

## Seerah is the answer: Identity – King or Vicegerent?

The biography and the history of Muhammad ﷺ shows the rise of a people who were the least powerful, despised and oppressed, rose to become the most powerful, influential role models of their time in one generation.

Makkah was a pilot project, proof of concept which if we apply and globalize, will yield the same results. That is what pilot projects are for.

Makkan society in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when Muhammad ﷺ was born, grew up and announced his Messengership of Allah ﷻ was almost an exact replica of our globalized world and culture today. The differences lie only in scale. Makkah was a crucible to prove a point. Today our world is the canvas to paint the picture. More on that in a minute.

In the middle of this milieu emerged Muhammad ﷺ. He was from their own; from the elite of the Makkan social class. Not only was he from Quraysh but from Banu Hashim and Banu Abdul Muttalib; the keepers of the keys to the Sanctuary (Ka'aba), the 'owners' of Zamzam, the well which his grandfather Abdul Muttalib had discovered, and the family who watered and fed the pilgrims. But his branch of the family was not wealthy. He was born an orphan; his father having died before his birth. His mother passed away when he was about five or six, but he had the tribal family behind him. They knew him, they knew his family; he was family. They were delighted at his birth. Abu Lahb, his father's brother, was so happy that he freed the slave who brought him the news of his birth and gave her two gold bangles as a gift. They watched him grow to maturity and developed such a high level of respect for him, thanks to his truthfulness and good character that they named him As-Sadiq ul Ameen (The Truthful and Trustworthy). Among Arabs, the worst sin was not murder or anything else; it was lying. This was because in a society where reading and writing were not common and were in the realm of priests and scribes, most dealings were all based on a man's word and a man whose word was not reliable was shunned by everyone. In this context, to be called, As-Sadiq ul Ameen was the highest accolade possible.

But it was this same Muhammad ﷺ, who when he started to preach Islam was opposed, maligned, threatened, assaulted, boycotted and almost assassinated. In one instant he went from being the most beloved and popular man to being the most

hated and maligned. His followers were tortured, killed, dispossessed and banished. This persecution never let up. It went on for thirteen years until eventually he migrated to Yathrib, an oasis village about four hundred and fifty kilometers north of Makkah. Big question is why this stark difference in treatment before and after the message? Most idol worshiping people have little problem with another god, or with any twist or turn to the god story. So what was so difficult for the Quraysh to accept when it came to Muhammad ﷺ's message of Islam?

The answer lies in the nature of Islam's message. Islam is not a message about theology or philosophy alone. It is a message about an entire system of life based on that theology in the same pack. That is why Islam is equally a practice, applicable to all spheres of life. If one doesn't apply its practice, he or she cannot be a Muslim. Islam is about belief coupled with action, not about race or mere intellectual understanding or academic interest.

Nobody understood this as well as the Quraysh. I dare say that the Quraysh understood what Islam meant and how it would change their lives better than many modern-day Muslims. That is why those who opposed it did so vehemently and those who followed it were so true to it. Both knew that Islam meant a total change of life choices, ideas of right and wrong, good and bad. They understood that their lives after Islam would have no resemblance to their lives before it. They knew it meant a complete change of social order and a revamp of leadership where ultimate authority would rest with Allah ﷻ and be exercised through His messenger Muhammad ﷺ. The Quraysh were used to living and acting as they wished. Islam declared that they and everyone was accountable and answerable to Allah ﷻ from whom nothing was hidden and to whom is our return. They knew that with Islam the powerless would have power, all people would have dignity, slavery would become untenable, women would gain influence, autonomy and authority. That is why the first followers of Muhammad ﷺ were slaves, women and the poor. Islam promised them freedom from slavery to people by accepting Allah ﷻ as their Master. Freedom is a powerful motivator.

Everything begins with a change in mindset.

That is what Rasoolullah ﷺ did. He changed the mindset of his people from, 'Life is of this world' to 'Life is of the Aakhira.' People still did the same things when it came to their remunerative activity, but they did it for a different reason. They used to buy and sell, farm and pasture, build and sew and weave for themselves and their families. Now they started to do it for Allah ﷻ. This meant that the way they earned and what they spent it on both had to answer the question, 'Does this please Allah ﷻ?' If it pleased Allah ﷻ they did it, if not, they desisted and changed. We take the opposite stance today. If our activity displeases Allah ﷻ but we either like it or think it is beneficial, we persist with it. How a Muslim can believe that something that displeases Allah ﷻ can be beneficial is beyond me. Interest-based banking, which Allah ﷻ outlawed and declared war against those who deal in it? Why is it so common among Muslims and legal in every Muslim country? It is indicative of the fact that we have not made the critical switch in our minds of putting Allah ﷻ first. Making Allah ﷻ No. 1 means that everyone and everything else is No. 2 or less. Our actions will be measured by this criterion when we meet Allah ﷻ.

In my study of the Seerah, I have identified eight elements ('switches') that are the fundamentals of success behind Rasoolullah ﷺ's strategy. If we can learn and apply them in our lives individually and collectively then Insha'Allah we can bring about the same change today that he brought in his time.

These eight are:

1. **Identity:** Move from King (It is all mine) to Vicegerent (I am a Trustee)
2. **Dealings:** Move from different strokes for different folks to Justice for all
3. **Culture:** Move from Discrimination to Equality
4. **Worldview:** Move from Charity is a sacrifice to Charity is and investment
5. **Money:** Move from Ends justify means to Means & End must please Allah ﷻ
6. **Character:** Move from Net worth means money to Net worth means Morality
7. **Attitude:** Move from Me first to They first
8. **Relationships:** Move from Get even to Forgive

## **Identity: Switch from 'King' to 'Vicegerent'**

The very first lesson we learn from the Seerah has to do with our identity, the answer to the rhetorical question 'Who am I?' This is the question that anyone who wants to enter Islam needs to answer and settle within himself because Islam means submitting our will to the Will of Allah ﷻ. Submitting without question, not because we believe blindly, but because we believe with knowledge. We recognize Allah ﷻ, we love Him and so we submit to Him and to His Will because we know that He owns us, He owns everything we own, He owns everything there is. And we know that to Him is our return.

If there is one single fundamental concept, the keystone on which the whole edifice stands, it is the concept of accountability to Allah ﷻ. Worship, to the polytheist Arabs, was about 'appeasing' gods to make them favorably inclined towards them and their activities. But little or nothing more than that. Then Muhammad ﷺ announced Islam and told them that Allah ﷻ doesn't take, He gives. So, making 'offerings' to Allah ﷻ was not the thing to do because it all belongs to Him anyway. What people need to do is to accept Him as the Only One worthy of worship, worship Him and obey Him by obeying His Messenger ﷺ. And to know and believe that one day they would die and be returned to Allah ﷻ to Whom they would be answerable for what they did or chose not to do. This concept was totally alien to the Arabs. That God was someone who was real, alive, seeing, hearing, knowing, who must be obeyed and who would hold them accountable for their actions and reward or punish, was not only strange but also problematic.

Problematic because it challenged their very self-concept, that they had the right to make lifestyle choices without answering to anyone. The whole idea that they lived by, 'it is my body, my wealth, my slaves, my property, my life and I can do whatever I want with it', was being challenged. Islam said that it was not yours but that you had been given all that you had, including yourself, in trust by the One who owns it and had been told how to use it and what to do with it and you would answer to Him one day. To understand this concept, think about difference between someone who deposits his own money at a bank Teller desk and the Bank Teller himself. The

Bank Teller handles more money in a day than any individual depositor but would never consider himself to be the owner of that money.

He knows that the money in his hands is only to do with as the rules permit and if he makes a mistake, it would come out of his pocket or salary, when the accounts are tallied at the end of the day. The Teller would never look at the money and say, "WOW! I am a rich man!" If he did, you would say that either he was joking or insane.

That is what Islam said to the Arabs of Makkah and says to all who come to Islam until the end of time. That you are trustees, not owners. And that you are answerable to the Owner. So, make sure you don't violate the trust. If you honor the trust, you will be rewarded and if you violate it, you will be punished on the day you meet Allahﷻ. That is a day you can't escape no matter where you lived and how you died. It was this concept that the polytheistic Arabs found so difficult to accept because they realized it meant changing their lifestyle. After all, Islam demanded that they change the very foundation on which their decision making was based. Islam demanded that the criterion of right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, virtue and vice, all be changed and brought in line with what Allahﷻ decreed. We are not talking about any cosmetic gestures. We are talking about a seismic change of lifestyle, priorities, emphasis and life goals. It was not easy for the Arabs of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It is not easy for us today. But it is a choice that we must all make because that is the reality we will face.

To understand this, let us reflect on the fact that when Allahﷻ decided to send Adam (AS) to earth, He said:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

**Baqara 2: 30** *And (remember) when your Rabb (Allah) said to the angels: "Verily, I am going to place (mankind) as a Vicegerent, on earth.*

Allahﷻ didn't say, 'Verily, I am going to place (mankind) as a King, on earth.' The difference is far from being merely semantic. It is systemic and seminal.

It is this mistake in understanding his identity that came in the way of Pharaoh Rameses IV when he declared himself to be god. He said, 'Ana Rabbukumul A'ala.' I am your Rabb the Most High, meaning, "I call the shots, I rule this land, my word is Law, I am above the Law, nobody can question me, I can do whatever I like." I am sure if someone had asked him whether he had created the sun and the moon, he would have denied it. That is because he didn't claim to be the Creator. He claimed to be the Ruler. It is in this context that we need to look at our own lives to remove our own Firawniyat (Pharaoh-like tendency). The issue is not with Firawn as the individual, but with Firawniyat as an attitude. The difference between Firawn Rameses IV and us (generally speaking) is only a matter of degree. The attitude is the same, because we too seem to believe that our will must dominate over the Will of Allah ﷻ and live our lives as if we will never meet Allah ﷻ. That is why Allah ﷻ called this attitude Shirk and told Rasoolullah ﷺ not to intercede for such people.

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهُهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً

**Furqan 25:43** *Have you (O Muhammad ﷺ) seen him who has taken as his ilah (god) his own desire? Would you then be a Wakil (intercessor) over him?*

That is why the very first issue that Rasoolullah ﷺ addressed was that of identity. The Kalima Tayyiba is a statement of identity where the person is declaring who he/she is, vis-à-vis Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. That submission is Islam. Without that submission, there is no Islam. It is really, as simple as that.

There are three main differences between a King and his Vicegerent.

<b>King</b>	<b>Vicegerent</b>
1. Law Maker, His Word is Law	1. Law implementer
2. Above the Law	2. Subject to the Law
3. Not answerable, but will question	3. Answerable to the King

My question is, if I look at my life, what do I see in my behavior? Reflections of a 'King' or a 'Vicegerent'? That is the key. For the Makkans, who understood the message of Islam much better than we do today, the matter was clear. They knew that if they accepted Islam, then in effect they would have to accept Allah ﷻ' s rule in their lives.