

Signs of God for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord.” (3:199)

Mukhayriq’s story is of an individual’s ability to transcend communal divides & to fight for a more inclusive idea of community. He was a true citizen of the state of Medina & he gave his life in its defense. **He was a Jew & he was an Islamic hero and his story must never be forgotten & must be told & retold. When Muslims forget to remember his, and other stories that epitomize interfaith relations they diminish the legacy of Islam & betray the cause of peace.**

If Muslim Imams told his story in their congregations, it will contribute to manifestations of increased tolerance by Muslims towards others. There are many such wonderful examples of brotherhood, tolerance, sacrifice & good citizenship in Islamic traditions that undergird the backbone of Islamic ethics. They must be told more often.

In the 15th century, Turkey was so attractive for Jews that Jewish writers wrote about Turkey **glowingly**. Isaac Zarfati, a Jewish refugee from Germany, wrote: “I proclaim to you that Turkey is a land wherein nothing is lacking, and where, if you will, all shall yet be well with you. Here every man may dwell at peace under his own vine & fig tree. Here you are allowed to wear the most precious garments. In Christendom, on the contrary, you dare not even venture to clothe your children in red or in blue, according to our taste, without exposing them to the insult. Beaten black & blue, or kicked green & red. O Israel, wherefore sleepest though? Arise! Leave this accursed Christian land Germany forever!” Similarly, in the 16th century Portuguese refugee Samuel Usque described Turkey as “a broad and spacious sea which God opened with the rod of His mercy as He opened the Red Sea at the time of the exodus...**here the gates of liberty are always open for the observance of Judaism.**”

**Struck No Root:** Few in the Muslim world took notice of Muhammad Asad’s passing (1900-1992). Muhammad Asad, Leopold Weiss (a Jew), was born in Livow, Austria (later Poland) in 1900. At the age of 22 he visited to the Middle East. He later became an outstanding foreign correspondent for the *Franfurtur Zeitung*. After his conversion to Islam he travelled & worked throughout the Muslim world, from North Africa to as far East as Afghanistan. After years of devoted study he became one of the leading Muslim scholars of our age. “It was not any particular teaching that attracted me, but the whole wonderful, inexplicably coherent structure of moral teaching & practical life programme. I could not say, even now, which aspect of it appeals to me more than any other. Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement &

support each other: nothing is superfluous & nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance & solid composure.”

He had argued for a rational Islam; he had sought to reconcile Islamic teachings and democracy; he made the Quran speak to modern minds.

Those studies & comparisons created in him the firm conviction that Islam, as a spiritual & social phenomenon, is still, in spite of all the drawbacks caused by the **deficiencies of the Muslims**, by far the greatest driving force mankind has ever experienced. His interest became centred around the problem of its regeneration. Islam provided the chance to achieve the ideal – the reform of a religion of law so that it could be made to live in a modern age, as a liberal force of continuing faith. Unlike so many other Western converts to Islam, Asad chose also to live in Muslim societies & worked to give Islam direction. But by advocating this reform, Asad remained a foreign body in contemporary Islam, a transplant rejected time and again by his hosts. Paradoxically, Asad won genuine acclaim in the West. There he found minds open to his ideas, and opportunities to publish & lecture.

Asad’s road **to** Mecca was the shorter journey, made headlong in the enthusiasm of youth. His road **from** Mecca was the longer journey, made painstakingly in an awareness of the contradiction between the promise of Islam & its contemporary practice. For all Asad’s fervour & belief, his Muslim answer never satisfied his question, put most poignantly by Asad to Asad: “**Why is it that, even after finding my place among the people who believe in the things I myself have come to believe, I have struck no root?**” Muslims, that statement must be resounding like a terrifying thunderclap in your heads. Why do we insult those who make great sacrifices for Islam? Putting their lives & their wealth on the line? Of Asad the Prophet (p) would have said, “**He was the best of Jews.**” Asad’s two important books are: *Islam at the Crossroads* & *Road to Mecca*.

For these Jews the truth was blindingly clear, but we are clearly blind. As the blind sees no rainbow of colours that speckles the earth, so the blind spirit sees not the love of God which colours every soul. **The best of Jews.** May such stories sharpen our “spiritual sight.” Give our souls 20/20 vision. “To whom God gives no light, there is no light.” (24:40)

Maryam Jameelah, an American Jewess, converted to Islam. Her story is amazing. “My professor, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Katsh, the head of the department of Hebrew Studies there, spared no efforts to convince his students – all Jews, many of whom aspired to become rabbis – that Islam was derived from Judaism. Our textbook, written by him, took each verse from the Quran, painstakingly tracing it to its allegedly Jewish source. Although his real aim was to prove to his students the superiority of Judaism over Islam,

**he convinced me diametrically of the opposite.”**

# The Islamic Jews

Al-Husayn ibn Salam was a **Jewish** rabbi in Madinah who was widely respected & honoured, even by those who were not Jewish. He was known for his piety & goodness, his upright conduct & his truthfulness. He was particularly struck by **some verses of the Torah** which dealt with the coming of a Prophet who would complete the message of previous Prophets.

Al-Husayn therefore took an immediate & keen interest when he heard reports of the appearance of a Prophet in Makkah. “When I heard of the appearance of the Messenger of God (p) I began to make enquiries about his name, his genealogy, his characteristics, his time & place & I began to compare this information with what is contained in our books. From these enquiries, **I became convinced about the authenticity of his Prophethood & I affirmed the truth of his mission.**” He studied his Torah. Israel’s most powerful rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, said (2000):

All Palestinians are “snakes” & that God regretted creating Arabs. It’s a pity he did not scrutinize his scriptures as Rabbi Salam did 1400 years ago. **Inquiring minds do not** read trash news like the Enquirer.

Or watch Fox News.

**They read the Scriptures.**

**They are Convinced. They Affirm.**

Hey you; yes u...what are u reading?

**O**ur Thoughts. Our Words. Our Speech. Our ability to declare truth have profound, eternal & life-changing consequences. When these Jews turned to God & followed His wisdom – the Quran – their lives were transformed.

The day came when the Prophet (p) left Mecca & headed for Madina. When he reached Quba, a man rushed into the city, calling out to people, announcing the arrival of the Prophet (p). At that moment, I was at the top of a palm tree doing some work. My aunt, Khalidah bint Al-Harith, was sitting under the tree. On hearing the news, I shouted: God is Great! God is Great! When my aunt heard me, she remonstrated with me: “May God frustrate you ...By God, if you had heard that Moses was coming you would not have been more enthusiastic.”

“Auntie, he is really, by God, the ‘brother’ of Moses & follows his religion. He was sent with the same mission as Moses.” She was silent for a while & then said: “Is he the Prophet about whom you spoke to us who would be sent to confirm the truth preached by previous Prophets & complete the message of his Lord?”

“Yes,” I replied. Without any delay or hesitation, I went out to meet the Prophet (p). I saw crowds of people at his door. I moved about in the crowds until I reached close to him. The first words I heard him say were: “O people! **Spread peace...Share food...Pray during the night** while people normally sleep & you will enter Paradise in peace.”

I looked at him closely. I scrutinized him. I was convinced that his face was not that of an imposter. I went closer to him & made the declaration of faith: **There is no god but Allah & Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.**

The Prophet (p) turned to me & asked: “What is your name?” “Al-Husayn ibn Salam,” I replied. “Instead, it is now Abdullah ibn Salam,” he said (giving me a new name). “Yes” I agreed. “Abdullah ibn Salam it shall be. By Him who has sent you with the Truth, I do not wish to have another name after this day.”

I returned home & introduced Islam to my wife, my children & the rest of my family. They all accepted Islam including my aunt Khalidah. However, I advised them to conceal our acceptance of Islam from the Jews until I gave them permission. They agreed.

Subsequently, I went back to the Prophet (p), and said: “O Messenger of God! **The Jews are a people inclined to slander & falsehood.** I want you to invite their most prominent men to meet you. During the meeting however, you should keep me concealed from them in one of your rooms. Ask them about my status among them before they

find out of my acceptance of Islam. Then invite them to Islam. If they were to know that I have become a Muslim, they would denounce me & accuse me of everything base & slander me.”

The Prophet (p) kept me in one of his rooms & invited the prominent Jewish personalities to visit him. He introduced Islam to them & urged them to have faith in God.

They began to dispute & argue with him about the Truth. When he realized that they were not inclined to accept Islam, he put the question to them: “What is the status of Al-Husayn ibn Salam among you?”

**“He is our leader & the son of our leader. He is our rabbi & our scholar, the son of our rabbi & scholar.”** “If you come to know that he has accepted Islam, would you accept Islam also?” asked the Prophet. “God forbid! He would not accept Islam. May God protect him from accepting Islam,” they said, horrified.

At this point I came out in full view of them & announced: “O assembly of Jews! Be conscious of God & accept what Muhammad has brought. You certainly know that he is the Messenger of God. **You can find prophecies about him & mention of his name & characteristics in your Torah.** I for my part declare that he is the Messenger of God. I have faith in him & believe that he is true.”

Do not let your mind become “subdued” so that it spells the end of rational thought. You become twisted & cannot accept truth. Like these Jews. **“You are a liar,” they shouted. “By God, you are evil & ignorant, the son of an evil & ignorant person.” They continued to heap every conceivable abuse on me.**

Abdullah ibn Salam approached Islam with a soul thirsty for knowledge. He was passionately devoted to the Quran and spent much time reciting & studying its beautiful & sublime verses. He was deeply attached to the noble Prophet (p) and was constantly in his company. He was known among the Sahabah as a man from the people of Paradise. This was because of his determination on the advice of the Prophet (p) to hold steadfastly to the ‘most trustworthy handhold’: belief in & total submission to God.

There are many stories that contemporary Imams rarely tell their congregations. The story of Mukhayriq, a Rabbi from Medina is one such story. We have heard the stories about the battle of Uhud, one of Prophet’s (p) major battles with his Meccan enemies, from Imams and Muslim preachers hundreds of times, but **not once** have we heard the story of the Rabbi who died fighting in *that battle* against the enemies of Islam. So, here’s the story of Rabbi Mukhayriq – the **first Jewish martyr of Islam.** Mukhayriq was a wealthy and learned leader of the tribe of Tha’labah. He fought with

Prophet Muhammad (p) in the battle of Uhud on March 19, 625 AD and was martyred in it. That day was a Saturday. Rabbi Mukhayriq addressed his people & asked them to go with him to help Muhammad (p). His tribe’s men declined saying that it was the day of Sabbath. Mukhayriq chastised them for not understanding **the deeper meaning** of Sabbath. He announced to his people that if he died in the battle his entire wealth should go to Muhammad (p).

Mukhayriq died in battle against the Meccans. And when Muhammad (p), who was seriously injured in that battle, was informed about the death of Mukhayriq, Muhammad (p) said, **“He was the best of Jews.”** It’s worth repeating: **“He was the best of Jews.”**

Muhammad (p) inherited seven gardens & other forms of wealth from Mukhayriq. He used this wealth to establish the first waqf – a charitable endowment – of Islam. It was from this “Jewish” endowment that the Prophet of Islam helped many poor people in Medina.

When Muhammad (p) migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 he signed a treaty with the various tribes there. Many of these tribes had embraced Islam, some were pagan & others were Jewish. All of them signed the treaty that is referred to by historians as **The Constitution of Medina.** The first Islamic state, a **multi-tribal & multi-religious** state, established by Muhammad (p) in Medina was based on this social contract.

According to article 2 of the constitution all the tribes, who were signatory to the treaty, constituted one nation (Ummah). Mukhayriq’s people too were signatories to this treaty & were obliged to fight with Muhammad (p) in accordance to the Article 37 of the constitution of Medina: The Jews must bear their expenses & the Muslims their expenses. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. They must seek mutual advice & consultation. Loyalty is a protection against treachery. A man is not liable for his ally’s misdeeds. The wronged must be helped.

In a way Rabbi Mukhayriq, who was also a well-respected scholar of Jews in Medina, was merely being a good citizen & was fulfilling a social contract. But his story is fantastic, especially for our times when we are struggling to build bridges between various religious communities. Mukhayriq’s loyalty, his bravery, his sacrifice & his generosity are inspirational.

It is about people like Mukhayriq that the Quran says: **“There are among Jews & Christians, those who believe in God, in the revelation to you & in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to God. They will not sell the**

**Surely, those who believe, those who are Jews...**  
**any who believe in GOD & in the Last Day,**  
**and lead a righteous life, have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.**

QURAN 5:69

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