

MUHAMMAD'S EXCEPTIONAL INFLUENCE
ON HUMANITY

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In his book The 100, Hart wrote that while many billions of people have lived on the earth, only around 20,000 or so have merited being listed in biographical dictionaries. Only 100 of those individuals were profiled in Hart's book. His placement of Muhammad as the first entry in the book—as the most influential person in history—was warranted. While circumstances of the times were contributing factors to Muhammad's influence, those factors are the foundation upon which he rose. It was the man himself who elevated to the position of having such lasting influence on humanity. By understanding the expectations of the society at the time preceding Muhammad, the qualities of Muhammad himself, and the way that Muhammad was viewed after his death, it becomes clear that he was instrumental in the actions and events that led to his extraordinary acknowledgement in both the religious and secular realms.

Expectations of the Arab Society

The cultural tradition of prophets in Arabian culture from Adam to Muhammad facilitated the willingness of the Arab people to appreciate an individual like Muhammad. Hourani wrote about the theosophical beliefs of Ibn 'Arabi (1165 – 1240), one of which was the notion that all humans “could be regarded as perfect manifestations of God” (177). He meant that greatness could be true for any individual who strove for spiritual awareness, and his belief is reflected in the axiom, “He who knows himself, knows his Lord” (Hourani 178). But Ibn 'Arabi described another type, the Perfect Man, and this type was one who was more than just spiritually aware. He was the actual embodiment of the archetype of spiritual enlightenment. Ibn 'Arabi referred to this archetype as the “Light of Muhammad” (Hourani, 177). Ibn 'Arabi

believed that no one else could represent that archetype as completely as Muhammad. Since Muhammad was the prophet who introduced the Koran to mankind and subsequently unified the Arab world, he is deserving of such singular acknowledgement.

Respecting leaders was a part of the Arab culture. Lawrence wrote that the Arabs were more likely to believe in persons rather than in institutions (25). They had very fragmented institutions in the form of tribal societies. Each clan was represented by a sheik, a leader of heritage. The sheik was not dictatorial, but rather a representative of and symbolic authoritative figure for the clan. Since the Arabs were predominantly democratic in organization, no one person could assume total control. It would take a unique individual who could unite them all and be embraced by all of the numerous clans throughout the Arabian peninsula and help them cease their history of inter-clan conflicts. Once Muhammad came with his prophecy, it was easy for them to finally accept the guidance of a single man and unite as a singular group with a spiritual commonality; this spiritual unification helped quell their future infighting.

Right before Muhammad's mission, some Arabs had started to feel unfulfilled in their polytheistic beliefs and began to be more open to the basic concept of monotheism which had already been long-established in Jewish and Christian traditions. After writing about changing religious beliefs and tension in the political realm, Hitti wrote, "The stage was set, the moment was psychological, for the rise of a great religious and national leader" (108). It will be fruitful to consider the qualities of such a great leader and recognize that Muhammad did indeed possess them.

Qualities of Greatness

No one can argue that it was certainly a combination of *both* the man and the circumstances that allowed Muhammad to exert such influence on mankind. But anyone

claiming that it was the circumstances that *made* the man are not properly weighing the value of the qualities of character that instill in some individuals the burning passion for exemplary expression of greatness.

Inspiration

Ibn Khaldûn included a chapter in his book The Muqaddimah regarding God's choosing of a select few individuals to express eternal spiritual truths to mankind. He described that the way to recognize these individuals is that they often seem introspective, even if physically surrounded by the company of others (70). In their state of inspiration, they quiet themselves and allow the essence of spirit to dominate their consciousness. When they are in this detached state, they can then be fully able to allow expression of spiritual principles. That expression may come forth orally, with either the subject or witnesses transcribing the message.

Hourani offered a similar description of enlightenment when an individual's mental images align with those of archetypal images (178). He argued that during such a mental session the individual ceases to be consciously aware of their own personality. He also mentioned that the individual develops a mindset through which God is seen in all of life.

Character

According to Ibn Khaldûn, the second way to recognize a spiritually superior individual was by witnessing the way they conducted themselves and by observing their character. Ibn Khaldûn wrote that these individuals "seek to propagate religion and divine worship by means of prayer, almsgiving, and chastity" (71). By observing how an individual acts, it can be ascertained if they act as they instruct. Muhammad was known to be generous in nature, and believed in helping those in need. During his lifetime, those who were curious about Muhammad's prophecy would often ask him what they were required to do. They would be told that they must live in a

manner consistent with the grace of God. Muhammad conducted himself so, and thereby was a polestar of excellence for others.

Leadership

The third way that Ibn Khaldûn described spiritual greatness was by the way the individual was held in the esteem of the people (71). By virtue of the fact of Muhammad's behavior and qualities of leadership, and by the example he set for others, the people of many of the Arabian communities increased their respect for and trust in him. As a culture, they had been ready for someone like Muhammad, and when he came and conducted himself at such a high standard, he became venerated by the people. They trusted him, valued the prophecy he brought forth, and were eager to follow his leadership.

Muhammad not only received the prophecy, he subsequently revealed it by actively speaking and teaching to others. Because he was initially ridiculed in his home town of Mecca, he moved to Medina where he was welcomed as a leader. While in Medina, he became more politically oriented. His leadership became fully realized when he led a group of some 300 Muslims to defeat a considerably larger group of Meccans. The importance of this first military victory was that Islam became more than a religion—it became a state (Hitti 117). Muhammad necessarily performed functions beyond those of a religious leader and prophet. He also assumed the roles of “lawgiver, ... chief judge, commander of the army, and civil head of state” (Hitti 139). His wide range of roles broadened his appeal to the Arab people.

Metaphysical Signs

According to Ibn Khaldûn, the fourth way to recognize a spiritually gifted individual was in the miracles they performed (71). Ibn Khaldûn discussed that the difference between saints and prophets was in the magnitude of wonders they could effectuate. Saints were typically of a

lower order of divine grace, at least as far as miracles went, but not all saints could perform miracles, nor were all saints prophets (Hourani 177). In contrast to saints, prophets not only reflected divine grace but were also able to perform miracles. Saints were spiritually superior humans, but prophets were superior still in their decided ability to manifest the miraculous. The value placed in miracles was based on the belief that only the most enlightened individuals could “speak” for God by manifesting as God did (i.e., without limits).

While Muhammad’s only miracle was the transcription of the writings that made up the Koran, that miracle was deemed of the absolute highest caliber, especially because the prophecy and the miracle were one and the same. The miracles of previous prophets drew warranted attention to their respective prophecies. With Muhammad, his miracle *was* his prophecy. It was seen as a miracle because it was intuitively pure, instructive, and complete, and it had come through one man. In the Koran are not just spiritual directions, but also proscriptions for how to handle commerce, legal and domestic issues. It was a prophecy of inestimable high value not only for the Arab culture in particular, but for mankind in general.

Retrospection

The way history views Muhammad indicates the immense influence he had on humanity. In the years after Muhammad’s death in 632, Arabian armies began to course through Syria and Mesopotamia. “Islam exploded upon the world with the sudden force of a whirlwind” (The March of Islam 19). Within approximately 10 years, their conquests included Egypt and Persia. The spread of the Islamic religion was concomitant with the spread of the Islamic state.

In the centuries before Muhammad, bonds among Arabs were based on kinship, and manifested in groupings of clans and families. But after Muhammad, the primary bond was one of religious faith (Hitti 120, 121). Even today, the bond of the common faith of Islam for

Muslims is a strong one worldwide, regardless of race or nationality.

Summary

At any given moment in history, there are in play an almost inconceivable number of variables and circumstances and combinations of factors. The stage is *always* ready for someone to rise to the top, but few do. It takes an individual with exceptional qualities who can make it to the top in any field or endeavor, especially a field in which great historical influence may be effectuated. Muhammad was just such a man. He was powerfully successful in both the religious and secular domains. Hitti was accurate when he wrote that the people were ready for a great leader. But only one did arise, and that man was Muhammad.

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