

Original Birth-name of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)¹

Nearly 1,440 years ago, on 26th April 571 AD (Arabic month of *Rabi al-awwal*), a child was born in Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula. Mecca was a mountain town in the high desert plateau of western Arabia and which is on the eastern bank side of Red Sea. A few weeks before this child was born, his father had already died whilst on a return business journey. This child was already named as Ahmad² before he was born. This is explained in next set of paragraphs.

The child's mother's name was Aminah bint³ Wahab, who was married to Abd'Allah bin Abd al-Mutalib⁴, a wealthy businessman of the Banu Hashim family, in Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula. The Banu Hashim family were members of the *Quraysh* tribe. A few weeks after Abd'Allah had married Aminah, he went away on a trading journey to Syria. It is important to understand why it was necessary for Abd'Allah as a businessman, to take such a long journey of several months, from his country Arabia, to another country, Syria.

Damascus in Syria, in those days was the international business and market trading centre in the Middle East. Inasmuch as in this modern era, the main Asian trading centres of Bangkok, Singapore, and Hong Kong, may be similarly imagined for Damascus in Syria as main trading centre, in those days, 1,500 years ago. Traders had to travel from other neighbouring countries, using camel-trains and the journey took several months in each direction. Abd'Allah loaded his camel-trains with saddlebags filled with various supplies from Arabia, and then together with his employees as camel riders, proceeded to Damascus in Syria, to sell the off the supplies from Mecca. According to business traditions in those days, Abd'Allah always used the cash proceeds from his sales in Damascus, to buy other merchandise, which he then used to sell back in Arabia.

On his return journey home from Syria, Aminah's husband (Abd'Allah) fell ill and died. His camel riding employees buried Abd'Allah at location where he died (close to the oasis district of Yathrib⁵); and then they brought over the camel-train of merchandise to his young widow, Aminah who was pregnant with her first child. Later, Ahmad was born without ever seeing his own father. So saddening!

Before birth of her only child, Aminah dreamt she was visited by her husband Abd'Allah, and who informed her in her dream that she will have a son and her son was to be named Ahmad. She also saw that a very powerful blue light was spreading out from her womb, out wide, to every country in the world. She knew confidently, her son would be really great, later in his life. In true obedience to her husband Abd'Allah, Aminah named her son "Ahmad."

Aminah had no other source of income apart from whatever proceeds she was able to accumulate after selling off all her wares, which her husband Abd'Allah had brought over from Damascus, with the intention of selling them off in Mecca. She had no other option.

The young widow Aminah progressively salvaged some cash, as she sold off all the merchandise and she

¹ (pbuh)= The expanded version of (pbuh) means "Peace Be Upon Him."

² Ahmad= this name comes from the Arabic root word "hamada" which means "to praise and to glorify."

³ bint Wahab means "daughter of Wahab."

⁴ Abd'Allah bin Abd al-Mutalib means Abd'Allah, son of Mutalib.

⁵ Yathrib was later renamed as the current City of Medina in Saudi Arabia.

also sold off her camels and gradually she used up all the proceeds from that final trade transaction. She had no other means of dependable and steady income.

It was customary amongst Arabians 1,500 years ago, that a child be brought up by a wet nurse. But all wet nurses denied Ahmad's acceptance because his father had died and that it was also common knowledge in Mecca that "Abd'Allah the businessman" had died. It soon became common knowledge that there was no assumed guarantee of the wet nurse's regular payments. Most other wet nurses therefore declined to accept baby Ahmad. He was finally accepted and brought up by a poor woman named Halima bint Abi Dhuayb.

Aminah's financial status began to deteriorate hopelessly and she slipped lower in her status from recognised wife of a wealthy businessman to a common widow with child – by today's standards, she would be called: as "a widowed single parent with no source of income whatsoever."

In the meantime, Aminah also had to pay Halima constantly for upkeep of her baby (later as toddler) Ahmad. Again, it is so saddening! When Ahmad was four-five years old Halima, the wet nurse, returned him to his mother, Aminah, whose economic status had further deteriorated. Aminah could no longer pay Halima. Since she had no means of income, she was salvaging from whatever proceeds she had accumulated, after she sold off her husband's merchandise and his camels.

Less than two years later when Ahmad was six-seven years old, and now under control of his widowed mother Aminah, his mother also died. Aminah was buried in Abwah⁶, which was then a village located between Mecca and Medina along the camel highway.

What a dismal start for a child! The neighbours then felt pity, hired some camels and then took the orphaned and infant Ahmad to his grandfather Abd al-Mutalib, also of the Banu Hashim clan, who lived in Yathrib. Yathrib⁷ was an oasis district, away in another part of the region, in the northern outskirts of Mecca. Abd al-Mutalib was professionally a livestock farmer, and who owned several goats and camels surrounding the oasis region. He also had several of his own children, helping him on the farm. The neighbours who delivered Ahmad to Abd al-Mutalib, explained that his eldest son, Abd'Allah had died nearly seven years ago, and further his daughter-in-law, Aminah had also died just recently (then) and consequently Ahmad was truly orphaned and consequently he had no means of survival.

Abd al-Mutalib accepted his grandchild on a certain mindset. He wanted his newly inherited grandson Ahmad, to turn a totally new life and so Abd al-Mutalib changed and renamed his grandchild as "Muhammad"⁸ from his mother's originally given birth-name of Ahmad. Of course, in those days there was no such thing as Birth Certificate, so change of name did not matter. His grandfather, Abd al-Mutalib then took charge of Muhammad. It was here, on his grandfather's farm, that Muhammad learned the rudiments of animal husbandry, for goats and camels; and especially in dealing with camels, which was the only and basic means of transportation through the deserts of Arabia and between desert countries.

Two years later in 578AD, the grandfather (Abd al-Mutalib) also died. The child Muhammad, now aged eight, was much worse-off. So sad!

⁶ Later, when accommodated at his grandfather's house, Ahmad used to visit his mother's grave in Abwah, and pray for her soul.

⁷ Yathrib is 340 kilometres or 211 miles, north of Mecca; Yathrib is the old name for current City of Medina. People travelling from Mecca to Damascus, Syria had to pass through Yathrib (Medina) on the same camel highway.

⁸ Muhammad means "praiseworthy."

Then, at the age of eight years, Muhammad was subsequently sent to live with his uncle Abu Talib, also in Yathrib. Abu Talib was also involved in animal husbandry and inherited the farm from his father. The home of Abu Talib was also a very poor home. It was poverty that shaped and formed children into certain aggressiveness; and fights among children were common occurrences to get the best. The same concept also applies amongst poverty-stricken communities, even today. Muhammad, however, was different right from the beginning and very noticeably so. Muhammad never went to school inasmuch as his other neighbours and friends, in sharp contrast to children from wealthier families within the tribe, who received private tuition. Poverty ruled the fate of children from childhood through to adulthood. Abu Talib's family took good care of youthful Muhammad and paid him a small stipend for his hard work in animal husbandry.

Muhammad's honesty, reliability, straightforwardness and dedication earned him special respect from his uncle Abu Talib. At the age of twelve years, Muhammad became the favourite of his Uncle Abu Talib, who took him on a trading journey to Damascus, Syria. On the way they met a Christian monk named Baheera. When Baheera saw Muhammad's glowing face, he told Abu Talib to take great care of Muhammad, as the boy's face had very special signs of future greatness.

Muhammad lived to be a person who always had a friendly sweet smile. He had a very powerful memory, lively imagination and quick understanding. His speech was soft, yet firm. He never wore any fine clothes in his life and led a life of practical simplicity. Muhammad did not discard clothes because they got torn. He washed and mended his clothes and never became a burden upon other people to do things for him. Muhammad had his very special feelings for partly orphaned or fully orphaned children.

Since his childhood, Muhammad disliked worship of idols. He considered them as lifeless creations of man, rather than living creations of God. When Muhammad was a child, the worship of idols was the normal way of life for most Arabians. Muhammad hated making and consumption of any intoxicating beverages or anything which altered the mind. He also hated all forms of vice and kept away from people with bad habits.

At an early age, still in his teens he acquired the title of *Al Amin*, which in Arabic means the "Honest One." At the age of 25 he married a widow⁹ of age 40, who was a businesswoman of Mecca. After his marriage he was very successful in increasing her business most extraordinarily, and he was singularly instrumental to free her slaves and thereafter, all slaves in Mecca.

Muhammad started his prayer meditation in a cave called *Hira*, hollowed out in the side of the mountain *Jabbal-al-Noor* and spent most of his free moments in prayer. It was on one such day in the month of *Ramadan* that Archangel Gabriel appeared to him in the cave and delivered the revelation, which are the first eight verses of the Holy Qur'an.¹⁰

⁹ She was Khadija bint Khuwaylid (ra). She died at age 65. She bore Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) 2 sons and 4 daughters but only one daughter (Fatima) survived. The rest died in childhood.

¹⁰ The first eight verses of the Holy Qur'an, when it was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as 96:1-8: "1. Read in the name of thy Lord Who creates — 2. Creates man from a clot, 3. Read and thy Lord is most Generous, 4. Who taught by the pen, 5. Taught man what he knew not. 6. Nay, man is surely inordinate, 7. Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient. 8. Surely to thy Lord is the return."

NB: The balance of verses 96: 9-19 were revealed much later, but assembled together as whole of Chapter 96.

This was his initiation into prophethood and henceforth he is referred to with exclusive respect as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Thereafter the words "Peace Be Upon Him" are always added after his name, and after he became a prophet as "Rasul-Allah (pbuh)."

The world's most recognised prophet, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), died on 6th June 632AD, (Arabic month of *Rabi al-awwal*), exactly 23 years after his first revelation, and his personal completion to the final editing and his sealing off each of the 114 Chapters of the Holy Qur'an. Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) death also brought to the final sealed closure, of any *Nabi* or any *Rasul* till the end of this world.

Fiji