More specifically he has seen his work as a continuation of the Biblical prophetic tradition. However he has stressed his election as correcting what has been altered in this Biblical tradition.

**Muhammad: A prophet of God** argues that he has as a prophet the same defining elements as Biblical prophets; as a result we must not criticise him unnecessarily, that is, for the sake of fitting him into our categories. Muhammad must be seen terms of his experiences. In addition we must capture his contribution to humanity.

## Key Concepts

Revelation

Prophecy

Prophet

Proclamation

nabi

ummi

rasul

tawhid

communication

oracles

proclamation-feedback

cosmic functionality

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Muhammad is a very prominent character in this world's history. It is for this reason that this study is initiated to understand this man from an outsider's viewpoint. His life has given hope to many people, yet he is not fully accepted and is grudgingly acknowledged as a man who yearned for God. This hesitance belies the fact that many people have given heed to his admonishments and followed his lifestyle slavishly. For this author the question remains: is he a prophet? What makes him a prophet? Why do people follow him? This man, Muhammad, judging from his actions is no ordinary person. It prompts our curiosity to verify the basis on which his claim to speak on behalf of God and subjecting humanity to these urges rests.

The correlative here is to consider the larger aspect of Muhammad's venture. Thus Muhammad: A prophet of God is the key issue here. It is said that Muhammad is a Prophet, that is, a vassal of God called to communicate his cosmic ideal. From this perspective he is entrusted with a universal message of restoration of humanity's intention to worship of the only God. The term "prophet" is a curious term, seemingly used in a transcultural manner denoting a serious communicant, that is, an intermediary between a higher being and a community. Central to the idea of "prophet" lies the kernel of his or her engagement.

Muhammad, a citizen of Mecca where a multiplicity of gods and deities vied for the attention of that community as well as the Peninsula were drawn to the monotheistic concept of ultimate reality (Surahs 5:75; 6:22; 16:51). According to Surah 3:64-80 the monotheistic conceptualisation of Supreme Reality found homage amongst the Jews, Christians and Hanifs. It dawned upon him that his umma or community largely ignored the possibility of a transcendent god (Surahs 71:23). To them gods were numerous, visible and silently interactive. It can perhaps be said that for Muhammad the seeds of intermediation<sup>1</sup> was planted upon this realization.

### 1.1 Why is this particular study of Muhammad relevant?

The author's search is for an understanding of what the possible meaning of "prophet" is. The search is from the perspective of an outsider into a world that sits across a divide because the observer holds onto certain accustomed views. Consequently the question surfaces whether it is possible for this term to be used in any situation where the seeker is drawn to a transcendent reality? The appeal is that a prophet remains in the ontological domain that taps into the spiritual potential of humanity. Another reason is that the occurrence of prophets points to many ways of seeing spiritual reality; this can then possibly colour one's way of looking at prophets messages especially where one hold's on to one's own prophet's message to be true at expense of others. Moreover in the

ambit of Christian understanding there remains the nagging question that Muhammad is not necessarily a prophet but a person with religious propensity (Rodinson, 1973:218 & David Waines, 1995:214). In this context one needs to know whether the term "prophet" can be applied to Muhammad. Concomitant to this identification is his personality and traits, which plays a role in his prophethood. Tied to him as a prophet is a peculiar message that he cast as a life giving force (discussed in chapter 4). Furthermore the pith of his message is of cosmic value, and therefore incumbent on the world to internalize, and to follow it through. The need to understand Muhammad has a teleological reference; it follows here from that to know him has epistemological value as well as practical value. This twin need is combined to recognize how Muhammad as a person remains so important as well as how the message he has brought serves as a causal law in knowledge for its own sake and knowledge as life-giving.

## 1.2 Methodology

### The interest

The author is interested in understanding Muhammad as possibly part of the fraternity of historically regarded prophets (Surah 2:253; 3:33-34; 4:163-166). Since the Qur'an often alludes to other prophets and that his role is a continuance of the self same prophetic activity (Surah 23:3 -

26), it is therefore reasonable to conclude that Muhammad had seen himself legitimately as a prophet.

### 1.2.1 Conceptualising the understanding of "prophet"

The denotative dimension of the concept "prophet" relates to the particularities of this phenomenon, that is, the attributes associated with "prophetness." The process of operationalizing the concept is denoted by the seven elements found in Biblical prophets that will serve as a form of measurement. Muslim believers and theologians add a connotative variable as differentiation between the titles nabi and rasul. To some these terms are simply interchangeable while for others there are qualitative dissimilarities. These connotative references serves as boundary lines, which if crossed could imperil the sense imparted.

An understanding of the concept "prophet" was first sought from its etymological sources in the Hebrew and Arabic languages. This will guide the path of the discussion to an extent that it will give us a general overview of prophetic activity. Thus the goal is to show through this linguistic portrait of "prophecy" how the prophethood of Muhammad ties in with an historical channel of prophetic behaviour. By using these definitional aids the author hopes to show how Muhammad's "prophetic" activities are akin or similar that of Biblical prophets. To justify Muhammad's prophetic activity in terms of other prophets' experiences and behaviours is termed criterion validity. The criterion as cited above



is prophets as they occur in time and space. The understanding of "prophet" is therefore operationalised by means of a cross-cultural comparison of some Biblical prophets. It will be impossible to take all known examples of Biblical prophets into reckoning but rather consideration is given to a random sample of prophets drawn. It must be possible to see that these examples of prophetic occurrences do indeed ratify the process of prophetic experience as normative. Simply stated, this cross-reference of prophets over time and place seeks to point out form similarity or composite elements; in addition prophets in the Biblical and Qur'anic traditions seems to show that they have similar experiences. The result is that we cannot conclude that there are attempts to connive such expressive behaviours. A high correlation between various prophets will consequently serve as good predictors of prophetic qualities as well noting such experience as normal and valid.

### 1.2.2 Indicators of cosmological impact

The justification of Muhammad as a prophet in a similar vein as others urges the author to consider why he became an adorned figure. When observing how people respond to him it is evident that Muslims have a heightened awareness of him. With this in mind the understanding of Muhammad as a prophet is magnified to expound the value placed upon him from the side of God and society. In support of this study consideration is given to who exactly he is; and the characteristics that coalesced into making him such a venerated figure. Further, in support of

his prophetic inclination and his belief that he was simply from a primordial line of prophets, consideration is therefore given to the theologians' and believers' argument that Muhammad was foreordained. Such proof is allegedly found in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Abraham as a historical monotheist and typological figure too, is used to entrench the prophetic claims of Muhammad.

Since the investigation is on Muhammad as a prophet who becomes a prophet with universal appeal it is prudent to tie in Muslim understanding of his characteristics and traits as a contributing factor to his election as a man of God. Several indicators converge here to gain an understanding of Muhammad's prophetic enlistment. The first indicator is the construct endearment, which is used to refer to his disposition as a contributing element in his accepted vocation. The following indicators are also considered: Muhammad's central role at the Ka'ba, Muhammad the ummi prophet which is allegedly prophesied in the Jewish/Christian scriptures, his exceptional characteristics, which includes his spiritual beauty, strengths, comparisons to other prophets, his role as intercessor, the significance of his name, his intellect, personal traits, his closeness to Allah; and role of Abraham in his thinking.

Another factor evident in Muhammad's role as a prophet is gained from the construct proclamation. What this means is that his role as prophet is centred on a message. This message defines his ultimate preoccupation with a transcendent being that was regarded as the supreme authority in

a highly hierarchical relationship (God-prophet-people). The proclamation logically ties in with the quest for justifying Muhammad's prophethood. It follows that a prophet cannot operate without some idea in mind, that is, his *raison d'être* for being prophet. Consideration is given to what Murata and Chittick (1994) and Rahman (1980) defines as the three dimensions of Islam - Iman, Ihsan and Ibadat. This simplification serves merely as a heuristic device that advances the profile of Muhammad's prophethood but more importantly verifies his cosmic relevance.

There are three dimensions considered here, which define the intentionality of Muhammad as prophet; consideration is given to various constructs that are relevant to this message. The embodying term "Islam" subsumes the whole intention of this prophet. The first dimension, which basically takes its cue from islam (surrender), is referred to as iman. It deals with indicators such as Allah and his nature, the contents of Allah's ideas, that is, the holy books, angels the soul, God's messengers, Judgement Day, qadar, understanding of good and evil, an understanding of human beings. In addition it considers the second part of the shahada, which emphasises the mandatory belief in Muhammad. Furthermore, it weighs up the perceived dichotomy that exists between rasul and prophet. The supposed intentions behind Muhammad's thinking were to persuade humans to redirect their path from ghafla (heedlessness) to dhikr (remembrance). The design seemingly here is to plead to humans to return to God as the ultimate and only

power. He of course provides a rationale for this supplication, that the end of the world is inevitable and that qiyama (resurrection) is the goal.

The second dimension, that is, what the author terms as the process of islam refers to ihsan. More specifically ihsan refers to a constant commitment to God. Hence in this discussion the constructs sincerity, salih (wholesomeness), taqwa (God-weariness) and attitude of worship are suggested.

The third dimension incorporates the Ibadat, which contains what is regarded as the pillars of belief. Some say there are five pillars but others agree there are six. These six pillars are the shahada, salat, zakat, sawm, hajj and jihad.

These three dimensions integrate Overholt's seven elements of prophecy into a holistic projection of prophetic relevance. A prophet (Muhammad) cannot be seen apart from the message, which he was called to deliver.

### 1.2.3 Abraham as a typological figure of Muhammad

Several constructs were considered, which amplifies the prophethood of Muhammad, which though similar to others is in fact of a markedly superior authority and calling. Muhammad as prophet is used to justify



why he is a vassal of God and what motivated God to elect him in this capacity. These constructs employed are broadly portrayed as the qualities he possessed and those, which are recognized by God as worthy of election; the proclamation of God's cosmic ideal; the impact of this cosmic message. These elements serve to explain why as prophet he has been accepted as well as why he was so successful. The difference though is that Muhammad is a prophet with a cosmic purpose. Different constructs are used to show how the prophet amassed a cosmic function. Since a "prophet" has been operationally defined, the task now remains to show what personal elements contributed to him becoming a prophet. What elements suggest that he is a cosmic prophet? How successful was this universal prophet in enhancing the life-saving message to a needy world?

Muhammad was viewed as special and worthy in the eyes of God, and to the people whom accepted him as a prophet. As a corollary to this section, discussion is led on how the community venerated him. In addition, the need is to point out how his election according to theologians' and believers' is said to have been foreordained. This esteem has meant he was conferred super-ordinate status.

To this end the need is to proffer reasons for the cosmic authentication of his message. The universal applicability of Muhammad's message has resulted not only in him being seen as a hero amongst Muslims but also one who have been venerated as an extraordinary human being. In this

context Muhammad as prophet has justifiably accrued the respect of being a prophet as well as excelling in spirituality. Hence the reason the value placed on him has at times taken on extreme description. It is difficult to separate legendary material from fact, but this need not be a problem since it demonstrates an important principle, that is, a prophet that is held in high esteem. It follows that his adherents have absorbed the lessons he has bequeathed to such an extent that it found expression in all facets of life. This principle is aptly demonstrated in terms of the impact the message had on economics, art, education, science, architecture, ethics, jurisprudence, and women's issues.

This study is based on various works on the life of Muhammad. It consequently follows, that the extent to which these instruments measure the sought after characteristics of Muhammad is not directly observable but are rather inferred from patterns in the behaviour of people and institutions that regard themselves as Islamic. This then will give this study a measure of construct validity.

It is important to note that this study will lack criterion validity largely because it is not the author's intention to measure Islam with other religions. Muhammad therefore remains valid despite what others may believe. However with regard to the issue of prophetic validity, criterion validity will play a definite role. The measurement here will focus on the

extent to which the results of prophetic similarity correlate with one another. This related measure is called criterion validity.

### 1.3 Literature review

In this particular study primary sources as well as secondary sources are consulted. Primary sources in this regard refer to the Qur'an and the hadith; secondary sources are the works of scholars who have based their works on these sources. The use of the hadiths is mostly ignored here, whereas the Qur'an is freely sourced as support for certain assertions. Secondary sources are employed as means of understanding the central problems in this study, viz. the prophetic qualities of Muhammad and the cosmic nature of his message.

In *Channels of Prophecy*, the social dynamics of prophetic activity, Thomas Overholt (1989:23) says that prophecy is the experience of individuals that are selected from the common lineage of humanity. They live side by side of those anonymous people who simply blend in with the environment. It follows from this that the extent of this study is that it seeks to understand prophecy as a common experience of humankind occurring across various communities. It is for this reason that Biblical prophets in this study are exclusively used since they are analogous to Muhammad's "prophethood." It points out those Biblical prophets as well as prophets of other societies who were embedded within particular societies with peculiar problems. Muhammad remains no different. To

this end the value for understanding prophecy lays in a social context it places him in.

Randall David Parks' curious hermeneutical study, *Abraham, the first Christian and the first Muslim* (1987) unwittingly ties in with the sentiments expressed by Overholt. He ventures that Abraham the patriarch has immense value for Jews, Christians and Muslims. However, it is the Muslims who place him in a timeless zone of independent monotheist. Abraham holds strategic consequences in Muhammad's incipient religion. The monotheistic model of Abraham found its conclusion in Islam. Monotheism validifies the prophetic ascendancy of Muhammad since it is the tool that radicalises not only the socio-religious context of the Hijaz but its cosmological significance is propitiatory.

Several books are used here to follow-up on the meaning of prophecy. It follows logically that Muhammad is regarded with increased emphasis as a prophet and the reader is never left in doubt about this. One aspect that points to his prophetic role is his foreordination. Another aspect is said to have been his "illiteracy"; Uri Rubin discusses these factors in the eye of the beholder (1995) that outlines the process by which Muhammad became entrenched as a prophet. The prolific author Fazlur Rahman in *Prophecy in Islam: philosophy and orthodoxy* (1958) points out that intellect of a prophet subsists by design of God. Consequently the election of Muhammad as prophet is not an extempore decision but one that is foreordained.



Interspersed in the biblical annals are hints of Muhammad's ordination. It was up to the communities to extract it and announce it to the world. Both Martin Lings in *Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources* (1991) and Rubin in *The eye of the beholder* (1995) consider the Arabic annunciation of Muhammad. Muhammad's own countrymen were confronted by his imminent appearance. Lings' work arranges an important element that's intrinsic to the Peninsula, for instance the Ka'ba, a pre-Islamic monument that has had relevance for the nascent religion.

While it is true that the knowledge of some prophets is hidden in manuals or documents, the same cannot be said of Muhammad. Annemarie Schimmel in her book *And Muhammad is messenger* (1985) articulates the community's response to Muhammad's venerable qualities. It is her aim to extract opinion from the vast Islamic community. She points out that the magnitude of opinion on Muhammad is found on a grandiose scale. The opinion-makers in this umma consist of poets' theologians, mystic or Sufis, professionals and ordinary folk who are variously enthralled by this massive personality.

The search for the historical Muhammad gets a timely impetus from Clinton Bennett in his work, *In search of Muhammad* (1995). He writes that the search for the "Historical Muhammad" has come a long way. His remarks are mainly intended for a Western audience. Perhaps unwittingly

his criticism towards Western authors is an admission that they are capable of more "objective" appraisal of Muhammad than Muslim authors who by large hide behind legendary material.

He admits the paucity of credible material on Muhammad but wants a more valid presentation on Muhammad from Western authors. Bennett's style is marked by a complete epoche that stops short of conversion. His whole purpose is perhaps to negate the nagging subjectivity that scholars find themselves defending. The need is to understand Islam for its own sake.

Sachiko Murata and William Chittick have given us an extensive discussion on the message Muhammad proclaimed. In their inspiring work *Vision of Islam* (1994) new levels of understanding is reached on Islam's worldview. This work fittingly dwells on Muhammad's message to the world. The bloodstream of Muslim belief is thoroughly examined through the three-fold dimensions of: iman, ihsan and ibadat. These dimensions encapsulate what Islam stands for; moreover it renders the thinking of Muhammad open for greater scrutiny. It is through these dimensions that vital clues on Muhammad are given. Through this study, *Vision Of Islam* the strategic message of Muhammad is passed on. The discussion on the dimensions of Islam is supported by the views of Afzalur Rahman in his work *Islam: ideology and the way of life* (1980). Rahman, too, gives extensive consideration to the dimensions of Islam.

Muhammad remains a person who cannot be ignored. The handling of the core beliefs in Islam by Murata and Chittick shows the worth it has for countless people. The reach of this message has embodied the value for its adherents and those benefiting from an enduring legacy. The living proof of Muhammad lies in what has been achieved through his ideals. It has inspired belief into various cultural activities. It influenced education, art, economics, science and social activities.

Muhammad initiated an idea that had far reaching influence in this world. The inspirational work revealed to him, the Qur'an, had throughout the centuries, been at the center of all Islamic intellectual activity, impacted on philosophy, lexicography, jurisprudence, law, theology, art, calligraphy and other facets of life. Yvonne Haddad (1984) as editor of *The Islamic Impact* writes in her article that the Prophet's message through the proscriptions and prescriptions of the Qur'an rooted itself in the fundamentals of life. Seyyid Hossein Nasr in *Islamic science: an illustrated study* (1982) and *Islamic education science: a summary appraisal* (1984) shows how the spirit and teachings of the Qur'an contributed to an educational curriculum that served to penetrate the hearts and mind of the Islamic community. John Esposito in *Law in Islam* (1984) follows this logic by giving a glimpse of how Muhammad's spiritual insight gave credence to the law.

Women's issues are factors that have wide reaching consequences for society in Islam. They remain a vital part of human functioning. Women

have an entirely different disposition to men and often this becomes abused. For this reason Jane Smith in *The experience of Muslim women: considerations of power and authority* (1984) highlights the impact women have on Islam; she shows them as a vital force, as co-claimants to Muhammad's legacy. The notion that women are the step-children of God is negated as Jane Smith points out. They, too, have found inspiration in the life of Muhammad the prophet.

In her book *And Muhammad is his messenger* (1985) as well *Aspects Mystical thought in Islam* (1984) Annemarie Schimmel shares insight into the facets of poetry and mysticism. Here poetry and mysticism are understood to lend heightened awareness of Muhammad as Prophet of God, a vassal with unique and venerable qualities.

#### 1.4 Outline of this Study

Chapter two is a foray into the world of Biblical prophets. The framework of this section is based on the perceived elements of prophethood gained from a Biblical perspective that points to the experiences of the person as a prophet. The process of communication is an integral part of the interaction between all role players in the prophetic context.

The process of communication is measured by what Overholt (1989) enumerates as proclamation, audience reaction, additional proclamation, feedback to source of revelation and supernatural confirmation. More



importantly several prophets are compared and measured for manifesting the seven elements that are said to be the key considerations in prophethood. This section point out that fundamentally prophets emerge within a social situation. The social situation is such that it fosters a need for intervention or reformation. Chapter three is an extension of chapter two since it seeks to demonstrate that the experience of Biblical prophets is analogous to Muhammad's. In addition David Aune's classification of proclamatory elements is deemed to be valid for God's articulation in the Qur'an too.

In Chapter four consideration is given to the aspect of prophecy. It evaluates Muhammad's experience according to those elements Overholt has identified as aspects of prophethood. The key issue is whether Muhammad's experience is similar to Biblical prophets. Consideration is also given to Abraham who serves as a prototype of Muhammad. Moreover, Abraham fosters an understanding of the prophetic activity of Muhammad who sought to legitimise the worship of a single monotheistic God. Abraham's experience, too, demonstrates how monotheism becomes a central concern for true submission.

The fifth chapter looks at the message that was entrusted to him or the one that he had to bring to humanity. His strict brand of monotheism, the hallmark of his venture that steered him into the spiritual domain of humanity, led him into conflict with all those who did not support his objectives. Since Muhammad conceived God to be one, the thinking

behind the Oneness, called tawhid, plays a comprehensive role in his apprehension of Allah. This chapter defines for the Muslim the essential aspects that he or she is likely to encounter in Islamic lore.

The sixth chapter discusses Muhammad's impact on his universe. The impact of Muhammad incorporates the revelation of ritualistic living to economics; his way of life influenced art, music and many other facets of life. In fact the spirit of Islam dominates all facets of life; hence it is called a living faith seeking to dominate the individual and his activities. The fact that it has controlling effect on the community or believers shows the extent of acceptance. This section verifies the impact Muhammad's message had on the umma; it was not simply belief but also the doing that kept the spirit of Muhammad's message alive.

Lastly, we live in a fragmented world of competing ideologies and as such there was scope for Muhammad, too. This inclination to see him self as an extension of the Biblical tradition has caused some Christian and Jewish theologians to question him and consequently cast doubt on his prophetic worth and claim. It is however inescapable that the proclamation he gave the community had a persistent and indelible effect on this world. In this chapter the author gives his perspective on the treatment of Muhammad and his worth and acceptance as a prophet.

## 1.5 The Value of this study

This study seeks to acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet since the Christian-Muslim debate must seek to understand his message to the world. Obviously there is conflict on the validity of the message on both sides but this is not under discussion now. Rather a small step is taken, which is to affirm that in the greater scheme of prophetic behaviour, Muhammad indeed displayed and projected the behaviour of prophethood.

## 1.6 Interpreting the prophetic role of Muhammad

The quest for understanding others who differ from us is a nagging reminder of our partisanship. We are in good company though. For we live in our own enclaves trying to peep into other peoples' domains. There is nothing to stop us though since the need of others cannot simply be left alone but must be approached with the right attitude. Hence in the domain of philosophical hermeneutics has served a role in trying to eliminate our fore-conceptions we bring to our inquiry. This is of course more easily said than done. The quest at understanding is however a constant activity that continues unabated. In religious inquiry we often approach religious history or documentation from their text, either primary or secondary texts. The task here is deciphering meaning from the context, the context of Muhammad, which has attracted us so that we too can explain. The hermeneutical path in this study is explaining and

understanding Muhammad's prophetic career in terms of wider occurrence of this prophetic phenomena. Paul Ricoeur (1981:43) writes that hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts. Hermeneutics seeks to understand written language. A natural characteristic of language is its polysemic nature, for instance, in this context the understanding of nabi/navi. This is a feature that tells us that it has more than one meaning when considered outside their use in a determinate context. The polysemic nature of words calls forth as its counterpart the selective role of contexts for determining the current value which words assume in a determinate message, addressed by a definite speaker to hearer placed in a particular situation. Sensitivity to context is the necessary complement and the ineluctable counterpart of polysemy. The use of context involves an activity of discernment, which is exercised in the concrete exchange of messages between interlocutors, and which is modelled on the interplay of question and answer (Ricoeur, 1989:44) For Schleirmacher effort is not spared to rise above the particularities of texts, in other words, he tries to deregionalise it. In addition he scales above the rules into which understanding is possibly located. Therefore hermeneutics is the attempt to raise exegesis and philology to the level of a *kunstlehre*, that is, a "technology" which is not restricted to mere collection of unconnected operations (Ricoeur, 1989:45-46).

Schleirmacher grappled with the relation between two forms of interpretation: "grammatical" interpretation and "technical"



interpretation. Grammatical interpretation is based upon on the characteristics of discourse, which are common to a culture; technical interpretation is addressed to the singularity, indeed the genius, of the writer's message. In this situation Schleirmacher makes it clear: to understand the common language is to forget the writer, whereas to understand the individual author is to forget his language, which is merely passed over. The first understanding is called "objective", since it is concerned with linguistic characteristics distinct from the author, but also "negative", since it merely indicates the limits of understanding; its critical value bears only meaning of words.

Dilthey on the other hand sought to bring understanding to hermeneutics and history. Thus he said that trying to understand a text of the past is trying to figure out an historical interconnection. Therefore, before the coherence of text is understood the coherence of history must be understood. Historicism in all its pejorative baggage shifts interest from chef's d'oeuvre of humankind to the historical interconnection, which supports them.

Dilthey furthermore searched for intelligibility of the historical, not in ontology but in the epistemology. The way to give justice to historical knowledge was to give it a scientific dimension comparable to natural sciences. In response to positivism Dilthey undertook to endow human sciences with a methodology and epistemology as respectable as those in natural sciences. This meant he had to clarify the concepts explanation

and understanding of history. In pursuance of this he employed psychology for searching as a means to understanding. The difference between natural science and the human sciences is that the natural sciences sees man as alien to himself whereas in the human sciences man can grasp himself, that is, he is knowable. Thus in riposte to positivism, he points out that man is not alien to man; he is capable of knowing himself (Ricoeur, 1989:5-53).

The meaning of being is sought after in *auslegung* or explication. Heidegger suggests *Dasein* or being there is where emphasis is to be placed. By *Dasein* is designated the place where the question of being arises, the place of manifestation. It is the structure of being to have pre-understanding of being. Through *Dasein* one seeks to unfold foundations by means of clarification. Furthermore, epistemological grounding brings about the task that would cast light on the concepts governing the objects, the region of nature, of life, of language, of history. But the philosophical task of foundation is to unfold the fundamental concept, which determine prior understanding of the region, providing the basis of all the thematic objects of a science and thereby orientating all positive research (Ricoeur, 1989: 54). In philosophical hermeneutics at stake is the explication of those beings with regard to their basic state of being.

Hermeneutics is not a reflection on the human sciences, but an explication of the ontological ground upon which sciences can be constructed (Ricouer, 1989:55).

Gadamar (1975:267) stated that a person trying to understand a text would always project. He projects a meaning for the text as whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the texts. Initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations with regard to possible meaning; working out fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into meaning, and understanding what is there.

Gadamar (1975:267) says that Heidegger's process is to describe or revise the fore-projection so that it becomes capable of projecting itself as a new understanding of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretations begin with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. Thus a person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by things themselves. Meanings represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities, but within this multiplicity of what can be thought, that is, of what the reader can find meaningful; and if a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he will be able to fit in what he has understood into a range of his own various expectations of meanings. The hermeneutical consequently becomes a task in itself, a questioning of things (Gadamar, 1975:p267).

Hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. This kind of sensitivity does not involve "neutrality" with respect to content nor extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices (Gadamar, 1975:269). Hermeneutics is not at all a matter of securing ourselves against the tradition that speaks out of the text, but on the contrary, of excluding everything that could hinder us from understanding it in terms of the subject matter. It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition (Gadamar, 1975:269-70). Earl H. Waugh (1985:42) in terms of this ideal sought a hermeneutically justified position on Muhammad's life; he goes on to advise that understanding Muhammad's role could not be limited to a historical recounting of his days on earth. Muhammad's "prophethood" is mediated through his individuality and his own personhood. Furthermore, accent on Muhammad's life must be based on the cue taken from believers' claim on his value.

The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudices thus giving the hermeneutical problem real thrust. In the light of this insight it appears that the historian despite the critique of rationalism and of natural legal philosophy, is based on modern enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices.



In the light of this hermeneutical task presented here Greer (1992:14) takes cognisance of this same advice. He noticed that Christianity and its adherent scholars are often guilty of demonising Muhammad and Islam. The Qur'an was ridiculed and Muhammad proclaimed a false prophet against whom Christ had warned (Greer, 1989: 15). He goes on to say that attacks on Muhammad were built on the assumption that Islam was at best a Christian heresy; portrayed as a plagiarist and was totally dependent on other religious sources; Muhammad was understood as purely a product of religious and cultural environment (Greer, 1992:16).

Further, Raymond Lull cast aspersions on Muhammad's prophethood when he professed that Christianity was superior to Islam. Thus he attacked the message of Muhammad as deficient and incomplete in terms of his monistic emphasis. Consequently Lull argued that the doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation was a superior belief and that it led to superior understanding of God (Greer, 1992:19).

During the Enlightenment a developing commitment to the rule of reason became a dominant characteristic of the period, which impacted on all Western religious studies. A religious rationalism resulted from a dawning awareness of the unappreciated wealth of the cultures and growing disgust over the brutalities of the religious wars. Some significant efforts to view Islam from a more objective stance were initiated. For the first time scholars were able recognize and admit the element of

prejudicial bias, which had robbed studies of Muhammad of their objectivity (Greer, 1992:24).

The emphasis on reason only seemed to encourage Christian feelings of intellectual superiority. Faith came to be defined as a right knowledge and superior reason. Islam and the prophet Muhummad were consigned comfortably to a position of supposed inferiority (Greer, 1992:22). Construction of Muhammad's life and character took on diatribes against the character of the Prophet. As a result he was portrayed as the incarnation of evil, a charlatan, one who detested the Christian truth (Greer, 1992:23).

The phenomenological environment of Muhammad's experience includes economic, political, social and psychological elements, all of which are interconnected (Greer, 1992:85.) Muhammad took on the role of liberator of the people from the oppression of the Qurayshs. He gave recognition to the need for liberation from oppression (Greer, 1992:89). Islam crystallized under the inspiration of Muhammad, as a religious response intended to confront the basic dilemma of the Prophets day and time (Greer, 1992:92). His universe was in crisis and therefore he must be understood as struggling against the lack of socio-human justice in his universe of existence. Islam's genesis as a socially directed religion can be attributed to the essential concentration of the prophet upon justice in the community under God (Greer, 1992:94).

Muhammad is an earnest and dedicated searcher after the divine truth, who became profoundly and honestly convinced that God had chosen him to convey his message to humankind (Greer, 1992:97). He is the man whose creative imagination worked at deep levels and produced ideas relevant to the central questions of human existence (Greer, 1992:97).

Islam crystallized under the inspiration of Muhammad, as a religious response intended to confront the basic human dilemma of the Prophets' day and time.

- Islam was born as a response to a predicament which threatened meaningful existence in the human community
- From this perspective the interest is in cause and factors, which brought about the primary socio-human predicament of Muhammad's day. This consideration must be given to the creative efforts of the prophet to address this dilemma on behalf of God.

One must be aware that Muhammad's universe was in great crisis (Greer, 1992:97). It was characterized by social and human injustices: there was constant struggle to survive in the face of powerful systems and structures which determined to destroy meaningful human existence. There were forces that were determined to bring about violence, structural dehumanisation and breakdown of human relationships (Greer, 1992:93).

As the Christian studies Muhammad from a phenomenological perspective, he/she will resist comparisons of the Prophet to Christ, but will

eventually return for consideration of that which is authentic to our own particular Christian experience of God in Christ.

One must always be a student of one's own presuppositions and prejudices, as these threaten an honest study of the Prophet and his message. The study of Muhammad from within his own context requires that one be immersed within the contextual viewpoint, which can allow for the raising of the awareness of the legitimising of Muhammad within his own milieu (Greer, 1992:79).

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End Notes on Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> By intermediation is meant transference of ideas between God and the community.



## Chapter 2

### A Biblical Perspective of Prophethood

The purpose of this inquiry is to come to an understanding of what is meant by the term "prophet" especially from a Judaic/Christian perspective. Can Muhammad's experience be defined or incorporated into the fraternity of prophets, which falls outside the ambit of Islam? From the Qur'an it is evident that Muhammad informed the community that he is a prophet in the same vein as others<sup>1</sup> (Surah 3:33, 5:21, 5:50, 23:23-50) primarily modelled after Biblical prophets, although traditions have him saying there are historically 124,000 prophets and 313 messengers<sup>2</sup>. The assumption from this acknowledgement is that he would have had the same purpose as those religious attendants. The key to this section is to understand how the role of prophet fits Muhammad. Within this concept "prophet" resides the intentionality of this principle figure. The search is essentially for the significance of Muhammad as prophet, the vassal of God. If Muhammad fulfilled the role of prophet it would mean that the role he lived out is a fundamental feature of a prophet. He would have been attentive to those ideas that formed or made "prophets" as well as to those factors that assisted him in articulating this "prophetness."

#### 2.1 In search of understanding the "Prophet"

The hermeneutical aim is to render language concerning a "prophet" intelligible. Embedded within religious discourse lies the polysemy of the term "prophet." The purpose is to extract the value it holds for us in the

context. The hermeneutic process serves in this instance as a guide on how to become sensitive in our quest to explain and to understand others as close as possible without offending. When consideration is given to the term "prophet" it is discernable that there is a close relationship between semiology of Semitic languages, hence the closeness of the meaning of "prophet." This sign has similar meanings in Hebrew and Arabic. The sense Uffenheimer (1999:16) wants to bring across does contribute to the objective of this chapter, that is, to make sense of Muhammad's "prophetic" claim. Uffenheimer proceeds by tracing the etymology of the noun prophet as coming from the Hebrew navi which in turn comes from the root nb' used in the Bible. The etymology and the meaning of the term navi and the root nb' are variously explained. Based on the Arabic, the root nb' and the Arabic nbh, to arouse from sleep, suddenly to pay attention to something; others point in this context to the root nb'=to announce, to announce some news, as the prophet announces the word of God. Most scholars refer to the Akkadian verb nabu, to call; some explain the noun pattern navi' in an active sense i.e. messenger or herald.

One can distinctly recognise the Arabic form of the root here, viz. nb. From this root is derived n[a]b[a] or naba'a (Hans Wehr, S.v. naba'a) which is rendered to be high or prominent or projecting, to inform, notify or tell, to be evident, to communicate, to claim to be a prophet. The root can also mean to disagree or come in conflict with (al-Mawrid. S.v. naba'a). When the Bible speaks about a prophet's activity and frequently

uses the term *slh*, that is, to send (Uffenheimer, 1999:18). The intrinsic authority of the prophet's message is derived from the fact that he participated in the divine council, and that as a member of the divine retinue he was charged with various missions. To be sure, the prophet occasionally acted spontaneously as messenger of the community, praying on their behalf (Uffenheimer, 1999:19). In sum, the term *navi'*, according to its etymology, its contextual environment and its usage in the bible, designates a messenger as sent to announce the word of God to the community (Uffenheimer, 1999:21). Further, it tells us that the term "prophet" has several other meanings, such as a person who shares the characteristics of ordinary folk in the community of the "prophet." It can also refer to those persons who can predict the future. This term is thus rich (connotative) in meaning and does inform us that we cannot limit this vocation to one sense (denotative).

Uffenheimer's interchange supports "prophet" in a denotative sense as a person sent by God to a community. But the point here is that the prophet is driven by the state of the community. The collective understanding from these meanings is that a "prophet" is a member of society whose intentions are to serve his/her community. Thus as Jacques Waardenburg (1978:107) noted: the "quest is for what is essential to prophesy is basically a problem of significance or meaning. A prophet as Overholt noted does not exist within a vacuum. A prophet is a member of a community with a purpose. Usually there is some sort of transcendent reality that is assumed to be of significance, which demands attention. A

prophet claiming authority from a Transcendent Reality will always manifest certain behaviours that emanated from this interaction. Indeed Overholt suggests that there are seven factors that can possibly demarcate a prophet from an average person who has religious experience. These elements are revelation, proclamation, audience reaction, and prophetic feedback to the source of revelation, additional proclamations, supernatural confirmations and disciples. Does Muhammad's activities exhibit these processes? And are these necessarily marks of a Prophet?

#### 2.1.1 The Process of Communication

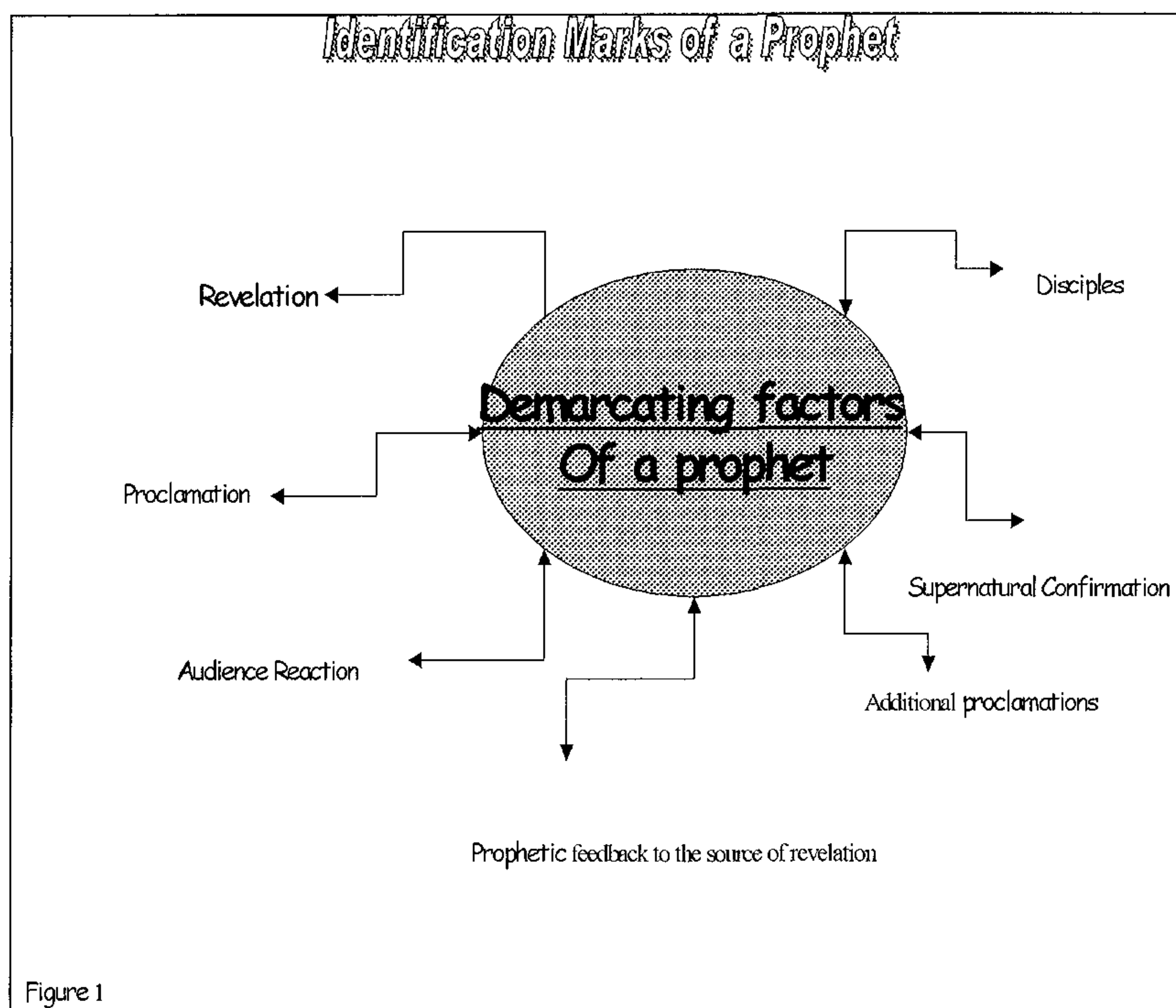
Thus far we have come to understand the prophet as being sent by a Transcendent Being. The act of being "sent" presupposes interaction between at least three parties. This interaction or communication (naba'a) is a vital process in the God-human relationship. Acts of communication occur by means of interpersonal communication, such that, A, transmits information to B, who transmits it to C. Prophetic communication is not made in isolation but made as a result of stressors bound up within a society. For successful communications to take place feedback must become an integral part of communication (Rensburg, 1996:1ff). Persuasive communication is a prerequisite for a positive response (Rensburg, 1996:18). The words and other actions of an intermediary express a certain perception of the world in general and the specific details of the current situation. Perception is the result of two



activities: (1) cognitive filtering, or seeing what is there; this is not always seen in total objectivity. There is often selective attention given to situations presented this selective response to a socially based process. The plausibility of our views on reality depends on the social support which these views receive from significant others within our milieu; (2) cognitive mapping, or seeing what something means; we will confront information by placing it within a certain frame of reference. Thus meanings are assigned and are not intrinsic to the things. They arise in a process of interaction between people.

Cognitive filtering and cognitive mapping are as much part of the prophet's assessment of reality as it is of the ordinary person.

Muhammad has demonstrated the very process on his first encounter



with the numinous. He had no inclination of what he had experienced. As a result he had to make sense of it in his own time. Through the communications process the deity connects with the intermediary laying down the rules for future behaviour. This communiqué is transferred to an awaiting audience who are exhorted to carry out the deity's commands. Communication is not a single occurrence but a continual event.

Through this interactive performance the deity showed his attentiveness to the community. The manner of communication is through revelation and proclamations. Thus far a "prophet" must acknowledge that a Transcendent Being, who entered into dialogue with him through some method that, will become clearer hereunder, sent him.

## 2.2 A Revelation

A revelation is a communicative process. Usually a deity is regarded as the source from whence the revelation emanates. The prophet is the one who experiences such revelations. The route to knowledge of God is through revelation and the concomitant processes. These attendant processes of access to a deity may be through dreams (Daniel, shamans), trances (shamans), or auditory sounds (Moses, Muhammad) or revelations (Muhammad), and visions (Amos). Overholt (1989:1ff) in *Channels of Prophecy* remarks "we are concerned with prophecy as a religious phenomena, who should be included in the category prophet". From the

rich sense of this word the rendering of the term navi/nabi above, it is evident from just a cursory look around that many people could be included in this category. Revelation though is a personal and unverifiable experience. It serves as a point of contact with a transcendent reality and eventually turns the transmitted communication into proclamation/s. The person, receiving the revelation is in a process of contact, which we refer to as communication.

Revelation is a means by which a deity makes himself known to humanity (Deist, S.v. Revelation). Unfortunately revelation is not open to all of humanity but to a special group of people only. It is thus possible that God may have spoken personally to the prophet or a helper or through dreams, visions and trances. The prophet Amos records that every time he had a vision: "The Lord had shown me". Four visions of coded messages came to him at various times, these visions were meant for an aberrant community who had to reform or face dire consequences. Each had been shown an encrypted vision, which held some danger for them as a result of their delinquent behaviour. This happened to Isaiah, the biblical prophet, who in a vision saw God sitting on his throne in awesome splendour. Consequently this experience served as confirmation of God's power and ultimacy. Since the prophet had seen God this experience pointed to a confirmation of a higher order of existence. Such was the case of Isaiah: a ceremony of purification took place whereupon he was commissioned to carry a message from Yahweh to the people at large. (Overholt, 1989:2). Moses, too, had this sublime experience of a majestic

deity (Exodus 3:2). He struggled to comprehend the significance of this experience initially. However this episode was to turn his life as a shepherd upside down; he then became a man commissioned by God (Jonathan Kirsch, 1998:111)

In the year 742B.C. Isaiah Ben Amoz saw Yahweh garbed in royal robes, sitting upon the throne in his temple in the capital city of Jerusalem. The sight was awesome - the foundations of buildings shook, the air filled with smoke, and God himself was surrounded by winged creatures who sang his praises- and Isaiah was filled with his own sense of unworthiness. Jeremiah saw a vision, which considerably influenced his thinking for his future tenure as a prophet (Koch, Vol. 2, 1983:17). He remarked (. Jeremiah 2:13-16) that " word of Yahweh came to me..." In this vision God showed him the marauding forces that in brutish venery are there to pounce on them (Israelites) because of their penchant to forsake Him. Muhammad usually visited the cave at Mount Hira north of Mecca, suddenly one night there arose in a vision before him an angel, the messenger of God, at about two bows -length (Surah 53) urging him to "recite!"<sup>3</sup>.

The process of revelation is more than a scene of introduction. From the discussion above it has become clearer that nb is the conduit through which communication took place. In addition this person was regarded as the vassal, that is, he was sent to the community or the larger world. The reason being that God needed to convey certain laws or bring to the



attention of the populace certain existing rules. The prophet through proclamations or oracles often spread revelations. These speeches carry much weight as it is from a source that many regarded as authoritative.

### 2.3 Proclamations

When referring to "proclamation" the pretext is that God has had reason to speak to humanity. The World Book Encyclopaedia (1992, S.v. proclamation) defines proclamation "as an executive notice issued under the authority of the head of a country (society). It announces some order or regulation that is important (in that context or for all contexts)."

Seen from this perspective proclamation is the personal revelation of the prophet becoming *au fait* amongst the community, God had reason to speak to humanity (Overholt, 1989:70). From God's powerful position and superior thoughtfulness human aberration required restitution to God's primordial goal. It led Him to communion with intermediaries. The revelation in which he initiated the intermediary into His presence contains rudimentary but profound proclamations. The Supreme Reality was aware of the present situation faced by the community; the community either faced a collective threat or served created gods that had no control over reality. In light of these threats a revelation was necessary through which the deity passed certain decrees. He claimed sovereignty over all and consequently brought new ways of seeing reality. In the visions of Amos the purpose even though in an encrypted format



conveyed an immanent doom awaiting the community. Amos, like many other prophets, preached repentance (Overholt, 1989:43). Therefore pending disaster was based upon the community's possible change of heart.

A proclamation formula accompanied oracular profusion; usually it stated, "hear the word of Yahweh" (Amos 7:14). The divine proclamation was used in the proclamation of divine law, in wisdom teaching. Another form of proclamation is an oracle of Yahweh, which states, "Hear the word Yahweh had spoken" (Amos 3:1). The structure of proclamation is based upon prediction of the future. It can either be a negative prediction, that is, a threat, or it can be a positive prediction, that is, a promise. An accusation justifies a threat and an admonition and this in a way is a statement of divine self -disclosure.

David E. Aune (1983:91-97) has identified major forms of proclamations (or, prophetic speeches): (1) the announcement of judgement, (2) the announcement of salvation: (3) the oracle of assurance, (4) admonition, (5) the oracle of divine self-disclosure, (6) woe speech and, (7) judicial speech. According to Overholt though, one must differentiate between an initial proclamation and subsequent proclamations. The initial proclamation is the defining "speech" or the induction of the recipient of the revelation into annals of prophets.

This first or the initial proclamation is the defining moment for the prophet. It sets the tone for his career as a man of God. It is true that prophets appeared in unsettled times in their communities, when they were in the throes of crisis- the family, personal life and societal - in which the normal things seemed to be threatened with collapse (Overholt, 1989:81).

The kerygma through Amos is that the people have lost the meaning of the design shaping their destiny (Beaucamp, 1970:3). From Amos (1:3) it is clear that God will punish his people because they have turned away from him and followed nations without any notion of God (Beaucamp, 1970:5). Isaiah supports this idea by pointing out that the rule of God, that is, the need for morality and good governance has been aborted. He uses the king in greater scheme to show his uncleanness and consequently that his sacrifices has been rejected. Thus religious feeling and liturgy is not a means to please God alone.

The proclamation is that they (community) must wash themselves-clean (Beaucamp, 1970:56). Similarly, for other prophets too, the first proclamation became tone setting for subsequent prophetic activities. From Isaiah (Isaiah 1:2 et seq.) it is clear that the problem with the community is formulated in the first oracle from God to him (or to them).

## 2.4 Additional Proclamations

God made contact with the community on several occasions. Hence the initial experience between God and the prophet was not a single confirmatory experience; it took place at different times as God saw fit. In fact, God's instructions to the vassal occurred over space and time. A prophet's continual communication with God becomes the basis for doctrine in time to come. Such regular revelations by the numinous were intended for the community as a basis for their reconstitution in God's ways.

The need for revelations arose due to the to the community's state of decline and need for possible deliverance. As such there were basic conditions that needed to be fulfilled before such a community had any hope of sharing the fruits of association. David Aune above noted several categories of proclamations that the author finds useful in understanding the deity's continual intervention in the community's affairs. The constant oracles of the deity show him as clearly involved in the affairs of humanity.

#### 2.4.1 The Kerygma of Judgement

The Qur'an is steeped in passages decreeing the ineluctable Judgement. This unavoidable day refers to God's means of reviewing the success or failures of human inclination to embrace His laws or the neglect or refusal to do so. It is incumbent on the prophet to announce the judgement; it consists of a threat (Amos 6:11-12) and accusation (Amos 3:2; 4:1-2; 8:4-8). Amos had four distinct visions in which God was dooming his society. Isaiah, too, has levelled threats and accusations at his people (Isaiah chapter 2 and 3). They have become a proud and evil nation by doing wrong in the sight of the Lord, being unjust and oppressive (Isaiah 1:17) therefore he took vengeance against them (Isaiah 1:25).

#### 2.4.2 The Proclamation of Salvation

According to Aune (1983:93) the announcement of salvation is not always discernable in all prophets but the underlying factor is that there will be deliverance from servitude. Amos's fight against the establishment is seen by scholars as a reformer who rejected outward form of worship and religion in its cultic form. God, it is said, can be truly found in social action, without hymns, sacrifice and incense (Koch, Vol.1. 1982: 54).



The expression "The Day of Yahweh" is an eschatological term that is projected as the visible victory by Yahweh.

#### 2.4.3 Oracle of Assurance

According to Aune (1983:94-95) the phrase "fear not", "behold" or an equivalent is used to reassure the populace of God's good intentions (Isaiah 41:10,13,14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 51:7; 54:4). The oracle of assurance is a prophetic speech form found throughout the Near East and is found in Jewish apocalyptic literature (1Enoch 95:1-3; 96:3; 104-1,4) and Christian literature (Luke 1:30; 12:32 Acts 27:24; Rev 1:17). The whole exercise in dispensing threats and judgement is simply not to destroy but create anew. For this reason the deity must reassure the populace of his concern and ability to preserve those who are just or willing to change their ways.

#### 2.4.4 Admonition

The prophetic admonishment demanded that Israel do what it had neglected to do. Such admonition is often expressed in imperatives and jussives, which calls for repentance and improvements (Amos 4:4-5; 6-7,11-15, 21-24,27, Isaiah 1:10-17). The view is that prophets were seen as warners since their messages called for repentance. The admonishment belongs to a future already determined by Yahweh (Aune, 1983:95).

Klaus Koch (1983:43) associates Amos' prophetic doom with a call to repentance. According to his view disaster is conditionally based on their willingness to repent. God had solemnly sworn that a foreign power would soon carry off the "fat cows" of Bashan (Amos 4:1) to a foreign land (Koch, Vol.1. 1982:46-47).

Amos condemned the sacrificial feasts and acts associated with them (tithes, songs of jubilation) (Koch, Vol.1. 1982:54).

#### 2.4.5 Oracle of Divine self-disclosure

The oracle of divine self-disclosure was usually placed at the conclusion of a prophetic promise. The core of an oracle is that "You/they shall know that I am Yahweh"(Kings 20:13,28). God revealed himself in the fulfilment of the prediction announced by the prophet (Isaiah 45:3; 49:23). Amos introduced his speech at times with "thus said the Lord," which gave Him a sense of power and authority.

#### 2.4.6 Woe oracle

The woe form of oracle found itself as a description of the misdeeds of those against which it was directed. It was often followed by a threat. The single element that most distinguishes the woe oracle from other types of oracular speech is the focus on the contrast between the heights of human audacity and pride and the depths of despair which the

Day of the Lord was to bring (Isaiah 5; 28:1-33:1). Apart from their social woes the community was under political siege and had become vassalage for the Syrians in which harsh terms were imposed, says Isaiah. Thus it is striking to him how the community had juxtaposed the majesty and holiness of Yahweh as supreme king for a lesser king. A prophet confronted his society with its ills. Moses was no different in this regard - the Egyptian gods held no sovereignty over Yahweh. He confronted one political entity, which ensconced itself as legitimate while it was not. For Moses, the process was to dismantle political oppression and exploitation by countering it with the politics of justice and compassion. Moses introduced not only a new free God and a message of social liberation, but he also engaged his community and the usurpers of power with an ultimatum that Yahweh stood for liberation and human justice (Overholt, 1989:17).

Israel's leaders were guilty of social mismanagement and it accordingly led to their downfall. The practices they had allowed had contributed to decrepit social conditions leading the populace to undermine the integrity of God (Koch, Vol.1. 1982:44).

#### Woeful Policies of Isrealitic leaders

They sell the righteous for silver	They trample on the poor
They are immoral	They defile the sanctuary

Adapted from Klaus Koch The Prophets vol.1. 1982

#### 2.4.7 The Judicial Speech

The juridical speech is a rhetorical form drawn by the prophets from the life of the community. It exhibits a three-part structure (1) the summons (2) the trial (3) the sentence. Each element is not always present but the juridical speech is usually obvious. Amos has demonstrated how the rich, the leaders and those in charge of the social as well as the cultic process have used the system with total disregard for others. Justice and righteousness, the two social and cultic strands evidently represented the highest value for the human condition and behaviour. Amos declared that these were totally lacking at that time. This condition incensed Yahweh. The sentence passed on them was guilty as proven. (Koch, Vol. 1. 1982:56-57).

#### 2.5. Proclamation-feedback-proclamation sequence.

Proclamation has an ardent sense of urgency to reach the community. Their dramatic nature tells the audience that they exist in dynamic tension with a Super-Reality. It is for this reason that they are unequivocally warned that they were standing on the brink of a great national disaster. This message however aroused a great deal of hostility. According to Jeremiah 5:12-13 the prophets were accused of merely being windbags and their words could thus hardly have emanated from Yahweh. On at least one occasion was Jeremiah beaten up and put into stocks by members of the priestly establishment. Following his remarks



in the temple the leaders of the community-priests, prophets and ordinary folks- tried to engineer his death (Jeremiah 26:7-9)(Overholt, 1989: 56). Thus in several instance people refused out rightly to obey him or accept that he was from God. There were of course people who have supported him regardless of this opposition (Jeremiah. 26:16-19,36:13-19). As a result there were times that some came to him to learn the will of Yahweh.

It has been said that a prophet's message could be evaluated by general criteria one that it is sufficiently grounded in cultural and religious traditions and relevant to the current sociopolitical situation. However, two people using these standards would not necessarily come to the same conclusions about what the prophet had said. Indeed, Jeremiah and Hananiah each had their following and each found legitimate grounds for believing their "prophet's" message- that it was faithful to the tradition of and to the current political situation.

#### 2.5.1 New realities, challenging the existing order

From these Biblical perspectives several important issues have been raised that had repercussions for the community. This is the sovereignty of a Transcendent Reality and the non-viability of the gods as well as openness to a more egalitarian system of governance. Thus it is true that Moses' predilection for an alternative consciousness energised his

community into new ways of thinking about reality. The task of subsequent prophets was to build on it but also to remove wrong interpretation of this view. In so doing the task of the prophet is to bring to expression the new realities against the more visible ones of the existing order. To invigorate the community is closely linked to giving them hope. Being energised occurred not by that which the community already possessed but by that which was promised and about to have been given; the presentation of the message is thus eschatological.

These examples of Amos and Isaiah, Jeremiah and Moses as prophets show us that they did not exist as static recluses but that they lived in energetic interaction with the community. It is this interactive process that occurred at the heart of prophetic activity. This prophetic activity gives us a perspective on certain social realities that are the function of prophetic acts of power or social imperatives or miracles, and the nature of the situation in which the prophets had operated in. This point will be expanded in chapter four where Muhammad's message is further considered.

It must be noted here that it is not only Biblical prophets and founders of major movements of cultural renewal that are spiritual intermediaries but also widespread institutionalised roles such as shamans and spirit mediums that share these characteristics as well (Overholt, 1989:67). Although prophecy exists in many variations, nonetheless a similarity underlies all kinds of prophets. Jesus conformed to a cultural role

identified by the term "prophet." The role models were of course, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus had interaction with God that motivated interaction with the community; members of his audience experienced his authoritative teaching and this authority was confirmed in the minds of the people by his powerful acts (Overholt, 1989:67). Jesus conformed to a cultural role identified by the term "prophet." It follows from this that the prophet could not live in isolation from his message and the community. He had to be actively involved in the community's activities, emotions and yearnings. Involvement with the community gave him a certain perspective on social realities.

## 2.6 Source of Authority

The prophet's authority is based on two sources: God and the community. Overholt observed that prophets made claims that a deity had authorised them to proclaim a certain message. The basis of this message was usually a religious experience that was intangible and unverifiable by the members of the audience, who nevertheless assumed that genuine prophets would have had such an experience in any case. Secondly, intermediaries could not have been effective and can therefore not have functioned as intermediaries unless people acknowledge their claim to authority (Overholt, 1989:70). Thus the social reality of prophecy depends on this.

From this perspective prophets justify their utterances and condemn their opponents. This is an important element in the people's understanding of prophets. It follows that the prophet's power over others was not exclusively their presumed contact with the supernatural world. Despite their revelatory experiences, intermediaries could not have effectively exercised their roles unless at least some of their audience responded positively (Overholt, 1989:69).

From these examples there is ample evidence that the "prophet" was confronted with the appearance of the deity in a concealed manner. The people choose their prophets, that is, they attribute authority to them, because they perceived in the proclamation continuity with the cultural traditions sufficient to offer the possibility of a new interpretation that will bring out what is perceived as chaos.

Another related mark of prophetic authority is the real or imagined that seems to characterise the intermediary's activities. The effectiveness is perhaps most often experienced in the form of rhetorical skill, but marvellous acts, including instances of fulfilled prophecy may also play a role.

## 2.7 Audience reaction

From the point of view of the audience reaction, then, the general criterion for the attribution of authority to prophets might be expressed



as perceived effectiveness. The audience confirm the role the prophets have because of the powers they have witnessed they have. The audience recognises the role of the prophet in relation to their power.

A prophet who mobilised his community usually looked for a positive response to his religious experience. This was usually indicated through fulfilled promises.

Yet this alone does not account for people's reaction to the prophet's message. They had to show, a willingness or unwillingness to carry out the commands of the prophet as given by God. Audience reaction remains a critical means of authenticating the intermediary's Prophethood. Amaziah the priest had an altercation with Amos in which he suggested Amos leaves the area for another (Amos 7:12-13). Opposition to the prophet served as a deterrent to his prophetic activity. Moreover the refusal by the audience to consider his words as authoritative created reciprocal tension. From this perspective the prophet lived in dynamic tension with his audience. The audience had to judge whether the visible behaviour of a particular actor merited the acknowledgment that this experience was an occurrence of genuine intermediation. Similarly, in Jeremiah's context, he too, faced opposition from various quarters. The dialectic about God's will resulted in heated arguments between the nebi'im and Jeremiah. This conflict that broke out became profounder as time went on; the opposing positions were of course under inspiration (Koch, Vol. 2. 1983:58). His

riposte against them was that they were lying, naturally. He was eventually left in a pit of mud to die.

Aune (1983:54) tells us that the biblical experience shows that the audience's reaction to a proclamation will differ in terms of what it presents. Furthermore it was pointed out earlier that several categories of proclamation exist. Through the various communicative channels cognitive filtering occurred as a result of the audiences' cognitive perception; the result was that negative or positive responses was likely. It follows that a society existed in a state of dynamic flux and hence the joy of one is to be viewed as threat to the other. In Amos' case God's oracular judgement was a direct threat to those who had filtered the message as a threat to the status quo.

## 2.8 Supernatural confirmation

Koch (Vol.2, 1983:74) affirms that God's supernatural confirmation occurs when God utters his historically efficacious word through the prophet's mouth. This meant an anticipatory speech event, which cannot in principle be recalled before it has materialised in a corresponding "factual" event. A word issue from God's purposive thinking, which is always directed towards humanity; or it may spring from some profound hurt by which he has been touched. According to the prophetic model of communication, a prophet would have adamantly admitted that he never spoke for himself and that his mission was always based upon the

relationship he had with the Supreme Reality. This often was unverifiable because the community never entered into the domain of his personal and private experiences. The feedback mechanism is usually noticed in times of disappointment. In the case of Israel their lack of faith resulted in the death of a person or defeat of the nation in battles.

It is consequently surmised that God or the Supreme Being has kept a keen watch on all the communities behaviours over which he had placed a prophet. Their positive or negative responses have held the key to their eschatological outcome.

Miracles and acts of power are a means of supernatural confirmation of the prophet's authenticity as an intermediary from God. Acts of power are unusual, extraordinary, or miraculous actions of the prophet. These acts are divided into three categories: acts that are fully within the capabilities of any person to perform. For example Jeremiah walking with a yoke around his neck or walking naked like Isaiah. These acts call attention unto itself. A second group of actions are those, which abrogate the laws of nature, example, Moses dividing the sea (Overholt 1989:87-88).

Jeremiah had always prophesied about the "harlotry"<sup>4</sup> of the community as well as God's displeasure in their behaviour. As a result, God, he said, had resolved their fate to be decided by the Babylonian empire. God consequently manifested himself by means of this prophecy; the

besiegers of Jerusalem invaded it, taking the king and his family into exile. The people were consequently carried off to exile (Koch, Vol. 2, 1983:60).

## 2.9 The Revelation-feedback-revelation sequence

The conviction was that the message of the prophet was based on the revelation he received from Yahweh (Overholt, 1989:55). The communication that took place in Moses, Jeremiah and Amos's revelatory experiences was not at all a one-way process. There were constant indications of cross referrals, that is, God-prophet-community and community-prophet-God sequence. The feedback from Yahweh to Jeremiah began when he was summonsed to acquaint himself with the protest in his community; Yahweh indicated that as a result of his youthfulness he lacked insight to the problem confronting him. The personal problems that beset him were the animosity people felt towards him. The wickedness of his enemies is stressed (Jeremiah 12:4) as is the unfairness of them prospering. Jeremiah announced that disaster would befall on the people not because he delighted in it but because Yahweh deemed it necessary. Jeremiah had his doubts about this pronouncement and this became an element of his feedback to Yahweh. The complaints of Jeremiah against God contain two examples of Yahweh's rejoinder to the prophetic feedback (Jeremiah 12:5-6; 15:19-21).



The key to the revelation-feedback-revelation sequence is that God is constantly assessing the community with the result that continual dialogue occurs with the prophet throughout his tenure as prophet. Secondly, it also answers the question of constant changes to proclamations (Overholt, 1989:56).

## 2.10 Disciples

A prophet may have had close associates whom we may call disciples. These people were sometimes directly involved in the prophetic activities. A prophet's message filtered through to the disciples before it reached the intended audience. The disciples also received feedback from the audience, which was relayed to the prophet (Overholt, 1989: 44ff). Disciples therefore remain faithful workhorses of the prophet.

## Conclusion

This is the first part of a twofold look into the matter of Muhammad's prophethood; it dealt with prophetic activity from a Biblical perspective. The reason has been plainly stated previously that Muhammad has seen his work as a continuation of that which had preceded him. Certainly he (God) spoke (Surah 3:64-80, 4:47,153-161) of Christians and Jews as "People of the Book" (Ahl al-Kitab). Moreover, he was bold enough to tell these communities they were erring (Surah 5:64-66, 44 45). This high regard for the "Book" showed Muhammad's reverence for the aspiration

of this spiritual manifesto. Consequently consideration of these prophets into this discussion is to find out empirically whether Muhammad's experience is equivalent or analogous to their experiences. Overholt's treatment of this subject is merely to underscore the fact that prophets simply manifest certain identifiable characteristics. In the next section the author needs to confirm or deny whether these elements are valid for Muhammad too.

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End Notes on Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Holy Qur'an commentary no.374

<sup>2</sup> This is based on the Biblical annunciation of Muhammad; see Uri Rubin Eye of the Beholder, Annemarie Schimmel. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Commentary no 759 Holy Qur'an.

<sup>3</sup> As recorded in Surah 96, the Iqraa

<sup>4</sup> Koch pens this term in reference to the Israelites tendency to follow paganistic tendencies as well as their fraternizing with a social law that has not been promulgated by Him.

## Chapter 3

### Muhammad as prophet

From the previous chapter the discussion centered on Jewish personalities in the Bible as precursors of prophethood. Muhammad however was a man with a mission too. Thus far it has been said that there are certain recognizable elements to prophethood, it is now time to consider whether these elements also appear in Muhammad's experience.

The discussion was primarily aimed at how other prophets experience their (religious) mission. Consideration is now given on whether Muhammad's actions are analogous or different to those of Biblical prophets. It was pointed out that prophets do not live for themselves but for the sake of the community. This is the case for Muhammad too; his community (umma) was fraught with tension that had religious and social consequences. His broodiness in the cave of Mt. Hira demonstrated that he acknowledged that his community needed new direction. This is one sense of naba'a (to have intelligence), which meant that he had confirmed the state of the "nation" being in need of reformation.

For Muhammad at this juncture to have been of any help had to ready himself inwardly. His verification of the lifestyles of others, that is, their sense of reality, their justice system, organisation and will to succeed had brought him to the point of profound confrontation. To have confirmed

these impulses he needed recognition from a source he had hitherto ignored but had increasingly become enthralling. His greatest reward for his uneasiness was a revelation that assured him that he was on the right path.

Uffenheimer's disclosure earlier on concerning the concept nabi is as much applicable to Muhammad as it is to other prophets. The Qur'an juxtaposes the term nabi and rasul when referring to Muhammad. Thus, in a sense suggesting no inordinate difference between the two terms. It is important to note however that Muhammad was also asked to go into his community, to the world, to warn (Surah 7:184,188; 15:89), to inspire (Surah 17:110; 103:2-18) and to be a universal messenger (Surah 34:28).

### 3.1 Revelation

A revelation, we have learnt was an essential experience for any prospective prophet. This, as it turned out was indeed the case for Muhammad. His first revelation always stood out as a ground-breaking contact with the Transcendent Being. It opened up his mind to the possibility of an unseen reality more powerful than his heretofore-mundane experience. Thus for a person to be regarded as a prophet he/she had to receive or experience revelation/s. It can be confirmed that Muhammad indeed had an initial revelatory experience followed up by several others over twenty-three years. Muhammad's first revelation (Surah 96:1-5) was unsettling and fearful because he had heard a call (nida) "O Muhammad!" but this nonetheless was a revelation: a reminder that God was different to other



gods-he was living and responsive. God's responsiveness in contrast to the unresponsiveness of the gods had shown that He could take the initiative by opening up the communications channel to humanity. God would thenceforth involve Himself in the affairs of the umma. The communicative process for Muhammad is an essential interactive process through which the deity as barometer of human condition gives his credible assessment.

The Qur'an uses the term wahy (revelation) as inspiration from God (Surah 42:51-52). The allusion here of course suggests God as an active force. This contributed to His word becoming an animated force that rendered Him different to the gods. Rahman (1977:31) sees God as a living channel of communication since the Qur'an is both the Word of God and the word of Muhammad because he had these words in his heart. Furthermore the Qur'an is believed to be completely inspirational and as such it contains life-giving substance; it is a source of light, having principles of justice for humans to an understanding of the true God (Rahman, 1977:32). Revelation is an act of cognitive arousal for the "prophet" since it involves his mental search in two ways: absorbing what has happened to him (filtering) as well as figuring out what it means (mapping). Montgomery W. Watt (1953:40) succinctly portrayed this process when he quotes az Zuhri's material on Muhammad's cognitive state " And I came to Khadijah and said, I am filled with anxiety for myself; and I told her my experience. She said, rejoice; by God, never will God bring confusion; you do good to your kindred, you speak truth, you restore what is entrusted to you, you endure fatigue, you entertain the guest, you succour the agent of truth." Furthermore, both

Martin Lings (1991:34) and Watt (1953:40) recount that Waraqah b. Nawfal b. Asad, apparently a devout Christian, confirmed the authenticity of Muhammad's experience as valid and in line with previous prophets.

This heart-rending experience in all its dramatic unfolding pointed to a far bigger picture. This "revelation" was the harbinger of something much bigger than he has thus far anticipated. Later he identified this force as Allah, who addressed him through the agency of the angel Gabriel (David Waines, 1995:12).

This process of mapping and filtering as it turned out to be was a reflexive action that was needed to make sense of his state of mind and eventually it settled the nagging questions that had been agonizing him. Revelation however does not suggest prophethood in itself. The content of the revelation must, according to Overholt, portray a purpose. This is what we now need to verify.

### 3.2 Allah's Proclamation

The issue of an initial proclamation is the second identifying mark of a prospective prophet. It has been noted that a proclamation is an executive directive, more specifically, an exchange between God and the intermediary, in this instance Muhammad. The intention of which was to reach a wider audience. A proclamation is never a single occurrence, however we must

distinguish between an initial proclamation and subsequent proclamations. In Muhammad's case the initial proclamation served as a watershed experience for him as well as for the community.

The initial proclamation of Allah is encapsulated Surah 96 and manifests the intention of God; it is his claim to be the Sovereign Creator. In chapter 4 the basis of this proclamation becomes clearer. This initial proclamation serves as the identification and election of Muhammad's prophethood. Moreover it serves as a reminder of the primordial God who is timeless. The Qur'an is the Word of God (Kalam Allah). The first proclamation is an oracle that was meant to be redemptive. As a result the Qur'an spoke of dhikr (Sura 36:69; 62:10; 63:9) or, remembering God, as the source of life and as the creator.

A person being proclaimed a prophet must "show" a third element as well, that he has received several subsequent revelations or proclamations. The link between man and God through prophetic revelation was sometimes interrupted; this caused Muhammad, the recipient of revelation a serious crisis. The lapse of revelation had Muhammad going through an emotionally torrid time, one in which self-doubt surfaced continuously (Rubin 1995:113-114). But, this lapse of revelation (fatrat al wahy) did not remain so indefinitely, revelations resumed after a while. The resumption of revelations affirmed the God-prophet link. Revelation remains a core signature of Muhammad's prophetic calling. The Qur'an is sated with

evidence of God's communication with Muhammad. In fact, Muhammad's public ministry is said to have lasted for twenty-three years. In this period God recurrently connected with the Muhammad. The basis of God's interaction over this period was used as the building blocks of the Shari'a.

The *fatrat al wahy* was brought to an end as reflected in the *Muddaththir* passage (Surah 74). As a result he acted with more self-assurance. The *Muddaththir* passage confirmed that Allah had asked him to warn the umma. Later in the period of political turmoil, God told him, as recorded in Surah 26:214, also called the *isda* or *ashira* verse: "Declare what you have been ordered to do, and turn not away and admonish thy nearest kinsmen"(Rubin, 1995:130). The emphasis here must be placed on the additional proclamations that occurred. David Aune's classification of proclamations as a set of discourses of God is detected in the Qur'an too. The following examples are extracted from the Qur'an to verify how Allah intermittently relayed various proclamations to the community.

The eschatological vista for the umma is tied up with God's eternal attitude, the Judgement. Obviously the need of the Prophet (Muhammad) as the *nabi* or *rasul* is precisely meant to act as a Warner of the eventual cataclasm. Indeed from the *Iqraa* (Surah 96:6-8) God's duress is specified as His return. In the *Takwir* (Surah 81), the break-up of the world as we know it is suggested; humankind will have to meet their maker. The effects of His



return will have repercussion for the individual that will be more than visceral; it will have effect the whole being (Surah 6:29; 34:7; 37:16-17; 50:2-3).

Sachiko Murata and William Chittick (1994:231) indicate that the underlying reasoning behind God's return is that people will be called to final account for what they have done. It has been written in the accounts of the Prophet's Sunna that on this day the scrolls will be opened and read for the (mis) deeds of each individual. God will weigh each individual on scales, whereupon He will then pass judgment.

The Day of Judgment is a time of recompense (jaza)-(Surah 18:88; 20:75-76:157), which includes either punishment ('iqab) or reward (thawab). The soul must therefore choose the latter for it is pleasant and the former painful (1994:233).

### 3.3.2 Admonishment

From the possible negative outcome of the Judgement it is clear that Muhammad is warner of the umma. He has received several proclamations that admonished the individual concerning his/her inclination to pursue heedless (ghayba) life. The Qur'an consequently states in certain terms that a person could avoid his/her just recompense through simple rules such as the internalising the shahada and living it practically. Moreover the commitments of shirk, that is, associating God with someone else a grave sin.

Such proclamations were received by Muhammad and are interspersed throughout the Qur'an (Surahs 4:36; 31:13; 6:19; 13:36).

Murata & Chittick (1994:51) report the Prophet's assertiveness about the commitment of shirk, this is also well documented in the hadith.

### 3.3.3 Woe Oracle

This type of proclamation describes specific misdeeds of those at whom it is directed at and is usually followed by a threat. The context of Surah 39:64-72 demonstrates the anguish that these members will experience as a result of continuing to reject God. Their persistence would bear the consequences of hell. To the Christians God's judgement was hanging over their heads following their insistence on suggesting and believing that God had begotten a son (Surah 19:35); they will face God's wrath on the Day of Judgment (cf. verse 37 et seq).

### 3.3.4 Self- disclosure

The concept "aya" (ayat plural) literally refers to the sign/s of God. In a sense these signs are indicators of God's existence. However they are not full disclosures of Him. Allah, according Surah 42:43, has much superordinate qualities that are awesome, but his Being is more complex than what we could understand; there is a complexity about Him that is

sometimes difficult to understand; as much as he can destroy so does he show an affinity to patience and forgiveness.

To Allah belongs all dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what he wills. He bestows to male and female according to his will (vs. 49).

Furthermore it maintained that is not fitting for man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending of a messenger. The messenger has therefore to reveal, with Allah's permission what Allah wills: for he is the most High, Most Wise (42:52 et seq).

According to Surah 43:46 (et seq.) it testified that God was concerned with saving the Israelites from having to receive humiliating punishment (Surah 44:30). Human beings have to disassociate itself from paganistic habits. He assisted humans in this way by rising up a prophet who reminded (dhikr) humans of its primordial affinity to the one and only true God. The Qur'an remains the primary means of God's self -disclosure. In it and through it He reveals himself and the ways he has.

The Qur'an is the good news about God; it is his intentional speech. The words and sentences in it are called ayats because each expression is sign form God (Surahs 2:99; 10:1; 12:1-2).

A forceful aya of God is nature. From Surah 2:164 (et seq) Allah comes across as a powerful creator of the forces of nature and its unfolding. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (The Holy Qur'an, commentary no. 166) states that "the

signs are taken from the features of beauty, power and utility to man himself, and lead to appeal to mans own intelligence and wisdom."

### 3.3.5 Assurance

In the Qur'an Allah is cast in a positive light in manner in which humanity will undoubtedly come to the conclusion that they need Him in their lives.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Qur'an commentary #3002) writes that His light is spiritual Truth, which illuminates the mind and understanding imperceptibly.

Further on in the Surah (41 et seq) Allah says he controls processes of nature, making rainfall, changing day into night as well. From this perspective He signs are given to manifest him and his nature (Surah 24:45).

### 3.3.6 Judicial speech

Justice (adl) is a key factor in God's way of ruling; it reflects to putting a thing in its' proper place. The ultimate source of the law is God; he has ordered humanity to obey him alone (Surah 18:26; 7:54; 2:107). Since justice is a key principle in the social and spiritual domain, the Qur'an has stigmatised wrongdoing (zulm). One of the greatest wrongs is shirk, or the associating others with God. The Qur'an is nothing if not a book of exhortations directed at people to get them striving on the path to god. It demands voluntary islam over and above universal and compulsory islam. God has ordered humans to obey him alone. The community was exhorted to establish regular prayers (Surah 17:78).



In the Nur 24:1ff a legal procedure is given that impacted on the adulterous behaviour of humans. In the same manner is Nur24: 27ff and 24:32ff key examples of proclamations by God that laid rules of behaviour for the umma in other settings.

### 3.4 Audience Reaction in the Hijaz

The community's responses are well documented. Many were sceptical while others were faithful to the initial call to surrender. Persecution of the Prophet is a prevalent theme in his biography. It is presented as the "suffering servant." The persecuted servant however is never left without the enduring disciples or supporters.

Rubin (1995:127ff) notes that in Islam the universal theme of persecution was made the leading theme of the story of Muhammad's emergence in Mecca. The Quraysh, the dominant tribe, in Mecca did not agree with his message. This led to Muhammad challenging them. Eventually he had to go into hiding and into exile (Hijra).

### 3.5. Muhammad's Prophetic feedback

No interaction can take place in the absence of feedback. Feedback takes place as a result of what the prophet filters through his perception.

Previously we spoke of cognitive mapping and filtering. This remains true for Muhammad as well. Montgomery W. Watt (1961:44) spoke of the ideational aspect of this new religious movement, which was based on the God-man relationship and the social programme that needed implementation. The Peninsula was a cauldron of competing beliefs; Christians, Jews, Pagans and Hunafā lived side by side each trying to make an impact on each other. The religious ideation of Muhammad was clearly drawn to the Judaic/Christian/Hunafā views. The Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet made it abundantly clear that Jews, Christians and Hunafā sought to serve the true God. He had initially great admiration for these folk; their thinking was quite congruent with his.

The Qur'an is intermittently punctuated by God's address to Muhammad as "we" (Surahs 33:7; 29:47; 14:5). In other instances God addresses Muhammad as "O Prophet..." (Surah 33:1). Such interaction does not occur in isolation but it is deliberate. God's concern was always toward third party-humanity. He demanded correct behaviour from humans. The indication here is that God and the Prophet remained in touch with each other. God needed to change the people's behaviour but the community needed some evidence that this whole interaction between contracting parties were going to be useful and have good consequences for them. Feedback is a two-way process

between God and the prophet and between the community and the prophet. This process undergirded the prophet as driven by a power beyond himself.

### 3.6. Muhammad received additional Proclamations

The link between man and God through prophetic revelation was sometimes interrupted, which caused Muhammad, the recipient of revelation a serious crisis. The lapse of revelation had Muhammad going through an emotionally torrid time one in which self-doubt surfaced continuously (Rubin 1995:113-114). But, this lapse of revelation (fatrat al wahy) did not remain so indefinitely it resumed after a while. The resumption of revelations affirmed the God-prophet link. Revelation remains a core signature of Muhammad's prophetic calling. The Qur'an is sated with evidence of God's communication with Muhammad. In fact Muhammad's public ministry is said to have lasted for twenty-three years. In this period God recurrently connected with the Prophet. The basis of God's interaction over this period was used as the building blocks of the Shari'a.

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### 3.7. Supernatural confirmation

The 'isra and the mi'raj, based on Surah 17, tells of Muhammad's personal interaction with God. On the night called 'isra or Night Journey, Muhammad was whisked to the seventh heaven by the steed al-Buraq. Together they travelled with Gabriel. This angel is the angel of revelation. On this journey through to the various heavens Muhammad was met by several Biblical prophets; they acknowledged his privileged position and accordingly he was led them in ritual prayer (Schimmel: 1985:159). The Mi'raj is linked to the 'isra by being experienced as a continuum of the same event (ibid., p159). The mir'aj is Muhammad's heavenly ascent on a ladder on the Night Journey (ibid.p158). This whole encounter vindicates the Prophet's election and posterior socio-religious profile<sup>1</sup>.



The 'isra is more than a heavenly journey; it was a personal encounter with the Creator and Sovereign Ruler. In heaven and different environments Muhammad's encounters with Jesus and Abraham indicates his privileged position. These are two personalities that Muhammad had high regard for. Moreover, Abraham is his archetype character, the one who preceded him in realizing the principle of tawhid.

A third factor is his audience in the very proximity of God. Besides having met with senior prophets and being regarded as their superior, his negotiations with God emphasises his stature amongst the prophetic fraternity as well as his profound regard by God. Avicenna, as Rahman (1966:32) records him saying, remarks, that the Active Intelligence deposits the forms of all things, past, present and future into the prophet's soul and this not an irrational acceptance on the part of the prophet but has a rational order of cause and effect for acceptance in the realm of things which are known only through their causes does not possess certainty and rationality.

The Battle of Badr amongst others was etched in the psyche of the early Muslims as well as the Prophet. It provided conclusive proof that their rag-tag army's convincing annihilation of the well oiled army of the Quraysh served as ample proof of His providence as well as His favourable disposition over the believing umma (Hodgson 1974:176)

Muhammad's life was extraordinary hence the community saw in his acts powerful expressions and capabilities. The Battle of Badr is exemplary to the presence of God and His power, and consequently interminably lodged in the minds of the umma. This Battle was fought with a handful of under-prepared soldiers. The nascent community prevailed over defeated the mighty army of the Meccans. Even with seemingly incredulous accomplishments like the Battle of Badr and many other successes Muslims largely say that Muhammad's actions are not necessarily noted by such miracles but rather by his greatest miracle the reception of the Qur'an. The fact is that many regard him as umm, which means illiterate. In this regard it is understandable why the Qur'an is regarded as miraculous (Maulvi Mohammad Inayat Ahmad, 1982:1ff). The Qur'an remains the quintessential expressions of God's desire for humanity and has been passed on through to his favoured vassal.

Mohammad Maulvi Mohammad Inayat Ahmad observed however in his work the Authenticated Miracles of the Prophets that his whole life is marked by several miracles. The Qur'an and the Sunna contains many miracles.

Maulvi Mohammad Inayat Ahmad-Categories of Miracles performed by Muhammad

Miracles of the Qur'an	Miracles relating to humanity
Miracles relating to the Genii	Miracles regarding the ethereal world
Miracles relating to the elements	Miracles relating to vegetables
Miracles relating to the animal world	

Adapted from The Authenticated Miracles of Mohammad, 1982

### 3.8. Disciples

The Prophet Muhammad like many other prophets was involved with many people<sup>2</sup>. His whole life was geared to persuading those in the landscape of the Peninsula and beyond of the integrity of his message. For this reason he spoke about his conversion, his impulses, the revelations and visions, to those close to him as well as to those whom he thought should know it as well.

Muhammad's friendship and persuasive predisposition is well attested to. This will be further considered in the next chapter. Although many people were persuaded by his message only a core group could be regarded as close confidantes. Three people it need to be said were close to the prophet for example his cousin Ali b. Talib who was a trusted confidante and a member who fought tirelessly for the cause of Islam; Abu Bakr, a businessman and father-in-law to Muhammad; the freedman Zayd b. Harithah, a staunch supporter and secretary. There are more and these are by no means the only close followers of Muhammad. There were scores of people or groups who wholeheartedly believed in him and supported him with passion.

The Aws and Khazraj's could perhaps be placed in this group of close followers. They made the Hijra possible. The Hijra remains a defining moment in Islamic history. The City or Medina served Muhammad well as he planned to conquer the Meccans as well as the rest of the Peninsula<sup>3</sup>. Watt (1953:1) writes, " On his arrival in Medina Muhammad had a large following.

His Meccan and Medinan followers were known respectively as the muhajirun (immigrants) and the ansars (helpers)."

This principle is therefore aptly demonstrated that ardent supporters surrounded Muhammad too, like other prophets. Moreover there was an inner circle that knew him closely; whom he trusted; and who assisted him in propagating Islam.

### 3.9.1 Abraham

The confirmation that all seven elements of prophetic recognition are present within the experience of Muhammad's experience does not complete the picture for him. Muhammad to this author goes a step further by linking his call to prophecy too that of Abraham's embracement of monotheism and the denial of the existence of a multiplicity of gods. However this notwithstanding Abraham serves a crucial albeit secondary symbol of Islam. He provides a viable apologetic to be used not only against the Jews and the Christians, but it is in the context of polemics against pagan Arabs and their idolatry that he should be understood. He gives legitimacy to the Prophet Muhammad, not only about his prophecy but also about his coming, about his legitimate paradigm as a prophet. All the five pillars of Islam, its obvious requirements, appear explicitly or implicitly in Abraham's life and example. His sons provide a valid explanation for the ambiguous relationship of the Jews and Christians, and Muslims Parks, 1987: 271-273).



In Islam, Abraham points to Muhammad who supersedes him in importance. Abraham points to the new geographical locus, Mecca, which is more important, than the secondary one, Jerusalem. Abraham combines the appropriate amount of information and obscurity to become an appealing object of religious appropriation. He is far enough back in time not be identified with highly institutionalized religion, as Moses. Interpreters comprehend him in a polyvalent manner. As a result of life and the magnitude of his faith, the drama of his life, in particular the sacrifice of his son, have gripped the imagination of people across cultures. The significance of his life and his actions is available to various interpretations. These of course are dependent on the specific communities who have expropriated the experiences of his life.

All three religious communities Judaism, Christianity and Islam have one God but these have been misused. In Christianity and Islam, the symbol of Abraham serves the identical function. He serves to legitimise both religions. These two religions embody Abraham as the perfect archetype and prototype of each faith. He therefore becomes the first Christian and the first Muslim. The fact that a particular symbol is the same historical personage and serves an identical function does not mean that it is the same symbol in both religious traditions (Parks, 1987:275-276). The emphasis upon his common fatherhood blurs the crucial differences that he possesses in the different religions. Unlike in Judaism in which Abraham is a primary symbol, in Christianity and Islam Abraham is a secondary symbol, which lacks

the vitality and importance it has in Judaism. Abraham legitimises both these traditions as the root metaphor in their faiths. In Christianity the understanding is that Christ is fulfilment of history, thus they look past Abraham to Christ. For Islam, Abraham was a Muslim and Muhammad restored it (Parks, 1987:277).

### 3.9.2 Analysis

It is an inescapable fact that Abraham the patriarch of Mesopotamia becomes a figure of solidarity in spiritual matters. His sacred connectivity becomes foundational for much of humanity and in a sense become weaved into a cultural hybrid. Manifestly the life of Abraham has been disengaged from the momentum that was pervasive in his setting. Perceptually he is regarded as foresighted from this side of the divided. Since his cognition suggests a preponderance of sacred understanding and progression. For Christians and Muslims Abraham's example is worth emulating seeing that he radicalized the understanding of a "living god." The long held presumption that Abraham has challenged is the one that assumes "god is dead".

God is accessible to and by humans and has a personality even though it may at times be vague. This God, wants humans rationally to locate him within this domain, hence he is available to those who listen. Quintessentially Abraham set the standard for humanity by vitiating human concatenation

with materiality. This fundamentally has made sense to Muhammad when he assessed his community against the legacy Abraham bequeathed.

Abraham's life was much more than a metaphor about the "real" God; it was a mental growth through jettisoning the obsolete and lifeless abstraction of "god." Abraham and Muhammad's life have certain parallels in that both fought their folks on the issue of idol worship (Surahs 43:26-30; 37:83-113, 29:16-18, 26:70-104, 21:41-50, 2:258-260).

Muhammad's understanding concerning Abraham was that it was wrong to correlate him with Judaism or Christianity; rather he is of cosmic relevance. Abraham belongs to the believing world that lay value in his monotheistic ideal. The Prophet Muhammad has thus gone along way attach that iman (or faith) -the Shahada, there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet- has found its root in this patriarch's lifestyle. In his willingness to sacrifice his son the formula for commitment to God was laid and this was worth following. This act of obedience and faith branded all those that followed his example submitters to God-Islam. In addition to his act of upholding the values of true belief, Abraham strengthened his expression of faith through the ritual of pilgrimage to Mecca. The adoration of God at the Ka'ba subsequently restored by Muhammad became the locus of belief and reaffirmation for posterity. Abraham's life and beliefs entrenched the universal brotherhood for those who belief in him. He is becomes a primary model for pious Muslims.

Christianity like Islam has endorsed Abraham's faithfulness to God. It is in agreement with Islam that idolatry has been a debilitating problem for humanity. Abraham played a vital role by redefining humanity's reorientation to the "real god." Abraham is not the principle figure for both Christians and Muslims; it is rather Jesus Christ and Muhammad who fill these roles respectively.

## Conclusion

The discovery of etymological similarity of the word "prophet" does not answer the question of prophetic authenticity. It only refers to an experience that is human and open to others as well. The etymology of the concept "prophet" helps us simplify the hermeneutic that confronts us. It directs us per definition to the experiences of others that are similar to us in some respects. The task of hermeneutics we have heard earlier is to seek understanding about written language. Language characteristically has a polysemic nature, for instance, in this context the understanding of nabi/navi. This requires us who search and explain religion to be sensitive to context.

Prophetic experience always occurs in different context and unique experiences. That is why the use of context must involve an activity of discernment, which is exercised in the concrete exchange of messages between interlocutors, and which is modelled on the interplay of question



and answer (Ricoeur, 1989:44) Schleirmacher made it clear that we often need to clarify "grammatical" interpretation and "technical" interpretation. This is precisely what has happened here. The grammatical interpretation of "prophet" was dissected for its specific characteristics in this discourse and which are common across culture. From Schleirmacher's perspective the quest is to understand the common language operative here. We search for understanding the individual prophet.

From a Diltheyan perspective the search for common elements in prophetic experience led us to hermeneutics and history. The comparability of the various prophets for similarity of experience flows from need to understand a text of the past and consequently to figure out historical interconnections. Importantly Dilthey remarked that, before the coherence text is understood the coherence of history must be understood. Historicism in all its pejorative baggage shifts interest from chef's d'oeuvre of humankind to the historical interconnection, which supports them.

As Dilthey theorized the search is for intelligibility of the historical, not in ontology but in the epistemology. From this perspective Overholt's seven elements of prophetic recognizance is simply to show how Muhammad as prophet is valid too. And this is stated not because we need to be sympathetic but to give justice to historical knowledge. In this sense the acknowledgment is to justify our scientific search for valid knowledge on the prophet. Seeing Muhammad as part of the fraternity of prophets is to acknowledge that he is not alien to humanity but that he is knowable.

Dilthey's riposte to positivism is that Muhammad is not alien to us but that he is capable of being known from the similarity of our experiences.

From these two perspectives (chapter two and three) on prophets the suggestion is that Muhammad's experience indicates comparability on many elements. They do single Muhammad out as a prophet. Moreover it tells us that the quest for spiritual growth is not confined to one grouping but is accessible to others as well.

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End Notes on Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> Annemarie Schimmel places the 'isra and the mi'raj as an on occurrence on the same night, whereas other scholars separate these two events.

<sup>2</sup> Montgomery W. Watt, 1956, pp 158-180 the first Muslims; also refer to Montgomery W. Watt, 1953, pp 86-99 political groupings and supporters.

<sup>3</sup> See Montgomery W Watt Muhammad at Mecca, 1953

## Chapter 4

### The Qualities of Muhammad

Attention in this chapter is focussed on the qualities that endeared Muhammad to God. Consideration is hereby given to those legendary and historical elements that he possessed or believed to have had. The period of jahiliyya is considered as a condition for the emergence of the Prophet. A brief look at Abraham's contribution as the initiator of Muhammad's logic will add to the understanding of his prophetic thinking. The central concern though remains the pivotal character of the Islamic drama - Muhammad. The excursion here is to build upon the established facts discussed in chapter two and three in which it was discovered that his experience was indeed akin to Biblical prophets. Thus certain facts will portray him as more than just a legendary figure that feeds our imagination; from an historical perspective Muhammad is embedded in our everyday lives. His historical actions have contributed to certain descriptions about him and his actions being seen as excessive. These are however quite understandable in the context of his achievements.

#### 4.1 Who is Muhammad?

It is not precisely known when Muhammad ibn Abdallah was born but some say A.D.570 (Watt, 1961:6) while others would like it to have been A.D.569 (see below). Muhammad as prophet is unique as he surpasses even the Biblical prophets whose cues he has taken. He was careful to adapt his prophetic role on that of Abraham, since he reasoned that Abraham is a

messenger not enfranchised to any particular religion. Muhammad fulfils the exemplary role to every Muslim believer (mu'min), who is called on to imitate him, even in seemingly insignificant actions and habits (Watt, 1961:4). Through the course of centuries Muhammad's personality disappeared behind a colourful veil of legends and myths (Watt, 1961:5). It is therefore difficult to construct a true account of Muhammad's life since the earliest extant account is one written by Ibn Ishaq (d. ca. 768) and then edited by Ibn Hisham (d. ca. 830). In addition Muhammad's secretary, Hassan Ibn Thabit, wrote praise poems from which valuable information can be derived; Muhammad's Sunna and the Qur'an also gives further clues to the veracity of his life and command. Much of what is known about him may be clouded in legendary and mythical material; for instance his birth is covered in legendary material that casts his life as a truly miraculous event; M Hamidullah in this regard says Muhammad was not born in 570A.D. as is conventionally agreed upon but in 569A.D. when a foreign army besieging Mecca turned away from it (Surah 105).

He was very unfortunate that he lost his parents during his infancy. It is also not clear what type of life he lived without his parents, but it is known that he had foster parents. Much has been written about Halima, his wet nurse. The hadiths write glowing accounts of her. It can be assumed that between Halima and his grandfather, Abd al- Muttalib, and his uncle, Abu Talib, there must have been some sort of stability since the hadiths and legendary material write of him as a generous, loving and thoughtful person. Psychologists tell us that such traits are absorbed from stable family environments. Thus, if he was a kind hearted, approachable and



loving person, it is possible that these behaviours were modelled to him during his most impressionable years. Of course it is known that he was not a rich person and that he could scarcely have afforded to marry let alone provide for a dowry. He eventually married an older woman than him, Khadija, whom he may have seen as a source of financial stability. It can reasonably be said that poverty could not have made him a nasty person; to the contrary he was accessible and prone to lasting friendships. We can accordingly extrapolate that he was a normal human being born into a society with its normal tensions (Watt, 1961:6).

#### 4.2 Jahiliyya

Thus far it has been stressed that a prophet does not simply jut out from nowhere. He is quite ensconced in a society, which holds a special place in his thinking. Muhammad paradoxically has seen himself as part of his societal and world system. How was this possible? One has to first understand what jahiliyya has meant to him. Hodgson (1961:173-174) reports that the society in which he found himself stressed individual and group pride to the point of honour; this meant this pre-Islamic society was punctuated by behaviouristic traits based upon factors such as pride of birth, stress on ones own wealth or prowess, pride which led, when crossed, to an unremitting, pitiless vengefulness; it also led to a passionate and heedless pursuit of self-centredness and pursuits of inherently trivial ends.

It is thus not difficult to see how humans in this society with needless pettiness showed sheer ingratitude (Kufr) to their Creator. These hard passions were termed jahiliyya (Hodgson, 1961:174). Such tendencies interrupted the smooth operation of the community pointing out to the wise that society was in need of a new direction. Mecca was an important center for pagan worship; Allah was Lord of the central Shrine, the Ka'ba; there was another great god within the same precinct, Hubal; it also included astral deities such as al-Manat, al-Uzza and al-Lat. To all these deities were allegiance and sacrifices made (Waines: 1995:9). The gods were consulted to intervene in human affairs; they resolved conflict whether social, economic or political. Life, based on their advice was indeed steeped in uncertainty (Waines, 1995: 9). Moreover soothsayers were also consulted, as were omens such as the flight of ravens (Waines, 1995:10)

Humans lived with crippling pessimism; no avenue of escaping their fate seemed possible. Life was consequently harsh and marked by defiant behaviour as well as excessive hedonism. Justice was therefore never guaranteed (Waines, 1995:10).

#### 4.2.1 The turnaround

This system was not one in which homeostasis was going to be achieved. The situation needed a turnaround. It needed some forceful redressing. This eventually happened on the night of Ramadan when God sought out Muhammad to address him with regard to the state of jahiliyya in this amorphous community. God however could not simply choose Muhammad

because he needed someone to be in the vanguard of reformation. The prophet had to have a special quality. As we shall see Muhammad fulfilled this expectation.

#### 4.3 Terms of endearment

Muhammad's father Abdullah ibn Muttalib died in the year of the Elephant when his mother, Aminah, gave birth to him. As he grew older, he travelled in business caravans to distant places. Involvement in these activities gave him valuable exposure in the world of business as much as it had given him insight to the cultures and behaviours of others who were different to the Quraysh. Importantly though was the human skills he had cultivated, that is, honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, that had him referred to as the al-Amin (Martin Lings, 1991:34). These were the qualities Khadija, his boss and successful entrepreneur had noticed. It was thus not lost on her that he, Muhammad, could make an ideal partner for several reasons. The remark by the Nestor in Bustra, Syria, to Maysarah that the man under the tree who had accompanied him had the marks of a possible Arabian prophet affirmed the amiable character and attractive presence Muhammad must have had.

By all accounts it seemed that the marriage to Khadija was a happy one. She supported him at least in two ways, financially and in his ideals. She bore him six children, four daughters and two sons. Unfortunately for him, the sons whom he would dearly have loved as well as whom would have given him some prestige in his social circles, never survived. Besides these

members there were several others, who in later years became part of his inner circle; Zayd ibn Harithah a personal slave who would later become a champion for Islam; Ali ibn Talib, his cousin a champion of Islam and son-in-law, Abu Bakr b. Abi Quhafah his close friend and father-in-law, Umar b. al-Khattab, Uthman b. Mazun, Uthman b. Affan, Abd -al-Rahman b. Awf all became disciples of his (Hodgson, 1974:169).

#### 4.3.1 The centripetal role of the Ka'ba

The Ka'ba played a key role in his life in the years before his assumption as prophet. Accounts show him to be the most important figure in the rebuilding of this monument before his dramatic qualification as prophet. Portents at this instance pointed at the significant role he was about to fulfil (Rodinson, 1961:52). Not only was the Quraysh as tribe to be blessed but also one amongst them would become an icon, a favoured son in this world's history. He was the one to place the "stone from Heaven" into its resting place in the Ka'ba. Henceforth this shrine would influence his worldview as well as spiritual ritual for his spiritual descendants.

The forebodings at the Ka'ba at the age of thirty-five realised itself five years thereafter. Years of accumulative spiritual impressions from the Judaic-Christian nexus, the words of Buhira, and the Nestor tormented his soul. The result was his constant retreat to Mt. Hira to seek reflection on



these impulses. Suddenly during the month of Ramadan a phantom-like visitor exhorted him to read (iqra):

"Recite in the name of thy Lord who created  
He created man from a cloth of blood  
Recite: and thy Lord is the Most Bountiful,  
He who hath taught by the pen,  
Taught man what he knew not."(Surah 96:1)

These words of wisdom though impressive, did not stop him from feeling overwhelmed and scared. But it was Khadija who consoled him, who put a cloak or a mantle over him. This act of putting on the cloak was a confirmatory belief on her part that he was like the nebi'im of the Old Testament. Moreover, Waraqa, the Christian cousin of Khadija authenticated the verisimilitude of Muhammad's experience. It was if this blind old man was awaiting this event before he could die, declaring, "Holy, Holy, by Him in whose hand is the soul of Waraqa, there had come unto Muhammad the greatest namus, even that he would come unto Moses. Verily Muhammad is the Prophet of his people. Bid him rest assured."(Lings, 1991:44).

This revelatory experience and subsequent ones laid the foundation for his public ministry.

#### 4.4 Muhammad foretold Prophet

Muhammad is believed to have held a pre-eminent position as a Prophet, one who was preordained by God. The premise of Muhammad as succeeding prophet is premised on Surah 61:6, which articulates itself as:

" And remember, Jesus,  
The son of Mary, said:  
O Children of Israel!  
I am the apostle of God  
(Sent) to you, confirming  
The law (which came)  
Before me, and giving  
Glad tidings of an Apostle  
To come after me,  
Whose name shall be Ahmad.  
But when he came to them  
With clear signs  
They said, this is  
Evident sorcery!"

This Surah states clearly that the prophet Jesus spoke of a future prophet who would come to confirm the law. It furthermore states the name of this prophet, which is to come. Hence it not surprising that some Muslim scholars have turned to the New Testament to corroborate Surah 61:6. Some scholars such as Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari (The seal of the Prophets and his message: Lessons on Islamic doctrine. Book 2., Fakhrul Islam Muhammad Sadeq (Anisul Alaam Fi Nusratel Islam, Vol.5) S.H.Bahar

(The truth of the existing Christianity, translated by S.H. Bahar, and Dr. S.A.Hoseini President of the Islamic center in South Africa (in conversation, 2003/05/31) are of the opinion that the New Testament may have references to the Prophet of Islam. Consequently, Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari (2000:163-164) is of the opinion that "Spirit of truth" Holy Ghost" and "Comforter" may refer to the Prophet Islam.

The apostleship of Jesus is invoked to prophesy the appearance of the Seal of the prophets, Ahmad. The purpose of the coming prophet was to attest the same law as was given to the previous prophets. An important corollary here is that Muhammad was predestined to come. This coming of the "Praised One" is attested by an authoritative source- Jesus. The Qur'an attests further that he was to be sent as a mercy for all creatures (Surah 21:107).

#### 4.4.1 Muhammad the Ummi Prophet

Further references for Muhammad's annunciation comes from, Surah 7:156-58. Here God reveals to Moses that He will extend His compassion to those who will follow the messenger, the Prophet, the ummi, whom they find written with them, in the Torah and the Gospel...." (Rubin, 1995:23). There are two senses conveyed regarding the word "ummi". Firstly, the title ummi comes from the Book of Abraham, Genesis, probably 17:20, which al Sha'bi quotes as "many people shall come out of your son, till the ummi prophet comes, who will be the Seal of the prophets." The key biblical prophecy here is in favour of the children of Israel, from whom it's

believed the Muslim or Arabians emanate. Furthermore al Shabi notes the twelve princes of Genesis 17:20 became the one Islamic prophet, with the Biblical "nation"(Hebrew, goy) becoming ummi. Thus according Rubin there are some striking resemblances between the words "goy" and "umma" which refer to the non-Jewish umma (Rubin, 1995:24).

The Biblical passage found in Jeremiah 5:12-15 where the people of Israel were reproached is also a goy verse and is rendered by Ibn Rabban as umma or nation. God foretells of the ummi Prophet to the various Biblical prophets and these accounts draws on biblical goy passages, for instance Exodus 32:10-14 which is said to mean that God is disturbed and angry with the Israelites but will instead raise an al- nabi al ummi from amongst them (Rubin, 1995:26). Muhammad's Heavenly Journey (Isra) demonstrates how those prophets who were translated to heaven acknowledged Muhammad's superiority in a manner suggesting the confirmation here in the book of Jeremiah.

In the second instance, the ummi concept is further amplified in Surah 29:48 which states that "And thou wast not (able) to recite (read?) a book before this book (Qur'an), nor art thou(Able) to transcribe it with thy right hand....." This verse is said to convey the idea that Muhammad was illiterate, and therefore unaware of the previous scriptures, which is said to have proved his authenticity of his own revelation (Rubin, 1995:27). Furthermore, Rubin (1995:27) concludes that the Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) concerning, the illiteracy of the prophet was made part of the theme of annunciation. The part of Muhammad's illiteracy insofar as it is a



part of his biblical description was actually combined with his biblical description as ummi; in this context ummi means illiterate. Rahman (1958:30) writes that the prophet is a person of extraordinary intellectual endowment, to the extent that he is able to know all things by himself without the aid of outside help. Any other man in anything does not direct him. He has attained gnosis himself. This happens when man attains contact with Active Intelligence. From this point onward does the Prophet acquire intelligence?

This, Ibn Ishaq adduces from the Qur'anic ummi passage, Surah 7:157, which followed Surah 61:6(Ahmad). Furthermore he refers to Surah 2:89, where it is stated that the People of the Book used to pray for victory over the infidels (Rahman, 1958:29).

The combined effort of this discussion of the ummi prophet and the foretelling of the prophet to come serve a particular purpose here; this is to present the Muslim case for divine appointment of Muhammad as well as the direct influence under His power. The revelation of divine wisdom and will emanates from God himself (Rahman, 1958:103). According to Ibn Taymiya it must be the purpose of humans to go beyond having knowledge of God to 'ibada which is the true recognition of God. Through this form of recognition humans will show their allegiance by actively implementing the course he has chartered. (Rahman, 1958:102).

#### 4.5 The exceptional Characteristics of Muhammad

While what will follow here is incommensurable with the usual critical logic, it does however suggest the importance of Muhammad. He may never have claimed to have possessed any superhuman qualities but always reminded his audience that his only miracle was the Qur'an (Schimmel, 1985:24). For students in comparative religion this book stands phenomenologically parallel to the position of Christ in Christianity, that is, it is the Living Word. He only claimed revelatory experience and knew that "... God is the only one who guides onto the correct path." The Qur'an however mentions that Muhammad had an exceptional role in life; Surah 2:31 states that God had taught Adam the names whereas Surah 96:3,4 says, God taught Muhammad the Qur'an. Muhammad was also sent as a mercy to the world (Surah 21:107) for this reason God and his angels utter blessings over him (Surah 33:56). He is therefore of noble stature (Surah 68:4). These passages form the basis of the veneration of the Prophet.

Understanding these remarkable qualities of Muhammad demands that attention be paid to his Sunna, which consists of his recorded actions (fi'l), his words (qaul) and his silent approval of certain facts (taqrir). His trusted companions (sahaba) were the most important sources for prophetic traditions (Schimmel, 1984:29). The Prophetic tradition can be regarded as the first step in the interpretation of the Qur'anic revelation, for it reflects what the earliest generations had retained from the Prophet, who was necessarily the prime exegete of the revelations he brought (Schimmel, 1984:26)

#### 4.6 Proofs of Prophethood -The Shama'il and Dala'il Literature

According to Schimmel Muslim theologians<sup>1</sup> wrote on the Dala'il an-nabuwwa, or proofs of prophethood, which is a collection of expositions on the qualities that Muhammad possessed. This is also true of the Shama'il literatures<sup>2</sup>, which are expositions that complement the Dala'il an-nabuwwa. In these type of genres of which there are numerous examples in existence are extolled the lofty qualities and the outward beauty of the Prophet. The beauty of the Prophet is one reason why God had chosen him to be a prophet. Abu 'Isa at Tirmidhi does not overlook this aspect. Thus in his book Shama'il al Mustafa, Tirmidhi describes the Prophet's external form, that is, his physical beauty as well as his moral superiority in great detail. These qualities are consequently given as one of the reasons for the Prophet's election. Umm Ma'bad reports that the Prophet has physical presence, he was the most beautiful of mankind in character, that is, he was the most handsome in looks (Schimmel, 1984:34). He had a special mark on his body "the seal of prophethood" (Khatam an- nubuwwa), which was a mark of divine election and herald of divine revelation. This "seal" was a fleshy protuberance on his back, located between his shoulders. Muhammad becomes the archetype of all human beauty because the noblest spiritual qualities are also manifested in him somatically (Schimmel, 1984:33-35).

#### 4.7 The Prophet's spiritual beauty

The Prophet's inner and outer beauty served a role in his election as prophet. Thus, Muhammad's external beauty was a mirror of his spiritual beauty, for God has created him perfectly in nature and moral qualities (Schimmel, 1984:46). Muhammad was a humble person and kind hearted. He was friendly yet serious in attitude and did not often laugh (Schimmel, 1984:46). He was always concerned for the weak; hence he was never unkind to his servants. Tirmidhi says "he was well acquainted with sorrow, much absorbed in thought, had little rest, was silent for long periods and did not talk without cause; he always talked with authority from God, that is, "in the name of God." His love of the poor became a sign of love for the Prophet. Poverty was not simply lack of food but of a spiritual stage that consists in man's knowledge of his own lowliness and poverty before God, and the One Who Has No Need (Surah 35:16). He had love for children as well as animals. His love of women is seen as a means of combining worldly and spiritual spheres and hence confirms his special rank (Schimmel, 1984:48).

#### 4.7.1 His Outer Beauty and Strengths

Theologians (Ahmad, Mohammad Inayat, & Iyad) furthermore hold the belief that the attributes of perfection by prophets are a prerequisite for prophetic election. Muhammad's qualities are akin to those of other prophets and messengers, which include perfect constitution, handsome form, noble lineage, good character and good traits. This is a fundamental quality and such attributes shows the prophets humanness and above all their virtues since their rank is the noblest and their degree the highest



(Qadi Iyad, 1991:75). Since Muhammad was the aristocrat of humanity, that is, of prophets, nay a superior Prophet, he had the privilege to enter into God's very presence. The Night Journey (Isra) set him apart from all other prophets in that he had entered the very domain of God, in negotiations with him (Schimmel, 1984:91). Other prophets may be in heaven but they cannot enter His personal space or domain. Moreover, the Night Journey and Mi'raj was a an event that tells of Muhammad's journey to Jerusalem as well to heaven where he went to intercede on behalf of humanity, that is, working out a viable means of commitment on our part towards Allah. This experience points out the importance and high regard of Muhammad.

These impeccable dispositions made him immune to sin. As a consequence Muhammad was sinless since he was protected from falling into the trap of sinning (isma). The theological manuals, the Sanusiyya, say that the Prophet was immune to sinning because of the following attributes that he had: truthfulness (sidq), trustworthy (amana), proclaiming the divine word (tabligh) and is sagacious and intelligent (fatna). From this it follows that the Prophet could not lie (kidhb), be faithless or treacherous (khiyana) or conceal the divine message (katman) or be stupid (balada). A prophet may succumb to accidental weakness (Schimmel, 1984:58). This is, despite the Qur'an saying to Muhammad in Surah 93:7 " Did I not find you erring"?

#### 4.8 Greater than other Prophets

The prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) serves an important spiritual and hermeneutical function in Muhammad's life. From a spiritual sense Ibrahim acknowledges the Superior God as the only God. This God is real and demands human attention. From a hermeneutical perspective Ibrahim's experience added substance to his message, that is, Allah has cosmic validity. Abraham was aware of the unity of God (tawhid). For this reason he pleaded with his father and his community to accept that God is an unseen force not to be associated with any created matter that are regarded as gods. Muhammad behaved in a similar manner to his family. Abraham therefore becomes a typological Muhammad. In the Qur'an Abraham attacks his father's idol worship, as well as that of his tribe (Parks, 1987:246). According to Surah 3:67 Ibrahim's lure for Muhammad was his independence in belief. He was simply a correct believer who wanted to serve God as a singular powerful Being. Thus, the similarity between these two lay on the emphasis on monotheism.

Since Ibrahim is a type of Muhammad, it is concluded that Muhammad is superior to Ibrahim; this is also true in respect of all other prophets who were only partially reflecting some aspects (as well as the light) of Muhammad (Parks, 1987:63). According to Jami, Muhammad's greatness is far greater than other prophets; he was the only one who touched the apex of God's throne where Gabriel served him. Muhammad was chosen as the last prophet because he was greater and higher (in quality) than all prophets before him (Parks, 1987:65).

Muhammad's greatness does not derive from his ability to perform miracles, even though Ahmad, Mohammad Inayat (1982), suggests that the Prophet's is marked by many miracles. It was said he never claimed extraordinary powers except to be instrumental in receiving the Qur'an. Yet amongst the umma it was said that he had the ability to perform miracles (mu'jizat), that is, deeds that render others unable to match them (Schimmel, 1984:67). What made Muhammad greater than the rest (of the prophets) was recounted by one experience that became the central feature of all biographies, that is, the opening of Muhammad's breast. Surah 94 begins with God's recounting to him of the cleansing of his being. This story relates the process of the cleansing of all inner parts especially the heart or breastbone. This was an indication that he was more valuable and therefore more acceptable in God's sight than other human beings (Schimmel, 1984:68). It was on his way to heaven that Jabril opened his breast, washed it with the waters of Zam- Zam. Moreover a gold dish filled with wisdom and belief was poured into his breast and then sealed (Schimmel, 1984:93).

Muhammad performed an illustrious miracle as a sign for the perfidious Quraysh, to show his ability as a bona fide prophet, if not a superior Prophet. The Splitting of the moon (al haqq al-qamar) follows from Surah 54: "the hour approached, and the moon was split." This miracle is explained as a sign to the doubting Quraysh that the message brought was indeed true (Schimmel, 1985:69).

#### 4.9 Muhammad as an intercessor

According to Surah 21:107 Muhammad was sent as a mercy to the entire world (Schimmel, 1984:81). The throne verse Surah 2:256 describes Muhammad as an intercessor (shafa'a) for his community and the world. Herein is stated that no one can intercede with God "except with his permission" (Schimmel, 1984:83). Only those who carried the Divine Throne and surrounded it can constantly ask for forgiveness for the faithful. This means that on the Day of Judgment, God will gather humanity on a hill, they will consequently be filled with fear and grief. It is at that instance that they will choose Muhammad to intercede with God (Schimmel, 1984:84-86). This belief of Muhammad as intercessor is almost unanimously accepted; the Mu'tazilites reckon though that it is in contradiction to the principles of God's absolute justice.

Muhammad's designation as intercessor is enriched by the tasliyya. It serves as an abridgement of the shafa'a. The constant repetition of the tasliyya, which is the conference of praise on the Prophet, serves as a means of intercession on the Day of Judgement. Muslims repeat millions of times a day, their gratitude toward the Prophet by entreating his blessings, through prayers and poems and conversations as well as recurrent tasliyya, which is invoked as a request to the Prophet and his family to ask for mercy from God. The Qur'an itself says in Surah 33:56, that God and his angels "pray upon you," that is, send blessings on the Prophet. The formula blessing called the tasliyya, *salla Allahu alaihi wa*



sallam-"God bless him and give him peace" are used to ensure intercession from Muhammad (Schimmel, 1984:92).

#### 4.10 His Name

Muhammad's name is one that has profound meaning; it points to the underlying qualities he has. The name "Muhammad" is a passive participle of the second form of the verb hamada, to praise, to laud, and means "worthy of praise." Mahmud is the passive participle of the first form of the same verbal root, (the who) is praised, to whom, praise is due. The question arises what is praiseworthy about him?

The beauty of his form and the perfect proportion of his limbs are related in numerous sound traditions; it is related that from his hair to his toes he possessed beautiful proportion (Qadi Iyad, 1991:33-34). The complete cleanliness of his body, the sweetness of his smell and perspiration, and his freedom from uncleanness and bodily defects comprise a special quality given to him by Allah which no one else enjoys and these were made yet complete by the cleanliness dictated by the Shari'a and the ten practices of the natural behaviour (fitra) (Qadi Iyad, 1991:35). According to several hadiths the Prophet always had a sweet smell on him, never did he have pungent odours; it also reported from these sources that his urine had a special Baraka (Qadi Iyad, 1991:36) He had ample intellect, intelligence, eloquence and grace about him (Qadi Iyad, 1991:37). He was from the best of the Banu Hashim, and the stock core of the Quraysh. He was from the noblest and mightiest of the Arabs, both

on his paternal and maternal side. He was from the people of Mecca, from the noblest of lands in the reckoning of Allah and of his slaves (Qadi Iyad, 1991:43).

#### 4.11 Praiseworthy qualities

Muhammad did not become a prophet on the basis of peripheral qualities; it was the manifestation of excellent attributes that had set him apart from the rest of humanity that influenced his election. It is therefore not surprising that the Qur'an reminds us in Surah 68:4 that "You are possessed of a mighty character", an allusion to his praiseworthy qualities and noble adab (correct behaviour inward and outward)(Qadi Iyad, 1991:50). In the Prophet's case, according to the people of knowledge, he possessed these qualities from the time he was created, from the beginning of his natural constitution. He did not acquire them or learn them through education. He received them by divine generosity and the special gift of his Lord. The praiseworthy qualities he possessed are: Judgment as a child, (Surah 19:12), mighty character, (Surah 68:4), Confirming a word from Allah (Surah 3:39), Judgment and knowledge (Surah 21:79) (Qadi Iyad, 1991:51).

##### 4.11.1 His Intellect

Behind these inimitable qualities is his intellect, which is said to be "the root of all the branches of knowledge, the fountainhead and nucleus from which knowledge and gnosis springing forth."(Qadi Iyad, 1991:52). Such

sharp perception from Muhammad delivers humans attending to the Word of God from the shackles of ignorance. This path, it follows, is prepared for them and is strengthened through his keen understanding, clear perception, accuracy of observation, sound opinion, knowing what is best itself, striving against appetite, judicious policy and management and the acquisition of virtues and the avoidance of vices. Qadi Iyad (1991:53) defines these tendencies as majestic from which subsequently follow sort after virtues. This probability as optimized here is absorbed by anyone who studies the development of his states, the course of his life, the wisdom of his hadith, his knowledge of what was in the Torah, the Injil, the revealed books, the wisdom of the sages and the history of past nations and their.

#### 4.11.2 His Patience and sense of pardon

Allah endowed his apostle with the qualities such as forbearance (hilm), which is a state of dignified bearing and constancy despite provocation; longsuffering (ihtimal), self restraint and resignation in the face of pains and injury; patience; pardoning ('afw), which is the refusal to hold something against someone else (Qadi Iyad, 1991:54)

#### 4.11.3 His generosity (karam) and liberality

The Prophet was benevolent, that is, able to spend cheerfully in what was important and useful; he also had a sense of liberality, that is, to forego

what was owed to one cheerfully; magnanimity, the will to spend easily and to avoid acquisition of what is not praised (Qadi, 1991:58)

#### 4.11.4 Courage and bravery

The prophet was chivalrous in his political conduct. The circumstances in 7th century Arabia demanded dangerous conditions be met with fortitude. The need to conquer and be counted on necessitated moments of bravery and courage. With such determined qualities innate to him, he was fixated on his objectives to complete an action never wavering. (Qadi Iyad, 1991:59). These tendencies are affirmed by his modesty and inclination to lower his glance. In this regard Muhammad would never have turned his face away from something seen as wrong or somebody doing wrong. (Qadi Iyad, 1991:60). For him to have demonstrated these amiable characteristics compelled him to have good companionship, good manners and cheerfulness with all types of people (Qadi Iyad, 1991:61). It follows then that he was compassionate, tender and merciful to all creation as Surah 10:28 & 21:107 relates. He had integrity, probity in contract (Qadi Iyad, 1991:66 & 67). He was extremely humble and not proud at all (Qadi Iyad, 1991:64). The Prophet was the most trustworthy, just, decent and truthful of people according to Surah 81:21; 6:33. He was sedate, silent, deliberate, had manly virtue and excellent in conduct. He was often silent and did not speak except when necessary (Qadi Iyad, 1991:71). He was content with little of this world and turned away from its fruits. He was fearful of Allah and consequently obeyed him intensely (Qadi Iyad, 1991:72).



#### 4.12 Friend of Allah

Muhammad is spoken of as a "friend" of Allah. This, according to Schimmel (1984) and Iyad (1991) is a profound matter. Qadi Iyad (1991: 110) relates that hadiths refer to Muhammad as a "friend." The matters however are more complicated than meet the eye since Ibrahim has also been deemed a "friend" of Allah. There are similarities between Ibrahim and Muhammad; both of them were devoted to Allah; both of them sought him out even to the extent of cutting themselves off from others, that is, for the sake of Allah. There is also a difference to the meaning in friendship of these prophets. Muhammad is regarded as khalil (close friend) whereas Ibrahim is regarded as khalilu' allah, which means he was devoted to God. Qadi Iyad (1991:111) goes on to explain that being khulla is stronger than prophethood. Since he is, khalil says Abu Bakr; khulla (need) is the pure love, which demands that one, be singled out for being permeated (takhallul) by the secrets (of God)(Qadi Iyad, 1991:111). Muhammad is therefore in this argument closer to Allah than Ibrahim was. The differences though should not distract from the importance of both prophets for the faith (Islam). Their example has far greater implications; they forsook other means and causes for the sake being Allah's servants. Their election and His hidden kindness to them were greater, and the divine secrets and hidden things of the unseen worlds and gnosis that penetrated (khalala) their inward parts were more attractive (Qadi Iyad, 1991:112).

The prophet's understanding of tawhid, his knowledge of Allah and the attributes of Allah, his belief in Allah, and what was revealed to him is based on the greatest possible gnosis and clear certainty. It is free of ignorance, doubt and suspicion. The Prophet is protected in respect of these things from everything incompatible with gnosis and certainty (Qadi Iyad, 1991:279).

### Summary

Muhammad was a unique person for more than political reasons. His reputation literally has preceded him. Creation, according to various sources, had foreordained him to be a dynamic prophet. Henceforth the world will succumb to his message. The preceding discussion did not present Muhammad as a prophet in accordance with Overholt's overall framework. He locates the prophet simply on a social plane whereas in essence the prophet's work is more encompassing; there is an interaction of the social and spiritual dimensions. Muhammad does act within the prescribed framework of a social prophet but this discussion has revealed he is not simply moulded by this process alone. It will become clear below when the proclamation endowed to Muhammad is discussed that the social and spiritual worlds interact. The one does not preclude the other. This condition, it is noticeable falls logically within the ambit of tawhid.

The evidence presented here is that he is foreordained a prophet. His lineage through Abraham and Ismail does suggest did he was bound to be a prophet as per the covenant of Allah with Israel; that he emerged in a

society with severe socio-religio backwardness to belfry the umma is constant with the sublime description encased here.

I have tacitly moved beyond Overholt's conceptual elements of prophetic indicators. Here I have described Muhammad being blessed with certain predispositions that made him attractive to God as well presenting him worthy of being chosen as vassal of God.

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End Notes on Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> Abu Nu'aim al-Ishfahani, al- Baihaqi, Abu Isa at-Tirmidhi, Qadi Iyad, Yusuf an-Nabhani

<sup>2</sup> at -Tirmidhi's Shama'il al Mustafa

## Chapter 5

### The Proclamation

Muhammad confronted the Meccan society with a new response to the socio-religious crisis in the Hijaz by first mobilising the tribes of Hashim and al-Muttalib. The lifestyles and attitudes of those in the Arabian Peninsula reflected the state of humanity on a wider cosmic level too. The tensions that had existed between the tribes here were to an extent those found elsewhere in the world. Thus the emergence of Muhammad in this confrontation that occurred in the seventh century was the key to establishing principles of decent socio-spiritual living. Muhammad was much in favour of a unitary view of God, one that proclaimed Him as a powerful Being who was totally knowing and wholly responsible for what existed. This conceptualisation of Ultimate Being negated the dualistic concept of good and evil that hitherto existed since this would have meant that God was not all knowing and all-powerful. Muhammad termed this principle Tawhid.

A prophet's proclamation remains as a vital clue of the deity's ultimate authority over humanity as well as humanity's dependence on this deity. This chapter relates to this proclamation Muhammad received. This proclamation is based on Muhammad's need to change his community's as well as the world's perception about who God was. In addition this same deity had a course of action that would serve humanity by facilitating an egalitarian society based on sound justice and good ethics. In this regard however



Overholt remarked that an audience would adhere to this comprehensive message only if the prophet was reasonably successful in "proving" his credentials. The "proof" of success lay in his ability to have brought about change in essential areas, and to have performed remarkable feats, as well as to have come across as sincere. In this section the purpose is to show what message Muhammad brought and its' reasonableness in the mind of the umma. This worldview Muhammad bequeathed to the umma had restorative value for all humanity. For any person who would surrender (muslim) the path comprises of three fundamental dimensions in belief, Iman, Ihsan and Ibadat. These serve to inoculate humanity against any adverse performance or abuse of their intelligence in serving the true God. What follows here is congruent with God's cosmic ideal. The inexorable demand of God through his Messenger is for humanity to follow the prescription set out by Him and liased through Muhammad his vassal.

## 5.1 Islam

Like Abraham, the umma had to submit obediently to Allah, recognizing His sovereignty alone as God and not as a god. To this end the first fundamental element is islam or in its derived sense, submission or surrender to God. Those who bow to God are muslim, that is, those who have submitted to God<sup>1</sup>. There are two senses conveyed in Surah 3:19 & 3:85; the words *din* (religion) and *al-islam* (submission) being the subjects in case, can be understood in broader or narrower sense. It could mean the right way of doing things as set down by the Qur'an and the hadith, or every religion is

one of the forms of islam just as the message of all the prophets is tawhid (Murata & Chittick Vision of Islam, 1994:5). There are four basic meanings of the word islam (1) the submission of the whole of creation to its Creator, (2) the submission of human beings to the guidance of God as revealed through the prophets (3) the submission of human beings to the guidance of God as revealed through the Prophet, Muhammad (4) the submission of the followers of Muhammad to God's practical instructions (Murata & Chittick, 1994:6).

The impression given here points out that submitting to God demands certain practices. As Murata & Chittick observe, correct practices follow upon correct belief. Islam recognizes that practice makes people Muslims and that for most people, correct belief, follows upon correct practices.

Iman consists of five dogmatic elements as revealed in Surah 2.285 & Surah 4:136- Allah, His Angels, His books, His Messengers and the Judgement Day. These elements are integrally linked since they accord with Allah's tawhid. Iman becomes the basis of all action (a'mal)(Rahman, 1988:4).

### 5.1.1 Allah

Arabia was largely a paganistic society. Thus, the impact of the first Shahada was quite striking. It dealt with Allah as the sole benefactor of

human devotion. Divided loyalty to the material (gods) and immaterial (Allah) cannot be condoned. Thus the first Shahada impassionedlly layed down the peremptory creed "there is no god but Allah...." (Murata & Chittick, 1994:47). According to this statement there is a god (ilah) and then there is God (Allah); the first relates to a created deity having no real power being merely ornamental. The idea of God on the other hand, is a powerful Being, a creative force. The word ilah is used in a negative sense, denoting falsity. The Qur'an stigmatises those who worship according to their own inclinations, it calls those who does as hawa (wind), since they blow this way and that way to their life's content (Murata & Chittick, 1994:48).

God is against human tendency combining their assumptions of ilah and Allah hence his means to use prophets as reminder (dkir) of the difference. Existentially Allah is the creator, but the created gods (ilah) command the attention of most humans. These gods aid humans to exercise their misplaced expression (heedlessness). The first principle of faith is the recognition of the tawhid, that is, the acknowledgement that God is one (Murata & Chittick, 1991:49). The meaning of tawhid is expressed most concisely in the first Shahadah, which is called "The sentence of tawhid"(kalimat al-tawhid). "There is no god but God," means that there is only a single true worship and service that can suffice. All other objects of worship and service are false. To serve anything else is to fall into error and misguidance. It is to be guilty of shirk Surah 4:36, 31:13 and 13:36. The avoidance of associating others with God is thus a central part of the

Qur'anic message. Those who associate objects with God are mushrik (Murata & Chittick, 1994:50).

#### 5.1.1.1 Tanzih and Tashbih, the totality of Allah

The impact of tawhid is God's way of dissociating Himself, Creator, from the created (ilah). God disapproves of shirk (associating God with god) hence the Shari'a cures the mind from this grievous error. Shirk is the underlying cause of all wrong motives. For this reason, Allah gave the Qur'an as a guide to humanity. The Qur'an is replete with descriptions about Allah and expresses himself therein. The Qur'an is purposeful and intentionally the speech of God, directed at all humanity. It is also referred as an ayat (signs)<sup>2</sup>. God manifests his signs also through speaking. The words and sentences of God's speech are known as signs. All creativity is a function of God's speech. It is easy to confuse God's creation with God since created things are intrinsically His (Murata & Chittick, 194:70). Tanzih and Tashbih are terms that express that which is commonly employed to show the contrast between the perception of God's nearness and mercy and that of his distance and wrath; tanzih declares God's incomparability and tashbih affirms similarity (Murata & Chittick, 1994:71). Tanzih means literally to declare something pure and free of something else. For instance one can say God is like the rock of Gibraltar (tashbih) for God is strong and powerful like it; but it's not correct to say the rock of Gibraltar is God (tanzih). One has to assert that God is pure and free of all the defects and imperfections of His creatures. In the perspective of tanzih, God is so holy and pure that



he cannot be compared to any created thing, including concepts, since all our ideas are created (Surah 42:11).

Tashbih means to declare something similar to something else. It asserts that God must have some sort of similarity with his creatures, that is, God's signs are within the cosmos. God is tanzih and tashbih since it is the principle of tawhid. These terms are similarly associated with the two divine names batin (Inward or Nonmanifest) and zahir (Outward or Manifest) (Murata & Chittick, 1994:71). The two perspectives of tanzih and tashbih, or God's distance and nearness, are met constantly in Islamic texts and in the everyday life of Muslims. For instance "Praise be to God" which is recited by Muslims on all sorts of occasions and in all sorts of contexts, since it expresses gratitude to God. Subhanallah or Glory be to God is recited when the person has some ill feeling toward God or his activity, or when any thought occurs that God has motivations like humans (Murata & Chittick, 1994:71).

#### 5.1.1.2 Allah's ninety-nine Names

Allah has ninety-nine names each taken as expressing tanzih and refers to the essence of God. From these names we gather his attributes since they designate his innate qualities and characteristics. It follows that the essence (dhat) of something is its reality, its innermost core that defines it and makes it what it is. The names or attributes of God are such descriptive

designates of God that one can readily understand as the proximity and distance of or tanzih and tashbih qualities he possesses (Murata & Chittick, 1994:64). It is evident from what have been said here is that God can therefore be both merciful and wrathful; he is also a life giver and life taker (Murata & Chittick, 1994:67). Phenomenologically his divine names are divided into two categories, the first being attractive qualities- they include names such as Merciful, Compassionate, Loving, Kind, Forging and Beautiful. The second group embodies awe and fear inspiring qualities and includes names such as Wrathful, Vengeful, Severe, Majestic, Just, Harmer and Slayer. The names Beautiful and Merciful are more closely connected to tashbih than to tanzih, since they give news of someone who is intensely concerned for even the smallest details of everyday life. It is bewildering to understanding God as both near and far, both caring and wrathful. God's mercy takes precedence over his wrath (Murata & Chittick, 1994:76). The idea that God's mercy takes precedence over his wrath is one of the most important principles of Islamic thought. Tawhid therefore tells us that God is different from us.

The shahada's emphasis on the unitary God rather than multiplicity of gods focuses on Him as the "Knower of the unseen and the visible"(Murata & Chittick, 1994:79). This dimension makes God different from the gods. As humans there may be a readiness to understand that we view only in part, everything seems so obscure to us and is only sometimes seen or understood. When the Qur'an speaks about the "unseen", it does not mean that which our eyes do not reach in practice, but rather that which our eyes do not reach in

principle (ghayba). Our eyes can only see material things (shahada). The unseen can be divided into two categories: God and the angels. The unseen are seen by God and angels and by certain exceptional human beings, like prophets. Hence angels are unseen in relation to most human beings, but visible in relation to themselves and God.

Heaven and earth are key concepts in Muslim nomenclature (Murata & Chittick, 1994:80). The Qur'an refers to the seven heavens wherein is found seven planets. Although planets may be visible, the heavens themselves are in fact unseen. The mir'aj as vision or actual ascent to heaven demonstrate the importance and the function of heaven. It is the abode of perfection and the place where humanity would like to be. Heaven is the location of paradise, located just below the Throne itself (Murata & Chittick, 1994:82). When heaven and earth are discussed, the basic issue is the nature of the relationships that are established among things of the created universe, or the hierarchy that is set up in the cosmos as a result of its subordination to God. We learn about God's relationship to the cosmos both by contrasting his qualities with its qualities (tanzih) and by showing that the qualities of the two sides are in certain respects similar (tashbih).

### 5.1.2 The Holy Books

The Qur'an and all other scriptures revealed to the prophets before Muhammad constitute the third article of faith in Islam. According to Surah 3:84 Muslims are admonished to belief in Allah and what has been revealed

to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; and in the books given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets of their Lord (Rahman, 1988:17).

Important prophets had their "own" books such as the Prophet Abraham to whom was revealed the Mushaf, to David the Zabur, Moses the Tawrat and to Jesus the Injil. The Qur'an is a divine book revealed by God to Muhammad for the purpose of guiding humanity. This book, the Quran, is different to the other divine book, the Bible. The Bible is said not to be in its original form whereas the Qur'an is. The Qur'an is therefore the most perfect revelation of God. The Qur'an has several features that make it effective as well as truthful. It comprises of guidance, nur (light), admonition, furqan (criterion), appeals to reason, it leads from darkness to light, mercy, guard against evil, has clear explanation, taqwa and remembrance of God, Good news, warning to unbelievers and establishment of justice (Rahman, 1988:17-25).

### 5.1.3 Angels

The prophet said that people should have faith in God and his angels. The Arabic word for angels is malak and means messenger. Several angels are mentioned by name- Gabriel, Michael, Harut, and Marut. Angels have different functions. They may be reciters, glorifiers, scarers, dividers, casters, pluckers, ascenders, writers, watchers, envoys and outstrippers. A person must acknowledge the existence angels when performing salat.



Angels are found all over. There are angels who carry God's throne and others who circle around it praising and glorifying him (Murata & Chittick, 1994:P84-85). Angels basically bring messages, carrying out God's commands. The scripture is given to prophets and is brought by one specific angel to whom God has entrusted prophecy: Gabriel (Surah 19:17). Angels play the important role of acting as intermediaries between the visible universe and God himself, the creator of that universe (Murata & Chittick, 1994:86). But since the angels themselves are invisible, they pertain to the domain of the unseen. Hence they are heavenly creatures, suspended halfway between God and earth.

#### 5.1.3.1 Spirits and bodies

The spirit known as ruh means wind. A wind is something whose presence is made visible only through its effects. It cannot be seen. Gabriel is sometimes referred to as a spirit or the "Holy Spirit". There is however a difference between angels and spirits; spirits are connected to bodies. If the spirit is connected to a body made of light, then the configuration of the two is called an angel; if it is made of a clay and spirit then it is a human or animal. The spirit is then an intermediary between humans and God. The basic function of the spirit is to govern and control the body (Murata & Chittick, 1994:93).

### 5.1.3.2 Iblis

The Qur'an speaks of beings created neither of light nor clay but of fire. Most often the Qur'an refers to creatures made from fire as "jinn", which basically means hidden or concealed. Iblis is a jinn who is also known as Satan. Before Adam was created, Iblis was a pious creation that had spent his time in acts of devotion. When Iblis was created he was drawn toward angels, that is, light beings, joining their activities. Although mixing freely without problems, he (Iblis) soon found trouble when Adam was created. Iblis and angles were required to prostrate themselves before Adam (Surah 2:34, 7:11). Angles complied but Iblis refused<sup>3</sup>. He was consequently expelled from heaven, with the result that he found himself on earth deceiving Adam's offspring (Rahman, 1988:97ff).

Not all jinn are bad some do believe in prophets. Some are called al-shaitan because they don't believe. Iblis and those human beings who have the qualities of fire seek greatness and magnificence for themselves. Like fire, they assert their own reality and try to destroy that of others<sup>4</sup> (Rahman, 1988:99).

#### 5.1.3.3 The soul

When the spirit was blown into the clay we found something called nafs or soul or self. Before the spirit meets body, there is no human self, no human soul. In relation to the body the nafs has all the primary qualities of the spirit, such as life, knowledge, desire, and power (Murata & Chittick, 1994:101). The soul is frequently viewed in respect of its difference from the spirit, its immersion in the body, and its ignorance of the fact that its reality does not reside in the body but in the spirit and in God. In this sense of the term, the word nafs is used with a negative connotation. It refers to all the darkness within people that keeps them wandering in ignorance and distance from God. The soul keeps its' kinship with fire and the jinn. The spirit has desires but are perverted and distorted; the soul can therefore forget God. It can be luminous as well as be intelligent, desiring, and powerful (Murata & Chittick, 1994:100ff).

#### 5.1.4 God's Messengers

The Qur'an is clear about the existence and acceptance of other prophets beyond the confines of Islam. They, too, fit in the overall objective of Islam since it fits in with the concept tawhid. God has a universal purpose and to this end he uses various human beings called prophets or messengers to deliver his intentions.

The duties of messengers are to deliver messages of God as revealed to them. There are three things that necessitate the advent of new Messengers. First, when the teachings of the previous Messengers are changed or corrupted, then there is a need for a new Messenger who can purify and restore the religion to its original form. Second, when the teachings of the previous Messengers are incomplete and do not provide a complete code of life necessary for a successful and prosperous life, there is a need for a new Messenger who can amend, improve, or add something to the old teachings. Thirdly, when the old Messengers were appointed for a particular people or country their messages were only for those people and not universally applicable; a new Messenger was needed for other people, nations or countries as guide (Rahman, 1988:55).

The Qur'an has however made it clear that Muhammad is not parochial but of universal significance (Schuon, 1970:20). A messenger (rasul) helps advice the individual or community how to solve their problems and how to survive the pressures of the immediate future. From a Qur'anic point of view he is rasul, which has a higher calling than a prophet (nabi). The Almighty elevated some of his anbiyya (prophets) to a higher position called "Rasul". The Qur'an makes a clear distinction between the two: the extent to which a Rasul unveils the truth upon his addresses is so profound and ultimate that any denial from them makes them worthy of death and destruction as a nation- From Sura 58:20 Allah tells the nations " Those who show hostility to Allah and His Rasul are bound to be humiliated. The almighty has ordained that I and my Rasul shall be dominant." On the other hand the extent to



which a Nabi delivers the truth to his nation is not much as to entail death or destruction for his addresses. Consequently, the nation of a Nabi is not destroyed or humiliated even if they deny him. The Nabi is a general cadre and the Rasul (Messenger) a special one. Every Rasul is Nabi but the opposite is not true ([http://www. Renaissance. com.pk/marq995.html](http://www.Renaissance.com.pk/marq995.html)). Moreover a rasul brings a new code of guidance, whereas a nabi only obeys a code given to an earlier prophet. The Prophet (rasul) is called a mercy for the universe (rahmatun i'l-amin).

#### 5.1.5 The Judgement Day

The discussion here is of paramount importance for the community and for the world at large. Human existence does not simply end at death. Life can be extended beyond death and incorporated into a corporeal resurrection (Waines D., 1995: 129). The Last Day precedes the day of Judgment; it would be a momentous day when the trumpet shall blasts heralding terrible times, especially the reversal of the natural and order of things (Waines, 1995:130). The trumpet blast will awaken the dead for them to assemble on a great plain. This signals that the Day of Resurrection (yamn al qiyamah) has arrived.

The events of the Last Day occur as the final acts of the cosmic drama, which commenced at Creation day and will continue until the end of the earths history (Waines, 1995:131). Muhammad in the company of all prophets

will however be allowed to intercede on behalf of sinful Muslims. People will be called to final account for what they did in this life. On Judgement Day God will question humans and weigh their deeds in the scales and then pass judgement. The Judgement is often represented as a tussle between punishment ('iqab) and reward (thawab). However as Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Qur'an, 1934:1464)<sup>5</sup> explains it is an inducement to a certain course of action by the motive of winning the reward as well as apportioning the reward to the merits of the receiver.

#### 5.1.5.1 Measuring Out

Qadar or measuring out serves an important role within the ambit of iman. The prophet said, "Faith includes faith in the measuring out, the good of it and the evil of it." Often the term "qadar" or measuring out is rendered differently to correct sense, that is, conveyed as predestination. This is however not totally correct since there is wider meaning to it. The term comes from the same root as qadir, which is a divine name that can be translated as "powerful." The noun qudra which designates the divine attribute of power, is close to qadar in derivation of its meaning. It means to have the ability or capacity to do or make something, to perform an act, to achieve a goal. Qadar is sometimes used synonymously with qudra. In this sense it may also mean power and ability. But qadar puts emphasis on the basic meaning of the root, which is to measure or determine the size or quantity of something. The term may mean not only refer "to take something's measure, but also "to determine its measure." To measure

something, in this sense, is to control it and govern it, to have power. God is powerful over all things, while human beings have a certain limited power inasmuch as they reflect God's power. Humans have no power over God, neither are they able to understand God in the true sense without God's guidance, for understanding something gives us a certain power over it<sup>6</sup> (Murata & Chittick, 1995:104).

#### 5.1.5.2 Good and Evil

The hadith of Gabriel states God measures out good (khayr) and evil (sharr). It does not imply simply a statement of right and wrong but rather about a benefit or loss that something brings (Surah 41:49 & 10:11). The good and evil that are measured out have to do with things that people wish to have or avoid. People must not think what they desire is good and what they dislike is evil, since it is not necessary that the benefits of this world as they are. It cannot be good if it causes humans to forget their human responsibilities<sup>7</sup>.

The words "husn" and "su" are also terms that carry the idea of good and evil; they are loaded with moral connotation. Evil is inherent to the universe in respect to tanzih (incomparability), but good is inherent to the universe in respect of tashbih (similarity)(Murata & Chittick, 1994:120).

### 5.1.5.3 The human Being

Humans are remarkable creatures as they are close to God in configuration. The same cannot be said of other creations, they only reflect partial aspects of God. In others, some divine attributes are permanently manifest while in others they are hidden. In human beings, all divine attributes are present, and any of them can become manifest if circumstances are appropriate. Adam's life reflected some fundamental issues concerning human life or the nature of humanity. His life manifests that humans are vicegerents (Khalifa) of God and according to God's design. God moulded Adam with his own two hands and blew into him of his own spirit. Hence humans are of higher nature than angels because they have greater wisdom. The Qur'an often refers to human power over other creation in ways that make it clear that this power over creation is no small affair. After all, only human beings were created to be God's vicegerent. They came among all creatures and were taught all divine names, since they alone were created in God's form. Hence everything in the universe exists to be ruled by human beings (Murata & Chittick, 1994:122). The human being was created in God's form, embracing all God's attributes. The difference between the whole universe and all human beings is that the signs are infinitely dispersed in the universe, while they are concentrated into a single, intense focus in each human individual. The concentration of the attributes within human beings make people God's vicegerents, that is, creatures who can perform the same functions as God, with all due respect to tanzih. Human beings although manifestly having



some of God's attributes is still less than Him, lacking in creative ability and limitations of a spatio-temporal nature (Murata & Chittick, 1994:123).

Two kinds of vicegerencies exist:

- One pertaining to all human beings
- The other to those who have voluntarily chosen to serve God

(Murata & Chittick, 1994:124)

Vicegerency is specifically a human quality. Humans have been endowed with programmed percepts that are uniquely theirs. We discovered earlier on that God calls on special humans called prophets to carry out these instructions for the benefit of humanity. Those who succeed in this task are called 'abd or servant or slave. A servant of God serves God. The Arabic verb is 'abada, which means to serve, to worship, adore, obey, show humility, be submissive. Technically 'ibada means to perform all ritualistic acts that Muslims perform- the Five Pillars, to imitate the Prophet in his Sunna.

#### 5.1.5.4 Prophecy

The second part of the Shahada tells us that Muhammad is God's messenger. The appellation nabi (prophet) derives from the root that has two basic meanings:

- To utter a sound;

-The active verb comes from the root to inform, to give news; a prophet is therefore someone who informs people about God (Murata and Chittick, 1994:132).

The Qur'an employs four main words to refer to prophets: prophet, messenger (rasul), envoy (mursal) and possessor of steadfastness (Ulu'l 'azam). The Qur'anic usage of the term prophet is wider in scope than the term messenger. More-or-less 313 messengers have been sent. Not everybody sent by God to receive a message is designated a prophet. Among the prophets, a relatively small number have been given permission to establish unique religions. Messengers are those prophets whose messages were detailed enough to be preserved as oral or written scriptures. The most common opinion suggests that there are five messengers who have established major religions of history-Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad (Murata & Chittick, 1994:134).

Humans have innate dispositions, which is called Fatir, fitra. It is gathered from the root of the term, which means, "to cleave", hence implying, opening up and coming out. It also means to bring forth, and to originate, to knead and to shape. The Qur'an calls God the fatir fitra of the heavens and the earth, the creator (Surah 21:30). The word fitra is translated as "bring forth" (Surah 30:30-31). The Qur'an connects religion with human nature that human beings were given when they created. By being human, they have accepted the trust and entered into a lasting covenant. Some humans however do turn away from trust and commit wrong. Furthermore the

upbringing of human beings and their interaction with the environment distort their original disposition. Such distortion may lead them to commit shirk.

#### 5.1.5.5 Heedlessness (ghafla)

Heedlessness or ghafla arises due to nisyan (forgetfulness); Adam slipped because he forgot (Surah 20: 115). The fundamental difference between Adam and Iblis comes out of their respective responses to God when he questioned them about their disobedience. This is a fundamental fault of humans. To forget God is to forget tawhid, and without tawhid there can be no salvation. God can forgive anything except shirk, the association of others with him (Murata & Chittick, 1994:145.) There is a connection between the fire of hell and forgetfulness (Surah 45:34, 32:14, 7:179). One, who forgets God, forgets himself (Surah 59:19).

#### 5.1.5.6 Dhikr

Since heedlessness sets humans on a collision course our fitra stands us in good cause. It aids our remembrance (dhikr). Dhikr stands between humans and Gehenna or hell. Dhikr means much more than simply the proper human response to God, since it also designates the function of the prophets. The word dhikr has three basic senses: mentioning, remembering and reminding. God send prophets to remind humanity of their covenant of Alast. They do so by reciting God's signs and mentioning their debt to him. People should

respond to the prophets by remembering God, an act that demands that they mention him in prayers of glorification and praise (Murata & Chittick, 1994:147).

#### 5.1.5.7 Return to God

The return to God lies in the background of all Islamic beliefs. Human beings are compelled to submit to God in respect of their created nature, but at the same time they are free to accept or reject the prophetic messages. Everyone dies, and everyone meets God<sup>8</sup> (Murata & Chittick, 1994:194). People are compelled to return to God after death, but they can also choose to return to him during their life in this world. The Return to God (Surah 7:29,41:21) presupposes that the origination has been with God (Murata & Chittick, 1994:195).

The Qur'an discusses the dynamic changing relationship with God that it describes in terms of "that which is close" or this world (al dunya) and that which is last or the "next world"(al akhira). The next world is where we will be after we leave this world. The next world begins at resurrection; it is an intermediate domain that shares the characteristics of both this world and the next world (Murata & Chittick, 1994:197). The discussion thus far tells us that death is certain if we humans are to move over to the next phase of life. Having said this, Surah 2:195 admonishes humans to be careful and not throw their lives away. Muslims are exhorted to seek reasonable precaution.



From this is inferred that suicide is a major sin (Murata & Chittick, 1994:200).

#### 5.1.5.8 The end of the world

The end of the world is going to be the last day, which is also the Day of Resurrection. Thus Muhammad's message is a chance to put one's life in order (Murata & Chittick, 1994:202). The end of the world refers not only to the end of the macrocosm but also to the end of the microcosm (Surah 22:7 and Surah 7:187). The Qur'an says (Surah 14:48 and 27:87-88) that the order and regularity this world has known will come to end at the Last Day (Murata & Chittick, 203).

#### 5.1.5.9 Resurrection

According to Surahs 36:51-52 and 18:47-48, at the end of time Seraphiel will blow his trumpet for the second time the dead will awake to enter an enormous plain for presentation to God (Murata & Chittick, 1994:204). People will ascend to God as he descends to them. On the day of resurrection there will be the weighing of scales (Murata & Chittick, 1994:207). The angelic scribes who have recorded people's activities during their life in this world will at this resurrection day place their scrolls in the scales-Surah 21:47. The shining of the light at the resurrection will be a mercy for those who have eyes to bear it. People will also experience the ordeal of passing over the Path (sirat). At resurrection, the Straight Path is embodied as a

bridge stretching over hell, thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword. People will be told to cross it, and some will practically fly, while others will gallop over it. But many will fall to their destruction at the first step. How one experiences the Path at the resurrection depends on how one has followed the Straight Path in this world (Murata & Chittick, 1994:208).

People in heaven will have none of the trappings they were used to on earth (Surah 21:104). God will judge the people that day; many people will be thrown into the fire. The Prophet will however be able to intercede (shafa'a) on behalf of the people that day (Surah 17: 79). Other prophets will also be given a chance hereafter to intercede on behalf of their communities.

#### 5.1.5.10 Hell and Paradise

The idea of Hell is never left out of the equation of paradise. The underlying purpose it seems to suggest is that those not condemned to hell will experience paradise. Paradise contrast with hell; it is a happy place, a place of plentiful; hell conversely is a painful experience, one that would rather be avoided. The aim of humanity should be to enter into this place of paradise (Murata & Chittick, 1994:211).

#### 5.2 Ihsan

Ihsan is the second dimension of Muslim belief. It means doing what is beautiful, that is, the intentionality on the part of the believer. Ihsan

concerns the self, that is, how it is possible to bring one's motivations and psychological qualities into harmony with one's activity and understanding.

The Prophet said *ihsan* is "to worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He sees you." *Ihsan* derives from the word *husan*, which designates the quality of being good and beautiful. *Husn* is a good that is inseparable from beauty and attractiveness (Surah 4:7 and 28:84). The word *ihsan* is a verb that means to do or to establish what is good and beautiful. Humans must do what is beautiful in their relationships with God and other creatures. They should act in accordance with their *fitra* that God placed in them (Murata & Chittick, 1994:269).

### 5.2.1 Worship

The Qur'an connects *ihsan* to everything good and praiseworthy and makes its possessors the inhabitants of paradise. Worship or *'ibada* is required of humanity; *'ibada* comes from the root *'abd*, servant. Thus to worship is to serve him. *Ihsan* demands servanthood that is voluntary, free, and truly devoted (Murata & Chittick, 1994:273)

Worship in the narrow sense includes aspects of the Five Pillars of Islam, supplication and remembrance (*dhikr*) that have specifically ritual and devotional aspects. In the broader sense it means to accept God and obey his

commands and his prohibitions; to orientate one's life and existence to what one considers as real.

#### 5.2.2 Seeing God

The Prophet says, " What is beautiful, is to worship God as if you see Him, because if you do not see Him, he sees you." Here the Prophet focuses on the attitude and intention behind the outward activity demanded through islam (Murata & Chittick, 1994:276).

#### 5.2.3 Sincerity

One should act as if one is seeing God. Ihsan demands that people be aware of God's presence and act appropriately; it also demands that that they think, feel, and intend appropriately; inward thoughts and attitudes must conform exactly with outward activity. There should be no contradiction between what people think and what they do, or between what they are and what they think they are. Ikhlas is the harmonious tendencies and impulses coalescing with the same goal in mind (Murata & Chittick, 1994:277).

#### 5.2.4 Wholesomeness or Salih

The idea of doing works that are righteous is considered through the term salih . This word is derived from the root that means, "to be sound, wholesome, right, proper, good." When the Qur'an admonishes the community to be salih or wholesome it envisages correct deeds and intentions. For this



reasons those who are muslim who attain the fullness of fitra will be salih in the next world or lifetime.

#### 5.2.5 God-wariness (taqwa)

According to Qur'anic translators the term taqwa is rendered intelligible with meaning such as dutifulness, piety, righteousness, good conduct, guarding against evil, godfearing, and god-consciousness. The Qur'an frequently commands people to have taqwa. Its intension is that a person one must always keep God in view as Surahs 4:128 and 5:7 suggests. People have to protect themselves against those things that are dangerous (Surah 2:24; 2:196; 2:203). When people protect themselves from God's wrath and severity by following the prophets, they are brought under the wing of God's mercy and gentleness. God-wariness focuses on God's threats and punishment (Murata & Chittick, 1994:283,285). Those who are weary will be taken into the proximity of the Merciful Love (hubb). Love is at the center of the three dimensions. Love is intertwined with concepts of husn and jamal; through these terms it is implicitly acknowledged that God loves the beautiful things, that is, God loves those human beings whose character traits and activities are beautiful<sup>9</sup> (Murata & Chittick, 1994:286).

#### 5.3 Ibadat

There are five acts of devotion (ibadah) Rahman that fosters islam (1) Shahada (2) Salat (3) Zakat (4) Ramadan (5) Hajj. The jihad or Mujahada

may also be included, some say as a pillar. The faithful (mu'imun) are pressed into complete obedience or practice (a'mal), that is, islam requires iman (Rahman, 1964:64).

### 5.3.1 The Shahada

The Shahada is a verbal acknowledgement of the reality of God and his prophet Muhammad. The Shahada is a ritual whereby one submits oneself to God and the Prophet. This ritual must be recited in Arabic, with the intention of submitting one to God in the presence of two Muslim witnesses (Rahman, 1964:11). Rahman indicates that such acceptance is by extension the acceptance of all prophets and the Holy Words given to them (Rahman, 1964:66).

### 5.3.2 The Salat

When one recites the Shahada, it will be incumbent on one to follow through with the rest of the Pillars. The basic sense of the term salat is to pray or to bless. Salat purifies the soul. The Salat is divided into basic acts required and recommended. The primary required salat is performed five times a day. To perform these prayers a number of cycles (rak'a) are necessary. Each cycle involves a certain amount of Qur'anic text and other formulas to be repeated (Rahman, 1964:11-12). The requirement for salat is that the person must be in a state of ritual purity; this takes on either major (ghusl) or minor (wudu') purification.

### 5.3.3 Zakat

Zakat is similar an offering that is intended for the poor according to legal requirements in Surah 9:60. This "tax" usually comes from one's profit made over a year. According to Rahman it is a compulsory payment by the rich intended for the poor (Rahman, 1966:115).

Categories of Needy

The needy	The poor
Those who collect Zakat	Those in debt
Captives	Travellers
Those whose hearts are to be reconciled to Islam	Those who are fighting in God's path

Adapted from Vision of Islam by Murata & Chittick, 1994

The basic idea behind Zakat is to purify people's wealth by giving a share to God. Purification of one's wealth occurs by means of uplifting the poor with ones income. Zakat depends on social interaction.

### 5.3.4 Fasting

The person who has confirmed the Shahada into his life must fast during the month of Ramadan. The purpose of fasting is to benefit from the rigorous discipline that it imparts. The need to fast emanates from one's faith in God and love toward Him as well as fear of His punishment (Rahman, 1964:129-30). There are several benefits connected to Sawm, this includes, social benefits, physical benefits, moral benefits, spiritual benefits and economic

benefits. During Ramadan the adherent must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual activity. Ramadan is a time of heightened awareness of proper rules of conduct. A person's fasting is nullified should a person during this period break the fast deliberately, lie, slander, make ungodly oaths and looking on with passion (Rahman, 1964:17). Skipping Ramadan intentionally is a grievous sin and punishable by extra fasting days (Rahman, 1964:18).

#### Benefits form of Sawm

Social benefits	Share others lack of resources and experience of iftar <sup>10</sup> and tarawih <sup>11</sup>
Moral benefits	Spiritual benefits
Economic benefits the poor get endowments from the rich and the rich get blessed by God	Physical benefits reparation and cleansing of the body
Gains taqwa	

Adapted from Afzalur Rahman, Islam: ideology and way of life pp130-135

### 5.3.5 Hajj

The Hajj is a set of rituals that takes place only in Mecca and its' surrounding as well as around the Ka'ba, which is also the Bait Ullah (House of Allah). It occurs during the 8th -13th Dhu'l-Hajj. Muslims are required to make this pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime, if they have the means to do so. In a sense the hajj is a rite de passage, that is, a break from involvement in this world to a total preoccupation with God (Murata &



Chittick, 1994:19-20). The umra (visitation) to the Ka'ba is marked by tawaf (circumambulation) around it (Rahman, 1964:141).

The significance of this aspect of ibadah is that the worshipper gives up all work and family; gives up all pleasure for a simple ascetic life (Rahman, 1994:141). For this God forgives sins of those who have come here in devotion. Hajj has social, economic, political and spiritual benefits.

#### Benefits of Hajj

Social benefits helps to level all kinds of distinction, race nationality, wealth	Wear same clothes economic
Benefits discussion of mutual business interest, exchanges of ideas	Skills Political benefits political discussions on acquiring similar positions throughout their specific abodes
Spiritual benefits the feeling to be in God's presence and committed to Him	

Adapted from Afzalur Rahman, Islam: ideology and way of life pp142-145

#### 5.3.6 Jihad

The Qur'an uses the term "jihad" in a much broader meaning than its usual political connotation. It uses the verb along with expression "in the path of God." This path is the path of right conduct that He has promulgated and given to the Prophet (Murata & Chittick, 1994:20-21). Jihad complements islam, which is to surrender to God's will. Jihad, says Rahman, denotes a

maximum struggle or effort towards a goal. There are three senses that lay behind a jihad (1) a struggle of maximum exertion against a visible enemy (2) a struggle against evil forces in all forms (3) the struggle against the passions and carnal desires of the self. Thus jihad covers all kinds of exertions or efforts, physical, mental or materials that are undertaken in pleasing God (Rahman, 1964:170).

### Summary

The Prophet served as a communications channel between the community and God. This lasted for twenty-three years. Two elements here are overriding (1) God was in dialogue with humanity through his servant, and (2) God conveyed a set of social and spiritual rules as well as revising the old ones. This interaction serves to draw humanity's attention to God's presence as well as God's abiding interest in this world.

Muhammad's part in facilitating this communication plays a crucial part. However the is of the opinion that God's ultimate intention was the masses of people. With due respect to what was said earlier, in chapter three, that is, about Muhammad's venerable qualities; he cannot be the most important factor in this historical communiqué. A message without people receiving it

remains dead. The conclusion is that Muhammad's intermediation served to enhance God's image amongst the populace of this cosmos.

The importance of Muhammad's prophethood is twofold; he was preordained as a prophet and secondly he was readied himself inwardly. This at least to me is the difference between him and the hunafā. Muhammad moreover radically confronted on the community's strange habits in an effort to introduce to them a new way of living. As a consequence we can reassuringly conclude that a prophet's life is marked by social and spiritual involvement in the community or in the world. From this involvement in the community's or world of the audience can we grasp the validity of the prophet's message; an audience will consider the value of such a message depending on its plausibility.

Furthermore Muhammad's proclamation has a twofold authority: the One and only Deity, Allah, demanded such attention and secondly the Prophet (Rasul)), is Khatam Anbiyya or Seal of the Prophets. Muhammad's brief was to assist the change in people on earth. The preceding section has delineated the core of his message. The emphatic message is that God is sovereign over all matter even that which is immaterial. Muhammad's strategy from this message is multi- purposive; in one sense he needed to change his immediate community (umma) from ignorance (jahiliyya). This process encompassed the induction of Allah as the powerful being who disposes his mercy or wrath in various ways. The second was to show Allah as a force beyond his own

community. The evidence here is the insistence on tawhid of Allah, a very encompassing term.

Allah is not necessarily concerned with narrow interest but with a wider picture of humanity. Therefore whatever religious forces preceded Muhammad in time was simply lying on the same continuum of Allah's concern. God the timeless Being is all there is, such that the Seal of the Prophet is simply the culmination of God's response to humanity via the primordial prophetic channel. The message through Muhammad stands as an eternal reminder of God and His superior existence and mercy.

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#### End Notes on Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> Surah 2:131,133 & 5:111

<sup>2</sup> Surah 2:99; 10:1; 12:1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Surah 16:50

<sup>4</sup> Surah 38:73-74

<sup>5</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali. 1934. The Holy Qur'an, texts, translation and commentary. Appendix xii, number 3.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Surah 2:256; Surah 6:91,22:74,and Surah 39:67.

<sup>7</sup> Surah 3:14

<sup>8</sup> Refer to Surah 3:26; Surah 21:35; and Surah 29:57

<sup>9</sup> Refer to Surah 2:195, 3:133-34, 3:76, 2:222 to verify Allah's comments on taqwa

<sup>10</sup> Iftar-breaking of fast

<sup>11</sup> Tarawih-additional prayer at night



## Chapter 6

### The impact of Muhammad

In chapter one there was affirmation of prophets owing their status partly to the social role they served and that Muhammad was no different in this regard. Philip K Hitti (1970:96ff) sketches an Arabian milieu marked by Bedouin heathenism: "The masses were largely entrenched in their way of life." They had no fondness of serenity, for their lives were a constant conniving on how to out do the next person or group. Since there was a lack political and social coherence plundering and raiding served as a means to an end. Montgomery W Watt (1960:1ff) interprets this behaviour as a response to the socio-economic realities in the 7th century. The combined observations of Hitti and Watt concur that social justice and economic factors were absent from the Peninsula and that the strong and the rich benefited most from socio-political disorder. But even the rich were not immune to the fluctuation fortunes of their wealth. To safeguard their interest as well as those of the poor, fundamental changes were desperately needed. Muhammad stepped into this vacuum to seize the opportunity. It is no wonder that Muhammad is venerated not only for his spiritual influence but also for the linking the spiritual dimension to the need for social justice.

Greer (1992:92) states that Muhammad took the role of liberator of the people from the oppression of the Quraysh hierarchy. He gave recognition

to the need for liberation from oppression. Islam crystallized under the inspiration of Muhammad as a religious response intended to confront the basic human dilemma of the Prophet's day and time. His universe was one, which was in one that was crisis-infested, that is social and human injustices abounded. Muhammad can therefore best be understood as abetting a struggle against ghayba or heedlessness toward what he termed the remembrance (dhikr) of the primordial laws of God (Greer, 1992:93). The people listened, thus giving much needed impetus to Islam's genesis as a socially directed religion that can be attributed to the essential concentration of the Prophet upon justice in the community under God's direction (Greer, 1992:97).

The previous chapter outlined Muhammad's essential characteristics, which were said to be so enormous that he found special favour in God's sight. The prestige and influence that accompanied him secured for him far-reaching honour amongst his followers and enemies. As a result whole communities submitted to the message discussed in chapter 4. Moreover the message struck a right cord for many such that fervent believers mobilized their appreciation around the principles of his message. As a legacy to his achievements followers established educational institutions; operated economies on Qur'anic principles; drew inspiration for arts and cultural activities from his life and the hadiths; science and theological schools were brought into existence to gain greater understanding of the Qur'an and Hadiths.

The Qur'an remains the quintessential Book for the Muslim. Hence it is loaded with power, meaning and emotion. It evokes so much passion that some say it alludes or is the harbinger to much scientific discovery. This Book was revealed to Muhammad during the month of Ramadan (Denny, 1985:114). It thenceforth stands as an edifice of faith (iman) and consequently as the indisputable authority for humans. The importance of the Qur'an has acquired a central role within the umma to the extent that it regulates its whole religio-social life. Throughout the centuries, the Qur'an has been at the center of all Islamic intellectual activity, having had impact on philosophy, lexicography, jurisprudence, law, theology, art, and calligraphy. Committed to memory by many Muslims in childhood, it forms the collective conscience of the community, a constant reminder to the believers of the divine will (Haddad Y, 1984:1). The question may be posed, how this all ties in with Muhammad's prophethood? This becomes clear when considering the successes as a prophet. A nabi or rasul is elected to bring a message to the world; his successes are measured by how the audience was receptive to it. An important attribution of the successful proclamation is seen from the impact of the prophet's message throughout the ages; it stills rings true for those who elect to open their ears anew to it.

## 6.1 Islamic Education and Science

Education from its earliest inception seemed to have been valued. Indeed the secretarial duties of Zayd bin Thabit played a great role in keeping the Prophet informed as well as doing the written correspondence whether



political or of a religious nature (Muir, 1928:xv). Abilities such as this surely punctuate the reliance on literary skills, which in turn depended on a process of learning. Therefore, for Muslim faith to have succeeded the way it has, meant that men and women needed an education. Muslim intelligentsia had known this all along; hence from its inception the nascent religion used literary skills to expand its empire. Seyyid Hossein Nasr (1983:47) writes, "Whatever may have been the origin of the material for education and the sciences, the form was always Islamic, and both Islamic education and Islamic sciences are related in the most intimate manner to the principles of the Islamic revelation and the spirit of the Qur'an which is the central theophany of Islam." The Qur'an contains according to the traditional Islamic perspective, the roots of all knowledge but not, of course, scientific facts. Although it contains the principles of knowledge, it is not a textbook of science in the manner that is claimed by certain modern Islamic apologists (Nasr, 1983:48).

Muslim life is committed to the message previously described. The community's focus was of necessity enwrapped in the perpetual presence of the Qur'an. As a result the adherent's life becomes a witness to the foundational belief espoused by the Prophet through a continuous process of education based on the form of the spirit of the Qur'anic revelations. Being related to holiness, hence wholeness, Islamic education had to be concerned with the whole being of the men and women whom it sought to educate. The goal was to train the mind and the whole being of the person. The madrasah became the formal educational institution early in Islamic history and developed into a fully-fledged college and university system.



The main activities of Madrasahs concerned religious matters (Nasr, 1983:50). However other sciences such as logic, mathematics, natural sciences, philosophy that are called the intellectual sciences was used in tandem with Qur'anic teachings at these schools. Two types of activities abetted the activities of the madrasah: the scientific institution and private circles (Nasr, 1983: 51). Education through Islamic institutions paved the way for acquiring complex learning in the fields of architectural innovations; these included the construction of domes, and gardens with complex ratios.

As time progressed Muslim reason generalized to more auxiliary intellectual activities such as medics, observatories and other scientific activities. These educational activities formed an important part in the intellectual development of Islam. It can be observed how the recognition of the initial educational benefits increasingly became a valuable annexation to understanding Allah's revelation through Muhammad. Nasr's emotive revels in the progress Islam has made since 610A.D.; Islam has since then achieved dazzling heights in the sphere of the educational system and its corollary sciences. He admits that the foundations of classical Islamic civilization was confronted by Greco-Alexandrian world, Persian sciences also became the domain of Islam, Indian education too found its way to Islamic thinking. These and more inherited sciences and knowledge benefited Islamic culture and expansion (Nasr, 1983:54). In a period of less than two centuries ranging from the end of the first/seventh to the third/ninth century an immense corpus of scientific knowledge was translated into Arabic making the Arabic language the most

important scientific language in the world for several centuries and a major depository for the sciences of antiquity to this day (Nasr, 1983:55).

Islam has developed its own philosophical "divine wisdom" thereby creating one of the richest philosophical traditions. This has given Islam great spiritual significance. Islam created a powerful and original philosophy within the intellectual universe of Abrahamic monotheism and the Qur'anic revelation while also incorporating those elements of Greek philosophy that conformed to the Islamic Unitarian perspective. Islamic philosophy developed schools with different perspectives: Islamic peripatetic philosophy, which is a synthesis of the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus into the context of the Islamic worldview; and the Ismaili philosophy, which was closer to Hermetic tradition (Nasr, 1983:54-56). The Islamic philosophical tradition, although of great diversity and richness, is characterized by certain features that are of special significance both for the understanding of it and for the appraisal of its import for the world at large.

Mathematics served an integrating role in many sciences and it is not surprising that it is regarded as highly useful. The need for mathematics in astronomy can hardly be underscored since astronomical data serves an important role in the belief system. The Muslim calendar takes into account lunar data that serves as well directions of the qibla.

Astronomical calculations required astute minds as well as dedicated scholars. Such need meant further advances in mathematics and hence the exploration of the heavens for stars and planets (Nasr, 1983:58).

Muslims have influenced physics and as a result have made contributions in three ways: nature of matter, of projectile motion and optics. Muslims showed interest in mechanical devices. Nasr remarks that these inventions are playful inventions generated through the scientific and education processes. Through Islamic thinking development of medicine and pharmacology was stimulating. Greek and Iranian sources served a valuable purpose. Importantly though is that Islamic medicine combined a philosophical approach to medicine, based upon cosmological principles which dominated over the human body. Muslim physicians emphasised preventative medicine, psychological and physical aspects to health (Nasr, 1983:60-61).

The study of botany was highly influenced by Qur'anic ideas. In this regard we can speak of the wonders of creation as signs of God. Al -Masudi composed works on natural history, which were related to those of the Greeks but of a more comprehensive nature and deeply integrated it into the religious worldview of Islam. In the geographical field Muslims produced the first medieval maps; they were also instrumental in navigating ships throughout the world because of their knowledge of the sea routes (Nasr, 1983:62).



## 6.2.Law in Islam

The proscriptions and prescriptions of the Qur'an supplemented by the traditions of the Prophet's life form the essential core of Islamic law, which was developed to legislate proper behaviour with attention given to the smallest detail. Muhammad's legacy did not leave a law but the law was extracted from the Qur'an and Sunna. The law or the Shar'ia was directed at the umma; followers had to recognize the Islamic worldview and rules attendant to it. It was during the early centuries following the Prophet's death (in A.D.632) that Islamic law developed into a comprehensive system which encompassed and governed personal and public behaviour. Muslim activists have called for Islamic law to be implemented in islamically oriented states and societies. Thus, integral to the realization of the Islamization of society is the implementation of Islamic law that have become the norm by which Muslims sought to administer and supervise a righteous order (Esposito J 1984:69). The law dealt with all aspects of life, including the proper relationship of man toward God and the prescribed acts of worship incumbent on all adherents to the faith (Haddad, 1984:2).

Islamic law is concerned with family relations and spiritual relations. It is concerned with proper relations for instance between a husband to wife, of a child to parent and, of a believer to non-believer. It provides guidance on economic, cultural, social and political behaviour. Islamic law was seen as a stepping-stone into the spiritual dimension whose ultimate goal is union with God. To realize this experience there must have been a constant awareness of God, which could have only be achieved by various means



including prayer, meditation and the remembrance of his name (Haddad, 1984:3).

The teachings of the Qur'an and the example of Muhammad made it clear that Muslims not only had individual but also corporate identity. The community was no longer bound by tribal identities but by a greater vision. The Shahada attests to the cosmic nature of Islam. The Qur'an includes only 80 verses that may strictly be regarded as law. It was thus left to the leaders of the umma to extrapolate laws from the Prophet's life and the Qur'an. The 9th century jurist Al-Shafii argued that an additional element as the source of the law was the community; this follows from the Prophet's saying "My community will not agree upon error" (Esposito, 1984:71).

### 6.3 The experience of Muslim Women

From the media it is gathered that Islamic women are portrayed as restricted more so than men. Seemingly men are regarded as guardians of women. The American invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, for instance, has shown that women there are sometimes destitute and overly restricted. Similarly in Islamic Nigeria women bearing children out of wedlock are more likely to be prosecuted than men who had liaison with such women. The result is that for those in the countries with free press such issues are more likely to catch the attention. Women issues in the West and in some Islamic countries are increasingly aired because the perception and the reality amongst Islamic women are viewed as in dire need of reform. Be

that as it may be, the point here is that Muhammad's cosmic principles have had a definitive influence on them too. So much so that women are sometimes voluntarily subjecting them to the laws on women that were prevalent 1400 centuries ago. This is very noticeable in Western societies like U.S.A. Britain, South Africa, Europe and elsewhere, where Islam is not the official religion; women subject themselves to the behaviouristic peculiarities of "Islamic" teachings. Beyond the dress code of Muslim women are the social realities that they face. There are social factors such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, ownership, education, employment opportunities and many other elements affecting their lives.

The Qur'an is not silent on the affairs of women. Indeed, in many instances it is quite unequivocal about women's participation and behaviour in society. Apart from modesty in dress, social and economic rules abound in the Qur'an and the Sunna. A few examples will suffice here: in marriage, dowry is an aspect, which defines legalities of the antenuptial agreement. Husbands must give their prospective wives, bride-wealth, the worth of which differ from case to case. Some provisions of the Qur'an are however reinterpreted to fit in with this post-modern era. Thus, although polygamy abounds it is an accepted practice that women do accept. This notwithstanding the fact that questions have been raised against it. In some Islamic countries various forms of marriages are banned or limited. In some other countries we find certain legal stipulations that guard against this type of practice (Smith 1984:92).

Divorce has been a source of great pain for Muslim women but it too has been subjected the Sunna. A marriage can only be dissolved upon the prescribed period of three months. It may be initiated by a man or by a woman. Recently in some Muslim countries divorce was agreed upon only with the courts injunction (Smith, 1984:94/5).

Important though in this postmodernist society is that women strive for gender equality. Women argue that they are representatives of Allah too, and therefore are as much vicegerents as men (ICS302 -9, Tutorial Letter101/2002:41). They believe that they are also capable of leadership roles as men. The Queen of Sheba (Balqis) is mentioned in the Qur'an as a model of wisdom and leadership (ICS302-9, Tutorial Letter 101/2000:43).

#### 6.3.1 Inheritance and ownership

The inheritance and ownership laws is another example of the extent of how Muslims have embraced the legal provisions set out in the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet. According to Surah 4:11 women are entitled to inherit property at a rate half that of men. The inequity of inheritance between the sexes is premised on the Qur'an, which reasons that men have more of an economic burden, having to provide for their families (Smith, 1984:95).

### 6.3.2 Veiling and seclusion

Although the veiling of women is not set out in the Prophet's Sunna or the Qur'an, this does suggest to what lengths the community is prepared to go to live in accordance with the words that is remotely connected to him. The Qur'an does not say that women should be veiled or kept apart from men, on the contrary it insists on full participation of women in society and in religious practices prescribed for men (Smith, 1984:97). The veiling of women therefore comes from sources outside the Qur'an, most likely areas that were conquered by the Muslims (Smith, 1984:97).

### 6.4 Sufism

Sufism is seen as the mystical dimension of Islam even though there are some Muslims who would refute such appellations. In any case Sufism serves its purpose here too, since it is a mystical practice that emerged well after the Prophet's sojourn on earth. Sufism demonstrates the impact Muhammad's teachings had on the umma. The practice of the Sufi's has taken hold from early stage. These were people, some of whom became ascetics who constantly meditated on the Divine Word. From the earliest times many Sufis collected hadiths and strove to imitate the Prophet's actions as faithfully and closely as possible. With the information of the Prophet in hand Sufi's sought annihilation in God (Schimmel A, 1984:113-114). Man's goal is to attain knowledge by unceasing spiritual purification. They were aware that the *nafs* was a source of instigating evil. Spiritual growth and maintenance occurs through *dhikr* (remembrance) of God, that



is, religious formulas, reciting Divine Names or reciting the profession of faith as often as one can (Schimmel, 1984:116).

The impact of Muhammad's message is nowhere more visibly demonstrated as in the life of Al -Hallaj the great mystic. He proclaimed, "I am the Absolute Truth (haqq) and consequently was put to death for this blasphemy. The audience and the religious establishment did not understand the profundity of this remark; it is only now that Muhammad's message of the Real Omnipotent God could be realized.

Sufism's demonstration of the influence of the Prophet's message does not stop with al-Hallaj, it continues through to subsequent efforts of other Sufi's too, who tirelessly worked on proclaiming God and His messenger through prose and poetry as well as various other intellectual works. Biographical dictionaries, hagiographical books and various literary works emanated from these sources. Sufism set the trend with the veneration of the prophet (Schimmel, 1984:120). Important aspects of the Sufis' spirituality are the determination of the grades of sanctity humans could achieve.

The establishment of Sufi orders and Fraternities further demonstrates the impulse of the Islamic message. The impact of Muhammad's life and the revelation he left behind influenced various pious minded people and societies to live in accordance with this word. In two instances the Suhrawardiyya Order and the Qadiriyya Order was established so that these adherents could find inspiration and guidance from the Word

(Schimmel, 1984:122). It was largely due to orders such as these and others that the message of mystical Islam was brought to the masses. From the thirteenth century onward, the Muslim world from Africa to India became covered with a network of Sufi cloisters in which the tired wayfarer could find rest for a day or two or even find food. These cloisters were the springboards from which Islam was taken to the people worldwide (Schimmel, 1984:123).

Sufism, as a truly Islamic form of piety, has contributed to the Islamic consciousness by giving it deeper dimension to life. Its teachings place primary importance not on the letter of the law but rather in the spirit of the revelation and the spirit of the beloved Prophet, to whom all Sufis are connected by the chain of initiation. It has refined the ethics of Islam with the result that the manners amongst Muslims all over the world are similar (Schimmel, 1984:132).

## 6.5. Islamic Art

Material culture comes in all shapes and sizes and can be functional, decorative, built to last, or fashioned for limited use. It is always grounded in the experience of community, either reflecting the dominant views among a group of persons (John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:341-2). The language of material culture is an open-ended text. The possibilities for discoveries of meanings in religious architecture, relics and other categories of material culture

can be unlimited. Material culture always informs our understanding of authority, community, ritual, myth, ethics and religious thought.

Art is enduring and consequently has the capacity to survive beyond the life of the artist. It remains as material witness to the capacity of the artist and what he tries to leave behind. Indeed artists and patrons only survive by virtue of the artefacts for which they claim a responsibility. Yet neither artistry nor patronage provides for context as fixed properties of art works. In the sphere art, the tentacles of Muhammad's spirits reached as well. Figural representation art is restricted because of religious austerity and secular luxury in Islamic culture. The proscription of figural images rendered the arabesque along with calligraphy as the preferred form of decoration of religious objects such as books and buildings including furnishings. Art has always been a process of reification, a making of things with an independent and "worldly existence.

#### 6.5.1 Mosque as a functional design of the Prophets legacy

The material culture of Islam is largely a product of Muslims applying their Islamic convictions to certain vision of the world (John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:400). The mosque is designed to take into consideration the prescribed teachings, for example the qibla is an essential part of salat; the worshipper must prostrate himself in the direction of the holy mosque in Mecca. For this reason a niche is a prerequisite in a design of a mosque, it indicates the qibla. The dome though not essentially Islamic has predominantly been

identified with Islamic worshipper houses- the minaret (John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:401). The minbar or pulpit inside the mosque is also a uniquely inspired piece of furniture; the Qur'anic stand as well as other furniture and fittings attest to the Islamically inspired thinking. All mosques observe a separation between males and females; females are usually accommodated on the balcony, or separate rooms build into the mosque. In addition to these spatial arrangements and appurtenances of the mosque, there are also ablution areas for males and females. It is unlawful to perform salat except in a state of purity.

The principles of Islamic beliefs were extended into the artistic patronage that gave rise in Islam to complex genres of architectures (John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:153).

## 6.6 Domestic Space

From the textbooks of psychology we learn that individual personal space is sensitive matter. Humans only allow outsiders to encroach within certain limits. From its origins, Islam has been a religion that emphasises people living together in mutually supportive, responsible communities. There has always been a strong urban bias to the religion. In traditional Muslim towns the layout of the area is spread around the core- the mosque John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:403). Muslim domestic space could be made up of a single husband



and legally up to four wives and the children that are part of this union as well as extended families, that is, the grandparents. Marriage is based on familiar legal and social principles of being good and shunning that which may corrupt the family. Thus, it is not possible to have alcohol or storages for such beverages in the home. Muslims are not allowed to keep any statues in the house. Cats rather than dogs can be allowed in the house (John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:406-407).

#### 6.6.1 Personal habits

Islamic laws have strongly influenced ritual purity, personal habits and hygiene. The hadiths also prescribe certain dress and grooming for the adherent. The main principle that governs women's dress sense is modesty and they may not draw attention to their form. The same applies to men, their 'awra (bodily parts that must not be exposed) extends from the navel to knees. Many men wear the ghallabiya (long flowing robes). The hadiths are replete with laws that allude to proper dress and grooming practices for both men and women (John Corrigan, Frederick M Denny, Carlos M.N.Eire and Martin S. Jaffee, 1998:409-411).

#### 6.7 Unity and variety in the music of Islamic culture

The Islamic ideology or worldview is commonly referred to as tawhid. This term connotes a monotheistic creator who is powerful over man and the universe but never immanent or substantiated in either of them (tashbih

and tanzih) (al-Faruqi Lois Ibsen, 1984: 175). God is beyond precise or exhaustive meaning. Allah can never in essence be described. Music is used in many cultures as an emollient or emotive. Even though this may sometimes be deep but it cannot capture God's essence fully. Some Muslims do have the need to use music as a form of expression, they had to first overcome objection by the umma who had doubts about its efficacy. A process of consultation occurred consisting of the ulema, the community and those with necessary acumen who had to decide whether this form of praise was desirable and necessary. As a result the Islamic community has gone to great lengths to lend effort and support for religious music. Consequently the umma invested much time and effort into the musical rendering of the Qur'an with so much care and esteem that it has created and acted as a prototype for all musical expression in the culture throughout the centuries (al Faruqi Lois Ibsen, 1984:177).

#### 6.8 Islam as a global force

The expansion of Islam after Muhammad's death in 632 A.D. has seen it plant its presence in many other countries. It is only Charles Martel who stood between Europe and Islam's complete domination of the world. This however did not stop Muslims from exclaiming the message endowed by Muhammad. Muslims continue to thrust forward with expansion of its goals to the extent that it is that has become globalised now. The world has been made accessible by the ever-increasing advancement in technology; communication can crisscross the world in a matter of minutes. It was thus so when Salman Rushdie wrote his Satanic Verses igniting an incensed

Islamic community. Protest after protest, violence and death occurred because Rushdie desecrated the Qur'anic message (Akbar 1994:2). One consequence of the globalisation process is the necessity to look at Islamic studies not as an esoteric or marginal exercise but as something that concerns the global community. Muslim presence is a ubiquitous reality that concerns non-Muslims as well. Since Islamic issues have become dominant, its' language has also become rooted within human understanding; words such as fatwa, jihad, ayatollah, madressa, jama'ah, have become neologism in the Western languages.

The erstwhile connections have historically been understood in terms of economics but cultural issues have also played a significant part (Akbar, 1994:5). Worldwide political events have contributed to the world population becoming mindful of Islamic affairs; Bosnia has created a sharp awareness of the Muslims as a world community, both in the West and amongst themselves. The plight of the Bosnians have driven the point home that Muslims tend to see the world through Islamic spectacles and interpret the suffering of the Bosnian Muslims as a painful experience and exacerbated by the indifference of the West to the plight of ordinary Muslims. Bosnia has created and sharpened the sense of polarization and radicalisation in Muslim societies, while at the same time increasing the sense of being a Muslim (Akbar, 1994:7-8).

#### 6.8.1 Islamic Resurgence



The fascinating thing about resurgence or renewal is that it presupposes death or a state of slumber. Thus for Muslims to speak of resurgence is a means to revitalise the interest in Islam. Judith Nagata (1994:64) writes that Islam as an ideology of renewal has been gathering momentum in the Middle East and North Africa since the nineteenth century, but Islam that strikes a chord in the world today is associated with the so called "resurgence", which moved to the centre stage in 1960's and 1970's. This juncture marks the point at which contemporary Islam seriously became a player in the International domain, seeking power both as an end in itself and as a means of spreading an Islamic way of life. There were several people in the umma who were aware of the need to arrest the decline of Islam and entrenching an Islamic consciousness into a domestic audience as well as spreading the Islamic message; they resisted the effects of modernization. Influential thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh, Jinnah and Modh Iqbal, Hassan Al-Bhanna, Syed Qutb and Abdul Al Maududi, inspired Islamic thinking or an Islamic consciousness. It was al- Bhanna, Qutb and al Maududi who promoted the restoration of religious authority and standards in direct opposition to the incumbent regimes. Islamic movements in other states directed their attacks on the centres of power, with the aim of taking political control and the creation of an Islamic state. The influence of some these movements extend far beyond their countries of origin (Nagata, 1994:65).

Islam today is the official religion of twenty -four states in the world, and in others it is the dominant religion with in excess of 80% of the adherents adhering to it. The challenge for Muslim states and



constituencies is the extent to which they must express their Muslim identities. The Islamic identity has progressed so far as to incorporate the process of Islamization as a way of life for their populace. This has meant the unification of sources of authority, the realignment of the administrative and political unity with the religious. In dominant Muslim societies one would usually find a policy of assimilation by conversion of the non-Muslim populations, or the creating of subordinate, citizenship or status such as the dhimmi model for a plural society. Judith Nagata (1994:65) has shown through a case study of the Malaysian experience, that there is a need to be economically self-sufficient and globally competitive as well as belonging to the global village. Islam accordingly has to take into consideration multiethnic as well as the world program into account while it has to simultaneously stay true to its religious roots.

#### 6.9 Contemporary Islamic movements in the Arab world

Islam was once the dominant power in worldly affairs such that they had control over many countries. This dominance however ended and its power consequently decreased. As the pendulum swung back to the West devoted members and groups realised that they needed to root out the images of Western prestige and dominance. Such was thinking that dominated in the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, founded by Hassan al Banna. He held the view that Islam had to offer an alternative social order that was needed for the welfare and progress of the Muslim society (Bagader, 1994:114).

Abu'l Alla al- Mawdudi, an Indian trained journalist stressed the notion of Allah's sovereignty over the Muslim state. This meant the teachings of the prophet had to take precedence ((Bagader, 1994:118). Allah's laws had to be the only laws and all others had to be unlawful.

#### 6.10 Islam economics and society

Islam has a perspective on economics too that emanates from the Prophet. It is tied up to socio-economic processes, which insists on social justice. Islamic economics makes ethico-religious connections explicit from the outset (Naqvi, 1994: p.xvii). The Islamic economy is part of the religion of Islam, which covers various branches of life. The Islamic economic system is a fusion of economics and ethics (Naqvi, 1994:4).

The central idea that defines Islamic economics and, which sets it apart from positive economics, is its insistence on the explicit inclusion of an ethics based on religion in a unified framework (Naqvi, 1994:14). The Muslim believes that there is Divine Presence in the world therefore the conduct of the believer must be to act correctly since God sees his/her conduct (Surah 9:105). This belief is driven by a decisive influence of ethics on economic behaviour. The divine Presence in Islamic economics is obvious from the integration of ethical imperatives with economic considerations, which takes place at the level of primary motivation. Secondly, an amalgam of ethics and economics is an empirically verifiable fact. Thirdly the idea of the Hereafter plays a significant part in Muslim

daily life and consequently it has a bearing on his/her behavioural output (Naqvi, 1994:15-16)

The Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet are the primary sources for Islamic ethics, which can be used to deduce general principles of economic behaviour. Without going into detail the fundamental point that needs to be understood is that the prophetic activities of Muhammad contributed in no small measure to the socio-economic organisation of the Muslim community worldwide.

## Conclusion

This chapter is succinctly called the impact of Muhammad for reason being that for the Prophet to had to be forceful with his message to make it lasting. When one considers the thoughts of Maulvi Mohammad Inayat Ahmad in his work *The Authenticated Miracles of Mohammad* it strikes one how a believer internalizes the importance of the Prophet. The classical belief reminds us that Muhammad's life is not marked by miracles. Rather the Qur'an is the only attestation to his election as prophet. On the contrary Ahmad has judged Muhammad's whole life as interspersed with miracles<sup>i</sup>. Annemarie Schimmel in her work *And Muhammad is his Messenger* and Qadi Iyad in his work *Muhammad messenger of Allah* have shown the lengths to which people will go to confer praise and gratitude on the person of the Prophet. The Qur'an is based on the esteem of Muhammad and is the Word of God (Kalam Allah) in verity.

Yet these examples remain only a few and do not tell the whole story. The preceding discussion has highlighted the umma's response to Muhammad's prophethood. From the time Muhammad had died there was a struggle for succession. Those who had aimed to take over the leadership from him as history showed, used the principles he had endowed to the umma to expand. The proliferation of Islamic institutions and propagation centers has shown how effective Muhammad's message has become.

The impact of Muhammad gives recognition to Muhammad as prophet, more importantly though, it enlarges ones understanding of the proclamation and audience reaction. It tells us about the effectiveness of the initial and subsequent proclamations. Effective communication is regarded as attained the moment the information flow is circular and the outcome is positive for the initiator. There is reciprocity between God and humanity when God sees them as hearkening to his voice and they value the perceived change. Thus Overholt's contention that proclamation and audience reaction are key elements to a prophetic is as close to the truth as one could get.

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End Notes on Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> In the authenticated miracles of Mohammad 252 miracles are recalled.



## Chapter 7

### An assessment, where Muhammad stands in this fragmentary world of competing beliefs

The author's effort here has been expended on locating Muhammad within the fraternity of world prophets. This journey has taken gone through the process of suggesting that Muhammad's standing in the umma has taken on grandiose proportions. This was of course necessary when measured against his achievements in his lifetime. The Peninsula was fraught with internecine strife. Its justice system was skewed in the direction of the rich and the strong. Hope for the weak were always forlorn. The author argues that an a priori hermeneutic which we bring to the material to a degree, determines what we make of the Prophet (Bennett: 1995: 222). Depending on the view you take or the position you hold of Muhammad you may not arrive at the same conclusions. Yet it is inevitable to notice that a quite sizeable chunk of the world's population has been drawn to what he had to say. Moreover they have invested their energy and time promoting this same message. A predisposition to see goodness or greatness in the Prophet will construe the evidence to confirm this, whilst a predisposition to see Muhammad as morally culpable, suffering from some form of psychological malady, or as a clever political leader, will find what it needs to justify these views (Bennett, 1995:222).

What is at stake here is how Muhammad compared to other prophets and not whether he was legitimate as a spokesperson for God. A person who holds views either side of the divide best answers such thought. It has been sufficiently demonstrated that Muhammad's prophetic vocation lies within the social sphere of the community. He emerged from the religio-political ruins of the Hijaz to purposely set forth to change what has been tormenting him as a deviant lifestyle.

The reinvention of the Hijaz needed a plan. This plan was based on the one profound principle - Tawhid. This principle meant that life was to be purposefully directed to God. Furthermore its intentions were not to dichotomise human experience into spiritual and political domains; it rather saw both as a single experience. It follows that the conditions of the Hijaz was a microcosm of the greater world, which was reflective of the total human need. Paul Ricoeur (1996:225) citing Max Weber remarked that there is social action when human behaviour is meaningful for individual agents and when behaviour of one is oriented towards that of the other. The notion of social relation adds to this double phenomenon of predictability in a system of meanings. It is at this level of meaningful, mutually oriented and socially integrated character of action that the ideological phenomenon appeared in all its originality. It is linked to the necessity for a social group to give itself an image of itself, to represent and to realise itself.

The presentation of tawhid of Allah is a very encompassing feature through which Muhammad's own intentionality is projected. Having emerged in the cauldron of the Hijaz he realized that his purpose was not solely to reform

his immediate umma alone but expand his territorial influence. Tawhid negated the duality of life, that is, a spiritual dimension apart from the secular. To him tawhid suggested or pointed out the all-powerful existence of God. For this reason he is not a limited prophet but a prophet sent to all humanity.

The veneration of Muhammad had been for the Western reader/scholar somewhat contentious. The question arises whether this description remains valid despite these objections? Earl Waugh (1995:42) calls Muhammad a paradigmatic figure. As such he concludes that the Prophet had set some norms that others could follow. A paradigmatic figure is sharply contrasted to the normal person. How else do you describe such a person then, seeing that Westerners have a problem? As a paradigmatic figure Muhammad cannot be located on any plane. The propensity to say that he suffered from sort of deficiency does not place into perspective his religio-temporal foundation. Should the reader insist on this it will be reductionistic, that is, taken the argument to a different level. From a hermeneutical perspective the brief is to understand Muhammad's prophethood.

The veneration of Muhammad may seem excessive, however the critical indication of his worth to the reader may be answered only by assessing what Muhammad means to the individual holding him in high regard. As a paradigmatic figure he is an index of meaning to the searching soul. In terms of Emile Durkheim's conceptualisation of the sacred and the profane, Muhammad took a strong stance on what he perceived sacred and profane to be. To him community values had to be collectively based on sacred values.



His fortitude on the absolute power of Allah was unwavering and hence strongly alluring.

The believer's value orientation (taqwa) is channelled through investment of time and effort in what is considered as desirable in social action and relations. Muhammad did say the primal instinct of humanity is to chart their lives toward God. Hence the comprehensive message, which he delivered, touches almost every aspect of life. It had a conditioning effect on the masses. The basis of operant conditioning or the learning process is that the message becomes reinforced through constant rewards. A person can pair the outcomes of good behaviour with the possible rewards. It's perhaps at this point where one can see the value of tawhid. The economic and spiritual landscapes overlapped. The community noticed a change in their fortunes because the economic and social conditions improved. The economic conditions of course were dependent on spiritual growth of the people. The transmitted message of Muhammad held value for those who were attracted to it. In fact the veneration of the Prophet according to George Homas' Exchange Theory suggests a person will in all likelihood be attracted to the message or to follow what Muhammad had conveyed because he/she has felt the rewards previously. Furthermore, the more often a person paired the outcomes of this message with positive outcomes the more likely it is that such a person will be attracted to it. For those followers of the Prophet who had first hand experience of the remarkable feats and accomplishments of the prophet and the intermittent rewards concomitant to it, were more likely to elicit repeated behaviours than regular rewards.



A further reason why Muhammad's prophethood has become so successful at least according to the theory of Homas results from the process of generalisation, which is the tendency to extend behaviour to similar circumstances. The situation in Mecca and Medina played itself out elsewhere in the Peninsula and surroundings. He brought the whole Peninsula to heel because he reasoned that the goodness and prosperity the Medinans and Meccans experienced had to be good for everyone else. In fact as a cosmic prophet he was sent not only to his own community but also to the world at large.

Discrimination (furqan) is the opposite of this generalisation; it teaches the person rather to look out for that which is good as well as for that which is bad (ghafla). The process is to acknowledge what is good by internalising or embracing it while renouncing that which is bad when confronted by it. Dhikr is the process of remembering what is good and acknowledging when confronted by the bad.

## 7.1 Value proposition

It is true that Muhammad's success was built on the value doctrine that was revealed to him. This rule states that the more valuable to a person the result of his action is, the more likely he is to perform the action again. Thus, it is likely that if the rewards each offers to the other are considered valuable then the actors are more likely to perform the desired behaviours than if the rewards are not valuable. This explains why people are willing to follow a role model in the absence of immediate tangible results. One must

remember that the judgement is based on the perfection of one's life in the present to experience paradise in the future. A person will choose an action, which is perceived by him to be of value at the time multiplied by the probability a result that is greater<sup>1</sup>.

The caliphs kept alive the purpose of God communicated to Muhammad; these were the ideals embedded within the Qur'an and practiced by him as vouchsafe by his Sunna. Those who assumed succession reaffirmed their commitment of those very principles by conquering more territories that could be incorporated into the umma. These successors not only conquered more territories, but also built impressive empires according this very word left behind. In this respect ideology serves as a function of the distance that separates the social memory from an inaugural event; this must nevertheless be repeated. Its role is not only to diffuse the conviction beyond the circle of founding fathers, so as to make it the creed of the entire group; its role is also to perpetuate the initial energy beyond the period of its founding. According to Hegel individuals come to realize that their ultimate fulfilment lies in the development and expansion of society as a whole. People thus come to understand things, to understanding themselves, to understanding their place in the larger scheme of things. This spirit has been kept alive by two factors; the one was the charisma of Muhammad and the other the aura of the Qur'an.

## 7.2 Motivation

Da'wa<sup>2</sup> means to flock around, to join, and to rally around the banner. Using the word ideology is perhaps not the right word in this subject. While from a superficial perspective ideology does allude to overall interest one gets to grips with. Ideology in the sense refers to a grid or code (Shari'a) for giving an overall view of life, not only to a group but also to history and, ultimately, of the world. The codified character of ideology is inherent in its justificatory function (batin character); its transformative capacity (zahir) is preserved only on condition that the ideas which it conveys become opinions, that thought loses rigour in order to enhance its social efficacy, as if ideology alone could mediate not only the memory of founding acts, but systems of thoughts themselves (Ritzer 2000:225). The mutation of a system of thought into a system of belief is an idealised image that a group represents its own existence, and it is this image, which, in turn, reinforces the interpretative code (Ritzer 2000:226). This is not entirely true in Islamic sense since da'wa says the believer gathers around the banner, the Qur'an. The thoughts herein form the basis of ideology or more specifically da'wa.

The reason why ideology is not specifically correct to use here suggests a doxic character, that is, the epistemological level is that of opinion. Ideology is therefore readily expressed in maxims or slogans. Muhammad did not have this in mind rather his vision was Islam as a way of life. Islamic life is comprehensively expressed through practise not opinion. Hence Islam, Iman, and Ihsan are an epistemology weaved into praxis.

It was pointed out several times that Muhammad was a messenger (rasul) and the defining distinction is that he brought a new message as well as a Book. This Book is the charter of life. The Qur'an states unequivocally that Muhammad's experience of the Holy One was about two bows lengths in front of him. From the following ayats, Surah 97:97 and Surah 26:193 a similar view is expressed; to conclude otherwise is to judge Muhammad from ones own position. It is true that salvation history has a different outcome from a Biblical perspective but this hardly at issue here or from their works since Muhammad's claim to prophethood is met by his insistence of a valid numinous experience.

Muhammad fulfilled the role of cosmic prophet for several reasons; he was foreordained to lead humanity; his prophethood was again verified by several experiences over twenty-three years of revelatory visitations by various angels; the Night Journey placed him in the very presence of God.

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#### End Notes on Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup> Based on Homan's theory see Ritzer, George. Sociological Theory.

<sup>2</sup> According to both Hans Wehr and al Mawrid, S.v. da'wa



## Glossary

A. Adab - correct behaviour inward  
an outward

'Afw - pardoning

al-akhira- next world

a'mal -action

ansars- helpers

B. Bait'Ullah- house of Allah

Batin-inward

D. Dasein - being there or there  
being

Dhat- essence

Din- religion

F. Fatrat al wahy-lapse of revelation

fi'l -actions

Fitra - natural behaviour, innate  
dispositions

G. Ghafla- heedlessness

Ghusl-major purification

Goy- nation

H. hilm- forbearance, which is a  
state of dignified bearing and  
constancy despite provocation

Hubb- love

I. Ilah falsity or pagan god

Ihtimal-longsuffering, self  
restraint and restraint and  
resignation in the face of pain  
and injury

Ikhlas- sincerity, harmonious  
goals in mind

Injil- the Gospel that was given  
to Jesus

Inshiqaq al qamar-splitting the  
moon

Iqab-punishment

'Ibada- service, worship

Islam- submission

J. Jahuliyya-time of ignorance

K. Karam- -generosity

Khalifah-viceregent

Kalam Allah-m Word of God

Khalilu'llah- friends of Allah

Khalima- word or sentence

Khatam an nubwwa- the seal of  
the prophets

Kufr- ingratitude

M. Muhajirun-immigrant

Mu'jizat-miracles

Mu'min-faithful, believer

Mushaf-revelation to a prophet

N. Nafs-soul or self

Nabi-prophet

Nisyan- forgetfulness

Nur- light

Q. Qadar- measuring out

Qaul- words

Qiyama-resurrection

R. Rahmatun li'l-amin- mercy for  
the universe

Rak'a- cycles in prayer

Rasul-prophet

Risalat- prophecy

Ruh-wind, spirit

S. Sahaba- His trusted companions

Salih- derived from the root that  
means to be sound, wholesome,  
right, proper, good

Sirat- path

Subhanallah- Glory be to God

Shirk-polytheism

T. Tafsir-exegesis

Tanzih- to literally declare something pure and free of something else; incomparability

Taqrir- silent approval of certain fact

Taqwah- remembrance of God

Tawaf- circumambulating

Tashbih- similarity to God

Tawrat-the Pentateuch given to Moses

Thawab-reward

U. Umra-visitation

Ummi- illiterate, or nation

W. Wudu-minor purification

Y. Yawm- al qiyamah-Day of Resurrection

Z. Zahir- Outward manifest

Zabur-the Psalms given as inspiration to David

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