

Fast 28: Mortality of the Holy Prophet

- Founders of religions are frequently elevated by their followers into immortal figures who could not die like other human beings. A unique characteristic of the Quran is that it presents the Prophet Muhammad as physically a human being, having all the physical attributes and needs of a mortal, who would die as other people do.

“And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation; so ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know. Nor did We give them bodies not eating food, nor did they live forever.” — 21:7–8

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحَىٰ إِلَيْهِمْ فَسَأَلُوْا
أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾ وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ
جَسَدًا أَلَّا يَأْكُلُوا الطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٨﴾

“And We did not grant living forever to any mortal before you. If you die, will they live forever? Every soul must taste of death. And We test you by evil and good by way of trial. And to Us you are returned.” — 21:34–35

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِّنْ قَبْلِكَ الْخُلْدَ أَفَإِنْ مِتَّ فَهُمُ
الْخَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبَلَّوْكُمْ
بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

The first passage above shows that every prophet, including the Holy Prophet Muhammad, had a mortal body needing food for its support, and every one of them tasted of death. It also means that Jesus had a body which stood in need of food and he too must have tasted of death. The idea that he is alive is clearly opposed to this verse. By “followers of the Reminder” are meant people of earlier religious traditions or scholars of religions and religious history. The second passage tells us that death is ordained for every mortal, whether he was good or bad, from the highest to the lowest. Neither the Holy Prophet nor his opponents could continue in existence forever. Even if he died, his opponents still would not be successful and would perish.

- The inevitability of the death of the Holy Prophet is mentioned in the Quran:

“And Muhammad is but a messenger — messengers have already passed away before him. If then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels? And he who turns back upon his heels will do no harm at all to Allah. And Allah will reward the grateful.” — 3:144

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ
أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ
يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَن يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي
اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

This verse was revealed shortly after the battle of Uhud. The Prophet received severe wounds in that battle and there was even a rumour that he had been killed. This verse states that even if the Prophet were killed, Islam still remains true in its teachings and its principles, and those who had accepted Islam as being true could not give it up.

This verse served another important purpose at the death of the Holy Prophet. Some of the Companions thought that he was not dead. Abu Bakr went in to the Holy Prophet's room and saw that life had departed. So he came out, ascended the pulpit and read this verse to the gathered people. It had a magical effect upon his hearers. All of them became convinced that the Prophet had passed away, as all prophets had passed away before him. The prophets were but mortals, and their span of mortal life must no doubt come to an end like that of other mortals.

By the way, this verse affords a conclusive proof that Jesus was also dead according to the Quran; otherwise Abu Bakr's argument could not have silenced the doubters of the Holy Prophet's death. They would have replied to him that a prophet doesn't necessarily die as Jesus is still alive.

Here is the hadith from Bukhari about that occasion:

“Aishah related that Abu Bakr came riding his horse from his home in As-Sunh, and dismounted. He then entered the Mosque and did not speak with anyone till he came to Aishah. He went to the Prophet, who was covered with a striped blanket. Abu Bakr uncovered his face, and then bent down towards him and kissed him and started weeping. He said:

‘My parents be sacrificed for you, O Prophet of Allah! Allah will not combine two deaths on you. You have died the death which was ordained for you.’

Ibn Abbas said that Abu Bakr came out and Umar was addressing the people, and Abu Bakr told him to sit down but Umar refused. Abu Bakr again told him to sit down but Umar again refused. Then Abu Bakr recited the *Kalima Shahadah* and the people turned their attention to Abu Bakr and they left Umar. Abu Bakr said:

Whoever amongst you worshipped Muhammad, surely Muhammad is dead, but whoever worshipped Allah, Allah is alive and will never die. Allah says: ‘And Muhammad is but a messenger — messengers have already passed away before him ... (up to the word) grateful’ (3:144).

By Allah, it was as if the people never knew that Allah had revealed this verse before, till Abu Bakr recited it, so they learnt it from him, and then it was on everyone's lips.”

(Sahih Bukhari, Book of Funerals, hadith 1241–1242)