

The essence of the notion of resistance in the way of God is a matter of distinguishing through the miracle of the universe & the Quranic text, the presence of the One God, and of resisting the lies & terror of those who are moved only by a desire to protect their own interests & power. As the aggression continued, Muhammad (p) stayed aloof. He was patient & he endured, persevered & never despaired of God & His will.

The Arab tribes were not merely opposing a man & his message. For them, Muhammad's Revelations would mean a radical revolution in the order of their world. By calling for the recognition of One God, for the rejection of idols, for Life after life, for ethics & justice, Muhammad was initiating an outright revolution in mental attitudes as much as in society itself.

All of human experience reminds us of our fragility & of our need for God. This teaching is present in the chapter, "The Cave". The Prophet (p) recommended that every Muslim recite this in its entirety every Friday so as to remind themselves that which they must **not** forget: forget themselves or forget Him. If we forget then we stagger through life yapped at by our reason, pulled & shoved by our appetites, whispered to by fears, beckoned by hopes. Small wonder then that what we crave most is self-forgetting.

The phrase insha-Allah, "if God so wills", expresses the awareness of our limits, the feeling of humility when we act knowing that beyond what we can do or say, God alone has the power to make things happen. **This is not to be interpreted as a fatalistic message:** it is not that we should not act but that we should never stop acting while being aware of the real limits of human power. Whatever adversity we face, our strength and freedom on earth comes from our constant awareness of our dependence on the Creator.

**The Prophet (p) was a model of equity towards those who did not share his faith.** He applied the principles of honesty/justice that Islam taught him to whomever he dealt with, whether they were Muslims or non-Muslims. He was also understanding to those who, under pressure from their families, left Islam. The attitude of respect for everyone's freedom to think & act was a constant throughout the Prophet's life.

The message of Islam is **not a closed system of values which is at variance or in conflict with other such systems** but **relies on a set of**

**universal principles that can coincide with the fundamentals of other religious traditions.** Far from building an allegiance to Islam that is exclusive, Muhammad strove to develop the Muslim's conscience through adherence to principles that transcended all belief systems.

Muhammad (p) was **neither fatalistic nor reckless.** His trust in God was absolute but this by no means implied that he should forget to show responsibility and foresight in his choices in the human world. He planned the emigration to Medina for nearly two years & left nothing to chance, clarifying the meaning of *at-tawakkul ala Allah* which means reliance on God & trusting oneself to God. As Muslims, we are expected to exercise the intellectual, spiritual, and psychological powers which have been granted to us while remembering that **beyond what is humanly possible, there is God.**

When Muhammad (p) emigrated, he made sure to settle all his affairs in Mecca. He refused gifts, settled his debts and returned all deposits he held for others. While owing nothing to anyone, he was aware that he owed everything to Allah, that his indebtedness and obligation to Him were infinite. Hijrah (moving from Mecca to Madina) is this essential teaching that is at the heart of the Prophet's experience: a trust in God that entails independence from people as well as the humble recognition of absolute dependence on God.

**It is useful to note that Muhammad's guide out of Mecca was a non-Muslim Bedouin for throughout his life the Prophet (p) surrounded himself with people who might not share his faith but who were known to him for their moral qualities & their human abilities.**

During the hijrah, Muhammad (p) stopped at Quba & the Ranuna valley before reaching Medina. He started the construction of mosques at all three places thus pointing to the importance and the centrality of the mosque in the relation to God, to space, and to human communities. The Prophet (p) used to say: "The whole earth is a masjid, a mosque." His act of building the three mosques teaches us that whatever the exile or journey, whatever the movement or departure, we must never lose sight of meaning & direction. Mosques represent meaning, direction & settlement. They show that the believing conscience is "at home" because a place of worship has been provided.

**At the first stop at Quba on the journey to Medina, Muhammad (p) told his followers that they were to spread peace, feed the hungry, honour their kinship ties and to pray.** He was, thus, reminding the first Muslims of the ethical basis of the Muslim

presence. The quest for peace, including inner peace, is the path the believer must follow if he is to spread peace in the world and serve the poorest people.

On arriving in Medina, the Prophet (p) drew up a mutual agreement with the Jews who lived in the oasis. It was based on justice, equality, and the equal dignity of the signatories. Throughout Muhammad's life, the recognition of such contract-based relationships was a constant. A contract is a framework that asserts the autonomy and recognition of the parties and is central to Islam whether it is a marriage contract or social or commercial contracts, and Muslims are required to stand by the terms of their contracts.

When he settled in Medina, Muhammad (p) did not require anyone to convert to Islam and he made it clear that he wanted relations with the new society to be egalitarian and respectful. Even when relationships with the Jews deteriorated, these did not affect the principles underlying the relationship between Muslims and Jews. This meant that **the Muslim conscience should not yield to blinding passions & hatred.** "O you who believe! Stand firmly with God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not hatred of others to you make you depart from justice."

The Prophet (p) was perfectly balanced in his virtues & good moral qualities. He was courageous where to show courage was necessary, while he was mild, forgiving & humble. Humility makes great men **twice honourable.** He was dignified & gracious. His generosity was world famous. *Was there anyone more generous than him?* He was thrifty & condemned extravagance. Virtues & good qualities existed in him in a well-balanced combination.

Muhammad's (p) Companions were devoted to him. They sacrificed for him their lives & properties. Brought up among a primitive people, devoid of any positive notions of social life & administration, without a Scripture & immersed in the darkness of an uncivilized era, in a very short period, **they became in the footsteps of their exalted leader, the Prophet Muhammad (p),** the just rulers of the most civilized socially & politically advanced peoples & states. They ruled the world from east to west in an admired fashion.

Muhammad kept a keen distinction between situations & the people involved in them. He always showed the utmost respect for individuals & their beliefs. When he stood up while a funeral procession went past, his Companions informed him that it was only a Jew's funeral. His reply was, "**Was this not a human soul?**" This respect & tolerance is at the **heart** of the Prophet's message.

# In the Footsteps of the Prophet

The Prophet (p) prayed, meditated, transformed himself, and **transformed the world.** Guided by God, he offered the best in his being because such was the meaning of the command to "promote good & prevent evil." His life was the embodiment of this teaching. The Prophet's experience unites the call of faith, trial among people, humility, and the quest for peace with God. He came to humanity with a message of faith, hope & morality, in which God reminds all people of His presence, His requirements, and of the final Day of Return & Encounter. Muhammad's life journey offered at every stage an existence devoted to the worship of God. The human heart cannot help but commune with such a being as he follows the path to freedom: **freedom not only to think & act, for which Muhammad fought with dignity, but also the freedom of a being who had liberated himself from attachment to superficial emotions, destructive passions, or alienating dependence.** He was loved & respected because his spirituality enabled him to transcend his ego, to give humbly of himself, and, in turn, to love without bondage. He stated: "The best among you is the best toward people." He submitted & he was free in the peace of the divine & he was free from the illusions of the human. Wherever people rise up in protest against dictators remember the Gift that God gave to Muhammad (p): The Quranic text liberates the real strength in people, that strength which has the power to resist & overcome all persecutions in this world, because it **calls for the Life beyond the illusions of this life.**

**THE PROPHET (P) TAUGHT US THE DIFFICULT ASSOCIATION THAT TRUST IN GOD CAN BE ALLIED WITH PAIN. THE EXPERIENCE OF PHYSICAL/MORAL SUFFERING MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO REACH THE STATE OF FAITH WHERE ONE ACCEPTS ADVERSITY & DOUBTS ONESELF WITHOUT EVER DOUBTING GOD.**

The word Islam is often given the simplistic, narrow & linear translation of submission. It actually comprises a two-fold meaning of: “wholehearted self-giving” & “peace.” A Muslim is someone who attains God’s peace through the wholehearted gift of themselves to God. One whose conscience is their compass. A life full of turns, achievements, disappointments, surprises & crises...such as Muhammad’s. A life full of landmarks. His life expressed the manifested & experienced essence of Islam’s message. From time to time there appear on the face of the earth men of rare & consummate excellence, who dazzle us by their virtue, and whose outstanding qualities shed a stupendous light...such as Muhammad (p).

From an early age, Muhammad (p) lived in the Arabian desert & shared the nomadic life of the Bedouins in what was a difficult & barren terrain. The distant horizons would have brought to mind the fragility of human life, and would have been conducive to contemplation & solitude. Facing this barren landscape could be seen as Muhammad’s (p) first trial, his first ordination into the life of prophethood. When his mother Aminah died when he was six, making him an orphan, this, along with the family’s poverty, gave him the vulnerability & humility which were to become evident as he grew older. He always felt close to the most destitute, and he could never forsake the underprivileged during his prophetic mission because he never forgot the earliest lessons he learned in the desert.

We learn, therefore, that we must never forget our past, our origins, and our trials, and that we are to turn our experiences, even if negative, into a positive teaching for ourselves & for others. Like Muhammad’s was for him, our past should be a school from which to draw lessons for life.

As Muhammad (p) grew up among the Bedouins, he learnt their rich oral tradition. He developed his own mastery of the spoken language, a mastery which he used to convey deep & universal teachings. He also had a fine appreciation for the musicality of speech. Poetry that expressed beauty, conveyed the depths of emotions & spirituality, and highlighted the grace of God was part of his natural universe. He used that art, that spirituality of speech to express the depths of the self in the hope of rising naturally towards God.

The desert provides the human gaze with the horizon of the infinite which is linked to fleetingness & vulnerability. More than any other space, it opens the mind to observation, meditation & initiation into meaning. That desert landscape helped the Prophet (p) form a relationship with nature that remained with him throughout his mission. It is easy to conclude that an imperative of deep faith is living close to nature, and in observing, understanding & respecting it. Nature is the primary guide & the intimate companion of faith. Closeness to nature fosters a relationship to the Divine based on contemplation.

In the desert & in his youth, Muhammad (p) was a shepherd & through both the landscape and his work, he learned solitude, patience, contemplation and watchfulness, all qualities that were to help him in later life and in his mission.

Muhammad (p) grew up to become a trader, and had a reputation for honesty & efficiency. When he was just twenty he had already earned the title of *as-Sadiq al-Amin*, “the truthful, the trustworthy.” It was at this time that he caught the eye of Khadijah, a wealthy trader & widow. She & Muhammad (p) married and by the time he was thirty-five, he had become politically & financially prominent. But he was not interested in matters of public affairs. He started to make retreats to one of the caves near Mecca, retreats that lasted up to a month at a time. He was seeking peace & meaning in his life. He had never taken part in idol worship, had not shared in the beliefs of the Arab tribes, and had remained aloof from superstition & prejudice. He was dissatisfied with the answers to life’s questions that were offered by those around him. He sought truth through a deep introspection. *Are you seeking truth?*

In the cave, he meditated on the meaning of

life. It was a spiritual quest that led naturally to the encounter with the One God. At the age of forty, the first cycle of his life came to an end. Alone in his cave, Muhammad (p) received the first of the Revelations. The first Revelation turned the Prophet’s attention towards knowledge. Though he could neither read nor write, he was called on to read “*In the Name of your Lord*”, which drew an immediate link between faith in God & knowledge. The dignity of humankind, conferred to him through knowledge, cannot be devoid of the humility of reason which, aware of its own limitations, recognizes the necessity of faith. Between God & Man, there is a faith that relies & feeds on the knowledge that is granted to us by the Creator in order that we can answer His call & turn to Him.

When after the first Revelations, there was a period of silence, this created great doubt in Muhammad’s (p) mind. He doubted himself, his capacities & his power but this *trial of silence* was part of the shaping of the Messenger’s spiritual quest. While Revelation taught him the need for humility, God’s silence taught it to him practically. The silence fostered the need for Him in His Messenger’s heart.

Converts came slowly to Islam & Muhammad (p) decided to give a solid education to a small group, *giving priority to quality over quantity*. He showed a preference for the nature of the hearts & minds he addressed rather than their number.

The first years of the Revelation shaped the Quranic message around four main axes: the Oneness of God, the status of the Quran, prayer, and life after death. The message is meant not to appease doubts & fears but to impress on believers that life has meaning. Being *with* God and being *for* God involves doing what is right & forbidding what is wrong. It means changing one’s behavior and deciding to be part of a community that invites to itself all that is good. Islam, like other monotheistic religions, insists on a return to God, to his Judgment, and in the belief of Heaven & Hell. It is the spiritual experience that determines the meaning of life & links it to the requirement that we behave morally. Beyond the hope for His paradise, the pinnacle of the relationship with God is primarily to love Him & to aspire to contemplating His face for eternity.

However, when Muhammad (p) made his message public, he endangered the powers of the tribal

leaders. They tried to get him to stop spreading his message since it attacked their gods & their ancestral beliefs. They tried to bribe the Prophet (p) with goods, money & power. He refused all of it. He declared that he would trust in God & be patient as to the consequences of this decision. Insults, rejection & ill treatment became the rule for the believers. Muhammad (p) began to look for a solution to alleviate their trials & suffering. He approached a head clansman, Walid, to try & convince him of the truth of his message. He thought that if he could convince Walid, that the clansman would intercede on their behalf & bring an end to their persecution. While Muhammad (p) was putting his case to Walid, a poor & old blind man approached the Prophet (p) & asked him to recite verses from the Quran. Muhammad (p) became irritated with the old man who was preventing him from presenting his case. The chief, full of contempt, refused to hear Muhammad’s case. A chapter was revealed to the Prophet (p) as a result of this incident. It teaches all Muslims that we must never turn away from a human being even though they might be poor, old & blind. *Many “Muslims” suck up to the rich!*

Muhammad (p) is a true model for Muslims not only because of his *excellent qualities* but also because of the *weaknesses* in his humanity. Through this incident where the Prophet (p) showed weakness of character, we learn that we must never let power, or social, economic or political interests turn us away from other human beings, from the attention they deserve & the respect they are entitled to. This principle of faith is never to be compromised by any Muslim.

When the tribal chiefs encouraged others to mock Muhammad (p), the Prophet stood his ground. He used the Quran to answer, to protect himself & to resist. The text became his spiritual & intellectual weapon against his aggressors, became the weapon in his jihad, a word that means: “making an effort” & “resisting”. To those who sneered & attacked him, to those who wanted miracles & proofs, Muhammad (p) answered with the weapon & the shield of the Quran.

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