

IN THE
FOOTSTEPS
OF THE
PROPHET



Lessons from the
Life of Muhammad

Tariq Ramadan

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convert, but they let him go anyway, allowing him the freedom to choose and the time needed for his spiritual development. He even received—at a critical time in interclan relations—the Muslim community's protection, and it was a woman who spoke out publicly and forcefully on his behalf. Zaynab often went to the mosque, which was a space open to both men and women, and nobody objected to her making a statement there, among men; in fact, it was not at all uncommon for Muslim women to speak up publicly in such a manner. Later, in one such instance that is particularly famous in Muslim history, a woman would address Umar ibn al-Khattab, who had become the Muslims' caliph, and point out an error of judgment that he immediately acknowledged.

Inside the mosque, the women would line up behind the men's ranks, as the postures of prayer, in its various stages, require an arrangement that preserves modesty, decency, and respect. Women prayed, studied, and expressed themselves in that space. Moreover, they found in the Prophet's attitude the epitome of courtesy and regard: he demanded that men remain seated in order to let women leave first and without inconvenience. There was always gentleness and dignity in his behavior toward women, whom he listened to, and whose right to express themselves and set forth their opinions and arguments he acknowledged, protected, and promoted.



CHAPTER TWELVE

A Dream, Peace

The victory over the Confederates and then the expedition against the Banu Qurayzah had changed the situation in the Peninsula, with the power of the Prophet and his Companions acknowledged. Some, such as the Persian and Byzantine empires, were even beginning to speak of Muhammad as the "powerful King of the Arabs," since they saw him as an unchallenged regional power. As soon as he had intelligence of danger, Muhammad did not hesitate to send expeditions to the nearby tribes in order to forestall any attempt at rebellion or attack and thus make it clear to all neighboring clans that the Medina Muslims remained on alert and were ready to defend themselves.

It was during one such expedition, against the Banu al-Mustaliq, in the fifth or sixth year of *hijrah*, that the episode of Aishah's necklace took place. That event reminds us, like many others, that life and teachings went on as circumstances warranted and that religious practice was being clarified while the social dimension of Islamic ethics grew in depth. Internal difficulties also remained, particularly because of the actions of a number of hypocrites who tried to take advantage of any situation to cause Muhammad trouble.

A Dream

The month of Ramadan had begun, and the Prophet, as he usually did, intensified night worship and was even more attentive to the well-being of the poor and needy. This was a month of intense spirituality, when

Muhammad recited back to Angel Gabriel all that had been revealed of the Quran, and during which he lengthened ritual prayers and performed the additional prayers of *tarahi*.¹ Invocations (*dhua*) were also constant, while women and men were requested to fast during the day, liberating themselves from the characteristics that most directly defined their humanity: drinking, eating, and satisfying their sexual desire. By controlling their natural needs, believers were to strive to get closer to the qualities of the divine and experience His presence through meditation. Beyond the body's fast, Muslims were also expected to "fast" with their tongues (avoiding lies, vulgarity, and indecent remarks) and their hearts (avoiding bad feelings or thoughts). That spiritual discipline, as we have said, went along with additional demands as to the care and attention the poor must receive: the month of Ramadan was both the month of the Quran and that of generosity, giving, and solidarity. Believers, whether women, men, or children, were strongly advised to pay special alms at the end of the fasting month in order to take care of the needs of all the members of the community during the days of celebration they observed. The quest for proximity to the One can only be experienced and perfected through proximity to the poor: respecting, caring for, and serving them bring one closer to God.

During that month, the Prophet had a surprising dream, both perplexing and gratifying. He dreamed that he entered the Kaba sanctuary, his head shaved, holding the key to the sanctuary in his right hand. The vision was powerful, and the Prophet, as he usually did in such circumstances, interpreted it as a sign and a message. The next day, he told his Companions about it and invited them to get ready to go and perform the lesser pilgrimage (*umrah*) in Mecca.² They were both happy and surprised: how could they enter the Mecca territory, how would the Quraysh allow them to, how were they to avoid a conflict? The Prophet's obvious confidence nevertheless soothed them: the journey was to take place during the month of Dhu al-Qidah, which was one of the sacred months during which the Arabs never fought. Moreover, the Prophet's visions had up till then proved truthful: he had so far led them quietly and confidently. They got ready for departure.

Between twelve hundred and fourteen hundred faithful undertook the journey. The danger was considerable, but the Prophet did not allow the pilgrims to carry weapons (apart from the equipment necessary for hunting and other needs of the journey) and took with him his wife Um Salamah as well as Nusaybah and Um Mani, two women who had been present at the

first covenant of al-Aqabah. They set out and, at the first halt, the Prophet himself consecrated the camels that were to be sacrificed during the pilgrimage. As for the Meccans, they very soon heard that a convoy of Muslims was heading for Mecca, intending to visit the Kaba. Visiting the sanctuary had, for decades, been the Peninsula tribes' most legitimate right, but with the Muslims, the Quraysh were faced with an irresolvable dilemma: they did not see how they could either justify barring them from entering (and how could they compel them to comply in the sacred month of Dhu al-Qidah, during which war was prohibited) or, on the other hand, allow their enemy into the city, which would endow the Muslims with unacceptable prestige. Quraysh decided to send Khalid ibn al-Walid with two hundred men to stop the pilgrims from getting near Mecca. The Muslims' scout came to inform them of the fact, and they decided to change their route in order to avoid a situation that would inevitably lead to a clash. The Prophet relied on a Companion's knowledge of the area, and they took a route through which they arrived south of Mecca, on the edge of the sacred territory, in the plain of al-Hudaybiyyah. At that point, the Prophet's camel, Qaswa, halted and refused to go on. As had been the case when he had arrived in Medina seven years before, the Prophet saw this as a sign. He had to stop and negotiate the pilgrims' entry into Mecca with the Quraysh.

The Quraysh were once more totally taken aback by the Prophet's attitude, which did not fit with any of their religious, cultural, or warfare traditions. At the height of his new power, he was coming to Mecca unarmed, and thus in effect vulnerable, even though circumstances could have enabled him to attain even greater supremacy over his enemies. Moreover, he called people to a new religion but did not hesitate to rely on respect of the rules of Arab traditions to protect himself from their attacks, and in doing so he put the Quraysh into a dilemma, since they had to choose between their honor (respecting the rules) and the loss of their prestige (allowing the Muslims to enter Mecca). Muhammad's tactical choices proved rewarding.

Negotiations

The Quraysh were determined not to allow the Muslims to perform the pilgrimage, because of the crucial symbolic stakes involved but also, of

course, because they did not know what Muhammad's actual intentions were. They decided to send an envoy from the Banu Khuzaaah clan, Budayl ibn Warqa, who had no quarrel with any of the clans present and could therefore act as a mediator. He went to the Prophet, who assured him that he had no intention of waging war, but only wanted to perform the lesser pilgrimage with his Companions and go home. He added, however, that he was ready to fight anyone who opposed their right to enter the sanctuary freely, like all the other clans and tribes. If, nevertheless, the Quraysh needed time to get ready to let the pilgrims in, they would wait at al-Hudaybiyyah until the Quraysh had finished their preparations. Budayl returned to Mecca and suggested that the Quraysh should let the Muslims in, but his proposal got a chilly reception; in particular, it was flatly rejected by Ikrimah, Abu Jahl's son.

A chief named Urwah decided to meet Muhammad and negotiate, while at the same time taking a closer look at the people with him and the nature of the expedition. He went to the Prophet and began talking with him according to the customs habitual among Arab clans: he addressed him familiarly, on an equal footing, and took hold of his beard, as was usual among tribal chiefs. For this he was firmly taken to task by Mughirah, one of the exiles from Mecca, who threatened to beat him up if he went on behaving like that. Urwah was surprised, but before he left, he stopped to observe and visit the Muslims' camp, and was amazed at the respect and devotion the believers showed their leader, Muhammad. He went back to the Quraysh and told them, as Budayl had done, that it would be wiser to let the Muslims in, since they obviously had no intention of fighting. However, the Quraysh's leaders refused again.

While Urwah was on his mission, two other negotiation attempts had taken place. Hulays, of the Banu al-Harith, had also come to speak with the Prophet. The latter recognized him from a distance and, knowing how much Hulays and his clan respected religious and sacred matters, had the herd of camels consecrated for sacrifice sent out to meet him. When Hulays saw the camels, he understood the message and decided to turn back immediately, certain that Muhammad indeed had no intention other than peacefully performing a pilgrimage. The Prophet himself had not remained inactive: he had sent the Quraysh an envoy named Khirash, but Ikrimah refused to listen to him, cut his camel's legs, and was about to

strike him too when Hulays stepped in to protect him and request that he be allowed to return to the Prophet unharmed.

Four attempts at negotiation had failed, then, and the Quraysh seemed more unyielding than ever. The Prophet decided he must make a last attempt, sending an envoy who enjoyed sufficient respect and protection in Mecca that he would meet another fate than Khirash's and be listened to. He eventually chose Uthman ibn Affan, his son-in-law, who had solid clan connections in Mecca and whom nobody would dare attack. Uthman went and was indeed well received, but met with the same refusal: the Quraysh would not allow the Muslims to perform the pilgrimage. He himself could, if he wished to, perform the circumambulations around the Kaba, but letting in Muhammad and his men was out of the question. Uthman refused the offer. His mission had taken longer than expected, and for three days the Prophet had no news of him. The rumor spread that Uthman had been killed, and this caused the Prophet deep sorrow. Such an action on the part of the Quraysh—killing an envoy during the sacred month and opposing the Muslims' legitimate right to visit the Kaba, as all other tribes were allowed to—could only be seen by the Muslims as a new declaration of war. From then on, they had to prepare for the worst.

The Pledge of Allegiance

The Prophet had all the Companions summoned, and they hurried to him. He sat at the foot of an acacia tree and asked each of the Muslims to pledge allegiance (*bay'at ar-ridwan*), swearing him obedience and fidelity. Through that gesture, they explicitly stated that they would remain by the Prophet's side whatever the outcome might be. They had come to perform a pilgrimage, they were unarmed, and now they faced the very high probability of a conflict for which they were not prepared. The affirmation of their fidelity to the Prophet meant to them that they pledged not to run away and to go so far as accepting death, since the balance of forces was heavily against them. The Prophet himself put his left hand in his right hand and told the assembled faithful that this represented Uthman's pledge, since the latter had not given any sign of life and he considered him dead.³

However, just as the last Companions had finished giving their pledge, Uthman suddenly reappeared. The Prophet rejoiced at this: not only was Uthman, his son-in-law, alive, but the Quraysh had not been so rash as to act in disrespect of the custom of nonviolence during the sacred months. A conflict with the Quraysh thus seemed to be less likely, and the Prophet was informed that they had finally sent a new envoy, Suhayl ibn Amr, to seal a formal agreement with the Muslims. He decided to receive him and examine their proposals.

Uthman too had pledged allegiance to the Prophet. Like all the others, he had understood that this expression of faithfulness would be required in a potential war situation. However, the circumstances were now completely different, with Muhammad about to start negotiations on the terms of peace between his community and the Quraysh. They had all pledged allegiance thinking that they were expressing their fidelity in a situation of conflict, and moreover one in which they were in a weak position. Now their fidelity was going to be tested through the implementation and terms of a truce in which they held a strong position. Revelation relates that pledge: "God's good pleasure was on the believers when they swore fealty to you under the tree."⁴ The Muslims were demanding their right, they bore a message that they were certain was true, and they had acquired great prestige after the latest battles, so keeping a low profile was out of the question.

The Covenant of al-Hudaybiyyah

The Prophet received the Quraysh envoy, Suhayl ibn Amr, who came with two other men, Mikraz and Huwayth. The negotiations began at some distance from the Companions, and each element in the agreement was discussed, sometimes sharply. When the terms of the covenant were at last settled, the Prophet asked his cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib to write them down. The latter naturally began the writing of the text with the usual formula "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" (*Bismillāh ar-Rahmān ar-Rahīm*), but Suhayl opposed the phrase, saying that he did not know *ar-Rahmān* and that they should use the formula "In Your name, O God" (*Bismika Allāhumma*), the only one all the Arabs knew (even polytheists used it to address their main god). Some Companions

immediately retorted that changing the formula was out of the question, but the Prophet intervened and told Ali to write "In Your name, O God."⁵ Then he instructed him to write on: "These are the terms of the truce signed between Muhammad, God's Messenger, and Suhayl ibn Amr." Suhayl again disagreed: "If we had known you to be God's Messenger, we would not have fought you. Write instead: 'Muhammad ibn Abdullah.'" Ali, who had already written the usual formula, refused to give in and maintained that he could do no such thing. The Prophet asked him to show him where the phrase was written, wiped it out himself, then asked him to add what Suhayl had requested, which meant "Muhammad, son of Abdullah." Ali and the other Companions were shocked and could not understand the Prophet's attitude. The terms of the agreement were to alarm them even more, as they looked like a series of compromises highly unfavorable to the Muslims. The treaty was based on four essential points: (1) The Muslims could not perform their pilgrimage that year, but they would be allowed to stay three days the following year. (2) A ten-year truce was to be observed by both sides, and all their members would be free to travel safely in the region. (3) The terms of the agreement would immediately apply to any clan or tribe that entered into a covenant with either side. (4) Any Muslim leaving Mecca for Medina would immediately be delivered to the Meccan leaders, whereas anyone fleeing Medina and seeking protection in Mecca would be granted asylum.⁶

The Companions were beginning to realize that after the signing of a covenant that appeared to them to be a swindle, they would have to return without visiting the Kaba. Their disappointment reached its peak when they witnessed the arrival of Abu Jandal, the youngest son of Suhayl, who had just signed the pact. Abu Jandal had converted to Islam and had run away, his feet still in shackles, after his father had imprisoned him to prevent him from joining the Muslims. When Suhayl saw his escaped son, he reminded the Prophet that according to the agreement he had just signed, he could not keep him and had to give him back. The Prophet admitted this, and Abu Jandal, although he appealed to the Companions for help, was delivered into his father's hands while Muhammad enjoined him to remain patient. His elder brother Abdullah, who had been a Muslim for a long time and was among the pilgrims who witnessed the scene, was revolted by the situation. Another Companion, Umar, could not control himself when Suhayl struck his son's face with his chains. He rushed to

the Prophet and remonstrated sharply, firing at him a series of questions that expressed his total disapproval: "Are you not God's Prophet? Are we not right, and are our enemies not wrong? Why should we so shamefully give in against our religion's honor?" Each time, the Prophet answered sedately, but that was not enough to satisfy Umar, who, now seething with intense anger, turned to Abu Bakr for help. Abu Bakr advised him to calm down, as he believed the Prophet was right. Umar controlled himself and kept quiet, even though he clearly remained convinced that the agreement was a humiliation.

Suhayl and the other two envoys left the camp, taking with them Abu Jandal, who had collapsed into tears. The Muslims observing the scene felt intense sorrow and deep revulsion: they could not understand the Prophet's attitude. He had taught them courage and dignity, and now he was accepting an unfair deal obliging them to look on helplessly as one of them received degrading, humiliating treatment. When the Prophet asked them to sacrifice the camels that had been consecrated for the pilgrimage, none of the Companions could bring themselves to comply, for the wounds and the bitterness were too deep. The Prophet repeated his order three times, but nobody responded. This was the first time he was faced with disobedience in such a collective, determined manner. The Prophet, startled and saddened, retired into his tent and told his wife Um Salamah about what had just happened and the Companions' refusal to sacrifice the beasts. She listened, then suggested he should act wisely and silently: she advised him to go out without saying a word and sacrifice his own camel, merely setting the example. Muhammad listened to her advice, which turned out to be judicious. He went to his camel, pronounced the ritual formula, and sacrificed it. When they saw this, the Companions rose one after another and did the same. Then the Prophet shaved his head, and some of the Companions did too, while others cut their hair or just a lock of it.

Spirituality and Understanding Victory

The Companions were soon to realize that their first judgments about the treaty had been completely wrong and that they had not sufficiently appreciated the Prophet's deep spirituality, strict rational coherence, extra-

ordinary intelligence, and strategic genius. He listened for signs, and when his camel had stopped and refused to budge, he had the intuition that the Muslims would not move any further than the plain of al-Hudaybiyyah that year. The failure of the first four negotiations and the Quraysh's obstinacy convinced him that he must be patient. He was deeply confident: in his dream, he had seen himself entering the sanctuary, and this would not fail to happen, although for the moment he could not say when. The pledge of allegiance that had initially seemed to unite the Muslims against the enemy was thus, as we have seen, to turn into a pledge of fidelity requiring them to bear with dignity the conditions of a covenant for peace.

Moreover, when Suhayl refused the Muslims' two habitual formulas referring to God and to Muhammad's status as God's Messenger, the Prophet heard his point of view and was able, at that particular moment, to shift his perspective and see things from his interlocutor's standpoint. What Suhayl was saying was perfectly true according to his outlook. It was indeed obvious that if the Quraysh had acknowledged his status as God's Messenger, they would not have fought against him; therefore, an agreement on an equal footing could not possibly state an element that would in effect acknowledge what one side held as truth while contradicting the other's position. The Companions, whose respect for the Prophet was so deep, had been unable to immediately hear the other's truth, but the Prophet's attitude and his reasonable approach to the terms of the covenant were pregnant with spiritual and intellectual teaching. The point was that the heart's relation to the truth—deep spirituality—must never be allowed to turn into emotional, passionate blindness: reason must always be called upon to analyze the situation, temper one's reaction, and help establish an attentive, coherent relation to the other's truth. What appeared as an unacceptable compromise from the sole viewpoint of the believers' faith was fair and equitable from the double viewpoint of the respective rationalities of each of the parties drawing up the peace treaty.

Muhammad could not humiliate the Quraysh in order to save the Muslims' honor and prestige, or even to take advantage of the new political situation after the moat victory. Agreeing not to enter the sanctuary that year took into account the Quraysh's vulnerability and protected their prestige, and this contributed toward long-term peace. Such peace, which considered the general interests of both camps, was soon to turn to the

Muslims' advantage. The clauses stating that emigrants to Medina should be sent back and Muslims leaving Medina for Mecca given asylum only marginally affected the Muslims' interests: a believer leaving Medina was of no use to the Muslim community, and the Muslim faith of a Meccan sent back to his clan ought not—despite the suffering—to be shaken by this forced exile. Contrary to appearances, which Abu Jandal's plight reinforced, Muhammad had not made any serious concessions on this point.

Trust in God, allied to strict intellectual coherence and an exceptionally acute mind, had enabled the Prophet to establish a ten-year truce with the prospect of a visit to the sanctuary the following year. Most of the Companions, and particularly Umar ibn al-Khattab, considered only immediate results, however, and felt this was a humiliation that could amount to nothing but a defeat. Like many others, he regretted his violent reaction against the Prophet, but he remained convinced that the covenant was a capitulation. On the way back, he was told that Muhammad had sent for him; he was afraid the Prophet was going to blame him for his inappropriate attitude or, worse still, tell him that verses had been revealed disapproving his behavior. He found the Prophet with a beaming face, and Muhammad told him about Revelation of verses quite different from what he might have expected. The Divine Word announced: "Verily We have granted you a manifest victory."⁸ Then it mentioned the pledge of allegiance, saying: "He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquility [*as-sakīnah*] to them; and He rewarded them with a victory near at hand."⁹ All this was recalled in the light of Muhammad's initial dream, which was therefore truthful: "Truly did God fulfill the vision for His Messenger: you shall enter the Sacred Mosque, if God wills, with minds secure, heads shaved or hair cut short, and without fear. For He knows what you do not know, and he has granted you, besides this, a victory near at hand."¹⁰

The events of the recent past were presented in a manner totally at odds with the Companions' perception of them: the pledge of allegiance to prepare for war was in reality a pledge of fidelity for peace, the apparent defeat was presented as "a manifest victory," and a seemingly aborted dream was announced as a certainty in the future: "you shall enter the Sacred Mosque." The vast majority of Muslims had not understood, had not seen, or had been unable to perceive the prospects and hopes the covenant allowed. The signing of the pact was therefore, once again, a

privileged moment of spiritual edification with, moreover, an exceptional lesson about the value of intelligence and perspicacity. Listening, the ability to shift one's point of view, sensitivity to the other's dignity, and foresight were some of the qualities showed by the Prophet, contributing to fashion his role as a model.

He was an example too in another dimension of his life: when his Companions refused to sacrifice the camels, he went back to his wife Um Salamah, who listened to him and comforted him. She showed him her trust and suggested the solution to his problem. That dialogue, that understanding and listening, expresses the very essence of the Prophet's attitude toward his wives. As with Khadijah so many years before, he never hesitated to take the time to confide in the women around him, to consult them, talk with them, and adopt their opinions. At a time when the future of the whole community was playing out through visions, pledges of allegiance, and peace covenants, he returned to his wife's side and, like a simple human being, told her of his need for love, trust, and advice—an example for all human beings.

Respecting Covenants

The Muslims had returned to Medina and daily life had resumed its course, in a far less tense atmosphere than before. The truce allowed them to lower their guard against the outside and give more attention to the community's internal affairs. The number of converts kept growing, and their integration and Islamic education had to be constantly planned and organized. Powerful figures in the Peninsula were to join the anonymous hundreds who accepted Islam in Medina or came to settle in the city. For instance, Aishah's brother Abd al-Kaba emigrated after the death of his mother, Um Ruman, which deeply affected her husband, Abu Bakr. The Prophet changed Abd al-Kaba's name to Abd ar-Rahman: his practice was to modify a name when the original one could have an unpleasant meaning or refer to an attitude Islam considered unlawful. Thus, the name Abd al-Kaba (worshiper of the Kaba) had a meaning opposed to Islam's principle of worshipping God alone. In other situations, the Muslims could decide whether to keep their original name, which the vast majority chose to do. Never did the first Muslims imagine there could be such a thing as

"Islamic names," of exclusively Arab origin. Indeed, what preoccupied them was the opposite: they were to avoid the few names with a meaning clearly contrary to Islamic teachings, and allow an unrestricted choice of all sorts of different names, from all languages and origins. They had extremely varied names, of Arab, Persian, or Byzantine origin, and this was no problem at all for the Prophet and his Companions.

During those months of internal management and organization, the Muslims were faced with a new extradition case. Abu Basir came to Medina from Mecca and asked Muhammad for asylum. The Prophet, scrupulously faithful to the terms of the covenants he signed, could not allow him to stay, and when a Quraysh envoy, accompanied by a slave called Kawthar, came to demand Abu Basir back, Muhammad could not but comply. They left, taking Abu Basir as a prisoner, while Muhammad and the Companions exhorted Abu Basir to be patient. Early during the journey back, Abu Basir took advantage of his guards' momentary inattention and killed the Quraysh envoy. The slave ran away in terror and returned to Medina, where his former prisoner soon joined him. Muhammad wanted to send them back to Mecca again, but Kawthar was so afraid that the Prophet had no solution that would allow him to keep his word other than to send Abu Basir away from Medina (since the pact forbade him to stay). However, he did not have to make sure he actually went to Mecca, since there was now no guard to take him there. The Prophet ordered him to leave as the treaty required, and addressed an elliptical remark to his Companions: "Would that he had other Companions with him!"¹¹ Of course, Abu Basir did not go back to Mecca: he settled on one of the roads to the north, frequently used by caravans, especially the Quraysh's. Other Muslims who had escaped Mecca and had heard about his story soon joined him, and they decided to attack the Meccan caravans traveling on the northern route.¹² The group of Muslims became so numerous and the attacks so frequent and efficient that the Quraysh themselves eventually asked the Prophet to take in Abu Basir and his men as well as all future emigrants from Mecca. Their stratagem had been successful, and the Prophet received them, according to the Quraysh's wish to suspend the enforcement of that clause. It should be noted that Muhammad refused to send back women (for instance, Um Kulthum bint Uqba) under any circumstances, because the treaty mentioned only men: to this the Quraysh raised no objection.

To All Rulers

In the course of the year following the treaty, the number of Muslims was to double. During those months of truce, the Prophet decided to send letters to all the rulers of the neighboring empires, kingdoms, or nations.

Thus, the Negus of Abyssinia received a new letter from the Prophet before he converted to Islam, and he agreed to represent the Prophet at his proxy wedding with Um Habibah, who, as mentioned earlier, had been abandoned by her husband in Abyssinia. Muhammad also wrote to Chosroes, the king of Persia; to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor; to Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt (who sent the Prophet a Coptic slave girl, Mariyah, as a gift);¹³ to Mundhir ibn Sawa, king of Bahrain; and to al-Harith ibn Abi Shimir al-Ghassani, who reigned over part of Arabia up to the outskirts of Syria. The content of the letters was always more or less the same: the Prophet introduced himself as "God's Messenger" to the recipients of the various letters, reminded them of God's Oneness, and called on them to accept Islam. If they refused, he held them responsible before God for keeping their whole people in error.

The kings and rulers reacted differently to those various letters: some (the Negus, Mundhir ibn Sawa) accepted the message, some (Muqawqis, Heraclius) showed respect with no wish to either fight or convert, and others (al-Harith ibn Abi Shimir al-Ghassani, for instance) rejected the message and threatened to attack. Nevertheless, the message was known to all and the Muslim community was henceforth settled in Medina, acknowledged in its religious identity, and respected as a regional power. Its leader, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, was considered either as a prophet whose reign was destined by God to inevitable expansion or as a powerful and fearsome king who was to be respected and dreaded.

The truce of al-Hudaybiyah was indeed a victory and an opening (*faṭḥ*) to the world: the warlike had taken up all the energy of the community, who sought to protect themselves, resist, and survive. Things had now changed, and in that peaceful situation, the Prophet was at last able to convey the contents of Islam's message: the principle of God's Oneness (*al-tawḥīd*), which liberates human beings from possible alienation to temporal interests or powers, in order to direct them toward the respect of a spiritual teaching, an ethic, and values to which they must remain faithful. Colonized by the need to defend themselves, hampered

by the imperative to react, the Muslims had defended their lives and their integrity, but they had not had the means to express the contents and meaning of what they believed. Peace, which now reigned over the whole Peninsula, had transformed the situation: more and more clans could now grasp the essence of Islam's message. Some converted; others respected Islam without embracing it; others fought it but with full awareness, and not merely for matters of domination, wealth, and power relations.

Khaybar

One last stronghold, however, seriously threatened the Muslim community's security after the signing of the al-Hudaybiyah covenant. This was the city of Khaybar, which had received many refugees from the Muslims' previous conquests. Khaybar was a regional power feared by all, and attacking it seemed unthinkable because its fortresses, weaponry, and riches were far superior to what their enemies, including Medina, could ever hope to fight and overpower. The Khaybar leaders, advised by members of the Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayyah, were hostile to Muhammad's presence in the region and never failed to show it and to harm the interests of his community or of isolated individuals whenever they had a chance.

The Prophet decided to organize an expedition against Khaybar, but he determined to keep it secret until the very last moment, so as not to alert the enemy. While Khaybar and its allies could rely on nearly fourteen thousand men, Muhammad decided to go there with an army of only fourteen hundred (though he could have mobilized more). Nearing the city at night, he called upon a guide who knew the area well, and made his camp between two of the Khaybar fortresses: in that way, he could cut off all communication between the Khaybar people and their Ghassanid allies. When day broke, the inhabitants of the two forts were surprised and impressed, and fear immediately invaded their ranks. The siege lasted several days, during which Muhammad and his men gathered information enabling them to use the best strategy to compel their enemy to give in. They decided to attack the citadels one by one, beginning with the most exposed and vulnerable. The method worked very well, and it was not long before the first fortresses fell. The surrender conditions were dis-

cussed for each individual case, but most of the time the vanquished were required to leave their possessions and exile themselves with their women and children.

The last major fortress, Qamus, resisted for fourteen days but eventually gave in, for the Muslims' siege was choking it and left no hope of victory. Then the last two forts also surrendered and they, in their turn, negotiated the terms of their capitulation. The Prophet agreed to allow the inhabitants to stay and manage their farms and orchards, provided they paid the Muslims a regular tax on their products. With all the fortresses conquered, the Prophet had neutralized his last major enemy in the area.

Among the war captives was Huyay's daughter (Huyay had been responsible for the Banu Qurayyah's treason). Safiyyah in no way resembled her father, and she had long been trying to learn the contents of the Prophet's message. She was pious and did not share her people's animosity toward him. The Prophet had heard of that woman and of her spirituality, and she did not hesitate to tell him about one of her dreams associating her fate with that of the city of Medina. Muhammad listened to her, then gave her a choice: remain a Jew and return to her people, or become a Muslim and marry him. She exclaimed: "I choose God and His Messenger!" and the wedding was celebrated a short time later.

A new stage was reached in that seventh year of *hijrah* (628 CE). Peace now reigned over the area, and the Muslims no longer had to fear attacks from the north. Agreements regulating tribe or clan relationships, or trade in general, enabled the Muslim community to settle down with maximum security. The Prophet's marriages also had to do with that situation: some of his wives came from clans that had, in effect, become family to Muhammad and so considered themselves his natural allies. Hence, the Muslim community itself seemed to have become invulnerable and unassailable: in the space of eight years, it had not only settled in a new city, Medina, but had secured unparalleled status and regional prestige.

"Islamic names," of exclusively Arab origin. Indeed, what preoccupied them was the opposite: they were to avoid the few names with a meaning clearly contrary to Islamic teachings, and allow an unrestricted choice of all sorts of different names, from all languages and origins. They had extremely varied names, of Arab, Persian, or Byzantine origin, and this was no problem at all for the Prophet and his Companions.

During those months of internal management and organization, the Muslims were faced with a new extradition case. Abu Basir came to Medina from Mecca and asked Muhammad for asylum. The Prophet, scrupulously faithful to the terms of the covenants he signed, could not allow him to stay, and when a Quraysh envoy, accompanied by a slave called Kawthar, came to demand Abu Basir back, Muhammad could not but comply. They left, taking Abu Basir as a prisoner, while Muhammad and the Companions exhorted Abu Basir to be patient. Early during the journey back, Abu Basir took advantage of his guards' momentary inattention and killed the Quraysh envoy. The slave ran away in terror and returned to Medina, where his former prisoner soon joined him. Muhammad wanted to send them back to Mecca again, but Kawthar was so afraid that the Prophet had no solution that would allow him to keep his word other than to send Abu Basir away from Medina (since the pact forbade him to stay). However, he did not have to make sure he actually went to Mecca, since there was now no guard to take him there. The Prophet ordered him to leave as the treaty required, and addressed an elliptical remark to his Companions: "Would that he had other Companions with him!"¹¹ Of course, Abu Basir did not go back to Mecca: he settled on one of the roads to the north, frequently used by caravans, especially the Quraysh's. Other Muslims who had escaped Mecca and had heard about his story soon joined him, and they decided to attack the Meccan caravans traveling on the northern route.¹² The group of Muslims became so numerous and the attacks so frequent and efficient that the Quraysh themselves eventually asked the Prophet to take in Abu Basir and his men as well as all future emigrants from Mecca. Their stratagem had been successful, and the Prophet received them, according to the Quraysh's wish to suspend the enforcement of that clause. It should be noted that Muhammad refused to send back women (for instance, Um Kulthum bint Uqbah) under any circumstances, because the treaty mentioned only men: to this the Quraysh raised no objection.

To All Rulers

In the course of the year following the treaty, the number of Muslims was to double. During those months of truce, the Prophet decided to send letters to all the rulers of the neighboring empires, kingdoms, or nations.

Thus, the Negus of Abyssinia received a new letter from the Prophet before he converted to Islam, and he agreed to represent the Prophet at his proxy wedding with Um Habibah, who, as mentioned earlier, had been abandoned by her husband in Abyssinia. Muhammad also wrote to Chosroes, the king of Persia; to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor; to Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt (who sent the Prophet a Coptic slave girl, Mariyah, as a gift);¹³ to Mundhir ibn Sawa, king of Bahrain; and to al-Harith ibn Abi Shimir al-Ghassani, who reigned over part of Arabia up to the outskirts of Syria. The content of the letters was always more or less the same: the Prophet introduced himself as "God's Messenger" to the recipients of the various letters, reminded them of God's Oneness, and called on them to accept Islam. If they refused, he held them responsible before God for keeping their whole people in error.

The kings and rulers reacted differently to those various letters: some (the Negus, Mundhir ibn Sawa) accepted the message, some (Muqawqis, Heraclius) showed respect with no wish to either fight or convert, and others (al-Harith ibn Abi Shimir al-Ghassani, for instance) rejected the message and threatened to attack. Nevertheless, the message was known to all and the Muslim community was henceforth settled in Medina, acknowledged in its religious identity, and respected as a regional power. Its leader, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, was considered either as a prophet whose reign was destined by God to inevitable expansion or as a powerful and fearsome king who was to be respected and dreaded.

The truce of al-Hudaybiyah was indeed a victory and an opening (*faith*) to the world: the warring had taken up all the energy of the community, who sought to protect themselves, resist, and survive. Things had now changed, and in that peaceful situation, the Prophet was at last able to convey the contents of Islam's message: the principle of God's Oneness (*at-tawhid*), which liberates human beings from possible alienation to temporal interests or powers, in order to direct them toward the respect of a spiritual teaching, an ethic, and values to which they must remain faithful. Colonized by the need to defend themselves, hampered