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# History



# بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

A Beacon of Light, In an Age of Darkness

There is, marked in history, a golden era in which the Muslims revolutionised Europe. From the time of the Prophet ﷺ, Islam travelled by way of numerous military conquests westwards across North Africa until the 8th century, when something significant was about to happen across the Mediterranean Sea. In my recent journey to Southern Spain, I visited the magnificent palaces and mosques that were built by the Muslims in the golden age, which inspired me to delve further into the fascinating history of Andalus.

While the ultimate aim of warfare in Islam is to convey the message of monotheism and to make the word of God the highest in the land, it is universally established in the books of history that the conquest of Spain was in fact a result of a cry for help from the natives themselves; the Muslims being their saviours.

Iberia - the ancient name for Andalusia - was under the rule of the Roman Empire until the fifth century CE, when it was invaded by the Arian Visigoths - Gothic Christian tribes from Germany - during which they established the Gothic state and subjected the Andalusian people to their rule. Andalusia was no longer under the rule of its indigenous inhabitants and was a land under occupation and persecution. The oppressive state lasted for approximately three centuries, during which it imposed tyranny on the Spanish inhabitants, namely the Jewish people, the Romans and the Spanish natives. Up until the time of the last Visigoth monarch, King Roderick, this period in history consisted of numerous civil wars and religious conflicts to the magnitude that a Spanish historian, Rafael Balasteros, comments: "If the Arabs had not interfered in the Peninsula's affairs in 711 CE and put an end to this age of turmoil, the Goths would have inflicted unimaginable harm on Spain."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Mediterranean, merely a stretch of water along the northern coast of West Africa was separating the justice and prosperity of Islam from the citadel of tyranny and occupation of the Christians in Europe. During this time, Musa bin Nusayr - the newly appointed governor of Africa - purchased a slave by the name of Tariq ibn Ziyad, who was later set free; he joined his former master in military expeditions, which led him to becoming the commander of the Moroccan army. At this point in Spain, the ruler of Ceuta, Julian, was one of many who could

no longer tolerate the oppression of Roderick's state, especially after his wife was captured and taken hostage by the King. He knew that across the sea was not only a people of peace and prosperity, but the Muslims also had a strong sense of honour and justice. So, Julian sent a delegation to inform Musa in North Africa, whom he admired and respected, despite their religious differences.

Once the Caliph in Damascus gave his consent, the call of distress essentially resulted in Musa appointing Tariq ibn Ziyad to lead the expedition to conquer Spain. Tariq's ships arrived and docked at Lines Rock, which later became known as *Jabal Tariq* (Gibraltar). Tariq, along with no more than a few thousand troops, marched across Spain and continued to annex territory after territory, until he was able to topple Roderick's dictatorship. The Muslims numbered only twelve thousand foot soldiers against a much larger army which consisted of cavalry and horsemen. Victory was attained in 711CE and Musa came to join Tariq in Spain, where together they continued to subdue the remaining northern areas. The conquest took no more than three years and within forty years, the Umayyad Emirate, or the Caliphate was established in Cordoba by Abd al-Rahman I. This was the dawn of Andalus; a newly liberated land now under the rule of the Muslims.

The notion that the Muslims invaded Spain by force and imposed their religion on the people by compulsion is false. Allah says in the Qur'an, "There is no compulsion in religion." [2:256] The number of men in Tariq's army alone is proof that the Spanish welcomed the Muslims and accepted their religion and culture willingly, otherwise the population could not have been overpowered by such a small army in an especially short amount of time of three years. The Muslims also went on to rule for 781 years; no empire that assumed dominion over its people by force could possibly have lasted so many centuries unless its people wanted it to. This shows that the conquest of the Muslims was not as much a military victory as it was an intellectual and ideological victory; it was their hearts and minds that they won, and the Spanish natives welcomed the Muslims as liberators for their justice and moral code. This event in history resonates the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his participation of *hif al-fudul* prior to prophethood where he supported what was just. Zion Zohar, a Jewish American historian, writes: "Thus, when Muslims crossed the straits of Gibraltar from North Africa in 711 CE and invaded the Iberian Peninsula, Jews welcomed them as liberators from Christian Persecution." It is interesting to ponder upon why an invasion could be considered as a liberation, not only from persecution but a liberation from the shackles of the mind, as the Muslims brought with them to Spain, a new way to live.

Not only did the Muslims restore justice and improve the legal, military and taxation systems in *Andalus*, but they managed to intensify Spain's prosperity and wealth. The Islamic conquest positively influenced many areas of life and civilisation in Andalus, such as religion, education, science, economy and society. There was a peaceful coexistence between Muslims,

Christians and Jews who gracefully interacted with each other and contributed in maintaining a flourishing society under the Umayyad dynasty. The streets of Cordoba were illuminated and Spanish homes were bountifully supplied with hot and cold water, and the streets were lit at night while the rest of Europe was in darkness.

The Muslims built approximately two thousand public baths and mosques and set up many schools for poor children. Libraries in Andalusia contained over 400,000 books, as literature, mathematics, architecture and other sciences prospered under the Islamic rule. This was as a result of their belief in the Holy Qur'ān which emphasised the power of knowledge. The Spaniards even adopted the language of the Muslims to acquaint themselves with Arabic works, and many illiterate Spaniards learnt to read and write under Umayyad rule. Many Christians and Jews also converted to Islam devotedly and adopted their culture. Such religious tolerance in the community can only be an outcome of the fact that Muslims did not act as oppressors but instead aimed to enrich life and faith in Spain. Sciences such as algebra, arithmetic, medicine, biology, chemistry, astronomy and philosophy began to thrive in Andalus after the conquest. Among the legendary Spanish Muslim scientists, philosophers and writers are Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Zuhr and Al-Razi; all of whose works are still studied to this day.

Industry and trade was also advanced in the Muslim era and economy in Spain was flourishing. The Muslims introduced silk to Andalus, which led Spain to becoming one of the largest industries in the world for silk production. Moreover, they brought with them plants such as *al-qutun* (cotton), as well as pepper, satin, fur and many other fabrics. The Umayyad dynasty also improved the irrigation system, which in turn intensified agriculture and crops in Spain, allowing the Spaniards to begin cultivating oranges, lemons, apricots and olives. The Muslims were also gifted in architecture and utilised their artistic skills to build magnificent gardens, castles and mosques which still exist today, such as the Mezquita in Cordoba and Alhambra of Granada where the Caliphs would reside.

Living in the west, and especially in Europe, understanding how and why Islam came to us is essential to our journey as seekers of knowledge. History helps us to understand change, and how the society we live in came to be. And perhaps in our case, taking a leaf out of our history books can also teach us how to go back to how things once were, or at least to recreate such beautiful eras. We used to be leaders in science, literature and medicine, rulers of justice and warfare. A beacon of light, while the rest of the world was still in the dark ages, let us then bring back our glory.

*Anisa Najam, Alimiyyah Three*

## A Reflection

A common theme that is found in the study of history is the rise and decline of nations, individuals and also those ideologies that shape society and people. When one nation falls another nation rises. Allah the Almighty makes mention in the Qur'ān of past nations, such as the nations of 'Ād and Thahmūd, who reached the pinnacle of power and stability. But in the end, these nations came to ruin. One thing that is for certain is that Allah ultimately gives power and authority to anyone or any nation, and at the same time he takes that very power away from them. In Surah Al-Imran, Allah the Almighty says:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّن تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ

*Say: Oh Allah, Master of all kingship, You give the kingdom to whom You please and take away the kingdom from whomsoever You please; You give honour to whom You please and disgrace to whom You please.*

No doubt, in the course of our Islamic history, there were periods where the Muslim state was in decline in terms of their power and stability; likewise, there were periods where they prospered and outshined other nations. The Muslim community from the beginning of revelation were very small in number, vulnerable to the slurs and abuse thrown at them by the polytheists. But, if we look to the latter portion of the life of the Prophet ﷺ, we see that the Muslims became a force to be reckoned with. They gained the respect of all the surrounding nations, which in turn helped the expansion of the Islamic Caliphate later on.

However, after the demise of the Prophet ﷺ, the Muslim Ummah was beset with many trials and tribulation, such as political and ideological struggles within the Muslim community and at times foreign invasions e.g. the Crusaders and the Mongols. Despite this, the religion of Allah has been carried through generation after generation, to the point at which it has reached us today. How was this possible? It is due to the Mercy of Allah that He has taken upon himself the protection of this religion and kept it safe from corruption. Abu Al-Hasan Al-Nadwi says in his book 'Saviours of Islamic Spirit', "Whenever the Ummah of Islam faced a new danger, internal or external, Allah raised among the Muslims scholars, leaders and groups who protected the true dīn of Allah and revived it in its true, pristine form. This ubiquitous phenomenon is known to the historian as revivalism or *tajdīd*."

Right now we are part of a period that will be remembered in history. The Muslim Ummah today is facing problems both internally and externally. Indeed, it is a confusing time that we live in. And at times one feels useless due to their own perception of their capability, thinking they are not making any significant difference to the Ummah today. One of the reasons why we should study our Islamic history, in my opinion, is to recognise the sunnah of Allah and having hope that this religion isn't going to be suppressed; and that there is benefit that we can give to the Ummah, be it of a small scale or large. And from the sunnah of Allah that we see time and time again is change from one state to another state.

The Muslim Ummah at one point held many beautiful cities that were hustling and bustling such as Baghdad, Andalus, Bukhara, etc. Baghdad was at one point the epicentre of learning in the entire world. But that changed, when the Mongols came and wrecked the city. The Grand Library of Baghdad - which housed countless ancient books - was destroyed, all of its books dumped in the Euphrates. It is said that the water of the Euphrates ran black with ink. It was a miserable time for the Muslims in Baghdad, the Mongols showing them no mercy, killing them without preamble. However, it is amazing to know that after approximately ten years, these very same Mongols embraced Islam.

I will end this piece by mentioning something that is a means of motivation for me. Did you know Salahuddeen Al-Ayubi and Imam Shatibi were from the same era? Salahuddeen Al-Ayubi led the expedition to win back Masjid Al-Aqsa from the Crusaders. Imam Shatibi was the first person to compose a poem about the seven *Qirā'āt*. What is one thing the two have in common? Both did what they needed to do; both left a legacy. I'm sure there were other people who lived in the same era as both of these great men and also left legacies still to be discovered. The reason for mentioning this is to remind students that there are many ways one can benefit the Ummah. So don't think that you have nothing to contribute. You may look at all the corruption that is taking place in the world and think to yourself, "Well, what benefit can I have?" Whatever you may contribute to the Ummah, may be small in the eyes of man; but if the intention is correct then it is weighty in front of Allah.

May Allah give us understanding and allow us to help his religion in any way possible, Ameen.

*A Scribe, Alimiyyah Three*

## Powerful Lessons From the Life of Khadijah رضي الله عنها

What made Khadijah رضي الله عنها great? She was declared by the Prophet ﷺ to be of the greatest women of all time and given the glad tidings of a house in *Jannah*, making her an exemplar of the ideal believer. She is often mentioned in our times as a sort of icon of girl-power, who knew what she wanted (to marry the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) and when she wanted it. Failing that, she is described as a successful CEO, her story misappropriated to fit a capitalist, materialist worldview, where economic worth is the only one worth mention. If only Muslim women could be more like her, the world (read economy) would be a much better place! Well yes, the world would be a better place but - as any Muslim who has understood her biography knows - not for the cliched reasons popularly given. What made her great and what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ praised her for, transcended all of that.

Recently, I was blessed with the opportunity to write the book 'Khadijah - Mother of History's Greatest Nation' published by Learning Roots. During the intense couple of years I spent poring over the life of our mother Khadijah رضي الله عنها and *ahādīth* related about her, I feel I got to know her. In the process of bringing her story to life, there were five themes and timeless life-lessons that really stood out for me as the most impactful.

### **Lesson 1: Live for a Vision Beyond your own Life**

Something that really strikes you when reflecting upon Khadijah's رضي الله عنها death, is that she actually passed away during what was the most trying and difficult period for the Muslims. She never saw the relief of migrating to and living in Madinah, nor the triumph of the Battle of Badr or Conquest of Makkah. This was because she passed away before the *hijrah*, just after the Muslims emerged from three painful years of suffering the boycott imposed upon them by the *Mushrikūn* of Makkah, where they lived in tents in a narrow valley known as *Shu'ab Abi Tālib*. Khadijah رضي الله عنها who was an upper class lady of high repute, had left the comforts of her usual lifestyle to stand by the side of the Prophet ﷺ and live as a homeless refugee in the most difficult of circumstances.

In other words, she died before seeing the fruit of her life's work materialise. She was living, striving, and patiently persevering as a believer, for a cause that would bear fruit after her death. She didn't see Islam spread through Arabia and establish itself from as far as the Siberian

Peninsula to the edges of the Far East. She never witnessed living in a world where a billion people are Muslims. And yet, here we are, sitting in London, and you, dear brother or sister, are part of Khadijah's رضي الله عنها legacy!

We too must realise that we may not see the true results of what we build in our lifetimes, but build it we must. Living for a cause beyond our own lives, for a vision of this world that we may never get to see, and Allah's pleasure shining down upon us in the Hereafter, are all we need to stop living a petty and small-minded existence. It causes our spirits to soar as we strive towards something greater. It reminds us that intention is more important than completion and results and that by having enormous intentions and then diligently working towards them, we secure reward from Allah, even if we don't get to complete what we started. Furthermore, Allah will see to it that our work continues beyond our lives.

So, what is the fear of failure stopping you from beginning?

## **Lesson 2: Seek your Status with Allah**

Khadijah رضي الله عنها was a woman from the nobility - Quraish - in a tribal society where lineage gave you immense status. When she took the Prophet ﷺ that fateful day, to her cousin Waraqah bin Nawfal, she heard for the first time that her people would turn them out of Makkah one day. It was an unbelievable notion to the Prophet ﷺ and Khadijah رضي الله عنها who were celebrities in their society. That day she will have realised that standing by the Prophet's ﷺ side would mean tough times ahead. It would mean losing the status she once enjoyed in her society. But it would also mean, being of the highest status in Allah's eyes. Because those who are pioneers in the way of Allah are not equal to those who come afterwards. By being the first believer, being from *as-sābiqūn al-awwalūn* who embraced Islam when it was not popular nor easy to do so, she secured her status with Allah.

Similarly in our times, those Muslims in the generation before us, who established Islam here in the West, were visibly and openly practising Islam, facing the racism and taunts of that era, who were pioneers of establishing institutions and infrastructure for their communities, will have been blessed with a higher status than those who came later and benefitted from the relative ease in being a practising Muslim in the West. I remember a time in London, when walking down the street with my mum, she was the only woman observing hijab that we knew. And I expected every other person who walked past us to shout "Paki" or some other abusive word in our direction. Today, hijab is normal. It wouldn't be, were it not for those early women like my mum, who stood firm upon their principles. We are indebted to them and no doubt their stand will have gained them a high status with Allah.

Often people of our generation want to escape the difficulty of living as a minority in the West. We dream of living in the ideal Muslim land, where being a believer comes easy. But in our hope to reach the greener grass on the other side, we may be missing the colossal opportunity for reward in practising Islam and engaging in *da'wah* in the West. Yes, it's tough going against the grain, yes it's hard fighting the Islamophobia and mistruths, but yes, the rewards will be great likewise, *insha Allah*.

What does our generation need to be brave enough to establish, that may not be easy to establish now, but through our efforts, could pave the way for a better future?

### **Lesson 3: Patiently Persevere in the face of ignorance**

Even the most beloved believers in history faced Islamophobia. Khadijah رضي الله عنها was the best of women, yet was subject to a campaign of social persecution by her people. Her house had an unsheltered courtyard in the middle of it and the wife of Abu Lahab used to have rocks, stones, filth and garbage thrown over Khadijah's رضي الله عنها walls, into that courtyard. What was Khadijah رضي الله عنها doing during that time? Perhaps she was preparing a meal. Perhaps sitting with her children doing the ordinary things a mother does. How must she have felt during this terrible campaign of hate?

How would you feel if the society around you was gleefully mocking the death of your child? When Khadijah's رضي الله عنها son passed away in infancy, the *Mushrikūn* in Makkah mocked her family and her husband and labelled them as 'cut off', meaning that they had no sons to carry on their family name.

Khadijah's رضي الله عنها life teaches us to continue patiently persevering through times of hardship and in the face of hateful ignorance. It teaches us that there may be tough times ahead, but that with commitment and patience in continuing to do our work, asking ourselves: 'What is Allah asking of me?' The believer will ultimately be successful because of '*wal-'Aqibatu Lil-Muttaqīn*', in the end, success is for the God-Conscious.

### **Lesson 4: Be a Tool for Allah's Sake**

One of the blessings of Khadijah رضي الله عنها was that she was a wealthy woman. But being a wealthy woman was not in itself her greatest trait. It was her willingness to use that wealth, spend those resources in the way of Allah, that was of her greatest traits.

This is something that the Prophet ﷺ would get very emotional about even after her death. He could never forget how readily she had believed in him and how selflessly she had put her resources at his disposal, to use as he saw fit for the sake of his mission. When he was questioned regarding her excellence, he affirmed her status in the highest terms and said: “She had faith in me when people rejected me. She believed in me when the people disbelieved me. She supported me with her wealth when the people prevented me, and Allah blessed me with children through her and not through any other wife.”

Thus, she made herself a tool in Allah’s cause.

Each one of us has resources, be it material or otherwise, be it our wealth, our homes, our time, our talents, our energy or our skills, that we can put forward for the sake of Allah.

So what are you prepared to give?

## **Lesson 5: Be the Backbone of your Family**

Khadijah رضي الله عنها was a source of pure comfort for her husband, a sanctuary that he could retreat to and find strength in-. For him to do the monumental work he was charged with, he needed Khadijah رضي الله عنها by his side, strengthening, reassuring, supporting, listening and being present to his needs.

She understood his need to go on the mountain and would deliver food to him there, to allow him to stay for as long as he needed to. She took care of his household during the toughest of times, giving him the freedom to do his work. She was the rock he could fall back on when he had a difficult day of preaching or when he was targeted with some particularly ruthless act of hatred.

Who did the Prophet ﷺ share his innermost fears and questions with on the day when he was first spoken to by the Angel Jibreel? Who did the Prophet ﷺ go home to when he had filth and the entrails of a camel thrown upon him as he prayed? Who did the Prophet ﷺ confide in at night when he returned from a day of preaching his message and being mocked and ridiculed in return?

Every home needs a pillar of strength to steady it. It is true that both husband and wife have their part to play in showing love and support to each other. But the particular type of security that Khadijah رضي الله عنها provided was one that we as women in particular have the propensity to establish since the home is our key domain. And that is to make our home culture, a place of comfort for our spouses and children. Home should be the place of sanctuary, not the place from which our family

members seek refuge. We must realise that joy, positivity and a calm environment can be generated by will. In fact a negative environment, a toxic attitude can be turned around by one individual who has the will and determination to bring the energy they wish to see into the environment around them. We don't have to reflect the negative energy we find around us. Through our connectedness with Allah and taking care of our own mindset, we can choose to generate the energy we wish to see in our homes and it will be contagious!

By being that source of comfort Khadijah رضي الله عنها became the backbone of the Messenger ﷺ and gained the love of her spouse, the love of her people, a place in history, a life that was impactful and most importantly, the pleasure of her Lord.

Her creating a calm and comforting home for the Prophet ﷺ was so significant that it was indirectly referenced by Allah through the Angel Jibreel in the glad tidings he gave her. Once when Jibreel was speaking to the Prophet ﷺ he said, "O Messenger of Allah, Khadijah is just coming with a bowl of soup for you. When she comes to you, give her greetings of peace from her Lord and from me, and give her the good news of a palace of jewels in *Jannah*, where there will be neither any noise nor any tiredness."

So dear brothers, what will your family feel about you, after you pass away? And dear sisters, what will our husband's remember about us after we die?

I believe that these five timeless lessons, constitute philosophies for a life well-lived, just as Khadijah's رضي الله عنها was. By internalising and actualising them, we too will be able to weather the storms of life.

*Fatima Barkatulla, Alimiyyah Three*