

Mortality of Prophets

Christmas and Prophet Muhammad's birthday come together in December 2015

by Dr Zahid Aziz

- This year, 2015, there is almost a conjunction of Christmas and the birthday of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him).
- Interestingly, neither of these great personalities ever asked their followers to celebrate their birthdays.
- In case of Islam, no such celebration of the birth of the Holy Prophet is found in its first six centuries. Then some people in the Middle East started observing it.
- In the Indian subcontinent the practice of commemorating his birthday only began as recently as a century ago, around 1910.
- It was in fact the pioneers of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement who held the first such meeting in Lahore in April 1908 to mark the Holy Prophet's birthday. At this public meeting, in Ahmadiyya Buildings, there were speeches and poems about the Holy Prophet and his life. Non-Muslims were also present in the audience.
- A famous Muslim newspaper, *Watan*, wrote about this occasion as follows:

“Just as there was great regret that there were no arrangements in Lahore for holding this great occasion of remembrance, there was equal pleasure that on 14th April, corresponding to 12th *Rabi-ul-awwal* 1326 A.H., on behalf of the Anjuman-i Ahmadiyya Lahore a magnificent meeting was organised by Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, lawyer, High Court. Capable speakers delighted the audience by telling them about the life of the Holy Prophet and his excellent and praise-worthy qualities. It is hoped that in future many people in Lahore will organise events for such a sacred remembrance.”
- Other Muslims then took it up and expanded it to an elaborate “Eid” function, celebrated with much fanfare, including activities that are in no way a part of Islam, nor do they serve any useful purpose for Islam. There now seems to be an eleven-day preamble leading up to the 12th day of the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal.
- What the Lahore Ahmadiyya pioneers started was a simple meeting with speeches and poems to inform the public about the Holy Prophet's life, mission and qualities, and to refute allegations against him. It was not an “Eid” festival as it has now become.
- Islam's great contribution to religion is to show that all prophets were mortal human beings. Any person who has a birthday was born as a human being, and born as a helpless baby.

MORTALITY OF PROPHETS

- Both Jesus and the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and other prophets, were born exactly like other human beings. As babies they depended on other human beings to feed and wean them. Throughout their lives they had to eat and drink and satisfy other physical needs, like every other human being. They all completed their lives and their physical bodies went to dust, like every other human being.
- The Quran says that all prophets had mortal needs:
 - “And We did not send before you (O Prophet Muhammad) any messengers but they surely ate food and went about in the markets.” (25:20)
 - “We did not give them (i.e., prophets) bodies not eating food, nor did they live forever.” (21:8)
 - “And certainly We sent messengers before you (O Prophet Muhammad) and appointed for them wives and children.” (13:38)
- All prophets declared to their people about themselves:
 - “We are nothing but mortals like yourselves, but Allah bestows favours (i.e., message of guidance) on whom He pleases of His servants.” (14:11).
- The Prophet Muhammad declared the same:
 - “I am only a mortal like you — it is revealed to me that your God is one God.” (18:110 and 41:6)
 - “Am I anything but a mortal messenger?” (17:93)
- Their opponents raised this as an objection against them, that they were only mortals. To their minds, a mortal like them could not be a messenger of God:
 - “They said: You are only mortals like ourselves, nor has the Beneficent revealed anything — you only lie.” (36:15).
 - “...their messengers came to them with clear arguments, but they said: Shall mortals guide us?” (64:6)
 - “And the chiefs of his (Noah’s) people who disbelieved ... said: He is only a mortal like you, eating what you eat and drinking what you drink.” (23:33)
 - “Their messengers came to them with clear arguments, but ... They said: You are nothing but mortals like us; you wish to turn us away from what our fathers used to worship” (14:9–10)
 - “...they say: Has Allah raised up a mortal to be a messenger?” (17:94)
 - “And they say (about Prophet Muhammad): What a Messenger is this? He eats food and goes about in the markets.” (25:7)

- Like prophets before them, both Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad were mortals who would die:

“The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger — messengers had indeed passed away before him. And his mother was a truthful woman. They both used to eat food.” (5:75)

“And Muhammad is but a messenger — messengers have already passed away before him. If then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels?” (3:144)

- The prophets and messengers of God were mortal human beings because their mission was to act as models and examples for others. They came to show what human beings can achieve. About the Prophet Muhammad, the Quran tells Muslims:

“Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much.” (33:21)

He was a husband, father, worker, teacher, soldier and general, ruler, lawmaker and judge, and had all kinds of social, business and official dealings with both ordinary people and their leaders. He forgave his persecuting enemies after overcoming them, he overlooked the faults of his followers even if he had suffered as a result, and he punished tyrants for wrongs they had inflicted on innocent persons. Hence he was an excellent exemplar and a perfect model in all walks of life, and he not only gave practical rules of guidance, but gave by his life a practical illustration of all those rules.

How the Holy Prophet Muhammad was an “excellent exemplar” is mentioned in the Quran in the following verse, where God says to the Holy Prophet:

“And surely you have sublime morals.” (68:4)

The word for “sublime” here is *‘azīm*, which also means “very great”. The exalted height of his moral values and conduct made him an exemplar for his followers.

- The Quran also requires Muslims to follow the examples of other prophets, who appeared before the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and their immediate loyal followers. Regarding Abraham and his followers of his time, the Quran says:

“Certainly there is for you in them a good example, for him who hopes for Allah and the Last Day.” (60:6)

For preaching the message of truth and adhering to it under great difficulties, the Quran asks Muslims to follow the example of Jesus and his disciples:

“O you who believe, be helpers (in the cause) of Allah, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples: Who are my helpers in the cause of Allah? The disciples said: We are helpers (in the cause) of Allah.” (61:14)

- Both Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad, instead of asking their followers to celebrate their birthdays, gave them the same basic commandments to follow. Jesus was asked: “Which is the first commandment of all?” He replied:

“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark, 12:29–31).

In another place, giving the same answer, Jesus added: “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the (teachings of the) Prophets.” (Matthew, 22:40)

The Quran says the same in these words:

“And they say: None shall enter the Garden (of heaven) except he who is a Jew, or the Christians. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful. No, *whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good (to others)*, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve.” (2:111–112)

Here the Quran rejects the idea that merely by calling oneself a Jew or Christian, or anything else, entry into heaven is guaranteed to you. Submitting “entirely” (or your whole self) to God has the same meaning as what Jesus said about loving God “with all your heart”, etc., and being a “doer of good to others” is the same as loving your neighbour as you love yourself.

- The Quran also says:

“It is not for a mortal that Allah should give him the Book and the (authority of) judgment and the (rank of) prophethood, then he should tell people: Be my servants besides Allah’s; but (he would say): Be worshippers of the Lord because you teach the Book and because you study (it); nor would he command you to take the angels and the prophets for lords. Would he command you to disbelieve after you submit?” (3:79–80)

As every prophet was a mortal, no prophet taught his followers to worship him in addition to worshipping God, nor could any prophet teach this to his followers. Both Jesus and the Holy Prophet Muhammad came to make people into worshippers of the One God and to do good to everyone around them.

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