

Bilal the Abyssinian – One Light, Many Colors

Islamic Viewpoint on Racism

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Bilal, the Abyssinian FOREWARD

Hypocrisy is living well in the West. How else does one explain the demonization of Islam, a culture of peace, piety and enlightenment by cynics in the Occident? While many western societies found escape from tyranny through pitched warfare and violent revolution, they have been quick to decry the use of even vaguely similar remedies to liberate oppressed peoples throughout the world and have, in fact, supported the politics, policies and methods of criminally repressive regimes to their own selfish ends. The tragic irony is that Muslims have suffered exponentially at the hands of westerners, whose marauding 12th century ancestors found escape from the Dark Ages only through gifts bestowed upon them by Muslim scholars, scientists, artisans and theologians. The genius of Muslim polymaths, from al-Farabi to ibn Sina, al-Kindi to ibn al-Haythem, ibn Rushd to al-Ghazzali are precious drops of water in an ocean of Islamic scientists and philosophers whose ideas quite literally swept a stagnant, reactionary Europe into its much cherished Renaissance.

Keystone methods and modes of thought as well as institutions, libraries, hospitals and universities flourished in Europe after being introduced by Muslims. Resultantly, Europeans incurred a cultural debt to Islam they have been loath to repay, choosing instead to slant, distort or ignore Islamic influences in their great revival rather than embracing this fundamental truth: medieval Europe needed Muslims to kick start their science, art and culture, much as today they may need Islam to avert their rather advanced moral and spiritual decline.

One of the hallmarks of western repression is the illusion that “race,” supposedly expressed as physical characteristics like skin color, eye shape and hair texture among others, confers superiority or inferiority on individuals, rendering them ripe for systematic, generational exploitation, sometimes with the blessing of religious authorities. Church sanctioned racism validated the Crusades; religion underwrote Columbus’s brutal genocide of native populations in the New World and provided the template for future conquests and the scourge of imperialism; Christian missionaries, who gave dark peoples their Bibles in exchange for their lands, were both shock troops and the spiritual tricksters who prepared native populations to accept lingering colonialism as salvation; church chapels were integral to the slave castles that lined the Gulf of Guinea; segregation and apartheid both enjoyed church support in America and South Africa; secular Israel defiles Judaic tradition with deadly intent in the Holy Lands. In western hands, religion has often been a bludgeon supporting the murderous hypocrisy of racial supremacy and its destructive global reach.

Despite the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—insistence on the indisputable Oneness of the Creator, of creation and of humankind, Islam is unique among them in its historical demonstration of social and ethnic equality from the time of our Noble Prophet Muhammad (p) to now. While the ordering of societies along supposedly “racial” lines has sullied the very heart and soul of western cultures, the timeless message of Islam, articulated on the tongue and in the life of the Prophet (p), brought the legislation of equality to the Muslim faithful, who in turn introduced it, through faith and practice, to the world. No better example of brotherly love’s transcendence

over socio-ethnic differences exists than that of the virtuous Prophet of Islam's long and fruitful relationship with an Abyssinian slave he chose as the first Muslim *mu'adth-dthin*, or caller to prayer, Bilal ibn Rabah (r). It is to this storied bond between the Prophet (p) and a most faithful Believer that our noted scholar and beloved teacher, Dr. Abdur-Rahman al-Sheha, turns his attention to illuminate the braided strands of Muslim law and pristine Islamic practice. The result is a memorable narrative as bountiful in its assembly of Quranic and Traditional proofs of Islamic equality and tolerance as it is in establishing the ascension and triumph of the African Bilal over incipient Arab racialism and bigotry.

Dr. al-Sheha's reverent examination of the life of the virtuous Bilal is buttressed by wholly engaging, scholarly commentaries on equality in Islam and unity of humankind. His writing is made more attractive by the power of simplicity as he deftly makes the liberating point, citing copious evidence from the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of our Honorable Prophet (p), that piety, or its lack, confers either honor or dishonor on each of us. Expanding on this encompassing theme of equality, he firmly underscores both the necessity and the responsibility of equality under law (Shari'ah) which both rewards and punishes in equal measure, sanctifies the blood of the Muslim as well as his/her property and belongings, grants equal access to Allah's bounties and rites of worship. These principles, so firmly rooted in Islamic culture, are bedrock to the faithful and provide a tangible framework for the poignant story of Bilal, the model of faith and forbearance; Bilal, the calm, the resolute; Bilal, the companion of the Holy Prophet (p); Bilal, the bane of Bani Jumah and Umayyah ibn Khalaf; Bilal, whom Dr. al-Sheha reminds us, "honored not only Islam, but all humanity." And of

whom ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (r), when speaking of Abu Bakr, Sheikh al-Sheha further discloses, would say, “Abu Bakr is our master and the emancipator of our master.” These sentiments, among countless others affirming and reaffirming them, conferring the title of “Master” on a former slave, cast the notion of equality—in cellular form—within the Muslim ummah. So that Islam, unlike other world religions, has not suffered the divisive contradiction of segregated worship, as is clearly witnessed daily in *masajid*, or mosques worldwide, where the ranks of prayerful believers assemble without regard to “race,” class or caste. Or where the annual *hajj*, or pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites, the largest annual pilgrimage in the world, is a viable, vital testimony to the strength, the beauty of Muslim equality, unity and faith.

With this outstanding treatment of the life and social significance of Bilal ibn Rabah’s position within the Prophet’s contemporaries, even the most cynical of critics is cowed by Sheikh al-Sheha’s spirited accounts of the devotion to inclusion exemplified by Muhammad (p) and his Companions (r) as they established the first Islamic Republic based solely on the Qur’an and the Traditions of the Prophet (p), traditions which are firmly in place today and give lie, in the most basic and fundamental of ways, to crass charges of Muslims as “terrorists,” “Europhobic,” “misogynists,” and “tyrants.” On the contrary, Islamic culture, firmly rooted in equality and brotherhood, stands in the light of history as a way to Peace, both in this world, and in the world to come.

Truth is the enemy of hypocrisy. This latest work by Dr. al-Sheha, in casting light on the exemplary, humble life of Bilal ibn Rabah (r), honorable friend of the Prophet Muhammad (p),

lends itself to the continuing global dialogue to uphold the dynamic elements of the world's fastest growing religion, and breathes life into the idea of piety as an achievable way of life.

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Introduction

A society is doomed to failure when it is based on ignorance and anarchy. This fact becomes more apparent when people are void of moral conduct and racial tension is high. In a society like this, the strong will oppress the weak and the rich will exploit the poor. Under circumstances such as these, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ¹ came forth to mankind with the Message of Islam². It spread rapidly. At first, many rejected it and tried their best to stop it from spreading. Oppressors knew quite well that this meant an end to their reigns over the general population. Islam, the Message of God, frees the soul and mind from being enslaved to any individual.

One of the key characteristics of the Message of Islam is that it instructs people to seek education and to cast aside all vile acts. Racial supremacy -in all of its forms- was extinguished, for all people stand equal before God Almighty. Superiority, according to Islam, is not achieved by one's color, race and ethnic origin; on the contrary, it is only achieved through piety. The more one is God-fearing, the more beloved they are to God.

¹ Some translate it as 'peace be upon him'. This translation is incorrect; the correct translation is, may Allah exalt his mention, and render him and his household safe and secure from every derogatory thing.

² Islam is a way of life, which is both private and public. It is an inclusive term meaning: acts of worship, political practice, and a detailed code of conduct, including hygiene or etiquette matters.

Chapter 1: Other Systems

A Muslim stands firm to fight all forms of oppression, immoral behavior and ignorance. Racial tensions based on skin color, race and sex dissipate in Islam. These social maladies were very common in the pre-Islamic *Makkan* society, as they are today in the West.

Before the advent of Islam people worshipped idols made from stone or wood. It was quite common for a person to enslave his fellow brother-in-humanity in laborious schemes to exhaust him financially and physically. The Prophet ﷺ clarified that no one was superior to another; all were equal before God. The Prophet ﷺ said:

“O people! Indeed your God is one, your father is one, and there is no superiority to an Arab over a non-Arab or to a non-Arab over an Arab. A red skinned person is not superior to a black skinned person, nor is a black skinned person superior to a red skinned person.”

(Ahmed)

Brahman India

The scriptures used by the Brahman Indians clearly make mention of a caste system whereby some people are considered superior to others. According to them, Brahma created the Brahmin people from his mouth. He created the *Kshatriya* from his arm and the *Vaishya* from his thigh and the *Shudra* from his feet. At the top of this fourfold system is the Brahmin and at the bottom is the *Shudra*. According to their scriptures, **“One**

occupation only the lord prescribed to the Shudra: to serve meekly even these (other) three castes [varnas”.

Ancient Greece and Rome

In Ancient Greece and Rome the nobles believed themselves to be created from a substance unlike that of the rest of creation who they called ‘Barbarians’³. Aristotle spoke of the Barbarians in a very detrimental manner, saying, **“The nature of a barbarian and a slave is one and the same.”**⁴

He also said: **“The lower animals cannot even apprehend a principle; they obey their instincts. Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freemen and slaves, making the one strong for servile labor, the other upright, and although useless for such services, useful for political life in the arts both of war and peace. And doubtless if men differed from one another in the mere forms of their bodies as much as the statues of the Gods do from men, all would acknowledge that the inferior class should be slaves of the superior.”**⁵

Jews and Christians

The Jews and Christians -before the advent of Islam- saw themselves as the chosen family of God. They believed

³ This term refers to the following meanings, "uncultured", "uncivilized" or "speaker of a foreign language".

⁴ Republic for Aristotle volume 1.

⁵ Book 1, chapter V of ‘The Politics’.

themselves to be special. They gave the name ‘*ger toshav*’⁶ to anyone else, whether they were atheists or general non-believers. They claimed that they were the only ones who deserved to be served, so they exploited other nations. Allah clarifies this in the Quran saying:

“And among the People of the Scripture is he who, if you entrust him with a great amount [of wealth], he will return it to you. And among them is he who, if you entrust him with a [single] silver coin, he will not return it to you unless you are constantly standing over him [demanding it]. That is because they say, ‘There is no blame upon us concerning the unlearned.’⁷ And they speak untruth about Allah while they know [it].”(3:75)

The interpreter Ibn Kathir said: **“What lead them to rejecting the truth was that they claimed, “We have no sin in our religions from consuming the wealth of the ignorant, who were the Arabs. God has made it lawful for us.”**

Some among the early monotheists belittled all other nations and viewed them as being of a lesser class. They asserted that all among humankind were their slaves. Allah clarifies to us their nature and explains at the same time that all humankind are equal. He says:

“But the Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of Allah and His beloved.’ Say, ‘Then why

⁶ Literally it means a Gentile who is a "resident alien" living under Judaic law.

⁷ The early Jews did not consider it a sin to gain the upper hand over a gentile or a pagan.

does He punish you for your sins?’ Rather, you are human beings from among those He has created. He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills. And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, and to Him is the [final] destination.” (5:19)

The Arabs

The Arabs held the same belief and viewed themselves as superior to all other races of people. They crowned themselves as Arabs and referred to other races as ‘non-Arabs’, and considered them worthless. The Prophet ﷺ clarified to them the mistake of their ways and the fallacy of this belief. He said to his Companions:

“It is not appropriate for one to say that I (i.e. Prophet Muhammad) am better than (Prophet Jonah) Yunus bin Mat’ta.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet’s words are like guiding lights both for the Arabs and for all nations, to show how one is to respect all others. The Companion, Ibn Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, related that the Prophet ﷺ said:

“I saw in my dream many black sheep gathering together with white ones.’ He was asked, ‘What is the interpretation of this dream O Prophet of Allah?’ He said: ‘Non-Arabs will share in your *Deen*⁸ and your

⁸ The word translated as religion is ‘*Deen*’, which in Arabic commonly refers to a way of life.

lineage.’ The Companions exclaimed, ‘the non-Arabs!’ The Prophet ρ then said: ‘If *Iman* (faith) was tied to a star, it would have been claimed by men from the non-Arabs.’ (Haakim)

People come from many racial backgrounds and have their individual moral elements. Every person has unique characteristics, and perfection belongs to God Almighty alone. Imperfection is an inherent nature in man, except for the Prophets and Messengers for they perfectly conveyed the Message of God to their respective nations. The message of Islam had a great effect on humankind with the result that they began to treat one another, in varying degrees, with respect.

Al-Mustourad al-Qurashi τ⁹ said, while I was with Amr bin al-Aas τ I told him that I heard the Prophet ρ saying: **“The Final Hour will not be established till the Romans are the greatest people in number.”** Amr τ said, **“if this is the case, it is because they (the Romans) are merciful to their kind. When an affliction befalls them they are the quickest to regroup. They stand together and fight fiercely. They are good to orphans, poor, weak, and do not tolerate the wrongdoing of their rulers.”** (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah ρ was sent to efface the caste system that was in place in society. He was sent to free mankind from the servitude they showed to men and to make them worship God alone.

⁹ Pronounced “*Ra'dee-Allah'who an'who*”, it means: ‘may Allah be pleased with him.’

Chapter 2: Equality in Islam

Rulers and their subjects are all equal before Allah. Regardless of the subtle differences between people, in Islam every Muslim is a brother to his fellow Muslim. The black and white, the Arab and non-Arab are all the same. Allah says:

“O mankind, fear your Lord¹⁰, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another,¹¹ and the wombs.¹² Indeed Allah is ever,¹³ over you, an Observer.” (4:1)

The origin of all humankind is their father, Adam v. When the Christians said that Jesus son of Mary was the son of God, Allah, the Exalted, said:

¹⁰ The Arabic word for Lord is ‘*Rubb*’. It means, the Creator, the Fashioner, the Provider, the One upon Whom all creatures depend for their means of subsistence, and the One Who gives life and causes death.

¹¹ i.e., request favors and demand rights.

¹² i.e., fear Allah in regard to relations of kinship.

¹³ When used in conjunction with Allah’s attributes, the word “ever” (occurring repeatedly throughout this *Surah* and elsewhere, such as in *Surah al-Ahzab*) is quite inadequate in imparting the sense of continuation expressed by the word “*kana*” in Arabic, which indicates “always was, is, and always will be.”

“Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah¹⁴ is like that of Adam. He created him from dust; then He said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was.” (3:59)

Allah, the Exalted, also says:

“And of His signs is that He created you from dust; then, suddenly you are human beings dispersing [throughout the earth].” (30:20)

All of humankind is from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve. Based on this, there can be no virtue for one over the other on account of one’s race. Accordingly, there is no reason for people to show off and boast or to belittle or scoff at another, or worse, for anyone to enslave another individual. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“Allah has taken away from the customs of the *Jahiliyah* era (pre-Islamic era). One is not to show off by boasting who their fathers are. All people are from Adam and Adam was created from soil (earth).” (Ahmed)

And further in this regard, Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And mankind was not but one community [united in religion], but [then] they differed. And if not for a word¹⁵ that proceeded from your Lord, it would have

¹⁴ i.e., regarding His creation of him.

¹⁵ Allah’s decree to allow time on earth for His creation or not to punish anyone before evidence has come to him.

been judged between them [immediately] concerning that over which they differ.’ (10:19)

As humankind increased in number they spread across the land and on account of this their languages naturally became diverse and their cultures formed and they changed in skin color. Based on these differences, people’s ideologies gradually changed and at times their belief systems were affected. Allah sent the Prophets and Messengers to guide humankind back to the belief in the Oneness of Allah. He, the Exalted, says:

“And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], ‘Worship Allah and avoid *taghut*.’¹⁶ And among them were those whom Allah guided, and among them were those upon whom error was [deservedly] decreed. So proceed [i.e., travel] through the earth and observe how was the end of the deniers.”
(16:36)

Islam does not judge a person by his/her outer appearance. The Prophet ﷺ said:

“It may be that a shaggy-haired, dusty person who people don’t consider as being much is so beloved to Allah that were he to make an oath by Allah, Allah would fulfill it for him.” (Haakim)

Since it is known that some may exploit these differences of the race, color, language, culture to belittle others, the Prophet ﷺ said:

¹⁶ False objects of worship

“Allah created Adam ﷺ from a scoop of soil (earth) that was taken from all parts of the Earth. The sons of Adam came forth bearing the marks of that soil from its various sources; of them are those who are red skinned, white skinned, black and yellow. Among them are those who are good natured and evil.” (Ibn Hibban)

All people, regardless of their skin color, language, country of origin stand equal before Allah. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous¹⁷ of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.” (49:13)

The Prophet ﷺ said:

“The lineage that each of you is related through is not a shame upon anyone. You are all the sons of Adam, no one is favored upon the other, and the most honorable of you before Allah is the most religious and those who do the good works.” (Ahmed)

Allah has made us into nations and tribes, no one is favored over the other; no race is better than the other. He has

¹⁷ Literally, “he who has the most *taqwa*,” i.e., consciousness and fear of Allah, piety and righteousness

made you like this so that you get to know one another. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.”
(17:70)

This honorable status is for all of mankind. It is not specified for a race over another or for a group over another.

Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And it is He who has made you successors upon the Earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.”
(6:165)

Chapter 3: Equality among Humankind

All of humankind have been created to worship Allah alone and to live on this Earth and to earn their livelihoods therein. Allah has made people of different social levels so that they would benefit from others in terms of earning their livelihoods. Allah, the Exalted, says:

‘It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service. But the mercy of your Lord is better than whatever they accumulate.’ (43:32)

Based on this, to Muslims, all among humankind are equal in the following:

- a. ***Protection of common rights regardless of one’s race, ethnicity or color.*** Every human is to enjoy freedom as is outlined in the religion. This form of freedom is distant from animalistic desires.

When a person opens himself up to all base desires, he would actually lower his status beneath that of the animals, if not worse!

- b. ***People are equal in terms of law.*** There is no differentiation on account of ethnicity, color or sex. Allah says: **“O you who have believed, it is not**

lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion.¹⁸ And do not make difficulties for them in order to take [back] part of what you gave them¹⁹ unless they commit a clear immorality [i.e., adultery]. And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good.” (4:58)

The Prophet ρ said: **“O people one of the things that destroyed the previous nations is that when the rich would steal, they would leave that person alone, but when a poor stole, they would make sure to get their full right from him. By Allah, if Fatimah the daughter of Muhammad stole something, I would have cut off her hand as well.”** (Muslim)

c. ***People are equal in terms of responsibilities, reward and punishment.***

Allah, the Exalted, says: **“So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.”** (99:7-8)

d. ***People are equal in human honor.*** A person is not to be harmed on account of their color, sex or belief.

Allah, the Exalted, says: **“And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus We have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to**

¹⁸ The deceased man's heirs have no rights of marriage or otherwise over his widow.

¹⁹ At the time of marriage as *mahr* (dowry).

their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do.”(6:108)

- e. *People are equal in the sanctity of their blood, properties and belongings.*

The Prophet ρ said: **“Indeed your blood, wealth, and honor is inviolable as this day is inviolable, as this month is inviolable, as this city is inviolable. Let those who are present inform those who are not.”**

(Bukhari)

- f. *People are equal in terms of seeking public office.*

It has been said: **“Whoever uses an individual and appoints him over a group, and in the group there are those who are more rightful, he has indeed been treacherous to Allah, the Messenger ρ and the believers.”** (Haakim)

Adi bin Amira al-Kindi said: 'I heard the Messenger of Allah ρ say: **“Whoso of you is appointed by us to a position of authority and he conceals from us a needle or something smaller than that, it will be considered as a misappropriation (of the public funds) and he will be required to produce it on the Day of Requital.”**

Adi τ said: “A dark-complexioned man from the Ansar stood up and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, take back the duty you have given to me.’ He said: **‘What has happened to you?’** The man said: ‘I have heard you say what you have said!’ He ρ said: **‘I say that (even) now whoso from you is appointed by us to a position of authority, he should bring everything,**

be it something big or small, and whatever he is given (by us) he may take, and what he is not given he should refrain from taking it.” (Muslim)

The Prophet ﷺ considered the loss of trust a sign of the end of societies, and it is a sign of the closeness of the Final Hour.

Abu Hurairah τ said: **“While the Prophet was sitting in session teaching people, a Bedouin came to him said: ‘When will the Final Hour be established?’ The Prophet continued talking to the people and after he finished, he asked: ‘Where is the one who asked about the Hour?’ The Bedouin said: ‘I am here O Messenger of Allah!’ The Prophet, may Allah praise him, said: ‘When trust is lost, the Final Hour will be established.’ He asked, ‘How would it be lost?’ He said: ‘When public matters are put under the responsibility of people who are not responsible, wait for the hour to be established!’”**

(Bukhari)

- g. *People are equal in terms of using what has been placed at our disposal by the Creator.*

Allah, the Exalted, says: **“O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.”** (2:168)

- h. *People are equal in terms of worshipping Allah alone.* Everyone is a slave to Allah regardless of their

race, ethnicity, skin color and language. Allah, the Exalted, says: **“O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous.”** (2:21)

The religion of Islam has come to eradicate all forms of racism. It is mentioned in the narration of Abu Uqbah, who was a freed slave from the people of Persia: “I fought with the Prophet ﷺ at the battle of Uhud and I struck a polytheist and I yelled at him, ‘take it from me and I am the Persian boy!’ The Messenger of Allah ﷺ turned towards me and said, **“You should say, take it from me and I am from the boy from the Ansar.”**

(Abu Dawood)

The Prophet ﷺ encouraged him to tie his root back to the *Ansar*, it was more beloved to him than saying that he was the ‘Persian’. Although the Companion was a Persian the Prophet ﷺ was very keen that one’s love and hate and alliance be with the religion of Islam, far from racial ties.

The Prophet ﷺ showed great love and affection towards Bilal who was from Abyssinia and Suhaib the Roman. He even said about Bilal that he was from the people of *Jannah* (Heavenly Abode)²⁰. He gave the glad tidings of *Jannah* to Abdullah bin Salam who was a Jewish convert to Islam.

We also see that the Prophet was not irresolute; when people from his own family did not believe, he distanced himself from them. Look at his uncle, Abu Lahab, who, when he

²⁰ Bukhari.

showed open enmity towards Prophet Muhammad, ρ the following chapter was revealed concerning him:

“May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained. He will [enter to] burn in a Fire of [blazing] flame, his wife [as well] – the carrier of firewood. Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fiber.”

(Chapter 111)

Abu Lahab was highly revered in his tribe and was among the most noble of people in terms of lineage.

The Quran also informs us of Luqman, the Wise. He was from an African background, and had great wisdom. An entire chapter in the Quran bears his name. In it his virtue and merit are mentioned. There are other chapters in the Quran that have been named after Prophets and Messengers, such as Noah and Abraham, and families, such as the family of Imran, Mary, Joseph, Jonah and Muhammad, among others. Muslims recite these chapters in their prayers. This serves to reaffirm that we are all equal before Allah.

The Prophet ρ spoke of a pious king who lived in Abyssinia, the Negus. He said about him, **“No one is wronged by him.”** When he died, the Prophet ρ performed prayers for him. Some said, ‘Shall we perform prayers on that Abyssinian?’ At this the words of Allah were revealed:

“Indeed, among the People of the Scripture are those who believe in Allah and what was revealed to you and what was revealed to them, [being] humbly submissive

to Allah. They do not exchange the verses of Allah for a small price. Those will have their reward with their Lord. Indeed, Allah is swift in account.” (3:199)

The Prophet ﷺ said: **“Ask Allah to forgive your brother,” and he stood with the Companions and prayed for him and he said ‘Allah Akbar’ four times.”** (Bukhari)

The issue of equality in Islam is not just a written matter that is not applied. Whatever the Prophet ﷺ preached, he would apply. Look at Osama b. Zaid, who was dark in complexion. The Prophet ﷺ would take him along with al-Hasan and say: **“O Allah love them, for I love them.”**²¹ A’ishah, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ said: “It is not befitting for a person to dislike Osama, for I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: **‘Whoever loves Allah and His Messenger, let them love Osama.’**” (Muslim)

The Prophet ﷺ appointed Osama over the army that was to attack Rome. Under his command were a number of the Companions. Some of the companions felt that Osama was unfit to lead the expedition and they spoke amongst themselves. When the Prophet ﷺ heard this he addressed the people saying: **“If you speak ill of him, you would have spoken ill of his father before him. He is indeed worthy of this position and he is among the most beloved of people to me.”** (Agreed Upon)²²

Before the expedition headed out, the Prophet ﷺ died and when they were ready to go, Umar came to Abu Bakr, who was appointed Caliph and conveyed to him some of the concerns he

²¹ Bukhari

²² This means the narration is both in Bukhari and Muslim.

had heard. He said to Abu Bakr, “Some Companions think that someone who is older and more skilled should lead the expedition.” At this Abu Bakr said: “May your mother lose you, O Umar! The Prophet ﷺ appointed him and you want me to remove him? By Allah, O Umar, if the wild animals would come upon me to eat me I would still send the army with Osama as its head.”

The young commander took his troops and Abu Bakr was walking beside Osama. He felt uncomfortable and said to Abu Bakr, “O Caliph of the Muslims! Either you ride alongside of me or I will come down to walk beside you!” Abu Bakr said, “By Allah, you will not come down, nor will I ride, what is wrong if I make my feet dusty for the sake of Allah!” He then took the permission of Osama to let Umar remain behind with him to take care of the affairs of Madinah.

The Prophet ﷺ was the most honorable of all people in terms of lineage, his tribe was the most honorable as well. Yet the Prophet said to his companions:

“Do not adulate me as the Christians adulated Jesus son of Mary. I am only the slave of Allah and His Messenger.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet married Osama to his relative, Zainab daughter of Jahsh. The Prophet ﷺ said:

“If someone comes seeking marriage, and you are content with his manners and religion, then get him married; if you do not, there will be great evil and corruption the earth.” (Tirmidhi)

He ﷺ would always ask about his companions. Abu Hurairah said that there was a black woman who would clean the Masjid. The Prophet ﷺ then asked about her and they told him that she had died. The Prophet ﷺ said to them, **“You should have informed me!”** They belittled the affair of that person thinking she was not that important. He said: **“Show me the grave!”** They showed it to him, and he prayed for her. (Bukhari)

He ﷺ would give out many gifts. Hakeem b. Hizaam said, “Muhammad ﷺ was the most beloved of people to me before the advent of Islam. When he became a Prophet and left to Madinah, a garment was found that belonged to *Dhi Yazen*²³ valued at 50 Dirham, so I bought it to give it as a gift to the Prophet ﷺ but the Prophet refused to take it from him and he said: **“We do not take gifts from polytheists. If they insist on giving something, we take it only after paying for it.”** (Haakim)

When he came to Madinah I saw him wearing it. He then gave it to Osama, and Hakeem, upon seeing it with Osama said to him, “Are you wearing the garment of *Dhi Yazen*?” He said, “I am better than *Dhi Yazen*, and my father and mother and better than his father and mother!”

It is indeed Islam that made him think with this mindset. Every Muslim realizes that they are all equal before Allah, regardless of their color, language and ethnicity.

²³ *Dhi Yazen* was a king before the advent of Islam.

Chapter 4: Racist Statements are Unacceptable

The Prophet ﷺ used to talk to his companions, joke with them, and listen to their needs. He would correct any errors he saw them doing especially when they were racial mistakes. Abu Hurairah τ said: “Two people swore at each other, and one of them scoffed at the other by ridiculing his mother. This reached the Prophet, may Allah praise him, and he called the man and said: **‘Did you scoff at his mother?’** and he kept repeating it. The man said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to forgive me.’ He said to him: **‘Raise your head and look about, you are not better than any individual regardless whether he is of a red or black skin color. No one is better than the other except through piety.’**” (Ibn Rahawaih)

The Prophet ﷺ would not stand for another to make fun of anyone else in his presence. Once while his Companions got together in a sitting and the Prophet ﷺ had yet not come, Khalid b. al-Walid, Abdurrahmann b. Auf, Bilal b. Abi Rabah, and Abu Dharr were among those in attendance. The only dark skinned companion present was Bilal the Abyssinian. He began speaking and Bilal corrected him. Abu Dharr, due his anger, exclaimed, “Even you, O son of a black woman, try to correct me?” Bilal got up, visibly upset at what was said, and said: “By Allah I will report you to the Prophet.” He went to him and informed him of what was said and the Prophet ﷺ became very angry. Abu Dharr rushed to meet the Prophet ﷺ and said “Assalamu Alaika (peace be upon you), O Prophet of Allah.” Abu Dharr said, “I am not sure if he responded to my greeting due to his extreme anger.” Then he said: **“O Abu Dharr! Have you ridiculed him on**

account of his mother? Indeed you are a man in whom there are traits of the pre-Islamic era!” Abu Dharr wept and said: “O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to forgive me.” He left the Masjid weeping and when he saw Bilal, he put his head on the ground and said to Bilal, “O Bilal, I will not move from my position till you put your foot on my head. You are the honorable and I am the disgraced.” Bilal wept, and kissed the cheek of Abu Dharr and said: “A face that has prostrated to Allah is not to be stepped on; rather, it is to be kissed.” (Bukhari)

Bilal was a great man. The Prophet ﷺ said to him: **“O Bilal, inform me of a deed which you have done and you believe it to be the greatest in the sight of Allah, for indeed I heard your footsteps in Heaven!”** Bilal said, “The most beloved deed that I did for the sake of Allah is that whenever I made wudhu (ablution), I would make whatever prayer I could after it.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet ﷺ revered these individuals so much that he would frequently sit with them. One day while Bilal, Suhaib and Ammar were sitting with the Prophet ﷺ an emissary from Quraish came and upon seeing these Companions with him, they said: “We want you to give us a time whereby we can sit with you. We want the Arabs to know our status and honor and the delegations come to you, but we are embarrassed that people see us with you while these poor individuals sit with you.” The Prophet said, “All right,” and he called Ali to write down something to this effect. But before anything happened, the command of Allah came down:

“And do not send away those who call upon their Lord morning and afternoon, seeking His countenance. Not

upon you is anything of their account and not upon them is anything of your account.²⁴ So were you to send them away, you would [then] be of the wrongdoers. And thus We have tried some of them through others that they [i.e., the disbelievers] might say, ‘Is it these whom Allah has favored among us?’ Is not Allah most knowing of those who are grateful? And when those come to you who believe in Our verses, say, ‘Peace be upon you.’ Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy: that any of you who does wrong out of ignorance and then repents after that and corrects himself - indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.’” (6:52)

The Prophet ﷺ tossed aside the letter he was about to have written for them and said: “Peace be upon you. Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy.” (Ibn Majah)

²⁴ No one is held accountable for the deeds or intentions of another. That is left to Allah’s judgment.

Chapter 5: Story of Bilal the Abyssinian

Let us hear the story of Bilal τ who was a mere slave before his conversion to Islam and after his conversion became a 'master' of Islam. He was honored in Islam to be chosen to call the *Adthan* (call to prayer).

Whenever Umar τ mentioned Abu Bakr τ he would say, "**Abu Bakr is our master and the emancipator of our master.**" (Bukhari) Umar τ gave the title "Our Master" to Bilal τ who was very dark in complexion, had a slender build, was very tall, thick-haired and had a sparse beard, as described by the narrators. Whenever he was praised he would lower his head, and weep saying, "Indeed, I am an Abyssinian. Yesterday, I was only a slave!"

So who is this Abyssinian who was yesterday only a slave? He was Bilal son of Rabah, the one who gave the call to prayer. Out of every ten Muslims, from the beginning of Islam until today and until Allah wills, we will meet seven, at least, who know Bilal. That is, there are hundreds of millions of people throughout the centuries and generations who knew Bilal, remember his name, and know his role just as they know the two greatest Caliphs in Islam, Abu Bakr τ and Umar τ !

If one was to ask a child in his first years of primary school about Bilal, he would answer, 'He was the one who called the *Adthan*.' He was the slave whose master would torture him with hot burning stones and he would chant, 'God is One', 'God is One.'

Before Islam, Bilal τ would tend to his master's sheep and livestock for a handful of dates. Had it not been for Islam, it would have been his fate to remain a slave, wandering among the crowd until death brought an end to his life. However, his faith proved to be true, and the magnificence of the religion which he believed in gave him, during his lifetime and in history, an elevated place among the great and noble men of Islam. Indeed, many human beings of distinction, prestige, or wealth have not obtained even one-tenth of the immortality which Bilal, the Abyssinian, gained. Indeed, the black color of his complexion, his modest lineage, and his contemptible position among people as a slave did not deprive him, when he chose to embrace Islam, of occupying the high place which his truthfulness, certainty, purity, and self-sacrifice qualified him for.

The people of Makkah thought that a slave like Bilal τ would neither have power over anything, nor become anything. But he went beyond all expectations and possessed great faith that no one like him could possess! He was an Abyssinian of African ethnicity. His mother was as well from Abyssinia. Her name was Hamaama and she was a slave to Umayyah b. Khalaf al-Jumahi in Makkah.

The news of Prophet Muhammad's message reached the ears of Bilal τ. In fact, the Prophet was the buzz of Makkah; people from every walk of life were talking about him. It so happened that he was doing some work and his master along with other noblemen of Quraish were sitting. They were talking about the Prophet and his Message. His own master, Umayyah bin Khalaf spoke quite harshly about the Prophet ρ and his

words were usually filled with anxiety, rage, and malice! As he listened in he found out about the characteristics of Islam. He also heard from them that Muhammad was a nobleman, trustworthy and very loyal. They said to one another, "Muhammad was never a liar, magician, or mad, but we have to describe him this way so that people will abandon his religion." Bilal heard them whispering about the reasons which caused them to challenge and antagonize him. The reasons were as follows:

First was their allegiance to the religion of their fathers;

Second was their fear over the glory of the Quraish which was bestowed upon them because of their religious status as a center of idol worship and resort in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula;

Third was the envy of the tribe of *Bani Hashim* that anyone from among them would claim to be a prophet or messenger.

After hearing so much about the religion of Islam, Bilal accepted it and converted to Islam. It did not take long before the news of his embracing Islam was spread. It was a shock to the chiefs of Bani Jumah (the tribe who owned Bilal). Umayyah ibn Khalaf, the owner of Bilal, considered it a great shame and disgrace but he said mockingly: "It does not matter. The only one who will accept Islam is this slave!" However, the direct opposite occurred. Islam spread and the practice of idolatry was brought to an end.

Bilal, honored not only Islam, but all humanity. He resisted the harshest forms of torture. Allah made him an example of the fact that blackness of skin and bondage would

not decry the greatness of the soul if it found its faith and adhered to its Creator. Bilal gave a profound lesson to those during his time and afterwards as well; freedom and supremacy of conscience could not be bartered either for gold or punishment, even if its quantity was enough to fill the earth. He was stripped naked and laid on hot coals in order to make him reconsider and denounce his faith, but he refused. He would be taken out in the heat of the day and his body would be dragged on top of the burning stones. A huge stone that took several men to lift would also be placed on his body and chest. This savage torture was repeated every day until the hearts of some of his torturers took pity on him. They told him, “If you speak well of our idols, we will let you free.” The Quraish did not want it to be said that they were unable to convince or forcefully bring a slave out of Islam. Even with this, Bilal refused and he began to repeat his lasting chant: “God is One, God is One!” His torturers shouted at him, imploring him, “Mention the name of Al-Laat and Al-'Uzza.²⁵” But he answered, “God is One, God is One!” They asked him to simply repeat after them, but he scoffed at their request saying: “I am unable to properly pronounce what you want me to say!”

So Bilal remained in his state and was tortured ever more severely. By sunset they tied a rope around his neck and ordered their boys to take him around the mountains and streets of Makkah. Bilal continuously chanted “God is One, God is One!”

When the night fell, they told him, “Tomorrow, you will speak well of our idols and we will leave you alone. We are tired of torturing you, and now the task is so cumbersome that it

²⁵ The names of two idols that were worshipped before Islam.

seems to us that we are the tortured ones.” Bilal remained resolute; he shook his head and said, “God is One, God is One!” Umayyah Ibn Khalaf kicked him and exploded with fury, and shouted, “How unlucky I am! What a wretched slave you are! By Al-Laat and Al-'Uzza, I'll make you an example for slaves and masters.” But Bilal answered with the holy greatness and certainty of a believer, “God is One, God is One!” They were playing a game with Bilal. One of the Polytheists who was present played the role of a sympathizer and he said: “Take it easy, Umayyah. By Al-Laat, he will not be tortured again. Indeed Bilal is one of us; his mother is our slave girl. He will not be pleased to talk ill about us or to ridicule us because of his conversion to Islam.” But Bilal gazed at their lying, cunning faces and with complete calmness that shook them violently, he chanted “God is One, God is One!” The next day Bilal was taken in the open sun and extreme heat. Bilal knew what was to come and he was patient, brave and knew that if he remained in this state, a great reward awaited him in the Hereafter.

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq τ went to them while they were torturing him and shouted at them, “Are you killing a man because he says, ‘Allah is my God!’” Then he shouted at Umayyah ibn Khalaf, “Take more than his price and set him free.” It was as if Umayyah was drowning and had caught a lifeboat. It was to his liking and he was very much pleased when he heard Abu Bakr offering the price of his freedom, since they had lost all hope that he would ever leave Islam. And as they were merchants, they realized that selling him was more profitable to them than his death.

They sold him to Abu-Bakr τ and he then emancipated him immediately, and Bilal took his place among free men.

When Abu Baker put his arm around Bilal, Umayyah said to him, “Take him, for by Al-Laat and Al-' Uzza if you had refused to buy him except for one ounce of gold, I would have sold him to you.” Abu Bakr realized the bitterness of despair and disappointment hidden in those words. It was appropriate not to answer, but because they violated the dignity of this man who had become his brother and his equal, he answered Umayyah saying, “By Allah, if you had refused to sell him except for a hundred ounces, I would have paid it.”

After the Hijrah of the Messenger ﷺ and the Muslims to Al-Madinah the Messenger enjoined that a call to prayer be called. Who was to be given this honor to call the prayers? It was none other than Bilal, who had called out thirteen years before while he was being tortured, “God is One, God is One!” He was chosen by the Messenger that day to be the first caller to prayer in Islam. With his melodious voice, he filled the hearts with faith and the ears with awe when he called:

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

I bear witness that there is no true god but Allah

I bear witness that there is no true god but Allah

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

Come to Prayer

Come to Prayer

Come to Success

Come to Success

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

There is no true god but Allah

Subsequent to this, the Muslims and the polytheists engaged in battle. The Battle of Badr was the first battle that took place between them. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ made the slogan of the Muslims during this momentous confrontation: “God is One, God is One!” In this battle 70 were killed and 70 were taken as prisoners of war. The noblemen of Quraish were finished off. Umayyah ibn Khalaf, who had been Bilal's master, did not want to go out of Makkah to face the Muslims. So he did not prepare himself. His friend Uqbah ibn Abi Muait was upset so he made a point of going to see him while he was sitting amongst his people and he gave him an incense burner and said to him, “O Abu Ali, use this. You are one of the women.” Umayyah shouted at him saying, “May Allah make you and what you came with ugly!” After this he found no way out. Uqbah ibn Abi Muait had been the greatest supporter of Umayyah throughout the ordeal of Bilal and other weak Muslims. And on that day, he himself was the one who urged him to go to the Battle of Badr where he would die, just as it

would be the place where Uqbah would die! It is truly amazing how Allah executes His command.

Umayyah reached his demise at the hands of none other than Bilal. When the fighting began between the two sides, and the Muslims began shouting, “God is One, God is One!” The heart of Umayyah sunk! These were the same words his slave used to repeat yesterday under torture and today it rocked the battlefield from all sides and was the cry of an entire nation of people! Umayyah thought to himself, had Islam spread so quickly amongst people! The swords clashed in the battle and the fighting became severe. As the battle neared its end, Umayyah ibn Khalaf noticed Abdurrahmann bin Auf, the Companion of the Messenger of Allah. He sought refuge with him and asked to be his captive, hoping that this would save his life. Abdurrahmann accepted and granted him refuge. He took him and walked with him amidst the battle to the place where the captives were held. On the way Bilal τ noticed him and shouted, “The head of *Kufr* (disbelief), Umayyah ibn Khalaf! May I not be saved if he is saved!” He lifted his sword to strike Umayyah, but Abdurrahmann bin Auf shouted at him, “O Bilal, he is my captive!” Bilal τ thought, “A captive while the war was still raging? A captive while his sword was still dripping from the blood of Muslims? This could not be!” Bilal realized that he would not be able to attack Umayyah himself so he called on his fellow Muslims, “O Ansaar! The head of *Kufr*, Umayyah ibn Khalaf! May I not be saved if he is saved!” A band of Muslims approached and surrounded Umayyah and his son, who was fighting with the Quraish. Abdurrahmann bin Auf could not do anything. He could not even protect his armor, which the crowd removed. Bilal gazed long at the body of Umayyah, who fell

beneath the smashing swords. Then he hastened away from him shouting, "God is One, God is One!"

I do not think it is our right to examine the virtue of leniency in the case of Bilal during this occasion. If the meeting between Bilal and Umayyah had taken place under any other circumstances, we would have been allowed to ask Bilal to show mercy and leniency, and a man like him in faith and piety would not have withheld it. But they met each other on the battlefield, the swords were blazing and the killed were falling. He saw him in the arena of battle and fighting. If Umayyah were able to, he would have killed Bilal. It is unfair for one to say to Bilal under the circumstances, 'Why did you not forgive him?'

The days went by and Makkah was conquered. The Messenger ρ entered it, gratefully saying, "Allah is the Greatest," at the head of 10,000 Muslims. He headed for the Ka'bah immediately. It was filled with many idols, each for one day of the year. As the Prophet ρ destroyed them, he called out **"The truth has come and falsehood has vanished."** Ever since that day, there has been no Uzza, no Laat and no Hubal²⁶. Man bows down only to worship Allah, the most High. The Messenger ρ entered the Kabah accompanied by Bilal. He had hardly entered it when he faced a carved idol representing Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) υ drawing lots. In anger he said, **"May Allah kill them. Our ancestors never drew lots. Ibrahim was not a Jew or Christian, but he was a true Muslim and was never a polytheist."** Then he ordered Bilal τ

²⁶ The names of three idols that were worshipped before Islam.

to ascend to the top of the Kabah to call the Prayer. He called the Adthan. How magnificent was the time, place, and occasion!

Life in Makkah came to a standstill, and thousands of Muslims stood motionless, repeating in submissiveness the words of the Adthan after Bilal while the Polytheists were in their homes hardly believing what was happening. The Prophet ρ addressed them saying **“Go, you are free!”** (Ibn Hisham)

Bilal τ lived with the Messenger of Allah ρ and witnessed all the Battles with him, calling to Prayer and observing the rites of this great religion that took him out of darkness to light and from servitude to freedom. With each passing day, Bilal τ became more beloved to the Prophet ρ. who described him as “one of the inhabitants of Paradise.”

But Bilal τ remained just as he was, noble and humble to a fault, always considering himself “the Abyssinian who only yesterday was a slave.” One day he was proposing to two girls for himself and his brother, so he said to their father, “I am Bilal and this is my brother, we were two slaves from Abyssinia. We were astray and Allah guided us. We were two slaves and Allah emancipated us. If you agree on us marrying your daughters, all praise is to Allah; if you refuse, then Allah is the Greatest.”

Whenever Umar ibn Al-Khattab τ mentioned Abu Bakr τ he would say, **“Abu Bakr is our master and the emancipator of our master.”** (Bukhari) That is to say, Bilal.

The Messenger ρ passed away and Abu Bakr As-Siddiq τ took the command of the Muslims after him. Bilal τ went to the

Caliph of the Messenger of Allah ρ and said to him, "O Caliph of the Messenger of Allah, I heard the Messenger of Allah ρ saying, **“The best deed of a believer is Jihad in the cause of Allah.”** Abu Bakr τ said to him, "So what do you want, Bilal?" He said: "I want to go in the path of Allah and die in that cause." Abu Bakr τ said, "And who will call the Adthan for us?" Bilal τ said, with his eyes overflowing with tears, "I will not call the Adthan for anyone after the Messenger of Allah." Abu Bakr τ said, "Stay and make the Adthan for us, Bilal." Bilal τ said, "If you emancipated me to be for you, I will do what you want, but if you emancipated me for Allah, leave me to Whom I was emancipated." Abu Bakr τ said, "I emancipated you for Allah, Bilal!" He then let him go on his way. The last time he called the Adthan was when the Commander of the Faithful, Umar visted *Shaam* and the Muslims begged him to ask Bilal to call the Adthan for them. They wept as they never did before, and Umar τ most strongly.

Bilal τ died in Syria, fighting in the cause of Allah just as he had wanted.

Conclusion

Look at the greatness of Islam, and the happiness one finds in their heart when they embrace it. This happiness remains in the heart and makes one forget about all the pains and troubles that they may have been through in their lives. The joy the Muslims feel upon applying their faith is far greater than any materialistic joy one can possibly experience in this life. If you really want to experience this happiness in your life you've got to take that bold step. Witness what Abu Sufyan bin Harb said: "Heraclius upon receiving a letter from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ called for us while we were in *Shaam*.²⁷ He said: **"Heraclius' messenger found us somewhere in the Greater Syria area, so he took me and my companions to *Ilya* and we were admitted into Heraclius' presence. We found him sitting in his royal court wearing a crown, surrounded by the senior Byzantine dignitaries. He said to his translator. 'Ask them whom amongst them is a close relation to the man who claims to be a prophet.'"**

Abu Sufyan added,

"I replied: 'I am the nearest relative to him.' He asked, 'What degree of relationship do you have with him?' I replied, 'He is my cousin,' and there was none from the tribe of *Abd Manaf* in the caravan except myself. Heraclius said, 'Let him come nearer.' He then ordered

²⁷ This is a historic region in the Middle East bordering the Mediterranean. It is generally considered to include the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan.

that my companions stand behind me near my shoulder and said to his translator, ‘Tell his companions that I am going to ask this man about the one who claims to be a prophet. If he tells a lie, they should contradict him immediately.’”

Abu Sufyan added,

“By Allah! Had it not been for shame that my companions brand me a liar, I would not have spoken the truth about him when he asked me. But I considered it shameful to be called a liar by my companions, so I told the truth.”

“He then said to his translator, ‘Ask him what kind of family he belongs to.’ I replied, ‘He belongs to a noble family amongst us.’ He said, ‘Has anybody else amongst you ever claimed the same before him?’ I replied, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Have you ever blamed him for telling lies before he claimed what he claimed?’ I replied, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Was anybody amongst his ancestors a king?’ I replied, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Do the noble or the poor follow him?’ I replied, ‘It is the poor who follow him.’ He said, ‘Are they increasing or decreasing (daily)?’ I replied, ‘They are increasing.’ He said, ‘Does anybody amongst those who embrace his religion become displeased and then discard his religion?’ I replied, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Does he break his promises?’ I replied, ‘No, but we are now at truce with him and we are afraid that he may betray us.’”

Abu Sufyan added,

“Other than the last sentence, I could not say anything against him.”

Heraclius then asked, ‘Have you ever had a war with him?’ I replied, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘What was the outcome of your battles with him?’ I replied, ‘Sometimes he was victorious and sometimes we.’ He said, ‘What does he order you to do?’ I said, ‘He tells us to worship God alone, and not to worship others along with Him, and to leave all that our fore-fathers used to worship. He orders us to pray, give in charity, be chaste, keep promises and return what is entrusted to us.’

“When I had said that, Heraclius said to his translator, ‘Say to him: I asked you about his lineage and your reply was that he belonged to a noble family. In fact, all the Messengers came from the noblest lineage of their nations. Then I questioned you whether anybody else amongst you had claimed such a thing, and your reply was in the negative. If the answer had been in the affirmative, I would have thought that this man was following a claim that had been said before him. When I asked you whether he was ever blamed for telling lies, your reply was in the negative, so I took it for granted that a person who did not tell a lie to people could never tell a lie about God. Then I asked you whether any of his ancestors was a king. Your reply was in the negative, and if it had been in the affirmative, I would have thought that this man wanted to take back his ancestral kingdom. When I asked you whether the rich or the poor people followed him, you replied that it was the poor who followed him. In fact, such are the followers of the Messengers. Then I asked you whether his followers were increasing or decreasing. You replied that they were increasing. In fact, this is the result of true faith till it is complete [in all respects]. I asked you

whether there was anybody who, after embracing his religion, became displeased and discarded his religion; your reply was in the negative. In fact, this is the sign of true faith, for when its pleasure enters and mixes in the hearts completely; nobody will be displeased with it. I asked you whether he had ever broken his promise. You replied in the negative. And such are the Messengers; they never break their promises. When I asked you whether you fought with him and he fought with you, you replied that he did and that sometimes he was victorious and sometimes you. Indeed, such are the Messengers; they are put to trials and the final victory is always theirs. Then I asked you what he ordered you. You replied that he ordered you to worship God alone and not to worship others along with Him, to leave all that your fore-fathers used to worship, to offer prayers, to speak the truth, to be chaste, to keep promises, and to return what is entrusted to you. These are really the qualities of a prophet who, I knew [from the previous Scriptures] would appear, but I did not know that he would be from amongst you. If what you say is true, he will very soon occupy the earth under my feet, and if I knew that I would reach him definitely, I would go immediately to meet him; and were I with him, then I would certainly wash his feet.’ ”

Abu Sufyan added,

“Heraclius then asked for the letter of the Messenger of God and it was read. Its contents were the following:

I begin with the name of God, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful [This letter is] from Muhammad, the slave of God, and His Messenger, to Heraclius, the

Ruler of the Byzantine. Peace be upon the followers of guidance. I invite you to Islam [i.e. surrender to God]). Accept Islam and you will be safe; accept Islam and God will bestow on you a double reward. But if you reject this invitation of Islam, you shall be responsible for misguiding the peasants [i.e. your nation].

(O people of the Scriptures! Come to a word common between you and us, that we worship God, and that we associate nothing in worship with Him; and that none of us shall take others as Gods besides God. Then if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered [unto Him].) (3:64)”

Abu Sufyan added,

“When Heraclius had finished his speech, there was a great hue and cry caused by the Byzantine dignitaries surrounding him, and there was so much noise that I did not understand what they said. So, we were ordered out of the court.”

“When I went out with my companions and we were alone, I said to them, ‘Verily, *Ibn Abi Kabsha’s* (i.e. the Prophet’s) affair has gained power. This is the King of the Romans fearing him.’ ”

Abu Sufyan added:

“By God, I became surer and surer that his religion would be victorious till I ended up accepting Islam.”

(Bukhari #2782)