

and he tried to respond to his wives' many expectations. With time, the situation changed, because the various victories, the truce, and the accumulating booty had brought some degree of wealth into the Prophet's household, and his wives were beginning to ask for more goods, which seemed to them fair compensation for the restrictions on their public appearance and movements that their status entailed.

Events were to accelerate with the arrival of the slave girl Mariyah, gifted to the Prophet by Muqawqis.⁶ Mariyah was exceptionally beautiful, and the Prophet visited her frequently. Jealousy took hold of the Prophet's wives, and Aishah and Hafsa did not hesitate to criticize Mariyah and the Prophet's attitude when they talked together in his absence. The Prophet first decided to move Mariyah's dwelling further away, since those attacks were painful to her. Some time later, with the situation worsening, he promised to part from her. But Revelation contradicted the decision the Prophet had forced himself to take, and demanded that the women choose whether they wanted to stay with him or wished to divorce.⁷ This crisis situation alarmed the wives, as well as many Companions, including Umar, as the Prophet isolated himself and refused to see his wives for nearly a month, until they had made their choice, as the Quran ordered. They all chose "God and His Messenger," according to the formula Aishah had used when the Prophet questioned her (quoting the Quranic verses that had been revealed to him about his wives and their future).⁸

The slave girl Mariyah had been a trial for all the Prophet's wives. In private life, as noted, they could differentiate between Muhammad's status as a prophet and the fact that he remained a human being who could be advised and with whom they could debate or even argue. But they could not try to use his status as a prophet in public life to obtain special rights or treatment from the community. Revelation moreover reminded them that being the wife of a prophet or of a pious man was not enough to claim to have acquired the qualities of faith and implicitly consider oneself as elect: thus, Noah's and Lot's respective wives were lost, whereas Pharaoh's wife was saved for her piety, even though she had lived with an arrogant, prideful man who denied God.⁹ Within a couple, each spouse's responsibility, choices, and behavior determine his or her fate. In this respect, the Prophet's wives could claim no privilege, and humility was required. The wives' trial was to be intensified by the fact that Mariyah became the mother of the only boy born to the Prophet after Qasim and

Abdullah (Khadijah's sons, who had died at a very young age). The Prophet called his son Ibrahim, after the prophet Abraham, whom the Coptic tradition of Mariyah also recognized as the father of monotheism.

The Lesser Pilgrimage (Umrah)

One year had elapsed since the covenant of al-Hudaybiyyah, and it was now time to prepare for the visit to Mecca mentioned in the agreement. Two thousand Muslims accordingly set off with the Prophet with the intention of performing *umrah*, the lesser pilgrimage.¹⁰ Among them was a poor man who had arrived from Mecca shortly after the Muslims' return from Khaybar and had settled with the *ahl as-suffah* (the people of the bench). He was poor and humble, and the Prophet called him "the father of the kitten," so much did he love kittens. This was Abu Hurayrah, who had converted to Islam rather late and who was to become one of the most reliable and respected narrators of Prophetic traditions (*ahadith*).

The pilgrims went to Mecca and stopped on the edge of the sacred territory to wait for the Quraysh to move out of the area, allowing the Muslims to perform their rites freely. The Muslims were wearing the humble garments consecrated for pilgrimage, and they entered Mecca while the Quraysh people watched them from the surrounding hills. The Prophet performed the seven circumambulations around the Kaba, then the same number of comings and goings between the hills of as-Safa and al-Marwa. After that, he sacrificed a camel and had his head shaved: he had thus completed the rites of the lesser pilgrimage, followed by all the other pilgrims. He wanted to get into the Kaba itself, but the Quraysh refused, arguing that this was not part of their agreement. The Prophet did not challenge them, and throughout his stay he remained in the enclosure of the House of God (*bayt Allah*), from which Bilal called the pilgrims to prayer five times a day in his beautiful, powerful voice. From the hills where they looked on, many Quraysh people were impressed, as they were later to confess, by the simplicity and dignity of the Muslims' religious practice and behavior.

Around this time the Prophet's uncle, Abbas, publicly declared his conversion to Islam. He offered the Prophet the opportunity to marry his sister-in-law Maymunah, who had become a widow, and the Prophet accepted. He would have liked to celebrate his wedding in Mecca, but the Quraysh

were adamant: the three nights were over, and the pilgrims were to leave the city according to the terms of the treaty signed a year earlier. The Prophet complied: he forbade his Companions to say anything inappropriate about the Quraysh and promptly left Mecca for Medina. By marrying the widow Maymunah, the Prophet also established a kinship relationship with his fierce opponents the Makhzum, who were henceforth bound to him.

When the Prophet was back in Medina and daily life had resumed its course, he heard of the unexpected arrival of three men who had met on the way and who were arriving together to meet him. Uthman ibn Talhah, Khalid ibn al-Walid, and Amr ibn al-As were all coming to convert to Islam and pledge allegiance to the Prophet, whom they had fought so fiercely for so many years. The Prophet was very happy about that, and so were all the Companions, who were aware of the three men's qualities: their commitment was sincere and unreserved, and the future was not to disappoint them, as it was to be strewn with success. Those conversions, like Abu Hurayrah's some time before, were pregnant with teachings, for not only was the past of Islam's worst enemies forgotten as soon as they recognized God's oneness, but the time these people had needed in order to follow the path of this recognition said nothing about their sincerity, their moral qualities, and their future status within the community of faith. After being hostile to the Prophet and his message for almost twenty years, they had undergone a profound conversion, and during the last two years of the Prophet's life they were to become epitomes of faith, self-abnegation, and integrity for the Companions as well as for all Muslims through the ages. Thus faith—its intensity and its power to convert and transform hearts—cannot be measured on the basis of time or rationality; its very sincerity and intensity attest to its nature, and this is why a recent convert can attain a deeper, more complete inner illumination than someone else can reach after years of religious practice. The opposite is also true, and again, this requires people to refrain from judging others' hearts.

Mutah

A few months later the Prophet decided to send envoys to the north, to ensure the solidity of existing alliances and the ability of Muslims to travel

to Syria for their trade. Fifteen men were sent out, but fourteen of them were killed; at the same time another envoy, who had been sent to Busra, was also stopped and killed by a leader of the Ghassan tribe. The threat from Syria was clearly intensifying, and those murders of peaceful envoys had to be redressed. The Prophet decided to send an army of three thousand men, and he placed the former slave Zayd ibn Harithah in command—which greatly surprised many Companions. He added that if Zayd was killed, Jafar, who had recently returned from Abyssinia, would take over the command, and if Jafar died too, he would be replaced by Abdullah ibn Rawahah.

They marched out, and when they arrived near Syria, they heard that a majority of Arab tribes had banded together and that they had managed to obtain the support of the Byzantine imperial troops, which made them more than a hundred thousand strong. Having only three thousand men, the Muslims had no chance: a meeting took place to decide whether they should return to Medina, send an envoy to ask for reinforcements, or simply go ahead and fight in spite of the vast disparity between the two armies. Driven by the confidence and ardor of some Companions (including especially Abdullah ibn Rawahah, who on the way had disclosed that he sensed he was going to die as a martyr), they decided to go ahead according to the initial plans and say nothing to the Prophet. They arrived near the enemy, spent a while observing them, then suddenly shifted their route toward Mutah; the Arab and Byzantine troops pursued them, thinking they were retreating. Once they reached Mutah, where the topography was more favorable, Zayd ordered his troops to launch a sudden attack, seeking to create a surprise. The strategy momentarily staggered the enemy, but it was not sufficient to tip the scales in favor of the Muslims, who were so heavily outnumbered. Zayd was killed, then Jafar, his successor, then Abdullah; the Muslim troops were in disarray until eventually Khalid ibn al-Walid took command, gathered the men, and enabled them to protect themselves from a new attack. They had lost only eight men, but they had had to retreat, and this was plainly a defeat; however, Khalid ibn al-Walid had managed to avoid a confrontation that could have ended up in a slaughter.¹¹

At that point, the Companions who had stayed in Medina with the Prophet underwent a most peculiar experience. They knew the Prophet had dreams and visions that very often came true; they knew he was inspired, and they had followed him as Revelations came to him in frag-

ments. They were therefore accustomed to the strange, surreal dimensions of his life among them. One day, Muhammad came to them and, though no envoy had come from the north and they had received no information about the expedition, started to recount the battle as if he had been present among the fighters. With tears in his eyes and painful emotion, he told them about the deaths of Zayd, Jafar, and Abdullah. He praised Khalid's feat and called him "*sayf al-islam*" (the sword of Islam), but he could not conceal his deep sorrow when mentioning the dead who were so dear to him. He went to Asma, Jafar's wife, and her children to tell them the news and comfort them; he began to weep before he could speak, and Asma burst into tears when she heard of her husband's death. The Prophet then went to Um Ayman and Usamah and told them about Zayd's death, his eyes full of tears: he had loved him like a son, and his family was particularly dear to him. Just after he left their dwelling, Zayd's youngest daughter came out of her home and rushed into the Prophet's arms; he tried to comfort her while tears were streaming down his face and he was sobbing. One of the Companions who was passing by, Sad ibn Ubadah, was surprised at this scene and particularly at the Prophet's tears, and asked him for an explanation. The Prophet answered that this was "someone who loves weeping for his beloved."¹² The Prophet had taught his Companions to express love and tenderness, and at that moment, when faced with the final parting of death, he taught them about human fragility and the dignity of tears expressing love and the suffering of those who love.

The Companions returned from Mutah under Khalid's leadership and confirmed the Prophet's vision: things had happened precisely as he had told them, and the three Companions had been killed fighting. For the whole community, those visions and that knowledge were additional signs of Muhammad's prophethood. He was singular, he acted singularly, his intelligence and qualities did not resemble anyone else's, and yet he remained humble and fragile, and like them, he wept.

The situation remained difficult in the north, and the Arab tribes certainly thought they could use the Muslims' defeat in Mutah to their own advantage. Muhammad received intelligence that some tribes were preparing a full-scale expedition against Medina. He decided to mobilize three hundred men under the command of Amr ibn al-As, who had family ties with some northern tribes; the Prophet asked him to study the situation and let him know how things stood, and he ordered him to draw up

alliances with as many clans as possible. He sent him another two hundred men because opposition seemed to be stronger than he had anticipated: however, it was not, and the Muslim force was able to proceed into Syrian territory, consolidate existing alliances, and establish new ones, which made it possible to secure that hitherto unsafe front.

The Covenant Is Broken

As previously noted, the covenant of al-Hudaybiyyah applied not just to the Medina community and the Quraysh but to all their allies as well. The Khuzaah were Muhammad's allies, and one of their clans, the Banu Kab, was treacherously attacked one night by the Banu Bakr, the Quraysh's allies, who killed one of their men. The Banu Kab promptly sent the Prophet an envoy to inform him of that treason. It constituted a breach of the covenant, and Muhammad decided the crime must not go unpunished: he had to help his Khuzaah allies.

As for the Quraysh, they understood how serious the situation was, and they decided to send their most influential man to persuade Muhammad not to respond to that isolated action. Yet, ever since the covenant had been signed, the Quraysh had kept encroaching on the terms and limits of the treaty, and they never hesitated to prompt other clans to set upon the Muslim community to weaken or even attack them. This time, however, things had gone too far, and this was why Abu Sufyan himself went to Medina to confer with the Prophet. The latter was curt and aloof: Abu Sufyan tried to enlist the support first of his daughter Um Habibah, the Prophet's wife, then of Ali, but he found no means to negotiate. The Prophet remained silent, as did his Companions, and Abu Sufyan did not know what to think of the situation.

During the weeks that followed, the Prophet asked his Companions to get ready for an expedition, though he kept its objective secret. Only a few close Companions knew what was coming, and he asked them to initiate several contradictory rumors. They were to suggest that the army would march toward Syria, or toward Thaqif, or against the Hawazin, so as to spread uncertainty over the whole Peninsula.

Yet, after an invocation in the mosque, the Prophet had a vision informing him that the secret was going to be betrayed and that a woman was tak-

ing a letter to the Quraysh warning them of an impending attack. He had the woman stopped as she was heading toward Mecca, and she gave up the letter to Muhammad's envoys. The Prophet decided to forgive the traitor who had written the letter, Hatib, in spite of Umar's wish to execute him. Hatib, whose behavior had been prompted by family motives, remained free, and Muhammad concentrated on preparing for war, sending envoys to all allied clans so that they could prepare to join the Muslims in an expedition of which they did not know the exact destination.

The expedition set off during the month of Ramadan, and the Prophet at first let the Muslims decide whether or not they wanted to fast. He himself fasted until they reached Marr az-Zahran; when they camped there, he required the Muslims to stop fasting, for they would need all their energy. On the way, he also asked a Muslim to see to it that a litter of puppies that he saw on the roadside were not trampled by the Muslim army; he thereby expressed his care for life, of whatever sort, and even though the survival of a few dogs might have seemed trifling to the Muslims at that particular time, he was keen to protect the puppies from the soldiers' recklessness.

The Marr az-Zahran camp lay at a crossroad: their destination might be Najd, to the east, or Taif, or Mecca. Abbas, who had left Mecca to settle in Medina, heard about the Muslims' movements and joined them. When they established their camp, the Prophet asked every soldier to light a fire in order to impress the enemy: ten thousand fires were lit, suggesting a huge army was on the move, since each fire was supposed to provide for the needs of five to ten soldiers. The Quraysh, as well as the other tribes who feared an attack, decided to send envoys to find out about the Prophet's intentions.

Once again it was Abu Sufyan who came to the Prophet from the Quraysh, along with two other envoys, Hakim and Budayl, to persuade him not to attack Mecca. They parleyed for a long time, but they eventually understood that the Prophet's determination was inflexible. They also observed the Companions, their behavior, and the serene atmosphere emanating from the camp. Hakim and Budayl decided to convert to Islam, and Abu Sufyan declared that he accepted the first part of the profession of faith ("There is no god but God") but that he retained some doubts as to Muhammad's status; he needed some more time before he pronounced the second part of the profession of faith ("Muhammad is His Messenger").¹³ He spent the night at the camp, and after early morning prayer,

after observing the Muslims' devotion and their behavior with the Prophet, he decided, following Abbas's advice, to say the whole profession of faith. The Prophet knew that this change of heart remained very fragile, and he asked Abbas to go with Abu Sufyan to the edge of the valley so that he could watch the Muslim army marching by. That produced the desired effect, as Abu Sufyan was greatly impressed. Before that, Abbas had, in a whisper, reminded the Prophet that Abu Sufyan loved to be honored and advised him not to forget that; Muhammad, a good psychologist, did not forget the advice and sent word that anyone in Mecca who sought refuge at Abu Sufyan's, or in the Kaba sanctuary, or simply remained inside their home, would have nothing to fear and would be spared. Abu Sufyan hurried back to Mecca before the Muslim army got there and (jeered at by his own wife Hind, who called him a madman and a coward, and by other leaders such as Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl, who insulted him) advised everybody to surrender and offer no resistance to the Prophet's extraordinary army.

Muhammad had turned Abu Sufyan into an ally, not only because Abu Sufyan had converted to Islam but also because the Prophet had heeded his character and personality. Abu Sufyan had first recognized God but found it difficult to confer special status on a man he had fought and considered his equal; Muhammad had understood this and had not rushed him, giving him time to observe and understand by himself. Even after Abu Sufyan had embraced Islam, the Prophet was aware that he retained an attraction for power and glory, and he took this into account when he exposed him to the strength of his army and conferred on him a specific role in the possible resolution of the conflict. Though Muhammad insisted on common principles, he was able to take particular traits into account; his mission was to reform the latter through the former, but he never neglected the character, aspirations, and specific features that made up each individual's personality. His message insisted on the principle of equality for all in justice, as well as the psychology of differences and of each person's singularity in faith.

Coming Back

Most traditionists report that the Prophet entered Mecca on the twentieth or twenty-first of Ramadan of the eighth year of *hijrah* (630 CE).

Muhammad had segmented his army into divisions that encircled the city and closed in on the center together. A few Quraysh groups posted themselves on the hills, led by Suhayl, Ikrimah, and Safwan, but after the first confrontations, they realized that resisting was pointless. Suhayl sought refuge in his home, and Ikrimah and Safwan ran away. The Prophet had demanded that no fighting or battle should take place on that day, which he called "the day of mercy."¹⁴

Some eight years before, the Prophet had left Mecca secretly, but with dignity and with his head held high. The Prophet now came back to Mecca in broad daylight, victorious, but this time he prostrated himself on his mount in thankfulness to the One as he recited the verses from the surah "Al-Fath" (The Victory):

Verily We have granted you a manifest victory, that God may forgive you your faults of the past and those to follow, fulfill His favor to you, and guide you on the straight path, and that God may aid you with powerful help. It is He Who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith.¹⁵

He entered Mecca expressing the deepest humility, and he required that the greatest kindness should be shown to the Muslims' former foes. He performed the greater ablution and prayed eight cycles of voluntary ritual prayer before resting for a few hours. After that, he mounted his camel, Qaswa, and went to the Kaba sanctuary, where he performed the seven rounds of circumambulation. Then, with his stick, he pulled down the idols and destroyed them while repeating the Quranic verse "Truth has arrived, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is bound to perish."¹⁶ He had the keys to the sanctuary brought to him and required that all religious images be obliterated, in order to reconcile the House of God with its essence, which was to celebrate the worship of the One, Who cannot be represented and must not be associated with any image: "There is nothing whatever like Him, and He is the One that hears and sees."¹⁷

This gesture of destruction by the Prophet was, in appearance, the exact antithesis of all that he had usually been doing since leaving Mecca, as he had had mosques (devoid of any image) built to mark the sacred space of worship of the One God. On the level of the spiritual message, however, this gesture was exactly of the same essence, since by breaking

the idols that lay inside and near the Kaba he was destroying what had, in the course of centuries, perverted the cult of the Transcendent. With this act Muhammad turned the Kaba into a real mosque, in which henceforth only the One was to be worshiped.

The Quraysh people were gradually coming out of their homes and gathering inside the sanctuary enclosure. After destroying the idols, the Prophet exclaimed: "There is no god but God, the One, Who has no partner. He has fulfilled His promise, supported His servant, and routed the enemy clans; He alone [has done that]."¹⁸ Then he turned toward the Quraysh, told them about the rules of Islam, and recited this verse:

O humankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored among you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you [the most deeply aware of God's presence]. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted [with all things].¹⁹

After that, he asked them "how they thought he was going to deal with them."²⁰ They replied that as a "noble brother, son of a noble brother," he would certainly deal with them kindly.²¹ At that point, the Prophet recited the verse that punctuates the story of Joseph when he was reunited with his brothers, who had wanted to kill him: "This day let no reproach be [cast] on you: God will forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy."²² Then he exclaimed: "Go on, you are free!"²³ The Prophet granted his forgiveness to all the women and men who came to him or to a Companion. Wahshi ibn Harb, who had killed Hamzah, was also forgiven, but the Prophet asked him to refrain from appearing in his presence in the future. Many Quraysh converted to Islam on Mount as-Safa in front of Umar; some years before, the Prophet had been called a liar on that same spot. When Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl came to the Prophet, the latter warned his Companions: "Ikrimah, Abu Jahl's son, is coming to you as a believer. Do not insult his father, for insulting the dead hurts the living without reaching the dead." He thus reminded them not only to forgive but also to always remember that nobody can be held responsible for someone else's mistakes, not even their father's, according to the meaning of the Quranic verse "No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another."²⁴ Prudence was required, as well as nobleness of soul.

The Prophet stayed in Mecca for two weeks, and the situation began to settle down. He sent expeditions to make sure that his alliances with the nearby tribes were solid and that those who had announced they accepted Islam had given up all idol worship. Khalid ibn al-Walid had been entrusted with such a mission among the Banu Jadhimah, who eventually surrendered, but Khalid decided, against Abd ar-Rahman ibn Awf's advice, to execute the prisoners toward whom he harbored particular resentment. After executing some of them, he stopped at Abd ar-Rahman's insistence, the latter having made it clear to him that his behavior was motivated by other intentions than faith in God and justice. The Prophet got very angry when he heard of Khalid's behavior; he decided to pay blood money for all the dead, and he kept repeating aloud: "O God, I am innocent of what Khalid ibn al-Walid has done!"²⁵

The path to the education of hearts and consciences of the Medina and Mecca Muslims was still long. Deeply rooted habits and old feelings continued to rise to the surface and manifest as behaviors contrary to Islam's precepts. Moreover, the Meccans' mass entry into Islam required additional efforts in religious education. The Prophet asked Muadh ibn Jabal to make this a priority: the new converts had to be educated and taught the principles of their new religion. The unity in adversity that had prevailed so far had paradoxically been easier to achieve than the unity in faith, love, and respect that must henceforth be established now that there were no major enemies left in the region.

The Prophet had come back to the place of origin of his mission. He had experienced persecution, then exile, then war, and he was returning to the source in peace, with the aura of victory. More than the physical path of a life, this was the initiatory journey of a heart and conscience going through the stages of the great *jihad* that takes people from the natural tension of passions to the peace of spiritual education. He had come back different in the intensity of his efforts and patience, and yet similar to himself in his faithfulness to the message. When he had left, he had prayed to the One, confident that he could not but come home one day to pray at the foot of the House of God. Thus, he had left Mecca as a human being undertaking the journey of his life, intimately convinced that someday he would have to come back to the origin, the center, close to his heart, and return to the source of Life, the pulse of the divine.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

At Home, Over There

The Prophet had come back to Mecca as a victor, and the generosity he had shown had surprised even his fiercest opponents. While many had insulted him, fought against him, and even killed members of his family and his dearest Companions, he offered them forgiveness, oblivion of the past, and protection. The Quran had mentioned those “who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, [for no cause] except that they say: ‘Our Lord is God.’”¹ Also, Revelation had already announced that when those persecuted people were victorious, they would stand out by their human dignity and their behavior, for they are “those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give *zakat* [the purifying social tax], enjoin the right and forbid wrong.”²

The Messenger was the living example of such nobleness. He showed no interest in revenge, wealth, or power. He entered Mecca prostrated, went to pray and prostrate himself in the Kaba sanctuary, destroyed the idols (in a gesture that recalled Abraham’s), spoke numerous invocations expressing his trust in the One God and his thankfulness, and then at last established peace in the city of Mecca.

Hunayn

Muhammad realized that he still had to face a number of dangers threatening the Muslim community. All the tribes had not acknowledged the Prophet’s authority, and some thought the time had come to overthrow him. Persistent rumors indicated that the Hawazin tribes and their allies

had mobilized more than twenty thousand men east of Mecca and that they were preparing to attack the Muslims. The Prophet sent scouts who confirmed the rumors: the Muslims had to ready themselves quickly. All the Muslims who had come from Medina were mobilized, and they were joined by two thousand from the Quraysh.³ Muhammad thus set off with an army of twelve thousand men, the biggest he had ever led. Some, such as Abu Bakr, expressed proud confidence as to their number and probable victory, which displeased the Prophet.⁴

The Hawazin army was led by a young warrior named Malik ibn Awf an-Nasri, who had acquired a solid reputation in the Peninsula. He had ordered his soldiers to take their women and children with them in order to impress the enemy with their number and to stir up the troops. He went to the Hunayn valley, which the Muslims coming from Mecca must necessarily cross, and under cover of nightfall he posted a great number of his soldiers in the ravines on either side of the valley. Those men were invisible from the valley. He deployed the rest of the army opposite the gorge so that they faced the Muslims arriving from the bottom of the valley and were thus deliberately visible. The Muslims were advancing in the light of early morning when suddenly Malik ordered the soldiers hiding in the ravines to attack the Prophet's army from both flanks. The surprise was total, and Khalid ibn al-Walid, who marched ahead, could not contain the charge: a general rout ensued, with Muslim warriors trying to protect themselves and retreating in total confusion. Caught in the narrow parts of the gorge, they became increasingly panicked. The Prophet, who was some distance behind in a more open space, witnessed what was happening; he immediately gathered his closest Companions and began to call the Muslims with the help of Abbas, whose voice was more resounding than his own. They both shouted: "O Companions of the tree, O Companions of the acacia!" in order to remind the fighters of their pledge of allegiance at the time of the covenant of al-Hudaybiyyah. The latter gradually realized what was going on and responded to the Prophet's call, shouting back: "*Labbayk! Labbayk!*" ("Here we are! Here we are!").⁵ More and more came to join him and reorganized to launch a counterattack.

The Prophet asked for some stones and, as he had done at Badr, threw them toward the Hawazin as he prayed to God: "O God, I beg You to keep Your promise." The Muslims then began to march on the enemy

with such ardor that Malik's soldiers were totally astonished; they could not have expected such a sudden and massive counterattack. Among the Muslims was a woman, Um Sulaym ar-Rumaysa, who took part in the fighting with her husband and who showed a determination shared by all.⁶ It was now their enemies' turn to be compelled to draw back, then run away, with the Muslim troops following them. Malik eventually found refuge in the city of Taif with the Banu Thaqif, while others had to hide in the mountains. They had lost many men and suffered a bitter defeat after a most unexpected and extraordinary reversal. Revelation was later to remind the believers of the different factual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of that fight:

Assuredly God helped you in many battlefields, and [remember] on the day of Hunayn: your great numbers elated you, but they availed you nothing. The land, vast as it is, constrained you, and you turned back in retreat. But God poured His calm [*sakinah*, His Spirit] on the Messenger and on the believers.⁷

Although many men had been killed, the victory was total, and the spoils gathered were considerable. For the surrender the Prophet placed the women and children together and ordered them to be guarded and fed in the best possible manner. He also had the mounts and riches guarded without immediately distributing them. Wasting no time, he mobilized his men to go to Taif, where Malik had sought refuge; this seemed to be the last serious stronghold of resistance in the region. The Banu Thaqif, however, were well equipped with food and weapons; the Muslim army besieged their fortress, but it soon became clear that they would not be able to force them out by this means. After two weeks, the Muslims decided to break camp and go back to Jiranah, where the Hunayn prisoners and booty were kept.

Spoils of War

The women and children who had been captured had been placed in a vast enclosure, sheltered from the sun, and properly fed until the Prophet's return. When he came back and saw that most of the captives were rather

poorly dressed, he demanded that money be taken from the booty to buy a new garment from the market for each prisoner. He then decided to share out the spoils, but he did not hand out the prisoners, who had become war captives, for he thought the Hawazin would surely send a delegation to ask for them.

He began sharing out the goods, and to the Ansar's surprise, he gave the Quraysh, and particularly Abu Sufyan and Hakim (Khadijah's nephew, who had just converted to Islam), an important part of the captured treasure. He did the same with Safwan and Suhayl, both of whom had both fought at Hunayn but still hesitated to embrace Islam. Revelation had ordered the Prophet to keep part of the booty for "those whose hearts are to be reconciled [to faith]"; this was not a means to convert people but rather was intended to strengthen, by a material gift, a faith that had already more or less expressed itself but remained fragile.⁸ The Prophet knew that Safwan and Suhayl were sensitive to faith and that they had fought bravely along with the Muslims, so he gave them large amounts of goods and did not require them to convert. His forgiving attitude at the time of the conquest of Mecca, then his courage and determination during war, and finally his generosity after the battle eventually convinced them that he was indeed a prophet. As for Abu Sufyan, the Prophet knew, as we have seen, how important social recognition and honors were to him, and Muhammad confirmed his status. For his part, Hakim expressed some pride when he received his share of the spoils: it was considerable, and he seemed to rejoice at the material gain more than anything else. Muhammad accompanied that gift with an essential spiritual teaching, reminding Hakim to resist the pride of possessing wealth and adding: "The upper hand is better than the lower hand."⁹ He thereby reminded him that those who are generous with their wealth and care for the poor, making gifts of both themselves and their possessions, are spiritually endowed with a far higher status than those who simply receive or beg. He also advised him to give some of his belongings to his family and all those who depended on him. Furthermore, he taught Hakim to receive in a more dignified manner, so as to give more humbly.

Seven days had elapsed since the surrender, and the Hawazin had not appeared to ask for their women and children back. Now thinking that they would not come, Muhammad decided to share out the captives between the Quraysh Muslims (who once again received a more impor-

tant share) and the Ansar. He had only just finished the distribution when a Hawazin delegation arrived. The Prophet explained to them that he had waited for them, but since they had not arrived he had already shared out the captives; he said that he would intercede for them and ask people to give back their prisoners if they wanted to. After some hesitation, all the fighters gave up their captives to the Hawazin delegation. Before they left, the Prophet asked about Malik, their chief, and he was told that he had sought refuge with the Banu Thaqif. He entrusted them with a message for him: if Malik came to him as a Muslim, his family would be given back to him as well as all his goods and a hundred camels.¹⁰ Everything happened as if the Prophet had already fathomed Malik's heart when he faced him at Hunayn, for as soon as Malik heard the Prophet's offer, he escaped from the Taif fortress by night, came to Muhammad, and immediately made the profession of faith. He had only just embraced Islam when the Prophet showed him incredible trust: he placed him in command of all the Hawazin who had already become Muslims and ordered them to go to Taif and put an end to the Banu Thaqif's resistance. The Hawazin set off immediately. Malik, who less than a month before had almost caused the ruin of Muhammad's army, was now a Muslim, in command of a Muslim expedition aiming to overthrow his former allies. The trust the Prophet had shown in him was incredible, but the following days and years confirmed his intuition: Malik not only successfully carried out his mission but also remained faithful and deeply spiritual in his commitment to Islam.

The Ansar had watched the Prophet's attitude with astonishment, since in the end almost all of the booty had been shared out among the Quraysh. Some began to give public expression to their disappointment or even disapproval, as it seemed to them that Muhammad was privileging his kin, despite all that the people of Medina had done for him when he needed them. When Sad ibn Ubadah came to him as the Ansar's envoy and voiced their complaints, the Prophet listened to him, then asked him to gather all the Medina Muslims so that he could speak to them.¹¹ He talked to them about their respective debts, for, he said, they owed him for his guidance and he owed them for having provided a refuge from persecution. Muhammad declared he had forgotten none of that, and he asked them not to be upset by the way he had shared out the booty, which, after all, was meant to reinforce some people's faith, no more and no less. They

should certainly not measure his love for them through the amount of booty they had received. Their love of the possessions of this world had led them to forget the meaning of true love for God, in God, beyond the riches and life of this world. The Quraysh people were leaving with sheep and camels, while the Ansar would go home with the Prophet, who had decided to settle with them in Medina, his adoptive city. He added: "Should all people take one path and the Ansar take another, I would take the Ansar's path."¹² The emotions in the group were intense, and many of the Ansar began to weep, for they understood how wrong they had been in their interpretation of the Prophet's attitude and of the signs of his loyalty. His presence was the sign of his love, while the goods he had distributed were simply evidence that he knew some hearts were still attached to the illusions of this world.

He decided to leave Jiranah and perform the lesser pilgrimage before returning to Medina. He had come to that city seeking refuge, but now he felt at home there, even though its culture and habits were so different from those of Mecca, where he had lived for more than half a century before being compelled to leave. He had settled into his new environment by observing the inhabitants' customs and traditions, their psychological makeup and their hopes, and then gradually integrating many of these dimensions into his own personality. He loved the Ansar with a deep, spiritual love that transcended tribe, clan, or cultural ties.

Back in Medina the Prophet was carrying on with his teachings when he was surprised to see the poet Kab ibn Zuhayr, who had formerly used his poetic gift to mock him and ridicule his claims to be God's Messenger. Kab had for some time been secretly staying with a Medina acquaintance and observing the Muslims' daily life. He knew his life could be at risk, for if certain Companions identified him they would not hesitate to kill him. He had heard that the Prophet forgave those who came to him, whatever their past or their behavior might have been. One morning, after dawn prayer, he went to the Prophet and asked him whether he would forgive Kab ibn Zuhayr if he came to him. The Prophet answered that he would, and Kab then gave his name. One of the Ansar rushed on him to kill him, but the Prophet stopped him and told him that Kab, who had come in repentance, was no longer the same. The poet then recited for the Prophet some verses expressing respect and love and asking for forgiveness. Muhammad was deeply moved, and when Kab had finished reciting, he

covered him with his garment to show not only that he had forgiven him but also that he praised his mastery of poetic language. Muhammad had a finely developed aesthetic sense and loved eloquence as well as the musicality of speech. Poetic verse expressing beauty, conveying the depth of feelings and spirituality, and highlighting the grace of the One as well as the love of beings was part of his natural universe, of his deepest cultural background. That art, that spirituality of speech, was throughout his life a means to express the depths of the self in the hope of rising naturally toward God.

Tabuk

When Mariyah gave birth to Ibrahim, the Prophet expressed particular joy at the news of the child's arrival. He organized a meal in celebration, and then the child was put to nurse north of Medina, as was usually done. During this time, the Prophet paid regular visits to his son. Life in Medina had become far more peaceful, even though a few expeditions still had to be organized in the region, especially in order to see to it that newly converted tribes did not maintain the idols' sanctuaries and lapse into syncretism, which the Prophet had always opposed—in particular, as we have seen, since Revelation had ordered him to tell his opponents and those who denied the truth of Islam: "To you be your religion, and to me mine."¹³

The news of the Byzantines' victory over the Persians some months later had a significant impact on the Muslims, for Revelation had foretold that victory some years before the event. The surah "Ar-Rum" (The Romans) mentions a defeat (which took place before the Muslims left Mecca), then a victory that was to occur in a few years (*fi bidi sinin*):¹⁴

The Byzantines have been defeated, in a land close by: but they, after this defeat of theirs, will be victorious in a few years. With God is the command in the past and in the future: on that day shall the believers rejoice in God's help. He gives victory to whom He will, and He is Almighty, Most Merciful.¹⁵

Not only was Quranic Revelation confirmed by the events, but the news of the Persians' decline also augured possible agreements with the

Christians in the north. The Muslims were not to find this out until a few weeks later; for the moment, the news from the north was rather alarming. Everything suggested that Heraclius's Byzantine armies had allied with the Arab tribes and that together they were preparing a full-scale attack against Muhammad, "the new Emperor of the Arabs." An immediate reaction was required, and the stakes were so important and the expedition so dangerous that for the first time the Prophet informed all his Companions of his destination. They were to march to the north preventively, in order to anticipate the advance of enemy troops and if necessary surprise them on their own territory. The season was not favorable and the army was going to face intense heat until they reached the north. Mobilization was general, and the Prophet asked the Companions to contribute as much as they could to defray the cost of the expedition. Umar gave half his fortune and understood as a lesson in self-abnegation the behavior of Abu Bakr, who put everything he had at the Prophet's disposal. Uthman similarly stood out by supplying mounts for half the army. All the camels and horses in the area were requisitioned, but they did not suffice to provide for the needs of all the soldiers; as a result, the Prophet had to refuse some Companions' requests to participate in the expedition, and some of them wept, so crucial did they know the expedition to be. The expected might of the enemy was such that the community's future was clearly at stake. The army set out at the end of the year 630 (the ninth year of *hijrah*); there were thirty thousand men, and the Prophet was in command. He asked Ali to stay behind with his family. Ali was mocked by the hypocrites: he could not bear it and eventually caught up with the army at their first camp. However, the Prophet sent him back and asked him to be as Aaron had been for his brother Moses, the guardian of his people while he was away.

The heat was intense, as expected, and the march to the north was difficult. Four of the Prophet's faithful Companions had preferred to stay in Medina, aware that the journey would be difficult. One of them, Abu Khaythamah, felt deep remorse and after about ten days decided to catch up with the expedition. He arrived when they had already encamped at Tabuk. The Prophet was particularly happy to see him arrive, so saddened had he been by the four Companions' defection, which could only be interpreted as cowardice or treason. Abu Khaythamah was forgiven when he explained his remorse and the imperative need he had felt to catch up

with the army. This was not the case for the other three believers, who included the faithful Kab ibn Malik: they chose to stay in Medina and manage their affairs there.¹⁶

The Muslim army stayed at Tabuk for twenty days, but it gradually became clear that the rumors of attacks from the north were groundless. No tribe was ready for war, and there was no sign of Byzantine presence in the area. Although it had been very trying, the expedition did not turn out to be useless. The considerable number of soldiers produced an impression all over the Peninsula, forcing the northern tribes to realize the extent of the Prophet's capacity to raise troops and his forces' incredible mobility. From Tabuk, the Prophet managed to set up alliances with a Christian tribe and a Jewish one: they kept their respective religions and accepted to pay a tax (*jizyah*) in exchange for their protection by the Muslim community against attack. Thus, the *jizyah* was understood as a collective military tax paid by tribes who did not have to share in the Muslims' military engagements, but in exchange for which the Muslim authority was to ensure their defense, their protection, and their survival if necessary.¹⁷ From Tabuk, the Prophet sent Khalid ibn al-Walid further north to besiege a Christian fortress and draw up a similar alliance in order to secure the route leading to Iraq and Syria. All those operations were successful, and the Prophet went back to Medina with the Muslim army.

When he arrived, he was told his daughter Um Kulthum had died: he felt deep sorrow, and so did Uthman ibn Affan, who was thus losing a wife for the second time (he had married two of the Prophet's daughters). As for the three Companions who had stayed behind, the Prophet required them to keep away from him, and decreed that no Companion should speak to them until God decided their fate. Fifty days elapsed before a Revelation announced that they were forgiven: "When the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for them, and their own souls were straitened for them, and they perceived that there is no fleeing from God but toward Him; then He turned to them, that they might turn repentant to Him."¹⁸ When he heard the news, Kab asked the Prophet, whose face was beaming with joy, if the forgiveness came from himself or from God, and the Prophet told him it was a Revelation. The news had been received happily by all the Companions, who had had to boycott their three brothers; it also delivered a profound teaching, since it showed how serious it was to selfishly prefer to manage one's own affairs rather than commit oneself,

body, soul, and possessions, to the defense of the Muslim spiritual community. Another dimension of this teaching was that the weakness of a timid or lazy commitment—bordering on potential treason—can be forgiven when hearts sincerely return to the One.¹⁹

The Delegations

The ninth year of Hijrah was named “the year of the delegations”: the Muslim community now enjoyed such power and recognition that envoys came from all over the Peninsula to draw up alliances or sign covenants.²⁰ The first to come to the Prophet were the Banu Thaqif, for Malik had subjected their city to such a siege that it was impossible for them to conclude any alliance with the neighboring tribes (most of whom had, anyway, either embraced Islam or established a covenant with Muhammad). They declared they wanted to become Muslims, but they wished to negotiate elements of their faith and practice: they wanted to maintain the cult of their idol al-Lat and to be exempted from prayer. The Prophet refused to negotiate about those points, as he did whenever he was asked, for accepting Islam meant worshiping none but the One God and praying to Him according to the norms established by Revelation and the Prophet’s example. They eventually accepted the terms of the agreement.

Other envoys from Jewish or Christian tribes also came to the Prophet, and he did not compel them to accept Islam. For them, as he had done with the two northern tribes, he drew up an assistance pact: they would pay the collective military tax (*jizyah*), and Muhammad and his army would ensure their protection and defense. Thus, throughout the Peninsula, the message was clear: the tribes who accepted Islam were to give up any idea of syncretism, for the Prophet did not negotiate over the fundamentals of faith. As soon as the profession of faith had been pronounced, religious statues were to be destroyed, and Islamic practices were to be fully implemented, from prayer and fasting to the payment of the purifying social tax (*zakat*) and pilgrimage. When tribes wanted to remain faithful to their tradition, they drew up a pact with similarly clear terms: the payment of a tax in exchange for protection. The Prophet let the clans and chiefs choose freely between these two alternatives, which many of them did during the months that followed the return from Tabuk.

The time for pilgrimage (*hajj*) was drawing near, and Muhammad asked Abu Bakr to take the pilgrims to Mecca.²¹ They set out during the following weeks, and while they were on the road, the Prophet received an important Revelation about Mecca and particularly the rites near the Kaba. He sent Ali to catch up with the pilgrims and convey the message, which consisted of the first verses of surah 9 (the only chapter in the Quran that does not begin with the ritual formula "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful").²² First, the verses announced most clearly that the rites formerly performed around the Kaba (where some pilgrims went naked) would no longer be tolerated and that idol worshipers would be allowed four months to make a choice about their future—whether to cease performing the rites near the Kaba, leave the area altogether, or accept Islam. After this period the Muslims would be free to fight them, apart from those who had either drawn up a pact (whose terms would of course be respected) or expressly asked for protection (which would then be granted to them).

The message was firm and established that the Kaba, the sacred mosque, was now exclusively devoted to the worship of the One, and that only Muslims could enter it.²³ The verse reads, "The mosques of God shall only be visited and maintained by those who believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, pay *zakat*, and fear none but God. For those, it may be that they are of the rightly guided."²⁴ Most of the Companions, and most scholars after them, understood this prohibition to apply only to the sacred perimeter in Mecca, not to other mosques that could receive women and men who were not Muslims.²⁵ What the message conveyed was the clear establishment of the worship of the One, *tawhid*, as the only possible worship in the center, near the House of God, toward which Muslims turned from all over.

Ibrahim

During the tenth year of *hijrah*, young Ibrahim, who was then about a year and a half old, fell seriously ill. At the very time when the religion of the One was being established all over the Peninsula, with adversity constantly diminishing and the number of conversions continuing to grow, the Prophet saw his only son about to leave life and to leave him. He visited

him every day and spent hours by his side. When the child eventually breathed his last, the Prophet took him in his arms and held him against his breast, tears streaming down his face, so deep was his sorrow. Abd ar-Rahman ibn Awf, his faithful Companion, was surprised by those sobs, because he thought that the Prophet had previously forbidden such expressions of grief. At first, Muhammad could not speak; then he explained to him that he had forbidden excessive manifestations of distress, through wailing or hysterical behavior, but not the natural expression of sorrow and suffering. Then he gave verbal expression to his grief that, in effect, became a spiritual teaching, as he declared that his tears were “signs of tenderness and mercy.” He added a comment springing from his own experience, but which was also true in every Muslim’s daily life: “He who is not merciful will not be shown mercy.”²⁶ In the difficult moments of life, kindness, clemency, mercy, and the expressions of empathy that human beings offer one another bring them closer to the One, *ar-Rahman* (the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). Through them, God reaches closer to the believer’s heart, offering the believer what the believer him- or herself has offered to a brother or sister in humanity.

The Prophet was intimately affected, and he did not hesitate to show and express his grief. He added: “The eye sheds tears, O Ibrahim, the heart is infinitely sad, and one must only utter what satisfies God.”²⁷ God had once more tested him through his humanity and his mission. He had lost so many loved ones—Companions, his wife Khadijah, three of his daughters, and his three sons.²⁸ His life had been crossed with tears, but he remained both gentle with his heart and firm in his mission. It was this chemistry of gentleness and firmness that satisfied the Most Near. At the time when, in this tenth year of *hijrah*, the world seemed to open up to the Prophet’s mission, Muhammad’s human fate seemed reduced to that tiny grave where Ibrahim’s body was laid, and over which he then led the funeral prayer. The Prophet was one of the elect; the Prophet remained a human being.

A few hours after his return from the graveyard, an eclipse of the sun occurred. The Muslims were quick to associate the eclipse with the death of the Prophet’s child and see it as a miracle, a kind of message from God to His Prophet. But Muhammad put an end to all such interpretations, saying forcefully: “The sun and the moon are two of God’s signs. Their light does not darken for anyone’s death.”²⁹ Muhammad was thus remind-

ing his Companions of the order of things and of the necessity to make no mistake in interpreting signs, in order to avoid lapsing into superstition. This was, for them as well as for himself, a spiritual teaching in restraint and humility: human beings, the Prophet among them, had to learn how to depart, and see their loved ones depart, in silence, with discretion, and amid the indifference of the order of things. The trial of faith and of humanity, which made the Prophet shed tears, consisted precisely in learning how to find, at the heart of the eternity of creation and of never-ending cycles, the strength to face the finitude of the human, sudden departures, and death. The sign of the One's Presence at the time of a person's death lies not in the occurrence of any miracle but rather in the permanence of the natural order, in the eternity of His creation, crossed here and there by the passage of created beings, who come and depart.

Forgiveness and Sincerity

At the moment when the accomplishment of his mission was clearly reaching its final stage, the Prophet continued to show a nobleness of soul that both surprised and attracted his former enemies, whether isolated individuals or entire clans, who now came to him in large numbers. Though he remained open, he knew he had to be wary of certain individuals or groups. His experience with the Banu Ghanam ibn Awf, and Revelation that had ensued, had taught him prudence. The Banu Ghanam had asked him, before he left for Tabuk, to inaugurate a mosque they wanted to build in Quba.³⁰ He had been kept busy by the Tabuk expedition and decided to go to Quba after his return. He later learned that the project had been contrived by a well-known hypocrite, Abu Amir, and Revelation had confirmed his misgivings: "And as for those who put up a mosque by way of mischief and infidelity—to disunite the believers—and as an outpost for one who formerly warred against God and His Messenger: they will surely swear that their intention is nothing but good, but God bears witness that they verily are liars. Never stand [to pray] there."³¹ Abu Amir wanted to build a mosque in order to attract the faithful of another mosque in the area, merely to foster division and exert his influence. Behind apparent faith and sincerity, some individuals thus tried to obtain prerogatives and power and did not hesitate to attempt to use

the Prophet in this aim. Such situations were occurring more frequently as the community grew.

Muhammad nevertheless remained very accessible and constantly ready to receive the women and men who tried to understand Islam or were in quest of truth. He had forgiven a lot to those who had opposed him in conflict or war situations, and he was now showing great patience and deep affection to those who, in peacetime, were struggling against themselves and their own hearts to go about their spiritual quest and find the path that could lead them to the One. He observed them, answered their questions, and accompanied their progress, whether it was swift, hesitating, or sometimes even rebellious. When returning from the Hunayn expedition, the Prophet had declared: "We are back from the lesser *jihad* [effort, resistance, struggle for reform] to the greater *jihad*." A Companion asked: "What is the greater *jihad*, Messenger of God?" He answered: "It is fighting the self [the ego]."³² For the Muslims, as for all human beings, this inner struggle was the most difficult, the most noble, and the one that required the most understanding, forgiveness, and, of course, sincerity to oneself. War and its lesser *jihad* had shown how difficult it was to die for God; daily life and its greater *jihad* now showed Muslims that it is even more difficult to live for God, in light, transparency, coherence, spiritual demand, patience, and peace.

The Prophet asked all those around him who were not convinced of the truthfulness of his message to seek, to observe signs, to search for meaning while fighting the illusions of the self and its conceit. He taught Muslims—those who had recognized the presence of the One—to carry on their inner struggle, to remain humble and aware of their fragility, to seek to derive spiritual nourishment from *dhikr* (the remembrance of God), and, as the Quran recommended, to ask God to keep their hearts firm: "Our Lord! Do not cause our hearts to stray after You have guided us."³³ The Prophet used to pray to God and say, "O Transformer of Hearts, keep my heart firm in Your religion!"³⁴ Thus, in peacetime, some were searching for truth and some were searching for sincerity, while they all experienced a new form of inner conflict that required effort, patience, and a perpetually awake consciousness. At a time when the prospect of the final establishment of the last religion seemed to be opening up, each of them was sent back to his or her own inner universe to seek light or forgiveness, to find peace and the clemency of He Who constantly

returns to those who come, or come back, to Him. Revelation reminded the Prophet: "When comes the help of God, and victory, and you see the people enter God's religion in crowds, celebrate the praises of your Lord, and pray for His forgiveness, for He is oft-returning [in forgiveness]."35

Those verses expressed the need to return to the One even when people seemed at last to recognize the message as true. Since this was an initiation to the perpetual struggle against appearances, the Prophet had, once more, to cope with contradictory tensions, which was the only way to transcend the self and reach toward the divine. While crowds were coming to him from everywhere, he was asked to return to the solitude of his heart and pursue his dialogue with the Most Near; while victory was coming to him in this world, he understood that he had to prepare to depart, to leave this life, to go home to be near the One. Abdullah ibn Masud was later to say that Revelation of that surah announced the end of the Prophet's mission and, in effect, his imminent departure.

The Farewell Pilgrimage

During the month of Ramadan of that tenth year, the Prophet received another sign from God. He told his daughter Fatimah about it: "Each year, the Angel Gabriel recites the Quran to me once, and I recite it to him once; but this year, he has recited it twice, and I think this announces my hour."36 Only one of the five pillars of Islam had not yet been accomplished by the Prophet, and the time to prepare for it was approaching. It was widely announced that the Prophet would lead the next pilgrimage to Mecca, and in the following weeks, he set out at the head of thirty thousand Medina pilgrims, who were to be joined by three times as many from all over the Peninsula.

Once in Mecca, he performed the various rites of pilgrimage, explaining to the Companions who were with him that they were thus reviving their father Abraham's pure, monotheistic worship. The pilgrimage, like the Prophet's entire life, was a return to the Source, to the Origin: a return to God, the One, in the footsteps of His prophet Abraham, who had first built the Kaba, the House of God, to worship the One. The Companions observed every gesture done by the Prophet, who was, in effect, most precisely establishing the ritual of pilgrimage: he had told them, "Take your

rites from me.”³⁷ On the ninth day of Dhu al-Hijjah in the tenth year of *hijrah*, the Prophet addressed 144,000 pilgrims on the Mount of Mercy (*Jabal ar-Rahmah*).³⁸ He spoke in short portions, and men around him repeated his words so that everyone throughout the valley could hear his speech.³⁹

The content of the message was powerful and intense, and the Prophet began by stating that he did not know whether he would again meet the pilgrims “in this place after this year.”⁴⁰ Then he reminded them of the sacred character of the place and month, as well as of that of their lives, their honor, and their belongings. He explained that the period of ignorance had come to an end, and so had its practices, its rivalries, and its conflicts based on power and profit. Henceforth, all Muslims were united by faith, fraternity, and love, which were to transform them into witnesses of Islam’s message. They must under no circumstances accept being “either oppressors or oppressed.”⁴¹ They were to learn of the equality of all people in front of God and the necessary humility because “you all descend from Adam and Adam was created from dirt. The most noble in the sight of God is the most pious. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, except by their intimate consciousness of God [piety].”⁴² The Prophet reminded all the Muslims to treat their wives gently and added: “Be intimately conscious of God as regards women, and strive to be good to them.”⁴³ Then he added, as if to show the Way and its conditions to all the faithful present and all those who were to follow his teachings through the ages: “I have left among you what will, if you keep to it firmly, preserve you from error: clear guidance, the Book of God and His Prophet’s tradition.”⁴⁴ After each teaching he reminded them of, the Prophet added: “Have I conveyed the Message? O God, be my witness!” At the end of the sermon, the pilgrims answered: “We bear witness that you have faithfully conveyed the message, that you have fulfilled your mission, and that you have given your community good advice.” Then the Prophet concluded: “O God, be my witness! . . . And let whoever is present convey this message to whoever is absent.”

The Prophet was indeed a witness in front of the spiritual community of Muslims. In communion with them, at the heart of the pilgrimage—which itself requires simplicity and the unity of human beings before their Creator—the Messenger recalled the essential point in the One’s message: the absolute equality of human beings before God, regardless of

race, social class, or gender, for the only thing that distinguishes them lies in what they do with themselves, with their intelligence, their qualities, and most of all their heart. Wherever they come from, whether they are Arabs or not; whatever their color, black, white, or any other; whatever their social status, rich or poor; whether they are men or women, human beings stand out by the attention they show their heart, their spiritual education, the control of the ego, and the blossoming of faith, dignity, goodness, nobleness of soul, and, for coherence's sake, commitment among their fellow human beings in the name of their principles. In front of thousands of pilgrims of all origins, slaves as well as tribal chiefs, men as well as women, the Prophet bore witness that he had fulfilled his mission in the light of the One's message, and all the believers testified with one voice that they had received and understood its meaning and contents.

A few hours later, the Prophet received the sudden Revelation of the verse that confirmed that his mission was nearing its end: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."⁴⁵ The last cycle of prophethood was drawing to its close, and the Messenger was to return to the place of his election, his home beyond this life, in proximity to the One.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Debtless

The celebration that punctuated the *hajj* was over; the Prophet had performed all the rites and wanted to return to Medina, so he set out with the pilgrims who had come with him. They at last reached Medina and life resumed its course. Many Muslims taught or learned the principles of Islam and the Quran, as well as the elements of religious practice with their rules and conditions. The *zakat* was collected according to the norms that had recently been established by Revelation and the Prophet's practice.¹ Thus, all the rites of the five pillars of Islam (*arkan al-islam*) had been codified, including pilgrimage, which had just been completed, and the Muslim community had received the information necessary to live Islam in daily life and face new questions arising in the future.

The Prophet asked Muadh ibn Jabal, whom he had named as a judge in the new environment of Yemen, "Through what will you judge?" Muadh replied: "Through the Book of God." Muhammad then asked, "And if you find nothing in the Book of God?" Muadh went on: "I shall judge according to the tradition [*sunnah*] of God's Messenger." Muhammad further asked, "And if you find nothing in the Messenger's tradition?" Muadh answered confidently: "I shall not fail to make an effort [*ajtahidu*] to reach an opinion." This answer satisfied the Prophet, who concluded: "Praise be to God, who has guided His Messenger's messenger to what satisfies God's Messenger."² The gradation in Muadh ibn Jabal's answers contained the essence of the Prophet's teaching and offered the means for the community to follow him and to remain faithful to him through the ages: the Book of God—the Quran—and the whole body of traditions (*abadith*) of the Prophet (collectively referred to

as *as-sunnah*) were the two fundamental references, and when faced with new situations, the keepers of those teachings were to make use of their critical intelligence, their common sense, and their legal creativity to find new answers that remained faithful to Islamic principles but fit the new context. The fundamentals of Islam's creed (*al-aqidah*) and ritual practice (*al-ibadat*) were not subject to change, nor were the essential principles of ethics, but the implementation of those ethical principles and the response to new situations about which scriptural sources had remained vague or silent required answers adapted to particular circumstances. The Prophet's Companions had understood this, and he had imparted to them both the knowledge and the confidence required to go ahead and observe the world and its vicissitudes, certain that they now had the spiritual and intellectual means to remain faithful to their Creator's message.

An Expedition, and Nature

A few months after his return to Medina, in the eleventh year of *hijrah*, the Prophet decided to send an expedition to the north, near Mutah and Palestine, where a few years earlier Jafar, Abdullah, and Zayd had been killed. To everyone's surprise, he gave the command to young Usamah, Zayd's son, who was only twenty years old, though this three-thousand-strong army included such men as Umar and other experienced Companions.³ This choice gave rise to much criticism, but the Prophet reacted very promptly and put an end to all arguments when he proclaimed: "You criticize the choice of Usamah to command the army, as you had formerly criticized that of his father Zayd. Usamah is truly worthy of the command I entrust him with, as his father was before him."⁴ In the past, some Muslims had reacted to the choice of Zayd because they still considered him as a slave, though he had been freed; now some opposed the choice of his son, perhaps because of his father, but mostly because of his young age. By confirming his choice, the Prophet informed them that neither a man's social origin nor his age should prevent him from exerting authority and power if he possessed the spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities required. One had to show discernment by offering the most destitute in society real equality of opportunity and trusting the young so that everybody could express their skills and talents. On a more

general level, this was a fine lesson in humility addressed to older Companions: they were to experience the inner, greater *jihad* of obeying a man who could have been their son, and in so doing remember that their time was limited, like any man's. By that choice, the Prophet taught them that time naturally erodes one's energy, and one must be wise enough to learn to step aside, to delegate authority to those who are young and strong enough to create and build.

The Prophet gave young Usamah his recommendations and asked him to set out promptly. However, the Prophet's sudden illness was to delay that departure, and the army waited near Medina during all those days of doubt about his condition. A few weeks later, Abu Bakr was, according to the Prophet's wish, to ask Usamah to carry out the expedition. He reminded him of the Prophet's teachings concerning war ethics, for the latter had constantly insisted on the principles Muslims must respect when dealing with their enemies. "Do not kill women, children, and old people," Abu Bakr ordered him.⁵ "Do not commit treacherous actions. Do not stray from the right path. Never mutilate. Do not destroy palm trees, do not burn houses and cornfields, do not cut down fruit trees, and do not kill livestock except when you are compelled to eat them. . . . As you move on, you will meet hermits who live in monasteries and serve God in seclusion. Leave them alone; do not kill them and do not destroy their monasteries."⁶ Those teachings were essential, and they were conveyed to Usamah in the light of what the Prophet had said in various circumstances about warfare, respect for nature, or how to treat animals. In a few sentences, Abu Bakr was synthesizing the essence of the Messenger's teachings in this respect.

Years before, at the end of the Battle of Hunayn, the Prophet had passed by a group of people standing around a woman who lay on the ground, and heard that she had been killed by Khalid ibn al-Walid (who was then, as we have seen, a recent convert). He was deeply angered and asked that Ibn al-Walid be told: "God's Messenger forbids killing children, women, and slaves."⁷ He had also blamed him when he had killed men who had already surrendered after a battle. In both cases, then, the message was the same: one should fight only enemy soldiers, while sparing all those who did not directly take part in armed conflict or could no longer cause any harm. The Prophet had clearly stated before sending the Muthah expedition: "You shall not be treacherous, you shall not deceive, you shall

not mutilate, you shall not kill children nor the inhabitants of hermitages [*ashab as-sawami*].”⁸ War was never desirable, but when Muslims were compelled to it because they were attacked or because their survival was threatened, they had to keep strictly to what was needed to fight enemy forces who were armed and/or determined to fight. If the latter wished for peace or surrendered, the war must be stopped, according to the Quranic injunction: “But if they incline toward peace, do you [also, in the same way] incline toward peace, and trust in God, for He is the One that hears and knows [all things].”⁹

We have seen that the Prophet made an exception when he cut down palm trees during the siege of the Banu Nadir. That exception, mentioned in Revelation, proved the rule of respect for nature, especially in wartime. Creation is filled with signs that tell of the goodness and generosity of its Creator, and it is hence a sacred space: respecting it is akin to charity (*sadaqah*) or invocation. The protection of palm trees, fruit trees, and other vegetation in wartime is the consequence of a more general teaching conveyed by the Prophet to all Muslims. One day, as he passed Sad ibn Abi Waqqas, who was performing his ritual ablutions, the Prophet said to him: “Why such waste, O Sad?” “Is there waste even when performing ablutions?” Sad asked. And the Prophet answered: “Yes, even when using the water of a running stream.”¹⁰ Water is a central element in all the teachings and ritual practices, for it represents the purification of body and heart, of physical outwardness as well as spiritual inwardness.¹¹ But the Prophet taught Sad and his other Companions never to consider water, or any other element of nature, as a simple means toward their spiritual edification; on the contrary, respecting nature and using it moderately was already, in itself, a spiritual exercise and elevation, a goal in their quest for the Creator.

The Prophet’s insistence on not wasting any natural resource, “even when using the water of a running stream,” indicates that he placed respect for nature on the level of an essential principle that must regulate behavior whatever the situation and whatever the consequences. This is not an ecology springing from the anticipation of disasters (which result from human actions) but a sort of “upstream ecology” that rests people’s relation to nature on an ethical bedrock associated with an understanding of the deepest spiritual teachings.¹² The believer’s relation to nature must be based on contemplation and respect. Indeed, this respect is such that the Prophet once said: “If the hour of Judgment Day comes while one of

you holds a sapling in his hand, let him hurry and plant it.”¹³ The believing conscience must thus, to the very end, be sustained by this intimate relation with nature, to the extent that one’s last gesture should be associated with the renewal of life and its cycles.

The same teaching is present throughout the Prophet’s life as far as animals are concerned. We have seen that when marching toward Mecca with his army, he had expressly required that a litter of puppies lying by the wayside be protected. That the Prophet insisted that animals must be well treated even in the extreme case of war is, once again, a direct consequence of his more fundamental teachings in this respect. Muhammad particularly loved cats, but, more generally, he constantly made his Companions aware of the need to respect all animal species. He once told them this story: “A man was walking on a road in scorching heat; he saw a well and went down into it to quench his thirst. When he climbed up again, he saw a dog panting with thirst and said to himself: ‘This dog is as thirsty as I was.’ He went down into the well again, filled his shoe with water, and climbed up, holding it between his teeth. He gave it to the dog to drink, and God rewarded him for this and forgave his sins.” The Prophet was then asked: “O Prophet, do we get a reward for being good to animals?” And the Prophet answered: “Any good done to a living creature gets a reward.”¹⁴ On another occasion, he said: “A woman was punished for a cat she had imprisoned until it died. Because of this cat, she went to hell. She did not give it food or drink while she confined it, nor did she enable it to eat its prey.”¹⁵ Through such traditions, and through his own example, the Messenger stressed that respect for animals was part of the most essential Islamic teaching. He made use of every opportunity to insist on that dimension.

Thus, concerning the sacrifice of animals for food, the Prophet did not merely order Muslims to respect the ritual and say the formula “*BismiLLah, Allahu Akbar*” (in the name of God [I begin], God is the Most Great), which made it possible to kill the animal to eat it. He required that the animal be treated in the best manner and spared any needless suffering. One day an individual had immobilized his beast and was sharpening his knife in front of it, and the Prophet intervened to say: “Do you want to make it die twice? Why did you not sharpen your knife before you laid it down?”¹⁶ Muhammad had requested that all people strive to master their own area of competence as best they could; for someone sacrificing ani-

mals, this clearly consisted in respecting their life and their dignity as living beings, and in killing them only when necessary while sparing them any needless suffering.¹⁷ The formula accompanying the sacrifice was to be understood as the final formula that, in effect, testified that, in its lifetime, the animal had been treated in the light of the teachings of God and His Messenger. The formula alone was by no means sufficient to prove that those teachings had been respected: properly sacrificing an animal according to Islamic ritual after ill-treating it in its lifetime was therefore, according to the Islamic principles conveyed by the Messenger, deviation and treason. The Prophet had threatened: "Whoever kills a sparrow or a bigger animal without respecting its right to exist will be accountable to God for it on the Day of Judgment."¹⁸ Muhammad thus taught that an animal's right to be respected, to be spared suffering, to receive the food it needed, and to be treated well could not be negotiated: it was part of the duties of human beings and should be understood as one of the conditions of their spiritual elevation.

Illness

A few weeks after the month of Ramadan in the eleventh year of Hijrah, the Prophet went to Uhud, where the second battle between the Muslims and the Quraysh had taken place, and he performed a farewell prayer for the men who had been killed there. He then went back to the Medina mosque, sat on the *minbar*, and addressed the faithful.¹⁹ First he said, "I am going ahead of you [in the hereafter] and I shall be a witness over you." Then he advised them, and concluded his speech by saying, "I do not fear your reverting to polytheism after me, but I fear you will quarrel over the riches of this world."²⁰ Those words clearly expressed that he felt he must get ready to leave this life. In the same breath, he expressed a fear for the future of his spiritual community: faith would not leave them, he said, but the world with its illusions would colonize them, and both would, unfortunately, coexist within them. The Prophet was in effect expressing a fear that sounded like a prediction: they would continue to pray to God, the One, but they would be divided because of honors, wealth, power, or their different affiliations, which would make them forget the fraternity that united them.

In the night following that day, the Prophet went to the Al-Baqi graveyard, in Medina, to greet its occupants, and he punctuated his invocations with the words: "You are the first [you went ahead] and we are coming after you [we are joining you]." On the way back, the Prophet felt a violent headache, which did not leave him for almost two weeks and kept him confined to bed during the last days of his life.²¹ At first, he continued to lead congregational prayer, in spite of the headache and a fever that caused him great suffering. As the days went on, the illness grew worse, and the Prophet had to lie down for longer and longer periods. He was then staying with his wife Maymunah (for his wives took turns receiving him), and he insistently asked whom he was to visit the next day, then the day after. Maymunah understood that he wished to go to Aishah's, and she spoke to the other wives about it; they decided that the Prophet would immediately be transferred to her apartment. He had become so weak that Abbas and Ali had to help him walk there.

He had been staying with Aishah for a few days when his fever increased, his head suddenly ached more intensely, and he fainted. When he recovered his senses, he requested that seven skins of water be poured over his face. After a few hours, he felt a little better and decided to go to the mosque with a bandage around his head. He sat on the *minbar*, addressed the Companions present, and spoke to them about graves, insisting that they must never turn his own grave into a place of worship: "Do not commit acts of idolatry on my grave."²² He was the Messenger, but he remained a man: he knew how deep his Companions' love for him was, and he warned them against committing the mistakes of those who had come before them and who had idealized their Prophets and their guides to the point of worship.²³ Only God is worthy of worship.

To complete this reminder of his humanity, the Prophet rose and asked whether he owed any of his Companions anything. Did he have an unsettled debt? Had he offended or hurt anybody? If so, that person should speak out so that the situation could be settled. A man stood up and reminded the Prophet that he owed him three dirhams: the Prophet ordered that the money be given back to him immediately. The Messenger, following the injunctions of Revelation, did not pray on a believer's grave until all his earthly debts were settled, and he knew that even for one who had given up his life to God, debt remained a burden that God did not remit. He had to depart debtless, free from owing anything to any

other person, taking with him no unforgiven offense, no unhealed wound, no undischarged trust, no unheard message.

The Prophet sat on the *minbar* again and confessed: "God, the Most Noble, has offered one of His servants the chance to choose between the possessions of this world and that which is near Him, and he has chosen that which is near God."²⁴ At those words, Abu Bakr burst into tears, for he had been the first to understand, from the depths of his love for the Prophet, that Muhammad was speaking of himself and of his own impending departure. The Messenger soothed him and, while continuing to address the congregation, directly and personally addressed Abu Bakr's heart, thus publicly settling a private love debt that was both deep and intense: "The Companion who has been the most generous to me with his company and his wealth is Abu Bakr. If I were to have an intimate friend beside God, he would be Abu Bakr; but Islamic brotherhood and affection are preferable."²⁵ Their communication was public, but it was in fact singular, personal, secret. Abu Bakr's tears expressed his love and cleared the debt; he loved, and at that particular moment, he understood.

Departing

The Prophet went back to Aishah's and lay down again. He intimated to the Companions who visited him later on that he wanted to have his last recommendations written down. Umar expressed reservations because of the Prophet's condition, while others backed the idea. They raised their voices in the Prophet's presence, and he asked them to withdraw, for he could not bear to hear them argue. In any case, the project was not carried out, though the Messenger gave a few more verbal recommendations about faith, practice, and maintaining the Kaba. Then he wanted to go to the mosque, but the pain was so intense that when he tried to get up he fainted. When he came to, he asked if the faithful had prayed, and Aishah informed him that they were waiting for him. He again tried to get up, but he fainted once more. When he recovered consciousness for the second time, he asked the same question and was informed that the Muslims were still waiting for him. He told Aishah to see to it that the people prayed, and that Abu Bakr was to lead the prayer.

He told her this during the following days as well, but every time he did, Aishah requested that her father be exempted from leading the prayer; she insisted that he was too sensitive and that he wept when reciting the Quran. Each time she objected, Aishah received the same firm and determined answer: Abu Bakr must lead the congregational prayer. Abu Bakr's sensitivity and tears held a secret, and the Prophet remained firm in his choice. Two days later, his illness allowing him some respite, he was able to go to the mosque while the Muslims were praying *zuhr* (the noon prayer) behind Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr wanted to step back and leave his place to the Prophet, but the latter prevented him from doing so and merely sat on his left. The Prophet led the rest of the prayer while Abu Bakr repeated, in a louder voice, the phrases that accompanied the different movements.

This was the Prophet's last appearance in the mosque. During the day that followed, he had all his belongings distributed, down to his last dirhams and his coat of mail, and he continued to give out some advice; he repeated again and again that slaves, the poor, and the lowly must be treated well. The next morning, a Monday, at the time of dawn prayer, the Prophet raised a curtain in Aishah's dwelling, enabling him to look at the Muslims in the mosque, and he was seen to give a smile. The Muslims were surprised at that gesture and thought that the Prophet was going to join them, but the curtain went down again and the Prophet did not reappear. During the hours that followed, Fatimah, his daughter, came to visit him and made a compassionate remark about the intensity of the Prophet's suffering; at this, he told her: "After this day, there will be no more suffering for your father."²⁶ He also whispered into her ear, as we have seen, that she would soon join him, and this made her smile through her tears. The pain was getting more and more intense, and the Prophet was soon unable to speak.

Then Aishah came to sit by the Prophet's side, pressed him against her, and laid his head on her bosom while stroking it to soothe the pain. Abd ar-Rahman, Abu Bakr's son and Aishah's brother, came into the room with a *siwak*, the small stick Muslims used to brush their teeth, in his hand, and the Prophet looked at it in such a way that Aishah understood he wanted it. She softened it in her mouth and gave it to the Prophet, who brushed his teeth with surprising vigor considering his general weakness.

Attention to hygiene thus accompanied God's Messenger until his very last moments, for he knew how important it is to keep one's body fit and in good health. Throughout life, that body has rights over the being and conscience to whom it has been offered as a gift from God, a present. One must provide for its need for tenderness, gentleness, or sexual attention, just as one must keep it fit, surround it with good hygiene, and protect it carefully from all that could affect its balance or cause it illness. Hygiene and responding to the body's needs are two dimensions and conditions of spiritual elevation, and so during the final moments of the Prophet's life he received tenderness and brushed his teeth vigorously; even though the consequences of that final attention to the body would no longer be seen by any human being on earth, God knew the intention behind the gesture. The Prophet had once declared that one of the questions believers would be asked on the Day of Judgment was what use they had made of their bodies.²⁷ As opposed to all the illusions of personal possession, the body is basically a trust temporarily offered to each being, and here too, one must clear one's debt before departing.

The Prophet closed his eyes. Aishah was holding him against her, and she heard him whisper: "In Paradise, in supreme union . . ." Then he recited the end of the verse: "In the company of those on whom is the Grace of God—the Prophets, the sincere, the martyrs, and the righteous; how beautiful is their company!"²⁸ He again repeated three times: "In supreme union!"²⁹ His forearm suddenly sank down and his head became heavier, and Aishah understood that the Prophet had just breathed his last. He had departed to join his Lord, his Educator, his Friend, Who had called him back to Himself to let him at last find ultimate peace, beyond the world of human beings to whom he had been sent to bring the final message from the Most Gracious. Since that day, the spiritual community of believers has never ceased, all over the world and through the ages, to salute the last Prophet and recite, with all their heart and love: "God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. O you that believe! Send blessings on him, and salute him with all respect."³⁰

Emptiness

The news of his death spread through Medina and caused infinite sorrow. Faces showed dismay; tears, sobs, and sometimes screams expressed the

intensity of the pain. The Prophet had recommended that grief should be expressed but without excess, without hysteria, with restraint and dignity. Heavy silence, crossed with sighs and sobs, reigned near the Prophet's home. Umar ibn al-Khattab suddenly broke that silence and exclaimed forcefully, as we have seen, that the Prophet was not dead, that he would come back, as Moses had done, after forty days. He even threatened to kill whoever dared declare that the Prophet was dead. His love was such, and the feeling of emptiness was so intense, that Umar could not imagine the future without the man who had guided and accompanied them, and whose love and attention had been stressed by the Quran itself: "Now a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves: it grieves him that you should suffer, he is ardently anxious over you: to the believers he is most kind and merciful."³¹ Emotion had taken hold of his being.

At this point, Abu Bakr arrived at the Prophet's home, sat at his bedside, and lifted the blanket that had been laid over the Prophet's body and face. Tears were streaming down his face as he realized that the Prophet had left them. He went out and tried to silence Umar, who, still in a state of emotional shock, refused to calm himself. Abu Bakr then stood aside and addressed the crowd, and this was when he uttered those words, so full of wisdom, that we mentioned in the introduction, that synthesized the very essence of Islam's creed: "Let those who worshiped Muhammad know that Muhammad is now dead! As for those who worshiped God, let them know that God is alive and does not die."³² Then he recited this verse: "Muhammad is no more than a messenger; many were the messengers who passed away before him. If he died or was killed, will you then turn back? If any did turn back, not the least harm will he do to God. But God will reward the thankful."³³ When Umar heard that verse, he collapsed, and he was later to confess that it was as if he had heard the verse for the first time, even though it had been revealed a long time before. He realized, along with all the Muslims, that the Prophet was gone for good, that he had left them, and that the emptiness that had suddenly set in must henceforth be filled by their faith in the One, Who "is alive and does not die"; they must ask Him to help them find in themselves the strength, patience, and perseverance they needed to go on living without the Messenger, but always in the light of his example.

Umar, despite his strong character and impressive personality, had lost control of himself for a short while, his emotions seizing him so strongly

that it brought out a heretofore unsuspected fragility, causing him to react like a child refusing the ruling of God, of reality, of life. By contrast, Abu Bakr, who was normally so sensitive, who wept so abundantly and so intensely when he read the Quran, had received the news of the Prophet's death with deep sorrow but also with extraordinary calm and unsuspected inner strength. At that particular moment, the two men's roles were inverted, thus showing that through his departure the Prophet offered us a final teaching: in the bright depths of spirituality, sensitivity can produce a degree of strength of being that nothing can disturb. Conversely, the strongest personality, if it forgets itself for a moment, can become vulnerable and fragile. The path to wisdom and to strength in God inevitably leads through awareness and recognition of our weaknesses. They never leave us, and the Most Near recommends that we accept them—with confidence, as Abu Bakr did, and with intensity, as Umar did, but always with humility.



In History, for Eternity

Revelation had apprised the Companions, just as it tells Muslims today and for all eternity, throughout history and across manifold societies and cultures: “You have indeed in the Messenger of God an excellent example for him who hopes in [aspires to get close to] God and the Final Day and who remembers God intensely.”¹ The Messenger is the master whose teachings one studies, the guide one follows on the Way, the model one aspires to resemble, and, above all, the elect whose sayings, silences, and actions one is invited to ponder.

A Model, a Guide

Throughout the twenty-three years of his mission, Muhammad sought the way to spiritual freedom and liberation. He received Revelation, step by step, in the midst of the circumstances of life, as if the Most High was conversing with him in history, for eternity. The Prophet listened to Him, spoke to Him, and contemplated His signs day and night, in the warm company of his Companions or in the solitude of the Arabian desert. He prayed while the world of humans was asleep, he invoked God while his brothers and sisters despaired, and he remained patient and steadfast in the face of adversity and insult while so many beings turned away. His deep spirituality had freed him from the prison of the self, and he kept seeing and recalling the signs of the Most Near, whether in a flying bird, a standing tree, falling darkness, or a shining star.

Muhammad was able to express love and spread it around him. His wives were gratified by his presence, tenderness, and affection, and his Companions loved him with an intense, profound, and extraordinarily generous love. He gave and offered his presence, his smiles, his being, and if a slave happened to address him or wanted to take him to the other end of the city, he went, he listened, he loved. Belonging to God, he was nobody's possession; he simply offered his love to all. When he gave someone his hand, he was never the first to draw it back, and he knew what light and peace can surge in the heart of a being who is offered a tender word, an affectionate name, comfort. Freed from his own self, he neglected nobody's self. His presence was a refuge; he was the Messenger.

He loved, he forgave. Every day he begged God to forgive his own failings and oversights, and when a woman or a man came to him burdened with a mistake, however serious, he received that soul and showed her or him the way to forgiveness, solace, dialogue with God, and the Most Gentle's protection. He covered other people's mistakes from the sight of others, while teaching everyone the need for personal rigor and discipline. When laziness moved anyone to ask him for minimal practice, he always answered positively and invited them to use their intelligence and their qualities to understand, improve, and free themselves from their own contradictions while accepting their own fragility. He taught responsibility without guilt and adherence to ethics as the conditions for freedom.

Justice is a condition for peace, and the Prophet kept insisting that one cannot experience the taste of equity if one is unable to respect the dignity of individuals. He set slaves free and recommended that Muslims pledge to do so constantly: the faith community of believers had to be a community of free beings. Revelation showed him the way, and, as we have often seen, he never ceased to give particular attention to slaves, the poor, and the lowly in society. He invited them to assert their dignity, to demand their rights, and to get rid of any feeling of inferiority; the message was a call for religious, social, and political liberation. At the close of his mission, in the plain lying at the foot of the Mount of Mercy (*Jabal ar-Rahmah*), men and women of all races, cultures, and colors, rich and poor, were present and listened to this message, which stressed that the best among people are so through their hearts, which are determined neither by class nor by color or culture. "The best among you is the best toward people," he had once said.² In the name of human brotherhood—

addressing not just Muslims but all people (*an-nas*), as he did during the farewell sermon—he taught each conscience to transcend the appearances that might hinder its progress toward the Just (*al-adl*). In the presence of God, nothing could justify discrimination, social injustice, or racism. In the Muslim community, a black man called the believers to prayer, and a slave's son commanded the army; faith had freed the believers from judgments based on deceptive appearances (linked to origin and social status) that stimulate unwise passions and dehumanize them.

He had listened to women in his society, who often experienced denial of their rights, exclusion, and ill-treatment. Revelation recalls this listening and this accessibility: "God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint to God. And God hears the argument between both of you. For God hears and sees [all things]."³ Similarly, he listened to a woman who wanted to divorce her husband because she did not like him anymore; he heard her, looked into the matter, and separated them.⁴ He also received another woman who complained that her father had married her off without asking for her opinion; he was ready to separate her and her husband, but she informed him that she was actually satisfied with her father's choice but wanted to make it known "to fathers" that "this was not their decision" and that they could not act in such a way without seeking their daughters' consent.⁵ The Messenger conveyed to women the twofold requirement of spiritual training and of asserting a femininity that is not imprisoned in the mirror of men's gaze or alienated within unhealthy relationships of power or seduction. Their presence in society, in public space and in social, political, economic, and even military action, was an objective fact that the Prophet not only never denied or rejected but clearly encouraged. In the light of spiritual teachings, he guided them to assert themselves, be present, express themselves, and claim the real freedom of heart and conscience. They had to choose it by themselves and trace it out for themselves, trusting in the Most Gracious.

The Messenger loved children, with their innocence, gentleness, and ability to be present in the moment. Close to God, close to his own heart, he remained attentive to those who primarily understood the heart's language. He kissed them, carried them on his shoulders, and played with them, reaching toward their innocence, which is in its essence the expression of a permanent prayer to God. Children, like angels, wholly belong

to God. They are signs. The Prophet's attitude was a constant reminder of this: thus, if his ritual prayer to God was disturbed by a baby crying—the infant, in effect, praying to God by invoking his or her mother—the Messenger would then shorten his adult's prayer as if to respond to the child's prayer.⁶ The Messenger, moreover, drew from children his sense of play and innocence; from them he learned to look at people and the world around him with wonder. From watching children experience beauty he also more fully developed his sense of aesthetics: in front of beauty, he wept, he was moved, he sometimes sobbed, and he was often filled with well-being by the poetic musicality of a phrase or by the spiritual call of a verse offered by the Most Generous, the Infinitely Beautiful.

Freedom and Love

The Prophet came to humankind with a message of faith, ethics, and hope, in which the One reminds all people of His presence, His requirements, and the final Day of Return and Encounter. Though Muhammad came with this message, throughout his life he kept listening to women, children, men, slaves, rich, and poor, as well as outcasts. He listened to, welcomed, and comforted them. An elect among the inhabitants of this earth, he concealed neither his fragility nor his doubts; in fact, God had, very early on, made him doubt himself so that he should never henceforth doubt his own need for Him, and shown him the reality of his failings so that he should seek His perfect Grace and remain indulgent toward his fellow human beings. He was a model not only through his qualities but also through his doubts, his wounds, and occasionally, as we have seen, his errors of judgment, which either Revelation or his Companions would point out.

However, absolutely everything in his life was an instrument of renewal and transformation, from the slightest detail to the greatest events. The Muslim faithful, believers of any faith, and all who study Muhammad's life regardless of personal religious belief can derive teachings from this, thus reaching toward the essence of the message and the light of faith. The Prophet prayed, meditated, transformed himself, and transformed the world. Guided by his Educator, he resisted the worst in himself and offered the best in his being because such was the meaning of *jihad*, such

was the meaning of the injunction commanding believers to “promote good and prevent evil.”⁷ His life was the embodiment of that teaching.

Muhammad’s life journey offered at every stage an existence devoted to the worship of God. The heart cannot but commune with such a being as he follows the path to freedom: freedom not only to think or act, for which Muhammad fought with dignity, but also the freedom of a being who had liberated himself from his attachments to superficial emotions, destructive passions, or alienating dependence. Everybody loved, cherished, and respected him because his demanding spirituality enabled him to transcend his ego, to give himself, and, in turn, to love without bondage. Divine love was free from human dependence. He submitted, and he was free: he submitted in the peace of the divine, and he was free from the illusions of the human. He had once told one of his Companions the secret of real love: “Keep away from [do not envy] what men love, and men will love you.”⁸ God had inspired him to follow the path to the Love that continues this love: “My servant keeps getting closer to Me through freely chosen devotions until I love him; and when I love him, I am the hearing through which he hears, the sight through which he sees, the hand through which he holds, and the foot through which he walks.”⁹ God’s love offers the gift of proximity to the divine and transcendence of the self. God’s Love is a Love without dependence, a Love that liberates and elevates. In the experience of this closeness one perceives the presence of the Being, of the divine.

Muhammad had followed a path that entailed a number of different stages: the call of faith, exile, return, and finally departure to the first resting place, the last refuge. All along the way, beginning with his initiation, God had accompanied the Messenger with His love, and He caused human beings to accompany him with their love as well. The Prophet carried a universal message, both in the experience of love present throughout his life and in his reminders to people of the need to adhere to a universal ethics that transcends divisions, affiliations, and rigid identities. This was a true freedom—the freedom of a being who loves with justice and does not allow himself to be entrapped by passions springing from his race, nation, or identity. His love illuminating his ethical sense made him good; his ethical sense guiding his love made him free. Profoundly good among men and extraordinarily free from them—such were the two qualities that all Companions recognized in the last Prophet.

He was beloved by God and an example among humans. He prayed, he contemplated. He loved, he gave. He served, he transformed. The Prophet was the light that leads to Light, and in learning from his life, believers return to the Source of Life and find His light, His warmth, and His love. The Messenger may have left the human world, but he has taught us never to forget Him, the Supreme Refuge, the Witness, the Most Near. Bearing witness that there is no god but God is, in effect, stepping toward deep and authentic freedom; recognizing Muhammad as the Messenger is essentially learning to love him in his absence and to love Him in His presence. Loving, and learning to love: God, the Prophet, the creation, and humankind.

Notes

Introduction

1. It is recommended to Muslims that they offer a prayer for the Prophet whenever his name is mentioned. Therefore, the formula "*Salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam*" (May God's peace and blessings be upon him) usually follows the Prophet's name whenever it appears in classical biographies. Since the present book is addressed to a wide audience, both Muslim and non-Muslim, we shall abstain from mentioning it in the text, and let the Muslim reader personally and inwardly formulate this prayer as he or she reads.
2. Quran, 18:110.
3. Quran, 33:21.
4. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
5. Quran, 3:31.
6. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 6:75–76.
7. Quran, 3:144.

Chapter 1: Encounter with the Sacred

1. Quran, 2:156.
2. Quran, 22:78.
3. Genesis, 15:5 (Revised Standard Version).
4. Genesis, 17:20.
5. Genesis, 21:17–19.
6. Quran, 14:37–39.

7. Quran, 2:124–26.
8. The Islamic tradition is that God asks Abraham to sacrifice Ishmael; in the Bible, the tradition is that Abraham is asked to sacrifice his second son, Isaac.
9. Quran, 37:101–9.
10. Genesis, 22:1–2 and 6–8.
11. In particular, his analysis of Abraham's experience in his *Fear and Trembling* (1843).
12. See our analysis of this point in *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2000), Part Three: "Values and Finalities."
13. Quran, 2:186.

Chapter 2: Birth and Education

1. Muslim tradition draws a distinction between prophets (*nabi*, pl. *anbiya*) and messengers (*rasul*, pl. *rusul*). Prophets bear a message or teachings that they are not meant to transmit to humankind; rather, they remind the people of God's presence and behave accordingly. Messengers, by contrast, receive, live, and transmit the divine message (sometimes to their tribe or people, sometimes to humankind at large). Thus, a messenger (*rasul*) is always a prophet (*nabi*), but not all prophets are messengers.
2. Meaning "pure," "following a faithful or orthodox line."
3. Quran, 4:125.
4. Ibn Hisham (d. 828 CE/AH 213) is the author of the first account of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which has come down to us as *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (*The Prophet's Life*). This is considered the authoritative work on the subject. Ibn Hisham selected, reproduced, elaborated on, and commented on the facts reported by Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 CE/AH 150) in an earlier work that is now lost. The quotation is from *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 1:294.
5. Tribes were the largest social units in Arabia. They were divided into clans, and then into subclans or families. The term *banu* means "clan."
6. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 1:293. The meaning of the name Muhammad is "he who is often praised" or "he who is worthy of praise."
7. Ibid.
8. The word *Rabb* is often translated as "Lord," but the root of the word includes the notion of education or educator, which is directly present in the word *tarbiyah*, derived from the same root, which means education aimed at building a moral personality.

9. Quran, 93:6–11.
10. Prophetic tradition (hadith) reported by al-Bukhari.
11. Quran, 41:39.
12. Quran, 3:190.
13. Quran, 2:164.
14. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 1:301.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 302.
17. Hadith reported by Muslim. In Islamic tradition, jinns are spirits who can be incarnated or not and who can be virtuous or evil. Like human beings, they are free to believe or not.
18. The Lotus of the Utmost Boundary is mentioned in the Quran and refers to the limit beyond which it is impossible to go while being in the presence of God.
19. Al-Mustafa is one of the Prophet Muhammad's names.
20. Quran, 94:1–4.
21. Quran, 94:5–6.
22. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari. See also Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 1:303.

Chapter 3: Personality and Spiritual Quest

1. See Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 1:319.
2. Ibid., 321.
3. The Quraysh were a powerful Meccan tribe, descendants of Qusayy, who were prosperous merchants largely controlling trade in the region.
4. Hadith reported by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham and confirmed as authentic by various sources, including al-Hamidi, and partly by Imam Ahmad.
5. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
6. Ibn Hisham reports an episode with a monk who, having seen Muhammad sitting under a tree, told Maysarah that this young man “could only be a Prophet.” See Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 2:6.
7. See Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 2:6–8. See also Ibn Sayyid an-Nas, *Uyun al-Athar* (Medina: Dar at-Turath, 1996), 80–81.
8. Muhammad was subsequently often called Abu al-Qasim (father of Qasim), and some prophetic traditions refer to the Prophet by this name.
9. He was to bear that name until Revelation commanded that all adoptive children keep their family names when known (Quran, 33:4–5) in order to draw a clear distinction between blood kinship and the status of the adopted child.
10. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 2:66–67.

Chapter 4: Revelation, Knowledge

1. Quran, 96:1–5.
2. Hadith reported by Aishah and authenticated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
3. Ibid.
4. In the above-quoted hadith, Aishah reports that they went together, whereas Ibn Hisham (*As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* [Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.], 2:73) states that she first went alone, and that Waraqah ibn Nawfal met the Prophet later.
5. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 2:73–74.
6. Ibid., 2:74.
7. Hadith reported by Aishah and authenticated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
8. Quran, 2:31.
9. “Your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will certainly establish a vicegerent [*khali-fah*] on earth’” (Quran, 2:30).
10. Quran, 68:1–6. This surah is often classified as the second in the chronological order of Revelation.
11. Hadith reported by Aishah and authenticated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
12. Quran, 74:1–5.
13. Al-Bukhari, 91:1.
14. Quran, 93:1–5.
15. They all died when Muhammad was still alive, except for Fatimah, who died six months after him.
16. And the mother of all his children, except for Ibrahim, whom Muhammad had with the Copt Mariyah and who also died in infancy.
17. In a hadith reported by al-Bukhari (1:1), Ibn Abbas relates the painful character of the moment of Revelation: “The Messenger of God tried to appease the suffering occasioned by Revelation” by moving his lips, hence the verses “Do not move your tongue concerning the [Quran] to make haste with it. It is for Us to collect it and to recite it. But when We have recited it, follow its recital” (Quran, 75:16–18).

Chapter 5: The Message and Adversity

1. Quran, 26:214.
2. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 2:98–99.
3. Because of this status, the Quran answered him in a later Revelation, using the same formula with the additional aesthetic power of assonance and consonance in the Arabic words: “*Tabat yada Abi Lahabin watab*” (let the hands of Abu Lahab perish, let him perish). Quran, 111:1.
4. Quran, 15:94.

5. Quran, 17:110.
6. This surah was revealed later (during the Medina period), but it synthesizes the substance of the believer's relationship to the One Who is merciful and infinitely kind. The Prophet particularly enjoyed this surah, which he once called "*arusat al-Quran*" (the Quran's bride) in allusion to its beauty.
7. Quran, 55:1–13.
8. The elements of the Islamic creed, according to the Quran, include belief in God, angels, prophets, scriptures, and the Day of Judgment.
9. Quran, 16:103.
10. Quran, 73:5.
11. Quran, 59:21.
12. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 2:83.
13. Quran, 73:1–8.
14. Quran, 2:186.
15. Quran, 3:31.
16. Quran, 33:21.
17. Quran, 93:4.
18. Quran, 95:6.
19. Quran, 3:104. In Islamic terminology, *al-maruf* means "what is right" but not in a restrictive way. A central concept, it refers to what is universally known as good, proper, ethical, and moral and is confirmed as such by Revelation. Revelation may specify some teachings, but it primarily relies on the collective and common sense of "what is good."
20. Quran, 3:104.
21. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 2:101.
22. Ibid., 2:132–33.
23. Ibid., 2:159.
24. Ibid., 2:128.
25. Ibid., 2:162.
26. Quran, 80:1–12.
27. The Prophet also said in this sense: "Wealth is not the possession of goods; wealth is the wealth of the soul" (authentic hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim).
28. Hadith reported by Muslim.

Chapter 6: Resistance, Humility, and Exile

1. *Yawm* in Arabic means "day" but also "a period of time" or "a cycle" of sometimes indeterminate duration.

2. Quran, 41:1–10. *Hâ* and *mîm* are Arabic letters; as noted previously, their presence in Revelation is not explained. The appropriate translation is “purifying social tax” which covers the three dimensions of the concept of *zakat*: It is a duty before God and man; it is levied for the benefit of the poor in society; the believer’s conscience is appeased in the knowledge that his/her property is purified by fulfilling the right of God and man.
3. Quran, 25:52.
4. Quran, 29:64.
5. Quran, 53:29–31.
6. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
7. Quran, 16:106.
8. Quran, 10:78.
9. Quran, 112.
10. Quran, 109. This surah was revealed when some Quraysh leaders suggested a kind of syncretism between their forefathers’ polytheistic religion and the monotheism brought by the Prophet. Revelation’s answer is clear and final; it determines the inescapable character of the distinction while implicitly opening the way to the injunction of mutual respect.
11. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 2:140.
12. Quran, 18:23–24.
13. Quran, 17:85.
14. Quran, 18:60–82.
15. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 2:164.
16. Present-day Ethiopia.
17. Quran, 19:16–21.
18. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 2:180.
19. *Ibid.*, 2:181.

Chapter 7: Trials, Elevation, and Hopes

1. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 2:189.
2. Quran, 20:1–8.
3. Quran, 20:14.
4. Abu al-Hakam was, as mentioned before, the name of the man whom the Muslims had nicknamed Abu Jahl because of his limitless cruelty toward Muslims.
5. From that day on, Umar was nicknamed Al-Faruq (the one who draws a distinction) in reference to his determination to distinguish the Muslim community (having accepted the message as true) from the Quraysh (stubborn in ignorance, *al-jahiliyyah*).

6. Quran, 2:187.
7. Quran, 28:56.
8. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 2:268.
9. Ibid., 2:269.
10. Differences exist in classical sources telling of the Prophet's life as to the chronology of events: the account of the Night Journey sometimes precedes that of the Year of Sorrow.
11. There were initially to be fifty prayers, but the number was reduced to five after successive requests from the Prophet acting on Moses's advice.
12. Quran, 2:285. The return to God refers to the idea of the hereafter and the Last Judgment. A prophetic tradition (hadith) reported by Umar ibn al-Khattab and authenticated by al-Bukhari and Muslim mentions the sixth of the pillars of faith (*arkan al-iman*) that constitute the Muslim creed (*al-aqidah*): belief in fate (*al-qadr wal qada*) whether good or evil.
13. Quran, 17:1.
14. Quran, 53:4–18.
15. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 2:256.
16. Ibadat includes the religious duties of worship required of all Muslims who are of age and of sound body and mind. They include the profession of faith (*shahadah*), prayer (*salat*), purifying social tax (*zakat*), fasting (*sawm*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).
17. Ibid., 2:281.
18. Ibid., 2:281–82.
19. Quran, 60:8–9.
20. Quran, 39:53–54.
21. Um Habibah was later to marry the Prophet.

Chapter 8: Hijrah

1. Quran, 13:11.
2. Quran, 9:40.
3. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
4. Muslims still turned toward Jerusalem for ritual prayer.
5. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
6. Quran, 39:10.
7. Quran, 16:41–42.
8. Hadith reported by Ibn Majah. Ansar (helpers) was the name given to Medina Muslims while Mecca-born Muslims were henceforth called Muhajirun (exiles).

9. Quran, 73:10. The Quran makes use of forms of the word *ha-ja-ra: uhjurhum* (exile yourself from them) or *fahjur* (therefore, exile yourself).
10. Quran, 74:5.
11. Quran, 29:25–26.
12. Hadith reported by Ahmad.
13. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 3:20.
14. The Christian tribes lived on the outskirts of Medina, and this agreement did not directly apply to them.
15. In modern terms, we would say that they enjoyed full citizenship.
16. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 3:31. Polytheists in Mecca kept expressing their hostility and their desire to fight, since Muhammad's settlement in Yathrib amounted to humiliation and defeat for them.
17. In particular, of course, in the different branches of Islam's first applied science (*al-fiqh*, Islamic law and jurisprudence).
18. Quran, 17:34.
19. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
20. Quran, 3:2–4.
21. Verses 108 to 116 in surah 4, "An-Nisa" (Women).
22. Quran, 4:112.
23. Quran, 5:8.
24. Surah "Al-Baqarah" (The Cow), which is also the longest surah in the Quran.
25. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Quran (Mukhtasar)* (Cairo: Dar as-Sabuni), 1:27–37.
26. Quran, 2:8–9.
27. Quran, 2:14.
28. Hadith reported by Ahmad and Muslim. A *hadith qudsi* is a Prophetic tradition in which God speaks through the Prophet's words. Unlike the Quran, this is an inspiration verbalized by the Prophet.
29. This is one of God's names.

Chapter 9: Medina, Life, and War

1. Commentators have often made a difference between two types of expeditions: *as-sariyyah* (pl. *saraya*), in which the Prophet did not take part, and *al-ghazwah* (pl. *ghazawa*), in which he was present.
2. Quran, 22:39–40.
3. Quran, 22:40.
4. Quran, 2:251.
5. Quran, 2:30.

6. Quran, 2:144.
7. Uthman ibn Affan would later, after Muhammad's death, become the third caliph.
8. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 3:161.
9. Ibid., 3:162.
10. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
11. Hadith reported by Muslim in Muhammad Nasr ad-Din al-Albani, *Al-Jami as-Saghir wa Ziyadah*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1988), 2:948.
12. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
13. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 3:167.
14. Ibid., 3:175.
15. Authentic hadith reported by al-Mundhiri. See al-Albani, *Al-Jami as-Saghir wa Ziyadah*, 2:955.
16. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
17. Quran, 3:123.
18. According to some accounts, it was Mughirah ibn al-Harith, an ordinary soldier in the Quraysh army, and not Abu Sufyan.
19. Quran, 111. Abu Lahab is the only person who is condemned by name in the Quran.
20. Quran, 8:67–68.
21. Quran, 8:1.
22. Quran, 8:58.
23. Quran, 8:61.
24. Quran, 8:67.
25. Quran, 8:57.

Chapter 10: Teachings and Defeat

1. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
2. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
3. Hadith reported by Muslim.
4. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
5. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
6. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
7. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
8. According to one version, he brought some dates. Another narrator, called Abd ar-Rahman, said that he did not know what kind of food it was.
9. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

10. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
11. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
12. Hadith reported by Muslim.
13. Hadith reported by al-Bayhaqi.
14. A bench had been set up for them near the mosque. Some commentators, looking for the origin of the word *Sufi*, have linked it to those *ahl as-suffah*, some of whom had deliberately chosen to be poor and withdraw from the world, its desires, and its possessions.
15. Hadith *hassan* (reliable) reported by Abu Dawud and at-Tirmidhi.
16. Hadith reported by Abu Dawud and an-Nasai.
17. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 2:112.
18. As Ibn Hisham points out, the first eighty verses of the surah "Ala Imran" (The Family of Imran) deal with this encounter and more generally discuss respective positions about God, messages, and commands.
19. Quran, 3:1–4.
20. Quran, 3:64.
21. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 2:114.
22. Quran, 2:256.
23. Quran, 49:13.
24. The Arabic form *taarafu*, used in the verse, expresses mutual knowledge based on a horizontal, equal relationship.
25. Quran, 5:82.
26. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
27. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
28. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
29. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim (according to another version, he concealed her with his cloak so that she could watch their games).
30. Quran, 24:31 and 33:59.
31. Hadith reported by Muslim.
32. Hadith reported by Muslim.
33. Quran, 24:11–26.
34. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
35. Hadith reported by Muslim. This referred to Aishah, whose skin was very white. Another version says: "Take half your religion from this red-colored young woman."
36. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 4:30.
37. Another version relates that Wahshi brought her Hamzah's liver, and that she then went to look for his body on the battlefield and disfigured it.
38. Quran, 16:126.

39. As we shall see in the last chapter, he was to give similar orders about animals.
40. Quran, 3:159.
41. Quran, 42:38.

Chapter 11: Tricks and Treason

1. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 4:138.
2. Quran, 59:5.
3. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:145.
4. Quran, 16:90.
5. Hadith reported by Muslim.
6. Quran, 57:1.
7. Quran, 17:44.
8. Quran, 67:19.
9. Quran, 55:5, 6.
10. Quran, 17:74.
11. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
12. Hadith reported by at-Tirmidhi.
13. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
14. Hadith reported by Muslim.
15. Quran, 8:63.
16. Quran, 33:32. The practice of polygamy was widespread and unrestricted as to the possible number of wives. The Quran prescribed a limit of four wives, with strict conditions to be respected when marrying a second, third, or fourth wife.
17. Quran, 33:40.
18. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:170.
19. Hadith reported by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.
20. Quran, 33:10–11.
21. Quran, 33:12.
22. Quran, 33:13.
23. Quran, 33:21.
24. Quran, 33:22.
25. Quran, 4:103.
26. Hadith reported by Muslim.
27. Quran, 20:14.
28. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:188.
29. *Ibid.*, 4:193.

30. They did not pray *al-asr* until the last evening prayer (*al-isha*).
31. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:198.
32. Jewish law, implemented in war and victory situations, stated: “And when the Lord your God gives it into your hand you shall put all its males to the sword; but the women and the little ones, the cattle, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourselves” (Deuteronomy 20:13–14).
33. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:205.

Chapter 12: A Dream, Peace

1. Eight to twenty cycles of prayer, according to the various schools of Islamic law and jurisprudence, performed after the last evening prayer (*al-isha*) and during which all of the Quran so far revealed was recited.
2. The *umrah*, the lesser pilgrimage, can be done at any time during the year, whereas the *hajj* can be done only during one specific period each year.
3. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 4: 283.
4. Quran, 48:18.
5. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:284.
6. Ibid., 4:285.
7. Ibid., 4:287.
8. Quran, 48:1.
9. Quran, 48:18.
10. Quran, 48:27.
11. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 4:291.
12. Abu Jandal, whom we mentioned above, was one of them.
13. Mariyah was to give the Prophet a son, Ibrahim, who died in infancy, to Muhammad’s great sorrow (see the next chapter).

Chapter 13: Coming Home

1. He was the son of former slave Zayd ibn Harithah, whom the Prophet had long considered as his adoptive son.
2. Quran, 4:94.
3. Quran, 9:84.
4. As far as Abdullah ibn Ubayy is concerned, some traditions note that he had changed and that the above-quoted verse did not apply to him. Al-Bukhari

reports a hadith (23, 78) stating that the Prophet had a particular attitude toward him because of his attitude toward his uncle Abbas. This implies he had changed, and his conversion seemed sincere in the last moments of his life. Whatever the facts may be in reality, what remains is the depth of the teaching we have tried to point out.

5. Hadith reported by Muslim.
6. Mariyah became the Prophet's concubine, a practice that Islamic teachings accepted, while they were proceeding by stages, but very clearly, toward the cessation of slavery.
7. Quran, 66:1; see also the whole of surah 66.
8. Quran, 33:28–29.
9. Quran, 66:10–11.
10. The major pilgrimage, *al-hajj*, is the fifth pillar of Islam. Every Muslim must go to Mecca at least once in her or his life, during specific days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah.
11. According to some traditionists, twelve men were killed.
12. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 5:31.
13. Ibid., 5:59.
14. Ibid., 5:66.
15. Quran, 48:1–4.
16. Quran, 17:81.
17. Quran, 42:11.
18. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 5:73.
19. Quran, 49:13.
20. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 5:74.
21. Ibid.
22. Quran, 12:92.
23. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 5:74.
24. Quran, 17:15.
25. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 5:96.

Chapter 14: At Home, Over There

1. Quran, 22:40.
2. Quran, 22:41.
3. Most of those Meccans had recently embraced Islam, but others, such as Suhayl or Safwan, fought along with the Muslims at Hunayn without having become Muslims.

4. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 5:111 n. 1, 5:128.
5. Ibid., 5:113.
6. Ibid., 5:114.
7. Quran, 9:25–26.
8. Quran, 9:60.
9. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
10. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 5:166.
11. Ibid., 5:176.
12. Ibid., 5:177.
13. Quran, 109:6.
14. Between three and nine years, since the Arabic word *bid* means any number from three to nine.
15. Quran, 30:2–5.
16. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 5:214.
17. This was exactly how Umar ibn al-Khattab, then the caliph, was to understand it several years later when he gave back to Christian and Jewish tribes the whole *jizyah* they had paid while telling their chiefs, before an upcoming conflict, that he was unable to ensure their protection.
18. Quran, 9:118.
19. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 5:219.
20. Ibid., 5:248. In fact, most probably it was the ninth and the beginning of the tenth year of *hijrah* (end of 630–beginning of 631 CE).
21. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 5:229.
22. “*BismiLLah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*” ([I begin] in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). The reasons for this absence have been given various interpretations by Muslim scholars: some consider that it is due to the very contents of the surah, which deals with idolaters and war, while others think that it is merely the continuation of surah 8.
23. Some traditionists place the Najran Christian delegation’s visit during that year of the delegations, i.e., long after Badr. Others, such as Ibn Hisham, consider that a second encounter took place at that time and that the Najran Christians afterward converted to Islam.
24. Quran, 9:18.
25. Some scholars, however, particularly those of the Maliki school, consider that the prohibition applies to all mosques.
26. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
27. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
28. Zaynab had also died some time before, and the Prophet had personally given instructions as to how her body should be washed.

29. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
30. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 5:211.
31. Quran, 9:107–8.
32. Hadith reported by al-Bayhaqi.
33. Quran, 3:8.
34. Hadith reported by Ahmad and at-Tirmidhi.
35. Quran, 110:1–3.
36. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
37. Hadith reported by Muslim.
38. The number of pilgrims was between 124,000 and 144,000, according to different accounts.
39. In March or April 632 CE.
40. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 6:9.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 6:10.
44. Ibid.
45. Quran, 5:3.

Chapter 15: Debtless

1. During the ninth year of Hijrah, according to the majority of traditionists and scholars in Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fuqaha*).
2. Hadith reported by at-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud.
3. Some traditionists mention, among the Prophet's Companions who were to take part in that expedition, the names of Abu Bakr, Ali, and Uthman; however, they are not unanimous about who actually went.
4. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), 6:12 n. 3.
5. Literally, "Let the blood of women, children and old people never soil your hands."
6. Ibn Jarir at-Tabari, *Tarikh ar-Rusul wal-Muluk* (Cairo: al-Matbaah al-Husaniyyah, 1905), 3:213–14.
7. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 5:127.
8. Hadith reported by Ibn Hanbal.
9. Quran, 8:61.
10. Hadith reported by Ahmad and Ibn Majah.
11. The Prophet said in this respect: "When a believer performs ablutions and washes his face, all the sins he has committed with his eyes are washed away; when he washes his hands, all the sins he has committed with his hands are

- washed away; when he washes his feet, all the sins toward which he has stepped are washed away” (hadith reported by Abu Dawud).
12. The preoccupations of the two ecologies are eventually bound to meet even though their sources differ.
 13. Hadith reported by Ahmad.
 14. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
 15. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
 16. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
 17. “When you do something, do it with mastery [in the best possible manner]” (hadith reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim).
 18. Hadith reported by an-Nasai.
 19. An elevated chair from which the imam addresses the faithful in a mosque.
 20. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
 21. All the facts narrated here are reported by all of the reference traditionists, but there are sometimes differences in their chronology or the time when they actually took place: the speech in the mosque, the transfer to Aishah’s, the prayers in the mosque, etc.
 22. Hadith reported by Malik.
 23. This injunction never to lapse into the worship of human beings explains why prophets cannot be represented in classical Islamic tradition. Pictures, like carved statues, are by essence liable to fix human imagination on an object or a being that can come to be idealized or worshiped because of, and through, their representation. One should follow the prophets’ teaching and not their persons: they are paths that guide people and bring them closer to God. A believer reaches toward God’s presence and love, but the Being and His Presence transcend all that humans can represent or imagine. Faith is thus a disposition of the heart, not of the imagination and its images.
 24. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 6:64.
 25. Ibid. (hadith also reported by al-Bukhari).
 26. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.
 27. Hadith reported by at-Tirmidhi.
 28. Quran, 4:69.
 29. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 6:73 n. 1.
 30. Quran, 33:56.
 31. Quran, 9:128.
 32. Ibn Hisham, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, 6:75–76.
 33. Quran, 3:144.

In History, for Eternity

1. Quran, 33:21.
2. Hadith reported by al-Bayhaqi.
3. Quran, 58:1.
4. Several women came to him asking for divorce (*khul*), for instance Jamilah bint Ubayy ibn Salul, Habibah bint Sahl al-Ansariyyah, Barirah, and Thabit ibn Qays's wife. In this last case, Ibn Abbas recounts that Thabit's wife came to the Prophet and told him that she had nothing to reproach her husband with as far as religion was concerned, but that she did not want to be guilty of infidelity regarding Islam (by failing to respect his rights as a husband or betraying him through her thoughts or behavior). The Prophet asked her whether she was willing to return the garden that he had given her as dowry, and she accepted. The Prophet then asked Thabit to accept the separation (hadith reported by al-Bukhari).
5. This is found in a hadith reported by Ahmad. In another hadith reported by al-Bukhari, an-Nasai, and Ibn Majah, the Prophet is said to have simply canceled a marriage contract established without the woman's consent.
6. "Sometimes," the Prophet had said, "I prepare for prayer, intending to make it last, but when [during prayer] I hear a child cry, I shorten it for fear of distressing his mother" (hadith reported by Abu Dawud).
7. "*Al-amr bil-maruf wa an-nahy an al-munkar*" (see, e.g., Quran, 22:41).
8. Hadith reported by Ibn Majah.
9. Hadith reported by al-Bukhari.

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