

THE CALL TO FREEDOM

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Title: 'The Simple Words that Carry Deep Meaning'

In the year 625 A.D. a soft call was heard from within a small town hidden amongst the dunes of the Arabian desert: *"God is Greatest, God is Greatest!"* Those few simple words carried deep meaning. They meant, to whomever acknowledged them, that none is worthy of worship except The Greatest, and none has the right to set the Doctrine except The Greatest. Suddenly, when compared to Him, all who had been assuming the robes of superiority found themselves disrobed, and were seen as they truly were: mere creatures. What this call conveyed to the general public was, in fact, an announcement of total freedom. Freedom from bondage to any human being, any social order, any doctrine, any attitude or belief other than what The Greatest Himself had announced.

Many sacrifices were made in the application of this new faith. It took 23 years of Prophet Mohammed's teaching (peace upon him) plus the efforts he and his companions offered, all the while inspired by Divine Revelation, to finally transform these professed words into a nation-wide conviction.

Main hurdle

There were many difficulties at first. The main hurdle that youthful Islam had to overcome was peer pressure. The backbone of this new faith was its opposition of the accepted norm, where it had to begin by erasing all preconceptions. No matter what they or their forefathers had been taught, no matter what was embedded through generations in their hearts and minds, no matter what their previous form of reasoning was, or the scales by which integrity and respect had been judged: all that now was of no worth:

"Similarly, whenever We sent before thee a warner to a town, its wealthy declared:

We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will indeed follow in their footsteps'.

He said, 'Even if I brought you better guidance than that upon which you found your fathers'?

They said, 'We disbelieve in your mission!'

So we exacted retribution from them: now see what was the end of those who rejected."

(HQ, 43:23)

It took a certain kind of people to rise to the responsibility. Although no one in Quraish had ever disbelieved the Prophet (peace upon him), and all who had actually listened to the Revelation realized the impossibility of it being of human source, yet not many adopted the new faith. Those who did

were the bravest, who did not fear the loss of life or livelihood. Thanks to them, and to the later followers of this faith in Medina, the call was carried far and wide, bringing freedom to all those it reached. Slaves were freed, women were given equal rights, children were nurtured regardless of gender, and parents were cherished throughout their old age. Even animals now had the right to fair treatment. Citizens, both male and female, now had the right to choose their leaders, and to speak out for or against the government. Acts of violence became uncommon, for freedom brought with it security, and security nurtured tolerance, which bred kindness. The ultimate kindness was forgiveness, and the Prophet set an example to that by pardoning his direst enemies upon his victorious entry into the holy city of Mecca. If not for freedom, all this could not have come about.

The Muslims entered Mecca peacefully, with neither swords brandished, nor spears raised in pride. The Prophet entered his hometown after it had forced him out, riding gently upon his mount, his head bowed down in thanks to his Lord. Freedom, brought by the belief that God is Greatest, was manifested by Bilal when he climbed atop the Holy Ka'ba, his strong voice soaring above the desert sands... sands that had once drunk his blood when as a slave his black body was tortured by his master. But in reality, even then Bilal was free, for while the owner of his body was putting it to torture, Bilal was chanting "*Ahadun- Ahad... Ahadun-Ahad!*" "Only One Is He... Only One!" That belief, in itself, had set him free forever.

How times have changed. As Muslims we still profess that God is Greatest, but our voices have lost that triumphant ring. That call, which once meant so much, has been reduced to signify no more than the announcement of prayer time. And whenever troops of Muslims chant together "Allahu-Akbar," the occasion contradicts and the sentiments belie these words. So many of our religious views today are misconstrued, and everyone bears a burden of blame. Religion, to most, is upholding Islam's 'five pillars', and hardly anyone pays attention to the structure for which the pillars were established! Acts of worship, as understood today, can never uphold a religion on their own. Our acts of worship, which are mostly practices done in semi-privacy, do not have much bearing on society. It is commitment, on both the social and individual levels, that upholds a religion. Just like any establishment, that will require cooperating together in education, organization, dedication, and hard work, all aiming towards the same goal: the advancement of their establishment.

Objectives

Compared to those objectives, acts of worship are easy! Yet we go on -while lacking education and organization, while avoiding hard work and commitment- we go on arguing about women's clothing, men's beards, sighting new moons and fighting new wars. We need brave men and women to rise to the occasion.

Let us once again taste Freedom: a freedom we have sadly lost somewhere along the way. Let us start bravely, as youthful Islam once started. Let us start by educating ourselves, men, women, and children. Let us learn first-hand from the Holy Qur'an. Let us not be hindered by existing norms or preconceptions. Let our voices ring loud and true: "*Allahu-Akbar, God is Greatest!*"

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